



# Internship Success Kit



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## **1.0 Introduction**

Employers place great emphasis upon the value of skills. Any work experience will add to your skills profile, supplementing those developed during your degree and through extra-curricular activities.

Many employers are well aware of the benefits of work experience to students and often use their work experience programmes as an extended interview process. It also helps to raise their profile with students at an earlier stage than would be the case if they were to recruit only graduates. Remember that you can bring them new insights and the ability to tackle problems and tasks that otherwise would not get done.

Internships count as valuable experience if you learn how to articulate the skills you are developing.

## **2.0 What are internships?**

An internship is a short term or part-time period of work experience during the academic year, easter vacation or summer months in which a student receives supervised practical training in a certain role. Internships are often very closely related to a student's academic course and career goals, and may serve as a foundation to professional employment. Some internships provide very close supervision by a mentor in an apprenticeship-like relationship. Some internships provide you with a salary, while some are unpaid.

The most important factor in choosing an internship is to select a company in an industry which generally interests you. Most internship programmes will expect a minimum level of academic achievement before you are accepted. Make sure you research any company you apply to thoroughly and confirm what you will be doing before accepting any offer.

Although any company or industry can offer an internship they tend to be found in city based companies. Banking, investment and financial services organisations, strategic and management consultancies, engineering and law firms are common employers. These companies recruit hundreds of graduates each year and internships form part of their recruitment campaign. For these companies, internships provide a 'try-before-you-buy' method of selection and many summer interns are offered graduate jobs after their placement.

### 3.0 The benefits of an internship

Internships can vary greatly in structure, duration, pay, work (both amount and quality) and the benefits they provide. One of the best ways to decide which career is for you is to undertake an internship in that area and see if you enjoy it. Obviously, if you want to be an accountant you cannot actually expect to work as an accountant in a firm in the summer for six weeks, but, if you get an internship with an accounting firm, you could find yourself working alongside them, helping them with their work and seeing what really goes on.

In addition, an internship will give a real feel for the working 'culture' of an organisation and allow you to find out if you will 'fit-in', something that is really hard to grasp from reading companies' recruitment literature (which as you know can all sound the same). So what better way is there to help you make your career decision?

An internship is also a fantastic way to improve your transferable skills (skills that you learn in one situation and can take to another environment). Team working, organisational, time management and communication skills are classic examples that most employers want evidence of in the application process. Even though you will start to develop these kinds of skills when you are studying at university, the more evidence you can give employers the stronger candidate you will be and an internship will certainly help you demonstrate your abundant transferable skills.

With the development of economies and globalisation, exposure to international business and culture is becoming a necessary and valuable experience for college graduates entering the job market. An international experience in an academic program brings a significant edge to individuals when seeking career employment. Employers are always looking for persons who are self-confident, worldly and knowledgeable of a multicultural world. Successful completion of an international internship will further develop characteristics, which are desired by companies in the real business world.

An internship is an excellent way to determine if the industry and the profession is the best career option to pursue. Interns not only gain practical work experience in a field that they intend to pursue but also build experience of international platforms.

Internships help individuals to combine theory with practical work experience.

An internship helps to develop professional work habits; provide an understanding of corporate cultures, give an opportunity to analyse international business settings and offer platforms to compare differences in work styles.

Internships taken internationally offer the privilege to observe differences in businesses, and see how projects are handled in different cultures, which might be conducted differently in the intern's home country.

Internships may present a potential for an offer of full time employment. International work experience is the most beneficial advantage that can be acquired by completing an internship. For students or fresh graduates, having this work experience on their CV can be the best way to get the foot in the door. This can result in more job offers as compared to individuals who lack such work experience. With globalisation, more and more, employers are looking for individuals who have an international background, and that is where the advantage comes in.

