

How to Get an Internship in Finance or Software Engineering, According to Hired Students

Getting an internship isn't easy. You might need to start your internship search over a year in advance, and the applicant pools are competitive. Plus, you need to juggle internship recruitment alongside coursework, extracurriculars, and other obligations.

We spoke with students who got hired at internships in finance and software engineering at top companies to learn how they did it. Here's the advice they would give other students about the recruitment process.

Start Early

Large companies start recruiting for [summer interns](#) years in advance. If you're a freshman now, it's not too early to start preparing.

"It is quite competitive, and so the hiring every year moves out further and further from your actual start date. One thing I was surprised by was just how early the recruitment process started," says Jack Cady, a junior majoring in chemistry at Miami University who is an incoming trading summer analyst at JPMorgan Chase.

Companies start recruiting for internships one and a half to two years in advance. Cady's first point of contact with JPMorgan was during the fall of his sophomore year when he signed up for a series of Zoom webinars aimed at students who didn't attend Ivy League schools or weren't majoring in finance.

Cady knew that it was crucial to get a summer analyst position between his junior and senior years. "That's kind of the pipeline to a job in the field, and if you don't have one of those, it doesn't go so well. It's not as easy," he says.

His upcoming internship will take place during the summer after his junior year, a year and a half after his first contact with the company.

Justin Kocur is a junior studying computer science at Case Western Reserve University who completed a [software engineering internship](#) at JPMorgan Chase in Columbus, Ohio this past summer.

He began preparing during the summer before his sophomore year.

"You can't expect results right away. It takes time," he says. "For me, I started preparing my resume, doing LeetCode questions, doing all of that months, maybe like six, seven months in advance. So if you're not seeing results right away, don't worry. They'll come eventually if you just keep working at it."

>>**MORE:** Check out our [ultimate guide to internship application deadlines and open dates](#).

Consider Early Identification Programs

Some companies have [early identification programs](#) that can help you get an internship. Companies use a variety of names for these programs, including pre-internships, early insights programs, and career discovery programs.

Gabriel Thomas Vieira is a junior studying economics at Yale. This upcoming summer, he will intern in global research at Bank of America in New York City.

Vieira received the internship offer with Bank of America after an early networking event called the Campus Diversity & Inclusion Forum at the company's New York office in March of 2023.

Students had to pass a [HireVue interview](#) to participate in the event. Vieira then interviewed for the global research program on the forum's last day.

"We had fantastic seminars the day before about BofA, our prospective roles, and interview preparation, which helped me tremendously," he says. "As an international student from Brazil, I advise other students to look for events like mine, which have become standard practice for many companies and provide a unique opportunity to meet new people, learn, and hopefully get a job offer."

>>**MORE:** Explore investment banking at Bank of America with this [free job simulation](#).

Prioritize Networking

[Networking](#) can be critical to getting an internship, though it may not be an explicit requirement of the application process.

Evan O'Connell is a sophomore studying finance and real estate at the University of Alabama. He completed an internship as a summer associate with First Hope Bank in Sparta, NJ this past summer and recommends networking through cold outreach before applying to internships.

"Having the referral network going before you even put your name in the hat is really a big help because if you're getting vouched for by five, ten people, you're definitely standing out way more than the guy who's kind of just tossing his name in the hat with no follow-up," he says.

Networking in person can be helpful if you have the opportunity to do so. As the secretary of the Culverhouse Real Estate Society at the University of Alabama, O'Connell gets to network with speakers from various companies who visit campus.

Cady strongly recommends [networking virtually](#) as part of the internship recruitment process. He advises that students reach out to alumni from their school who work at a company they're interested in and ask for an [informational interview](#).

When you reach out, be specific. People are more likely to respond to a cold email if you're specific about the position you want, why you want it, and why you're qualified, rather than saying something vague like, "I'm interested in working in finance."

"Prioritize [knowing what you want to do](#)," Cady says. "It's very difficult to know what you want to do as a freshman especially, but you need to have a solid idea of a direction to move into."

Don't expect to get a response to every informational interview request you send.

"Even just knowing that maybe one or two people might reply of like ten or twenty — I mean, it's still better to have one or two people on your side and vouching for you rather than no people at all," O'Connell says.

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Manage Your Time

Applying for internships is time-consuming. Preparing your resume, scheduling networking chats, submitting applications, and preparing for interviews all take time, and college students are often short on time even outside of recruitment season.

Talia Andrews is a senior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute who completed a software engineering internship at Walmart in Bentonville, Arkansas this past summer.

"It's really hard to balance school and looking for an internship," she says. "Really work on your [time management skills](#), and make sure to set time aside to practice [coding problems](#) every single day, if you can. If not, a couple of times a week."

Allan Dao, a senior studying computer science at the University of Washington, completed a software engineering internship at Wayfair this past summer in Boston. Before landing that internship, he attended a virtual career fair that allowed him to speak with recruiters one-on-one.

