

1. What can I expect of an internship at *The Economist*?

Unlike many other journalistic internship programmes, ours will give you the opportunity to chip in and pitch stories right away. You will attend our editorial meetings, so you'll quickly pick up how it's done, and interact with senior correspondents and editors right from the start. You will have ample opportunity to meet people across the newsroom, learn from them and ask questions.

The Economist is a friendly organisation with a collegiate atmosphere, and everybody will be keen to help you settle in. You will be assigned a buddy, usually a former intern, who can be your first port of call on how to navigate the organisation. There are social and affinity groups that run across the entire Economist Group: Women of TEG, for women and allies; Wilde, for LGBT+ people and allies; TEG in Colour, which works for the advancement of ethnic diversity; Family Network; and The Economist Sustainability Group. We are building up a collection of video tutorials with senior correspondents; you will be invited to attend any held during your internship, and previous sessions are available to browse.

Alongside our weekly edition, which was launched in 1843, we produce an increasing amount of digital-first journalism: films, newsletters, podcasts, breaking news and analysis; short agenda-setters for the day ahead, pithy explainers on topical issues and graphics-led journalism from our award-winning data team. Our internships offer a rare opportunity to gain experience right across these varied forms, and to produce journalistic work that will have an immediate impact.

2. What sort of piece should I write for my application?

Out of all the tangled mess out there in the world, each *Economist* story draws out a few strands that we think are important or interesting. We take confusing news and explain it. We leave our audience feeling interested, informed and slightly relieved that they've got a grip on what's going on in the world.

- Our journalism does more than add information. Our value is in the **clarity and originality** of our thinking, and our ability to entertain as well as inform.
- You should **imagine an audience of busy but literate professionals**, living anywhere in the world and with no direct knowledge of, or financial interest in, what you are covering. Ask why they should bother with what you are about to say. If there is no good answer, we are in trouble.
- **Check what else we have run on the subject.** It will save you from looking silly.
- What is the **one-line summary** of the message of your story (what we call the rubric)?
- **Think big.** The most memorable work contains new ideas.
- **Think small.** Include the funny detail or irreverent anecdote.
- **Think ahead.** Don't just react to the news.
- Strive to be **fair and accurate**, saying what you believe to be true, rather than what you can get away with.

- **Move your story along.** Come up with an intriguing thesis, a great question to answer, a sideways take on the news or a fresh lens on a long-running story.
- Put the news in **context**. Why did it happen? What’s coming next? How do other places do it?
- Even the lightest pieces need **analysis**. Is it a consequence of something bigger, like demographic collapse? Is a strange phenomenon actually an unfolding economic principle?
- **Be wonkish:** explain the quirk of regulation or policy behind some striking event.
- **Stories about people** can be a delight—though they must tell you about more than the person.
- Likewise **comparative pieces**—two places; two systems; two companies.
- Most importantly, **tell us something we don’t know**. Show us your originality. A number-crunching piece on an arts topic, or a business piece from an African city, or a story from London’s suburbs or Rio outside the favelas is more likely to stick in the mind. It’s best not to try to write about the biggest story of the day, or the main story from a beat or region: it will be too hard to stand out. That leaves plenty else: most industries and sectors have untold stories; and most people, in most places, are not living out their national metanarrative.

3. How should I go about writing it?

Your first draft takes the amorphous ideas and information and anecdotes swirling round in your head and builds them into an argument. It may be helpful to do an “essay plan”. Here is some advice from one of our deputy editors (a former intern):

Quite often I work out what I’m trying to say, and what the flaws in my argument are, while I’m doing my plan; sometimes my plan turns out to be dodgy and I find out the problems with the piece only as I’m writing it.

Usually you’re trying to explain why something has happened, and what the consequences are. It sounds easy but it isn’t. It’s often hard to establish what the reasons for anything are, and what is cause and what is effect. If A and B happened at the same time was it a coincidence, or did A cause B, or B cause A?

Sorting out the structure of a story, getting in all the bits of evidence, making sure the argument works both logically and as a piece of prose is I think rather like carpentry. Sometimes you have a vaguely uncomfortable feeling about the argument you’re making, and you look at it and suddenly realise it’s only got three legs. Then you have to start all over again. If you get the structure right you probably want to spend ages refining it and polishing it till all the drawers move smoothly and it’s nice and shiny. Then you send it to the section editor, and cross your fingers.

If editors had only to correct style infractions, each piece would take ten minutes. What takes ages is changing an article's structure. If yours works, much else will be forgiven. The basic element of any article is the paragraph. If your editor doesn't have to re-order them, or move things from one to another, then even if they have to rewrite every sentence, your article will not count as a tough edit.

A paragraph is (usually) a point followed by elaboration, evidence, quotes and examples. A well-structured article is the right paragraphs in the right order. Not as easy to do as to say, but it offers a strategy for your first draft. And a way of checking whether the finished article's structure works: let your eye scan down the start of each paragraph and see if the argument is clear.

To get you thinking about structures, here are two used in our pages over and over again.

a: Backwards and forwards

If there is a classic *Economist* structure, this is it. It opens with a paragraph saying what it is about, but neither goes into detail about the news nor states the argument of the piece. It then hops back to when the story starts. The next several paragraphs return to the present, providing momentum, and detail, context and analysis for the initial news event. The rest of the article proceeds into the future to speculate about what will happen next.

