What Is an Internship and Why Do You Need One?

What Is an Internship?

An internship is a short-term, structured work experience that provides students with hands-on learning opportunities in a specific industry or field. Internships bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, helping students explore career options and develop professional skills.

Purpose of an Internship:

- ★ Gain practical experience in your field of study.
- ★ Apply classroom knowledge to real-world situations.
- ★ Explore potential career paths and clarify career goals.
- ★ Build professional networks and references for future opportunities.

Key Features of an Internship

1. **Duration**
    - Internships typically last from a few weeks to several months.
    - Length varies depending on the organization, industry, and academic requirements.
2. **Learning Opportunities**
    - Practical Exposure: Apply academic concepts to professional settings.
    - Skill Development: Build technical, interpersonal, and professional skills.
    - Industry Insight: Develop a deeper understanding of workplace expectations and industry standards.
3. **Supervision and Mentorship**
    - Interns work under the guidance of a designated supervisor or mentor.
    - Supervisors provide feedback, direction, and opportunities for professional growth.
4. **Networking**
    - Interns connect with professionals and peers in their field.
    - Networking can lead to mentorship, job referrals, and long-term career connections.

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Benefits of an Internship

1. **Resume Enhancement**
   - Demonstrate relevant, hands-on experience to future employers.
   - Showcase initiative, reliability, and professional growth.
2. **Skill Development**
   - Apply classroom learning in practical settings.
   - Build transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.
3. **Career Exploration**
   - Experience daily work in a chosen field before committing to a full-time role.
   - Identify areas of interest and refine long-term career goals.
4. **Networking Opportunities**
   - Build relationships with industry professionals.
   - Gain access to potential job leads and professional recommendations.

What Is Not Acceptable in an Internship

Internships should always provide meaningful learning experiences. The following practices are not appropriate:

1. Assigning interns personal errands or unrelated tasks.
2. Excluding interns from meetings, training, or projects that contribute to professional development.
3. Overloading interns with repetitive administrative tasks that offer little educational value.
4. Failing to provide regular feedback, supervision, or mentoring.

Before You Apply: Define Your Internship Requirements

Ask yourself the following questions before beginning your search:

1. **What are your interests?** What type of work or industry do you want to explore?
2. **Compensation:** Do you require a paid internship, or are you open to unpaid opportunities?
3. **Timing:** When can you start? (Spring, Summer, or Fall semester)
4. **Location:** Can you commute or relocate? Are you open to hybrid or in-person positions?
5. **Academic Requirements**: Does your major require an internship for credit?
6. **Credit Options**: If not required, can you still earn academic credit for your internship experience?

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How to Find an Internship

1. **Utilize Career Services**
    - Schedule an appointment with the Career Development Office for personalized guidance.
2. **Use Job and Internship Platforms**
    - Handshake
    - LinkedIn
    - Indeed
    - Internships.com
3. **Build Your Online Presence**
    - Create and update your LinkedIn and Handshake profiles.
    - Join professional organizations related to your major or career interests.
    - Follow companies and organizations on social media (especially LinkedIn).

Application Process

What You'll Need:

1. A professional resume and cover letter tailored to each position.
    - Some applications may request a personal statement, essay, or transcript.
2. References
    - Have 2–3 professional references ready (professors, supervisors, or mentors).

Submit all documents through the employer's specified platform and **follow all instructions carefully.**

Interview Preparation

1. **Research the Employer:** Understand the company's mission, values, and culture.
2. **Schedule a Mock Interview:** Practice with Career Development staff.
3. **Prepare for Common Questions:** Review typical behavioral questions using the STAR Method (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

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Making the Most of Your Internship

- ★ **Build Relationships**: Get to know your coworkers and supervisors.
- ★ **Set Goals:** Define what you want to achieve during your internship.
- ★ **Ask Questions:** Don't be afraid to ask questions - this is a learning experience!
- ★ **Clarify Expectations:** Understand deadlines, tasks, and evaluation criteria.
- ★ **Document Achievements:** Record accomplishments weekly for future resume updates.
- ★ **Seek Feedback:** Regularly ask your supervisor for constructive feedback.
- ★ Take Initiative: Participate in training or professional development opportunities.
- ★ Update Your Materials: Revise your resume, LinkedIn, and Handshake profiles with your new experience.

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