

INTERNSHIPS 101:

**From the Classroom
To the Newsroom..
Making the Most of Your
Television News Internship**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this booklet, chances are you're a college student who wants to work in television news. Maybe you're a semester or two away from graduation. Or maybe you're just starting to look into television journalism as a possible career. Either way, this booklet is designed to better prepare you for what will be an essential part of your preparation to enter the profession: Your Television News Internship.

Too many interns underestimate the value of this training experience and squander the opportunity before them. Others arrive at stations fully prepared to roll up their sleeves and get involved. Guess which ones end up with job offers at the conclusion of their internships, or when they graduate.

My own college internship in television news took place in the summer of... well, let's just say it was several years ago... in the newsroom of KTVN-TV, the CBS affiliate in Reno, Nevada. The station was just large enough to expose me to life in a "real" newsroom, yet small enough where I could also gain plenty of hands-on experience. I did everything from run TelePrompter to edit voice-overs to report and write stories. Six weeks or so after I'd returned to school for the fall semester, the news director from KTVN called me. "I have a reporter opening," he said. "Are you interested?"

I took the job.

Hopefully, your experience will be similar to one of the success stories you will read in these pages. At the very least, the stories, advice, and other material gathered here will help you make the most of your internship. Many thanks go out to those who took the time to share their stories for this publication. I have also included some tales about interns who didn't do so well ("interns without a clue" I call them) in the hope that you will avoid their mistakes.

Best wishes for a successful internship and a long and prosperous career!

WHY INTERNSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT

A college professor once asked what advice I would give to journalism students applying for internships in television news. I told him students should think of their internship the same way someone who wants to become a doctor views a medical school internship, as a critical phase in their professional training. Granted, when it comes to working in television, "It's not brain surgery," as so many of us in the business like to say. But if you're looking for a career in TV news, an internship is vital.

Internships provide everything that actual classroom instruction is unable to do. Concepts you learn in class are materialized into actual events and situations. Additionally, internships allow you to make initial contacts "in the biz" which could help you land a job or a promotion later on in your career.

-Elizabeth Berman, Assignment Editor

Your internship is not something to be taken lightly. In my experience, too many interns make that mistake, viewing their internship as an extended field trip instead of the training experience it is supposed to be. Others arrive in the newsroom totally unprepared, have little or no knowledge of the business, and seem ignorant of what it takes to cover a story or put a newscast on the air.

The best interns are not simply "journalism students," but "student journalists." The difference in my mind is this: journalism students are those whose exposure to the industry is limited to the four walls of a classroom. Yes, they are studying journalism, but they are not practicing journalism. Student journalists, on the other hand, have already covered numerous stories and therefore have a much clearer understanding of the news gathering process. They have worked for their college newspaper, campus radio station, or cable television operation. For student journalists, an internship is a chance to take the training and experience they have gained so far and build upon it, applying what they've learned off-campus in a professional setting. Journalism students are not yet ready to make that leap.

I had four internships while in college and the experience was invaluable. WLWT-TV in Cincinnati hired me after graduation. If I had not interned with them, I don't think I would have gotten the position. They didn't interview anyone else. Yes, I was an overnight assignment editor for a year. But after that I was moved into a temporary producer position, promoted to a permanent producer position with the early morning newscast, and then promoted to weekends before moving to KARE-TV in Minneapolis as a producer at age 23.

-Debbie Davis, Producer

WHERE TO GO FOR YOUR INTERNSHIP

Students seeking careers in television journalism secure internships in a number of ways. Some schools of journalism have established relationships with stations in the region and have a history of placing interns with them. In other cases, students apply on their own. In most cases, you can find out the name of the staff member in charge of hiring interns and the requirements for selection with a simple phone call to the station.

When someone asks you what you want to be, never say that you want to be the next Tom Brokaw or Katie Couric. In many markets, young interns who announce that they only want to be anchors are considered shallow, fame seekers only interested in face time. Television is first and foremost about news and journalistic integrity, and without a solid news foundation, you won't get far at all.

