

INTERNSHIP INTELLIGENCE

How To Find, Get, and Enjoy the Rewards of a Great Internship

Many college students go through the motions of applying for internships because it falls on the list of things you are supposed to do. With a little preparation, internships *are* a terrific opportunity to learn more about how and where you might fit into the professional world, develop new skills, and make valuable connections. If you have no idea what you want to do with your life, don't worry. Research shows that 75% of incoming freshmen don't declare a major or change their minds at least once before graduation. No one expects you to have all the answers, but there is no time like the present to get the ball rolling.

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Defining a Great Internship for You

1. Start by Asking A Few Questions

Before you start applying for opportunities, there are a handful of practical steps you can take to make the process easier.

Shift the paradigm. Instead of pondering what you want to do with the rest of your life, ask a few questions grounded in what you already know. What subjects do you enjoy most? What classes have you excelled in? What skills are you most excited to utilize? What kind of environments do you thrive in? What are you good at? When are you most engaged in life? Take the time to write down and reflect on your responses.

Wishlist. Identify skills you want to develop and address gaps between where you are where you want to be at graduation. One way to help the process is by looking at listings for full-time jobs that interest you and keeping track of what interests you and what skills you need to develop. [Micro-internships](#) are also a great way to explore what you are curious about.

Survey your family and friends. There is great value in asking a handful of trusted advisors how they see you. Consider asking family members, friends, coaches, teachers, or clergy to identify your greatest skills and most interesting attributes. When have they seen you thrive? Look for commonalities between what you and they observe. Patterns will appear that will make your internship search more productive.

Take stock. Consider your obligations and think about how much time and energy you have to devote to an internship. How much time can you work each week? Do you need to be compensated monetarily or in school credit? Honestly assess your circumstances so time isn't wasted looking for programs that are not a fit.

Evaluate expectations. Start thinking about what is more appealing: being a generalist at an established company or having a more defined role at a smaller, lesser-known entity? While a big name might seem like the obvious resume builder, being able to sell your experience to your entry-level employer is the ultimate goal of an internship.

2. What Does A Great Internship Look Like?

The point of an internship is not to make copies and fetch coffee. While some less-compelling tasks are part of the deal, the goal is to get a chance to apply the knowledge and skills you have learned in college. By starting the process early you can be more selective about which internships to pursue.

You'll want to emerge from an internship with the following:

- Real-life experience working within a professional organization
- Better understanding what makes an organization run and how corporate structures operate
- Stronger professional skills such as time and project management that can be added to a resume
- A handful of meaningful professional connections that can help with a future job search



- References for a future employer

3. Get Ahead Of The Pack

Planning ahead is essential when it comes to securing an exciting internship.

Get organized. Landing an internship is a competitive endeavor. In order to put yourself ahead of the competition, you'll need to have your resume template ready to tailor to each job application.

Put it on the calendar. Set time aside to initiate a search. Some internships are posted and filled on company-specific recruiting schedules and many have early deadlines. The sooner you start, the better the results.

Identify keywords. After you have evaluated your skills, strengths, and interests, create a list of keywords associated with those attributes. These keywords will help you find the right opportunities versus blindly clicking through internship posting.

Finding a Great Internship for You

The best internships come with exposure to multiple projects and departments and provide an opportunity to show off your talents and value. Ideally, they are also led by experienced supervisors who have a stake in the success of their interns. From the perspective of a future employer, securing a new hire who has already has work experience in the real world is an appealing proposition. The benefits of an internship are crystal clear. Knowing where to find one is less transparent.

1. Where To Look

Here are a few strategies to help you find that gem.

Start at the beginning. The first stop on any internship journey begins at your career services center. An advisor will be able to provide you with access to internships established by your institution. They might also know of opportunities available through alumni associations or other resources not found online.

Tap into your network. You might not think you have a network, but you do. Tapping into it simply means letting everyone know you are looking for an internship and asking them for potential leads. They can also help to spread the word. This includes professors, academic advisors, teaching assistants, neighbors, family friends, friends' parents, and past and current employers.

