

Prepare to Succeed at Career Fairs!

Career and job fairs are your chance to make important contacts with potential employers. The career fair is often a good first step, enabling you and the employer to meet face to face for a few minutes and exchange some information.

But you need to do more than press your business suit and print 30 copies of your resume to make the most of this opportunity. You have to be prepared. It's not likely you'll be interviewed at a career fair (although, occasionally, this does happen), but it's wise to take as much care and approach the career fair as if it were an interview. After all, you want to make a positive impression—and you've only got a limited amount of time. Here's what the experts recommend:



• Know your employers.

Pick up a list of employers expected at the career fair from your campus career center and focus your research on the three or four that interest you most. Your career center can help you identify resources, so that you can go to the fair knowing something about each of these companies. As a rule, good research is key to an effective job search, and you'll find that it's well worth your time to investigate employers up front, before you get there. That way, you won't waste your time (or anyone else's) on employers that don't interest you.

• Know what you want.

What type of opportunity are you interested in with a specific company? Although you may not be able to identify the exact position or department you'd like to work in, you should be able to give the recruiter some sense of where you might fit in the organization. This is the kind of information you can find through research. Saying, "I'll take anything" or "What jobs do you have for me?" to a recruiter shows a lack of research.

• Prepare a two- to three-line script, and customize it to the needs of the companies you are most interested in.

Include your name, your class year and major, and your career interests as they relate to the target company. You will also want to include any relevant work experience you've had, such as an internship, volunteer experience, or part-time job, and highlight your strengths and skills. Be sure to tell the employer whether you are interested in a full time, internship, or co-op position. Once you've developed your script, practice it, and test it out with career center staff. Ask for advice on how you can improve both your script and your "delivery."

• Prepare a scannable resume.

There's a good chance that your resume will be scanned into applicant systems, so keep your resume format simple. Avoid fancy fonts or symbols, and be sure to include relevant keywords.

• Pack your credentials.

Although some employers will want only a scannable resume from you, be prepared to offer more. In addition to your scannable resume, be able to supply potential employers with a cover letter, copies of reference letters, and a completed job application (if applicable). Put your materials into a net, clean folder to make it easier for employers to keep your credentials together.

• Dress the part.

The career fair isn't an interview, but go dressed as if it were. This is your first impression on the employer, so look like a professional.

• Arrive early.

Come early while employers are fresh—and go first to the booths of the employers you have identified in advance as most interesting to you. Don't arrive 30 minutes before the end of the day and expect to talk to employers.



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- ☛ **Don't get diverted by the "goodies" employers are offering at their booths.**

Stay focused on your target employers. Remember that you are at the fair to make contacts, not collect pens and other items. And, when you are talking with a target employer, be sure to express interest in the organization—not in the giveaway being offered.

- ☛ **Greet each employer with a smile and a strong handshake.**

Use your prepared script to introduce yourself and express your interest—and be enthusiastic. Make eye contact. Be positive.

- ☛ **Ask appropriate questions.**

If you have time, use it wisely. Don't waste it asking questions that could be readily answered through a little research—such as "What does your company do?" or "What jobs do you have for me?" Instead, ask questions that show you have done your homework ("I am very interested in XYZ Company's management trainee program. Can you give me any advice on how I might tailor my resume for that program?") and are genuinely interested in the organization (What does XYZ value in its employees?").

- ☛ **Be considerate of others.**

Other students will want a chance to talk with the recruiter, and the recruiter will want to meet as many students as possible, so be considerate. If you've taken the time to prepare a two- or three-line script, you'll be able to get your qualifications and interest across without wasting anyone's time—and that will make a good impression on the recruiter.



- ☛ **Ask for the next step.**

At the end of your conversation with the recruiter, ask how you should follow up and what the next step is in the hiring process.

- ☛ **Pick up business cards.**

Collect business cards from the recruiters you speak to. Jot notes on the back of the card about the recruiter and the company. Use your notes to personalize your thank-you notes.

- ☛ **Write a thank-you note.**

Send a thank-you note to every employer you speak to at the career fair. Some employers prefer notes by snail mail; some are happy for an e-mailed thank you. Check with your career center for advice on which type of note to send.

- ☛ **Complete any online applications requested.**

You may find that an employer will ask you to complete an online application. For many employers, the online application is part of the process, so, if you are interested in the employer, be sure to do so. Even if you've left a scannable resume behind, filling out an online application ensures that your information is in the employer's system quickly.

article from *Job Choices for Science, Engineering, & Technology Students: 2007*

Need help preparing a resume?

Visit Career Services
in the Student Services Building (next to Glaske)

Call x4467 to meet with a Career Counselor!
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