



CAREER VISION

Why Internships Matter

You need a job to gain experience. But, you need experience to get a job! It's the ultimate *Catch 22*, isn't it?

There was a time when college grads gained experience by paying their dues in entry-level positions that utilized the **technical skills** they learned in classrooms. As new employees, recent grads developed and mastered the **soft skills** required to move into higher-level positions while working. But, this model for career growth has changed dramatically — *and so has the world of work*. Primarily as a result of advances in technology and automation, we're seeing significant transformations in the way work is done in some industries and occupations.

These days, rather than crunching numbers or preparing reports behind the scenes, many entry-level workers and interns are meeting with customers, identifying and resolving issues, and serving on cross-functional teams. And that means today's new hires have an *even greater need* for soft skills than ever before (especially critical teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills).

Now here comes *Catch 23*! To get a job, you need the **right mix of both the technical and soft skills** needed to do the job. But soft skills aren't typically developed in the classroom. So how can you acquire the skills you need in preparation for your first professional position after college? Through an internship (or two...or even three)!

Internships Matter

In essence, an internship is the *new entry-level* job. Employers want to hire college grads who not only have the required education and training for the job, but relevant experience as well (whether gained through work, internships / co-ops, or volunteerism). Typically, an internship is a single, multi-week work experience. Cooperative programs, also known as "co-ops" tend to be longer-term, often spanning several semesters, with related classwork interspersed throughout the schedule.

Internship experiences significantly increase odds that: the

1. hiring managers will actually read your resume
and
2. you'll get at least one job offer(perhaps even before you get your degree).

Those are two pretty big benefits of internships, right? And the perks don't stop there.



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Through internships, you can:

- **“Test drive” a career.** Not only will you *learn by doing* in an environment where you’re supervised by a professional, you’ll also gain deeper insight into who you are and the types of work environments and tasks you enjoy most.

And, by applying what you’ve learned in your classes to real work, you’ll get a better understanding of your major, occupational field, and targeted career options. You might even discover some gaps between classroom instruction and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do the job effectively.

By identifying gaps early on, you’ll have time to plan and implement the actions needed to close them. As an added bonus, your internship manager may even give you some suggestions about specific courses, experiential activities, and certifications that would be beneficial.

- **Develop skills.** Remember, employers want to hire college grads that have the technical and soft skills needed for the job. Even if you already happen to have exceptional work habits and [the soft skills employers expect to see on your resume](#), you’ll sharpen them by interacting with working professionals. In turn, you’ll become even more confident in your ability to land and succeed in your first professional position.
- **Build your resume.** Of course, any experiences that are relevant to the types of post-college jobs you plan to apply for will strengthen your resume. But keep in mind hiring managers look for college grads who have participated in internships or co-op programs. Without at least one internship (and / or a leadership role in a student organization) on your resume, you may be at a distinct disadvantage (whether you’re looking for work or applying to graduate schools).
- **Expand your professional network.** You’ll have a manager (or many managers, depending on the nature of your internship). You’ll have co-workers. You’ll attend meetings. You may even serve on a cross-functional team or two. Bottom line — you’ll make many new contacts during your internship. Some of these people may serve as references when you apply for jobs. And, you never know — one of them may even become a lifelong mentor, offering advice and guidance to you throughout your career.



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Through internships, you may:

- **Get a job offer.** According to research by the [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#), 68.3% of college students who did an internship and 40% of co-op students received an offer from their employer for a full-time position upon graduation.
- **Make some money.** Of course, not all interns are paid, but many are. According to [NACE](#), paid interns at the bachelor's degree level earned an average of \$20.82 / hour. That's a nice wage, especially when you consider that an internship offers several other bonuses (including opportunities to learn on the job, sharpen your skills, build your resume, and expand your professional network).
- **Earn college credit.** Your college may offer academic credit for internships. In fact, growing numbers of schools *require* you to complete one in order to graduate. Check with your school's career center for more information.
- **Transition more easily from college to career.** Lots of things will change after college — starting with the time your alarm goes off in the morning! By building good work habits during your internship, the big adjustment from campus life to work life will go more smoothly.

Matters of Choice

An internship is very important to your career success. But does that mean you should accept anything that's offered to you? Maybe not. Here's why. You want to get the most you can from your internship experience, right? And you know that employers hire applicants that have the right mix of technical and soft skills to fill their job vacancies.

So look for internships that:

1. align well with your major / targeted career choices
and
2. afford you the opportunity to enhance your soft skills.

Also, prioritize paid internships over unpaid — for two important reasons. The first one is quite obvious — you'll make some money, which is great!



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Yet, the second reason is even more important than the first. Paid interns have many more opportunities for professional skills development *and* are much more likely to receive a job offer from the employer than are unpaid interns.

Considering the significant impact paid internships can have on your career development and employment opportunities, should you forego the experience if you can find only unpaid opportunities? Not necessarily (especially in a tough job market). Unpaid interns can benefit by learning about their occupational field and expanding their professional network.

Practical Matters

To reap the many benefits internships offer, first you have to find one. Looking for an internship is much like looking for a job. Your search will be most effective if you use a combination of these strategies:

- **Contact your school's career center** to access internship postings, register for upcoming job and internship fairs, and connect with alumni mentors working in your field of interest.
- **Use social media.** Hiring managers and recruiters rely heavily on social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter) to source for interns and soon-to-be college grads in the job search process.
- **Search postings.** Check these websites for internship opportunities:
 - ✓ [Way Up](#)
 - ✓ [Indeed](#)
 - ✓ [Monster](#)
 - ✓ [aftercollege](#)
 - ✓ [LinkedIn](#)
 - ✓ [idealist](#)
- **Send your resume and a cover letter** to businesses and organizations that employ professionals who work in your desired career. Start by checking their websites for postings. Even if there are no intern openings listed on a company's website, send an unsolicited resume and cover letter to inquire about possible opportunities.
- **Network!** As is the case in any job search, networking is the most effective way to uncover hidden internship opportunities.



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Be sure to start your internship search early. On average, employers with formal internship programs begin interviewing candidates about eight months prior to the targeted start date.

Performance Matters

Last but not least, approach your internship like you would any job. Be mindful of the fact that the quality of your work and your interactions with others will affect how you're perceived by your managers and peers.

So, work hard and do your best. Approach every task with a “can-do” attitude, no matter how challenging (or mundane) it is. After all, in the larger scheme of things, even the little things matter!