

OZARKS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Career Employment Services Guide to Career Fair Success



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What is a Career Fair?

Whether or not you are looking for a job, a career fair is a great place for you to:

- ❑ Conduct company research
- ❑ Explore numerous career opportunities
- ❑ Make personal contacts that can lead to a job
- ❑ Gather information from potential employers
- ❑ Find out what an employer values in its employees
- ❑ Demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively

10 Tips for Career Fair Success

1. **Dress** in a conservative and professional manner. Be considerate of others when using perfume and aftershave.
2. **Bring** along a portfolio with copies of your résumé, a list of references, a pen (that works) and a notepad; a smile, a strong handshake, a positive attitude; and a 30-second "sales pitch" about your skills, abilities, education and experience.
3. **Research the companies** that will be represented at the fair and prioritize your favorites. Visit several other companies first to gain confidence and reduce anxiety. See a list of companies at www.collegecentral.com/otcfair.
4. **Prepare** a list of questions, based on research, to ask company representatives.
5. **Review** your résumé to reacquaint yourself with your educational background and work history.

6. **Prepare** an opening statement or greeting. Employers respond well to individuals who appear confident and focused on a specific career goal. Make eye contact with the person to whom you are speaking.

7. **Be courteous** and respectful of the privacy of other candidates when approaching an employer.

8. **Talk** with many employers. Take this opportunity to **gather information** about the company and the career field(s) they target, as well as employment opportunities.

9. Before leaving an employer, ask for his/her business card. **Write notes** regarding the topics you discussed on the back of the card.

10. After the fair, **follow up** on all leads. Send thank you notes to the recruiters to whom you spoke and reiterate your interest in a position with their company.

Courtesy of Parkland College, Champaign, IL.

Sell Yourself at the Career Fair

5 Things to Take to the Career Fair

1. Copies of your résumé-it needs to look professional.
2. A smile, a strong handshake, and a positive attitude.
3. A 30-second "sales pitch". See *Perform a One-Minute Miracle* for ways to sell your skills and abilities.
4. Information about the organizations attending the fair.
5. Energy! Keep moving with your best foot forward.

5 Things Not to Do at the Career Fair

1. Don't cruise the booths with a group of friends.
2. Don't carry your backpack, large purse, or other paraphernalia with you.
3. Don't come dressed too casually! A career fair is a professional activity. Make a good first impression.
4. Don't "wing it" with employers. Do your homework. Research the company.
5. Don't come during the last half hour of the event.

5 Things to Take Home from the Career Fair

1. Business cards to write follow-up letters.
2. Notes about the contacts you made during the career fair.
3. Information you gathered from participating companies.
4. A better sense of career options.
5. Self-confidence in interacting with representatives.

Perform a One-Minute Miracle

Career services practitioners recommend drafting an introduction as a brief "commercial" that allows you to promote yourself at career fairs, interviews, or other networking opportunities.

Follow the Formula

Provide the following information during your introduction:

- Name
- Class (high school, freshman, sophomore, graduate)
- Major/degree
- 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.

Ask Engaging Questions

Recruiters are there to provide you with information, so feel free to ask them about any concerns you might have. The following are suggested topics and questions to discuss with the various employers and/or schools at a career fair.

- ❑ What are your fields of greatest need and do you anticipate these needs changing over the next few years?
- ❑ What kind of things can I do while in school to make myself more competitive in the job market?
- ❑ Do you hire college students for co-ops, internships or summer employment? How do I apply for these opportunities?
- ❑ What kinds of career opportunities are available for people with my degree and skills?
- ❑ What qualities are you looking for in new hires?
- ❑ What opportunities do you currently have available?
- ❑ What are your future hiring plans?
- ❑ What type of training do you offer new hires?

- ❑ What geographic locations do you hire for?
- ❑ What are your policies concerning transferring and relocation?
- ❑ Identify typical career paths based on past records. What is the realistic timeframe for advancement?
- ❑ Are your starting salaries competitive with the industry and area? What range are they currently?
- ❑ What makes your organization different from its competitors?
- ❑ Describe the work environment at your organization.
- ❑ What characteristics do you see in successful people at your organization?
- ❑ What is the best way to apply for a position with your organization?

Questions to Avoid

What does your company do?

What can your company do for me?

How much does your company pay?

Does your company have any jobs available?

Practice to Perfection

Many career services practitioners recommend practicing your introduction. “Winging it” is not a very wise plan of action, especially when a potential job is at stake.

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 poise are also critical components to the successful introduction. Of course, self-confidence and personality should be obvious, but not in an exaggerated 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.

A solid introduction will help you move on to the important next step—the interview. A poor introduction, however, may put you on a slippery slope to the cutting room floor.

Sample Introduction

Hello. My name is Kathy Thompson and I am graduating with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Accounting at Ozarks Technical Community College this May. I noticed on Acme Financial's web site that you have openings for accounting clerks, 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 accounting forms. This was invaluable training because it afforded me greater insight into the accounting field and allowed me to show my ability as a team player. Perhaps best of all, it confirmed my desire to become an accounting clerk for a top-10 firm, such as Acme Financial. I have been following your company's expansion into the greater St. Louis area in the Post-Dispatch. I also read in Acme Financial's annual report that it is considering establishing operations elsewhere in southern Missouri. Could you tell me more about this proposed expansion? Could you also tell me about your accounting management training program?

Dress to Impress

What is Business Casual?

