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# Tips for Applying to Internships

## SUMMARY

The Art Institute of Chicago offers several paid internships opportunities throughout the year. The department of Academic Engagement and Research has gathered some helpful tips to help make your application stand out.

### Before Applying to the Position

Read the job description many times to pull out this information:

- What specifically about this internship interests you most?
  - What are the requirements for this role? How do your strengths and achievements set you up for success in this position?
  - What can you learn / get out of this position? How can this internship help you with your professional goals?
  - What are your opportunities to explore, experiment, and /or find joy in this role?
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### Cover Letter

Each internship application is different, but they might ask for a cover letter. A well-written cover letter can make your application stand out amongst other applicants and keep you memorable to recruiters. For internship positions, we recommend that cover letters stick to one page unless the application states a specific word count or page limit.

Make sure that your cover letter complements your résumé and doesn't just repeat information from it. While a résumé will detail your work history and technical skills, reviewing committees will look at cover letters to hear your narrative, assess your communication skills, and see how your achievements,

professional goals, and values might connect with the role. A cover letter is the place to tell the organization why you're ideal for the role, so try to illustrate your letter with specific examples.

**If you're stuck on how to write a cover letter, use this basic structure:**

- 1.) Address and Date
- 2.) Greeting / Salutation
  - a.) If you're not given instructions for who to address your cover letter to, simply write "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Hiring Committee"
- 3.) In one or two sentences, introduce yourself and explain why you're applying to this role
  - a.) Avoid a basic introduction, such as "I am an art history major looking for a summer internship." Instead, write something interesting about your skillset and be sure to demonstrate a connection between your skillset and the organization's goals for the role: "My research interests in the history of photography and my strong ability to keep organized records make me especially excited about this opportunity to work on this collections project in the Photography and Media department."
  - b.) Explain briefly what appeals to you about the internship. Remember to answer specifically about this internship position.
- 4.) Explain who you are and why you're ideal for the role
  - a.) This is the largest part of the cover letter and should be used to explain who you are. Be sure to use this section to convey your soft skills and values, something that may be less readable in your résumé. Describe what you learned from X experience in the past and why that's made you want to pursue Y in the future.
  - b.) Elaborate on what you would contribute to the position and why your contributions would be valuable to the department. It is wise to use 1–2 specific past achievements as examples to demonstrate your contributions and qualities. If you're stuck on what to explain, look at the duties and responsibilities of the role and see where there's possible alignment with the job and your previous experiences.
  - c.) Talk a bit about the organization to show that you've done your research. Try to respond to the stated mission of the department or organization and why or how you would support their work. Remember: don't tell an organization what it already knows about itself; use this space in your cover letter to draw connections to you as a candidate.
  - d.) Because this is an internship, explain what you look forward to learning in this role. You can use the internship outcomes in the job description to help inspire your answer to this question.
- 5.) Conclude with gratitude and a call to action
  - a.) Briefly reiterate your interest in the role and express gratitude for the hiring manager's consideration.
  - b.) Include your phone number and email address
  - c.) Include a call to action:

- i.) “I look forward to further discussing my qualifications” or something similar that hints that the conversation should continue after they’ve read your application.
- 6.) Close the letter
- a.) Be sure to close the letter professionally using an appropriate sign-off and your first and last name: For example, “Sincerely, John Smith”

### Short Answer Essays / Personal Statement

Short Answer Essays and Personal Statements help recruiters hear your story, learn your values, and see how an opportunity could help you with your professional growth. Below are a few key components to keep in mind when addressing this part of your application:

**Follow the requirements.** Almost every short answer question or personal statement has specific requirements for word count, font size, and/or format. It is absolutely crucial that you follow these requirements, otherwise your application may not be considered.

If you’re having difficulty sticking to the word count, write more than what’s needed in your first draft, take a short break, and then edit your materials to trim unnecessary sections or simplify longer sentences.

**Be clear and concise.** One of the biggest misconceptions around essay answers and personal statements is that they should be freeform. While you are welcome to think creatively in answering, it is imperative that you be clear and concise with what you write. All answers must be easy to read and understand.

