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Job Fair Preparation

Provided by



North Idaho College

Career Services

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UPCOMING JOB FAIR: April 26, 2017 from 10-2 at Real Life Ministries.

This event will be full of employers and you can stop and shop at the ones that may interest you.

Even if they have no current openings that are of interest to you, the connection could provide opportunities for the future.

Plan on having a conversation with the hiring representative there. Think about what you'll say.

Prepare

The National Association of Colleges and Employers asked employers what advice they would give to a student going to a job fair. Every single one said that students need to **prepare** properly - employers describe proper preparation. The employers' answers fell into four categories as they recommended that students:

- **Research the organizations in which you are interested**
- **Dress appropriately**
- **Bring a well-written resume**
- **Have a strong introduction**

Have a Game Plan When You Enter the Job Fair

1. Review the floor plan
2. Prioritize employers of interest
3. Prepare mentally and physically (get plenty of rest)
4. Know your resume
5. Know yourself
6. Know what you want to achieve with each company representative (let the representative know what you're interested in)

Attitude

- Polite - Don't interrupt the employer representatives or fellow job-Seekers
- Sincerity always wins
- If you have a real interest in an employer, find out the procedures required to secure an interview
- Communication - Don't just drop your resume on employer's display table

Research

- Be aware of which companies will be there, and which ones you'd like to talk with most. Focus on only a few.
- If you know nothing about a company, find out. Look them up on their web site, or use the tips on "Researching Employers."
- At least read the job fair handout the day of the fair while you're walking in and learn about participating companies and organizations before you approach recruiters. One recruiter advises to please avoid saying:
 "So, tell me about your company..." I don't mind telling you about my company or about the job opportunities that are available, but I do mind having to do all the work. I have to think you're a really lazy person if you don't know anything about the company. It's okay to ask pertinent questions, but don't expect the recruiters to do the work for you."
- To maximize the brief time you have with each employer, you need to know how your skills and interests match their needs.

Research companies to obtain information in each of the following categories:

- Organizational overview: age, size, financial outlook, growth, and structure
- Competitors
- Location of plants, offices, stores, subsidiaries
- Trends/issues in the industry
- Mission, philosophy, objectives
- Public or private or foreign-owned
- Products and/or services
- Names of key executives
- Sales, assets, earnings
- Current challenges
- Major achievements, activity, issues, news
- Career paths, training, benefits
- Company culture
- Growth history and current growth activity

Dress

- Dress as though you were going to a job interview – at least business casual (see below). Dress very conservatively – subdued and nice. Remove piercings, any large bright jewelry.
- Try to leave your book bag in your car and carry only a padfolio, folder, or small briefcase with your resumes, a tablet to write on, at least two pens or pencils, and any other information you might need to fill out applications.

Business Casual Attire –Adapted from
<http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/BusinessCasualAttire.html>

Business Casual Guidelines for Men and Women

Business casual is crisp, neat, and should look appropriate even for a chance meeting with a CEO. It should not look like cocktail or party or picnic attire. Avoid tight or baggy clothing; business casual is classic rather than trendy.

Specifics for Men's Business Casual

- Basics** Khaki pants, neatly pressed, and a pressed long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirt are safe for both men and women. Polo shirts, unwrinkled, are an appropriate choice if you know the environment will be quite casual, outdoors or in a very hot location. This may not seem like terribly exciting attire, but you are not trying to stand out for your cutting edge look, but for your good judgment in a business environment.
- Shoes / belt** Wear a leather belt and leather shoes (matching if possible). Athletic shoes are inappropriate.
- Cost / quality** You are not expected to be able to afford the same clothing as a corporate CEO. However, do invest in quality that will look appropriate during your first two or three years on the job for a business casual environment or occasions.
- Details** Everything should be clean, well pressed, and not show wear. Even the nicest khakis after 100 washings may not be your best choice for a reception. Carefully inspect new clothes for tags, and all clothes for dangling threads, etc. (as with interview attire).
- Use common sense** If there are six inches of snow on the ground and/or you are rushing to get to an information session between classes and you left home 12 hours earlier, no one will expect you to show up looking ready for a photo shoot – they'll just be happy you made it. Just avoid wearing your worst gym clothes and jeans. If you show up at an event and realize you're not as well dressed as you should be, make a quick, pleasant apology and make a good impression with your interpersonal skills and intelligent questions.
- Ties** Ties are generally not necessary for business casual, but if you are in doubt, you can wear a tie. It never hurts to slightly overdress; by dressing nicely, you pay a compliment to your host. You can always wear the tie and discreetly walk by the room where the function is held; if no one else is wearing a tie, you can discreetly remove yours.
- Shirts** Long-sleeved shirts are considered dressier than short-sleeved and are appropriate even in summer. Choosing white or light blue solid, or conservative stripes is your safest bet. Polo shirts (tucked in, of course) are acceptable in more casual situations.
- Socks** Wear dark socks, mid-calf length so no skin is visible when you sit down.

