Externship Guide:

Tips and tools for finding the job shadowing experience that's right for you!

University of Virginia
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### Externship Checklist

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### Externship Checklist #2

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Have you thought about a career in law, photography, marketing, zoology, medicine, museum work…or something else entirely? Learn more about what it’s like to work in these fields by becoming an extern and spending a week alongside professionals in your area of interest.

**What is an externship?**
An externship is a volunteer “job shadowing” opportunity. Students spend anywhere from one day to three weeks in an organization during school vacation (winter, spring or summer break). The typical externship, however, lasts one week and students spend that time observing, working with professionals, investigating a career field, and experiencing a typical work setting. *Externships offer you the chance to “test” a career without the several-month commitment that most internships require.*

**Why do an externship?**
This experience does not offer pay or course credit but greatly benefits both you and your sponsor. As a student you can clarify your career goals, while your sponsor (or prospective employer) can scrutinize the interests, skills, and abilities of a potential employee. Externing can get your foot in the door for a competitive internship program or job.

**What do externs do?**
Externs might rotate among departments to gain an overview of the organization, or they may spend the week with just one person to obtain a more in-depth perspective. Externs assist as they are able, and as needed, on established projects or short-term activities. Details of the extern’s schedule are flexible and are arranged by the sponsor and student to be mutually beneficial. Externs often:

- Conduct informational interviews with a variety of employees
- Attend meetings and other functions with staff and/or clients
- Observe and ask questions
- Perform general office tasks and projects
- Tour the organization
- Edit or proofread

Confused about which career path to take? Trying to decide between public relations and event planning? Perhaps you are trying to hone your interests within a given field. What is the difference between the work of a nurse practitioner and a registered nurse anyway? Do as many externships as you need to help you answer these questions and more.
What are the benefits of developing your own externship experience?

Job search experience
The process of arranging your own externship closely mirrors the process of finding internships and full-time work after graduation. Externs have the opportunity to practice the skills they need to succeed in these future endeavors.

Flexibility
Unlike formal internship programs, which have set start and end dates and are often concentrated in metropolitan areas, externs can create an experience with any organization at a mutually convenient time for them and their sponsor. While most students complete externships during school breaks in their hometown, some have class schedules which allow them to conduct externships with a local organization during the academic year, such as every Friday for one semester.

Control over planning
Again, because there is no formal externship application process, you can create your own timeline for trying to arrange an externship. Please note, however, that this can be a time intensive process. Some students have secured an externship in as little as one day, while it has taken others 6-8 weeks from the point of initial contact with a sponsor.

Making a great impression
Employers admire initiative; a student who arranges and successfully completes an externship demonstrates courage, ingenuity, and determination. Making a good impression, even for a week-long commitment, can lead to future opportunities.

Access to UCS resources and staff
University Career Services can direct you to online and print resources to help you develop a list of potential sponsors. During walk-in hours and individual appointments, UCS staff can answer your questions, critique your resume and cover letters, prepare you for initial contact with sponsors, etc. In addition, UCS can send information to your sponsor to explain externships, if you wish.

“Not only did I get one-on-one communication and insight from my sponsor, but I also got input from the different salespeople in the field, from the biomed techs who actually do equipment repairs, and from the newly hired biomed engineer who had a completely different background and perspective.”

-Third Year Student, Engineering major at U.Va. Medical Center

THE BASICS:

- Externs find and arrange their own externships in a career field of their choice.
- Externs must secure their own accommodations and transportation to and from the extern site.
- Externships should not exceed 3 weeks (15 business days).
- Externships are opportunities for career exploration, they do not provide pay or academic credit.
- Externs develop:
  * Initiative
  * Determination
  * Follow-through
  * Attention to detail
  * Professionalism
  * Experience
Identifying a target is the foundational piece of your externship search, and UCS can help. Focusing on a particular career field, position, and/or location will guide your search and enable you to find and effectively market yourself to the specific employers that really interest you.

Having an “I’ll go anywhere and do anything” attitude will only make your search seem overwhelming; it’s the equivalent of writing a research paper without a topic. And, of course, if you hear about a great opportunity outside of your targeted focus, you always have the option of following up on it.

Consider location, career field/industry, and job function/title and decide their order of importance. By figuring out what matters most to you, you will develop a targeted focus.

Target your search in three ways

1. **Job Function/Title**
   You may be most familiar with the idea of targeting your search by job function (or title). For instance, you may want to work with an event planner, recruiter, market researcher, or legal assistant. If you’re not sure, it may help to think about your skill set. For example, how do you see yourself using your writing, researching, or instructing skills in a professional setting?

2. **Location**
   Since externships are unpaid, cost might play a significant role in determining where you will look for an externship. Many students choose their hometowns, or places where they have friends or family, so accommodation and transportation are taken care of.