Networking is probably one of the most significant advantages interns may have. The opportunity to meet with company managers, executives and peers is a wonderful gain for internationals. Especially if the goal is to conduct business internationally, the network will be ready for exploration. The contacts made during an internship can lead to job openings after your internship, either at the same location, or at other locations.

Students with relevant work experience, coupled with strong academic backgrounds and a blend of extracurricular activities, leadership positions, and community service are better-prepared and more marketable upon graduation. Students who have completed internships find an easier time conducting a job search, because they have acquired and polished more of the skill sets sought by employers.

Internships give students the chance to "reality test" a career. They try it out by working on a full-time or part-time basis, before making a commitment after graduation. As a result, some students change a major, minor, or career direction. They change their career path before it is "too late." A senior computing and information science major said, "Through my two internships with a public utility, I learned that I preferred being in an academic environment more than working in an office. I applied for an internship for money and experience; I got so much more. I learned a lot about myself and changed my career plans. My internships gave me the chance to work with business computer applications. While I enjoyed them, I decided to apply my technical skills in the medical field, possibly designing software to diagnose medical illnesses."

Internships boost self-confidence, increase independence and self-reliance. Extra earnings help toward college expenses and internships can provide valuable future contacts for finding that first job after graduation.

Over 50% of internship employers hire their interns. The employer has had the chance to observe, review and evaluate the intern. Also the intern has examined the job, knows the environment, requirements and culture. It's a two-way street, with student and employer benefiting.

As a Psychology intern said, "During my spring internship with a private, non-profit social service agency, I confirmed my career decision - to work with juveniles, helping them to put their lives in order by providing a treatment program to meet their needs. I felt proud that I played a part in helping them achieve educational and personal goals. Their success was my success and I contribute it to my internship. I carefully selected my internship site, because my faculty advisor told me that a full-time offer is sometimes made to current interns. He was right!"

#### 4.0                    **How to make the most of an internship**

**An internship is a step into the professional world.** Your future employer is not only looking for excellent academic achievement, they also want well-rounded employees who have some experience of the 'real world'. An internship provides you with the perfect platform to achieve this. However, after you have secured your place how do you ensure you benefit from the experience so you can demonstrate your skills and abilities to potential future employers?

**Set realistic personal goals.** While some internships are very structured, others are not, so you need to spend some time before you start the internship setting goals that you want to accomplish. Maybe it's deciding on what area within the marketing industry that you want to specialise, or learning new skills, or building your network. Whatever your goals, you will feel a greater sense of accomplishment once you achieve them. Have regular meetings with your supervisor(s). You may get a supervisor who never schedules meetings with you or travels quite a bit, so you have to make sure to have regular meetings where you can share experiences and lessons learned - both good and bad - as well as give progress reports.

**Tackle all tasks with enthusiasm and a positive attitude.** In just about every company, a new intern is going to have to "pay his or her dues." You will undoubtedly be given some menial work to do, such as photocopying, but the key is to complete all your work assignments with the same level of enthusiasm and professionalism.

**Avoid negativity.** The quickest way to ruin a good internship is being negative. So, avoid complaining, being rude, disrespecting colleagues, arriving late, leaving early, being small-minded, missing deadlines, appearing arrogant, wearing improper attire, acting unprofessionally, appearing inflexible or taking part in office politics. Never shun a chance to learn more. Take every opportunity presented to you to attend company or industry meetings, conferences, and events; participate in training workshops; read all company materials.

**Get as much exposure as possible.** Some of the best internships rotate you among departments and supervisors, but if yours doesn't, don't let that stop you from tackling new tasks, meeting people outside your department, and attending company social events. The more you are exposed to new ideas and new people, the more you'll learn.

**Don't be afraid to ask questions.** Always remember that an internship is a learning experience for you. While the employer expects to get a certain level of work from you, you are not expected to know everything. Seek advice and raise questions whenever you encounter something that is not familiar to you. Be open-minded about new ideas and procedures - remember that you don't know everything!

