→ What's a career fair?

A career fair is a place where employers and job seekers can come together to talk about internship and job opportunities. A fair consists of employers at individual tables, staffed by human resource professionals who focus on recruiting, employees of different divisions, and, often, university alumni who are working there. Employers can speak to positions they are currently recruiting for, the application and interview process, and answer broader questions about the company.

→ Why should I go?

By attending a career fair, you can walk away with industry and organization knowledge, information to enhance your resume or cover letter, a contact to follow up with, and sometimes an interview. You also benefit the employer by putting a face to your resume!

Depending on where you are in your education and career, you might attend the career fair for a unique reason. A first year student might attend to learn about different careers and organizations. An experienced career changer might attend to have the opportunity to share your story face to face. A sophomore or junior might attend because you applied to a position at an organization and want the opportunity to make a personal connection or find out who the best person might be to follow up with. Unequivocally, a career fair gives you a special chance to make a personal connection with a few employers at organizations that you hope to work for now or in the future and get answers to questions that you can’t find online.

→ How do I get ready for a career fair?

Start with Research: Identify organizations that interest you.
- Research 3-7 companies through their career pages, LinkedIn, Glassdoor.com, Vault guides, Google search, Twitter and/or trade publications.
- Check LionSHARE for internship/job postings from the company.
- Prepare questions or comments about the company or positions that interest you.
- If you have limited time, spend more time on preparation for your top choices.

Then, prepare your introduction: Take some time to think about what makes you a good fit for the role you are pursuing, Write out what you want the employer to remember about you. Be ready with a self-introduction, focusing on your experience and interests.

→ What should I wear? Why do I have to dress up?

Career fairs have dress codes, so always be sure to check the fair web site for guidance on what to wear. Even if you are targeting companies that are casual (e.g. start-up or tech), still wear a professional outfit in line with
recommendations. While some employers may dress informally, they understand that there is a dress code for attendees, and that as a general rule candidates are more formally dressed for networking and the interview process than they will be on the job. Professional, neat dress helps to communicate that you are serious about the organization and the possibility of working there. Remember, if you need a suit for a professional reason you can borrow one from CCE’s Clothing Closet.

→ Do I need to bring anything?

**Bring with you:**

- A nice folder or professional portfolio to keep your materials organized.
- Many copies of your resume to hand to employers (upon request).
- If you have different career interests, be sure to bring different versions of your resume, e.g., for a research position and for a position in industry.
- A list of questions and quick pointers about each organization.
- A pen and paper to take notes about the employers you meet with, after you leave the table.
- A water bottle. But, if you have too much to carry, stop at the water fountain instead.
- A bag. In addition to written material about the company, employers often bring fun giveaways.

→ How do I talk to employers?

Every employer has their own style, so it is important to be flexible and adapt to the person with whom you are speaking. Some employers will ask for a resume first, some will just start talking about their company, others will expect you to start the conversation or ask questions. Think about what you want to learn and what you want the employer to know about you, and that will be the best guide to the conversation. A few pointers:

**Be Curious!** Ask specific questions based on your research, knowledge of the company, and information you are hearing in the moment.

**Following are a few questions you could ask (these are just a small sample of relevant questions):**

- What do you look for in resumes /a candidate?
- As a freshman, I have some time to plan ahead. Would you be able to recommend any skills I should develop to be attractive to your field.
- Which project do interns work on at your organization?
- Can you tell me about your hiring timelines for internship and/or full time positions?

**Be brief and enthusiastic!** If you have the opportunity to introduce yourself, highlight your experience, skills or interests, as related as possible to that employer or position. Demonstrate how your interests fit with the company’s mission or how your skills will fill the employer’s needs. Be aware that you may only have a few seconds to introduce yourself, and employers may have their own agenda.

**Be sure to make note of the representative or employer’s name!** You will want to follow up after the fair with a brief thank you note and will need to know whom to thank!

→ How do I introduce myself to employers?

Most people feel anxious about introducing themselves to employers, so it helps to plan in advance and practice what you want to say. A good introduction should answer: Who are you? What do you do (or hope to do)? What are you looking for? Write an outline, bullet points or full script (no more than a paragraph long) of what you would actually say.

Start with “Hi, I’m [insert your name]” then share 1 or 2 comments about your interest, skills and academic or work experiences. Try to choose those which are most relevant to the position or company. End by expressing your interest in the company’s work (projects, internships, products, news items). Practice with a Career Coun-
Should I give my resume to employers?

