

# Internships

## The how, why and when?

- Monica Mehta

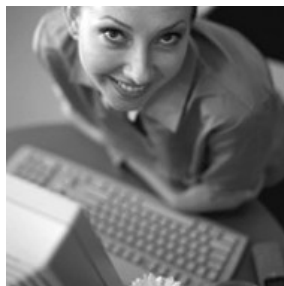
**G**oing overseas for an education? Your nightmares must be more about finding the right job after graduation than getting into the right school!! If that's the case, relax!! The job search is far away; there is something more important to think of before that...any guesses? Your internship of course!! An internship maybe even more important than your job because it may eventually get you the dream job or even open new career avenues for you. However, it is difficult to conduct an effective search for an internship or even land up with one, if you don't know what you want to do and why you believe you are qualified for the same.

When you start looking for an internship, you must have a pretty good idea about why it interests you, and your merits must be equally convincing for your employer. Thus, it entails knowing your strengths and weaknesses relatively well, so that you can portray yourself correctly to the interviewer. Here are a few ways to get started:

- ▶ Informational interviews are a great way to learn more about an industry, explore career opportunities and make professional contacts in your field.
- ▶ Identifying suitable positions without worrying about job titles.
- ▶ Even if you are not very sure of what you want to pursue, you must be able to provide the potential employer with some direction as to where you see yourself headed.
- ▶ Presenting your strengths to employers through the resume, cover letter and finally the interview.
- ▶ Gaining Self-confidence, which is a key ingredient for an internship search.
- ▶ You must build for yourself a top 10 list of reasons why someone must hire you, in order that you get yourself to convince the person about the same.

Creating your top 10 list of reasons:

- ▶ Rummage through your brain and record your favourite skills. You can draw from many experiences, not just paid positions, and focus on tasks or roles you particularly enjoyed.
- ▶ After each skill/quality, list one or more examples to back it up.



- ▶ Record the most important skills first and proceed with diminishing order of priority.
- ▶ It is a list that can guide your thinking for an information interview or it may be used to create your resume and letter for the potential employer.
- ▶ When creating a list for a position, always include an item relating to your career interest; one that relates to your education and how it has prepared you for the internship.
- ▶ Although some items may remain constant, this list would generally be fluid. Also, your skills are transferable and can be used for different positions and companies creatively.

### **Possible top 10 reasons for being hired:**

- ▶ Career interest in the field the job is being sought.
- ▶ Field experience in college
- ▶ College preparation in terms of the right courses suited for the job
- ▶ Background and subject knowledge in the area of work.
- ▶ Outdoor skills, which enhances value at the job.
- ▶ Mechanical skills, which enhances value at the job.
- ▶ Committed to environmental issues.
- ▶ High energy level, can work several hours a day.
- ▶ Dependable and trustworthy.
- ▶ Strong interpersonal skills.

### **Strategies for Landing Your Dream Internship:**

Below are five strategies to help you prepare for and secure your dream internship:

#### **Get Experience**

It is important to try and gain some related experience to be successful at getting recruited at the corporate level. The "experience" I am referring are varied, let's look at a few:

**School Activities:** Most schools have numerous clubs, which you can join and which might be related to your field of interest. Zero in on these and join them in order to show practical experience on your resume.

**Volunteer Activities:** Not only does volunteer work beef up a resume, it demonstrates that you are a concerned, responsible citizen.

**School Projects:** Whenever possible,

utilize the experience of school projects to your advantage by detailing the project in future correspondence with employers.

## 2. Learn to Write a “Power Resume”

A “Power Resume” is one that will easily tell an employer that you are the right candidate for the job. It means honing in on the key skills/requirements that the employer is looking for. It should be easy for the employer to identify after looking at the first half of your resume that you are the right candidate for the position.

You could include a Relevant Experience category towards the top that details all of your related school, volunteer, and/or previous internship experience.

Jobweb’s Guide to Resume and Cover Letter Writing can help you with writing a good resume and will explain all the basics in detail.

## 3. Learn to Write a “Power Cover Letter”

An employer reads so many generic cover letters from people that say “they were the best fit for the position”, that they were “very interested in the company”, and that they were “dedicated and hard-working”. While these statements sound good in black and white, they are nothing but just words on paper. There must be a reason for the differentiation. Avoid simply stating qualities, rather back them up with real life, solid examples, and actually portray to the employer how you are different.

## 4. Your Interviewing Skills need practice

If an employer is interested in the resume you submitted, they will call you in for an interview, which will require some preparation. Depending on your industry of choice, you may even want to prepare a portfolio that includes relevant work or writing samples.

### How a Professional Portfolio Should Be Used

A professional portfolio is typically presented within an interview situation. A portfolio should be neat, clear and concise and be tailored to a specific type of position. For example, a student applying for a computer programming internship might present an example of a program he or she has written when asked about relevant programming experience.

It is important to remember while giving the interview that:

- ▶ A thorough research on the company that you are being interviewed for must be done and brought up during the course of the interview.
- ▶ Ask questions during and after the interviewer has finished asking his/her questions. It demonstrates interest and enthusiasm for the position that you have applied for.
- ▶ Appear enthusiastic about the position and demonstrate an interest in it through positive eye

contact, firm handshakes, confident body language and carefully planned responses.

- ▶ Last but not least, tell the interviewer before leaving that you want the internship. Show your interest in obtaining the position, that is very, very important.

### Follow Up

Sending a follow-up thank you letter has got to be one of the most important things you can do in your internship search. This demonstrates a very important skill to employers... Follow through! Always be sure to send this out within 24 hours of the actual interview.

Within your thank you letters, I suggest indicating that you enjoyed learning whatever it was you learned from the interviewer, reiterating how your skills and experience fit the position and, again, explicitly stating your interest in the position.

Some comments from School Career Placement executives:

Shawn Graham, assistant director of career services at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, says more organizations have developed formalized internship programs, so interns often are given more hands-on experience than in the past. He believes that a thirteen-week summer period for interns is a good chance for them to validate what they thought that they would be interested in, and it gives the hiring company a chance to be sure that the person performs well and fits in well.

Companies often dip into their own pool of interns when hiring, he notes, but recent grads with first-hand experience within their fields have a definite advantage over those who have not interned. “I expect many companies will tell you that in the last number of years, some sort of experiential learning program has replaced GPA and other things and is the top thing employers look at when hiring,” he explains. “Retention has become a big issue with employers. Employers want people who fit them and can be successful in their environment. They have found out that internships are a good economical way to test out whether students are serious about their career interests.”

“In good economic times, it’s very, very helpful,” he says, “and in bad economic times, it can become almost essential. “If you make decisions about what to do this summer, make decisions in light of a job market that could be more difficult than in the past.’ I’m saying that more vigorously right now, ends Graham.”

These tips should go a long way in helping you with your internship search and making it a success story as well. I wish you all the best in your internship and career search! ■

The author is Director, Student Affairs, American Alumni Association [3A’s]