



Developing Your Own Internship

There are many different ways to find a great internship experience. Many companies have well-established strong internship programs. Others may have assorted positions available as the need arises. However, it may be that you can't find the position you're looking for. In this case you **can research and develop your own position**. It takes time and effort but an internship that is specifically tailored to your own academic and career goals can be better than one that is "close enough."

THE GOAL

It is important to keep the *goal* in mind while developing your internship. So let's review...

What is an internship?

- On-site work experience that is directly related to a career goal or field of interest
- Duration is agreed upon ahead of time and is short-term (typically a summer, a semester, or a year)
- Emphasis on learning and professional development, which may involve guidance of a mentor figure
- Can be paid or non-paid and have full-time or part-time hours
- May be for [academic credit](#) (but not required)

What are the advantages of interning?

- Gain valuable work experience-competitive edge for your job hunt and graduate school applications; develop professional and marketable skills
- "Test Drive" a chosen field – do you like the type of work, atmosphere, hours, coworkers, etc.?
- Practical Learning Environment- use theories learned in class
- Networking- develop business contacts, secure letters of recommendation, and connect to employer who may offer you full-time work in the future

BASIC STRATEGY

The basic strategy for finding an internship goes like this:

1. **What do you want to do?**
2. **Where do you want to do it?**
3. **Make the contact and proposal.**

Some of the helpful **Career Center** resources you'll find include:

- Information on [self-assessment](#) (skills, values, and interests)
- Research tips on exploring [career options](#)
- [An appointment](#) with a Career Counselor

This process should involve a fair amount of research in order to ensure that you find the best placement.

What Do You Want To Do?

In essence, work is a defined set of tasks or activities that need to be completed. Skills have been described as having an ability to perform a task or activity in a competent and proficient manner. Developing a clear idea of what *skills* you would like to use and what *activities or tasks* you want to experience will help you to conduct a more focused internship search.

Some questions to keep in mind while doing your research

- Why do you want an internship (skill development, career exploration, or both)
- What do you hope to learn?
- What experiences are you hoping to gain?
- What kind of responsibilities would you like to have as an intern?
- What kind of daily duties would you like to be involved in?

The answers to these questions, as well as others you generate yourself, can help you narrow the focus of your internship search.

If you have two or three fields of interest, it may be much easier to conduct effective research and secure an internship that will provide you with a valuable experience if you focus on one at a time. If your circumstances allow, you can do several internships in completely different areas. Just keep in mind that it will be important to stay organized and keep the projects separate if you pursue internships in more than one field at the same time.

Where do you Want to Do it?

Researching the Field

There are several ways to research a field:

1. Use online resources (Cal alumni network, professional associations, [Career Fields](#) section of the Career Center website, general web searches, etc.)
2. Use prepared materials (such as books, newspapers, business journals, etc.)
3. Network - talk to people who are connected to that field (professors, GSIs, family, friends etc.)

The purpose is to:

- Explore the type of work available
- Decide if there is a match between the needs of the field and what you want to do
- Determine who hires people or interns to do this

Networking

One of the best ways to gather information about a given field, a specific position, or a particular company is to talk to people directly. Through [informational interviewing](#) you can gather information and identify opportunities that you can't get from reading a company brochure. People working in the field can provide the most up-to-date information on how

people get started, what employers are looking for, career paths, corporate culture, and industry trends.

Begin by networking with everyone you know: family, friends, professors, GSI's, Career counselors...Everyone!

Let them know that you are researching the field and ask them if they have any information or know anyone who might. Go to [Career Fairs](#) , use the [@Cal Career Network](#) to find Cal alumni working in the area, attend career panel presentations, or contact a company directly. Your goal is to get the names of people who might be willing to meet with you and talk about their work.

Making Contact

As you gather information you should start to get a picture in your head of what your internship is going to look like. Through your research you may identify a company that does what you want to be doing. It is in your best interest to contact that company directly and ASK. Give them a call, send an email, or write a letter. Ask if they hire interns, have hired interns in the past or if they might be thinking about hiring an intern. They may not be advertising until next month, or their internship positions are currently filled but an opportunity may open up at a later date. If they hadn't considered using an intern your inquiry might plant the idea in their minds.

The Proposal

Just because a company does not have a formal internship program or any current internship openings does not mean that you can't approach them and inquire about setting up an internship. Based on the information you gathered during your research, prepare a proposal for the work you would like to do as an intern.

Don't be afraid to approach employers with your proposal. What you are offering them is a highly valuable commodity. At the same time, do be prepared for the company to not be interested in what you have to offer. It may be that they simply don't have a need for your services at this time. Don't let this discourage you and don't take it personally. Just put together the best proposal you can and keep searching until the right opportunity presents itself. Remember: You can [meet with a career counselor](#) to develop a plan and increase your confidence during this process!

What are you Proposing?

The proposal might be for a specific project you know (from your research) that the organization needs done, or it could be for a particular position you know (from your research) that the employer is likely to have. Most employers are too busy for people who will "do anything" so be as specific as possible in terms of what you would like to do and what you have to offer.

What to Include

There is no prescribed format for your proposal, but a letter written specifically for each employer is a good place to start. It should:

- Include a clear and concise description of what it is you are offering to do for the company and why you think they will benefit from it.
- Be specific about the project you want to work on or position you wish to fill
- Highlight why you are the right person to do this for the company
- Include your dates of availability and whether you are looking for a full-time or a part-time position
- Indicate that you are seeking a paid (or non-paid) position
- Your proposal should include a resume that illustrates the strengths you are offering. Your academic experiences, participation in student groups, research experience, extra-curricular activities, and part-time job experiences all translate into marketable skills such as, time management, communication, teamwork, and analytical skills.

Make sure you take the time to prepare your materials carefully so that it's clear that you are offering something of value. A well-crafted resume will highlight the skills you possess that the company is looking for.

Where to Send it

Be sure that your proposal gets to the person who has the power to hire you. The human resource department is often a good place to start asking questions but also ask for referrals to managers or supervisors in the department in which you want to work. These are the people who might have a better idea of the company's staffing needs and who can actually offer you a position. Organizational charts, websites, and company literature can help you find the name of these people (look in the "about us" or "contact us" section), or ask your networking contacts if they have any suggestions. Telephone receptionists and department secretaries can help too. It is better to invest the time into a few phone calls than to send a letter to the "Director of Personnel" or "To Whom it May Concern."

Follow Up

Follow up with a phone call or an email within a few days of the receipt of your proposal. Students sometimes feel it's pushy to make such a call or that they are bothering the employer. Don't be pushy, but a polite follow up is expected and reinforces your interest and commitment. Everyone in the working world understands the need for persistence.

ENCOURAGEMENT ☺

As was mentioned at the beginning, there are many different ways to find a great internship experience. Developing your own internship takes time and effort. Don't be discouraged if you can't find a position that is readily available, keep at it. Persistence is key!

Use all the resources the **Career Center** has put together for you. Work with a Career Counselor to develop your strategy.

An internship experience that you've created to be specifically tailored to your academic and career interests will be far more rewarding than a position you settled for because it was all you could find.