Recording Studio Internships: How NOT to Get One -- and How to Get Ten Offers

What’s In This Handout:
• Specifics for applications
• Past Studio Intern success stories

Citation
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Andrew Koss of Terminus Recording Studios in NYC has some advice for aspiring audio interns.

For commercial recording studios operating in today’s recording industry, the need for a strong intern and assistant team has never been higher.

At Terminus Studios in New York City, our interns are expected to develop not only the technical skills to operate the equipment, but the awareness to maintain the space, and the social skills to work with a wide range of clients. The studio business is very much a service-oriented business, and our interns and assistants are often the main point of contact between the studio and the client.

I receive a lot of emails from prospective applicants looking for opportunities at the studio. Some emails instantly grab my attention, while others do the applicant a grave disservice and never receive further consideration.

These emails are usually my first look into an applicant, and I am forming opinions about the sender right from the time I read the subject. If you are considering applying for an internship with a studio, I hope with this insight into what a studio like Terminus is looking for, you can better position yourself to be considered for an interview.

What are we looking for?

Our interns have come to us from big and small educational programs. Some have had no formal training but developed their skills at other facilities, while others had minimal experience but showed they had passion and a strong desire to learn.

We’ve seeing varying degrees of technical knowledge, but the clear common thread that binds all our successful interns has been the quality of their character: They are dependable and trustworthy, reliable and punctual.

When there’s a client in the space, they handle themselves with utmost professionalism. Being aware of a client’s needs and keeping them comfortable is paramount to ensuring a positive experience. They are sociable when it is appropriate to be so, yet they know when it’s best to give the client space.

As they begin to assist in sessions, they are meticulous in their actions, checking and rechecking that any setup was done correctly. During downtime at the studio, they continue to be engaged, asking questions, and studying the equipment. They use free time at the studio to put new techniques to practice, pushing outside their comfort zone, and becoming more confident in their skills.
What NOT to do?

Unfortunately, for every promising application we receive, there are many more that fall short. Here are a few examples of things that are almost certainly going to get your application passed up. While it may seem like common sense, all of these examples have happened numerous times.

All quotes are from actual emails, copied exactly as they appeared.

• **CCing other facilities on the email:** Sending an email that shows me all the other studios you’re applying to is a great way to *not* get a response.

• **Sending a blank email:** Don’t just attach a resume and leave the email completely blank. I rarely even open the attachment in these cases.

• **Being too casual:** I know it’s the music industry, but being too casual doesn’t read well when seeking employment:

  *Hi I am a 22 year old musician here in NYC and was wondering if you had any internships open. I’m just your average cool guy looking for some new excitement in my life/*

  Don’t write your introductory email without reading these tips!

• **Copy and pasting:** The most common problem I see. I don’t blame someone for using a pre-written message to make up the bulk of an email. However, when an email is so obviously generic, and lacks any connection to my facility, it feels disingenuous. There’s a huge difference in my reaction when I read, “your facility” and when I read “Terminus”:

  *Dear Sir, My name is (removed) And I’m a recent (removed) Graduate. I’m also looking for an Internship position at your establishment, within this email You will find my Cover letter and resume attached/*

• **Using another studio’s name:** Yes, this has happened more than once. I’ll receive an email telling me how excited they would be to work at the facility up the road.

  *I’m wondering if you are looking to hire any interns this quarter to help you at Electric Lady.*

  *I am looking for a possible internship not even necessary for credits at Avatar Studios.*

• **Poor grammar and typos:** I try to overlook this to a point, but an email with too many errors portrays a lack of effort. There is really no excuse for not proof-reading. If English isn’t your first language, I would suggest asking someone to read through your application first to help.
What does help?

The little things really do go a long way, and taking the time to put in a little extra effort speaks volumes about an applicant. If I feel like you honestly want to be a part of our team, I’m far more inclined to give you that opportunity. Here are a few things that I would encourage you to do when composing your email.

