

Finding an Internship: Guide and Worksheet

Overview

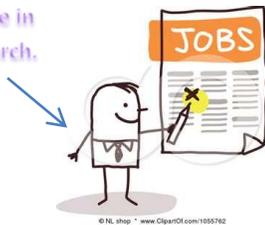
Internships come in all shapes and forms. A few types of distinctions include:

- Paid v unpaid
- For academic credit v not-for-credit
- Structured v unstructured
- Applying directly to internship site v 3rd party provider

In media fields, the most common type of internship, historically, is unpaid and required to be taken for credit. Internships fall on the spectrum of highly structured (with formal applications, deadlines, set dates, and tight supervision) to highly unstructured (e.g., you're introduced a friend of a friend who has a small record label you can work at for an unspecified amount of time). Much of the time students apply directly to an intern site; however, there are some 3rd party organizations that will place you in an internship site either through competitive application or for a fee.

Internships also vary in quality. On one end of the continuum are well organized internships with built-in training and hands on learning opportunities, where interns complete substantive projects under supervision from engaged staff. On the other end of the spectrum are the "coffee-run" internships where the intern rarely has the chance to rise above clerical duties and educational opportunities are limited. Most internships will fall somewhere in-between, regardless if they are paid or unpaid. Less substantive internships can still be useful to build your resume, learn about the industry, and clarify your career goals, but it's important to self-advocate and ask for opportunities to gain more experience in your areas of interest when appropriate.

You being proactive in your internship search.



You working hard to secure an offer.



You committing to getting the most from an internship position.



Interns that get the most out of their positions tend to . . .

- Have a positive attitude, regardless of the duties they are given
- Be humble and see the intern site as a place to absorb knowledge
- Ask plenty of questions and network as much as possible
- Display energy and enthusiasm and take initiative when appropriate
- Display solid communication, listening, and teamwork skills
- Be respectful to all staff members in the organization from the office assistant to the CEO
- Take full advantage of the opportunities given and go above and beyond when appropriate
- **Treat the internship like any new job** (i.e., act professional at all times, show up early, dress appropriately, err on the more formal side when writing emails, don't over socialize or abuse lunch hour/break time, avoid gossiping, and never bad mouth current or past employers)

Finding an internship can be challenging and time-consuming, much like the real job search process. If you are serious about finding a quality internship, be prepared to put in the time and work. The internship search can be divided into four basic phases, which often overlap (e.g., you may be applying at the same time you are researching).

Phase 1: Reflection

Phase 2: Research

Phase 3: Applying and interviewing

Phase 4: Accepting an internship offer

Phase 1: Reflection

While it is important to keep an open mind and be flexible about potential opportunities, it will be helpful for you to start off with specific goals and ideas about what you are looking for in an intern position.

Consider the following questions...

What type(s) of organizations would I like to intern at? What do I want I want to observe? What types of skills do I want to develop or practice?

What size of organization would I like to intern at?

Where do I want to be geographically? *(It sometimes helps to narrow down to just a few locations)*

What are my strengths? What can I offer an internship site?

Are there specific companies I already know of that fit my qualifications or are my “dream” internship site? _____

Phase 2: Research

Based on the information you provided above, begin to develop a list of potential internship sites. It is sometimes helpful to keep a Word document or Excel spreadsheet to keep track of opportunities, deadlines, and other notes. You may also want to store this document in a specific internships folder that contains all your application materials and related documents.

Things you may want to track in this document include:

- Name of organization
- Application deadline and procedure
- Website link and/or physical address
- Contact name(s) and information
- Status/progress of your application

Setting reminders about deadlines in your email calendar or phone is another way to keep organized.

Example of internship tracking spreadsheet:

Name	Deadline	Website	Status	Notes
ChiTown Digital Media	1-Dec	chdm.com	Submitted 11/15	
Video All Stars	10-Jan	vallstars.com/intern		Need writing sample
Next Mile Media Lab	8-Oct	www.nextmilemedia.org	Interviewed 10/31	Contacts: Jessie Rogers - jrogers@nextmilemedia.org

Below are several resources you can use to develop your list of potential internship sponsors. The strongest internship searches will draw from multiple of the below sources.