**Take the initiative.** Employers encourage employees to tackle tough problems and to think "outside the box" in order to find solutions. Just make sure you work with your supervisor(s) so you don't overstep your authority - and make sure you share the spoils with them.

**Find a good mentor.** A mentor is someone at a higher level in the organisation that looks out for you and makes sure you are learning what you need to know and accomplishing what you need to do. A mentor can also shield you from office politics and be a good sounding board for you to discuss ideas, ask questions, etc.

**Network.** One of the key tools of job-hunting is utilising your network to find your next career step, whether another internship or a job upon graduation (and beyond). Build professional relationships with your supervisor(s) and other managers in the organisation. These people are also a good source for getting other job-hunting advice and tips from their years of experience.

Leave with tangible accomplishments. One of your goals with any internship is leaving it with some tangible results - both for your CV and your portfolio (if you use one). Maybe you developed a brochure, computerised an inventory system, organised a sales conference, met with clients, tracked industry trends, etc.

**Enjoy yourself.** Most internships are great experiences, so make sure you have some fun while you're working and learning.

Despite many of the positives aspects of internships, one of their drawbacks is that they are competitive and sometimes harder to get on to than the company's graduate training scheme. And remember, only certain sectors of the job market offer internships. For example internships are often offered by financial firms but looking for an internship in the media might be like looking for a needle in haystack.

Getting an internship in an organisation is not easy and takes real commitment but the results are certainly worthwhile. Good luck!

## 5.0 Case Study: A student's experience

### Case One:

Here a language student from Edinburgh University recounts her internship experience.

“Coming from a non-finance background (as a Modern Languages student) I was surprised to be accepted onto the internship programme. I knew that I would have a lot of ground to gain compared to my peers on the programme so I was determined to work unbelievably hard in order to catch up and hopefully earn myself the security of a job offer, which would take the pressure off my final year. I put in the hours. When I arrived, I could easily equate the experience to arriving in a foreign country, with an entirely different culture and a very foreign language. The impenetrable language of finance.

I tortured myself trying to understand every last detail of every piece of information I was given. The finance world is full of individuals who have worked unbelievably hard to get where they are and they do not want anyone else to take the easy route. They will say ‘liquid assets’ when they mean ‘money’. If you want to ask a question you will have to organise a coffee meeting or a 7 o’clock breakfast. When they give you their time, you take it gratefully and absorb every well chosen abundantly multi-syllabled word they offer you. Because these people are exceptionally intelligent. They have pierced the impenetrable armour of incomprehensibility and are standing on the other side, building further reinforcements. The industry necessarily must be like this. It must be difficult to know how to make money or they would be out of a job.

My efforts were not in vain. I hollowed a little crack out of the wall and had a peek inside. The Garden of Eden is almost all it seems. It is challenging, stimulating, everything it promises to be on the glossy webpage. But it is a constant struggle. I met some of the most intelligent and inspiring people I have ever been fortunate enough to work with. I learnt more than I thought possible in a ridiculously short amount of time. I slept very very little and I barely saw the sun. During the summer.

However it really doesn't have to be like this. My mistake? I took it all too seriously. I truly believed that if I didn't know every single thing in the whole world that I would be placed on a podium in the centre of the office and publicly ridiculed. Then the whole world would explode and I would be ostracised as a leper. I really shouldn't have. It's a learning experience not an act of servility. You should make the most of it, enjoy it, but be realistic- a job is part of life not a replacement for it. The first thing my manager said to me was that the name of the game was ‘Facetime’ be seen to be working hard and staying long hours and you'll look good. Naively I believed him. My advice is to anyone doing an internship; don't play games. Do your best, but leave by 7.

### **Case Two:**

I spent 6 weeks last summer working as a Research Assistant at the School of Informatics, University of Edinburgh. I was awarded the Assistantship after having worked on my thesis at the same research group. Having spent three months working hard, I managed to interest my supervisor enough for him to offer me this position until the start of the new academic year.

