

Internships: Test Drive the Real World

“Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand.”

Why intern?

Internships are an excellent way to enhance your résumé, expand your knowledge base, and get your foot in the job market. As a future professional in training, you gain hands-on, real world experience and skills in your area of study, generally under the supervision of a faculty advisor and the tutelage of an industry professional. Interning makes you more marketable to recruiters, and many now expect to see multiple internships on résumés prior to hiring.

Internships may be full- or part-time, paid or unpaid, national or international, with or without college credit. As a student, you can design your internship with your advisor to complement your studies. Or you can choose an internship posted at your career or employment center that suits you.

Not sure if a major, career path, or a certain company is right for you? Explore the pros and cons through an internship and make a more informed decision. Paid internships help with education and living expenses. However, unpaid internships demonstrate to recruiters your seriousness and commitment, and help you stand out from the competition. Best of all, more than half who intern are offered permanent jobs, often ahead of non-interns.

An extended interview and preview

Internships work both ways: You get to evaluate the employer and the business, while the employer assesses your capabilities and compatibility. It's the real world, so whether paid or not, treat an internship as you would a permanent position: Be on time; dress professionally and appropriately; be courteous, enthusiastic, and dedicated; and DON'T complain!

Learn the employer's needs and challenges and help solve them. Demonstrate your creativity, capabilities, and productivity, as well as contribute fresh ideas, perspective, and energy. Internships are invaluable opportunities to apply classroom learning to real world demands, and to gain greater insight. Take on responsibilities and deliver. After all, you're marketing yourself in real time, so prove why you would make an ideal employee!

Cash or credit?

For employers, internships are a cost-effective means to handle the workload. Interns most often work for little to no pay in exchange for work experience and college credits. For many, these benefits and the possibility of securing a future job are worth the effort, even hardship. Few interns will risk a golden opportunity by objecting.

However, an intern should not a slave be. There are Federal regulations and ethical guidelines that address fair labor. Depending on the company and requirements, pay scales range from zero stipend to minimum wage to an average of \$16 per hour and higher. Talk to your career counselor or former interns for interning leads and guidance:

- find out if you will be compensated and, if so, how much; some students simply cannot afford to intern even for college credit;
- ask what your duties will include; hours vary by industry and tasks can range from industry-related to menial;
- realize that interning is no guarantee of a job.

“You're hired!”

The benefits of interning go beyond just the experience: The increased likelihood of a higher starting salary; networking contacts and professional relationships; a smoother transition from college to the workforce following graduation; even the inside scoop on upcoming job openings and opportunities.

Be more prepared for future interviews. Enter the workforce with more confidence and initiative, as well as greater problem solving abilities, communication skills, and teamwork awareness, all of which make you a more marketable job seeker. Get ahead: Add internships to your résumé!



i n a nutshell:

Internships enable you to preview a career path and “try before you buy”:

- **Gain work experience; apply classroom learning to real world demands**
- **Market yourself in real time**
- **Network with professionals**
- **Travel; broaden your mind**
- **Increase your future chances of being hired**
- **Improve your interview skills; gain greater confidence**
- **Be in position for a smoother transition into the workforce**
- **Apply early; beat the summer/graduating crowd job search**

Get the experience you need, so you can get the job you want. Intern!



Top Ten Tips for Finding Your Dream Internship

1. Plan Ahead!

Get a head start on your internship search. There are millions of college students out there fighting for the same good internships. Start looking in February for a summer internship, August for a fall internship and October for a winter semester internship. There is a lot to do to prepare for your internship search - so the earlier the better.

2. Write a Resume and Cover Letter That Showcase Your Skills.

Internship coordinators and employers don't expect you to have a lot of work experience. Hey, that is what an internship is for anyway. But, you should use your resume to highlight your talents, skills and extracurricular activities and sports. Show employers what you have accomplished, whether it was in another job or through sports or school activities. Be ready to tailor your resume for each internship to which you are applying. If you are want to work as a programmer highlight your computer skills. If you want work with people emphasize volunteer work, your gig as a school DJ, or student government experience. Emphasize skills you have that will help the bottom line of the company and articulate how you will be a producer. Show that you are a self-starter who is willing to work hard and learn on the job.

3. Know Your Audience.

When applying for an internship you should be familiar with the company you are applying to and the industry in which the company participates. If you express an understanding of a company's products, services, key personnel and recent news in your cover letter or interview you will impress the employer. Research the company through their Web site, a search of news stories on news sites (www.news.com, www.businesswire.com) or through career sites like the Vault (www.vault.com).

4. Use Correct Spelling and Grammar.

Sounds obvious, but incorrect spelling or grammar will instantly put your cover letter and resume at the bottom of the pile, if not directly in the trash. You should use your word processor's spelling and grammar tools and then you should have at least two other qualified people review your work. Don't risk rejection because of something as simple and obvious as spelling and grammar.

