An internship is not only a great experience, it's also a great way to jump-start your career. But finding the perfect internship takes time and effort.

**Time It Right**
Finding an internship is not a last-minute project. You need time to research your options, prepare your application and interview for the position. And if you want college credit for your internship, you'll have to work with your school beforehand. So plan ahead and start your search at least three months in advance.

**Be Pro-active**
Internships won't come to you. It's up to you to find them or, in some cases, create them. But there are a lot of resources to give you a head start.

Start with your college. Many companies actively recruit interns on college campuses. To find your leads check out:

- Your department. Industry leaders often contact departments directly to find the best and the brightest.
- The college placement center. Center staff can direct you to resources to help you find promising programs.

The Internet can also provide great leads for internships. Free online databases, such as Internshipprograms.com (www.internshipprograms.com) and Monster.com (www.monster.com), provide information about programs nationwide.

You can also use the Web to learn more about internship opportunities at companies that interest you. Check the company's home page for internship opportunities and contact information for the Human Resources department.

Don't worry if you don't find established internship programs that interest you. It can pay to take the initiative and offer your services even if the company doesn't run a formal program.

**Get Moving**
Once you've identified a prospective intern program, you need to make contact. If you're applying to a formal internship program, request an application form and submit the required materials as soon as possible. Application requirements often include:

- an application form;
- an essay describing your background and goals;
- letters of recommendation;
- transcripts; and/or
- a portfolio of your work.

If you're proposing an internship to a company that doesn't usually hire interns, you may need to work a little harder. Start by identifying the department you'd like to work for. Learn what you can about the organization and the department, using online resources such as www.hoovers.com or print media such as newspapers, magazines and journals.

Next, draft a letter of inquiry outlining your interest in the company, your background and your desire to serve as an intern. Use the letter to demonstrate your knowledge of the organization and the industry by commenting on recent company projects or media coverage. Suggest ways your background could work for the company. Be sure to include your resume and current contact information.

**Don't Just Apply**
Landing an internship requires more than just filling out an application. To stand out, you must be able to speak intelligently about the company and your future plans. Do this by researching the company and the industry.

- Visit your career placement office. Counselors should be able to direct you toward corporate resources.
- Ask your college reference librarian about resources for companies in your field such as Infotrac, an electronic database available at most libraries.
- Also check Hoovers Online (http://www.hoovers.com) for exhaustive information about various companies.

By knowing where to look and how to prepare, you can land a great internship. The opportunities are out there - it's up to you to go out and find them!