

Andrew Scherer

brilliant

Intern

How to get the best
internships and
make them count



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Dedication

For my parents, Dion and Jane, and brother, Charles, for all their support over the years – with love.

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About the author

Andrew Scherer (BA) read German at the University of Bristol and is marketing manager of Inspiring Interns (www.inspiringinterns.com), London's leading internship agency. In his job he has overseen almost 1,000 people complete internships, the majority of whom went on to earn full-time jobs at their companies. He was previously a journalist. Andrew completed several internships (some good, some bad) during university and immediately after, including a year-long placement in Germany. This is his first book.

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Author

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Introduction

Work experience in the UK traditionally has been characterised by brief periods of informal shadowing, often found through personal contacts. However, increasing numbers of school and university leavers are discovering that employers now demand more from potential employees than just academic qualifications. Thus, the concept of longer, more formalised periods of work experience – internships – has risen to prominence in recent years.

Brilliant Intern will help you plot a path through the still-developing internship landscape, pointing out common pitfalls, making helpful suggestions and generally being a useful guide to what is often the key to unlocking your future career.

Of course, the term ‘internship’ is still a very fluid idea and can mean many different things to different people. One company might use it to describe two weeks’ of work experience full of photocopying and handing out mail. Another might consider it to be a year-long placement complete with a full salary, normal employee benefits and genuine responsibilities.

That said, most people are now making a distinction between shorter periods of ‘work experience’ and longer ‘internships’. The former generally lasts less than a month and consists of little more than observing other employees doing their jobs and very occasionally doing small pieces of work. The latter usually takes place over a course of a number of months (often three) and

includes structured learning through completing tasks under the supervision of permanent members of staff.

An internship is a big deal. It's not quite your first job, but it could lead to one. It won't tie you to one industry for the rest of your life, but could go a long way to plotting your career path. It won't cement your professional reputation, but could cultivate it. In short, a good internship has the potential to be a defining moment in your passage from student to worker.

At a time when a degree on its own is rarely enough to secure a job, an internship can help you develop a raft of qualities that will put you ahead of your peers in the hunt for a first job. With the cost of higher education rising significantly, well-structured internships are starting to offer a genuine (and significantly cheaper) alternative to Master's degrees and other aspects of higher education.

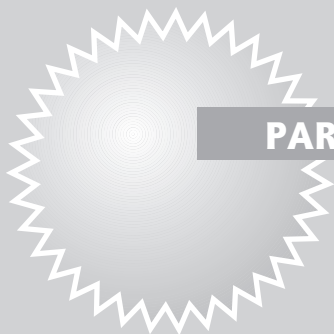
At the most basic level, spending several months in a professional environment confirms to a potential employer that you possess the fundamental skills required for work and will not come to them in need of intensive training. More significantly, it gives you a chance to show that you *can* transfer those oft-mentioned transferable skills from education to the workplace. Anyone can say they have 'strong analytical ability' and 'a good work ethic', but being able to point to three months where you used them in a work environment is of immeasurable value to a job application.

An internship is also a fantastic chance to get a real insight into a particular industry before committing to a job in it. It is all very well listening to careers talks about management consultancy or accountancy (for example) but, until you are actually exposed to the day-to-day routine involved in a job, can you really decide if it is something you want to do for the rest of your life?

Spending three months as an active member of a company also helps you develop a raft of new and relevant contacts, both

within your host organisation and outside of it. If you make yourself useful during your placement, your name is likely to reach a number of different people within the firm who could have a bearing on your future. Equally, if you are in communication with other organisations, you will begin to develop a network within your industry.

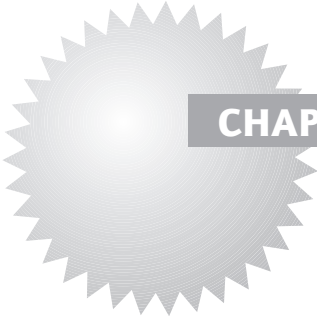
All in all, an internship has the potential to be a crucial stage in your career. It is therefore wise to give as much thought to an internship as you might a potential job. There is little point sending half-hearted applications to positions you know little about and have even less interest in. Investing time in your internship, from application to completion, *will* reap rewards. It is an old cliché, but you really do get as much out of it as you put in.



PART 1

Finding an internship

There are thousands of internships out there and many different ways to locate them. Finding the right role is crucial to completing a successful internship and you should dedicate plenty of time on your search. This section will give you a broad number of techniques for finding suitable positions and provide advice on how to impress potential employers.



CHAPTER 1

Selecting a sector

You have started thinking about your future career and have decided an internship would be a good way to kick-start your professional life. Fantastic – but what sort of area do you want to work in? Choosing a sector in which you want to gain experience should be given some thought. After all, this internship may end up influencing your career decisions for the next decade or more. So the big question that needs answering is: if an internship is (in part) a way to help me decide which industry I want to work in, how do I decide which industry I should do an internship in?