5. Have Reference Letters Prepared.

A good reference letter from a professor, advisor or employer can help you get an advantage over other candidates with similar qualifications. Most professors and school counselors or advisors are used to writing references and will be willing to help. You should obtain references as soon as possible and prepare them for distribution to potential employers. Employers will be impressed that you have references at all, and even more impressed that you have them ready for them to read upon request.

6. Be Clear About Your Availability.

Your location is one of the very first things an employer will look at when considering you for an internship. If it isn't obvious that your location matches the location of the internship the employer may not consider you for the position. If you are applying for an internship outside of the area in which you are attending school and/or reside, you must let the employer know that you will be relocating to their area for the internship period. Your cover letter should be very clear in expressing this. Also, unless you are a stellar candidate with special skills you should not expect a company to pay to relocate you for an internship.

7. Don't Wait for the Internship to Come to You.

There are several on-line internship Web sites and internship books available. These are great resources, but bear in mind that there are hundreds of thousands of students using the same set of resources. Don't wait for an internship to be announced. Be proactive and search out companies that interest you and then approach them directly. Make contact with their human resources department or hiring manager to find out what internships might be available. Get the inside scoop before information about internship openings are made available to everyone else and, while you are gathering information you can also start the job of selling yourself as the right person for the internship.

8. Network!

While you can certainly find great internships on-line and through your school career center and print resources, nothing beats good old-fashioned networking. Use your network of family, friends, friends' family, school and work contacts to find out about possible internships. If your friends and acquaintances know you are looking for an internship they will be likely to let you know when they hear about one. Also, attend industry events in your area. In most major cities there are interest groups, clubs, professional associations and large conferences related to specific industries. Identify these groups and events and try to participate. You can attend huge conferences like Internet World, complete with its .com career fair and access to hundreds of presenting companies, for free.

9. Get the Right Contact Information.

Know who is responsible for hiring and initiating intern candidates at the companies you are interested in. You will be able to find some of this information on-line and through books, but you should also make inquisitive phone calls to companies of interest to make sure your resume ends up on the desk of exactly the right person. If you don't direct your effort to the right person then you will be wasting your time.

10. Pave the Way for Your Career.

If you are lucky enough to find your dream internship you should use the experience to build the foundation for another future internship or post-graduate job offer. Offer constructive feedback throughout your stay, take advantage of every opportunity to learn, and be willing to assist the company with future internship recruiting. Most importantly, lay the foundation for a future internship for yourself or full time employment by showing your employer that you are a talented person who is willing to work hard. Employers invest a lot of time and money in individuals they hire so interns with a proven track record and history with the company have a distinct advantage over everyone else. Even if you don't end up with a post-graduate job offer from your internship you can earn a good professional reference and you can build future business and personal contacts.



Interviewing for Internships

The Groundwork

Interviewing for an internship or co-op assignment does *not* have to be a scary process! Think of it as conversation between you and an internship representative to see if there is a fit between your goals and the internship position. You are interviewing her, just as she is interviewing you. You want to know if this internship will allow you to meet your learning goals. She is trying to find out if you have what it takes to help the organization meet its needs. Doing your homework prior to your interview is the key to a successful interview 'conversation.' Taking time to lay the groundwork increases the odds that your meeting will be productive.

Research the organization. Check out its web site. Request brochures, annual reports, and other company literature. Search out news articles referring to this site. Talk to other interns who worked there previously. Your knowledge of the organization will be impressive and can offset lack of experience.

Dress like the serious professional you will soon be. If you have a suit, wear it. If not, plan to wear a sports jacket, collared shirt, tie, and slacks (if you're male) or a pantsuit or blazer, blouse, and skirt (if you're female). Choose dark colors—they convey an air of authority. Practice your smile, good posture, and firm handshake. Leave flashy jewelry and strong scents at home.

Rehearse/role play answers to typical questions you may be asked. Practice, but don't memorize your responses word-for-word. You don't want to sound like you are reading from a script! It is usually better to give up-front, honest responses rather than 'canned' answers you think the interviewer wants to hear.

Here are typical questions you could be asked in an interview for an internship or co-op position:

- Why do you want an internship or co-op with this organization?
- Why should we hire you for our internship program?
- Do your grades reflect your true ability? Why or why not?
- How many hours each week would you be able to devote to this internship?
- Would you be able to work beyond one semester?
- How would you handle conflicts between your school schedule and a surprise, rush job here?
- What type of supervisor do you prefer to work under?
- How will this internship help you meet your career goals?
- Who is your least favorite professor? Why?
- What are your greatest strengths and biggest weaknesses?
- Give me an example from your past that shows the following: how you dealt with difficult people; how you overcame an obstacle or solved a problem.
- Which of your courses, jobs, or school activities has prepared you for this internship?

