

Externship Survival Guide

Externships are one of the most valuable experiences of veterinary school, a chance to explore different practice settings, meet mentors, and develop your skills in real-world environments. They can also feel demanding, especially when traveling across the country, working overnight shifts, and adapting to new medical approaches. This guide is designed to help you prepare, thrive, and make the most of every externship rotations ahead.

Before You Travel

- 📌 **Plan Early:** Confirm your externship schedule, housing, transportation, and clinic contact information well in advance.
- 📌 **Budget Wisely:** Account for travel expenses (gas, flights, meals, housing) and check if your hosting clinic offers stipends or reimbursements.
- 📌 **Pack Smart:** Bring versatile scrubs, a comfortable pair of shoes, stethoscope, business casual clothes for meetings, a notebook, and any personal medications.
- 📌 **Backups Matter:** Carry digital and hard copies of your schedule, directions, emergency contacts, and school paperwork.

Adjusting to Shifts (Overnights)

- 📌 **Prioritize Rest:** Use blackout curtains, eye masks, or white noise apps to improve sleep quality on unusual schedules.
- 📌 **Fuel Your Body:** Pack high-protein snacks, stay hydrated, and avoid excess caffeine close to rest periods.
- 📌 **Stay Safe:** If you're too tired to drive post-shift, rest first or arrange a ride. Fatigue management is part of professional self-care.
- 📌 **Routine Helps:** Try to keep a consistent sleep and meal schedule, even if it feels unconventional.



Making the Most of Your Learning

- 📌 **Prioritize Rest:** Use blackout curtains, eye masks, or white noise apps to improve sleep quality on unusual schedules.
- 📌 **Be Curious:** Ask thoughtful questions about cases, procedures, client interactions, and practice workflows.
- 📌 **Take Notes Daily:** Write down interesting cases, medications, or techniques. These will be valuable for NAVLE prep and interviews.
- 📌 **Say “Yes” Often:** Volunteer when opportunities arise, whether it’s restraining a patient, helping with client communication, or scrubbing into a surgery.
- 📌 **Observe Broadly:** Notice how different doctors manage cases, lead teams, and communicate with clients. These soft skills are as valuable as medical knowledge.

Building Relationships

- 📌 **Seek Mentorship:** Introduce yourself to multiple doctors, you’ll get different perspectives on medicine, career paths, and work-life balance.
- 📌 **Show Professionalism:** Arrive early, dress neatly, listen actively, and express gratitude to the staff (techs and assistants are often your best teachers).
- 📌 **Follow Up:** Collect contact info and send a thank-you note or email after your rotation. Relationships you build now can shape your future job search.

Taking Care of Yourself

- 📌 **Set Boundaries:** It’s okay to say, “I’d love to observe, but I need to rest before my next shift.” Burnout doesn’t help you or your patients.
- 📌 **Stay Active:** Even a 15-minute walk or stretch routine can reduce stress and reset your focus.

