



CAREER VISION

Avoid Common Internship Mistakes

In today's very competitive hiring environment, employers are looking for graduates who are goal-oriented and have already built a resume of coursework and work experiences related to their career direction. Internships provide students with the opportunity to gain that valuable real-world experience, making their textbook learning and classroom discussions come alive.

The best internships give students a practical preview of a career, company or organization, and/or geographic area. Exposure and experience help students clarify career goals and make better course selections. Internships give students important exposure to work environments, diverse co-workers and supervisors, office operations, business terminology, and professional behavior. Participating in meaningful project work lets you show your skills and network with employees across the company. Often, the longer the internship, the better the project.

Students may participate in internships during the summer or academic year. They can range from 4 weeks to a year, depending on the academic program. Most summer internships are 6 to 12 weeks long and typically take place during the summer between junior and senior year in college. Proactive students are opting for multiple internships, beginning with their freshman or sophomore year. Companies commonly use their internship program to attract and develop talented individuals who are desirable full-time hires upon graduation.

Sometimes academic credit may be earned for internships. Sometimes they are paid. Sometimes they are strictly voluntary. An internship is not just an activity to check off your list. Determine what you want to learn or gain from the experience, and how you can contribute.

What are some common mistakes to avoid when looking for an internship?

1. Don't wait until the last minute. Do visit your campus internship or career services center four to six months before you would like to begin your internship to investigate what resources they offer to secure internships.
2. Don't rely solely on someone else to find opportunities for you. Do take the initiative by identifying companies and organizations you are interested in, and then search their websites to see if they have internship programs. If you don't see a formal program mentioned, call the company and inquire.



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3. Don't underestimate your talents. If a company doesn't have a formal internship program, don't let that fact deter you. Do ask them if there are any short-term projects that need doing. Developing your own proposal plants a seed that can turn into an internship equivalent.
4. Don't skip career fairs offered by your college or your community to meet company recruiters. These professionals may also be sourcing candidates for their internship program. Do ask them about company and industry needs.
5. Don't overlook government departments and agencies. Remember to look at federal, state, county and city government internship programs.
6. Don't neglect telling your network what you are looking for. Do the work to clarify what you are looking for and be able to articulate it to others.
7. Don't be unprofessional. Do treat the internship search like a formal job search. Take advantage of the resume writing, interviewing and job search workshops at your college career center to learn how to present your best self to a potential employer. And do treat the internship as if you were a full-time employee.
8. Don't get upset if you have been turned down for an internship. Do look at opportunities to stay on the company's radar. Send a letter expressing your continued interest in a position if one opens up later. Sometimes students offered internships do not accept, or plans change as summer approaches and they withdraw.