

INTERVIEWING FOR INTERNSHIPS

By Marianne Green

THE GROUNDWORK

Interviewing for an internship or co-op assignment does not have to be a scary process! Think of it as conversation between you and an internship representative to see if there is a fit between your goals and the internship position. You are interviewing her, just as she is interviewing you. You want to know if this internship will allow you to meet your learning goals. She is trying to find out if you have what it takes to help the organization meet its needs. Doing your homework prior to your interview is the key to a successful interview ‘conversation.’ Taking time to lay the groundwork increases the odds that your meeting will be productive.

Research the organization. Check out its web site. Request brochures, annual reports, and other company literature. Search out news articles referring to this site. Talk to other interns who worked there previously. Your knowledge of the organization will be impressive and can offset lack of experience.

Dress like the serious professional you will soon be. If you have a suit, wear it. If not, plan to wear a sports jacket, collared shirt, tie, and slacks (if you’re male) or a pantsuit or blazer, blouse, and skirt (if you’re female). Choose dark colors—they convey an air of authority. Practice your smile, good posture, and firm handshake. Leave flashy jewelry and strong scents at home.

Rehearse/role play answers to typical questions you may be asked. Practice, but don’t memorize your responses word-for-word. You don’t want to sound like you are reading from a script! It is usually better to give up-front, honest responses rather than ‘canned’ answers you think the interviewer wants to hear.

Here are typical questions you could be asked in an interview for an internship or co-op position:

- Why do you want an internship or co-op with this organization?
- Why should we hire you for our internship program?
- Do your grades reflect your true ability? Why or why not?
- How many hours each week would you be able to devote to this internship?
- Would you be able to work beyond one semester?
- How would you handle conflicts between your school schedule and a surprise, rush job here?
- What type of supervisor do you prefer to work under?
- How will this internship help you meet your career goals?
- Who is your least favorite professor? Why?
- What are your greatest strengths and biggest weaknesses?
- Give me an example from your past that shows the following: how you dealt with difficult people; how you overcame an obstacle or solved a problem.
- Which of your courses, jobs, or school activities has prepared you for this internship?

Prepare questions to ask. This is your chance to make sure that a particular internship will meet your needs and goals. Answers to your questions will help you discover which internship or co-op is right for you. Here are some

suggested questions:

- Could you list some tasks and projects I would be involved with?
- Should I expect training or an orientation prior to beginning my internship?
- Would I receive a wage, stipend, or reimbursement for my expenses?
- Is there a dress code I would be expected to follow?
- Would I have regular meetings with my supervisor?
- I will need to take time off during my exam periods; is this acceptable?

Bring along samples of your work. Show the interviewer articles you have written, programs from events you have planned, photographs of activities you have organized, and newsletters you have edited. These aids will convey information about your skills and abilities that your resume cannot.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

You might get an offer on the spot, if your interview goes well. Hiring decisions for interns and co-ops are generally made much more quickly and unilaterally than hiring decisions for jobs. If this is the internship you want, by all means accept the position. But don't let pressure force you into a decision you aren't ready for. It's okay to ask for two or three days to make up your mind. This delay gives you time to weigh the pros and cons.

Follow up. Make sure you leave your interview with the name of your interviewer (and its correct spelling) and the address where she can be contacted. Write a brief thank-you note on a note card, or type a brief letter. (In this day and age, e-mail thanks are gaining acceptance, as well, but the 'hard copy' approach is still preferred.) Use this opportunity to thank your interviewer for her time and remind her of your strengths; you may wish to include additional information that you forgot to mention in the interview.

If you received an offer at the interview, use your thank-you note to thank the interviewer for the offer, and, if you've already accepted the position, confirm your start date and schedule.

THIS STUFF GETS EASIER

After your first interview, the whole process won't seem quite so daunting. Interviews for experiential positions are merely forerunners to the scores of interviews you'll be having in the course of your working life. The more interviews you have, the easier it gets. Who knows? You may even start to enjoy them!

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