Widen your circle. Look beyond the career services center at your university to online and in-person career fairs. Even though the purpose of most career fairs is to solicit for full-time employment, representatives might be able to put you in touch with colleagues who are looking for interns.

Look online. There are a number of online [resources](#) that list internships across industries, including government, non-profit, international, and environmental sectors, among others.

Internship Search Resources:

- [CareerShift](#)
- [Parker Dewey](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Glassdoor](#)
- [Indeed](#)
- [Idealist.org](#)
- [Internshipfinder.com](#)
- [GlobalExperiences.com](#)
- [Monster](#)

2. A Word About Networking

Most college students don't network, because it can feel uncomfortable to promote yourself. People, particularly students, forget how enjoyable it can be to find common experiences and interests with others. Think of it this way: [networking](#) is simply an extension of introducing yourself and shaking hands with people you don't know.

Here are a few pointers to make it less daunting.



- **Go first.** Make it a habit to introduce yourself at social gatherings, school events, and career-related fairs and gatherings.
- **Elevator pitch.** Prepare an introduction that includes your name, where you go to school, and a sentence or two about your broad career interests.
- **Follow up.** When a positive connection is made, be proactive about asking to exchange contact information and actually stay in touch.
- **Think digitally.** Utilize social media channels to spread the word that you are looking for an internship and ask for introductions in your areas of interest. Make sure to include channels that you might not utilize in your personal life.
- **Maintain decorum.** Consider it a given that employers check social media profiles to assess candidates. All public posts should be appropriate.
- **Be proactive.** Building a network is all about taking the lead and not waiting for something to happen. It is also the beginning of a lifelong endeavor. Connections you make today may very well serve you years from now.
- **Be helpful.** Offer to connect your peers and new contacts to your resources. Networking is a mutually beneficial experience.

3. Prospecting: Hidden Opportunities

There are a lot of college students clamoring for the best internships. The exceptions are the ones you find on your own through prospecting. This is the practice of reaching out to companies to inquire about opportunities that may not yet exist or have not been advertised.

Here are a few ways to make prospecting as effective as possible:

- Identify a list of companies and local businesses in your area that you would love to work for.
- Call or visit them in person and share your elevator pitch.
- Use LinkedIn to reach out to employees, introduce yourself, and start a conversation about the company and your interest.
- Ask to speak with someone in the department closest to your areas of interest and experience.
- Inquire about summer job opportunities (that could potentially lead to a more formal internship).
- Request an informational interview and follow-up.



Positioning Yourself for Success

Now that you know how to pick out a rewarding internship opportunity, it's time to go for it. Your task is to clearly articulate your strengths and experiences and how they will benefit the companies you are applying to. It is also important to find unique ways of making your application stand out from others. The competition for most internships is stiff.

1. Application Checklist

There are two key components to most job applications: a resume and a cover letter. Some companies require forms to be filled out and submitted online. The essentials are still the same. You share what you have done in the past and how that translates into what you can do for a company in the future.

2. Resume Essentials

As a college student, it is likely that your past work experience is limited. Whether you babysat, shoveled snow, or had a minimum wage hourly job, previous work experience demonstrates ambition and is an opportunity to cultivate valuable [skills](#). Past work experience also extends to the classroom.

Past Work Experience

- Include work experience that is relevant to the job you are applying for.
- List one or two big school projects that are most closely aligned with the position you are seeking.
- Include the parameters of the projects and the challenges you faced.
- Share specific steps taken to overcome those challenges.

Technical Skills

- It is expected that you know how to operate a personal computer. Skip the minutia.
- Only list technical skills that are relevant to the position. Do not feel pressured to embellish.

Soft Skills

- Soft skills equate to great people skills.
- Demonstrate your ability to collaborate, empathize, listen, and lead through overcoming challenges in your past work and university experience.
- Convey other essential soft skills such as curiosity, problem-solving, critical thinking, and a strong work ethic however you can. Try to write brief, compelling examples of how you have used them in school and in prior work experiences.