- Deniene Erickson, Former Producer

BIG MARKET VS. SMALL MARKET INTERNSHIPS

All of the news professionals who submitted advice for this booklet endorsed small market internships over internships at large stations or at the networks. That said, it is important you have a clear understanding of what those of us in the industry mean when we advise you to “go to a small market.” If you’re attending college in New York City (market #1), a station in say, Phoenix, Arizona (a top 30 market) may seem small. It’s not. By “small market,” we’re generally talking about stations in markets 80 and below. Cities such as Bakersfield, California; Tallahassee, Florida; and Duluth, Minnesota would be examples of small markets.

Small or medium market internships are FAR superior to large market internships. I interviewed for an internship at a top-10 station and was told that they welcomed me to watch, but I wouldn't be able to actually DO anything. In a smaller market, you're encouraged to get hands on experience and there are plenty of experienced folks to guide you on your path to success.

-Elizabeth Berman, Assignment Editor

Avoid major market or network internships. Most students do nothing but answer phones and make lunch runs, and news directors know this. They'll look much more favorably upon students with internships at smaller stations. Don't be shy about volunteering for extra duties, and do so cheerfully.

-Kim Dancha, Producer

If you plan a career on-air, small market internships can be especially valuable. If you haven’t heard it from your journalism professors already, your first reporter job won’t be in Dallas, or Detroit, or Denver. It is extremely rare, if not unheard of, for young reporters entering the profession today to begin their on-air careers in cities of that size. By interning in a small market, you expose yourself to the working conditions you are likely to face in your first job. If you’re good, they may hire you. In larger markets, interns who do well may qualify for positions as associate producers, production assistants, or assignment desk assistants. But they will not be considered for on-air reporter positions.

KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

When it comes to the daily drill that takes place in most television news operations, some colleges prepare their students quite well for their experience as news interns. Others have journalism programs that leave reporters and producers wondering what on earth students have been doing in the preceding semesters. This section is designed to help you determine where you fall along that spectrum, identify areas where you may want to do some additional research, and raise questions you might want to ask your broadcast journalism professor before you start your internship.

Before your first day as an intern, you should have a basic understanding of what takes place in the course of the news day to put the evening newscast on the air. Know the roles of the key decision-makers in the editorial process: the news director, managing editor or assistant news director, assignment editor, executive producer, and producer. Know the functions of the various departments that exist within the television station in addition to news: sales, engineering, programming, production, promotion, and traffic (which has nothing to do with cars).

My friend Molly and I were first year interns at a medium market TV station. We were giving ourselves an unguided station tour through the various departments. When we got to the traffic department, Molly mused out loud, "Why do they have a whole department for traffic when they only do the reports on the morning news?"

-Elizabeth Berman, Assignment Editor

Knowing the industry lingo is also important. If a producer or assignment editor asks you to “watch the package that just came down on the feed and get super times,” it would be best if you didn’t have a completely blank look on your face.

Below are some television news terms you should be able to define or at least be familiar with. See how much of the worksheet you can complete. Some of these terms may seem pretty basic to you. That’s good. Don’t be discouraged if you miss a few, because not every term is used in every shop. On the other hand, if the industry jargon reads like a foreign language to you, then you have some real catching up to do.

GENERAL NEWS TERMS:

Sat Feed
Wire Services
Beat Calls
PIO
Bureau
Stringer
Freelancer
Microwave (No, not the kind for cooking)

SCRIPTING TERMS & TYPES OF STORIES:

Cold Open
Anchor Intro
Anchor Tag
On-Cam Tag
Reader or Copy Story
VO
VOSOT or VOB
SOT
Package
Straight Package
Live Package
Live Tag

PRODUCTION RELATED TERMS:

TelePrompter
Over the Shoulder Graphic
Full Screen
Still Store
Chyron or Character Generator
IFB
Switcher

REPORTER & PRODUCER TERMS:

Tease
Live Tease
Stand-Up
Stand-Up Tease
Stand-Up Bridge
Stand-Up Close
On-Set
Roll Cue
Out Cue
Run Time
TRT
Hit Time
Back Time
Supers or CGs
Super Times or CG Times

