

# CHOOSING AN INTERNSHIP THAT MEETS YOUR CAREER GOALS

## Is an Internship for You?

Are you thinking about doing an internship, but not sure if it would be worth your time? An internship offers many benefits.

- An internship will allow you to test your career objectives, help you identify your talents and direct you towards an appropriate career. It will also help you to acquire those essential practical and professional skills you need in the business world.
- You'll gain valuable experience. Many employers look at the resume for work history - they want to hire people who have experience and can step into the job and be productive right from the start-and job applicants say their internships never go unnoticed. Experience will give you a competitive edge in today's job market.
- An internship will help you make contacts, get ideas, and learn about the field. You will be among people who have knowledge or access to job opportunities of interest to you.
- You will have the chance to apply theories learned in the classroom to a real world setting. The reverse is also true. During your internship, or when you return to the classroom after your internship, you will better understand the many nuances of business operations that relate to the theories you study.
- An internship can also expose you to the human factors inherent in any workplace and help smooth your transition from classroom to workplace.
- In many cases, an internship can lead to a job offer.

But finding an internship that will do all this for you takes some thought and preparation. Before setting out to find an internship, ask yourself these questions:

- What type of work would I like to do? In what field?
- What type of organization would I like to do an internship for?
- What do I want to gain from an internship?
- What specific skills or experiences do I want to acquire?
- Where do I want to do an internship? My hometown? Out-of-state?

## Locating Opportunities

After you've answered these questions, you're ready to start searching for internships. Here are some suggestions for locating employers and internship opportunities.

- Check with your academic adviser to see if your department maintains listings of internship opportunities in your field of study.
- Visit the career services office. Many offices have internship listings and may be able to help you locate other resources such as books, employer files and directories, and web sites
- Attend job fairs. Employers often use fairs to identify students for internships as well as for full-time employment.

- Contact the Chamber of Commerce of the city where you would like to work to obtain information about local employers.
- Network. Talk with friends, family, co-workers, supervisors, instructors, administrators, and professionals in your field of study, and let them know you are searching for an internship. You never know who might be able to put you in touch with a contact person for an internship opportunity.
- Design your own internship. You may find a company that interests you but that doesn't have an internship program. Think about what you would like to gain from the internship and what you have to offer the company in return. Let the company know what your goals are and what you want to learn. If the employer is interested, you can work together to design a list of responsibilities and activities for your internship.

### **How to Select an Internship**

1. Research the internship before you accept it. Read as much as you can about the company and the job, and ask questions of your career counselor and the internship coordinator at the site. Some questions you might ask are:

- Will the internship allow me to do the type of work I'm interested in?
- How hands-on will it be? (Ten weeks of merely observing others can be boring and fruitless.)
- Are interns treated like valued employees or cheap labor?
- What types of projects have interns typically done?
- May I speak to former or current interns? (Ask them what that liked and what they didn't like.)
- What kind of supervision will I receive?

2. Don't pick flash over substance. A great name does not mean a great internship. For example, working for a major league baseball team may impress your family and friends, but it may not provide the experience that you seek. Working for a well-respected minor league team may give you more experience.

## **REQUESTING AN INTERNSHIP - THE EXPLORATORY LETTER**

The exploratory letter is the cover letter that will accompany your resume when you request an internship interview. In many cases, you will not be responding to an advertisement or other invitation to apply. You are trying to develop an internship with the organization, and many employers usually do not advertise positions of that sort.

Your letter must accomplish four purposes and not exceed one page in doing so. It must (1) introduce you to the prospective employer, (2) describe the kind of experience or opportunity you seek, (3) attach some benefit to your employment, and (4) request an interview.

### **Introduce Yourself to the Prospective Employer**

In introducing yourself to the employer, you want to highlight those skills that you feel would be most important to this particular employer. These skills will be amplified in your resume, but your letter should direct the reader to them. The sample letter emphasizes the appropriate courses and summer experiences, as well as the applicant's interest in the field.

### **Describe the Experience/Opportunity You Seek**

In describing the kind of experience or opportunity you seek, try to be as specific as possible. It helps the employer if you can identify specific opportunities or positions in the organization. In the letter the student mentions the position of chemical technician in the metallurgy laboratory and expresses his desire to increase his skill with laboratory equipment used in metallurgy.

### **Attach Some Benefit to your Employment**

Permitting you to obtain the kind of experience you want is not enough incentive for an employer to hire you. You must also show that you can provide some kind of service to that employer while you are learning. Your previous skills, no matter how minimal, allow you to perform tasks that employers must hire people to accomplish. In the letter, "Harry Walker" indicates that he can perform certain tasks as a chemical technician. He has learned to use certain kinds of general laboratory equipment and has performed a variety of menial tasks in other industrial laboratories. He should be better prepared than a "new hire" without these skills, so he is trying to capitalize on his work history.

### **Request an Interview**

Finally, the student states clearly his purpose for writing. He wants an appointment for an interview. In the third paragraph of the letter, he asks for an appointment and indicates what further steps he will take to arrange for the interview.

Notice that the exploratory letter uses a standard business letter format, including (1) return address and date, (2) inside address, (3) salutation, (4) body of the letter, and (5) complimentary close. The specific style and placement of these items on the page allows for some flexibility of choice. The sample letter shows only one way of how this might be done. You may use any appropriate letter style.

Notice also that the body of the letter contains a "thank you." When requesting this kind of consideration, you should express your appreciation in advance. The letter should be typewritten or printed by a computer, centered vertically on the page, have adequate margins on the right and left, and be free of spelling and grammatical errors. There is no substitute for careful proofreading!

## SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING AN INTERNSHIP

123 Fourth Street  
Bowling Green, OH 43402-6721  
February 28, 2003

Ms. Mary C. Gomez  
Research Director  
Useful Alloys Corporation  
910 Eleventh Avenue Hamilton, OH 45011-1963

Dear Ms. Gomez:

I am interested in a temporary position as a chemical technician in your metallurgy laboratory. On my enclosed resume you will note that I have finished two years as a chemistry major at Midwestern University, have completed analytical chemistry, and have worked the past two summers in an industrial chemical laboratory. My strong interest in metallurgy, combined with my courses and my laboratory experience, provide me with the background to make a worthwhile contribution as a chemical technician in your organization.

For a project in analytical chemistry, I wrote a research paper on the use of molybdenum in specialized steel alloys. In my summer jobs, I learned how to use various kinds of instrumentation to do assay analysis. The specific instruments used are detailed on my resume.

I would like to make an appointment with you so that we might explore the ways in which an internship would allow me to make a contribution to your company. As your employee, I would also be able to increase my skill with laboratory equipment used in metallurgy. I will telephone you within two weeks to arrange for an interview at a mutually convenient time.

Thank you for your consideration. If you need additional information, please contact me at (513) 555-2431.

Very truly yours,

Harry Walker