3. **Career Field**
   The third way to target your search is by career field (a particular industry or type of organization). Identifying your interests can help. For instance, you might want to work in the fashion industry or in sports, but you are not sure about what specific job you want to have.

For example, you may want to extern with a corporate lawyer at a law firm in Richmond, VA.
25 Career Fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accounting</th>
<th>Work with clients and account teams to track business transactions for public and private clients.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising/PR</td>
<td>Develop products and programs to enhance client’s image and visibility in the marketplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/Entertainment</td>
<td>Create, preserve, or present both performance and studio work for public and private use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Services</td>
<td>Monitor business-to-business service, contract negotiations, manufacturing, distribution and logistics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying/Retail</td>
<td>Participate in buying, supply management, and store management training programs with major retailers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science/IT</td>
<td>Design, implement, test, or manage software solutions for the workplace or personal use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>Use analysis to resolve problems in marketing, management, restructuring and planning of all fields.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design/Architecture</td>
<td>Provide expertise in technical layout, graphic design, production of graphic imagery or architecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Training</td>
<td>Support learning through instruction, administration, program management and service delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Design, deliver, and maintain mechanical, electrical, civil, computer, and aerospace structures or systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>Meet with private and business customers to design investment, insurance and risk management products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Influence decisions with review and creation for policy for international, federal, state and local services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>Care for patients through medical, service, and administrative roles in a variety of health care settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality/Event Planning</td>
<td>Manage customer needs in travel, hotel, resort, restaurant, and tourism industries or produce events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Implement and monitor services in staffing, payroll, benefits, corporate structuring and executive search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking/Investments</td>
<td>Oversee money management, investment analysis, securities review and loan allocations for business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Services</td>
<td>Provide support for legal counsel team to support clients in law firms or public agencies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management/Administration</td>
<td>Provide direction or management of office, business, or organization as a department or project manager.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing/Market Research</td>
<td>Analyze information from sales/demographics to monitor trends and models for business planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/Publishing</td>
<td>Manage projects in magazine, publishing, newspaper, radio, Internet and telecommunication areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td>Guide special interest, public service, issue specific, and historical/custodial agencies in private sectors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales/Real Estate</td>
<td>Represent products or services in pharmaceuticals, consumer products, chemical, medical and energy fields. Rent, buy or sell properties for clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science/Research</td>
<td>Use technical skills at industrial, medical, government agencies, chemical and environmental organizations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>Assist others in social work, mental health counseling, program management and advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports/Recreation</td>
<td>Work with the public in fitness, leisure, recreation, parks management and coaching roles.</td>
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### Identify your existing network

Networking is about building and maintaining relationships in order to:
- discover an opportunity you did not know about,
- keep current with trends and personalities in your field,
- gain perspective on your target market, and
- increase your base of contacts.

Make sure the people you know are aware of what you do and what you want to do so that they can help you make connections in your field of interest.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Relatives:</th>
<th>Neighbors:</th>
<th>Parents’ Friends:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections through U.Va. Student Organizations:</td>
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Think about the members of your community who are already doing what you want to do or frequently come into contact with people who are. You might be able to secure an internship/externship through one of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctors/Dentists:</th>
<th>Accountants/Realtors:</th>
<th>Clergy/Social services providers:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Professors:</td>
<td>Hairstylists/Barbers:</td>
<td>Government Officials/Lawyers:</td>
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Self-Assessment Exercise #1

What are you hoping to get out of an externship/internship experience?

1).
2).
3).
4).
5).

Tip: Don’t forget to include a couple of these in the body of your cover letter. In doing so, potential sponsors can be honest about whether or not they will be able to provide you with the kind of experience that will help you to clarify your career related goals.

What would you do as an extern with our organization? This is a question you will undoubtedly get from potential sponsors. Right now think about what kinds of activities during an externship would help you to clarify your career related goals (listed above)? You may not get to do some of the things you want to, if you don’t ask.

1).
2).
3).
4).
5).

Tip: Don’t forget to include “help out with any ongoing office projects” on your activity list. This may be a way to sell a potential sponsor on the concept of having an extern. Remember sponsors are volunteers. In exchange for the opportunity to test out a career field of interest, you would be okay with doing some filing, right?
UCS Resources

Career related print materials
Learn more about the career that interests you. Books in the UCS library are organized by career field and many may be checked out for up to one week.

UCAN (U.Va. Alumni Career Assistance Network)
More than 75% of jobs are obtained through networking. Use your U.Va. connections! UCAN is a database of nearly 25,000 alumni who have volunteered to serve as career contacts. The database can be accessed in the UCS library or at hoosonline.virginia.edu. Although UCAN members have not agreed to be extern sponsors, you may want to arrange an informational interview with alumni in your career field of interest in order to obtain insider tips that can improve your externship search strategies. Of course, it is always a possibility they will take you on as an extern.

