

Career Fair Networking Guide

Take advantage of this opportunity to meet employers and alumni who want to talk to you about their occupations and employment opportunities. Gather information on career options, develop a network of contacts, identify job and internship openings, or secure an interview.

Use these tips to network at a Career Fair.

- ◆ **Dress professionally:** Employers will make decisions based on first impressions.
- ◆ **Expand your focus:** Approach employers that appear unrelated to your major. Technical companies offer non-technical positions, and vice-versa. A technical company may have openings in human resources, marketing, public relations or accounting. Employers do look for candidates with a strong liberal arts background and internship experience.
- ◆ **Communicate your purpose:** If you are looking for a job, state the type of position that interests you. If you are gathering information, tell employers you are exploring career options and are interested in learning about them.
- ◆ **Make a strong first impression:** When meeting employers, introduce yourself, offer a firm handshake, make eye contact, state your purpose, ask questions, listen and act professionally. ***If you plan to request an interview, dress in business attire.***
- ◆ **Highlight your strengths:** Be prepared to discuss your qualifications that are most related to the job. Include clear, concise examples to demonstrate your qualifications. Practice your verbal presentation (a 30-60 second “commercial” about you) so you can approach employers with confidence.
- ◆ **Bring your resume:** Bring enough resumes to give to organizations you are targeting. Carry them in a portfolio. Omit the objective to expand your options.
- ◆ **Ask questions:** Use questions to increase your knowledge of industry trends, job options and career paths. Try these questions:
 - ⇒ What entry-level positions in (your career interest) are available in your organization?
 - ⇒ What kind of background do you look for when filling these positions?
 - ⇒ How do you see this field changing over the next five years?
 - ⇒ What advice would you give me if I wanted to break into this field?
 - ⇒ How did you get involved with this industry/organization? What keeps you involved?
- ◆ **Follow-up:** Request a business card for your records. If you want a job interview, follow up with a thank-you note or e-mail within 24 hours and include your resume.

To view a list of participating organizations, visit <http://career.sdsu.edu>

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Follow the Formula

College career counselors and employers alike suggest following a formula for your introduction. According to them, students should provide the following information during their introduction:

- Name
- Class (senior, junior, sophomore)
- Major
- Opportunities that you are seeking
- Relevant experience (work, internship, volunteer work)
- Highlights of skills and strengths
- Knowledge of the company

Tailor your introduction to each employer based on good research and knowledge of each company—this will generally impress recruiters. Ted Bouras, director of the Grainger Center for Supply Chain Management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Business School, says you should articulate how you'll fit with the company based upon your research.

Do your research before the career fair. A list of employers attending is usually available prior to the event through the career services office. Most companies have web sites that provide information about their products and services. Other resources such as annual reports, press releases, and newspaper coverage are also very helpful and can usually be found on the Internet or in the library with a little digging.

Ask an Engaging Question

Tracey Cross-Baker, associate director of career services and leadership education at St. Lawrence University, suggests that you end your introduction by asking a focused question that will engage the employer in conversation. Robert Jankouskas, human resources analyst for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, said he often remembers students by the questions they ask during career fairs.

Cross-Baker suggests asking: "Could you tell me more about the new (product) you are developing?" or "Could you tell me more about your financial management training program?"

Several things career services counselors and employers say you should **avoid** doing include:

- Asking what the company does;
- Asking if the company has any jobs; and
- When asked what type of position you are seeking, saying you would be willing to do anything at the company.

Here's a sample introduction from a fictional college senior at Catalina College's annual career fair. She is an economics major and is about to speak with a recruiter from the Acme Financial Corp.

Hello. My name is Kathy Thompson and I am a senior economics major at Catalina 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?