

Graduation is coming... What's next?

Graduation is less than a month away. While I cannot wait to throw my hat up into the air and officially check off Went to College on my to-do list, there is one thing that has been staring me down that I absolutely dread. Entering the workforce.

I believed that with my shiny new degree and my references on my CV, I would be able to start working at the lower end of companies I spent four years preparing myself for. Instead, in all job postings that I find I see this requirement: "3+ years of experience in related field."

Speaking from personal experience, I believed that my extracurricular activities at the university prepared me for the jobs I was applying for, but that rejection letter keeps showing up in my inbox. From the comments I have received about my application, they all ask for more experience in the field, although an entry-level job is a job that "requires minimal professional work experience."

Well, I did not have an internship or a job history in the field. I spent my time on campus — at least until COVID-19 forced me to be home for a year-and-a-half participating in clubs and magazines. I completely forgot about internships. Now, while I would like to believe I could dismantle the idea of needing three years of experience for an entry-level job, I am just one person. So, instead, I am out here telling you to find internships as soon as possible in your field of interest.

Internships are not just for the school year. There are many internships that happen during the summer. There are also remote internships so you do not have to keep yourself geographically limited. Unpaid internships are one of the most helpful things to set you apart from others. There are some that do pay — I've seen some that pay \$15 an hour, which is crazy in my eyes — which is considered a blessing, but at some point, the only thing available is an unpaid internship.

Our university has an entire webpage devoted to internships and how to get them. A free account for an internship network is created for each student upon admission to the university. You can research employers, apply for jobs and internships, begin the internship registration process and participate in on-campus mock interviews. There are multiple people to support you. Schedule an appointment with a career coach — for help in finding or developing an internship opportunity that is right for you. During the school year, you can also meet with a peer advisor for a CV or cover letter review. Visit with your academic advisor or departmental internship coordinator to find out about academic internship courses or opportunities offered through your major department.

Don't forget about networking with family, friends, and campus contacts. Let others know the types of opportunities you are looking for and share your CV with them. Finally, attend a career fair or a networking event. These are great networking opportunities!

I am not here to be gentle with you. Sometimes the internship work is gruelling for no pay, but in the end, it is worth the payoff when trying to get a higher paying job in the workforce. There is no such thing as an entry-level job because many of them are still asking for years of experience, despite being on the low-end of the corporate food chain. While they will still teach you the basics of their working environment, most companies want to have someone who already knows their way around and can throw themselves into the work without much of a fuss.

In the end, that internship is going to save you in the long run. Take it from someone who did not do an internship and is now paying the price.

The expression *set you apart* in "the most helpful things to set you apart from others" (paragraph 5) is closest in meaning to "make somebody sound..."

1. ...suitable.
2. ...professional.
3. ...different.
4. ...useful.