

# The Intern's Perspective

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There are so many opportunities for accounting majors in the Chattanooga area alone. For accounting students, that means a lot of choices, and it isn't easy to know what you want only based on the classes you have taken. Public or private accounting? Audit or tax (or other public accounting)? Big firm or small firm? Internships are a great way to find some direction in your career, but you still need to know where to start.

Private accounting is a good choice for those that know what industry they want to go into right out of college. You can be an accountant in any industry you want. If you're passionate about nonprofits or restaurants or dancing, there are plenty of accounting opportunities to work in that industry, and that could provide a steadier work-life balance than a public accounting firm.

In public accounting, you get to work with a variety of clients. It's a great environment for those who like to learn a lot and enjoy a faster pace. This can help you find an industry you really enjoy working with or you may find that you want to stay in public accounting. It takes longer to become an expert in this field, but that's a good thing if you don't necessarily know what you want to be an expert in yet.

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Audit and tax tend to correspond with different personalities, whether you prefer to figure out all the details like a puzzle (tax) or figure things out from a big picture perspective (audit).

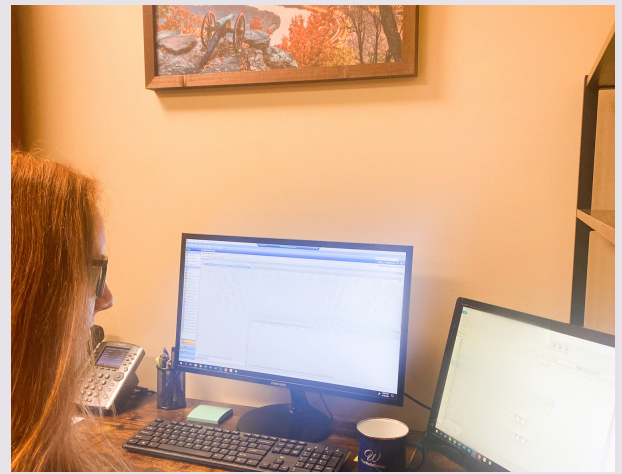
Auditors tend to be curious people and those who want more client interaction. Tax may be a better option if you hope to start your own practice one day, and audit can be a good choice for those trying to find an industry where they want to work later in their career. For some, the choice could just be a matter of workflow preferences – busy season and a slow season versus more consistency in hours.

Most accounting students wonder if they should try to work for the Big Four. Everyone gets to do their own cost-benefit decision for this. I decided that a decent work-life balance outweighed the benefits of Big Four for me. Ask others who have had a big firm experience what their thoughts are, but your success should not be measured by how big of a firm you start your career at. You get to choose what is best for you.

The recruiters you are talking to want to find a good fit when you're looking for internships just as much as you do. And really,

you have as much power to make decisions as the firms do. Internships are about finding a good fit for the job, on both sides. Be inquisitive in your interviews to figure out if the work and the people – clients and coworkers – are things you're excited about.

There are so many opportunities to be a successful accountant at all sizes and all kinds of firms. The choices you have now may feel like they will make or break you, but you can use all the tools you have to grow during this time. The more effort you put in, the more you can get out of your internships. Even if you decide you don't want to work at that company, you make much better use of your own time by working hard and learning as much as you can.



## About the Author

Rachel started with The Walls Group in 2021 as an intern during her last undergraduate year at Lee University. She has enjoyed working on both the audit and tax sides of the firm. She is currently finishing her Master of Business Administration at Lee and working toward passing all the exams to become a Certified Public Accountant. Rachel and her fiancé enjoy being involved at Matthew's Table Church. When she isn't working or studying, Rachel likes going on walks or hikes with friends, playing pickleball, and discovering new local coffee shops.