Though I was required only to work 8 hours daily, I found myself working a lot more than 8 hours - and even working weekends. I demonstrated my work during this period to quite a few representatives from industry, and therefore it was essential that what I did was up to scratch. Presenting my work to these people also helped hone my communication skills, and aided me in making my accent more neutral (and hence, more understandable to people from different parts of the globe).

An internship or assistantship of this sort is, in my opinion, a stepping stone to more exciting work, or at the very least, work at the same place on a more permanent basis. This is why I considered it imperative that I tried to work much harder than I was expected to.

### **Case Three:**

My internship was as a business process developer at BT working on the Hewlett Packard account. My project was to improve the way BT and HP do business together, to make the transaction more efficient. The task was very broad and I had full responsibility and access to all the resource necessary.

Initially I didn't get the internship. I got short listed to the final two, but didn't pass the face-to-face interview. I couldn't understand this and contacted the line manager for feedback. He was so impressed that I'd contacted him and persevered he put me forward for the post-interview psychometric tests. Amazingly the other person who was interviewed for the internship didn't pass, and so I got it in the end! Proof that employers are impressed by determination and perseverance.

On my first day in BT, and in my new suit, I was given a laptop and a mobile phone. I was put on an audio conference and felt completely out of my depth. It sounded like they were talking another language there was so much jargon! I was full of enthusiasm ready to change BT for the better and I felt like I couldn't do anything, not even get my laptop to work.

Over the coming weeks, however, I started to really enjoy my internship. I went to senior management meetings with my manager on a regular basis to try and get a feel for BT and the jargon used. Whilst this was taking place I was also conducting my own meetings, both face-to-face and audio, with people from all levels and areas of BT to

establish how the existing interaction between BT and HP occurred. This was no easy task, BT is huge and complex, and there are lots of informal relationships occurring within the formally defined structure. As fast as I was coming up with suggestions for improvement there were people telling me the reasons why I couldn't do it. At one point I felt like I'd really hit a dead end, however, an appraisal and review meeting with my manager revealed that I was not only greatly exceeding his expectations but that I'd found a solution that could be implemented and the objections dismissed.

I then started to put the wheels in motion for developing an online quotation tool for HP customers to use, to gauge a quick budgetary quote for BT's products before they contact BT with their more specific requirements; so saving BT a lot of time.

As an aside I also conducted some research into a major new sales opportunity between BT and HP in the business continuity and disaster recovery services market, ready for a sales pitch my manager was going to present to a CEO in HP.

Ten weeks wasn't enough to see my project implemented, however, I gained a lot of experience and confidence. At the end of the project I gave a presentation to a meeting of senior managers, and was offered a job by my manager's boss on the spot, completely turning his opinions on me around!

I gained so much from my internship, that I genuinely feel I had developed myself and my skills more in that 10 weeks, than I had in two years of my degree!

## **6.0 Find an internship**

The first step is research. There are all kinds of sites to help you find the internship you are looking for. Take the time to research a week or two before you apply to anything. Check out the staples such as [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com) and [www.monstertrak.monster.com](http://www.monstertrak.monster.com) along with sites that are specific to the industry you are trying to break into.

Once you've found your potential employer take the time to look at their organisation. If you can't display at least a rudimentary knowledge of what they are about in your cover letter they won't take the time to learn why you are a good fit. This is also important because you should be picky about where you intern. Since you aren't going into the job for money you should intern only for an organisation that fits what you want and will give you the experiences you think you need to succeed.

I know it's just an internship but the cover letter and CV should be just as high in quality as if you were applying for a CEO job. Employers appreciate it and expect it. I have personally heard from employers who received applications that misspelled their company name in the first paragraph. They couldn't tell me much more than that, because they stopped reading. Don't let that happen to you. Take the time to re-read your cover and give it to a friend too.