CAVLink
CAVLink is an online listing service where you can find externship and internship postings targeted toward U.Va. students. Visit the following Web site to create your own password and profile: www.career.virginia.edu/CAVLink

Career Shift
Complete database of employers and job/internship for students and recent grads. Includes a comprehensive resume builder.

Internship Information
You may have more luck securing an externship with an organization that has a formal internship program. Most of these organizations are already familiar with the experiential learning model and working with college students. In addition, internship coordinators are great people to contact because they may be able to help you create a volunteer opportunity and/or direct you to an appropriate potential sponsor within the organization. The UCS Web site has numerous online internship resources where you can find internship announcements. In the UCS library, you can also find print materials highlighting internship opportunities. In addition, every spring semester UCS sponsors the Spring Job & Internship Fair. Attending this event is a great way for you to establish personal contact with an organization.

Please visit UCS during walk-in hours to learn more about the above mentioned resources and how to use them.
Identify Your Career Field of Interest

Advertising

Break Down the Career Field

Corporate and Industry
Publishing
Agencies
Radio and Television
Sports and Entertainment

From UCS print resources

Determine the Type of Work

Account Services
Media Services
Creative Services
Planning/Research

From VAULT, accessed for free with a MyUCS account

Target Specific Organizations (ie: size, location)

Leo Burnett (all organizations in Chicago)
DDB
Draft Inc
Cramer-Krasselt
Energy BBDO

From Career Shift

Identify the Organization’s Structure

Advertising
Public Relations
Media Planning and Buying
Interactive
Promotion

From organization’s website

Media Planning and Buying Extern

Finding the right fit within a career field

Research, research, research. Learn more about the field and the companies/organizations in which you are interested. Develop a list of 3-5 potential sponsors to increase your chances of securing an externship. By far, the best way to assure a good externship experience is to choose potential sponsors wisely.
Well-developed professional materials will open the door for you. Your resume and cover letter are primary marketing tools with which to sell your skills, abilities and experiences to employers. If you have ever wondered how to write a confident and relevant cover letter, or whether or not your resume successfully communicates your skills and experiences, keep reading.

**First resume?**

Use these questions to organize your skills, abilities, and experiences before drafting your resume.

1. Describe the type of job/career field that you are considering/seeking.
2. Describe the types of organizations to which you will be sending this resume.
3. List previous or current classes that relate specifically to the type of job/career that you are seeking.
4. List all (collegiate and high school) activities, experiences, leadership roles, and honors that relate specifically to the job/career that you are seeking.
5. List any additional educational endeavors such as study abroad experiences, special programs, independent studies, minors, double majors, etc.
6. List the skills you possess that will help you in this particular position/career field.

A chronological format is usually recommended for college students. In a chronological resume, items are arranged in reverse-chronological order within topic areas (education, experience, etc.). If only some of your experience is relevant, you can divide it into two blocks: “Related Experience” and “Additional Experience.”

**Guidelines**

- Avoid resume templates—the automatic formatting will limit your options. Find a resume (in the UCS library or a friend’s resume) you like and copy its style.
- Avoid large blocks of text (i.e., more than 10 lines).
- As a general rule, one page is the recommended length. This may vary if you have extensive experience.
- Don’t sacrifice margins and white space to keep your resume to one page.
- Use standard, readable fonts like Helvetica, Bookman, Arial, and Times New Roman.
- Keep font size within 10-12 points. Some headings and your name can be 14 point.
- Avoid script fonts and underlining; boldface and italics are generally better ways to highlight an item.
- Avoid graphics, shading, and lines. If you do use lines, put at least ¼ inch of white space around them.
- Don’t compress the space between letters, you want your resume to be readable!
- Always send originals on light-colored 8 ½” x 11” paper, when faxing, set the fax machine on “fine...
Resume Worksheet

Use this checklist to make sure the content and format of your resume are consistent and correct.

Content
☐ Specific objective statement (position of field identified)
☐ Identified relevant work experience and activities
☐ Identified position titles
☐ Identified employers and organizations (organization name and city, state)
☐ Avoided personal pronouns in description, especially “I”
☐ Used action verbs describing responsibilities
☐ Work experiences and/or activities support the objective statement
☐ Identified skills gained from each activity and experience. Make sure to include enough information so the employer knows what you actually did
☐ Ordered descriptions with the most impressive information first
☐ Dates are included but not highlighted
☐ College summers are accounted for
☐ Leadership and management roles are well defined
☐ High school information is included or excluded appropriately
☐ Accomplishments are highlighted
☐ Results are quantified where possible (numbers, statistics, or percentages)

