

Many employers use career fairs—both on and off campus—to promote their opportunities and to pre-screen applicants. There are many types of Career Fairs from small community-sponsored events to giant regional career expositions held at major convention centers, some are even based online.

Most career fairs consist of booths and/or tables manned by recruiters and/or representatives from each organization. For on-campus events, some employers also send alumni representatives. The booth or tables typically have some sort of business information sheets, such as business cards or brochures. Other booths may contain extravagant multimedia displays, videos, posters and swag.

Fashions and Accessories

Generally, the appropriate attire for career fair attendees is more relaxed than what you'd wear to an actual job interview. In most cases, "business casual" is the norm. If you're unsure of the dress code (particularly for off-campus events), it would be wise to err on the overdressed side—you'll make a better impression if you appear professional. Think of it as a dress rehearsal for your real interviews!

Remember to bring copies of your resume (or resumes, if you have several versions tailored to different career choices), a few pens and pencils (have backups—they have a way of disappearing), a folder or portfolio and some sort of note-taking device (paper or electronic pad). Keep track of the recruiters with whom you speak and send follow-up notes to the ones who interest you. Don't bring your backpack; it's cumbersome for you, it gets in the way of others and it screams "student!" instead of "candidate!"

Stop, Look and Listen

Keep your eyes and ears open—there's nothing wrong with subtly eavesdropping on the questions asked and answers received by your fellow career fair attendees. You might pick up some valuable information, in addition to witnessing some real-life career search "dos and don'ts."

In order to maximize your career fair experience, you must be an active participant and not just a browser. If all you do is stroll around, take company literature and load up on the freebies, you really haven't accomplished anything worthwhile. It is essential to chat with the company representatives and ask meaningful questions.

Create a 30-second infomercial to make yourself stand out to an employer. Your 30-second script will introduce yourself, tie your background to the organization's and state your knowledge of and interest in the organization. Your infomercial might require you to do some research prior to the career fair about companies you are interested in visiting, to make sure your spiel is relevant. Career Services lists the companies attending on their website under the Career Fair section.

You're a Prospector—Start Digging

The questions you ask at a career fair depend upon your goals. Are you interested in finding out about a particular career field? Then ask generalized questions about working within the industry. If you're seeking career opportunities with a specific employer, focus your questions on the application and interview process, and ask for specific information about that employer.

Fair Thee Well

By all means, try to attend at least one career fair before beginning your formal job interviewing process. For new entrants into the professional career marketplace, this is a good way to make the transition into "self-marketing mode" without the formality and possible intimidation of a one-on-one job interview.

5 Rules for Career Fair Etiquette

1. Don't interrupt the employer reps or your fellow job-seekers. If someone else is monopolizing the employer's time, try to make eye contact with the rep to let him or her know that you're interested in speaking. If all else fails, move to the next exhibit and plan to come back later.
2. If you have a real interest in an employer, find out the procedures required to secure an interview. Some employers at the career fair do initial screening interviews on the spot. Other times, the career fair is used to pre-screen applicants for interviews to be conducted later (either on campus or at the employer's site).
3. Sincerity always wins. Don't lay it on too thick, but don't be too nonchalant either. Virtually all employers are looking for candidates with good communication skills.
4. Don't just drop your resume on employers' display tables. Try to get it into a person's hands and at least say a few words. If the scene is too busy and you can't get a word in edgewise, jot a note on your resume to the effect of, "You were so busy that we didn't get a chance to meet. I'm very interested in talking to you." Look around the display for the recruiter's business card, or at the very least, write down his or her name and get some literature with the company's address, and send a follow-up note and another copy of your resume.
5. If you know ahead of time that one of your "dream companies" is a career fair participant, do some prior research. A little advance preparation goes a long way and can make you stand out among the masses of other attendees.

Career Fairs might seem overwhelming, but they can actually be FUN. Employers are truly excited to meet (and hire) OSU students. Career Fairs are a great opportunity for ALL students to meet employers, and learn about potential jobs/internships/careers. Here is a list of things you can do to make the fair a fun and successful event.

Before the Fair

- **Research** the companies who will be attending the fair and the majors they are looking for.
- Develop **informed questions** to ask of each employer you are interested in. Questions such as “I’m interested in the management training program at XYZ; can you describe an ideal candidate for this program?” or “Could you tell me more about your internship programs?” are much more effective than “So... what does your company do?”
- Create a **game plan**. Decide how much time you have to spend at the fair and prioritize your time accordingly.
- Create a competitive, “**get noticed**” **resume**. Visit the Career Services Office to have your resume reviewed during drop-in hours: Monday through Thursday 1-4 pm, in the basement of Kerr. Do not forget to make copies!
- **Register** with Beaver JobNet, the Career Services online job/internship database. Many employers will be looking to interview students they meet at the fair, and you can only register for interviews if you are on Beaver JobNet.
- Prepare a **30 second infomercial**. You have 30 seconds to make yourself stand out to an employer. Create a script that introduces you, states your knowledge of/interest in the organization and relates your background to the position(s) in which you are interested. Include your name, class, major, relevant experiences, skills/strengths, and opportunities you are seeking with an employer.

During the Fair

- **Dress Professionally**. Career Fairs require the same attention to attire as an interview; in essence they are your first interview. If unsure what to wear, it’s better to overdress than under dress. Dark suits are always appropriate and wear comfortable shoes!
- **Leave your backpack** and coat at home, or use the coat check at the fair.
- **Sign in** at the Registration Table at the entrance.
- Have an **open mind**. Approach lesser-known employers to discover their potential for your professional development or “out of the box” divisions that may help you begin your career.
- **Be independent**. Approach employers on your own, even if you came with a friend.
- **Don’t be afraid of the recruiter**. Approach him/her with confidence, remembering all the prep you’ve done! Employers come because they want to talk to you!
- Greet each employer with a **firm handshake**, a **positive attitude** and **eye contact**.
- **Be patient**. Don’t interrupt the employer or jump into a conversation he/she is having with someone else. Wait your turn and listen for valuable information.
- **Put your resume in the recruiter’s hands**; don’t leave it on the table. Take time to market yourself with your infomercial.
- **Be sincere**. Don’t overstate your abilities, but DO let the recruiter know what you have to offer.
- **Don’t monopolize** the recruiter’s time. Market yourself, make a good impression, and let the next person do the same!
- **Close the deal!** Inquire about obtaining further information, take a business card, and find out what the next step is (company visit, setting up an interview, etc.)

After the Fair

- **Follow up with employers** Write a thank you email, emphasizing a key point from your conversation at the Fair. Reiterate your interest in the company/position, and include your resume.
- **Practice your interviewing skills**. Stop by Career Services to speak with a career counselor or schedule a mock interview and find out what you can do to prepare for a successful interview!