Shoes Leather shoes should be worn. No sandals, athletic shoes or hiking boots.

Facial hair Just as with interviews: Facial hair, if worn, should be well-groomed. Know your industry and how conservative it is; observe men in your industry if you are unsure what's appropriate or are considering changing your look.

Jewelry Wear a conservative watch. If you choose to wear other jewelry, be conservative. Removing earrings is safest. For conservative industries, don't wear earrings. Observe other men in your industry to see what is acceptable.

Specifics for Women's Business Casual

Don't confuse club attire with business attire. If you would wear it to a club, you probably shouldn't wear it in a business environment.

Pants / Skirts: Women can wear casual pants or skirts. Neither should be tight. Fabrics should be crisp; colors should generally be solid; navy, black, gray, brown and khaki are always safe bets. For the most business-like appearance, pants should be creased and tailored; neither extreme of tight or flowing. If you are pursuing a conservative industry and are in doubt, observe well-dressed women in your industry on the job, at career fairs, at information sessions, etc.

Skirt Length and Slits Your skirt should come at least to your knees while you are standing. While you are seated, your thighs should be covered. If your skirt comes to just below the knee, a slit to just above the knee might be acceptable. A very long skirt should not be slit to above the knee. Generally slits in the center back of a skirt — to facilitate walking or stair climbing — are acceptable. Slits to facilitate a view of your legs are not appropriate for business purposes. Slits should not be visible.

Shirt / Sweaters In addition to tailored shirts or blouses, tailored knit sweaters and sweater sets are appropriate business casual choices for women. Cotton, silk, and blends are appropriate. Velvets and shimmery fabrics suitable for parties are not appropriate. Fit should not be tight. Cleavage is not appropriate to business and job search occasions.

Jewelry / Accessories Wear a conservative watch. Jewelry and scarf styles come and go. Keep your choices simple and leaning toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style and color. If your industry is creative, you may have more flexibility than someone pursuing a conservative industry.

- Cosmetics** Keep makeup conservative and natural looking. A little is usually better than none for a polished look. Nails should be clean and well groomed. Avoid extremes of nail length and polish color, especially in conservative industries.
- Shoes** Should be leather or fabric / microfiber. Appropriate colors are black, navy and brown (to coordinate with your other attire and accessories); white and pastels are not appropriate. For the most conservative look, toes should be covered. Sandals which are neither extremely dressy nor extremely casual might be appropriate. Thin straps and high heels are not appropriate. Chunky heels and platforms are not appropriate. Make certain you can walk comfortably in your shoes; hobbling around a job fair in shoes that are pinching your feet does not convey a professional image.
- Hose** Not essential for business casual, but are recommended if your skirt is knee length (rather than calf length) and in more formal environments such as hotels.
- Purse / Bag** If you carry a purse, keep it small and simple. Purse color should coordinate with your shoes. A briefcase is certainly not necessary for most business casual events. You may choose to carry a small briefcase or business-like tote bag in place of a purse. Leather, microfiber, and fine wovens are appropriate. Canvas and straw are not appropriate.

