



Make a Positive First Impression at a Career Fair

THE BASICS

What is a Career Fair?

- An event where employers/recruiters and job seekers meet face-to-face
- Usually held in a large room or hall, where employer has a table staffed with representatives of the company
- A great place for students (or any job seeker) to gather information about potential employers and make contacts that can lead to an internship or a professional job

How Can I Get the Most Out of a Career Fair?

Your preparation will depend on your purpose. If you are in the early stages of your college career, you may be attending the Career Fair to become comfortable with the atmosphere including venue/location, types of employers, layout, etc. You will also practice introducing yourself to employers and asking appropriate questions. In this case, you will preview the employers who will be in attendance, prepare your 30-second elevator speech, and meet employers to explore future opportunities. Making a positive impression now can certainly set you up to succeed in the future! If you are in later stages of your college career and are seriously looking for an internship or a permanent, professional position, your approach will be more formal and more targeted. Review and practice the steps outlined below to get the results you are looking for.

BEFORE THE CAREER FAIR

Preparing before the Career Fair is the most important step in making a positive impression on employers. It shows that you are truly interested in their company and that you are knowledgeable about the industry.

Step 1. Update Your Résumé

Your résumé should be a concise summary of your education, experience, and skills. Providing a professional résumé will give employers an accurate picture of your background and abilities, and will help improve your in-person presence, as well. After reviewing your résumé, you should have a renewed appreciation for your accomplishments and the value you can bring to employers. Several (3-4) weeks before the Fair, have staff at UNK's Academic Advising and Career Development Office critique your résumé. Allow enough time to revise and polish it.

Step 2: Gather Information about the Career Fair

Login to Handshake to learn more details about the Fair including date, time, and location. Additionally, browse the AACD website to access information additional information about building your résumé, interviewing, and more.

Step 3. Research the Employers

Login to Handshake several days before the career fair to review the list of employers attending. You can find information including company bio, types of employment offered (part-time, full-time, internship), job titles, desired majors, reviews and advice from former employees and more. From here, you can decide which employers match your skills and experience. You can find more information on the employer's website including mission, customers served, where the company is located, and why you might want to work there. Take notes, and jot down questions you might want to ask the employer representatives. You will make a good impression on employers when you can speak intelligently about their companies, the opportunities they offer, and the qualifications you have that match their needs.

Pro Tip: Employers expect job seekers to know something about their company. They will not be impressed by questions such as “What does your company do?” or “What are the job duties for ____ position?”

Step 4. Develop your “30-Second Elevator Speech”

Be able to present yourself to potential employers concisely and confidently. Develop your elevator speech in four parts:

- Provide a greeting including your name and a brief background
- State your immediate purpose or career goal
- Demonstrate your research about the company
- Explain what you can contribute

Example:

“Hi, my name is ____ and I will be graduating in ____ with a degree in _____. After graduation I’m hoping to obtain a position in _____. I’m especially interested in your company because _____. Based on my experience in _____, I believe I can bring ____ to your organization.”

**Adapt to each company and for your particular purpose.*

Step 5: Prepare for a Mini-Interview

Many employers conduct short screening interviews with candidates at the Career Fair. To prepare, review and practice your responses to standard interview questions (you can find questions online, on the AACD website, and on Big Interview). A few common questions may include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are some of your strengths / weaknesses?
- What type of work experience do you have?
- How did you choose your major (or this particular field)?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What campus activities have you been involved in, and have you taken on any leadership roles?

The impression you make at the Fair will determine whether you will be considered for a more formal interview at a later date. To increase your confidence and professionalism, practice schedule a mock interview with staff in the Academic Advising and Career Development Office before the Fair.

Step 6. Plan Your Appearance/Attire

First impressions count! If you are seeking a professional position, or even an internship, wear conservative business clothes; a suit in a dark color is most recommended. Be sure your shirt/blouse is ironed and your shoes are polished. Avoid trendy clothing and stay away from anything lacy or revealing. Wear socks that match your slacks or wear neutral-colored hose with closed-toe shoes. Minimize your accessories and go light on (or avoid altogether) cologne or perfume. Remember, you want employers to view your attire as professional, neat, and mature. This is not the time to make a fashion statement.



Pro Tip: Leave your coat/bags at the backpack station. Bring a portfolio or a professional-looking folder instead of a purse or a backpack. Have printed résumés to distribute to employers with whom you meet. As a backup to a paper resume, bring a pdf version of your résumé on a flash drive. In recent years, some employers have preferred receiving the electronic version.

DURING THE CAREER FAIR

Plan Your Strategy

Arrive early and study the map of the employers' booths. From your previous research, you will know which employers you most want to meet with. Some people recommend starting with an employer who is not on the top of your list in order to practice your elevator speech and your interview skills. However, if you feel confident and prepared, it's fine to go straight for your top choices.

Pro Tip: Avoid walking around the Fair with your friends. Interactions with employers should be personal and professional.

Approach Each Employer with a Professional Greeting

People hire people they like, so developing confidence and an ability to talk to people in many different situations will increase your employability. Brush up on your social skills and use the **SMILE** technique to make a great impression:

- S** Smile and Shake Hands
- M** Make Eye Contact
- I** Introduce Yourself
- L** Learn and Use Names
- E** Engage in Small Talk

Make Your Contacts Brief, Yet Meaningful

You want to meet with multiple employers, and employers attend the Fair to meet with a wide variety of potential candidates. So, out of respect for both parties, make sure you manage your time carefully. Make your conversations interesting and memorable. Offer your handshake and your elevator speech, answer the recruiter's questions concisely and enthusiastically, and ask a few questions of your own to affirm your knowledge and your interest.

