Career Fairs

Tips to Make the Most of Your Time

Career fairs can seem intimidating, but if you know the purpose of the event and present yourself in a positive manner, the benefits are invaluable. Career fairs are designed to help you learn about specific career fields, what education and training is needed, and information about companies and internship opportunities. Preparation is the key to success.

BEFORE

Clarify Goals
- Make sure you know the goals of the fair and understand that your goals need to be consistent with the purpose of the event. What do you hope to accomplish by the end of the fair? Career fairs are for gaining career and internship information.
- Determine what you are looking for in a job/internship.

Research Employers
- Visit the Career Education website to find out which employers are attending.
- Make a list of those you are interested in speaking with.
- Research the company’s philosophy, where they are located, what they are hiring for (jobs/internships), etc.
- Prepare questions you would like to ask the employer to gain a better understanding of the organization and the positions they are hiring for.

Sample Questions
- What kinds of entry-level positions exist within your organization?
- Does your company hire on a continual basis or just at certain times of year?
- How long does the hiring process take?
- What does your organization consider the 5 most important qualities in an employee?
- As an entry-level employee, what can I expect to be doing 2, 5 and 10 years from now?
- How long have you worked for this company and why did you chose the organization?
- For how many years does the entry-level employee typically stay with the organization?
- What percent of applicants are eventually hired?
- What makes your company unique compared to others in this field/industry?
- What would you expect your ideal hire to do during the first month on the job?

Prepare Properly
- Gain confidence by knowing about yourself--your interests, skills/capabilities and goals.
- Plan what attire you will wear. It is important to wear comfortable shoes since you will be on your feet for a long period of time.
- Be sure to get a haircut if necessary.
- Prepare a 45-second "commercial" of your interests, skills, and why you are interested in the company. Schedule an appointment with a Career Coach or find a friend to practice.
- Create or update your resume and have it reviewed. Your personal presence takes the place of a cover letter and objective statement at a career fair.
- Purchase a portfolio where you can have copies of your resume, a list of questions you would like to ask employers, your 60 second sell, and a place to store business cards. Don't forget a nice pen!
- Design and print business cards. (optional)
- Register for the fair by the deadline in order to receive a professional nametag.
- Be aware that due to federal hiring regulations, some employers may not be able to speak with you in depth at a career fair unless you have gone through their online application process. Submit your resume online beforehand to avoid getting frustrated by this.
DURING

Present Yourself in a Positive Manner

- Approach the company representative with confidence, interest and enthusiasm.
- Be well organized.
- Arrive EARLY and orient yourself, allowing you time to organize your thoughts.
- Demonstrate that you are able to connect what the company does and how your skills and interests would contribute.
- Ask appropriate questions and provide clear, concise, answers. Avoid questions about salary and benefits.
- Avoid distracting mannerisms and maintain eye contact with each recruiter you speak with.
- If the line around an employer table seems too long, it may be more efficient to select another company and go back later when the crowd thins out.
- Consider talking with employers that might not be your top choice companies prior to talking to your top choice companies to allow yourself time to warm up.
- Ask what the next steps entail so you can follow up accordingly. Request business cards so you have all the information at your fingertips for doing so and for sending thank you notes.

Demonstrate Proper Etiquette

- Respect other people's privacy as they speak with a company – don’t barge in and interrupt a conversation.
- Conduct yourself professionally at all times. Remember that you are being observed even when you are not speaking directly with an employer.
- Try to talk with as many companies as possible within a reasonable time frame. Pick up brochures. You may want to correspond with some companies after the event. Get business cards; too, as these will help you follow up.
- As you approach the table, establish eye contact, present a firm handshake, introduce yourself in a clear voice and explain why you are interested in the company. State your interests, state what you know the company does (if you do), and ask about the opportunities for internships and how you can prepare for employment in the future.
- Never say anything negative at any time during the event. You never know who is listening; it can cost you dearly.
- During a conversation, listen for information that relates to something you have done. Use transition statements, “That’s similar to an experience I had when I worked for…”
- At the end of the conversation, offer a firm handshake and express your appreciation.
- If you sign up for an interview, you have made a commitment to show up.