There are numerous opinions regarding what type of clothing falls within the category of business casual. Some companies consider khaki pants and short-sleeved polo shirts as business casual. Other organizations require slacks or skirts and long-sleeved shirts when they refer to business casual. Although there is a wide range of definitions for business casual, there are some general rules that apply:

- Jeans, tennis shoes, tight or short skirts, t-shirts and sweatshirts are never considered business casual.
- Business casual does not apply to grooming standards. Your appearance should remain neat and respectable. This includes nicely pressed clothing, polished shoes, and conservative accessories.

Business casual is defined by the geographic region, industry, and individual companies. The best way to determine a company's standard is to conduct research or ask a company's representative. As always, when in doubt, dress conservatively and lean more toward the business side rather than the casual side.

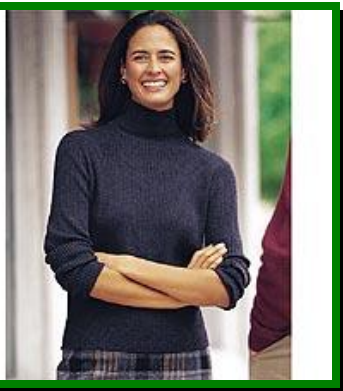
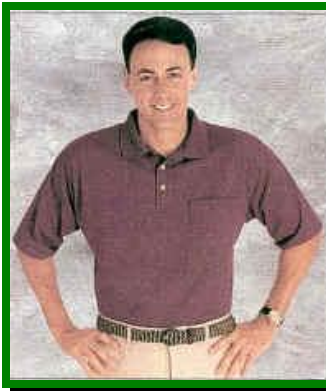
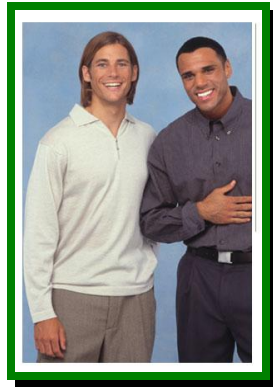
Appropriate Attire for Men

- Business or sports jacket is appropriate
- Stylish, solid colored pants, khakis, chinos, or trousers
- Necktie—based on industry expectations
- Long-sleeved solid or striped dark shirts with collars (polo-style or button down)
- Loafers with dark colored socks
- Matching belt and shoes

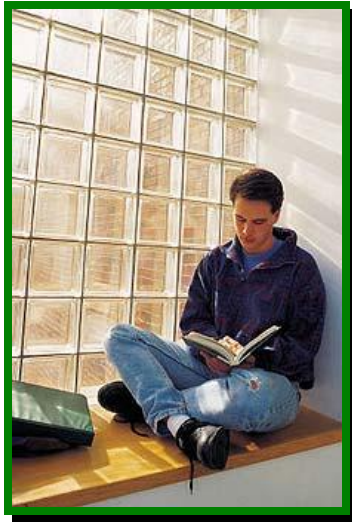
Appropriate Attire for Women

- Business skirt or pants
- Conservative blouse or sweater
- Blazer or vest is appropriate
- Flat or low heels
- Neutral hosiery
- Accessories should remain understated

Four Suggested Outfits



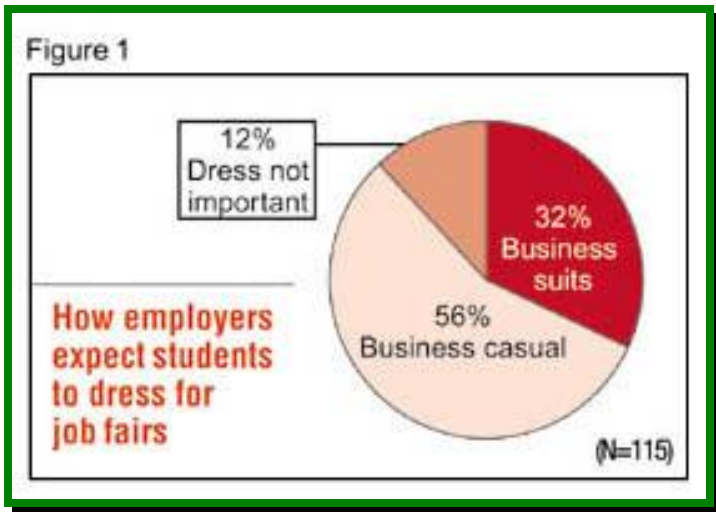
What Not to Wear



For other tips on making the most of the event click on:
www.collegecentral.com/otcfair/tips.cfm

Employer Expectations

(NACE Journal, Employer Expectations of Students Attending Career Fairs)



Most employers consider business casual to be appropriate attire for a career fair. To help create a good first impression, students usually can't go wrong by dressing for a career fair as if they were going for a job interview.

You already know how to dress neatly and demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively. But, recruiters say, the students that most impress them at career fairs are those who demonstrate a familiarity with the organization, have intelligent questions to ask, and have thought about the way they might fit into the organization.

Figure 6

Job fair no-nos for candidates according to employers

No. of responses

- | | |
|----|---|
| 18 | Lacking focus and not knowing what type of position to look for. Admitting "I'll take anything" or answering "I don't know" when asked about interests. |
| 17 | Not dressing neatly or professionally. |
| 16 | Not bringing a resume. |
| 8 | Lacking knowledge of a company and/or confusing the company with a competitor. |
| 7 | Lacking enthusiasm or interest in the company or job opportunities. |
| 6 | Asking about salary. |
| 5 | Not asking any questions, asking inappropriate questions, and having a poor or unprofessional attitude. |

Other student mistakes cited by several respondents included grabbing free stuff, not making eye contact, lacking communication skills, not being willing to relocate, not bringing a transcript or anything to write with or on, giving a weak handshake, and not taking time to fill out a job application.

(N=79. Some respondents gave more than one answer.)

Career Fair Notes