



General Job Search Strategies

Career Fair & Career Expo Strategies

While you may find the thought of speaking to employer representatives at a career fair to be uncomfortable, either because you are reserved or do not like crowded venues, it is important to realize that many employers prefer to recruit at job fairs. Career fairs allow employers to quickly assess a student's communication skills and relevant experiences. Because you must "work" the fair to make a positive impression with employers, the following tips will help you stand out among those who think they can just show up and distribute copies of their resumes! If you are early in your studies at Ohio State, career fairs are an excellent opportunity for you to experience how recruitment events work, to practice your elevator pitch, and to connect with employers who recruit your major. Think of it as a dress rehearsal for when you need to find an internship or career position for after graduation. This tip sheet can also be used when preparing for Career Connections events or a Career Conference that includes an opportunity to interact with employers.

Applicable Career Communities:



Good to Know

In an ideal world, students would know in advance which career fair recruiters were genuinely interested in speaking to them. Unfortunately, the practices that employers engage in at career fairs is varied and sometimes conflicts with information posted in advance of the event...making it a challenge for students seeking out the "best employers" to chat with. Examples of challenges you might face include 1) approaching an employer to chat about internships when they are strictly interested in collecting resumes from seniors or recent graduates for their full-time jobs, and 2) having an employer tell you they don't accept resumes during fairs so you'll need to apply online.

Overall, it is important for you to recognize the variability in recruitment styles that you will encounter at a career fair. Do not take it personally if a recruiter doesn't seem interested in considering your resume. Instead, focus on staying upbeat and move on to another employer.

Before the Event:

Clarify your goals for attending: What do you want to gain from the event? Do you need to clarify application procedures? Are you looking to discover possible career paths? Do you need to expand your network of contacts? Do you want to distribute your resume in person to maximize your professional impact?

Get focused: What types of positions interest you? A common mistake students make when attending a career fair is having no career direction. This is evident when students ask questions like, "What are you hiring for?" This question implies you are "shopping around" or that you did not conduct research ahead of time.

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Gather information: Study the list of participating employers in Handshake. Identify the 3 or 4 companies that most interest you. You will likely speak to many more employers; however, this small group will serve as your targeted employer group. Gathering information on each organization in advance will allow you to become an informed conversant with the recruiter(s). When you show a recruiter your intellect and understanding of his/her company, you will stand out! Try to discover:

- What is the full array of products/services provided by the organization?
- What is their predicted growth? Expansion plans?
- What media coverage have they recently received?
- Where are the geographic locations for employment (branches, subsidiaries)?
- What qualifications do they look for in entry-level hires?
- Which of their internships or jobs match your interests?

If you need assistance finding information about an employer, schedule an appointment with a Career Coach to learn about resources like Hoover's Online, a helpful database for researching employers that is available through the University Libraries collection at: http://guides.osu.edu/job_interview

Prepare questions: Be ready to ask the recruiters questions to determine if the organization would be a good fit for you. The questions should lead to further discussion with the recruiter. For example, asking "What skills should a program evaluator have?" will possibly allow you to share examples of when you have demonstrated those skills. A good resource to use to develop meaningful questions is found on The Muse site: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/questions-to-ask-at-career-fairs%20h>

Prepare your resume to perfection: Your resume will be the focal point of your chat with any career fair recruiter. Great care should be given when writing and formatting it! The Arts and Sciences Career Success Office offers resume reviews on a walk-in basis. You can also book a one-on-one appointment with a career coach via Handshake to gain a more intensive and personalized review.

