

Interview Guide

Vail Internship Program

When preparing for an interview it is important to anticipate the types of questions you'll be asked and then prepare and practice your answers to those questions. Unlike most interviews, we have provided a list of all of the questions we might ask you, as well as tips for how to properly answer them. Your goal is to sound prepared but not rehearsed or robotic. The best way to achieve that is to start your interview preparation early and break the work into smaller chunks. You should type out answers to each question and then modify those answers and rehearse them. We highly recommend students conduct their own mock interview, asking their parents or a teacher to evaluate their performance on our interview rubric. The more prepared you are, the easier it is to push past your nerves and deliver a solid interview performance.

It is important to note that this guide is written specifically for high school students who are applying to the Vail Internship Program. As you continue on in your professional career, your answers will change and evolve to better represent yourself as a good fit for opportunities you pursue in the future.

1. Tell me a little about yourself.

Don't underestimate this question. It feels casual but it is your chance to sell yourself without having to fit your answer into a specific box. Be prepared to talk about yourself for thirty seconds to one minute. You should touch on who you are as a person and who you are as an emerging professional, with some common thread that brings that all together. Make sure to point out the professional value/lesson in everything that is included in this answer. When developing your answer for this question, avoid just listing off all of the accomplishments and/or credentials on your resumé. And for our purposes you should not start with, "I'm _____, I'm 16 year olds and I'm a junior at _____ school."

Personal Background - here are examples of information you could mention:

- Only child or siblings (relevance of your birth order)
- Moved a lot or come from a military family
- Lived in the same community your whole life
- Have a family with strong cultural ties
- Lived abroad
- Childhood interest/passion that relates to the career field you're interested in
- Sports/clubs you have been involved in (highlighting leadership roles you've held)

After you talk about your personal background (or throughout your answer), explain how those experiences have given you professional skills. Below are some examples of professional skills you may have gained from your personal background

- Communication
- Flexibility
- Leadership
- Versatility
- Time management
- Active listening
- Ability to work under pressure
- Conflict resolution
- Adventurous
- Empathy
- Collaboration/teamwork

2. Tell me what you know about the Vail Internship Program?

This is your opportunity to show that you have gone beyond the surface to investigate the opportunity for which you are applying. The level of detail you provide indicates your level of interest and preparedness. In a regular interview you might be asked, "Tell me what you know about our Company?" Use all of your resources to prepare for this question: scour the website and ask your peers or teachers. A solid answer will include critical thinking about why you would be a good fit for the program.

3. Do you have any coursework or experience that relates to the field(s) you hope to intern in?

Be prepared to tell us the names of the relevant courses you've taken (CTE or otherwise) and/or the names of the courses you plan to take as a senior. Don't forget to mention AP/Honors courses that relate to your first career field interest (for example, math and science classes if you're interested in medicine/engineering or english if you're interested in law), or even that you are a year ahead in a relevant subject. Relevant experience doesn't have to be in a class. For instance, a student interested in pediatrics should mention if they have regular babysitting jobs or nursery experience, or volunteering for an organization that relates to your career field interest.

For our purposes your answer should be clear and concise, there is no need to elaborate beyond the names of the classes and the years you took or will be taking them. For our purposes, it's ok to not have any relevant experience. The appropriate way to communicate that in an interview is to say something like, "I don't currently have relevant experience but I am eager to begin gaining experience through an opportunity like this."

4. Is there a particular place/company you'd prefer to have your internship?

While we can't guarantee a placement for any student, we like to know if you have an interest in a particular company. This helps us support you while seeking potential mentors. If you plan to name a specific company you should be familiar with their mission/vision statement, their location, and the services they provide. This helps you determine if that business would be a good fit for your current experience level and interest.

5. What are your greatest professional strengths? Weaknesses?

Always be prepared to share three strengths and three weaknesses but make a note of how many an interview panel asks for and share that amount, no more, no less. Take time to choose words that accurately describe you and aren't overused resumé words (e.g. hardworking, driven, organized, responsible, trustworthy, motivated) If you're asked to share both at the same time, it's nice to lead with your weaknesses so that you can end with the positive strengths.

After naming each weakness you should address something specific you are doing to overcome that weakness. For example, if one of your weaknesses is time management you could say, "I have struggled with time management in the past but at the beginning of the semester, I started using the calendar app on my phone. I have not missed an assignment deadline since I started entering reminders into the calendar on my phone."