Grooming Tips for Men and Women

- **Hair:** Should be clean and neat.
- **Shoes:** Should be in polished condition. Make sure heels are not worn.
- **Details:** No missing buttons, no lint; and don't forget to remove external tags and tacking stitches from new clothes.
- **Hands:** Clean fingernails.
- **Fit:** Clothes should be clean, neatly pressed, and fit properly, neither tight nor baggy.
- **Smell:** Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly or not at all.
No odors on clothes.
Don't smell like smoke.
- **Padfolios:** Preferred over a bulky briefcase. A small briefcase is also appropriate, but if you have no reason to carry a briefcase, don't; you risk looking silly.

What to Bring

1. Bring a well-written resume.

- Be sure to bring copies of your resume (25-40 copies polished and well-reviewed by others). Be sure it represents your knowledge, skills, and abilities effectively. See Career Services resume handout or look online at www.nic.edu/career Step3.
- If you are interested in a variety of positions, you may want to bring multiple copies of different types of resumes.
- Some employers will expect you to complete their job applications while you are at the job fair, so be sure to bring information that may not be included on your resume. Information may include:
 - Addresses and telephone numbers of former employers
 - Addresses and dates of attendance for high school and other schools
 - Contact information for references

2. Have a Strong Introduction

Approach an employer, smile, and offer your hand when you introduce yourself and deliver a strong handshake (not limp, not crushing). Maintain eye contact and a positive attitude. First impressions are important.

Present your resume. Plan an introduction of yourself and practice it before the Job Fair. You'll project confidence and charisma during your introduction if you are comfortable with what you are saying. Remember, the words that you say are just part of your presentation package to potential employers. Your overall manner and confidence are also crucial components to the successful introduction. Of course, your confidence and personality should be obvious, but not in an exaggerated or cocky way...just a professional one. Incorporate positive nonverbal communications, such as eye contact, facial expressions, body language, posture, etc. A mirror, a friend, and/or a career services staff member are all good practice partners. Ask for constructive criticism and try it again. Practice, practice, practice. A solid introduction will help you move on to the important next step---the interview.

You should try to impress recruiters within the first few minutes of conversation. The problem is that others will also be trying to talk with those recruiters. If you talk too long, you'll create a bottleneck in the flow of traffic. If you see disgruntled fellow students behind you waiting to introduce themselves to the recruiter, move on. This is not the interview. You can impress employers at other times.

Tailor your introduction to each employer based on good research and knowledge of each company---this will generally impress recruiters. Tell them how you'll fit with the company based upon your research.

Be sure to bring energy! Job 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!

Provide the Following Information During Your Introduction:

1. Name
2. Class (freshman, sophomore)
3. Whether you're interested in a full-time, co-op, or internship position
4. Major - Career interests
5. Opportunities that you are seeking
6. Relevant experience (work, internship, volunteer work)
7. Highlights of skills and strengths
8. Knowledge of the company (why you came to this company's table). For example, you can say *"I heard that XYZ is pursuing a business strategy that includes merging business units to create more synergy. I think that is a really strategic move."*

Sample Job Fair Introductions

"Hello, I'm Carrie Jones. I'm a sophomore here at North Idaho College 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."

"Hello. My name is Kathy Thompson and I am a sophomore economics major at North Idaho College. I noticed on Acme Financial's web site that you have openings for financial managers, and I am interested in a position in this capacity. Last summer, I had an internship with Johnson Financial and was able to participate in a variety of company operations. The most interesting project I worked on was redesigning the company's service demonstration events for the Southern California region. This was invaluable training because it afforded me greater insight into the finance industry and allowed me to show my ability as a team player. Perhaps best of all, it confirmed my desire to become a financial manager for a top-10 firm, such as Acme Financial. I have been following your company's expansion into the greater Los Angeles area in the L.A. Times. I also read in Acme Financial's annual report that it is considering establishing operations elsewhere in Southern California. Could you tell me more about this proposed expansion? Could you also tell me about your financial management training program?"

