



## **Application Tips...According to Dietetic Interns**

Read expert advice from students who have already been through the process. Below each preparation tip you will find quotes and advice that have been submitted to us by previous DI applicants. They walk you through the steps of preparing to start the application process, filling out the standard ADA application, writing a personal statement that will stand out, getting good reference letters, surviving the interview process, and tips on what to do on match day. Be sure to let us know if you have any tips to add!

### **Be Prepared!**

It's important to know what you're getting into before you begin the process of applying for a Dietetic Internship. Research websites like this one (All Access Internships), the ADA at [eatright.org](http://eatright.org), and individual Internship websites for information.

"Make sure this is what you want to do!"

"Talk to upperclassmen or past applicants early on about the process and what it entails"

"Go to any informational sessions that your teachers or advisors hold at school. Their information about the application process will be invaluable"

### **Study Hard!**

Dietetic Internships are very competitive! The last two matches only matched 55% of applicants to internships. While there is much more to an application than your good grades (more on that next!), having a strong academic background to supplement work and volunteer experience is essential.

"Internship Directors look for strong grades in science/dietetic course work and for the ability to juggle multiple things at one time."

"Grades are very important, especially in your nutrition courses."

"Grades are important, but it is equally important to take challenging

classes as an undergrad. Getting an "A" in tennis means a lot less to a selection committee than getting a "C" in Calculus 2. Also, get involved in campus activities as an undergrad. Or get a part-time job. This lets the selection committee know that you are prepared to balance an internship with graduate classes."

"Make sure that you make yourself as competitive as possible. Focus on your grades and try to do the best that you can in your classes."

However, there were a few former applicants who mentioned that a lower or average GPA wasn't as important as their experience:

"Be well rounded (as far as requirements go). If your grades are good, that's fine, focus on experience or volunteer work. Know what the program looks at and get a little bit in every area. Don't put all eggs in the "GPA" basket, it may be a selling point, but in my experience a lower GPA because you were gaining valuable field experience or volunteering is better."

"I think work experience mattered the most, rather than GPA. I had an average GPA but also had management work experience and held leadership roles in my sorority."

"GPA is very important when programs are looking at applicants but if you don't have the best GPA (as I didn't when I applied) you can also include volunteering and career experience related to the field in your application. Nothing is small, include it all."

"Well-roundedness on a resume is sometimes more important than a 4.0 with no other experience (job or volunteering). Having good experience in work or volunteering shows interest and ability to multitask - a skill very important to success in the internship."

### **Get Experienced!**

Gaining experience during your undergraduate education is vital for being a competitive applicant. Directors look for students that were able to juggle work and volunteer experiences while gaining a good education, and really value your ability to be proactive in searching for experience. Aim to gain a variety of experiences; don't limit yourself to only clinical, food service, or community. Also, be aware that many experiences you find may be unpaid – you're still in the learning stages and can't expect to get paid for every experience that comes your way. Check out Get Experience under the Resources tab for opportunities.

"I think that they look for a lot of experience, but they especially look for a broad range of experiences. Only having one type of dietetics experience will not make you stand out in the application process."

"While in your undergrad it is SO important to get experience! That can

- really make or break you."
- "Get as much clinical or research experience as you can when you are going through your undergraduate education and be enthusiastic about learning!"
- "Clinical experience isn't necessary to get chosen. I think maybe 1 person out of the 9 in my class had previous clinical experience. A wide variety of experiences is more important."
- "Work experience (or volunteering) is also a plus as it shows a student is devoted to the field and can bring "know-how" to the program."
- "Make sure you have a good variety of experiences during college that relate to dietetics - summer jobs, volunteer work, study abroad, or even certifications like personal trainer or strength and conditioning specialist."
- "I was told to get experience in three areas in order to augment my resume - clinical, foodservice, and community. Research is also an asset. Not always are these available as paid positions while completing undergrad so be open to volunteer work."
- "Be well rounded during your undergraduate years - get involved in extracurricular activities, volunteer at nutrition related programs (soup kitchens, food banks, etc.), work part time in a clinical setting as a nutrition assistant/diet tech if possible, shadow RDs"
- "Any experience during undergrad counts whether it is nutrition based or not. For example, I volunteered at the local food bank, did study abroad, and worked for 2 years during college as a waitress. I was able to relate these experiences to positive personal characteristics they instilled in me so that made every experience worthwhile."

