

# Self-Study Guide to Building Relevant Work Experience: Getting the Most from Your Internship Experience

## PRE-READING

Landing a great internship is only the beginning! Make sure you know what it takes to maximize your internship experience: a positive but realistic attitude, top-notch work ethic, attention to detail, and the desire to soak up every opportunity for career knowledge and growth. The reality is that most college students get out of their internships just about as much as they put into them.

1. Why should you seek out one or more internships during the course of your college career even if you are busy with other activities?
2. What strategies can you use to take advantage of the internship opportunities you are offered?
3. How will you make your mark in the organization even if some of the assignments do not meet your expectations?

## POST-READING

### Reflect

If you have had an internship, write three things that happened during the course of your internship that **surprised** you—either in a good way, or in a not-so-good way. Explain why. If you haven't yet had an internship, write down three things you hope will happen in the course of the internship, and three things you are worried about. Explain why.

### Apply

Line up an internship for next semester in a field of interest. Use your career center's internship databases and books. Investigate the resources your major department has to offer. Ask relatives and family friends for suggestions. Note deadlines and application procedures so you aren't ruled out for not following directions. **Keep in mind that prestigious internships may have some "clout" but you can use any internship to gain experience and competence that will glow on your resume!**

### Extend and Build

Having an honest and open relationship with an internship supervisor is critical. Good communication can mean the difference between making coffee and making presentations. Sometimes it's possible to scope out your potential boss's supervisory style at the internship interview. At other times you won't find out until you're on the job.

Mastering a formula for assertive communication may dispel some of your apprehension when approaching your internship boss. That is not to say that your questions, statements, and reaction must be faithful to this script!

- Start with a positive statement or point out an agreement.
- Suggest alternatives. Be clear and specific about what you would like to occur as a result of your conversation.
- Give a brief explanation.
- Check out your boss's reactions.
- Express thanks for her time and attention to your concern.

#### Example:

Here's a situation similar to one many interns face. Using open communication techniques may help you resolve the situation to your satisfaction, allowing you to get the most from your internship:

- During the third week of his internship, Dave arrived at his site, a law office, only to find that his boss was out of the office and no one had any idea what he was supposed to do. The other partners declined Dave's offer to assist them. Dave sat around for a while feeling useless, and then went home.

**Tip:** Naturally, interns find it frustrating to travel to their internship sites only to discover that their boss is unavailable and no assignments have been left. Asking co-workers if they need help, as Dave did, is a good idea. He could also have used the time to read company literature or work on an internship journal.

### Activity

When Dave's internship boss returns, what might Dave say to him, using open communication that would reduce the chance that this scenario would happen again?

*Guide provided courtesy of the National Association of Colleges and Employers.*

