

Student-initiated Internships – Tips and Techniques

Finding a Work Term Opportunity – How do I start?

Looking for an internship position is a crucial process because the strategies you use to secure this job will be invaluable in eventually helping you explore permanent career opportunities after graduation.

You can begin the research process by following two directions:

Research Visible Jobs:

- Fewer than 25% of all positions will be formally advertised. Using this method involves some leg work to find positions that suit your skills and interests.
- Resources that can help you find these jobs include the Student Success Centre (GH 110), newspapers, job banks, career fairs, magazines, public postings, and word of mouth.
- Talking to others is a very effective way of finding a job. Family and friends are usually most willing to pass along leads about job openings. The key is to do your part by making others aware of your goals and following through with the information that they provide.

Research Hidden Opportunities:

- The secret to find hidden opportunities is not looking for a specific job, but rather to look for ways to become connected to an industry or organization.
- Key resources include:
 - Cold calls – make cold calls in the form of seeking information, rather than a specific job, more people will be willing to talk to you. You can get started by reading articles in newspapers, publications, newsletters, brochures, and web sites (look specifically for companies that are moving, expanding or undertaking new projects). Once you have this information collected, organize it according to your priorities (location, size of company etc.).
 - Volunteering – Building relationships is the key to be remembered. Volunteer for a fund raising event the company is holding, offer a few hours a week to help out with daily tasks.
 - Looking outside the box - Start thinking about opportunities where you least expect them. Think about your skills and interests, not your degree title.

Contacting the Employer for the First Time – How do I do that?

Contacting a potential employer for the first time can be a bit overwhelming. Here are some tips to consider:

- Calling employers that you are less interested in first can be great practice for when you are calling those employers that you really want to impress – you'll be more relaxed, and you'll better know what to expect.
- First Impressions Count - Be confident. Be sure of yourself, your skills and what you want to get from the phone conversation.
- Contact the right person. Know who you want to talk to BEFORE you call. Never ask for "someone in human resources", instead ask for Ms. Smith, or John Mitchell. The best person to talk to is usually involved in recruiting, human resources, or even the manager of a specific department that you would like to get more information about. (You can find out names on the web site, company advertisements and brochures etc. or for a larger company you could simply call and ask the receptionist who the best person to speak to would be).
- Know what you want to say BEFORE you call. Role play with a friend or write down a script to practice beforehand. Never read from a script when you are talking to a potential employer – instead, write down general questions that you would like to ask.
- Make sure to clearly introduce yourself, tell them that you are enrolled in the _____ program at McMaster University, and that you are calling for general information about...
- Ensure that you understand what the employer is saying by asking questions and paraphrasing statements.
- If the person you would like to speak to is not in the office, leave a message, then call back within a couple of days if they haven't returned your call. Show genuine enthusiasm and interest in your messages.
- Always thank the employer at the end of your conversation. Tell them how they have helped you learn something about an area/career/subject matter etc.
- If you would like to contact them again in future, ask for permission. The employer may direct you to another person who may be better suited to answer your questions.

After Contacting a Potential Employer – What next?

After you have initially approached an employer, and talked to them about potential opportunities within their organization, you should start thinking about:

- Are you still interested in working for this organization?
- Did the employer seem interested in speaking to you?

- Did the employer identify some areas or departments where you may wish to consider pursuing an internship? If not, where can you see yourself working within this organization?
- What do you think you will learn from an internship with this organization?
- How will an internship with this organization relate to your area of academic study?