Format
☐ Checked for typos or misspellings
☐ Included full name and complete address (both your school and permanent addresses), including phone number and e-mail
☐ Education category is complete (University of Virginia, City, State, graduation date, degree, major)
☐ Included overall GPA (and major GPA if it is higher)
☐ Is work-related coursework included? Use full name not course number (Introduction to Psychology, not PSYC 101).
☐ Academic honors included? If honors are substantial, they may merit an “Honors” category
☐ Professional Appearance
☐ Clear print quality
☐ Uncluttered
☐ Not too brief
☐ Easy to read
☐ Abbreviations avoided (besides state, GPA, or degree)
☐ Order of categories (Experience, Related Experience, Activities, etc.) allows the most relevant information to lead the resume
☐ Titles or organizations are highlighted appropriately
☐ Entries within each category are ordered consistently
☐ Entries are ordered according to which is most impressive overall (title or organization)

The layout of your resume is very important. It must be visually attractive, well organized, and easy to read.
Cover Letter Worksheet

Answer these questions on another sheet of paper to make sure you have all the information you need to organize your skills, abilities, and experiences.

1. Employers Name and Title
2. Organization/Company
3. Address
4. Phone/Fax Number
5. Describe your goals for the externship and the activities
6. Describe what you’d like to participate in during the externship
7. List your previous and current classes that relate to this position
8. List college and high school* activities, experiences, leadership roles, and honors that relate specifically to this position
9. Describe the skills that you bring to this position
10. List any additional educational endeavors such as study abroad, special programs, independent studies, minors, double majors that strengthen your application

*There are some high school activities you may not want to include, depending on the types of activities and your current year at U.Va.

The First Paragraph
...is a basic introduction. It should state why you are writing. If you have had previous contact with the addressee, refer to that interaction or if a person referred you, mention their name. Keep this paragraph brief.

The Body
...can be one or two paragraphs long. It should explain why you are seeking an externship in that field and how you came to be interested in that organization. Feel free to quickly define what an externship is for the reader. In addition, elaborate on your academic and career goals and what you hope to accomplish during the externship. The body should reflect the research you have done on the employer and outline what you would like to do as an extern.

The Closing
...should make clear what action you will take to follow-up on the submission of your resume and cover letter. Keep the initiative on your side. Tell the employer you will call him or her in a specific amount of time. (Make sure to do so, of course!) Also, include when and how you are reachable.

Content and Format

☐ Sender’s address and date
☐ Recipient’s address:
  ☐ Person’s name and title
  ☐ Organization’s name and address
☐ Proper salutation and closing
  ☐ Dear (name)
  ☐ Sincerely,
  ☐ Signed (Have you signed the letter?)
  ☐ Enclosure
☐ No typos or misspellings
☐ Professional appearance
  ☐ Clear print quality
  ☐ Resume quality paper (24 lb bond linen or cotton, white or cream color)
  ☐ Same font used as on resume (10-12 point size is recommended)

TOOLS

➤ UCS walk-ins, Mon-Fri, check the web site for up-to-date walk-in schedule hours
➤ Great resources in print (all available in the UCS Library):
  • Writing Resumes handout
  • Cover Letters and Other Correspondence handout
  • Hoos Career Guide

Letter of Inquiry (i.e., inquiring about the possibility of externing)

☐ Identified type of career you are pursuing (career objective)
☐ Identified where you learned about the organization
☐ Outlined your strongest qualifications and referenced actual experiences
☐ Identified relevant skills
☐ Indicated future plan of action
Email is not the most effective strategy for initial contact with a potential sponsor. This step is VITAL to getting your foot in the door, so we encourage you to use the telephone when contacting a sponsor for the first time. There will be no second chance to make a good first impression. When you call an employer, you need to be:

- Professional
- Self-assured
- To the point
- Enthusiastic!
- Convincing

Know what you are going to say before you pick up the phone! Review specific information about the company (from your GREAT research notes). You may also want to conduct a mock phone call with a friend or with someone from UCS.

**30-Second Personal Introduction**

You call a potential sponsor for the first time and to your surprise you actually get them on the phone! They have only 5 minutes to talk with you before they have to prepare for a meeting. How can you make a positive and lasting impression in the brief time allotted?

Before you place your first contact call make sure to have your personal introduction prepared and rehearsed. Introduce yourself by talking about your strongest skills or leadership experiences. Mention your major if you feel it is clearly related to your career goals. Also, indicate why you want to shadow a professional in that industry and in that company more specifically.

**The Basics:**

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Introduce yourself and the concept of an externship.
- Market yourself!
- Flatter them!
- Send your resume and cover letter.
- Follow-up at specified time.

**Cold call contact tips**

Here are some suggestions for your first telephone encounter with the receptionist/internship coordinator/human resources office at a place where you would like to extern and don’t have any existing contacts.

