

Landing a Summer Internship: Our Interns' How-To Guide



One of the most useful experiences for students who want to prepare for their future career are summer internships. Summer internships can give you a short-term experience working in a professional setting, build your skill set and help you grow your network. However, it can be intimidating to apply to an internship, especially your first one. We asked our summer interns how they secured their summer internships and what advice they had for others like them. Whether you are applying for a marketing role or a lab research position, we hope this guide will help you navigate your way to a summer internship.

Getting Started: Decide When and Where to Apply

When is the right time for an internship?

If you have the availability, dedication and desire to do an internship, now is the right time to apply. The opportunity to explore job positions during the summer can solidify your aspirations or set you in a different direction. Either way, an internship will give you valuable insight at an early stage of your career path.

Most large companies offer summer internships for students with a range of experience levels, from freshman undergraduates to senior graduate students. Generally, more education or experience will give you a competitive edge. However, many employers will have specific internship opportunities available for those just starting out, so there is no harm in applying as soon as you feel ready. Rejection is inevitable, but if you demonstrate persistence and enthusiasm, you may be asked to reapply the following year. This is a great way to be considered a top candidate for the following summer.

What internship would be a good fit for me?

Now that you have determined you want to do an internship next summer, it is time to consider what type of internship you want. Here are some questions to think about when deciding what internship position would be a good fit for you:

Q: Do you want to increase your experience in a familiar field?

If you loved your past experiences in a certain area of work, then continue to look for internships in the same field. This can be a great way to explore similar roles at different companies, gain specialized knowledge and find out which companies have the atmosphere and work environment you prefer.

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Q: Do you want to expand your skillset and try something new?

If you are not loving what you currently do and want to explore other options, then a summer internship is a great way to gain experience elsewhere. One of our interns advises that you choose a company that seems exciting to you. Whether this company is well-known or close to home, pick one that stands out to you and start exploring their web site. Look at employees' job titles and job openings. See if any pique your interest.

If you feel overwhelmed by this decision, remember that a summer internship is not a long-term commitment. It is an experience designed to help you find out what you like, what you do not like and what you need to do to reach your career goals. Do not get bogged down trying to identify the "perfect" internship.

Where can I find an internship?

You have decided to pursue an internship next summer and you also have a good idea of what area you want to get more experience in. Now it is time to start looking for current openings. Our Scientific Applications and Global Marketing interns suggested applying to internship positions during November, December and January because this is when most companies are searching for interns.

There are three major sources to help find the right internship opportunity for you.

Company Web Site. If there is a company you are impressed with and want to work for, explore available positions posted on the company web page. This usually includes the most up-to-date postings, which is not always the case for other job search web sites.

LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a social media site for professional networking. If you do not have a LinkedIn profile, make one right away. If you already have one, make sure to update it to feature any new skills and accomplishments. After updating your profile, use the "connect" feature to add people to your network. You can add people you already know and employees who work at companies you are interested in. For people you do not know personally, give them context for why you are contacting them. Share a mutual contact or let them know that you are interested in their department, company or career path. Networking can be awkward, but it is expected in the professional world and a great way to find out about professional opportunities.

Internships can range from 20–40 hours per week. Make sure you can meet the time requirements and be upfront if you will need time off.

If you do not see an intern position, try contacting an employee in the department you are interested in. Networking could open other opportunities.

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There is also a “Jobs” section on LinkedIn for the sole purpose of finding open job listings. You can turn on notifications for a certain company or fields of work so you will not have to worry about missing an internship posting. There are other web sites that post job openings, including Indeed and Glassdoor. These sites can also notify you of job openings specific to your interests.

Colleagues & Mentors. Your research advisor or the career services office at your school may already know of internship opportunities or have relevant people in their network you can connect with. One of the most successful ways to land an internship is to get a recommendation from someone who can vouch for you and who has a connection within the company. Getting out of your comfort zone and networking is critical: it just takes one connection to get your foot in the door.

Next Steps: Prepare Your Application

Try to apply to multiple positions. The exact number will depend on your network and previous experiences, but our interns say that applying for three to ten internship positions is typical. This range is large enough to increase your chances of being accepted while still small enough to manage the work needed for each application.

Update your resume regularly and ask your school's career services office or family and friends for edits and feedback.

Although it is easy to make stock resumes and cover letters where company names and position titles are the only parts you need to change for each application, this approach will not make your application stand out. Companies want to see that you understand what the company does, what makes the company unique, and what skills applicants should have. You need to tailor each application document to that specific company and position.

As you are writing your resume and cover letter, do not shy away from bragging about yourself. It can feel strange, but you know how hard you have worked to get to this point. You are going to be your best advocate.

