

Summer Opportunities: It's Not Just About Jobs

Nowadays, the common advice for young job applicants and those applying to college is to participate in extracurricular activities. You're told to set yourself apart from others by your interests and community service. It can be difficult to pursue these activities during the school year since your days are filled with classes, projects, homework, and often a part-time job or a sport.

It makes sense, then, to pursue some new opportunities during the summer months when your days are (hopefully) a bit freer. While many teens opt for summer work, it might be a good idea to protect some time for different pursuits. But don't wait until the day school officially lets out to figure out how you're going to fill your time. Late winter is not too early to start researching summer opportunities. (Unsure of your interests? Check out the different links available to you under Assessment Tools to determine your skills and abilities.)

Summer camps

Probably the most common activity for teens, aside from finding paid work, is attending a summer camp. Camps are often designed for a variety of age groups, from 12 to 18. You can attend a day camp where you learn how to paint with oils, or spend three weeks away from home in the wilderness – the point is, there is a camp for everyone. While it's definitely important to find a camp where you can relax, have fun, and meet new friends, keep in mind that summer camps are a great way to network and gain new skills. So if you think you might want to become a drama teacher, going to a summer camp that focuses on horseback riding may not be the best choice. (Of course, if that's a hobby, go ahead and attend! Read on for other ways to donate your time.) A great site to begin researching summer camp opportunities is <http://acacamps.org/>. One of the most comprehensive sites that helps you locate summer camps by activity or region is <http://www.petersons.com/summerop/code/sssector.asp>.

Besides attending a summer camp, you may also want to consider volunteering your time at one. Many camps are for younger kids, especially elementary school age, and focus on a certain type of activity. Still want to be a drama teacher? Volunteering as an assistant at a theatre camp for nine to twelve year-olds would be excellent experience. You could help them learn their lines, supervise them as they paint a set, even help them put together costumes.

Internships

The summer months are also a fantastic time to secure an internship. You'd meet professionals who have successfully built a career in your field and gain some entry-level experience. Even if you end up making copies and doing some filing at a law firm, for example, you still absorb quite a bit of information about how a law firm functions. Now that you have more hours available in a day, why not contact employers in a field of interest and ask if they are looking for interns?

Talking to your high school guidance counselor about internships is a good first step. Often, counselors have listings of possible internships or might be able to suggest people to contact. But if that becomes a dead end, don't give up. Develop a clean, error-free resume and write a cover letter that states you're seeking an internship in your chosen field. Need help writing a cover letter and resume? Check out the Job Search section of CIS. The Youth Resume might be the best place for you to start. You may also begin by setting up informational interviews. For more information on how to do that, visit the Informational Interviews article in Job Search.

And don't forget to use your contacts. Brainstorm a list of people who could help you – teachers, friends' parents, local business owners you've come in contact with over the years. Send a brief, professional e-mail, or better yet, call those who might have information. Stopping by during work hours to ask in person is a bold, yet often effective, tactic. You'll be surprised at how much you can learn and accomplish with just a bit of initiative. (Be sure to be groomed and dressed neatly, by the way.)

Volunteering

Summer is also a great time to volunteer, and it's usually quite easy to find organizations that are in need of your help. Your school might be the first place to look, actually. Many of your teachers might know of opportunities in your community, and may even coordinate them. Some high schools set up crews to work in the community, doing everything from roadside clean-up to organizing book drives for the local library. Researching ideas on the Internet is also a good idea. The last page of this article has several links you can check out.

Often, spending time volunteering to gain experience in your field of interest is just a phone call away (just like finding internships!). Interested in working with animals? Call a local veterinarian and ask if they need someone to come in to play with the animals, clean out cages, or sweep the floor. In many cases, showing that you are a reliable volunteer who is willing to donate time can later lead to a paid job.

Worried you might be too young? It all depends on the organization. Many nonprofit organizations, camps, and similar groups know how hard-working 12-15 year olds are, and welcome your time. Be upfront about your desire to donate time, and let them know you have your parents' or guardian's permission as well (and, make sure you really do!).

When you're calling an organization to offer your time, ask to speak to the volunteer coordinator. The coordinator will have some questions for you, such as

- Why do you want to volunteer for our organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- How many hours a week will you be able to volunteer?
- What are your interests?
- Do you have any special skills?

- Do you have a way to get here?

In turn, you may have some questions for the coordinator. Here are a few to consider:

- What will be expected of me if I volunteer here?
- What kind of training will I receive?
- How many other volunteers are there?
- How many hours do you expect me to volunteer each week/month?

Some places interview new volunteers before they start work. Don't worry, it is a casual interview. The coordinator just wants to talk to you more about the organization and answer your questions.

Volunteering for causes that may not be directly related to your interests is a good idea. It's both personally fulfilling to you and attractive to potential employers and colleges to see that you spent time helping kids learn to read, cleaning up trails, or visiting nursing homes. Giving your time shows that you are both caring and ambitious. And who knows? You might discover a new interest or passion that you might not have otherwise. And when September rolls around, you'll definitely have something to write about when your teacher asks you what you did over your summer vacation!

Here are some great links about volunteering; your parents might be interested in some of these!

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/volunteer.html>

<http://life.familyeducation.com/volunteer-work/community-life/29595.html?relinks>

Sites that match people to organizations that need volunteers:

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

<http://www.networkforgood.org>

<http://www.dosomething.org>

<http://www.kidsforcommunity.org/>

You can even volunteer your time and earn money towards college:

<http://www.amerikorps.org/>