Make direct, unsolicited contact with a few selected companies. Irrespective of whether they have an internship program, or have published openings, or have even thought about hiring an intern, the direct approach can be even more productive as applying for an advertised position. Why? Because the latter is by definition a competitive situation. Everyone else who knows about the opening can apply and compete for it. Whereas, you may be the only one approaching a company who has not advertised or published an opening.

With a little time in the business reference library, scouting out dynamic growth you can find dozens or even hundreds of potential targets. Even if they have no formal program, with a little salespersonship and a good CV, you can convince them that having a high-quality, professional intern like yourself would be a real boon to their company.

One other piece of advice in this direct contact scenario: don't write to Personnel or Human Resources; they will just tell you they don't have any openings. Send a clear, crisp, convincing letter to the top manager in the functional area where you want to work. If it's an IT or IS organisation, send it to the CIO or VP of that function. If it's in software development for a technology company, send it to the executive in charge of development. You may have to make a phone call to the company to get the person's name, but the personalised approach is ten times better than "To Whom It May Concern." All the latter says is that you don't care enough to find out whom that is.

Just like the best jobs are never advertised, neither are the best internships. It is going to take some time, a little effort and a great deal of talking to people--or, in other words-- networking.

Because you are a student and just beginning your career pursuit, you are in the very best position to get direction from experts in your chosen field. You just need to ask for it. Most professionals are not only willing but also anxious to work with students that are just starting out. You can begin right there at university. Talk to a professor or a counsellor about your goals and specifically ask them for contacts. They are usually well connected individuals and can give you a good start in locating professionals that are willing to help.

When you have a list of contacts, call them and tell them who recommended them as a contact. Ask them for a 20 or 30 minute meeting to discuss their careers and your need for information. Do not tell them you are looking for a job--just some specific information relative to your overall career goals.

When you meet, be certain to ask them their story, how they started out, and what is needed for one in your position whilst at university. Ask them for additional contacts. Discuss with them the merits of pursuing an internship and where you might be able to obtain one. Many times these positions never get advertised. By making these

connections and making it known what your objectives are, you will find many people are willing to help.

An internship search takes just as much effort as a search for a permanent position, and may be more competitive: major corporations use their internships to identify, select, and "test drive" candidates for permanent hire upon graduation.

Without knowing you, I can't advise if you are applying for internships for which you are a poor "fit," or for too few internships, or if your job search skills are not up to those of your competitors.

Therefore, you have to cast a wide net and be pro-active in your search, which means that applying to advertised openings is only one channel. Here are some tips for each step of the search, including some for those interested in nonprofit organisations:

Use every source available:

- Internship Postings in your university's Career Services Office: these employers probably hired a student from your uni and came back for more, or they are alumni they are predisposed to want a student from your uni.
- Professors and fellow students may hear about internships they are willing to share with you or want to refer a good candidate to.
- Use your field's professional associations' web sites, such as the ACCA. Use PROSPECTS or HOBSONS and any other directories you can find in the library or on-line
- GRB's website **[www.grb.uk.com](http://www.grb.uk.com)** has a jobs board with internships and part time jobs. You can identify 25 organisations you'd like to intern for. Then look for their web sites for both posted internships and information that will allow you to approach the organisation for an internship even if none are posted.

**SUCCESS STEP 1**

Register your CV with GRB. Our experts will identify your strengths and match your CV with the best graduate career opportunities available

**SUCCESS STEP 2**

Apply for jobs. Receive one-to-one job application guidance and execute graduate job success kit

**JOB OFFER**

A job offer in a career that plays to your strengths and increases your chance for rapid progression

**Finally**

We hope this has been useful to you. Everyone at the GRB is delighted that we have been able help you prepare for the job market. If you would like to hear about jobs with fast growing firms and blue chips that are not advertised elsewhere **and** get one-to-one expert advice all for free contact any member of our team on **01273-325775** or by email to **info@grb.uk.com**