Use my name: An email that starts off using my name or the name of the studio manager engages me much faster. Most facilities will list the name of their studio manager or owner online and tracking that information down shouldn’t be difficult. You could even call the studio and ask.

In addition, use the studio’s name. Make it clear that you’re applying for a position with us, not just any studio. Make us feel special!

Why Us?: Tell me why you want to work specifically at our studio. What makes our facility interesting to you?

Why You?: Don’t sell yourself short! Tell me why we need you. Intrigue us! Here is an an email I recently received from an applicant looking for a position with us:

No nonsense, just a sensitive trained ear seeking employment as an audio engineer, and/or other capacity with Terminus.

I have good judgement, a strong work ethic, and have a great understanding of recording session etiquette. I am capable of working long hours and willing to perform all the tasks necessary to make a session run smooth and give the clients exactly what they need. The numerous sessions I have assisted on have given me the opportunity to show how dynamic, discrete, and capable I am in any studio situation.

Do some homework: This can pertain to the interview process as well, but do a bit of research on the studio, and reference that in your email. You can reference the studio's philosophy, design, or specific gear. Here are some examples I’ve pulled from various applications.

“I'm interested in how you’ve integrated analog gear with the digital system.”

“I have experience on SSL and Neve consoles, but would love to learn my way around the System 5.”

“I have always wanted to work with real Pultec’s and not just the plugins!”

Attach a clean resume and cover letter: It might be the music business and things might appear more casual but a well-formatted document still speaks to your professionalism and dedication. There’s plenty of Websites that can help with this. Keep it relevant and concise.

Lastly, I realize you may be sending out lots of these emails, so having a template that you paste into an email makes sense, but take the time to add a few lines that relate directly to the studio you’re emailing. Taking those extra few minutes will certainly pay off.
What’s Next?

The emails that make it through this process, will always yield a response and often lead to an interview. Even when we aren’t necessarily looking for someone to fill an immediate position, we like to maintain a list of strong candidates for opportunities that come up. In the interview process, it’s important to remember that we’re formulating our opinions in that moment, and how you present yourself matters.

Being on time, looking presentable, being polite and staying engaged are key to a successful interview. We’ve had people not show, only to call hours later to reschedule. We’ve also had people show up looking totally disheveled and others that appear to be trying a bit too hard and are in a full business suit. I would encourage anyone to be themselves, and be comfortable.

During the interview, we keep the mood conversational and friendly. We’ll discuss their education, experiences, and what makes them passionate about the industry. In addition, we’ll share our own philosophies, explain our expectations, and ask if they have any questions for us. Throughout all of this, we are gauging the applicant's character and how they handle themselves in the situation. Assuming we have not seen any alarming issues during this process, I like to bring potential interns in for a trial run. This is both to determine if they are right for us, and if we are a good fit for them.

What we do during a trial day varies on the applicant. We may ask them to help break down or setup some mics, do some basic patching, or assist in a recall. They’ll spend some time shadowing current interns and we’ll try to get a read on how they are able to handle what we’re asking. It’s really comes down to maintaining the right attitude.

Understanding studio etiquette, such as being punctual, being visible but invisible, doing your homework and learning the gear, not promoting your own projects unless asked, knowing when and when-not to speak, and having a positive attitude – these are all important characteristics to keep in mind when your pursuing an internship in a professional studio.

However, if I could give everyone one piece of advice above all others, I would say, never be afraid to ask questions. We don’t expect everyone to know everything from Day One. Questions also show us that you’re making the efforts to learn the craft. So go ahead. Ask how, ask why, we all love talking shop when we’re able.

So if you’re even slightly unsure how to do something that is asked of you, for everyone’s sake, just ask.

This will avoid scenarios such as the intern we had who came across a problem with our console, decided instead of asking for help, he’d run the system restore software – he proceeded to wipe out the entire system, erased every saved session, cleared the digital patching system, and lost all our templates! Needless to say, that intern wasn’t interning with us after that.

I say again: if ever in doubt, ask!
Set Yourself Apart

Above and beyond technical know-how, it is strength of character that have set every successful intern apart here at Terminus.