Resumes and application materials are usually submitted online, so they can be shared electronically. Though some employers may accept paper copies on site, others will ask you to apply online. Not all employers are currently recruiting, even though they attend the fair. Be sure to follow the employer’s directions, and don’t be offended by the employer’s preference. If an employer is not currently recruiting, but will have needs in the future, you can definitely ask about the hiring timeline and best way to apply.

What will an employer expect of me?

An employer will expect you to exhibit basic professionalism with a firm handshake, good eye contact, genuine smile, ability to introduce yourself and express interest in their organization. Employers expect that you have basic knowledge about their organization and have done some initial research about the internships/jobs they offer, so check the About Us and Careers page as well as their LionSHARE postings before the fair. An employer will also expect that you will want to follow up and keep in touch. They might not be sharing their contact information, but it’s always good to ask. Finally, an employer will expect you to be sensitive to the other people at the fair — if you’re the only one at the table, feel free to ask many questions. Otherwise, you might want to focus on your top 2 and then move on, graciously.

How do I follow up after the fair?

If an employer is sharing his/her contact information, send a thank you email within 24 hours of the fair. Refer back to your notes about the interaction. Follow up on any information requested, or ask a follow up question if you have one. Remember, the employer met many people, so try to reference something specific in your conversation to jog their memory about you. If you ask a question and don’t hear back, it is appropriate to send a follow-up email after two weeks. Even if you don’t receive a response, sending a thank you is an important part of your interaction.

What are some common problem areas that employers notice?

PERSONAL APPEARANCE
Wearing sneakers, jeans, or scruffy clothes – Make sure your shoes fit your professional image and the career fair’s dress code.

Bad breath – In the tight quarters of the fair you will be very close to employers. Be sure to brush your teeth, use a mint or mouthwash before you enter, especially if you had coffee or other strong foods.

Body odor/strong perfume or cologne – Career fairs get crowded and hot, noticeable body odor and/or strong scents are magnified.

SELF PRESENTATION
Monotone/over rehearsed pitch – Be sure to convey interest and be genuine. Be present, listen and respond (see How do I talk to employers? for more information).

Spacing out in line/missing cues – Employers notice who is in line and how they behave, so be attentive even while waiting. Listen to what the employer is saying to the student in front of you, but don’t crowd him/her.

Notice body language: is the employer trying to include several people in the conversation? If so follow their lead, turn slightly to open the circle, join in with a question if it seems appropriate.
Disorganization – Know who you want to see and a little about the company before you step up to the table. Have your materials in order (do not search for a pen or your resume). Be ready to hand over your resume if appropriate (See above Should I give my resume to employers?).

Weak or strong handshake – Employers will shake many hands, so don’t crush, hold on too long, or be limp.

Freezing/freaking out/flubbing conversation – Shake it off and move on, you won’t click with everyone and that is OK! Check in at the “Ask a Counselor” desk to practice on the spot or talk through what happened and where things went wrong.

PREPARATION
Crowds – Be ready for lots of people, noise, and heat. Have a plan. Pace yourself and know who you want to talk to. Drink water. Take a break in the party space lounge area to gather your thoughts or check in with friends. Stop by the “Ask a Counselor” table to reenergize. Visit employers downstairs for a break from the crowds on the main level.

Not having a plan – be strategic, know who you want to target, build up to your number one choice by practicing on the employers who interest you but who are not your top choice.

Not being flexible – your top choice may cancel at the last minute or have fifty people waiting in line, who else can you approach? You need to be able to adapt to the changing circumstances of the fair.

Thirst – There is a water fountain near the bathrooms (between the double doors on the main floor). Don’t step out for water or you will have to wait in line again.

Leaving prematurely – Once you leave you have to get back in line if you want to reenter the fair. Make sure you have spoken to every one you want to before you leave. Take a moment in the party space to collect your thoughts, review your notes, or just take a breather. If you leave the fair you will have to get back in line to reenter.

PROFESSIONALISM AND COURTESY
Cutting the lines – Sometimes it’s not immediately obvious where the line ends, so be mindful of others who are waiting. If the employer wants to speak to the group, help facilitate the group conversation and allow others to speak. Your ability to connect with the group will be noticed.

→ Want to know more?

Resumes 101: Learn how to put together a strong document that helps you shine!

Professional Image: Learn how to make a good first impression.

30-second Introduction: Learn how to introduce yourself to employers.

Researching Organizations: Learn more about the organizations on your dream list!

Thank You Letters: Here’s your chance to reaffirm your interest in an opportunity.

CCE’s Clothing Closet: Learn how you can reserve a suit from CCE.

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