3. Cover Letter 101

The beauty of a cover letter is that it provides a place to highlight relevant skills that you either haven't been able to fit into your resume or that you want to really reinforce.

- Introduce yourself and express interest in a particular position.
- Articulate what makes the internship appealing.
- Share how your skills will serve the company.
- Express specifically why you are the right person for the job.
- Tailor your cover letter to each opportunity.
- Proactively include at least two references.

4. References

- Supplying a handful of references before being asked demonstrates a level of professionalism that will impress prospective employers.
- If possible, offer up one personal and one professional reference.
- It is perfectly reasonable to share the characteristics and/or job responsibilities you would like a reference to highlight.
- Think about which people will provide the strongest references and give them time to think it over.
- You may want different references for different jobs.
- Like everything else, the sooner you get started the better.

5. Review

A really important part of the application process is review. It is so easy to overlook small errors that will make a negative impression. Most career service centers offer help crafting and editing resumes and cover letters. Ask friends to take a quick pass as you tailor each cover letter and offer to do the same for them.

Presenting Your Best Self

You have put in the hard work and submitted applications to the internships most aligned with your skills and broad interests. Ideally, you will hear back from a handful of companies that are interested in taking the next step: meeting for an interview. As thrilling as it is to receive an invitation, it can also feel nerve-wracking. The way to quell feelings of anxiety is through preparation. The following simple steps will put you in the driver's seat before, during, and after an interview.

1. Before The Main Event

There are several key areas of preparation that will give you all the confidence you need to succeed in an interview situation.

Research

- Read up on the company, including its history, product offering, and leadership team.
- Familiarize yourself with the latest news announcements by reading press releases on the company website and mentions in the media.
- Have a general sense of primary competitors.
- Conduct a web and LinkedIn search on the person you are interviewing with.
- Based on your research, compile a list of questions that you can ask during the interview both about the company and the role itself.
- Do not expect to apply every piece of information from your research. You may be able to draw on some of the knowledge, but being prepared is essential to nailing an interview.

Samples & Stories

- If the internship requires writing samples or a portfolio of any kind, pull together your best and most relevant work. Don't overwhelm your interviewer with everything under the sun. Stick to your best work.
- It is expected that prospective interns will have limited work experience. Instead, start a written list of essential school projects that enable you to share the narrative of a challenge, your role in the resolution, and what you gleaned from the experience.
- Most importantly, be ready to explain how your experience has better prepared you to be an excellent intern at that company.

Role-Playing

- Read up on the most common [interview questions](#) and practice answering them.
- Kick things up a notch by asking a family member or friend to run through some of the more challenging questions.
- Identify the key experiences and interpersonal strengths you want to convey in an interview situation and pay extra attention to having those messages down pat.
- Do not try to memorize answers, because it is difficult to express authenticity when you are trying to deliver lines versus sharing who you really are.

2. Go Time

Interviewing is an essential life skill. Consider this practice for something you will be doing throughout your lifetime. Your ultimate goal is to be enthusiastic and demonstrate preparedness.



- Get a great night of sleep the day before your interview.
- Choose your favorite professional outfit that makes you feel confident and poised for success. Better to be overdressed than under.
- Practice a few minutes of deep breathing exercises to calm your nerves as they creep up.
- Greet your interviewer with a smile, direct eye contact, and a firm handshake.
- Even though they know who you are and what your name is, formally introduce yourself and take a moment to express your gratitude for the opportunity.
- As you sit down, take a deep breath and remind yourself, “I can do this!”
- Be curious.
- Feel free to refer to a list of prepared questions, as well as to take notes during the interview.
- Remember: this is an opportunity to seek out a mutual fit. You are assessing the opportunity as much as the interviewer is evaluating you.
- At the end of the interview, thank the hiring manager for their time and remind them of your enthusiasm for the job.
- Ask about the next steps and timing.

3. Virtual Interviews

Given the amount of time and effort it saves, it is likely that [virtual interviews](#) will be around for years to come. It is important to try to be as professional in every way as you would for an in-person interview.

