

The San Francisco Art Institute
Career Services Office

The Art of Finding an Internship

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The goal of an internship is to explore working in the professional arts community, learn new skills, and broaden your circle of contacts. Having the opportunity to take risks and check out the reality of different arts-related work environments before you graduate can be highly useful. Many internships turn into paid positions once the student has proven to be an effective contributor to the organization and many arts organizations hire exclusively from the ranks of their interns and volunteers. Internships are an excellent way to build work experience and references for your resume.

For credit or not?

Internships can be taken either for credit or on a purely voluntary basis. If you want credit for the internship, you must register for the Internship class and work at least 90 hours during the semester at the internship; that averages out to about 6 hours per 15 week semester for 3 credits or 12 hours per week for 6 credits. The undergraduate class provides feedback, structure, and support during your internship; the graduate class is more open and independent.

If you decide to volunteer your time, the time requirement is more flexible although most good internships still expect a significant amount of time from you in return for the effort expended to train you and show you the ropes.

Finding an Interesting Internship

SFAI has already developed relationships with over 200 arts and community organizations in the San Francisco area; these opportunities are updated each summer and posted in binders in the Career Center. There are also numerous opportunities in arts organizations in other major cities. You can page through these opportunities to decide which ones interest you. Some are paid; most are not.

If you know where you'd like to intern but it is not listed in the binders, we are happy to help you develop any appropriate internship. First, you will need to talk with the class instructor to be certain your internship idea merits credit. Next, prepare your cover letter and resume with Pam Hyland, our Career Services Coordinator. When your materials are in order, you will contact the organization for the internship. The Career Services Coordinator is delighted assist you with any step in the process.

Applying for the Internship

Once you have found interesting internship listings, make copies of three or four of the best ones, then prepare cover letters and resumes for each one, mailing them early in the semester before you hope to start work. If you don't know how to prepare the materials, stop by the Career Center and pick up "The Art of Resume Writing" and "The Art of Cover Letters" handouts; they will help you prepare drafts that you and the Career Services Coordinator will refine until you are satisfied that they represent you well. You may be competing with students from other Bay area and national schools so it is important to send your materials early, at least a month before you hope to begin your internship. Follow up on your printed materials with a call to the sponsor to schedule an interview; if you are faxing the materials, call after two or three days.

The Internship Interview

An interview for an internship is much like a job interview. You should prepare carefully, dress appropriately, and act professionally. If you have never been interviewed on this level before, pick up a copy of "The Art of Interviewing" from the Career Center and read it carefully; in addition to useful advice, it contains sample questions you may want to ask the supervisor. Visiting the web site of the organization, reading any printed materials you can find, and preparing some questions will help you to get the most from each interview. Remember that you are interviewing them to find an interesting and challenging internship as well as being interviewed by them! Be ready to ask intelligent questions about your duties, what you will learn, your supervision, and the criteria for evaluating your performance. If you need assistance preparing for interviews, feel free to talk to Pam Hyland about any concerns you may have.

Although they will understand that students dress more casually than professionals do, they will expect you and your clothes to be neat and clean. It is also important to be on time for the interview; if you have never been there before, leave extra travel time or visit the site beforehand, noting how long the trip takes.

Before you leave, be sure to ask the interviewer when you can expect a decision and offer to send them any additional information they need regarding your candidacy.

Weighing Your Options

After the interview, take some time to think about your impressions of the organization and the internship position. Will it meet your educational needs? Did you like the people you met? Does the organization seem focused and productive? Do you feel aligned with the mission of the organization? You are looking for an opportunity to learn and develop skills – make sure the internship you accept is one that will foster your growth.

Courtesy Considerations

It is a nice idea to write a thank you letter to the interviewer to express your continued interest in the position. It can be hand written (if your writing is legible) or typed and should be quite short and businesslike. If you decide not to accept the internship, a short note or phone call thanking the interviewer for her/his time and withdrawing your candidacy is a courtesy you should observe.