This structure moves from certainty to speculation, which means prognostications are built on a solid-seeming foundation. It can feel intuitive and "right". The habit of describing events in chronological order is so hard-wired that we barely notice when somebody else does it. But it may not grab the reader as forcefully as a couple of bold opening paragraphs. And it does not work in every instance: it is rare in the Science section, for example. The trick is to use the historical paragraphs to illuminate the news and provide context. In effect, these are argumentative—just subtly so. Here are two examples: "Just spend", from finance, and "While you were watching", from Europe.

This structure can be used for long reads with the addition of a "nut graf"—a summary after the lede laying out the structure and argument of the whole. ("Nut" because it contains the kernel; "graf" because journalistic slang is generally misspelt. See "lede"—how your piece starts—and "TK"—"to come".) "The future of forever", a three-pager about diamonds, uses it on a grand scale. It starts with three paragraphs of colour, followed by three paragraphs laying out the structure, and then goes back in time—by a billion years. After an enlightening trot through the science of diamond formation and the history of the diamond industry, it returns to the present day to discuss the immediate challenges facing De Beers. It then states a long-term problem, which it analyses before returning to the opening scene to wrap up. It is a satisfying read that combines colour reporting, history, science, economics, business and speculation. But it is the elegant, intuitive structure that makes it hang together.

b: The list

Many articles contain a series of observations, and lists are favoured in leaders (“There are three reasons to think this is a bad idea”). But an article may begin with an observation, turn that into a puzzle and then list possible explanations, one per paragraph, perhaps guiding the reader by numbering (“First...”, “Second...”, “Third...”, “Finally...”).

Lists can be used in more complicated and subtle ways. The article “Squeezing the sleazy”, about anti-corruption efforts, is structured as a list, although it does not draw attention to this. The observations are not numbered; rather, the reader is gently jogged by the repeated word “too”. Lists can be used to develop complex arguments. “Don’t make yourself at home”, which compares the experiences of Tibetans and Uighurs, is one, although this only becomes obvious about half-way through.

The chief advantage of a list is clarity. It is easier to follow an argument that is divided into chunks. Another advantage is also a disadvantage. A list is a series of observations and arguments. A reader could disagree with or fail to understand one part, and simply skip on to the next without losing the overall point. Pieces structured as lists can seem choppy and disconnected, or lack urgency and momentum. A story about street protests that is organised as a list would read as a detached assessment, perhaps of whether these protests are going to achieve more or less than another lot. It would be hard to convey a sense of roiling forward motion, or suggest that they are building to something extraordinary.

The trick is to pose a genuine puzzle quickly and early. Why is crime falling even though unemployment is rising? Why are British exports so feeble even though the pound is so weak? Lists are best used in unexpected ways. A piece about a country’s GDP growth that examined the major components of national output in turn (“First, construction is weak...”) would be predictable and dull, since that is how the data are reported.

How to order your list? If it is the bulk of your article, one possibility is to start with the most obvious explanation for your puzzle, so your readers do not feel they are being fed spurious explanations with the big one withheld. But this is not a fixed rule. A story about why crime is falling, for example, should probably not start by observing that policing has improved. As well as being obvious, this explanation is an ugly combination of dull and floppy: it is extremely hard to prove that good policing cuts crime.

If you are writing a list as part of a story, you will probably want to get the minor reasons out of the way, and finish with the big one: “Among the possible explanations are A, B and C (this may take several sentences). But perhaps the most convincing is D (and this may merit a paragraph of its own).”

4. About us

The Economist has been published since September 1843 to take part in “a severe contest between intelligence, which presses forward, and an unworthy, timid ignorance obstructing our progress”. We were founded to campaign for the repeal of the corn laws in Britain in the 19th century, and we still continue to advocate on current affairs. Our audience is global and

our worldview is liberal (in the classical sense, not the American). Our liberalism favours personal liberty and free markets, owing much to thinkers like Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. Clarity, brevity and a hatred of jargon are the most important elements of house style.

We pride ourselves on our **editorial independence**. The constitution of the company does not permit any individual or organisation to gain a majority shareholding. The editor-in-chief is appointed by trustees, who are independent of commercial, political and proprietorial influences. The Economist Group's commercial management and staff have no influence over its editorial policy, and it is the responsibility of the Group's journalists and commercial staff to protect that tradition.

Discussion in our editorial meetings is free and robust, and everyone is strongly encouraged to participate, from new interns to the most senior correspondents. However, is **the editor**, and the editor alone, who has the final say over what runs in any of *The Economist's* editorial products. In particular, it is she who decides on our leader lines. She does not take into account any considerations beyond editorial ones—for example, whether a cover will be popular with advertisers, or whether a leader line will play well with the sponsors of events.

The weekly edition is published in print in Britain, the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East and Africa. Almost all the stories appear in each edition (the British one has three extra pages with local stories), but the sections appear in a different order, and the cover and order of leaders sometimes vary. An increasing share of our subscribers read the weekly online or on an app, and consume other types of content, including online news stories and Espresso, our daily news-in-brief app.