EDITING & PHOTOGRAPHY RELATED TERMS:

Nat Sound
A-Roll
B-Roll
Cutaway
Reversal
Jump Cut
Crossing the Axis
Shotgun, Stick, and Lavalier Microphones
Mike Flag

FINAL HOMEWORK BEFORE YOU START

Imagine for a moment that you are the main news anchor at a local television station. You appear nightly at 5, 6, and 11pm on the station's flagship newscasts. Your face is seen on highway billboards, on advertisements plastered on the side of city buses, and on countless promotional announcements that air on the station throughout the day. Then one afternoon, a young college student who has just started an internship at the station approaches you. The intern asks innocently, "So what do you do here?"

Countless reporters and anchors have had that very experience with new interns who failed to do even the most basic research on the station before starting their internship. At the very least, you should know the names and faces of those who appear on-air. Knowing the names of key players behind the scenes is also helpful. When the general manager calls the newsroom looking for the news director and you happen to answer the phone, you'd better know who both of them are. If the station is in a city other than where you live or have grown up, visit the station's web site often, and begin watching its newscasts the moment you arrive in town. Educate yourself on the station's parent company and find out where its sister stations are located. And for god's sake, keep up with current events!

I once had an intern who spent her first day following me around on a story. She sat in the live truck and watched as the photographer edited and then fed our package. Finally, at the conclusion of my live shot she asked, "So what are you guys, I mean, are you ABC, Fox, or what?" Not only did she fail to do any research on the station before accepting the internship, she apparently also missed the big CBS logo on the side of our live truck and at the main entrance to the station. And she wants to be a journalist.

I have to say the worst part of having interns is the sinking feeling I get when I call the main office and hear a new voice who refuses to put me through to the assignment manager because he or she doesn't know who I am. As a bureau chief, I am fairly self-sufficient, but on occasion I do need to call in. The interns answer the phone, don't know how to use the hold function so half the time I get cut off, or sent to some random extension. I also get steamed when I see information an intern has entered (into the computer) and it's full of misspellings. Or when they spell the name of a local town completely wrong. Not just a typo, an out-and-out garble!

-Lydia Reeves, Reporter and Bureau Chief

WHEN YOUNG INTERNS MAKE BIG MISTAKES

The more well-rounded you are, the better off you'll be. Some interns learn that lesson the hard way. Stations are filled with stories about students who were just plain clueless about television news, or the world around them, or both! Here's a sample:

We're talking about the perfect intern stereotype here - young, blonde, and totally vacant, a student from an expensive private university who, as you'd probably guess, planned on being a network anchor one day. Picture a major-market assignment desk about midday, multiple TV sets on over the producers' area, scanners, wires, the usual noise. And in the middle of it all, Ms. Blonde was raptly watching a network piece about some dispute or another in Congress. When the story ended, she turned to us and said, dead serious, "Why doesn't the President just FIRE all those senators he's having so much trouble with?"

-Craig Owensby

At our station, we try to introduce interns to all the different departments, so they can at least see how it all comes together. We try to give them at least one opportunity to sit in the control room during a live broadcast. One year, we had an intern who started out in the back of the control room, and eventually rolled up right next to the director -- crowding the space he needed to punch the show. Then she started reading the prompter aloud! Her visit to control

room ended quickly.

-Mohammed Benchi, Producer

We had an intern once who took home all the 10 p.m. tapes from the newscast. When the overnight producer came in, she had none of the tapes to use for the morning show. The station intern coordinator told the news director she would talk to the intern. The news director insisted on firing her personally.