- Tell them you are interested in gaining exposure to a variety of fields because you feel it’s the best way to find out what the jobs are actually like.
- Ask if they could refer you to someone you may be able to shadow or someone within the organization who might be able to help you arrange a shadowing opportunity in _______ department.
- Politely ask for the person’s contact information.
- Ask what they believe the best method of contact is and when it is most likely that you will reach him/her.
- Kindly thank them for their assistance. Write a follow-up note or e-mail to express your appreciation.
Sample cold call

“Hello, I’m calling from the University of Virginia. May I please speak to someone in Human Resources?”

“One moment please.”

“Human Resources. This is Amy. How can I help you?”

“Hello, my name is __________ and I’m a student at the University of Virginia. I’m calling because I am interested in volunteering with your organization the week of __________ as an extern. Externships are job shadowing experiences that students can initiate with professionals in their field of interest. I am considering a career in __________ and believe the best way I can determine if this is the right path for me is by gaining first-hand exposure to the field. Could you refer me to an appropriate person with whom I should discuss establishing this kind of opportunity?”

“We’ve never done this before, so I’m not even sure who to direct you to or if anyone will be interested. We have several different departments within the organization, which area would you most like to explore?”

“I would be most interested in the __________.”

“Okay, I’ll transfer you to Connie Davis in the __________ department. Maybe she can help you. Hold on.”

“This is Connie.”

“Hello Ms. Davis, I was forwarded to you by Amy in Human Resources. I’m calling because I am interested in volunteering with your organization during my break through an externship, which is a brief job shadowing experience that students tend to initiate as a means of career exploration. I am majoring in __________ and thinking about pursuing a career in __________. As part of my career exploration process I hope to gain first-hand exposure to the fields in which I am interested. I would be extremely grateful for the opportunity to spend a few days in your department shadowing members of the staff. In exchange for the opportunity I would be more than willing to assist with any projects going on at the time.”

“Really – well that’s interesting, but I’m not sure. You know, this is a very busy time of year for us. How long is your break. A week? What would you be able to do for us in that time?”

“I understand that it is a limited period, but I come with a strong background in __________ and have had the chance to work/inter with __________. I know I can learn quickly and would enjoy the opportunity to assist with office projects. However, my interest is mainly in gaining exposure to this kind of work by observing, attending meetings and interviewing members of the staff in order to learn what I can so that I can make better decisions about my career path.”

“I’ve done a lot of research on the __________ work you have done and have been truly impressed with the quality of your product/service. I am specifically interested in learning more about __________. Although there are other organizations located in __________ in the __________ field, yours is the most well-respected. I would be honored to have the opportunity to join you for the week of __________ for 3-5 days.”

“I would be happy to email you some information about externships and my resume to give you a better idea of my interests and goals. … Is it all right to follow up with you in a couple of days?”

“Well, it sounds like something we might be able to do, but I’ll need to ask around to see if anyone is interested in having you shadow them. Give me at least two weeks so that I can present this information at the monthly staff meeting on the 17th.”

“Thank you for considering accepting me as an extern! I’ll send you an email this afternoon and call you two weeks from Wednesday. Can I verify the correct spelling of your name, your title, and email address so that I can make sure this gets to you?”
Dear Aunt Denise,

It’s been months since we’ve talked! I’d love to learn about what you do as a fashion designer, how you got your first job, and what the field is really like. Maybe I can even spend a day or two on the job with you! You know I’ve always been interested in the latest trends. It must run in the family. Can you believe that I’m graduating soon? I’d like to hear where you think I would fit in out there in the real world. I’ll call you soon, so we can talk more.

Best,

Dear Mike,

Help! I’m graduating next summer and would really like to talk to your dad again about the work he does. We had a good conversation over the holiday at your house, but I’m not sure how to reach him to talk about possibly setting up an externship with him so that I can see what his work is like. I’ll call you next week to get your thoughts and his number. Thanks.

Sincerely,

Sample e-mails and phone calls for personal contacts

Sample phone call

Richard Johnson how can I help you?

Hello, Mr. Johnson. My name is Charles Lee, and I am a third year student at the University of Virginia. Luz Moreno recommended that I call you for advice about the legal services industry. Is this a good time to talk?

I have about 10 minutes before my next client meeting, so you’ll have to make it quick.

Sure, I’ll be brief. I recently declared government as my major. When my mother’s friend, Mrs. Moreno, found out she mentioned that you were in the legal services field and that I should contact you as a resource.

Oh, did she? How can I help?

I would like to discuss the possibility of scheduling an externship with you. Basically, externships are job shadowing experiences. I am trying to secure such an experience in the career field I’m interested in and as a result I was hoping to spend some time at your firm in the month of June.

This sounds great, but it seems like it would be a lot of work on our part should we choose to host you. Plus, I’m not sure if our budget is flexible enough to accommodate this.