**Share specific examples.** Remember that hiring managers are not interested in your entire life story; choose 1–2 specific and relevant examples. It’s helpful to share a unique experience or story about yourself that shows your ideas, skills, and values in action, while also maintaining the recruiter’s interest in your application. Supplement your résumé by talking about something less evident in the rest of your application and that shows a different side of your personality or values.

**Describe instances of growth.** Since this is an internship, talk about your goals for the future and how this internship might help you accomplish them. How have you learned from challenges? How have those experiences shaped who you are and where you want to go?

**Remember that you have the agency to pick what you want to share about yourself.** Your lived experiences can give you a wealth of knowledge but if you feel too vulnerable when sharing a specific story, don’t feel compelled to talk about it in your application. Choose another example where you’ve felt more empowered.

**Proofread.** Be sure to take extra time to proofread and thoroughly review your grammar and spelling. Short essays and personal statements help recruiters assess how well you write. Strong writing skills will convey your qualifications and how passionate you are about the position most effectively.

**Specifics around short essay questions:**

- Don't put less effort into answering essay questions just because the application asks for short answers.
- Indicate which short essay is the answer to which question (for example, by following their numbering system). That being said, do not repeat the question in your answer as that takes away space for you to craft a robust response.
- Remember to answer the questions with specific examples and avoid generalized statements. For example, when answering what interests you about the position, pull out specific parts of the job description that interest you rather than saying something less definitive.

**Specifics around personal statements:**

- Try to get the reader's attention within the first paragraph. It might be helpful to open with a story that made you see a new perspective or solidified a value important to you.
- Write an outline to help you structure your thinking and keep your statement concise. Here's a basic structure that you can adapt:
  - Opening paragraph that captures the reader's attention
  - A few paragraphs about your soft skills and values and how they might benefit you in this role
  - Your career goals and how you see this opportunity help you reach them
  - A short closing paragraph that refers back to how you opened your personal statement

**DO NOT:**

- Use long sentences. Read your personal statement or essay answers out loud. Any time you stumble or have to gasp for air may indicate that the sentence is too long or complicated to understand.
- Use overly generalized statements or clichés.
- Fabricate experiences. Not only is this unethical, but it will not truthfully speak to who you are as a candidate for this role.
- Use overly technical jargon, especially if you do not know it well yourself. It's best to write a personal statement that's accessible in tone. Your reader may be very busy with little time to spend on an individual application. To communicate effectively, use clear and direct language.

## Résumé

Résumés show how your previous experience, education, skills, and proficiencies make you the ideal candidate for the role. Below are a few important recommendations when writing your résumé:

### **Customize your résumé for the job:**

When updating your résumé, be sure to review the job description for the position you're interested in and align your skills with the position's responsibilities, qualifications, and outcomes.

Try a keyword exercise with the job description: if there are specific traits or skills you already possess that they call out in the job description, make sure those are reflected in your own résumé. For example, does the position ask if you're familiar with a particular software program? If your answer is yes, make sure to include that information in your résumé.

### **Speak actively about your accomplishments:**

When describing your previous experience, try to emphasize your accomplishments; remember that recruiters want to know how well you did your previous roles, not just what your job duties were.

Always begin describing your accomplishments with action-oriented verbs and quantify what you accomplish. Try not to use general, passive statements. For example, instead of saying, "I was helpful in the setting up and breaking down of many events over the course of a year," you can say, "Collaborated with a team of five people on setup and break down of 180+ events a year."

### **Make your transferable skills known:**

People new to a career often worry about their relative lack of experience, but there are many ways to make connections between your existing experience and an internship opportunity. Look at your past experiences and write accomplishments or achievements that speak to some of the following:

- Your communication skills
- Ways you think creatively
- Any instances you've had to multitask or problem-solve
- Areas where you acted as a team player
- Examples of when you took a leadership role
- Times when you've had to conduct research

### **Make sure your résumé is easily readable:**

Your résumé should be easy to read quickly. Despite your painstaking work, ultimately, it may only hold the reader's attention for less than a minute. Some hiring managers review hundreds of applications for a position so you want to make sure they're able to read and retain the important information in your résumé right away.