Prepare questions to ask. This is your chance to make sure that a particular internship will meet your needs and goals. Answers to your questions will help you discover which internship or co-op is right for you. Here are some suggested questions:

- Could you list some tasks and projects I would be involved with?
- Should I expect training or an orientation prior to beginning my internship?
- Would I receive a wage, stipend, or reimbursement for my expenses?
- Is there a dress code I would be expected to follow?
- Would I have regular meetings with my supervisor?
- I will need to take time off during my exam periods; is this acceptable?

Bring along samples of your work. Show the interviewer articles you have written, programs from events you have planned, photographs of activities you have organized, and newsletters you have edited. These aids will convey information about your skills and abilities that your resume cannot.

After the Interview

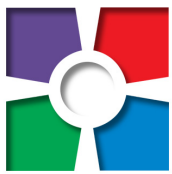
You might get an offer on the spot, if your interview goes well. Hiring decisions for interns and co-ops are generally made much more quickly and unilaterally than hiring decisions for jobs. If this is the internship you want, by all means accept the position. But don't let pressure force you into a decision you aren't ready for. It's okay to ask for two or three days to make up your mind. This delay gives you time to weigh the pros and cons.

Follow up. Make sure you leave your interview with the name of your interviewer (and its correct spelling) and the address where she can be contacted. Write a brief thank-you note on a note card, or type a brief letter. (In this day and age, e-mail thanks are gaining acceptance, as well, but the 'hard copy' approach is still preferred.) Use this opportunity to thank your interviewer for her time and remind her of your strengths; you may wish to include additional information that you forgot to mention in the interview.

If you received an offer at the interview, use your thank-you note to thank the interviewer for the offer, and, if you've already accepted the position, confirm your start date and schedule.

This Stuff Gets Easier

After your first interview, the whole process won't seem quite so daunting. Interviews for experiential positions are merely forerunners to the scores of interviews you'll be having in the course of your working life. The more interviews you have, the easier it gets. Who knows? You may even start to enjoy them!



Internships: Free or Fair Labor?

To be paid or not to be paid? Ay, there's the rub.

The Tempest.

No doubt, internships are a significant means for students and job seekers to gain entry into the job market. (See “Internships: Test Drive the Real World”) In a tough economy, with work experience and multiple internships almost a criterion for many recruiters, it’s no surprise there are students and job seekers willing to pay companies to find them internships, even unpaid ones.

Which brings up the increasingly controversial issue: Should interns be paid or not?

There are financial, ethical, and legal factors to consider when pursuing an internship. First, ask yourself whether or not you can afford an unpaid internship, even just for the experience. Realize you’ll still have living expenses during that time.

Second, be aware there are employers who equate interns with cheap or free labor, doling out menial duties instead of those intended to help you gain job-specific experience. Also, you are unlikely to receive any health and employment benefits usually given to employees. Know, too, there are employers who argue that they are already providing valuable work opportunities and that there is no shortage of willing interns.

Third, some employers insist that students be given college credit as a fair trade for pay. Your school, however, may not agree nor feel that internship’s benefits translate into credits consistent with the school’s academic standards. Plus, you end up paying for those and *any* college credits.

Measure for Measure.

Enter the U.S. Department of Labor and the Fair Labor Standards Act. They list six criteria that help determine whether or not an intern qualifies as an unpaid trainee or as an employee entitled to minimum wage and overtime compensation. If all these requirements are not met, by law, for-profit companies must pay the intern. Be aware, not every employer is aware of nor understands the law, and the Labor Department has neither the time nor the resources to monitor every business.

Here, basically, are the current six requirements that must be met for an employer to consider you an unpaid intern/trainee:

- the training, even though it takes place at and involves the employer’s site and facilities, must be similar to what you could pay for and receive elsewhere at a vocational or academic institution;
- the training is for *your* benefit;
- you do not displace regular employees, and you must be under professional supervision;
- the employer training you derives no immediate advantage from your activities; in fact, at times your training may even interfere with the company’s operations;
- you understand that your training in no way guarantees you a job at the conclusion of the internship;
- both you and the employer understand and agree that you are not entitled to wages during the time of your training.

Depending upon your needs, you may end up choosing work experience over financial compensation, and simply accept that things won’t always be as you like it.

All’s Well That Ends Well.

Since internships can play a crucial role in your job search, be sure to consult with your career center advisor for more information and to determine which internship is best for you. There are plenty of law-compliant firms that will provide the experience you need to enhance your résumé, as well as excellent internships that pay anywhere from minimum wage to \$25+ per hour. In the end, it’s your choice. So to thine own self be true: You can always walk away and seek another opportunity.



i n a nutshell:

Before accepting an internship, consider or determine the following:

- **If you will be paid or receive school-approved credit**
- **If you can afford not to be paid**
- **If the experience and duties will be relevant to your studies**
- **How many hours you will be expected to work**
- **Whether or not you will need to submit a report at the end**
- **That there are no job guarantees**
- **That other opportunities exist**

Ask for responsibilities that maximize your learning experience. And know your rights. After all, it’s your time and, possibly, your dime.