Well, the experience depends on what you can facilitate. Some externships last a week or two, some only a few days. And I’m not looking for any compensation; I can provide my own transportation and housing.

Okay, well it’s sounding better. What do externs typically do?

Externship experiences vary, but typically externs will shadow their sponsor or others that work within their firm, conduct informational interviews, sit in on meetings, as well as perform administrative tasks. Some externs have even been instrumental in research projects that their sponsor allowed them to work on.

Well Charles, this sounds like a great experience, however, I’m going to have to check my calendar for availability. I’ll also have to clear this with my partners, so I cannot make any promises at this time, but I will see what I can do. How about you give me a call back in a week I should have some details for you then. In the meantime, could you forward me some more information about the externships, what you hope to accomplish, and your resume?

Sure! I can do that immediately, how should I send my materials?

You can fax everything to me at (555) 888-1111.

Mr. Johnson, that sounds great! Thank you for your time,
What to do when you hit a wall

Wall: Talk to someone in Personnel/Human Resources.

You: I have already spoken with ____. Since I am looking for the opportunity to gain first-hand exposure and advice about the types of jobs in ____ I really need to talk with someone actually working in the field.

Wall: I’m busy.

You: I understand. When is a good time to contact you again?

Wall: We don’t have time right now.

You: I understand. Is there a time of year that is less busy? Can I call you back then?

Wall: We aren’t hiring interns.

You: Sir, I am trying to secure an externship which is a little different. As an extern…

Wall: We don’t have any funds to pay student help.

You: That’s fine. Hosting an extern is actually at no cost to you. In fact, in exchange for the opportunity to explore a career field that interests me I would be more than willing to…

Wall: We don’t award academic credit.

You: That is okay — this is not a for-credit experience, although it is educational in that I will have the chance to learn…

Wall: We wouldn’t be able to cover your accommodations.

You: No problem. I have made arrangements to…

Wall: It sounds like it would be a great opportunity for you, but what’s in it for me?

You: Great question. It’s an opportunity for you to mentor a young professional, show off your company and benefit from the skills and fresh perspective I have to offer.

Wall: Due to the Fair Labor Standards Act, company policy prohibits us from bringing students on board without compensating them.

You: It is my understanding that companies are fine to host externs without offering students pay or academic credit, but I can have someone from U.Va.’s Career Services Office contact you in order to better address your concerns.

Sometimes reaching potential sponsors can be difficult. People are very busy; sometimes if they don’t know you, they may be dismissive. Try not to let this deter you—but use your best judgment. If someone’s tone indicates that he or she is definitely not interested in speaking with you, be gracious. Simply say thank you and hang up.

Your first point of contact may also be with an administrative assistant who works with your contact. His job is to protect the time and interests of your contact. Potential resistance from this person is one reason to get personal referrals from people you know. People are more likely to speak to you if someone they know recommended that you call.

Don’t forget, one of the best ways to prevent blocks is to get a personal referral (check UCAN for alumni contacts or use family or friends).

Should you get a little frustrated, just keep your end goal in mind.

“Externing at Appalachian State University’s Residence Life Office solidified my career goals in student affairs. I got to interact with staff members, sit in on important meetings and network with professionals. It gave me insight into a career field and helped me better prepare for the job search process...Overall it was a valuable experience.”

-Graduate Student, Curry School of Education
As you work through your externship search, you will more than likely find it necessary to follow-up with potential employers via phone and email. Here are a couple examples. Again, it may take between 6-8 weeks of communication before you are able to secure an externship, leave yourself plenty of time.

**Samples of follow-up contacts**

Dear Mr. Sampson,

Good morning. I am writing to follow up on the phone conversation we had on February 13. You suggested that I contact you for an update on the decision-making timeline concerning the externship we discussed if I had not heard from you within a two-week period. I am thrilled at the prospect of volunteering in the Children’s Education Division of the Art Museum of Mayberry for a couple of weeks this summer and look forward to receiving notification from you soon. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Christina Nguyen
University of Virginia ‘11

Good afternoon, Dr. Finkelstein.
My name is James Hargrove, from the University of Virginia. I sent you a resume and cover letter at the end of July. I’m checking back with you to see if you have had the opportunity to review my materials.

**No. I haven’t.**

I understand that you must be very busy. I would just like to reaffirm that I am still very interested in externing in your dermatology practice on Monday afternoons during the fall semester. May I ask if you have a sense of whether or not spending time shadowing you will be an option for me while in Charlottesville for school this year?

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**THE BASICS:**

- Be respectful.
- Ask prepared questions.
- Be persistent, but not a pest (allow at least 3-5 business days between calls or e-mails).
- Keep an accurate record of your contact with potential sponsors.
- Remember potential sponsors will be impressed by your initiative and determination.
- Follow-up at specified time.
A UCS counselor can help you assess your externship search strategy. Simply make an appointment.