Even if you do put your best foot forward in your application materials, you will face rejection. One of our interns emphasizes that being rejected is not fun, but it does not mean that you are not good enough or not capable of getting an internship. Try to learn from rejection and reflect on what you can change the next time you apply. Maybe you can strengthen your network or better tailor your application to the job description.

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What should I include in my resume?

Most internship applications will require a resume and a cover letter. The resume should be no more than one page and should include your personal information (name, address and contact information), experience, education and skills. Each of these sections should be ordered depending on how relevant they are to the position. Use key words or specific skills that show up in the job description.

The person reviewing your resume will likely only skim it, so make it easy to read. Use headers, sub-headers and bullet points and do not be afraid of white space. Stick with a standard, black font like Times New Roman or Arial and do not include other colors, photographs or graphics.



What is the point of a cover letter?

A good cover letter is a chance to make a positive impression and “introduce” yourself to the application reviewer. It is a short letter, usually only one to two paragraphs, so make sure you use your words well.

Try to address your letter to a person, usually the supervisor for the position you are applying to. That is where all that networking you did can come in handy. If you cannot find a name, address your letter to the hiring manager.

The first part of your letter should state what position you are applying to and why you are the best person for the job. If you have a connection with someone at the company, address that early in the letter. Say why you are applying to the position and want to work for that specific company.

After this introduction, you should show how you are the best person for the position by discussing two to three relevant strengths or experiences from your resume. The goal is to capture the hiring manager’s attention and get them to give your resume a more detailed look.

Misspellings and grammar mistakes are the easiest way to have your application rejected. Check, double-check and check again!

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Set up for virtual interviews in a quiet location without distractions. Try to have a plain background for video calls.

The Final Hurdle: Interviewing

Your resume and cover letter caught the reviewer's attention, and they think you could be a good fit for the internship—but they are not ready to offer you the position yet. The last step is the interview, which is your chance to make a connection, demonstrate your enthusiasm and convince an interviewer that you are the best person for the job. Doing that well takes practice and preparation.

How can I stand out in the interview?

Prepare for the format. Your interview might be over the phone, on a video call or in person. In some instances, you might have multiple interviews where one is over the phone and the others are a video call or meeting. No matter the format, you should familiarize yourself with the platform to avoid any technical glitches or research the meeting location to make sure you can arrive on time. Communicating virtually may seem particularly challenging but it can be very convenient and still creates a place for meaningful conversations. These [tips on presenting at a virtual conference](#) can also apply to virtual interviews.

Prepare talking points. One intern at Promega explained how she practiced her interview with friends and colleagues ahead of time and created notecards listing her skills and questions she wanted to ask in the interview. Other interns found asking questions helped them impress their interviewers and gave them useful information about the internship. Some appropriate questions are:

- What will my specific role be?
- Will there be chances to network with other professionals?
- What are some company values?
- What is the time commitment?
- Will this internship be virtual, in-person or hybrid?

Be confident. Coming prepared to the interview not only helps with nervousness but makes a good impression on employers who also love when you do research ahead of time and contribute to the discussion during the interview. While an intern joked that “buzz words” can help make you “look smarter than you are”, there is real value in demonstrating your knowledge and qualifications.

Dress to impress. What you wear to an interview can affect an interviewer's first impressions of you, and your clothing should be appropriate for the position. Dressing nicely can even improve your confidence in phone interviews! If you need help deciding what to wear, check out this [resource](#).

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Be genuine. In interviews, some of the questions will take you by surprise, but most will probably be standard questions like *What is your greatest strength?* or *Why do you want this position?* Think about your answers ahead of time so that you can answer clearly, calmly and honestly. Find ways to connect your personal story with the specific duties of the position. In their interview, one of our interns talked about how their experiences as a gymnastics coach made them more empathetic and helped improve their writing. Being genuine and relaxed in your interview will give the hiring team a good idea of whether you will fit in with the company culture and will make the interview more enjoyable for you.

If you're looking for more advice and resources about interviewing, check out the [Professional Skills And Development](#) page in our [Student Resource Center](#).

Now, Get to Work

After months of research, networking, writing and interviewing, the email you have been waiting for finally comes in: you landed the internship! Now it's time to bring the diligence and hard work you demonstrated during the application process to your new job. Continue networking, show up on time and put an honest effort into your new assignments. Ask your coworkers questions and learn something new. Reflect often on your experiences and think about if this is the sort of work you want to build into your career.

Landing an internship is not easy, but we hope this guide will help you navigate every step of the process and find the path to your future career.

This white paper was produced in collaboration with former Promega Corporation interns, Melissa Martin and Sophie Mancha.