Ask an Engaging Question

End your introduction by asking a focused question that will engage the employer in conversation. Focus on a few companies and prepare questions specific to the companies you're most interested in. HR analyst for the Pennsylvania Department of

Transportation, said he often remembers students by the questions they ask during job fairs. Examples:

- *“Could you tell me more about the new (product) you are developing?”*
- *“Could you tell me more about your financial management training program?”*
- *“I understand that company XYZ is interested in opening a branch in ABC. Do you think that will expand its overall product mix?”*
 - Or you could ask – when you give them your resume, what the next step in the process is.

Common Mistakes

- Asking what the company does
- Asking if the company has any jobs
- When asked what type of position you are seeking, saying you would be willing to do anything at the company. Saying, "I'll take anything" or "I don't know" when asked about interests shows a lack of focus. (Tip: Seek the expertise of career counselors at your career center or consider careers related to your major.)
- Dressing unprofessionally or in casual clothing.
- Lacking a resume to leave with interested employers.
- Confusing a company with its competitor or not knowing anything about a company.
- Lacking enthusiasm or interest in a company or job opportunities.
- Asking about salary.
- Asking inappropriate questions, not asking questions, having a poor or unprofessional attitude. (Tip: Your career center probably has examples of good questions to ask.)
- Grabbing free stuff.
- Lacking communication skills, including not making eye contact and having a weak handshake.
- Coming during the last half hour of the event. Many employers come 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!
- Don't skirt the GPA issue. If you're asked, tell the recruiter your cumulative and/or semester GPA. If you aren't sure, say what you think it is. Give them some idea. If your GPA is not stellar it may not matter, but let them know honestly.
- Don't cruise the booths with a group of friends. Interact with the recruiters on your own. Make your own positive impression!
- Avoid having your phone out and be sure it is set to silent. Be fully attentive to the person to whom you are speaking.
- Try not to use your phone to access information while speaking with a recruiter (have printed copies of that information available).

Questions to Ask During a Job Fair

(Adapted from Portland Community College and Quintessential Careers by Randall S. Hansen)

Here are some suggestions for questions to have ready to demonstrate both interest in the company and dedication to your career plans. Tailor the questions you ask to your career interests, goals, knowledge of the company and how much time you have with the recruiter. Try to avoid asking questions that are answered in the company's annual report or employment brochure. Recruiters know when you haven't done your homework!

- My major is _____ (fill in your major), what advice would you give a student about to graduate with this degree?
- What do I need to know about the application process?
- I went online and filled out your application for the _____ (fill in with job you have applied for) and I am really interested in _____ (employer name) and was curious what else I might do to help me get a foot in the door?
- Are there some specific skills, work experience or educational background that can make me more competitive for the _____ (position name)?, or
- What kinds of skills and experience do you look for in the employees you hire?
- Can you suggest anything I can do to improve my chances of employment with your company?
- What are the characteristics of your most successful employees?
- What are the primary results a person in this position would be expected to achieve?
- What percentage of time would be devoted to each of the responsibilities of the position?
- What challenges and opportunities are associated with the position?
- How does your organization train its new employees? What opportunities does your company offer for individual professional development?
- How does the company measure performance? How often are performance reviews given?
- What are the backgrounds of other employees in your company or department?
- Are graduate degrees important to advancing within your organization? Which ones?
- Which courses or experiences do you suggest to be a successful candidate?
- Can you describe the corporate culture?
- Are internships available?
- Are there specific career tracks within the organization? In other words, what can a typical employee (for the position I am seeking) hired in your division expect to be doing 2, 5, or 10 years after hiring?
- For how many years does the typical employee stay with the company?
- Do you expect your employees to relocate? How much travel is involved?
- How many people are employed within your _____ department?
- What are the projections for future changes within your organization?
- What is unique about your organization?
- May I have your business card?

A job fair is a two-way street and you should be evaluating these companies as much as they are evaluating you. Every contact with an employer is an interview, the job fair is an

opportunity to find out more about what the employers you are interested in are looking for in potential candidates.

Recruiter Information

Some experts advise not asking the recruiter personal questions relating to his or her job, but especially if the recruiter is an alum of your university -- or you have some other personal connection -- these questions are fine. Even if there is no connection, these questions can be asked -- and their answers can provide you with some critical insights.