Not getting the RESULTS you want?

Do you know the most effective extern search strategy? Are you using your time accordingly? Are you using e-mail as your primary method of initial contact with a potential sponsor?

The most effective strategy is cold calling. Tell everyone you know that you are looking for the opportunity to shadow someone in a particular field.

You may want to try some of these tactics:

- Step away from your computer and go meet people in person.
- Hand-deliver your resume to companies; give it to anyone who will take it.
- Try informational interviewing with people working in your areas of interest. For contact information, use UCAN, U.Va.’s alumni career mentor database, or Career-Shift to locate people working in the career field, organization, or location in which you are interested.

Do you have a personal introduction and have you rehearsed it? The most successful sales people use a script and stick with the one that works best for them. If you haven’t already, write a personal introduction that describes your academic/extracurricular accomplishments and professional goals. It is often difficult for people to talk about themselves. Make sure to practice your personal introduction aloud before placing any calls or walking into an organization.

What are your strategies for follow-up?

Often, just sending out your resume and cover letter is not enough to prompt employers to respond to you. Be proactive in your search; call or e-mail to follow-up with potential extern sponsors.

How are you using your resume and cover letter? Are your externship objectives clearly articulated in your cover letter? Does it demonstrate that you have done good employer research? Is your resume too verbose? Is it longer than one page? Are your documents free of spelling and grammatical errors? Have you visited UCS lately to have your professional materials proofread?

Are you spending enough time searching?

Your externship search may feel like a semester-long project.

Avoid double booking yourself. The last thing you want to do is turn down an externship at an organization in which you are interested. If you decide to contact more than one organization at a time, suggest the week of ___ for Company X and the week of ___ for Company Y. If you are working with a specific time period (ie: spring break), start by contacting just one of the potential sponsors on your list. Before moving on, make sure to thank them for their efforts and notify them that you have begun to pursue other opportunities as well. If you end up with 2 externships for the same time period, instead of simply canceling one, notify the sponsor ASAP that you are no longer available at that time and try to reschedule it.
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Congratulations! You have been told that your top company would LOVE to have you as an extern! Having verbal approval is wonderful, but you want to be absolutely sure this is official and that all of the details have been worked out before you arrive on their doormat. Adhere to the following steps to confirm your externship arrangement.

1. Map out the Details
   Discuss with your sponsor logistics for the externship. Also, make sure to reiterate your goals for the externship experience and develop a tentative agenda together. Use the Planning Form located on the UCS Externship website to guide your conversation so that both you and your sponsor have the same expectations.

2. Check-in with Your Sponsor
   Things change quickly. Check-in with your sponsor one week prior to the start date of your externship to ensure that there are no changes to the plan. This is especially important if you secured your externship weeks in advance. In the past, students at this phase have discovered that their sponsor no longer worked at the organization, that the externship dates needed to be moved due to scheduling conflicts and that the organization had physically relocated!

Questions to ask your host:
- How do I get to your office from___?
- To whom should I report?
- Do I need to obtain an I.D. badge and/or parking pass in advance?
- Do I need to sign a waiver or complete additional paperwork in advance?
- What will the hours be?
- What is the dress code?
- Is there a place to eat in or near the office or should I bring lunch?
- Is there anything else you would like me to do to prepare for the experience?

Helpful information can be found on the Extern page of the UCS site!
http://www.career.virginia.edu/students/programs/externship/
On the first day of your externship, your sponsor may sit you down and say “Okay, so what do you want to know?” In preparation for the experience, make sure to develop a list of questions to ask during an arranged informational interview or just to have in the reserves for any conversation with your sponsor or other members of the staff.

**Sample questions for an informational interview**

- What are the major divisions in your firm?
- Where does your division fit in?
- What skills/abilities, level of education, do you find are essential in your work?
- What types of prior experiences are absolutely critical?
- How did you get your first job?
- What do you find most challenging about this line of work? Most rewarding?
- What are the areas of growth and decline in this field?
- How does one find out about job opportunities in this field?
- How does one progress from position to position?
- Here is my resume. How well suited is my background to this type of work? What could I do to make myself a more competitive applicant for entry level jobs in this field?

**Additional ways to prepare for your externship:**

- Conduct further research on the company Web site and about the industry in general using online and print resources. Make sure you have a firm understanding of the mission of the organization, the services they provide, their clientele and major competitors.
- Conduct informational interviews with U.Va. alumni from UCAN or personal contacts within the field.
- Pay attention to the news to learn about current trends in the industry you are exploring.
- Read biographical information about your sponsor and the most influential individuals in the field if available.
- Gather materials to take with you to the externship in anticipation of some down time. Books on career-related topics and industry specific magazines or journals are recommended (*Work It!* or *The Wall Street Journal*).
- Do a practice run of the route you need to take to get to your externship site. You do not want to risk being late on the first day because you got lost.
- Review your goals for the externship.