### **Do Your Research!**

Deciding where to apply for your Dietetic Internships is a crucial yet stressful process. There are a lot of things to consider, such as location, financing, and the emphasis of the internship (clinical, general, foodservice, community, etc.). Furthermore, you have to decide whether you want to pursue a Master's with the DI or focus solely on the Dietetic Internship. Some articles worth reading include "Decision 2008: Dietetic Internships" and "To Master or Not to Master." Both can be found by going to the Articles link under the Resources tab and clicking on the "Choosing an Internship" link.

- "Make contact with the internship director before you apply. Ask them questions you might have (i.e. why would you recommend your program?), and let them know a little about yourself. When they are looking at the stack of applications, yours will stick out because they have talked to you."
- "Look at the website! They spell out EXACTLY what they're looking for

- and how they're scoring the applications. Use that as a guide. Take care to follow directions, and give yourself plenty of time because you need to send more than just the standard application. Also, you'll truly be most competitive if you're a well-rounded person."
- "I would advise future students to email the director, current students, visit the website. I would also highly recommend if it is a top choice to visit the campus personally."
- "I was told "to apply to the program you are most passionate about because it will show through." That was the best piece of advice that I received."
- "Meeting with the program director made a difference because she was able to put a face with the name on paper."
- "Definitely visit the hospital if you can. Bring a list of questions for the dietetic intern that is going to give you the tour. Often times when you're there you're really trying to take things in and you'll forget your questions, it's much easier if you have them written down."
- "Investigate all of your options thoroughly before making any decisions!"
- "Make sure the program fits your long term goals. It's nice to attend a program that is based in a large hospital because you can get familiar with different types of disease states and different types of dietetics."
- "I would definitely recommend visiting and trying to meet as many people as possible...the director, managers, dietitians, past interns, etc. The people are able to tell you more than any websites or materials. I think it's important to go and see if it's a place that you could see yourself being for a year. Also, find out what the programs are all about and make sure that it fits your interests."
- "Work hard. The Dietetic Internship is one of the most crucial steps you will be making in getting a good education and becoming a well-rounded and educated dietitian. If it takes hours, spend hours. If it takes visiting your advisor 6 times out of the 7 days of the week - do it (and I did trust me - my roommates poked endless amounts of fun at me for it). All that time and effort truly will show in the end result though. I spent an endless amount of time on my application and emails to directors asking ridiculous questions but in the end, I got my first choice and it was all worth it."
- "Make sure that you know all the expenses that are entailed in the program you applied for (housing, travel, parking, instruction materials etc.). Some programs pay most expenses, others do not."
- "Keep your options open. Don't limit the places you apply to. If you want a top school, apply but don't rely solely on that place to accept you."
- "If you know the director's name, address your email or letter with his/her name. My director is frustrated by students who contact her for

- information with the greeting "To whom it may concern". When/if you do any research, you should know the program director's name."
- "Learn everything you possibly can about the curriculum and know what you're getting into."
- "Look at each program closely and apply to ones that fit your interests and what you are looking to get out of the experience."
- "I brought my parents to my visit and am thankful as they provided feedback on the area, the school, and their thoughts on the faculty that I may not have perceived."
- "Make sure you pick programs you really see yourself going to. You may not get your first choice and you want to make sure that you will be happy where you go. Many people I have talked to have gotten their first choice, but you never know."
- "Make sure that you want a Master's Degree. There is a lot of work regarding your thesis or graduate project and if you don't care to have a Master's Degree, then there is no use in going through this program."
- "Find out the preceptor/intern relationship. The preceptor is the one who will teach you more about the job than a good facility. Even if the area is not your favorite if the preceptor is top quality then you will learn a lot and what you need to 1- to pass the test and 2- to become a quality RD."

### **Get Started, and Start Early!**

An overwhelming amount of tips that we received mentioned the importance of getting started early when working on the application. This is because the application is very involved and requires you to input a lot of information. Make sure that you keep track of all your experiences throughout college and keep them organized for an easy "go-to" for references. Also make sure you speak with anyone that you have worked for to get their correct name, title, email, and phone number – these will be needed on the application because internships may want to contact your boss or manager to verify your employment or involvement.

