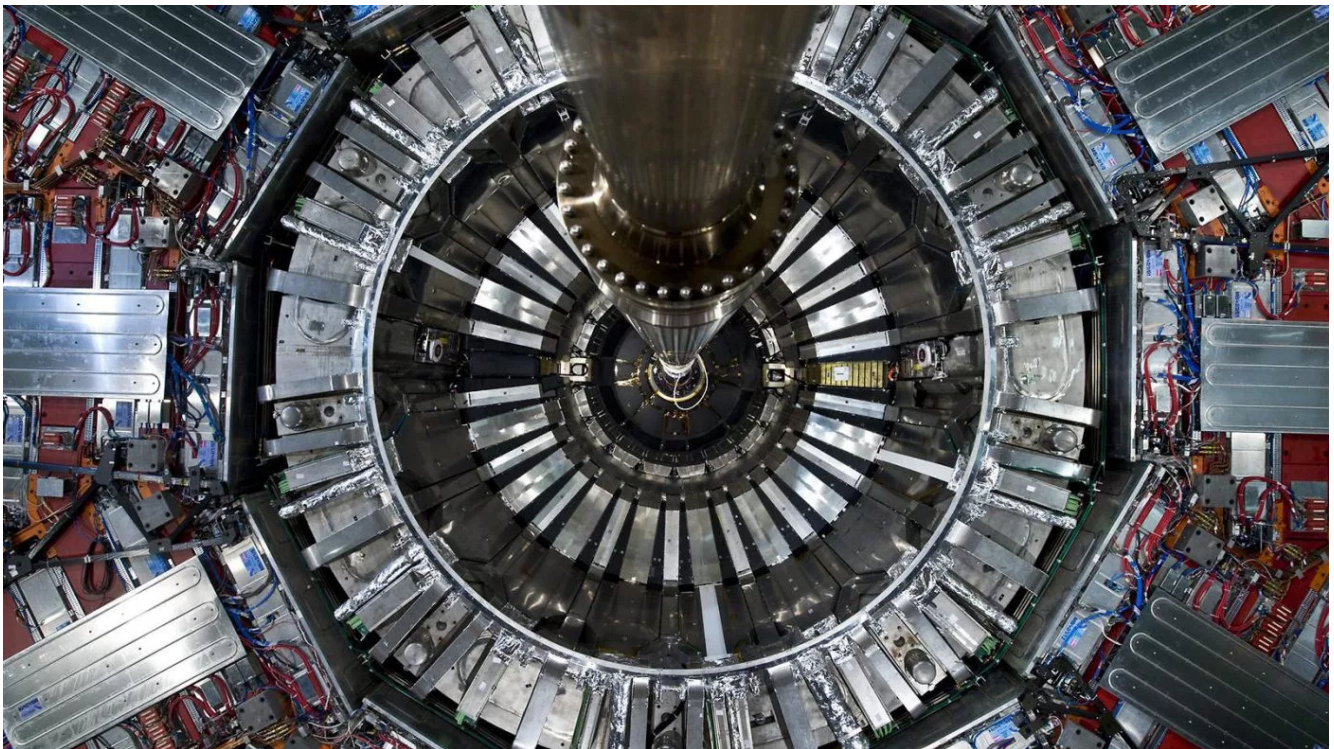


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Tips for students applying for (and accepted to) the Summer Student Programmes at CERN



This post is dedicated to all you rad boys and girls who have been asking *me* to give them some tips on how to get selected for a summer student programme at CERN and also to those who have been searching online in hopes of stumbling upon some honest advice.

In the interest of being stark honest throughout the post, I would like to point out that I would never accept advice from someone as messed up as I am. However, since you have put me on a pedestal so high as to consider me fit to give you some advice, I have tried my best to not disappoint you. Now that I am done rattling and causing some people to flee away from my blog, let us start digging.

O, by the by, if you need some introduction to the summer student programmes at CERN you can check out my previous blog post.

Tips for students applying to the programme(s)

1. **Begin early** – The application process for the different summer students programmes lasts for nearly 2 months. Aside from the obvious, the reasons I suggest you begin filling in the forms early is because there is a lot of information to be filled in the application form. Also, on certain occasions, after you have submitted your application form you may receive an e-mail from the recruitment desk either notifying you of some probable mistakes in your application form or some missing documents. If you submitted the form before the deadline you still have the chance to rectify those errors or upload the relevant documents.
2. **Do go through the tips provided on the official CERN website** – They have some pretty dope advice to offer you. Since they've done such a thorough job, I will not repeat the tips they've given (unless I think they are so vital that they need reiteration).
3. **How important are the recommendation letters?** – It depends on who is checking your application. While my supervisor told me that he read mine and analysed them carefully, looking for certain points, yet another supervisor (my friend's) said that he doesn't even open them at all. So, my advice is to make sure that you have uploaded the required number of letters of recommendation. Hopefully, your professors/mentors were kind enough to praise you to the skies, but if they were not, just pray that your potential supervisor isn't a Sherlock Holmes of LoRs like mine was and try to work harder on the parts of the application that you have more control over (like your CV).
4. **Don't brag** – Do you know what Rachel (from Suits) told Mike on his first day at the job? 'Nobody likes a show-off.' So don't be an obnoxious braggart and emphasise multiple times in your answers how you single-handedly saved the team project from falling apart at the seams with your uber awesome prowess and amazing set of multiple skills that you are sure CERN could benefit from.
5. **Use technical terms** – I believe this is one of the most important things to keep in mind while writing your answers. Anybody perusing through your answers would be looking for some key points. So try to include details such as the language, tools, algorithms, platform, etc you used while working on your projects. For example, instead of simply writing that you have built a private cloud, consider mentioning details like you used Eucalyptus to build the cloud-in-a-box version of a private cloud on CentOS 7 environment.
6. **What to write in the motivation letter?** – Now, my advice regarding writing a motivation letter is subjective. I think the best motivation letters are the ones that shout honesty. Take some time to share your story. I think it is okay to admit here that you have had struggles before (but you were determined to rise above them). Give the reader some idea of what you are most passionate about and what drives you. Sprinkle a few technical terms if you want, but don't flood your answer/letter with them (reserve those technical terms for other answers that you will have to write). Then again, this is just my opinion and may not be shared by others.
7. **Be honest** – You will regret lying. Also, don't try to predict your future when it comes down to mentioning your programming skills or experience. Don't add a skill you don't already know but you think you will develop in a month or two.
8. **Apply to other programmes in other organisations** – Not only as your backup plans for the summer but more importantly because each time you apply to a programme, you'll learn something. By the time you submit your documents and application to CERN, if you followed my advice, there is a very good chance that you would have read and revised them (the docs and the application forms) multiple times (unless, heavens forbid, you paste the same answers and upload the same CV everywhere). If you got rejected by certain organization(s), you'll learn that there's something in your application that doesn't work and needs to be changed. (It took me a rejection from MSU to earn an acceptance at CERN. We learn from our failures). What could be a better (albeit bitter) feedback than that?