1. **Professional association websites:** Most industries have several related regional or national associations. These associations may have career resources and internship opportunities listed directly on their sites and/or they may have member lists of organizations you can mine for potential internship sponsors.

For example students who want to work in advertising might visit www.aaaa.org. Not only is there an internship program run by the organization and internship listed in their online career center, there are also lists of member organizations and their locations.

*(There are **hundreds** these groups. To name just a couple: International Documentary Association; North American Broadcasters Association; Society of Professional Journalists; National Press Photographers Association; Independent Film and Television Alliance, Asian American Journalist Association, Casting Society of America).* Generally, a web search for “ *fill in with your specialization, interest, or major* + national association” will give you a good start on your research.

2. **SIU Career Services:** The **Saluki Recruiting** website allows you to search for jobs, internships, and co-ops posted for SIU students at <https://siuc.experience.com/experience/login>
3. **MCMA Internship Coordinator/Departments:** As we are contacted by alumni and potential internship sponsors, the internship coordinator will forward these opportunities to faculty/advisors and students as appropriate. Students who request to join the internships listserv will receive notification by email about opportunities as they arise. Individual departments may also have job boards outside their offices with potential opportunities. The internship coordinator is available to provide feedback on individual applications. **Reading all emails you receive from SIU faculty and staff is really important as this is the primary method we use to communicate possibilities with you!**

4. **Faculty members:** Ask professors if they know of opportunities that you should be looking into or if they know where students with similar interests may have interned. Some professors will have more knowledge of internships than others, so don't be discouraged if you get a few "not sure"s.
5. **Fellow students/RSOs:** Ask upperclassmen in your classes and RSOs if they completed an internship/externship. For those that respond yes, ask detailed questions about their experience, how they applied, and if they have contact information they are comfortable sharing.
6. **Web search:** Simple Google searches can sometimes be very effective in the internship search process. E.g., if you know you are looking for a "recording studio internship in Nashville, TN," a web search will offer several initial options to look into. If you are applying in a smaller city, it's sometimes easier to just search for companies in your areas of interest and then contact the companies directly to see in internships are offered (i.e. google "production companies Springfield IL" without the word "internship" in the search). Bookmark company websites you find that seem particularly promising so that you can easily get back to them on your computer.
7. **Friends/Family/Personal Networks:** Make sure that your personal networks know that you are seeking an internship opportunity. Ask individuals for advice, if they know anyone in your field you can speak with, or if they know of specific opportunities. *E.g., your Uncle Tom may be an architect, but perhaps his best friend works media.*
8. **Informational Interviews with alumni or professionals in the field:** Learn more about informational interviewing and the do's and don'ts here:
<http://career.ucla.edu/students/ExploreCareers/WhatsAnInformationalInterview.aspx>
9. **Internship/Job Aggregate Sites:** There are a number of career sites that offer massive listings of jobs and internships (*to name a few:* Indeed.com, MonsterTRAK, Internships USA, Internships.com, Idealist.org, Craigslist, Monster.com, Uloop, Internmatch.com). While these sites can be helpful tools, they generally should not be the only source you reference! Try to use at least one of the other 8 strategies listed here in addition.
10. **Fee-based 3rd Party Providers:** There are companies (e.g., Dream Careers) that will place you in an internship, and frequently provide housing and transportation, for a fee. These agencies can be a way to get a foot in the door in competitive fields, but note that the cost is often exorbitant. Research any fee-based placement company extensively and weigh the pros and cons before going with this sort of option.

Getting Internship-Specific Information from Potential Sponsors

Some employers will list internship information directly on their website, often in the career/employment portion of the site or on a blog/news feed, but for many organizations you may have to do some additional outreach to find out about internship possibilities and application procedures by politely reaching out to a contact name or phone number to inquire. Be ready to be persistent and face rejection graciously.