Questions to Ask	Questions to Avoid
What qualifications will make a candidate stand out?	How much vacation do employees at your company get?
Can you describe a typical day for someone working as a _____ at your company?	What's the starting salary for this position?
What do you like most about working for your company?	What benefits does your company provide?
Can you describe the company culture and management style?	Will your company pay back my student loans?

End with a Request

To close the conversation with an employer, thank the employer for their time and ask for a business card. Reiterate your interest in the company and offer to follow-up after the Fair.

Debrief and Take Notes

Before you leave the building – and while it is all still fresh in your mind - find a quiet place to sit and jot down notes about the different employers you met with. Note who you talked with (both the employer and representative's name), what some of your main topics of conversation were, your feelings about the company and positions they have available, and how you intend to follow-up.

Pro Tip: Some students do not wait until they are completely finished to debrief... they go back to the "prep area" after every two or three meetings to regroup, to take a few notes, and to review the next companies' information before they go out onto the floor again. Meeting, greeting, and interviewing can be a strenuous exercise, so take your time and do whatever it takes for you to make the best impression possible.

Avoid these mistakes

Coming straight from class (inappropriate clothing or unprepared)	Not having a purpose for being there
Wearing clothing that doesn't fit or looks unpolished	Not knowing how to begin or end a conversation
Showing up 15 minutes before the fair ends	Focusing on getting free stuff

AFTER THE CAREER FAIR

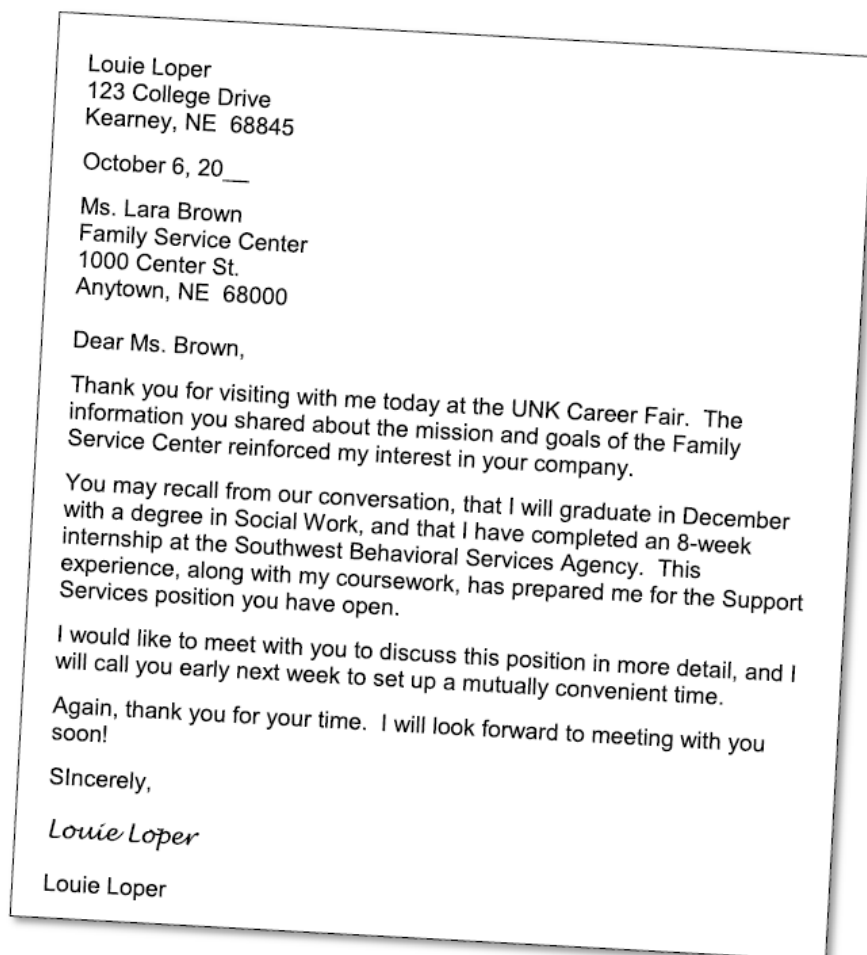
Review Your Notes

Within one day, review what you wrote about each employer while you were at the Career Fair and add any additional comments or thoughts you have had since.

Send Thank-You Letters

Write thank-you notes to employers you met with. (This is where business cards will come in handy.) Remind them that you met at the UNK Career Fair (be sure to specify, since many employers hit several career fairs during one week), and provide some detail that will help them remember you. Restate your qualifications and interest in their company, and express your desire for a more formal interview. End by saying that you will follow-up with a phone call.

Pro Tip: While emailed thank-you notes are usually acceptable, one that arrives in the mail will help you stand out from the crowd.



Evaluate Your Strategies

Think objectively about the way you conducted yourself at the Career Fair. Did you adequately research the companies? Were you smooth and confident with your '30-second elevator speech'? Did you ask thoughtful questions? Did you allow enough time to meet with the employers you really wanted to meet? (Squeezing the Career Fair in between classes might not really do it justice!) Were you dressed and groomed appropriately? Did you collect business cards?

As with anything, getting positive results (an invitation for an interview ... or even a job offer) from a Career Fair will take practice. That's why **we recommend attending several on-campus Fairs *before* your senior year**. Check our website (careers.unk.edu) to see when the next one will be held, then make plans to attend. Your future is in your hands!