- "Prepare early to give your self enough time to research, write letters, get personal references, etc. You do not want to rush and make a minor mistake that could cost you the internship."
- "There is a good bit of paperwork to fill out but it is not overwhelming. Just start early so you aren't freaking out in the end."
- "Organize materials as you go through college. Try to get as much volunteer work as you can and record it as you go so you are not overwhelmed when you apply. Try to make connections with

- professors as well as other RDs. They will help with letters of recommendations as well as jobs later on.”
- “Order your transcripts as soon as you can after your Fall semester grades are posted so you’re not scrambling to rush deliver anything from your university. Some require 2-3 weeks for delivery, but can rush transcripts for a very expensive fee.”
- “If taking the GRE, take the exam at least 3 weeks before sending in your application to assure the results arrive in time. Many people retake the GRE and their score goes down. This is common; just a warning.”
- “Start working on your application WAY in advance, and take a proactive approach to gain volunteer, work, and leadership experiences that will make you stand out.”
- “Do not procrastinate! Plan to have your application packets finished BEFORE the day of the deadline!”
- “Fill out your applications early! I started mine the summer before senior year and then just had to get letters of rec. and updated transcripts to send with the packets and I was much less stressed than my friends.”

### **Tips for Filling out the Application**

The application for dietetic internships is long and time consuming. As already mentioned, many have advised that you begin this process early! Below are a few other important application tips recommended from previous applicants.

- “Make sure the application is perfect; if there are mistakes, they might not even look at it any further. My college professors stressed how competitive the internships were and how experience was key to help stand out. I know from the work I do now, I have been involved in the interviewing process for interns and making sure your essays are well written, application is without mistakes and everything is turned in, grades and grade point average are looked at, but experience can have a stronger weight.”
- “If you have ANY food experience or volunteer experience, no matter how insignificant you think it might be...ITS NOT! List absolutely everything relevant!”
- “Read directions carefully when filling out the application & everything that goes with it.”
- “They look for a very well rounded individual. List all of your activities, even if they are not related to dietetics.”
- “Focus on your previous work and volunteer experiences in the nutrition field, or if you don't have any direct experience then on

- transferable skills that would apply to nutrition.”
- “Make sure you are thorough. Check, check then double check your application ensuring you have everything they ask for in the correct order. Also, be sincere in your responses to the questions.”
- “Organization and professional appearance are key for applying to any program. The more prepared you appear on paper, the more apt that programs are going to take you seriously.”
- “Have several people you trust proofread your work. DO NOT send an application with bad grammar or typos. Finally, read and follow the instructions meticulously to avoid getting "weeded out" by the internship selection committee.”
- “Follow directions “
- “The application process itself is a bit confusing because you have to apply to several things separately. Make sure to read directions very carefully!”

### **Tips for Writing a Letter of Application**

Your letter of application is one of the only ways that the selection committee gets to interact with you prior to an interview. A great recommendation letter is a crucial component of a competitive application. Make sure you highlight your passions, strengths and weaknesses, future goals, and any stories about work and volunteer experiences. Be sure to double-check thoroughly for spelling and grammatical errors, as errors will be reflected upon poorly by the selection committee. Also make sure you include whatever components that particular internship is asking for! It may be a good idea to tailor different letters to specific internships.

- “Answer questions honestly, note your strengths, and focus on how your personal goals can be met by participating in that particular program. Also, note the areas in which you want to grow in relation to what the program offers.”
- “Personal statement should be written to make you stand out from others and display that you have done everything you can throughout undergraduate studies to gain experience in the field of dietetics (variety of classes, volunteering, employment, teaching assistantship, clubs/organizations, etc).”
- “Be very honest about yourself in the application letter. An appropriate "fit" will be made when the applicant is honest in his or her areas of interest.”
- “Write a great essay with absolutely no grammatical/spelling errors!”
- “Make sure to make statement relevant to what program offers.”