If you are already familiar with the company, find a way to succinctly state that here instead. For, example, “My cousin recently used your company for her wedding photography.” You want to find a way to express your admiration and interest specifically in their company, but try to be authentic and not too pandering. If you heard about the company through someone, add that as well. If you know they offer internships, but just need the application information, adjust to reflect this.

Example outreach email

Dear Ms. Brown,

My name is Terrance Jones and I am a current junior studying photography at SIU Carbondale. {I recently came across the Pleasant Imaging website. I’m really interested in portrait photography and I love the diversity of walks of life you cover. I’m from Chicago and especially love your Millennium Park visitor series.

I plan to be back in Chicago for the summer and I’m wondering if you ever offer internships?} If so, can you let me know your qualifications and the application process? I’d be happy to send a copy of my resume and portfolio if that is helpful.

If there is another contact that would be more appropriate for me to speak with, please let me know or feel free to forward my email. I can be reached by email or on my cell at (619) 234-2345. Thanks very much in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Terrance

Phase 3: Applying

Common Internship Application Materials

Resume: A self-marketing tool that directs an employer's attention to the aspects of your education and background that are most relevant to a particular position. Most employers will scan NOT read your resume; therefore it is important to have a resume that:

- Is keyword rich, focuses on transferrable skills, and makes use of active verbs
- Outlines accomplishments (instead of just duties) and quantifies when appropriate
- Displays content in though a polished design that balances text and white space

You can pick up a resume checklist from the MCMA internship coordinator to help you self-review your resume, along with sample media industry resumes. You may also ask to have your resume reviewed in person by the MCMA Internship Coordinator or by a staff member at the SIU Career Center.

Cover Letter: A document, generally less than one page, which outlines your interest in a position and elaborates on why you believe you are a good fit without simply re-hashing your resume. Cover letters should **always** be customized for the specific organizations to which you are applying.

Formal application: Some internship sites may ask you to fill out a formal application form in lieu of, or in addition to, a cover letter. These applications may ask you to respond to essay or short-answer questions related to industry issues/trends or your interests, skills, thought-processes, etc.

Portfolio or Writing Samples: Some employers may ask for a demo reel, portfolio, or writing samples. It’s a good idea to have this ready, just in case. Optimally you will want a website as well as digital copies of your material. Always follow the individual employers guidelines (e.g., if they ask for only 3 writing samples, send EXACTLY 3 writing samples). Send only your best work—it’s better to have fewer samples that are higher quality. Ask for feedback from faculty, supervisors, trusted friends or peers, etc. if you aren’t sure how to narrow it down.

Professional References: Ideal references for internships are faculty members, supervisors, and advisors who are familiar with your potential and skills. You should have 3-5 references. It is recommended to have at least one faculty reference and at least one work reference (a supervisor from an employment OR internship position). RSO advisors, academic/staff advisors, or volunteer supervisors may also be appropriate references. **Always ask permission before listing someone as a reference.** It is also a good idea to give your references a heads up prior to when you think they might be contacted.

Unless the position specifically asks for **personal** references, assume the employer wants **professional** references. It is not appropriate to have a friend, neighbor, church group, family member, or high school activity advisor serve as a professional reference.

MORE INFORMATION ON THE ABOVE MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM:

- SIU Career Services (<http://careerservices.siu.edu>)
- MCMA Internship Coordinator (Room 1014A)

Interviewing: An interview is an opportunity to further sell yourself to a potential internship site as well as learn more about the internship duties and benefits of a particular site to see if it is a fit with your goals and interests. Individuals who excel in interviews tend to do the following:

- Research the company and the position as much as possible in advance
- Are able to articulate goals, strengths, skills, accomplishments
- Are professionally dressed and demonstrate confident body language and active listening
- Have questions for the interviewer and clearly show their interest in the company/position
- Answer behavioral questions using the STAR format (**S**ituation you were in, **T**ask you were given, **A**ction you took, and the **R**esults of your actions/what you learned)

Steps you can take right now!