- What made you choose this company and why do you stay?
- How long have you been with the company?
- What's the one thing that most surprised you about this company?
- Tell me about your job. What do you like and dislike about it?

Follow-Up

What to Take Home From the Job Fair (Sally Kearsley – NACE)

- **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.
- **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!
- **Information about organizations** you have contacted. Most recruiters will have information for you to pick up, including company brochures, computer CD's, position descriptions, and other data. You won't have time to deal with these at the fair!
- **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.
- **Self-confidence** in interacting with employer representatives. A job 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.

Follow-Up from Your Job Fair Experience

- Most employers said they follow up with students within two to four weeks after the job fair to request an interview.
- They also expect some kind of follow-up from you-a cover letter, phone call, or a completed job application. A handwritten thank you note always stands out. This follow-up may help determine whether or not you are offered an interview.

Time spent at a job fair pays off. It's your chance to see many of the career opportunities that are open to you and you may connect with potential employers who, ultimately, can offer you a job.

If you make a favorable impression, you are more likely to be invited to interview.

Researching Employers

(Adapted from Alicia Bervine, Anne Orange, & Jennifer Whetstone-Jackson)

Researching employers is perhaps the single-most important activity you will undertake in your job search. The information you uncover can help you:

- Discover organizations that are a good match for you
- Identify the organization's goals and needs
- Tailor your resume and cover letter to highlight your skills and experiences that match the employer's needs
- Know what questions to ask employers
- Demonstrate your interest in and enthusiasm for the organization
- Answer interview questions with confidence
- Make an informed employment decision

Unfortunately, many students overlook the importance of research when undertaking a job search or looking for an internship. In fact, it's common for employers to complain that potential job candidates haven't "done their homework," and instead come into the interview with little or no knowledge about the organization. These candidates flounder, asking questions that could be easily answered by a cursory look at the company website or literature. Needless to say, they make a poor impression, because employers often assume lack of research means lack of interest.

For Specific Industries or Sectors, See:

- *ThomasNet.com*, for brief information about manufacturers in 67,000 categories in the United States and Canada.
- *GuideStar.org*, for brief information on more than 1.8 million U.S. nonprofit organizations.
- *Idealist.org*, for information on 71,000+ nonprofit organizations worldwide.
- *USA.gov*, for a list of federal agencies (click on "Find Government Agencies" on the home page).
- *USChamber.com*, for a list of employer members (click on Chambers and then "Chamber Directory").

Don't forget the resources available in your campus career center: Check your career center for information about employers that recruit at your school. Finally, this list of resources is a *starting* point; never underestimate the power of a search engine. Simply "Google" the name of the organization you are interested in and see what information and news is returned!

Other Research Resources

Start with the organization's website.

Well-constructed and comprehensive sites will have abundant information, and for the sites that are not as comprehensive, it is still important to learn what is there. This is what the organization deems most important for you to know.

Look at university libraries' research databases.

These will have information not available elsewhere for free, including financials, industries, market news, trade data, and more. Choose the business databases for information for the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Some of the most relevant databases are Hoovers.com, Dun & Bradstreet Million Dollar Directory, Thomson One, Business Source Premier, IBISWorld, and Mergent Online.

Check your public library.

Public libraries have online research tools available free with a library card. In the business category, you may find ReferenceUSA, with information for more than 20 million U.S. companies, including nonprofit organizations. Speak to a reference librarian for additional options to research organizations.

Look at social networking sites, including LinkedIn.

LinkedIn has become a leading source of inside information about organizations.

- On LinkedIn, find companies of interest and once found, click on the "Follow" tab to receive updates posted by the company.
- Join groups related to any career interest appealing to you.
- Contribute to discussions and connect with other members.
- Use the advanced search to find alumni working in companies in which you are interested.

Try the Employer Locator on Careeronestop.

Go to www.acinet.org; under Career Tools Guide, click on "Employer Locator." This is a U.S. government database of nearly 12 million U.S. employers with brief information about each. It's a good resource for finding employers in a specific industry in a particular geographical location.

Look for small, independent companies in the local newspaper.

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Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).