He found that it was more efficient to have one-on-one conversations with recruiters instead of attending group sessions, though he notes that that was just his personal experience, and your mileage may vary.

Differentiate Yourself

Since internships can be competitive, consider how you can differentiate yourself from other applicants.

One way to increase your chances is to apply to internships in less popular locations. Internships located in big cities probably receive many more applications than internships located in smaller ones.

Evan O'Connell completed his internship last summer in his home state of New Jersey.

"A lot of places don't really want to pay for relocation because it can kind of add up," he says. "Definitely, being a first-year, location had a huge factor, for me at least."

Another way to differentiate your application is to include professional experiences and certificates you have earned outside of school, like the certificates you can earn by completing a job simulation on [Forage](#).

"[Forage] gives people like me — younger students — the opportunity to gain more hands-on experience," O'Connell says. "Especially for my field — it's very cutthroat and not easy to get an internship, especially at a big firm. So just kind of being able to get hands-on experience in that form provides a very great opportunity for someone like myself to really get their foot in the door."

Rohan Nambiar is a junior majoring in computer science at Rowan University. He completed a software engineering internship at JPMorgan Chase in Wilmington, Delaware this past summer.

Before his interview for the internship, he completed one of JPMorgan's programs on Forage and included it on his resume. "I emphasized it a lot to show that I had an understanding of what the workflow would be like," he says. "So I think that really helped my application."

In addition to giving you experience for your resume, Forage can help you figure out where you might like to apply.

Kocur completed JPMorgan's [software engineering program](#) on Forage. "Forage gave me a little taste of what it might be like to work at JPMC," he says. "That really influenced my decision to apply there, among other factors."

Andrews mentioned that Forage helped her get insight into the type of work she would do in an internship at a company.

"Looking at the programs on Forage, I definitely got a sense of what kinds of problems that they're trying to solve, what kinds of ways that they're trying to be innovative that I couldn't really get from their website," she says.

>>**MORE:** Explore [free job simulations](#) in software engineering on Forage.

Apply Widely

Several students we spoke with emphasized [submitting many internship applications](#) to have the best chance of success. However, applying to hundreds of internships can be very time-consuming.

"Prioritize networking over mass applying because it's better to have a lot of [references](#) over two hundred applications," O'Connell says. "In my opinion, it's not worth it because it takes a

lot of time to do as many applications as you can and more times than not, you're going to have a lower success rate if you're mass applying."

Sentiment is mixed on whether mass applying is good or bad. On one hand, if you apply to hundreds of internships, many of your applications will be "cold," meaning you haven't established a prior connection at the company. "Having a cold application is basically having a dead application," O'Connell says.

On the other hand, networking to build the connections you need to submit "warm" applications also takes time, but these applications may have a higher success rate than cold ones.

"Mass applying works. Networking works. The best candidates will always do both," Cady says.

You'll need to decide what balance makes the most sense for you, taking into consideration whether you have prior experience or industry connections already established.

The right balance also may vary depending on your major, your technical skill set, and industry conventions in the field where you're applying.

If you decide to submit a large number of applications, try not to be discouraged if you get rejected or ghosted by many companies.

"I applied to like twenty places, and I didn't hear back from a bunch of them, but I still got an offer," Andrews says. "You don't really need every company that you apply for to say something back to you. You just need that one company to say something back to you."

If you've submitted hundreds of applications to no avail, you may want to adjust your strategy. Consider asking a mentor for feedback on your application materials.

"Recruitment can be kind of a black hole...it can become a really demoralizing process," says Dao. "Just hearing from a mentor, 'I think you're on the right track. Here's how we can make your resume better,' just having those details would be really helpful in just encouraging them to maybe look into different avenues of how they're looking to recruit."

Prepare for Interviews

On a plane ride to New York for JPMorgan's [Superday](#), Cady reviewed a spreadsheet of answers he had prepared for 80 questions that interviewers had previously asked in JPMorgan interviews. When he arrived, he was shocked to discover that none of the other candidates had done this kind of preparation.

Several other students advised looking up [interview questions](#) ahead of the interview and practicing answers for them.

The students we spoke with who landed software engineering internships also advised practicing coding problems on HackerRank or LeetCode ahead of [technical interviews](#).

"I tried both platforms because they have different kinds of questions," Andrews says. "With HackerRank, they give you a word problem. They give you a situation, so there's an additional level of difficulty of figuring out the situation and then being able to solve the problem. Whereas with LeetCode...you get to the problem faster than you would with a HackerRank problem."

Remember to prepare for behavioral questions as well as technical ones.

"Study Java. Take data structures, learn about hash maps, stuff like that," Nambiar says. "And then just prepare for the interview, like common questions like 'tell me about yourself.' They asked a lot of situational questions, so just be ready for questions like that."

>>**MORE:** Explore [free job simulations](#) in interviewing and career skills on Forage.