

## INTERNSHIPS



**Summary:** Learn why should you get an internship and how to get one in this article. Learn more about internships and why they are important.

### Why Get One

One of the potential difficulties in looking for a job as a recent or soon-to-be graduate is that you may have a limited amount of work experience under your belt. Whether you work full-time during the summer or part-time during the school year, an internship is a great way to learn about an organization and get some real business experience, which may further focus your aspirations, make you a more competitive candidate, and yes, improve your résumé. It is also an opportunity to make contacts that may open up other opportunities and perhaps even land you the job you're looking for.

There are thousands of organizations that offer formal internship programs. But do not feel that you need to limit yourself to seeking an internship through these formal venues: many organizations will be happy to consider creating an internship position for a bright, dedicated and genuinely interested newcomer to their field.

### Knowing a Good One When You See It

A well-designed internship is a mutually beneficial relationship. You, as the intern, are getting practical, hands-on experience in a field that you wish to know more about and an opportunity to prove yourself in the work environment, make wonderful contacts, hopefully even find a mentor. Keep in mind that internships are frequently low-paying or even unpaid positions. Many organizations rely on interns to realize important projects that they may otherwise not have the resources to accomplish. Organizations sponsoring interns benefit from a dedicated workforce noted for its vitality, enthusiasm, eagerness to learn. Your compensation comes in the form of training, experience and exposure. In a way, you can think of your internship as an ongoing informational interview. And it is worth noting that many an internship has blossomed into a full-time job offer, largely because the intern is a known quantity, and the employer has already had the opportunity to establish a relationship with the candidate and assess his/her work.

### How to Get One

In order to determine which internships are appropriate for your needs, you need to identify your goals and then identify those organizations that match your interests. [Granted.com](#) includes [many companies that sponsor internships](#); you can also contact additional organizations that interest you and find out whom to speak to about an internship program. The approach will be different for organizations with and without formal programs.

Call or write those organizations that offer formal internship programs to request their internship brochure which should include the application procedure, an application, and pertinent deadlines. Be sure to identify the program coordinator with whom to correspond. An interview may not be required, but if it is, you should prepare just as you would for any other job and follow up promptly with a thank you note.

For organizations that do not have formal internships, you must first identify the appropriate party to whom you will send your request. Call the organization and make a friendly, preliminary inquiry. You needn't volunteer your name at this time; you're just getting a feel for the place and asking a general question. You will probably make a more official inquiry in a cover letter that states your interest in the organization and how you can mutually benefit from your participation in their organization. Keep in mind that one of the major benefits you can offer is your willingness to work for free, which you will provide in exchange for the opportunity to learn from their wisdom and expertise (a little flattery doesn't hurt here, but be sincere). Do not ask for too much up front—you're trying to get your foot in the door here. You are more likely to get that perk or two if you wait until you've proven yourself a bit and made them realize how valuable and hardworking you are. You want to emphasize that you are looking for experience not for "stuff."

### Why Bother?

Internships have become a critical piece in the career planning puzzle. More students than ever are competing for them, and more interviewers than ever expect to see internship experience on an applicant's résumé. Read on to find out why internships are so vital to the job search.

### The Importance of Internships

The National Society for Experimental Education estimates that one third of all college students complete at least one before graduation. One hundred percent of [American Express'](#) 1997 new hires had one during college. Wake Forest University's Career Center calls them "an investment in your education and your future." They are internships—supervised methods of gaining practical experience—and they are more important than ever.

Internships are nothing new. Formerly known as apprenticeships, they have existed for hundreds of years. They are forms of temporary employment in which students or recent graduates learn about an industry and gain hands-on work experience. More recently, students, universities, and employers of the nineties have come to realize that internships are one of the most beneficial types of work experience for future and recent graduates. Internships offer a myriad of benefits: exposure to the real-world workplace, references, recommendations, additions to portfolios, technical experience, career direction, and networking opportunities. In many cases, an internship can spark a student's interest in a particular field. For those who are undecided about their career plans, internships are short-term ways to explore a variety of industries.

Students, not just employers, recognize the considerable importance of internships. A Yale graduate and programmer at a computer consulting firm, says internships are valuable because "thinking about a career and actually experiencing a career are two different things. Students should have the opportunity to experience a career or industry on a daily basis—to know what it is all about instead of being told or reading about it." In addition to helping a student determine what career to pursue, an internship is also valuable because "it can both tell an individual what he or she enjoys and what he or she never wishes to do again," says Andrew Levi, a recent hire of a major consulting firm and a future student of [Yale Law School](#).

The numerous benefits of internships have undoubtedly led to their increasing importance. By completing an internship during college, a graduate gains experience before permanently entering the workforce. Yvonne, a member of the recruiting department at [American Express](#), says that she places a tremendous amount of weight upon internship experience. "You need to excel in more than just academics. Without internships you have to be judged on intelligence alone. It's a good idea to have some real-world experience on your résumé." According to Brigham Young University's Internship Office, it has been established that an internship on a résumé will generally give a student advantage over those without the experience. Employers prefer applicants who have dipped into the professional world and who have a good track record. The experience, in addition to the recommendations from internship supervisors, can easily push an applicant ahead of the competition. "A financial-type internship is almost a prerequisite for an individual seeking a job in investment banking," says Levine.

Not only do employers prefer applicants with internship experience, but recently employers have shown a preference toward their own interns. Last year [American Express](#) offered full-time positions to approximately 75% of their former interns. Internship coordinator at a major university, James Moore, says "companies use internship programs as testing grounds and as recruiting tools." Recruiters see internships as a way to evaluate students in advance and then

offer those who perform well as interns full-time positions upon graduation. Florida A & M's student magazine states, "Whether or not students decide to enter the career field in which they interned, it is quite common for them to receive job offers from their internship employers." Finally, internships can also increase a student's chances of being accepted into a graduate program. Admissions officers at professional schools and Ph.D. programs state that undergraduate work experience will help increase an applicant's chances for acceptance.

Unfortunately, the increasing popularity and importance of internships has made them more difficult to attain. Wake Forest University's Career Center finds that the struggle for an internship-filled résumé is now a highly competitive one. Martinez has found that there are many more applicants than internships and that the majority of those applicants have excellent qualifications and are extremely intelligent. The most competitive internships are the ones that pay well or are for prestigious, big-name companies. However, they aren't always the better experience.

That increase in competition has caused employers to expect more as they evaluate prospective interns. Bobrow states that employers want "bright, hardworking students with well-rounded backgrounds, good-grades, previous work or volunteer experience, and campus involvement." Previous summer internship experience is always beneficial. Involvement in extra-curricular activities at school shows initiative and energy. Employers favor interns who have strong writing skills and who are outspoken. Shy applicants are perceived as not being interested. Martinez comments that students should have skills in their specific area of interest, such as finance or technology. She says that all interviewers are impressed by students who "do their homework." An applicant's chances improve significantly if the student researches the company and is "up to speed with what is going on with the business and industry."

Despite the growing importance of internships, you can get a job without having had internship experience. Martinez states, "Students should be focused and have a plan. It's okay if you have not had internships but you should have had some part-time work experience relevant to your career goals or to your major. Almost everyone in the job pool is intelligent, you have to distinguish yourself through your work experience—whether that be through internships or part-time." At the same time, however, Martinez also remarks that 100% of [American Express'](#) 1997 new hires had internship experience. In the changing world of the job search, everyone agrees that internships can only help you. From experience to recommendations to connections and possible job offers, internships open doors that are now frequently closed to those who don't have the real-world experience to back up their degree. "The most important thing" says Levine, "is to select an internship that you think you will enjoy and learn from."

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