



Tip Sheet: How to prepare your internship and early-career application packages

Internship coordinators for national news organizations review hundreds of applications, if not more, while making placement decisions — so standing out is key. From the cover letter to resume to your work samples, applications require a keen eye and an editor’s approach.

Starting your search

- There is no one-size-fits-all application. Read requirements closely and submit exactly what’s asked.
- Cater each resume and cover letter to the team you are applying to join.
- Research the team you want to join and show in the applications how your passions, interests, and experiences tie into that role within the application.
- Be able to answer why you want to work there. If you’re familiar with the product, show that knowledge.
- Reach out to someone on the team to ask for an informational interview to learn more about the company.
- Keep a spreadsheet of requirements, deadlines, and contacts for different organizations if you are applying to multiple news organizations.

Crafting your cover letters

- Approach cover letters as a way to share your story and how that story ties into the role you’re seeking.
- Don’t use a generic cover letter for every organization.
- Find out the name of the person handling applications with a call or email inquiry.
- Treat the cover letter as another writing sample. Aim to keep the reader engaged and to educate them on who you are.
- Don’t simply repeat your resume in your cover letter. Use your cover letter to advance your cause.
- Think of a cover letter as a way to fill in the gaps on your resume.
- Typos can be disqualifiers for a journalism organization. Have someone read over your application materials carefully.
- Watch your length: A half to three-quarters of a page will be just fine.
- Remember that real people read your cover letters.
- Hyperlink to projects of work you reference in your cover letter, but don’t go overboard.

Organizing your resume

- Be accurate and honest: Don’t embellish on the work you’ve done, titles you’ve held, or how long you were with an organization. Employers check these facts with references. Include a few bullet points on your key responsibilities.



- Include metrics that show your impact with an organization, not just your job duties. Examples include: page views on a story, audience growth over time, policy changes after a story you reported, the number of people you managed as a student editor, etc.
- Highlight your hard and soft skills without embellishment: Software, social media, certifications, project management, leadership, etc.
- Results matter. Include employee awards (even seemingly small), describe leadership roles, etc.
- It's OK to link to your portfolio site, just ensure it's up to date and features your best work up front.
- Curate carefully: Keeping your resume to one page means selecting the experiences that best match the position you're seeking. Aim for concise and focused.
- Things to consider removing: work outside of journalism, unless it shows a relatable skill or experience; outdated experience or memberships (think high school); extracurriculars; etc. Leave those on LinkedIn and link through to your profile.

Assembling your work samples

- Select work samples that fit the job you're seeking. Know how many work samples to submit and select your very best in those areas.
- Don't include work samples with known typos, even if someone else inserted them. You won't have a chance to explain them.
- In some cases, it's OK if work samples are from experiences outside of journalism. Examples may include audio or visual work as a volunteer at a church or school; helping a nonprofit with its newsletter; or running social media for a club or organization you're involved with. Focus on the work, not necessarily where you did it.
- If you don't have student media experience, it's OK to submit coursework if it's relevant to the position.
- Avoid using co-bylined work samples unless you can clarify your role in the work with a brief note or annotation.
- Don't forget that headlines, page designs, code you've developed, or data visualization projects are all examples of work samples.

Preparing for an internship

- Do your homework on the cost of living and relocating to a new city. Some cities, like Washington, D.C., will be more expensive than your hometown.
- Housing costs in large cities can be an adjustment. Check with family or friends in the city who may have an extra room, or call colleges or universities to ask about student prices for off-peak seasons. Some newsrooms may provide housing or will help you find a roommate who is also interning.
- When moving to a city with public transportation, consider housing along those routes.
- Budget carefully: Can you realistically accept an internship in a particular city based on its cost of living and what you can afford? Will your stipend cover your expenses?
- Know whether your internship requires access to an automobile and/or a driver's license.



- If you're required to take classes during your internship, understand the work loads of both your courses and your internship.
- Think through how you'll make yourself unforgettable: What's the skill or talent you bring to the job that you'll showcase during your internship? How will you network and find mentors within your organization?

These tips are based on Sept. 23 panel discussion: "[How to land a journalism internship in Washington, D.C.](#)" Panelists included: [Sequoia Carrillo](#), reporter and intern manager, NPR's Education Team; [Shirley Carswell](#), executive director, Dow Jones News Fund; [Christine Cox](#), intern program manager, NPR; and [Angie Seldon](#), human resources senior specialist, C-SPAN. The conversation was moderated by [Beth Francesco](#), deputy executive director for the Institute.