



CAREER CONNECTION



## The Top Five Reasons You *Need* to Intern

[By Mary Waldron]

Now that school is getting back in session, many post-grads are asking themselves that golden question: “What do *I* do now?” Well, this is what they will do. They will spend the next six months or so scavenging the Internet desperately in search of *real* jobs—the types of jobs where their experience as servers at Fridays will not help them in the ways they need.

Finally, after months of mom and dad tapping their toes and raising their eyebrows, they will find typical entry-level positions—decent jobs. Emphasis on decent. However, they will still be behind those who had internships during college.

Why? Because those who served as interns got the hook-ups before they even needed real jobs. Interning is truly an investment—no matter what industry you hope to go into. I’ve spoken with many of the country’s smartest and most successful professionals, and they’re all plugging internships. Read on to find out why.

### 1. Get a Heads-Up.

The most obvious, but not usually contemplated, reason that you should find an internship as soon as possible is to gain a foundation of knowledge and experience in the industry. No matter how much “real” work a company has you doing, you benefit by being immersed in the laboratory’s environment. In addition to observing firsthand how a company works, you’re able to get some hands-on experience in basic lab procedures and practices. Although these skills will soon become no-brainers, they will give you an edge over those who only know what their professors told them in class.

Learning the language of biotech and actually putting it to use is another benefit that is equally as important. General practice and industry terms are not always completely covered in school, and when you finally hear them and use them, you become even more assimilated into the biotech community. Later on, when you are interviewing for a full-time position, you will be able to talk the talk, which will make

you much more appealing than the average fresh-out-of-biotech-school applicant.

### 2. See the Light—Whether It’s Good or Bad.

The beauty of internships is that you get to test the waters at an early stage. Interning should be done as soon as possible, even if it’s for the summer. When some biotech students start to see what the industry is really like, they decide it’s just not for them. Interning will help get this issue, if it is there, out in the open sooner, saving the student lots of time and money.

Internships can only benefit you; if you don’t like the experience, you can always leave without hurting your work history—maybe your reputation at that company, depending on the situation, but not your work history. Everyone’s situation is different, but many students work at regular paying jobs during college, filling their work histories for that period.

If you leave an internship early, you can always delete it from your work history because it is like an extra bonus. On the other hand, if you leave a job after a month, you will have to explain that to prospective employers.

### 3. Network, Network, Network.

In many demanding industries, including biotech, young professionals can always learn from their peers who are going through the same experiences simultaneously. Although it’s also a must to find and confide in an older mentor, having a younger and more current mentor gives you a huge advantage. You may meet someone who knows about another internship at a very

competitive company. You might meet the nephew of a well-known scientist whom you’d love to work for and learn from. You never know.

That said, you can also meet seasoned professionals who can advise you on your career in biotech. You can ask them about their career paths, where they interned, what their jobs are like, and so forth. Any person with whom you can have a verbal exchange is up for grabs. Take the people you meet out to lunch and pick their brains about biotech.

### 4. Beef Up Your Resume.

A resume can be a very blank document after you graduate—but it doesn’t have to be! Many graduates find themselves in the predicament of applying for entry-level jobs that require experience. If a job is entry level, what kind of experience are you supposed to have? Interning can fill in all the gaps. You will gain so much insight just by interning for a couple of months, but the real bonus is how your resume benefits from the experience.

Aside from all the references you collect, you can list all the skills that you acquired during your internship. Basically anything that you did in that laboratory can be tweaked (not twisted) to sound resume worthy and captivating.

And don’t forget to list the internship under “employment”! Many people downgrade their internships by leaving them out of resumes or not properly showcasing them on resumes. I always feel bad for those who list “biotech intern” on their resumes. You were employed by the company; why not spruce up the title to convey what you did? You might be able to say “lab assistant” or

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“research assistant.” The fact that you got school credit for your work doesn’t mean you have to highlight it by calling yourself an intern in the job title. Get creative and savvy. Don’t lie. Just present the piece in a different light.

### **5. They Usually Lead to Other Opportunities.**

The champion moment of any internship is when your boss says, “We’d like to have you continue working for us—in a paid position.” And then, on your last day of interning, you wait and wait, and nothing ever happens, and you say to yourself, “Well, that was a waste.”

In addition to all of the other benefits I’ve already listed, interning can also lead to job opportunities in other companies. Bosses usually have friends. More than a few have biotech professional friends. You get the picture. Many times, if professionals move to new companies or start new companies, they remember those loyal interns who worked for free. Then, months or even years later, they call or email you with a job offer, and at that moment, the internship becomes priceless. It really happens more often than you think in many industries. Build a good reputation as soon as you can, and the benefits will come.

So sign up for an internship now because the moment you graduate, it’s a different world. It’s so much more difficult to intern after college because you know that you have the credentials to get a paying job even if your lack of experience and connections is holding you back. You can start interning anywhere at any time. Even if it’s too late to register for credit for the fall, you can always register for credit during the next term. Start soon before it’s too late!

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