Remember

- Employers have paid money to have the opportunity to speak with you.
- Students from all majors and years are encouraged to attend.
- Many employers use career fairs to “prospect” for opportunities that they will be hiring for in the future.
- Look beyond the name of the organization. Companies that you might not expect have unique opportunities that might surprise you. Most are looking for all majors. By not speaking with employers that you know little or nothing about—you will never know what they may have to offer.
- Don’t eliminate “internships” from your job search if you are looking for full time employment. Many are paid experiences that may lead to full time employment.
- Recognize that some employers don’t hire interns, so when searching for internships, consider using the terms “part time or seasonal opportunities”.

AFTER

Follow Up

- Go to a quiet place to make notes of your conversations (what they were wearing, information shared, next steps, etc.). Consider writing these notes on the back of their business cards.
- Send thank you notes reiterating your interest in the companies (typed, email or handwritten are all appropriate).
- Write down as many questions (and how you went about answering them) you can remember that were asked of you. Use these to prepare you for future interviews.
- Complete and turn in surveys. Your feedback is vital to the improvement of future events.
- Be sure to follow up based on your conversations. This could be a test to see if you will follow through.
- Let the Career Education staff know what questions arise.
Dos and Don’ts of Career Fairs
By Sally Kearsley

5 Things to Take to a Career Fair
1. **Copies of your resume.** (25 to 40 depending on the size of the event). Be sure it represents your knowledge, skills, and abilities effectively. It needs to look professional--easy to read format on plain white or cream colored paper--and be free of typos. If you are looking at several career options, you may want to have two or more targeted resumes with different career objectives!
2. **A smile, a strong handshake, and a positive attitude.** First impressions are important. Approach an employer, smile, and offer your hand when you introduce yourself.
3. **A 30-second "sales pitch."** Hand the recruiter a copy of your resume and be prepared to expand on it quickly! Share basic information about yourself and your career interests like this: "Hello, I'm Carrie Jones. I'm a senior here at Wonderful University and I'm majoring in English. I'm very interested in a marketing career. As you can see on my resume, I just completed an internship in the Marketing Division of the ABC Company in Peoria. I've also taken some courses in business marketing. I'm very interested in talking with you about marketing opportunities with your organization."
4. **Information about the organizations which will be attending.** Gather information as you would for a job interview. To maximize the brief time you have with each employer, you need to know how your skills and interests match their needs. And don't just concentrate on the "big names." There are often great opportunities with companies with which you are not familiar.
5. **Energy!** Career fairs require you to be on your feet moving from table to table for an hour or so. Each time you meet someone, be at your best, as refreshed as possible!

5 Things to Take Away From a Career Fair
1. **Business cards from the recruiters you have met.** Use the cards to write follow-up notes to those organizations in which you are most interested.
2. **Notes about contacts you made.** Take paper and pen with you to write down important details about particular organizations, including names of people who may not have had business cards. Take a few minutes after you leave each table to jot down these notes!
3. **Information about organizations you have contacted.** Most recruiters will have information for you to pick up, including company brochures, computer diskettes or CD's, position descriptions, and other data. You won't have time to deal with these at the fair!
4. **A better sense of your career options.** If you have used the event correctly, you will have made contact with several organizations that hire people with your skills and interests. In thinking about their needs and your background, evaluate whether each company might be a match for you.
5. **Self-confidence in interacting with employer representatives.** A career fair gives you the opportunity to practice your interview skills in a less formidable environment than a formal interview. Use this experience to practice talking about what you have done, what you know, and what your interests are.

5 Things Not to Do at a Career Fair
1. **Don't cruise the booths with a group of friends.** Interacting with the recruiters on your own. Make your own positive impression!
2. **Don't carry your backpack, large purse, or other paraphernalia with you.** Carry your resume in a professional-looking portfolio or small briefcase works well. It will keep your resume neat and handy, and gives you a place to file business cards of recruiters that you meet. Usually you can stow your coat, backpack, or other gear in a coatroom.
3. **Don't come dressed for rugby practice (or any other extremely casual activity).** A career fair is a professional activity--perhaps your first contact with a future employer.
4. **Don't "wing it" with employers.** Do your homework! Research the companies just as you would for an interview. You'll be able to focus on why you want to work for the organization and what you can do for them.
5. **Don't come during the last half hour of the event.** Many employers travel a long distance to attend the fair and may need to leave early. If you come late, you may miss the organizations you wanted to contact!