Here are a few things to consider for a virtual experience:

- Test whatever technology platform your interview has been scheduled on. Glitches happen and are extraordinarily frustrating. You don’t want to be late or flustered over something you can control ahead of time.
- If you will be conducting the interview at your home or another shared space, make sure to let your roommates or family members know that you will be busy.
- Reduce distractions by closing windows and keeping your environment as quiet and calm as possible.

4. Following Up

- As soon as you have a moment after the interview, take a few minutes to write down which moments left the biggest impressions.
- Identify which job responsibilities and aspects of the company ethos were most exciting to you. These will become the basis for your follow-up note.
- Ideally, you will send a thank you note on the day of your interview.
- If you are genuinely interested in the opportunity, let them know why. Be specific on what you can bring to the company.
- If you don’t hear back, follow up one week later to inquire about the status of the position.
- If you are turned down for the opportunity, request feedback on how you fell short. Most importantly, remember that rejection is part of the process. A terrific internship is out there. Just keep going.



Making the Most of Your Internship

You landed an internship! Congratulations! After all your hard work, you have earned this opportunity, full stop! Now, before you actually start the job, it is time to start thinking about how you can make the most of the experience. Hint: be proactive, about *everything*, even if you have been offered a virtual internship.

How To Be The Consummate Professional

Knowing how to conduct oneself in a professional setting might seem straightforward, but it is truly the most critical element to success in an internship.

The Nitty Gritty

- Dress the part.
- Be on time for your workday. Be on time for every meeting.
- However friendly a corporate culture may be, do not cross lines during the workday or after it. This includes pursuing romantic relationships in the workplace or overconsuming alcohol at social gatherings after work, even if they are not specifically work-related.
- Keep an organized workspace. Every behavior is an opportunity to make a positive (or negative) impression.
- Prioritize follow-through and demonstrate dependability.
- Read any corporate materials like codes of conduct and organizational policy documents. Know what is generally expected of you before anyone has to tell you.
- In the spirit of cooperation, mentally prepare to face some grunt work.

A Day At The Office

- Make it a point to introduce yourself to as many people as possible, even beyond the scope of your job. Share your name and department with folks you encounter in the elevator, in the lunchroom, and around the water cooler.
- Set goals with your supervisor as early into your internship as possible. Ask them to share expectations of what you accomplish.
- Keep busy. Don't make personal calls or text friends during the workday. Don't use the internet for personal use in your workspace. If you don't have enough work to do, let your manager know.
- If time permits, ask to sit in on meetings and follow up with your manager on ways you might contribute to projects and tasks.
- If you are responsible for leading a meeting, stick to the proposed schedule. Be prepared with an agenda and at the end of the meeting repeat the key next steps and who will be completing them.
- If for any reason you are unable to meet a deadline, communicate with your manager before the due date. People make mistakes! Accept responsibility for your errors and propose solutions.

Think Ahead

- If you are experiencing a lull, be proactive about how your time might be best spent. Think about what the organization could benefit from and what might provide a great learning opportunity for you.



- If there is someone you would like to get to know better, ask them if they have 15 minutes to tell you more about their professional trajectory and current responsibilities. If they agree to the invitation, treat them to coffee.
- Keep a journal of all projects with details on your role in completing them. These are the tasks and experiences that will be added to your resume and portfolio.
- Seek growth opportunities when possible. Keeping a diary of how you spend time might reveal a path toward increased responsibility.

Note About Virtual Internships

Being able to interact in an office setting certainly has its appeal, but a [virtual internship](#) still has plenty of benefits.

- If an internship is a paid opportunity, that will not change in a virtual setting.
- You may have the chance to take advantage of flexible work hours.
- School credit will not be jeopardized if a company decides remote is the safest option.

Building Bridges

You have almost completed your internship! You put in the time and made the most of the opportunity. The actual internship may be nearly over, but there are a handful of strategies to leverage the experience even after the fact.

