

From 'Dr. Work' in the 'Work' supplement of The Guardian 5th May 2007

How can I get some decent career-related work experience?

I'm in my first year of an experimental psychology degree and want to get some related work experience. But it appears most companies only offer internships to undergraduates in their penultimate year. All that seems to be on offer is hospitality work. So you have any advice or useful websites?

What you are contrasting here are career-related internships and casual summer jobs. Both can provide valuable experience so if you can't get the former, don't dismiss the latter.

Finding work in the holidays that's related to what you're studying or the type of career you're aiming for is a real bonus, but is more difficult than picking up less skilled work. In a standard student summer job, the skills needed can be picked up quickly and you probably won't need much supervision.

A placement in what you call a stimulating environment is more complex. You need to be realistic about what you are able to contribute. The main beneficiary from this short relationship is going to be you. Why should they invest time and effort in an unknown, unqualified individual, with just one year of degree-level study when careers in this field normally require several years of postgraduate study? What can you offer that would persuade them to consider disrupting their pattern of work for a few months?

Well, for starters, there's your time, free of charge. Volunteering is one way of getting experience in professional settings you're not qualified to work in.

Another approach is, having identified the type of work you aim to do, find a summer job that provides related experience. So for example if you want to go into educational psychology, a summer playscheme might appeal. If it's consumer psychology, a retail or marketing job would be good – and where better to observe human behaviour than working in hospitality?

Reading University's Careers Service provides a very useful set of subject-related work experience guides, including on for psychology students, on its site, www.careers.reading.ac.uk/jobs/experienceguides.asp

A good source of general work experience vacancies for undergraduates can be found in the Communities section of prospect.ac.uk.

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