There are many similarities between how you select a sector you want to intern in and how you might look for a first job. Nevertheless, there are some key differences to bear in mind. This chapter will give you a good overview of the way to go about selecting an internship sector.

Your interests and skills

It is very easy to look at the well-advertised internships you heard about on campus and think ‘they’ll do’. But ask yourself whether you will really enjoy 12 weeks working as an accountant, whether that is the kind of experience you will find useful in the future, and whether you are just looking at it because a few of your friends mentioned it or you got a free pen from an accountancy firm at Freshers’ Week. If working closely with businesses

and numbers really does appeal to you, then brilliant – start applying for accountancy internships! If, having given it some real thought, you realise that accountancy may not actually suit your interests that much, then have a look at areas with which you feel a real affinity.

I don't wish to pick on accountants – as the old defence goes, some of my best friends are accountants – but it is a good example of an industry many students and graduates are attracted to, not because of a burning desire to be a financial bookkeeper, but simply because some big firms have a significant presence on campus.

It may seem a very obvious starting point, but why not begin your search for an internship by thinking about what your interests are? Massive football fan? You could start looking at a placement related to the sports sector. Bit of a fashionista? You might consider exploring the design industry. Of course, those are two obvious links to make, but try thinking about what you enjoy in life, and what positions may exist that relate to that.

Similarly, when identifying potential industries for your internship, try to match them with what you are good at. As I have already mentioned, many students and graduates are too quick to decide on a certain sector because of a bit of publicity they have seen from a major company, then get frustrated when they find their applications are not progressing as they might have hoped. Finding an industry where you can play to your strengths is, effectively, the first stage in a successful application. Giving serious thought now to what interests you and where your skills lie could save you realising, several years down the line, that you have made a serious mistake.

Research

There are lots of places that can give you a good overview of the different industries that graduates move into. Your university or

school careers service will have plenty of literature and advice on many sectors out there. They will have seen plenty of people like you move from education to employment, and should have some good advice on what lurks beyond graduation. They may know if a particular industry has a history of providing internships, when they run, and which companies are best to approach. Careers services should also have an idea of what sectors people who were on the same course as you moved into – this might give you an idea of how graduates are applying the skills you are learning to the working world.

brilliant questions and answers

Publishing internships

Abu Bundu-Kamara, Pearson's UK diversity manager, runs the Pearson Diversity Summer Internship Programme (PDSIP), aimed at ethnic minority graduates. It provides placements within one of Pearson's leading companies covering areas such as Publicity, Editorial, Sales, Communications, Business Administration and Finance. He talks to us about internships in publishing.

Q What qualities do you look for in a publishing intern?

A The first quality we look for in our candidates is an interest in our industries or the area the intern is applying for; if you're applying for an internship on the Journalism stream of the programme, we expect you to live and breathe journalism, or at least demonstrate a strong ability to write journalistically. As a company that thrives on creativity, content and communication we expect applicants to be good communicators – we look for people who are driven, express themselves clearly and succinctly and have a clear idea of what their career interests are.

Q Which is more important when hiring a Pearson Diversity Summer Intern – educational background or interest in the publishing industry?

A Educational background is, of course, very important to us when hiring a candidate, but it's not the be-all and end-all. We ask candidates for a 2:1 degree or equivalent qualification or experience; however, it's far more important that candidates have a well-rounded CV and a strong interest in the industries Pearson operates in and the area of the business they are applying to. For example, if you're applying for a marketing internship, we expect you to either have some work experience or extra-curricular experience in marketing, or strongly demonstrate how the skills and experience you have make you a suitable candidate for an internship in that area.

Q What will I learn from being a Pearson Diversity Summer Intern?

A Pearson interns learn a lot from this programme, not least how to work successfully within a global company. You have the opportunity to work with a variety of world-leading brands, including Penguin, *The Financial Times* and Pearson International. By doing this internship and undertaking a business-critical project, you get an opportunity from the first instance to learn the skills required for success in your chosen area. A key component of PDSIP is a Personal and Professional Development Programme, which focuses on helping you identify your professional strengths. The Development Programme is a two-day workshop that involves talks from high-profile speakers, workshops on key competency skills, as well as a CV and career-planning clinic. Throughout the internship, you're also coached on honing your networking and relationship-building skills, as well as having the opportunity through the company's Learning and Development Programme to attend a vast array of courses on skills you want to develop, from social media marketing to project management.

Q Do many of your interns go on to become permanent employees?

A Yes. Over the years, over 100 candidates have come onto the Pearson Diversity Summer Internship Programme. Though success on the internship