To do so, use bulleted, short but impactful sentences and use numbers when possible (ex. type “150+” instead of saying “more than one hundred fifty.”) Be sure to list your work history in chronological order with your most recent experience at the top. **Résumés should only be 1–1.5 pages in length.**

Other tips for readability:

- Use bullet points instead of paragraphs
- Use capitalization, formatting, or different fonts to convey separate sections of your résumé
- Be sure that margins are between 1” to .75”

**To understand the effectiveness of your résumé do a half-page exercise:**

Take a look at the top half of your résumé and see if it would be able to retain the hiring manager’s attention and give them the information they seek.

- What are the key takeaways that you see about what you’ve accomplished?
- Identify at least one area where you might be able to convey more of a sense of the impact that you had throughout your work.

### Other Key Tips

These are other key tips we and other interns have picked up along the way:

- 1.) When you are confused about a particular part of the application, remember that you can email the internship department for clarification; be sure to reach out with specific questions and not general statements or concerns. Reaching out to an organization with no call to action, or simply wanting to talk more about the position, does not give applicants an edge in the competition.
- 2.) Make sure your application materials are complete. The first vetting process for hiring managers is to filter out incomplete applications, so ensure that everything required for the application is uploaded.
- 3.) Apply on time and make sure you have strong internet access when applying. Don’t save this to the last minute in case you run into technical issues.
- 4.) Do your research about the specific department to which you’re applying. What do they do specifically? Do they have a public mission statement? How large is their team?
- 5.) If for whatever reason, you have a period of time not accounted for on your résumé, it may be helpful to acknowledge that in your cover letter as opposed to trying to hide it. You need not be specific. For example: “After a period away, I am eager to pursue this opportunity because...” Or,

"Despite taking a break for a time, I remain deeply committed to working in this field because..."  
This acknowledgment allows you to own your story and helps to address a question raised by your résumé.

- 6.) Avoid fluff and filler words when writing your application materials; think of simpler, punchier ways to write what you want to convey in order to keep the reader's attention. Remember that too many unnecessary sentences can take up precious space from your other accomplishments.
- 7.) When you've finished the first draft of your application, walk away for a while, even overnight, and clear your mind. You'll be able to look at it with fresh eyes later and make any changes to strengthen your materials.
- 8.) Have at least two different people review your application materials to proofread and check for clarity before you submit them.
- 9.) Create a strong online professional presence. Make a LinkedIn profile, and if you have a professional website, be sure to include that hyperlink on your résumé. But be sure to carefully edit and maintain these pages as well. If you have social media accounts that you'd prefer the recruiters not see, change their settings to private.
- 10.) Create a master résumé with every job you've ever had and every skill you've ever learned, so that you can pull from it to tailor résumés for each position.
- 11.) Keep track and document all of your accomplishments over the course of your academic and career path. Create a "brag" folder or list to maintain with achievements you're proud of.
- 12.) When submitting your résumé, make sure that it's in a pdf form to ensure all formatting stays the same. Be sure to include your first and last name in the file name.
- 13.) If you're applying to multiple positions, copy/paste all job descriptions you've applied to into a separate document for you to reference later in case you are chosen to interview. Job descriptions don't last online forever but referencing them in your interview implies that you're thoroughly interested in the role.
- 14.) Make sure your voicemail is set up and that the contact information you list in your application is the one you check frequently. If they cannot reach you or if you don't return a message from a hiring manager, they may give up on scheduling an interview.

- 15.) If your home doesn't have a space suitable for having a virtual interview, check with your library or school to see if they have a private space you can use. Make sure you have a strong internet connection.
- 16.) Make sure to send a thank you email to your interviewers after your interview. Sometimes it's the small kind things that can be really helpful.
- 17.) What if it doesn't work out? It's ok. Be gracious, because you never know when another future opportunity pops up. Keep in contact with the hiring manager and ask that they update you when a future opportunity arises.

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This document has been organized by the Art Institute of Chicago's department of Academic Engagement and Research. For more information about what opportunities we offer for students and emerging professionals, visit [www.artic.edu/internships](http://www.artic.edu/internships) or email [aerdept@artic.edu](mailto:aerdept@artic.edu).