1. Draft and polish your resume. Make it the best it can possibly be.
2. Research common interview questions and practice your responses.
3. Create an online portfolio or demo reel.
4. Attend workshops through the MCMA Internship Coordinator or by a staff member at the SIU Career Services. Conduct a mock interview through Career Services.
5. Google example resume and cover letters in your field of interest.

Phase 4: Accepting an internship offer

Hopefully through all your hard work you will receive an internship offer, and if you are fortunate, you may have multiple offers to consider. Once you have accepted an internship, it is generally understood that you will withdraw your candidacy from other companies/organizations. It's considered unethical to accept one offer, then later back out once you have received another. If you receive an offer from one company before hearing back from another, it is okay to ask for additional time to consider the offer, but be prepared to answer within the time frame you are given.

A few questions you may wish to ask before you start:

- Is there an office dress code (official or unofficial)?
- Is there anything they need you to bring with you on the first day?
- Confirm in writing your schedule, start and end dates, and the number of hours you will work

You should be prepared to do some tedious or monotonous tasks and busy-work as an intern, but if you are doing an internship for credit and you find your work is entirely busy-work with no educational opportunities, reach out to your faculty sponsor and the MCMA Internship Coordinator to discuss.

See the list on the first page for tips on making the most of your internship. In particular, acting professionally at all times is the key to success. This means always showing up for your shifts on time, being willing to take on whatever tasks you are assigned (within reason), taking advantage of opportunities to learn and grow, and keeping a positive attitude. The media industry is small and even if the organization you intern with doesn't have openings, they may know people who do! Treating your internship like a job (whether or not it is paid) can go a long way.

FAQs

How long does it take to find an internship? When should I start applying?

Start your research as soon as possible. Unfortunately, deadlines will vary quite a bit. Some very competitive programs or sites may have deadlines as early as October or November for summer internship programs. Others will not have formal deadlines, but rather work on "rolling" admissions (as they receive applications, until filled). Often deadlines will be a couple months before the start of the internship period.

What skills are internship employers looking for?

Employers consistently state interpersonal communication skills, the ability to work in a team environment, a strong work ethic, and problem-solving skills as their top desired traits. Verbal communication is frequently the highest rated skill in surveys of employers. The key is to demonstrate these skills through your experiences, work samples, and interviews, rather than overtly state you have them. In more technical areas, the ability to operate certain equipment and software may also be prized.

How hard is it to get an internship? What are my chances?

The answer to this question really depends on the individual candidate, their background experience, their goals, and how committed they are to finding an internship. The more flexible you are willing to be and the more work you are willing to put into your search, the better your odds will be. You have to be prepared to take ownership of your search. Paid internships are often more competitive.

I've submitted applications, but haven't heard anything yet. What do I do?

It depends on the individual company. Some employers will welcome communication, while others will state explicitly not to follow up with emails and phone numbers and will not confirm receipt of applications. If they do not state otherwise, it is perfectly acceptable to write a polite email or call to confirm if your application was received, if you never received confirmation. If you did receive

confirmation **and** the time frame for when they indicated you would receive a yes or no has already passed, then it is okay to write a polite note or call to inquire regarding next steps.

What's the deal with the paid v unpaid internship debate?

According to labor law, in order for a for-profit organization to offer unpaid internships, the internship should be primarily for the benefit of the student and shouldn't replace the work of paid employees. Historically internships in media industries have been unpaid, though the balance may be slowly shifting due to recent lawsuits from unpaid interns who felt their experience did not meet these standards. Unpaid internships can give students valuable experience and connections and many students find them to be an incredibly worthwhile investment, but ultimately it is a decision you'll have to make for yourself after you have taken all factors into account.

What are some additional resources for help on internship or career related questions?

SIU Career Services and the MCMA Internship Coordinator are always possibilities. There is also a boatload of career advice online, and some of it is more helpful than others. A few trustworthy sites:

- <http://www.askamanager.org> (Look at the categories in the right side bar to see posts divided by content area)
- <http://www.lindseypollak.com/blog>
- <https://career.berkeley.edu/Guide/ResumeLetterWriting.pdf>