**Emergencies**

Of course, there are some things you just can’t anticipate. Emergencies happen to the best of us. Some situations may be beyond our control, but we CAN control our reactions to them. Take a deep breath, and handle the situation professionally:

**Call your sponsor!** Don’t leave him or her worrying and wondering what happened to you! Once you have committed to extern with an organization, the only acceptable reasons for canceling or shortening your externship are personal illness or a family emergency.
Self-Assessment Exercise #2

All extern experiences are different. Many students walk into workplace environments and are given detailed schedules for the week. Other students are given a desk and a project and are asked to analyze a problem without any explanation or training. Then there are students who will be unable to work due to the highly specialized nature of the industry; instead they will passively observe their sponsor’s daily responsibilities.

*Any of these experiences can be rewarding or not, depending upon how much you put into it.*

Look beyond the surface! Don’t expect your sponsor to cater to your every wish. You may be getting a more honest picture of the organization and the industry by experiencing a company “in action.”

Be aware that your own biases will affect your interpretation of the externship. The following questions will help to define the culture of the organization and increase your objectivity:

How extensively will you be permitted to be involved in the work? How does this impact your learning objectives? What ideas do you have for dealing with the constraints that may exist? What will you do if you do not receive much direction from your sponsor?

To what degree will you be a participant observer in the setting? A non-participant observer in the setting? What are the relevant strengths and weaknesses of each role?

Will you record/journal your observations? If so, how? If not, why? What relationship do the ways in which you will gather and organize your data have on your learning objectives?
Make the Most of the Externship

Speak up and act interested!
Those externs who have benefited most from their experience were those who asked questions and showed genuine interest in all that their sponsor and other staff had to say. This is the time for you to explore a particular career area; because you have a limited time frame, you will be mostly observing and asking questions, so go prepared. Really give some thought as to what questions you may have and what you hope to learn from this experience. Staff members will interact with you more if you are genuinely interested in their work: Your enthusiasm will be contagious!

Idle time
Even after you and your sponsor have created an ideal agenda for the week, you may be faced with some idle time when your sponsor is busy. You cannot be entertained for eight hours a day, and you must be prepared for this. It is best to talk with your sponsor before the week begins so that he or she will not feel uneasy when idle time occurs. Ask if you can help around the office, read extra material pertaining to the career or industry, or bring your own reading material. Do not sit around and act bored.

Troubleshooting on-site
It is important to be open to whatever experiences your externship offers, but if you feel that administrative work is all you are doing, it is perfectly acceptable to approach your sponsor in a professional manner and remind him or her of the purpose of an externship. Come to the discussion with a positive attitude, and provide several specific suggestions of what you would like to do. Be patient and approach your sponsor at a quiet moment. If there is no improvement, don’t leave your sponsor. Call our office and we will help you decide what to do.

Future Internship Possibilities
It’s all about timing. The best way to express your interest in future opportunities is twofold. First, successfully complete your externship by making a good impression on your sponsor and the organization. Second, approach your sponsor at your final meeting and ask how you could go about establishing an internship with the organization.

Final meeting with your sponsor
At the beginning of your week, you will want to ask your sponsor if he or she can set aside time for you at the end of your week so that you can wrap up your experience, get feedback, etc. In this final meeting (which may range from five minutes to an hour, depending on your sponsor’s time), you will want to make one final impression on the sponsor and the company. Come able to discuss some of the important things you learned about the industry and the specific company, as well as what you have learned about yourself in relation to this work.

Write a thank you note
Don’t forget to send a thank-you note at the conclusion of your externship. These sponsors contributed valuable time to your experience—make sure you convey your appreciation! Also, you want to leave your sponsor with a good impression in the event you need his or her assistance in the future.
Self-Assessment Exercise #3

1). What did you learn from the externship experience?

2). What did you learn about yourself?

3). What did you learn about the career field?

4). Was it successful? This could mean either that you are even more psyched about the career field you tested out, or that you need to rethink your career plan because it wasn’t what you thought it would be like at all.

5). What are your next steps?

Tip: Don’t forget that UCS is here for you. If you want to talk to someone about where you should go from here, feel free to schedule an appointment with a career counselor.
Share Your Experience with UCS!

As an extern you are primarily independent, and without your feedback, UCS will never know how your experience was. We need you to keep us informed of the usefulness of this guide, suggested resources, and of course, your unique extern experience! Please use the “Share Your Experience” sheet on the UCS externship site. Let us know how your experience went—what challenges you encountered and how you met them. Your responses will help us to help your fellow students better meet these blocks in the future.