

Tips for Getting an Internship in Data Science (or a Related Field)

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Updated July 3, 2023

Before trying to get an internship in data science or a related field, please determine the following information and have it available in written form as notes. Remember, the goal is to please a manager or leader at a potential workplace, and impress them so that they will accept you as an intern. Therefore, it is important that you determine the following information first and write it down before you begin looking for internships, so you have it available for them if they ask.

Calendar Dates	- What calendar dates are you available for the internship? - Do you have a period of dates within that time that you cannot participate (e.g., vacation)?
Work Schedule	- What kind of daily or weekly work schedule are you anticipating? How many total hours? What days can you work those hours? - Do you have other commitments the internship site will need to work around (e.g., classes)?
Work Location	- Most internships are in-person. If the internship is in-person, what areas can you work geographically? Where can you easily access from where you are living? - Are you interested in a remote internship? If so, do you have any restrictions around this, such as time zone, or technology?
Educational Obligations	- Is this internship being completed as part of a college program? If it is, the internship site typically has obligations. You may need to make sure the person you report to at the internship, the internship site, length, and other features are approved by your educational institution before you proceed. - If this internship has such obligations, they need to be made explicit to the internship site. You will need to help them comply with doing paperwork for your educational program. - If the internship is not being completed around educational obligations from a higher education setting, is it to complete licensure, or some other regulatory process? You will have to be explicit about this with your internship supervisor.
Salary	- Are you willing to accept an unpaid internship? If so, are you expecting anything else besides salary in exchange (e.g., letters of recommendation)? - If you are looking for a paid internship, what are your parameters in terms of payment expected? What countries are you allowed to be paid in, and from what countries are you allowed to accept pay?
Visa and International Considerations	You are legally allowed to participate in the internship given your status in the internship host country?
Internship Content	- What specific experiences are you looking to have on your internship? - What specific domains within your field are you looking to experience? Typically, internships are so learners can apply theoretical learning to real-world problems. What examples of real-world problems are you interested in working on at the internship?

Organization Research

Once you have all of that information, you should determine organizations at which you want to participate in an internship. Make a list of those organizations, and research them. Make notes on the following:

- Why does this organization stand out to you as an organization where you want to do an internship?
- What locations would you like to go to participate in an internship with them?
- What specific experiences would you like to have in an internship with them?
- What kind of employees in terms of roles and expertise would you like to work with on an internship at their organization?

I created this blog post to guide you on researching potential employers and internship sites: <https://buff.ly/3Kda5Fj>

Preparing a Resumé and Cover Letter

Preparing a Resumé

Watch this video to learn how to make a data science resumé: https://youtube.com/live/t_ppLAXcugg

Preparing Cover Letters

When you send your resumé to a representative at the organization, you need to send a note with it (usually by e-mail) explaining why you are approaching them for the internship specifically. This is called a “cover letter”.

If you are looking for an internship, you typically prepare one resumé for this purpose, but then make a slightly different cover letter for each organization to which you are inquiring. If I am helping someone, I usually take the first organization on their list, and write a cover letter in Microsoft Word which I save. Then, once we identify a representative of the organization we want to contact, we copy/paste the cover letter into a message to them, and attach the resumé. For the next organization's cover letter, I do “save as” in Word, and edit the letter. That way, I have a Word version of every letter we sent.

Your cover letter should include the information from the table on the first page, as well as the information under the bullet-points above. Start by introducing yourself, and explaining what education program in which you are currently participating (or your career goals if you are outside an educational program). Next, go through the table on the first page and the bullet-points on this page, and explain everything as a narrative to the letter recipient. End the cover letter with providing your contact information so they can contact you for follow-up.

Finding Representatives at Companies to Contact

If in your research you find contact information for an internship director, this is the representative to whom you should send your cover letter and resumé. Another place to find contacts to connect with to apply to internships is on LinkedIn. If you visit a location in person, obtain the business card of the internship director or someone in the human resources department, and contact them electronically with your cover letter and resumé.

If you identify someone from an organization where you want to do an internship who is apparently just an employee at the organization, and you are interested in working with them, do not be afraid to ask them if they would be interested in having you as an intern. Send them your cover letter and resumé, and ask them if it would be possible. They may say, “no”, but it's worth trying. Once you put together the whole picture for them in a cover letter, they might share your vision, and accept you as an intern.

Internship Interviews and Onboarding

An intern is like a “volunteer, temporary employee” – which means, in some ways, they are like an employee. They have access to private employer locations and data, and can learn business secrets. For this reason, organizations interview and vet interns before they are selected, and have a whole onboarding process. Even organizations without a formal internship program will need to do this with people serving as interns at their organization.

If you undergo an internship interview, and you do not hear back from the organization, keep trolling them. Continue to try to contact whoever you have been in contact with before and ask them for a “yes” or “no”. You can tell them that you need to know because you are applying for multiple internships and getting offers. From experience, I can attest that managers are busy and often disorganized, because things are happening too fast in their environments. If you contact the manager at just the right time, they may select you for the internship out of convenience, since you are the one contacting them.

Once you are offered an internship, usually the organization provides you a letter explaining the internship (similar to an employment letter). If you do not get this letter, you should ask them to write you one, and help them by providing any details, such as who you are working with at their organization, and the nature of your project. This letter may be the only documentation of your internship (especially if it is unpaid). Once you receive the letter, you are all set to onboard for your new internship!