- “Focus on all your qualities and experiences that will help you be a good dietitian. Also how you will successfully complete the internship and enter the work force.”
- “Be honest, be candid, express your career aspirations/dreams and why the internship would help you achieve them, and what you can offer to the program.”
- “Make sure you share personal stories. Do a background check on the faculty at that internship so then you can include items in your letter that pertain to their interests and put you ahead of the rest of the applicants. Ex. if a faculty member is known for their GI related nutrition, add something about how you would like to study IBS....”
- “Be honest and let your personality really shine through in your personal statement. Although some candidates may be well-qualified, selection seems to be partially based on personality and how it will fit into that specific program. It seemed like a large number of people had the necessary grades, experience, and so forth so you have to find something that sets you apart...find and express your passion in your personal statement...what makes you unique?”
- “Be yourself and speak from the heart of your passion”
- “We have an internship program where I work now and RDs are part of the application review process. It is our job to review the application letters and make sure the intern's goals are a good match for our program. If the internship you are applying to focuses on Clinical, don't write a letter about your Sports Nutrition goals.”
- “Be honest but expand on what you know you're good at. These people know you just got out of school and don't have any experience so talk about your leadership skills or past research accomplishments, etc.”
- “Know what makes each program different from the others - show that you have done your research. Be able to state why you are right for that program & why they should choose you.”
- “I have been on internship application review committees for 4 years - proof read your personal statement, be yourself, and be honest about what you want to accomplish - not what you think will look good on your resume.”
- “The most important part of your application is your personal letter, because that makes you stand out and gets you an interview spot.”
- “I was told if it was my number one choice to make sure to say that in my personal statement.”
- “Address everything the application says to in the personal statement.”
- “It is your one chance to give the committee that reads your application a feel for what you want to contribute to the dietetic community.”
- “I asked many friends and family members to read over my personal

- statement and give feedback. I tried to connect my experiences with the program's rotations and explain why I was interested in this particular program.”
- “The personal statements are crucial in my opinion. Do not just restate everything that you included in your application. Bring forth new attributes and experiences you have that make you unique and stand out from the rest. Also, proof read, proof read, proof read! Have several other people edit your paper and give feedback.”
- “If it is handwritten it means that they are looking at grammar and sentence structure. It should be organized and flow well. Read it aloud to yourself to make sure that you like how it flows. Be sure that the letter does not repeat information that application has already covered. Your essay should focus on your goal and talk about experiences that you have had that will make you a competent dietitian.”
- “If you have any skeletons in the closet (i.e. low GPA, low GRE) make sure you address it in your letter and explain what happened.”
- “Become familiar with yourself. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Be able to identify weakness but to turn them into a positive.”

### **Get Recommendation Letters!**

It is important for applicants to get recommendation letters from teachers, advisors, and supervisors who will portray them in a positive light. You want to only ask those individuals who will write a letter for you stressing your strengths, not your weaknesses. Think very carefully about who you select. Also, many programs have requirements for the letters, indicating that one must be from a nutrition professor, one from your DPD Director, and one from a work supervisor. The standard recommendation letter form can be found here: [http://www.depdpg.org/index\\_580.cfm](http://www.depdpg.org/index_580.cfm)

- “Get letters of reference from people who will give you a good recommendation. While reading some of the letters, I was so surprised people would pick a teacher or boss who would rank them so low.”
- “Letter of recommendations are vital as they represent you directly from an objective person, but ideally from people who know you personally and professionally.”
- “When asking for letters of recommendation, ask the person to write you a letter IF they can say positive things; not negative. Have resume ready to give the person that is writing your recommendation.”
- “Establish good relationships in college to gain excellent references.”

### **Master the Interview!**

The Interview is a very stressful time for most applicants. But instead of stressing over it, spend a lot of time preparing for it. Review the program's rotations, mission statements, and any other general information that you can use during the interview. I actually had one program ask me if I knew how long the program was and how much it cost. Little things like this are important for you to know because it shows that you know what you're getting into and are prepared.

"Be prepared for phone interviews with stories you want to be sure to tell because they make you look good. Most likely there will be some question it will work for. And just sound enthusiastic!"

"For my program, the interview is tough. They ask very specific questions to access your knowledge, for example what the temperature has to be on the rinse cycle of a dishwasher, vitamin/mineral deficiencies, have you do calculations, what is Lasix or other drugs, etc."

"Dress for success. Wear a classy suit, even if you are just going to the open house. First impressions are extremely important and can make or break your acceptance into the program."

