

# Career Fairs: Tips to Fare Well



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A career fair can make your job search much easier. It gives you the opportunity to meet recruiters from dozens of companies -- all in one place over only a few hours.

But career fairs have their own special set of challenges. Impressing all those recruiters from all those companies requires a lot of preparation, practice, skill and stamina.

Simply put, a career fair is a lot like a job interview -- multiplied many times over.

Read on to learn how you can plan a strategy to survive, and even shine, at career fairs.

## **Do Your Homework, Plan Your Attack**

What you do BEFORE a career fair can be just as important as what you do when you get there. So what should you do? Your homework.

Most career fairs publicize a list of companies, along with their industries, that will be attending the fair.

Review this list and highlight the companies that interest you. Then, make a list of companies you want to speak with in order of importance. You want to make sure you speak with your top choices first in case you run out of time.

Research each company you plan to approach. Write down some key points about each, and bring them with you. If you have your research handy, you can refer to it to refresh your memory. Take a quick look at its key facts before you approach a company's booth at the fair.

## **Practice ... And Practice Again**

You're at a career fair. You walk up to a recruiter, smile and say ...

"Ummmm .... Hi ... How are ya? ..."

That's probably not the polished, confident approach that'll get you a job.

The first 10 seconds are often the most important. So you need to make a strong first impression.

Prepare your introduction in advance. Practice how you'll greet a recruiter (complete with smile and handshake) in front of a mirror at home. You should also prepare a 60-second summary that explains your basic skills and experience along with what type of job you're seeking.

Practice both your introduction and your summary until you no longer sound rehearsed, but natural. It's even

a good idea to try them out on a friend.

### **Wear Your Ambition on Your Sleeve**

If you're confused about what to wear to a career fair, don't be. The answer is easy: A suit.

You should dress just as professionally for a career fair as you would for an interview at a company. That means wearing a suit in a basic color, like black or navy, and conservative shoes. Men should wear a tie; women should wear stockings.

It's also a good idea to call the venue holding the fair and ask if they have a coatroom. You don't want to have to lug around a heavy winter coat or wet raincoat unexpectedly.

Not only do you want to look professional, but you'll need your hands free for all that recruiter handshaking. So if the venue doesn't offer a place to store your belongings, bring only what you absolutely need. Leave large tote bags, shopping bags and lunch bags at home.

### **Resumes: Don't Leave Home Without 'Em**

How many resumes should you bring to a career fair?

Ten? Fifty? One hundred ...?

Well, that depends on how big the fair is and how many companies there interest you. But follow this rule of thumb: Bring many more resumes than you think you'll need. You don't want to find yourself halfway through the career fair and realize that you've run out.

If you have more than one version of your resume (say, one version for sales jobs and another for marketing jobs), bring copies of both. After talking with the recruiter, you can decide which resume is most appropriate.