How To Maximize Your Internship Over The Long Term

The longer-term goal of an internship is to make a favorable impression on a prospective employer and/or to make connections that will lead to employment elsewhere. It is also an incredible opportunity to expose yourself to valuable new experiences that might guide the direction of your career. Here are a few ways to reap the benefits months, if not years, down the road.

At The Finish Line

- Ask your internship supervisor for an exit interview. Get into the mindset that feedback—both constructive and positive—holds a lot of value. Be open to it.
- An exit interview is also a chance to share your experience with your manager. Maintain a strict level of professionalism.
- Ask if your supervisor is comfortable providing a favorable reference when you eventually seek full-time employment.
- Follow up with a hard copy [thank you note](#). Electronic correspondences are the standard. An actual letter is more memorable.
- Circle back to your career services center and share the experience with an advisor there. Ask for advice and express your ideas about possible next steps.
- If you were exposed to new skills that you would like to strengthen, look into college classes or professional development courses that will develop these new interests.

When The Internship Is Over

- Stay in touch!
- Update your resume and profile on professional mediums to reflect this recent internship experience.
- Share relevant news with your internship supervisor about yourself and your accomplishments via email or through professional channels like LinkedIn.
- Follow the company on social media and professional networks.
- Share your reaction to news about the company through email and by posting and commenting on professional platforms. This lets them know you are paying attention and still interested in working at the company.
- If you see an interesting job posted at the company, email your contact before applying. Your previous manager might be able to give insight that helps you tailor a cover letter and resume. They might also put in a good word with the hiring manager.
- Also, keep in touch with former colleagues that you connected well with.
- In-person time together goes a long way to establish a bond that might lead to a job one day. Propose lunch or a coffee.
- Build your professional network by connecting on LinkedIn with anyone you worked with or established a relationship with at the company.
- Maintain a consistent presence on professional networks by commenting on posts and posting interesting articles and content.



CareerShift Internship Guide

How CareerShift Can Help You Find and Land Your Dream Internship

CareerShift enables you to search thousands of open opportunities, find helpful contacts, and convert your organized research into strategic outreach. CareerShift can make you more efficient, better targeted, and more prepared in your search for a great internship (or job).

Easy Ways CareerShift Can Expedite Your Search

1. **Limit Job Type:** If you're searching for an Internship, turn on "Advanced Search Criteria" and make sure that "Job Type" = "Internship."
2. **Prioritize Timing:** "Advanced Search Criteria" is also very helpful if you want to sort results by recency of job posting or you want to limit results to a specific time frame (e.g., within last day or week).
3. **Define and Redefine Geography:** To search by location, try multiple approaches, separately. Use the free text "Location" field to describe where you want to look. Try also leaving the "Location" field blank and using the "State/Province" and "City/Metro" fields. You can also try leaving "Location," "State/Province," and "City/Metro" blank and input zip code and "Zip Radius." Don't use zip code inputs if you're using those other geographic fields.
4. **Test Keywords:** Use the Keywords field to filter results and fine tune your search. Try the "All Keywords" and "Any Keywords" options to assess what's most effective in returning listings that match your interests.
5. **Use Company Search:** Try different variations of a company's name (e.g., with and without Inc. or Co., using/not using abbreviations, corporate parent vs. division or brand) to ensure that you are seeing all relevant listings.
6. **Save Results:** After finding opportunities of interest, select "Save for Later." Then, pick the folder to place the result, assign contacts to it, and add any notes you want to make about the opportunity. You can create sub-folders within "Jobs," such as "Interested" and "Apply" to better organize your found opportunities.
7. **Save Searches:** When you create a set of search parameters that produce results that interest you, use "Save Search" to reuse the selections later.

Enhancing Your Search with O*NET

O*NET, the Occupational Information Network, is a remarkable, free resource from the U.S. Department of Labor that provides explanations and forecasts of almost 1,000 occupations covering the entire U.S. economy. It's a powerful tool, but it can be an overwhelming one.

Here's how to use [O*NET](#) to quickly and easily gather great information to improve your internship search and career planning.