Lori Weber, Assignment Editor

DOING IT RIGHT

Now that you've learned what not to do on the job, here are some words of advice on how to make your internship a productive one. Rebecca Kutler, who once interned in Hearst-Argyle Television's Washington, DC bureau, has compiled a "top ten list" of intern do's and don'ts:

1. Be prepared to work hard.
2. Arrive at work ten minutes early everyday.
3. Show up to work with a smile and a positive attitude.
4. Dress appropriately for the job.
5. Look at every task as a learning experience.
6. Even if your responsibilities are small take them seriously.
7. Ask lots of questions during a slower time. Do not add to the chaos during a tight deadline.
8. Be professional. Do not make personal phone calls, use swear words, or make romantic advances toward your co-workers.
9. Appreciate the time a reporter or producer spends with you. They are busy professionals, and they deserve your respect.
10. Always say "please" and "thank you."

Before accepting an internship, I always suggest students make it known to the person doing the hiring that they're prepared to work a full shift on the days they're scheduled to report to the station. That means you arrive for work when the reporters and producers arrive, and you don't leave until they leave.

Some colleges and some stations wouldn't have it any other way. Some large news operations, however, have so many interns, they schedule them in blocks of three or four hours at a time. I've had interns who went out in the field with me while I conducted interviews but then left the station in the middle of the news day for an afternoon class or part-time job. They weren't around when I made follow-up phone calls, weren't around when I logged my tape and picked sound bites, weren't around as I wrote the story, weren't around as it was edited, and weren't around for the newscast. They were exposed to only a fraction of the editorial process.

If your class schedule doesn't allow you to spend the entire day at the station, then see if you can intern during the night shift or on weekends. Or plan on a summer internship. But work a full shift so you can follow stories as they unfold and observe how the newscast is shaped from conception to completion.

My advice for interns is stop staring at the "famous people" and pay attention to the training! Now I have had some excellent interns, who stay in touch with me over the years. They were good because they listened and learned. They made mistakes, but they learned from them and didn't keep making the same ones again and again. Internships are the key to making it in this business-- but only if you the intern make it a success!

-Lydia Reeves, Reporter and Bureau Chief

Sorting mail, answering phones and making beat checks may seem unimportant and not at all glamorous, but it gives you the skills necessary to communicate with people and will make you a better journalist. When you accompany a photog out on a story, offer to carry some gear. Once again, there is more to TV than just make- up and lights, so do your part and help.

-Deniene Erickson, Former Producer

Watch. Listen. Learn. Do absolutely anything. Smile. Be calm. Care. Write. We will give you station sweatshirts, smiles and recommendations for it.

-Nikki Egan, Executive Producer

Be aggressive! No ifs, ands, or buts about it. Make yourself known in the newsroom, and make it very clear that you want to actively participate in and learn about the news product. Don't expect any employee to come up to you and offer you work to do. You can either sit on your butt all day and answer phones or you can get out there and do things like hammering away at VOSOTs. You need to learn as much as you can. Do not expect to get on-air, regardless of market size.

-Anthony Reed, Producer

WHEN IT ALL GOES WELL

Interns whose journalistic skills show great promise will quickly earn the respect of producers, photographers, assignment editors and reporters. Those who do well will be rewarded with strong recommendations, referrals to job openings, and in some cases employment at the very same station.

I had a very positive internship experience that led me from the 79th market to the 4th in less than two years. During my final semester at Penn State University, I landed an internship at WTAJ-TV in Altoona, Pennsylvania. On the last day of my internship, the station's general manager called me into his office to say goodbye and to get some feedback on the internship program. When he asked if there was anything I didn't get out of it, I jokingly said, "Yeah, a job!" Literally, within minutes, the news director arrived to administer some writing tests, and I had a part-time job before I left that day. The station had fired its weekend producer, and decided to let me and another Penn State senior share the position. After a few weeks, a conflict became apparent between the weekend anchor and the other new producer, and I took over her duties. I produced on the weekends, and worked as a writer and occasional assignment editor three weekdays. After a few months, I landed the 6 and 11 PM producing job when it became vacant. I worked that shift for about six months before I decided to take a rather daring leap. I boldly sent a tape and resume to WPVI-TV in Philadelphia. My interview followed a week later, and the news director offered me the job within two weeks.

-Kim Dancha, Producer

**Let's hope you find similar success!
Good luck!**