Prepare your elevator pitch: The impression you make when approaching employers is critical to your success as a job hunter. Improve your chances by preparing and practicing a one-minute "commercial" about yourself and the contributions you could make to an organization. See the [Writing Your Elevator Pitch](https://artsandsciences.osu.edu/career-success/students/navigating-career-planning-process/guides-tip-sheets) tip sheet found at <https://artsandsciences.osu.edu/career-success/students/navigating-career-planning-process/guides-tip-sheets>

Consider attending a career fair preparation workshop: Make a habit of checking the Events listing at <https://artsandsciences.osu.edu/career-success/events> or on Handshake. Many events require you to RSVP because of space limitations, so please be sure to RSVP. The list is updated throughout the semester, so make sure to check it the week prior to explore special events being offered in conjunction with a career fair that interests you.

Select your outfit(s):

Determine the professional clothing you will wear to the fair and, if selected, to a follow-up interview. (The career fairs held on campus often feature an Interview Day on the following day, so it's a good idea to have two outfits ready.) Check out the website for pictures of acceptable career fair clothing: <https://www.iup.edu/career/events/recruitment-and-networking/job-fairs/how-to-dress-for-a-job-fair/>

Day of Event:

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Materials to bring to the career fair: The essential items to bring with you to the fair include multiple copies of your resume, pen and paper to take notes, and a folder/portfolio to carry these items. Most fairs will offer a coat check area where you can also leave your backpack, but be sure to check on this ahead of time. Lines can be long so allow extra time to deposit and pick up your belongings. Keep in mind that employers will have a very limited amount of time to interact with you. They will be focused on conducting a quick scan of your resume to identify key qualifications, while also evaluating how you introduce yourself. Generally, they will not have the time to review additional documents such as cover letters, references, or work samples. If you are targeting an industry that requires work samples, such as art and design, be sure to have a link to your online portfolio included on your resume. In your portfolio you might also include notes from research conducted prior to the fair. These notes could include details about specific positions in which you are interested or questions you identified when researching employers of interest. You can review these items while waiting in line to meet an employer, but be sure these notes are concise and well organized so you are not shuffling through paperwork while conversing with a recruiter.

Multiple resume versions: You may need to bring more than one version of your resume if you are targeting different types of career fields. For instance, if you have substantive experience in multiple areas creating different resumes will allow you to keep each document to one page while having enough space to add in detail about your qualifications for each field. A Career Coach can guide you through the process of creating separate resumes.


Arrive early to avoid long lines: If you show up at the last minute, you run the risk of missing some recruiters – either because they found enough qualified candidates or had to leave early because of their travel arrangements.


Know the territory: Take time when you arrive to study the event map and determine the location of your targeted employers. Meet with those employers first; then meet as many other employers of interest as time permits. Keep in mind that some employers will always have long lines, so you need to decide if you want to wait 20 minutes to talk with one employer or use that time to talk to three to four employers.

Make your introduction:

- When you approach an employer, smile and walk towards them with good posture; make eye contact. Shake hands firmly, stating your full name. Give your “one minute elevator pitch,” speaking clearly and showing enthusiasm.
- Ask your prepared, appropriate questions. Do not ask what the company does, or any other question regarding information that is easily available elsewhere (e.g., on their website).
- Thank the employer for their time and ask permission to leave your resume. Some may not wish to receive your hardcopy resume due to a preference for obtaining electronic copies or because of organizational policy -- a practice often followed by federal agencies. Do not be offended. Ask the recruiter what process you should follow to share your resume.
- Ask recruiters how they would prefer you to follow-up (e.g., phone call, e-mail)
- Do not ask about salary.
- Do not ask the recruiter personal questions. Flatter the company, not the recruiter.
- Take the company information, printed materials, and handouts - not just the free promotional items.

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Obtaining information about other company contacts: Recruiters may be at the fair to recruit talent for one company location. If you are interested in working at a different location, for a division they aren't familiar with, or even for a subsidiary, it is okay to ask them for the contact information of someone in their human resources division. Taking this step will allow you to continue to learn about their organization. Keep in mind that not every recruiter will know of every position in their organization.