1. **Search by occupation** – Enter an occupation in the [“Occupation Quick Search”](#) (upper right corner) and you'll get a list of related matches. Click one and get a wide variety of relevant information. For example, [this page](#) displays information about the job of Marketing Research Analysts, including tasks they might perform; technology skills, knowledge, and abilities required for the job; activities assigned; education requirements; pay; and a variety of other data. As you find occupations of interest, think about the relevant skills you possess, as well as requirements you need to develop to become a stronger candidate.
2. **Search by industry** – If your interest is a specific industry, go to “Industry” under the [“Find Occupations”](#) parent tab. Select an industry to explore from the dropdown menu, and you'll see a list of occupations within the field, projected growth by job, and the number of projected job openings. Selecting a job will take you to a page showing required skills, knowledge, abilities, wage trends, and more.
3. **Search by career cluster** – If you have an idea of what field you want to work in, but are unsure of what positions to pursue, use the [“Career Cluster”](#) tool to see a variety of jobs within career fields requiring similar skill sets.
4. **Search by job family** – Job Families are groups of occupations based upon work performed, skills, education, training, and credentials. Select [“Job Family”](#) under the “Find Occupations” parent tab. Similar to the “Industry” tab, pick from a dropdown menu to see a list of occupation choices. Selecting an occupation will allow you to see the required tasks, knowledge, skills, employment trends, and other analysis.
5. **Search by outlook** – If you want to view industries expected to grow rapidly over the next several years, check out the [Bright Outlook](#) tool. It allows you to check out industries projected to have the most job openings. This could be especially useful if you have interest in multiple industries. If one of them is on this list, you may want to favor pursuing internships in it to maximize future employment opportunities.
6. **Try Interest Profiler** – If you're unsure of what industry or occupation or type of work you want to pursue after graduation, O*NET's [Interest Profiler](#) provides a valuable collection of self-assessment career exploration tools. The profiler is a great resource to



help you discover work and activities you may enjoy, learn about areas of interest, and explore potentially relevant fields of work.

7. **Use O*Net Products at Work** – To search for articles about a field of interest, use the [O*NET Products at Work](#) tool. You can search by organization type, product type or customize your search field.
8. **Search by keywords** – Take advantage of [My Next Move](#), a resource created to help students learn more about career fields of interest. You can search by industry, keyword or suggestions made through the O*NET system.
9. **Use O*Net Academy** – Access a collection of resources including webinars, courses, and spotlights. Spend some time within the academy feature where you will learn about in-demand skills and technologies, how to prepare and search for jobs, and more. You can [find O*Net Academy here](#).

11 Key Reminders for Your Search

Internships are an invaluable supplement to your classroom experience. They can help you figure out what you want to do after college and make you a far more qualified and attractive candidate.

Finding an internship that's great for you and getting hired require determination and planning, but it's an investment in time and effort that can pay tremendous dividends.

Keep these tips in mind for a more successful and manageable search:

1. Explore your strengths, your interests, and your values to help you determine what you want to do and why. (Take the *DISC Assessment & Discovering and Developing Core Values* course, both included in this program.)
2. Identify skills you want to develop and gaps to address between where you are where you want to be at graduation.
3. Embrace networking and learn to ask for advice and help. (Use the *Building a Personal Board of Directors* workbook included in this program.)
4. Take advantage of the resources available through your school's career services center.
5. Keep in mind that micro-internships are a great way to explore what you are curious about. (Visit ParkerDewey.com.)
6. Create a list of projects you have done (in the classroom, in extracurriculars, in work settings) that enable you to share a challenge you faced, your role in resolving it, and what you learned. Be able to explain how your experience has helped prepare you to succeed as an intern.
7. Practice describing, in writing and verbally, examples of your ability to collaborate, empathize, listen, and lead.
8. Before every interview, research the company and the role, and prepare a list of targeted questions to ask.
9. If you are genuinely interested in an opportunity, clearly communicate why. Be specific.
10. Keep moving forward. Rejection and frustration are normal and unavoidable. Persevere.
11. Celebrate your successes, big and small.