Choose strengths that describe you AND are valuable or necessary to the opportunity for which you are applying. It's helpful to reference the job description for this information. When explaining why you chose each strength, provide a two to three sentence story of a time you demonstrated that strength. For example, if your strength is empathy, your story might be: "My friend Grace was struggling after her parents got divorced so I asked our friends to write down things they admired about her and happy memories they've had with her. We placed all of these notes in a jar and gave it to Grace. Grace was so touched by the notes and it really lifted her spirits."

6. Where do you see yourself in five years? What steps are you taking to get there?

This question provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate that you have genuinely thought about your future and are ambitiously pursuing opportunities that align with your future goals (traits that a potential employer will value). Your answer should be well thought out, detailed and still related to the opportunity for which you are interviewing.

For our purposes you should discuss your post high school plans, including the why for each decision you share. Don't forget to include how participation in the internship program fits into the mix.

Here is a sample answer: "In five years I will have graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering. I chose the University of Michigan for two reasons. First, they have one of the top 5 rated Engineering programs in the country. Second, I grew up in Michigan, my parents and grandparents went to school there, and most of my family still resides there. Having a deeply rooted family history in the area, I have a good network of professionals there, and I have an opportunity for an unpaid Civil Engineering internship I can participate in while I attend school, to build up my resumé. I also enjoy being active outdoors and living in Ann Arbor allows me the ability to be active in the warmer months on all the lakes that are nearby, and in the winter doing various outdoor activities such as snowshoeing, ice fishing, and cross country skiing. Being selected for this internship program would jumpstart my budding career in engineering by teaching me soft skills and helping me utilize technology to stay organized and focused."

7. What are three words that best describe you? Please explain.

Choose words/characteristics that describe you AND are valuable or necessary to the opportunity for which you are applying. It's helpful to reference the job description for this information. When explaining why you chose each word, provide a two to three sentence example of a time you demonstrated that characteristic (see number five for specific examples).

Avoid choosing overused resumé words like hard working, driven, organized, responsible, trustworthy, motivated.

8. Describe the characteristics of a supervisor (or teacher) you enjoyed working under. And one you didn't enjoy working under.

This is a tricky question. If answered correctly, it is an opportunity to brag about yourself and the professional characteristics you possess. If answered incorrectly, it reflects poorly on you and becomes a red flag for the interview panel. First and foremost, make sure you do not identify either party by name or provide too much identifying information. Simply refer to each person as "the teacher I did enjoy working with" or "the supervisor I didn't enjoy working with"

When discussing the teacher/supervisor you enjoyed working under, share one or two professional traits they demonstrated that made them enjoyable to work with, preferably skills you feel you also possess. For example: "I enjoyed working with my English teacher last year. She was very organized and had all of our assignments laid out with deadlines stated ahead of time. We were given a syllabus at the beginning of each semester so that we knew exactly what was expected of us. I appreciated that about her because I too, am organized and like to get things done ahead of deadlines." This answer not only brags about your English teacher from last year, but also allows you to highlight how organized you are without stating that outright about yourself.

When discussing the teacher/supervisor you did not enjoy working under, take care to not speak too harshly or at length. This is tricky, so draft and practice your answer ahead of time. For example: "I had a teacher last year I did not enjoy working under. She was very smart and knowledgeable in her content area, but she did not build connections with her students. She never took the extra time to ask us about our lives or drop by any of the after school events or performances. I did not appreciate working under her because I pride myself on my interpersonal skills and enjoy getting to know people. I find that that personal connection can go a long way when conflict or difficult situations arise." This answer states a weakness of this teacher but does not dwell on it. Ultimately, you spend most of your answer speaking positively about yourself and your professional skills.

9. Tell me about a time when you were a member of a team and someone wasn't supporting the team. Be specific. What did you do? What were the results?

Your answer to this question helps an interviewer understand if you work well in groups and could work collaboratively with co-workers in the future. The interviewer wants to be assured that you are not overly confrontational or too passive.

Your answer should highlight your ability to positively handle this type of situation without blaming other group members or completing the project solo. Describe the steps that you took to remedy the situation and ensure the project was finished on time and correctly. In doing so, you should focus on relevant skills you possess that helped your team achieve a positive outcome (active listening, developing consensus, valuing input from all members, monitoring progress, recognizing the achievements of others). Once again, bragging about yourself, without outright saying it. Also, make an effort to minimize the time you spend speaking negatively about the situation and your group members, focus on the positive.

10. Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond on a project or assignment? Be specific.

Choose a time when you exceeded expectations on a recent school or work task. Ideally, it should be related to the opportunity with which you are applying but that can be difficult for high school students trying to break into industry. First provide background details about the task; what class or job it was for, what the baseline requirements were, and how long you had to work on it. Then explain specifically how you went above and beyond, including extra time you spent, additional materials you purchased or utilized, and/or additional resources you sought out and used. It's ok to mention if your classmates or coworkers only fulfill the baseline requirements. Finally, make sure that you include a resolution to your story by sharing the grade you earned or that your teacher asked you to present it to another class as a model product.

An example would be: "In my World History class, we were assigned a research project that had to have five sources. Most students used sources from the internet and library research. Our teacher even gave us two class periods in the library to find sources. In addition to finding four sources in the library, I went out to two local businesses in the area to interview professionals to get their current views on the subject, to use in my paper. I planned and prepared 15 questions ahead of time to ask the professionals and recorded the interviews so I didn't miss any of the information. I received 100% on my paper and my teacher asked if he could use it as a sample for future students."

11. What has been your most rewarding accomplishment?

This question gives you the opportunity to share who you are as a person and how that would benefit the employer with whom you are interviewing. Start by creating a list of your worthy accomplishments and then select the one that most closely aligns with the necessary skills for the opportunity you are currently pursuing; reference the job description and research the company culture and values. If you find, when researching the company, that they value creativity, share an accomplishment that highlights your creative nature. This doesn't mean that your accomplishment needs to be an artistic masterpiece, it might be that you came up with a creative solution to an ongoing problem at your school.

As mentioned throughout the guide, it's important that your answer tells a story and includes ample detail. Instead of saying, "My most rewarding accomplishment was organizing Winter Formal, I am a perfectionist." You should explain what makes your organizational skills excellent and then share an example of a time you used those skills, including the results. For example, "My most rewarding accomplishment was being chosen to lead the Winter Formal Planning Committee. As a sophomore in student government I regularly created detailed spreadsheets on google docs to manage our budget and timeline of events. From those documents, I could then check in with each subcommittee and ensure they were on track with their responsibilities or offer assistance if they were struggling. Last year's Spring Fling was a huge success, we raised twice as much money as the previous year. As a result, my classmates voted unanimously to have me lead the Winter Formal Planning Committee."

12. What tasks do you imagine yourself doing as an intern in the field of _____?

This question is designed to make you think critically. Research what it means to be an intern, specifically at the high school level. Research the field you are interested in and then research the tasks and daily expectations of jobs in that field. Finally, combine all of that information to analyze what your contributions might be on a daily basis and also over the course of the whole year.

Keep in mind that interns are not paid employees, your daily tasks and contributions will center more on your growth and learning than directly affecting a company's bottom line or decision making process.

In the event that we can't place you in your exact career field, how could you benefit from being placed in a similar career field? For example, if you're interested in neurosurgery and we find a placement with a nurse in the cardiovascular wing.

13. How would you benefit or would you benefit from an alternate placement in a related career field?

First, you should address if you are open to alternate placements. Your acceptance does not depend on this answer but the ease with which you find a placement will be affected by your willingness to be open minded. Second, you should explain in detail what you could learn from being placed in an alternate but similar field. In order to correctly

answer this question you should research soft skills and technical skills. Then you can easily identify the overlap between an alternate placement and your ideal placement. A truly prepared candidate will go much deeper than saying, "It's still experience in the workforce and I might like that field."

14. Do you have any questions for me?

This is your last opportunity to leave an impression on the interview panel. Make it a good one! You should have 2-3 questions prepared for the end of an interview; depending on how long the interview has run, you can decide how many questions to actually ask. Asking questions gives you clarity about the position you are applying for while simultaneously showing the interview panel you are engaged and care about the position. You should have a mixture of company specific, role specific, and wrap-up questions. Below are some examples of each. Pro tip: asking a great question that the panel hasn't heard before (but is still relevant to the opportunity) will definitely make you a more memorable interview overall. Do your own research and find some questions that fit you and this opportunity well.

What is your favorite part about running the internship program?

How do you see this program evolving in the next five years?

What are the attributes of a successful intern?

What are some challenges that interns have struggled with in the past?

What is your timeline for filling this position?