9. **Just get started** – My friend at university was procrastinating and not filling in the forms because she was a little terrified of writing the “long” answers because she didn’t know what to write and how to structure them. You know, it can be a little overwhelming. When she reached out to me I asked her to just sit down and start writing something, anything for 15 minutes while I timed her. It would be like writing in an examination hall. Sometimes we can rant on endlessly even if we aren’t particularly sure about the answer. At the end of 15 minutes, she at least had a skeleton for her answer; something to get started with. This rough draft can really be very helpful.
10. **Read, re-read, proof-read, and make others read** – Make sure there are no grammatical mistakes and that you are truly satisfied with your answers.
11. **Provide links** – If you have a GitHub repository of your project, or you uploaded your project files on google drive/dropbox etc, or you published the project somewhere on the Internet, don’t forget to provide the links to your project in your answers.
12. **Build and complete more projects** – If there is some advice I could give my 18 years old self it would be this. More projects mean more experience and more learning.
13. **Go through a list of previous years projects** – CERN publishes reports written by the former summer students on its website. Go through the abstracts of these reports if you want to, or just skim over the title, or study them completely if you so desire. The idea is to get familiar with some technologies that people have worked on in the past and the kind of projects that they’ve built with these. Here’s a list of reports that Openlab summer students (2016) wrote. You may find this page useful as well (although it is a different programme). You can do a simple google search to find more of these.
14. **Do something every day** – The application you have to fill is relatively long. So, do something every day (even if it is as simple as reading or revising the answers you already wrote) to avoid getting overwhelmed.
15. **Keep your passport ready** – Okay, I know this one sounds bizarre, but I didn’t have a passport when I received the acceptance e-mail from CERN (I am weird) and I remember how much trouble that put me in.

If you did not get selected

O that’s okay. If you still want to be a summer student at CERN (and I hope you do) you have so many more chances. I encourage you to apply again the next year. Actually, why don’t you also check out the technical student programme or the fellowship programme?

If you did get selected

Wo-hoo! Congratulations to you! Here’s what you might want to do now:

1. **Contact your supervisors** – This is the first thing you should do once you are selected for the programme (okay, maybe you should yell with pure bliss and tell your friends and family the great, good news first). Ask them what technology/concept they’d like you to learn/revise/look into before you reach CERN. This will save you a lot of time afterwards.
2. **I hope you had your passport ready**

3. **Don't pack too many sweaters** – The first thing that came to my mind after hearing Switzerland was snow. And even though the weather app suggested otherwise, I decided to go with my judgement and packed every woollen apparel I could until my briefcase transformed from a cuboidal case to a spherical ball. Apparently, one or two sweaters is all that I needed. Also, people at Switzerland are crazy about hiking. So pack appropriate shoes as well (you can also buy or rent a pair there).
4. **Are you sure you want a single bed studio?** – Because I think the point of a summer student programme is to engage in networking. Having roommates will make the process easier. (Even though I am an introvert I had such a blast with my roomies).
5. **Don't panic** – Aww, it's so adorable that you are getting nervous. I remember feeling the jitters as well because I had never been to an airport before. Also, I know your project description sounds like a big mess of gibberish right now, but it will start making more sense once you reach there. So, take a deep breath.
6. **Learn some French words** – Because you'll see and hear a LOT of it. And, if you find yourself in a complicated and scary situation just say merci and run away (and never tell anyone that you took this advice from me because you'll be considered a bigger moron).

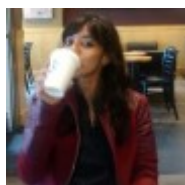
While at CERN

1. **Journal your work progress** (and your memories too, if you'd like to) – Very soon you'll have to write a report on your project. The journal might come in handy then.
2. **Be you** – If you are an extrovert and great at networking, good for you. Do your thing and work your magic. However, if you are an introvert like I am, don't you worry. You will make connections as well. (You might want to read about my experience at CERN).
3. **Explore more and take it easy.**

Phew! This was one long post. If you made it to the end, you are a sweetheart. And if you didn't, you are like me.

Either way, comment below and let me know if you are applying to the programmes or if you got accepted to one of them. If you have any questions or complaints, please write them out too.

All the best! Just slay it!



Published by Dinika

I am a front-end web developer and I also love data visualisation. [View all posts by](#)

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