"Just be yourself, be excited, be open-minded and completely devoted to learning."

"Be yourself. Different interview panels are looking for different things, but be yourself. One of the things they will be looking for is how your personality meshes with their staff as well as other intern candidates they are interviewing. You can learn the clinical skills needed to complete the internship, but you can't and shouldn't change your personality to fit them."

"Practice sample interview questions ahead of time."

"Be very prepared for the interview. Do a trial interview with some friends/family prior to the interview. (At my program) There will be approximately 6-10 preceptors in the room-each one asking you one question about past experiences and what would you do in certain situations. Do not get nervous, just do your best!"

"Think of strengths, weaknesses, leadership examples, and how you became interested in the field and the program. Dress up, be early, and think of a question to ask them."

"I would just say make sure you research each program you apply for thoroughly and ask questions during the interview. Be prepared to talk about some of things you did during you undergrad program also because they will most likely ask you a question or two about that during the interview. I did several interviews over the phone also so some may not be in person if the program is far from where you live."

- “Send a handwritten thank you note, not an email.”
- “Treat the interview like it's the most important job interview you've ever had (even if it's not your first choice!). First impressions are everything.”
- “Let your personality shine through in your interview and personal statement. The interns in my class are all high achieving but more importantly they're interesting people. It became pretty obvious after we all got to know one another that we were chosen not only for our academic and professional potential, but also because we must have seemed like fun people to have around. The bottom line: be yourself!”
- “Speak, dress, and present yourself professionally - this including researching the organization and preparing statements about yourself before the interview.”
- “Prepare for the interview by thinking through and outlining why you want to be an RD, what your strengths and weaknesses are, etc. BUT, don't worry too much--relax during the interview and be yourself.”
- “During the interview don't necessarily worry about getting the questions exactly right. They want to see your thought process working through the questions, and how you react under stress. They like work experience.”
- “Be real, they don't expect superman.”
- “As for the interview - remember it is as much them seeking information about you being a good fit as you seeking information about them being a good fit. Come prepared with your own questions, be yourself, and consider booking a mock interview with your career services on campus in order to practice. Also, get information on interview questions from career services and review all questions, even have mock interview with friends and family.”
- “Wear business attire. Be prepared to answer what your strengths and weaknesses are. Even if they don't ask during the interview, they may ask when you aren't really expecting it. Don't be afraid to take a minute to think about your answer, before you start speaking. You will most likely be asked a question where you will have to put things in an order that you would handle them....there aren't really right or wrong answers, they just want to see how you reason through a situation.”
- “Be goal oriented- Know your goals (trust me they will change), but go into the interview with goals in mind and be ready to effectively express your goals.”
- “Answer questions slowly and thoughtfully. Do not feel the need to rush into an answer or babble on. Do your research on the program beforehand.”

- “Come prepared to ask them questions and interview them as well.”
- “Try to focus more on your nutrition experience and professional qualities, rather than a lot of personal information. And smile!”
- “Make sure you ask lots of questions during the interview to understand what is expected of you and what you expect of the program.”
- “Know how to describe your past experiences in a brief but informative statement; Be EXTREMELY well acquainted with the program and do your research- it shows your interest and dedication.”
- “The interview process is tricky. Just really make that internship feel like they are your top choice (whether they are or not). Relate any experience you have to why it would make you a good candidate. Really try and get across your passion for the field of nutrition.”
- “Bring out the positive qualities, act enthusiastic but be honest.”

### **How to Handle Match Day!**

- “Definitely be yourself throughout the whole application process. You're meant to end up wherever you end up for a reason. Even if you don't feel that way initially, because I know I certainly did not, you will realize later that everyone has a crucial experience going through their internships, so stick it out and give it your best.”
- “Really don't freak out about it. Be prepared and do your best. What needs to work out for you will.”
- “Don't get discouraged if you don't get in right away. A lot of people don't get in their first go around. I personally didn't get in because I didn't have previous work experience.”
- “Be aware that you might not find out where you were matched exactly at the time proposed by D&D Digital. Sometimes the system gets too overcrowded and you might have to wait up to an hour later to find your results!”

For more tips, check out the e-book **Getting Matched: A Guide for Dietetics Students** and the **Resources** tab which has links to articles, ideas for gaining experience, and more!

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