Having the ability to adapt to the wide array of client personalities, calmly handle unexpected situations, make use of any and all free time to learn, and simply maintaining a positive attitude can lead to numerous opportunities to advance in this field.

Quite often, the biggest breaks come from being in the right room with the right person, and leaving the right impression.

Meet the Terminus Intern Honor Roll:

Ali Hassan was one of our very first interns. He had just wrapped up an engineering program at Fullsail University and was unhappy with his current internship at another studio.

Ali is not only remarkably talented at the craft he loves, but is thoughtful, polite, generous, and has the ability to make everyone feel comfortable. He can handle himself around any client and is comfortable handing any genre he’s been asked to work in.

During his internship, he utilized his free time to learn and develop his talents: putting in countless hours above and beyond what was asked.

Ali now works all over the city engineering in various studios and mixing live sound at major venues. Among his accomplishments since his internship, Ali has worked at Terminus with top producers like Eddie Kramer, and Neil Dorfsman, and has engineered for clients including John Legend, Alicia Keys, Jim Jones, Sebastian Bach, Scarlet Johanson, and MTV’s Guy Code.

Matthew McCorkle started his internship with us in 2008.

He reached out with an email that included a smart, well written cover letter and a polished resume. Matthew had just finished his degree in Audio Engineering from the Madison Media Institute in Madison, Wisconsin. During the interview process, it was clear Matthew had all the knowledge that his 3.92 GPA would indicate, while also having a great demeanor.

His Midwestern charm clicked with clients and he consistently took advantage of every opportunity that was presented. Since his internship, Matthew has engineered countless sessions at Terminus as other studios around the city. He’s gone on to develop his own mobile recording company and co-founded the music collective CDZA.

Matthew has worked with clients including Papa Roach, Fabulous, Boys Like Girls, Liza Minnelli, A.R Rahman, LMFAO, and companies like MLB and NPR.
Colin Rivers emits an almost herculean like presence at the studio. Not because of his six foot plus frame, or the 9 years he dedicated serving our country as a commander in the US Army, but through the unyielding strength of his character.

After retiring from the US Army, Rivers went to the Conservatory of Recording Arts and Sciences in Tempe, AZ. He worked his way up at various studios as an intern, then as a technician, and an engineer. He was attracted to Terminus because of our in-house production work and sent in his resume.

Rivers’ attitude combined with his engineering and technical skills made the decision easy. He adapts quickly to any client he’s placed with and can handle the most challenging situations with confidence and clarity all the while, never being afraid to ask for help when it’s needed.

In addition, he’s been instrumental in bringing new business to the studio as he works tirelessly to expose Terminus to new clients throughout the industry. At Terminus, Rivers’ work includes sessions with DJ Khalid, Future, Akon, CDZA, Vado, Just Ivy, Kelis Scarlet Johanson, and Michael Cera.

James Yost graduated from Texas Tech with a degree in accounting. Yet all the while, he couldn’t shake his strong passion for music and recording.

Throughout his early years, James recorded local bands and taught himself the basics of the craft. One day in NYC, James walked past East Side Sound, knocked on the door, and landed himself an internship. A little while later, the studio manager there referred him to us as he was looking for more work opportunities.

James was clearly talented, and he showed tremendous tenacity in accomplishing his goals. He worked hard, and steadily increased his proficiency in audio engineering. James has high expectations of the people around him and even higher expectations of himself.

He’s constantly studying, reading, and learning all he can about the business. By taking the initiative to master the inner workings of our deeply powerful System-5 console, and by being a consummate professional, James became a go-to guy for many of our clients.

Some of his sessions have included work with producers James Brown and Randy Jackson, and clients Danny Teneglia, KDrew, Taryn Manning, Kinky Boots, Mama Mia, American Idiot, DJ Khalid, Andre Previn, Bear Hands, College Humor, VH1, and CBS.

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- See more at: http://www.sonicscoop.com/tag/andrew-koss/#sthash.ZvTT3iRs.dpuf