Be sensitive to the time factor: Answer questions from employers clearly and concisely, showing you are well prepared. If there are others in line behind you, do not linger. Realize that recruiters typically want to meet as many students as possible, and you can make a positive impression by being respectful of their time. For example, you can state, "I realize our time is short, and you have other students waiting. Can I follow-up with you on e-mail to finish our discussion?"

How to address questions regarding GPA: GPA is only one of several qualifying factors considered by employers. If your grades not meet the minimum preferred by an employer, do not assume you will not receive consideration. Many employers will still consider you if you can effectively account for a low GPA, especially if the GPA in your major is higher. Be prepared to articulate other skills and experiences that may offset a lower GPA. Research all the qualifications cited by the employer in relevant job postings, and be prepared to share at the fair specific examples of how you have developed and applied skills valued by that employer. You can discuss the analytical thinking or problem solving skills you applied to course projects, or leadership roles you have engaged in through activities or volunteer work. The important thing is to be confident, and quickly move the conversation to your strengths and achievements. Be mindful of the limited time the employer has to spend with you, and practice your delivery of these examples. If the recruiter indicates that they have no flexibility in this area, thank them for their time and move to the next target employer.

Ask for the business card of every recruiter you talk to: Take notes immediately after leaving an employer's table on your next steps with that company – do this while your thoughts are fresh. Jot down notes on the back of the recruiter's business card to remind you of the conversation – doing so will make it easier for you to personalize your follow-up email.

Before You Leave the Event:

- Double check -- did you talk to representatives from every company you wanted to target?
- Did you get business cards from each representative?
- Did you jot down notes needed for follow-up (e.g., timelines, position titles, etc.) with each company?

Within a Day after the Event:

You are not done yet! Make sure you:

- Follow up with each employer of interest after the career fair by sending a thank you e-mail. Include an extra copy of your resume and mention any personal connections you might have made.
- Prepare if you have an interview scheduled. The interviews held in association with career fairs fall into the category of "screening interviews" and generally last 30-45 minutes.

Within a Week after the Event:

Complete any online applications or tests. These steps may be a part of their application process and are required, regardless of the connection you have already made with the recruiter. A quick turnaround in completing these materials will demonstrate your interest and level of commitment to working for them.

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Another good step to take is to check in with your network on LinkedIn to see if any of your connections know the recruiters that you engaged with.

Two-Plus Weeks after the Event:

Keep in contact with companies, particularly your target group. Some ways to do this include:

- A second follow-up with the recruiter you met at the career fair– sending an e-mail, or calling.
- Check the Arts and Sciences Career Success website and Handshake for campus events; note any on-campus information sessions to be held by your target employers. Utilize this information for further contact opportunities.
- Organize all of the information you have accumulated. Start a spreadsheet, detailing
 - 1) Information about the recruiters you've met (their full names, postal addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses)
 - 2) Follow-up steps you have completed and still need to take
 - 3) Information you have discovered about the employer since the career fair.
- Take steps to increase your professional presence online by using social networking sites responsibly. Employers do check Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social networking sites for inappropriate content. Make sure you and your friends do not post questionable photographs of you, and clean up any blogs that may contain extreme emotions or opinions. Also, keep in mind that recruiters use these same tools to market their company's career opportunities. You can make a positive impression by liking their posts and posting comments that support their social media goals.

Upcoming Career Fairs:

Information about upcoming campus and community career fairs that are open to Arts and Sciences students is found at: <http://asc-careersuccess.osu.edu>. To find the locations of recruitment events held outside of central Ohio you can check <http://www.nationalcareerfairs.com> and/or contact universities in your target city to see if they permit students/grads from other schools to attend their scheduled events.

"Career Fairs are a terrific way for members of the Center of Science and Industry Team to meet prospective internship volunteers. In the span of a few minutes, both students and organization/company reps can share career interests and opportunities to see if a match is possible. An exchange of position descriptions and resumes can occur with a more thorough review later."

Recruiter, Center of Science and Industry
Columbus, Ohio

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