

Reverse Career Fair

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A **Reverse Career Fair** flips the tables – Students have an opportunity to showcase their achievements and talents to potential employers in a comfortable environment through a display/presentation; Employers have an opportunity to circulate among the student booths, introduce themselves and learn about the students' skills and abilities that meet their hiring needs. At a typical career fair, students may only be able to present a resume and short introduction. Done correctly, a **reverse career fair** provides students the chance to showcase samples of their work and leads to richer conversations with employers.

Preparing for a Reverse Career Fair

A key element in preparing for a reverse career fair is to answer the question, "What do you want to get out of the conversations you will have with the employers at the event?" How you answer will give purpose to your preparation efforts - whether looking for your first job on your career path, evaluating advancement opportunities, learning more about the career field you have chosen, or laying the foundation for future employment by expanding your network. Once you have your purpose, use this guide to help get started.

PRESENT A WINNING IMAGE

Treat the reverse career fair as a job interview:

- **Dress to impress** – look clean and well groomed, dress professional and smart
- **Speak the right body language** – stand with good posture, show a welcoming smile, use a firm handshake, maintain good eye contact, and put away your phone
- **Make a good first impression** – start with a friendly hello, show enthusiasm when presenting your display, stay positive and relaxed
- *Personal appearance and a quality display will be the reason employers decide to visit.*

It is strongly recommended to dress in *formal business attire*:

- **Men** – dress pants and jacket, button-up collar shirt with tie, dress shoes
- **Women** – pantsuit or jacket with matching skirt, conservative top, formal conservative heels
- *If your presentation includes a hands-on demonstration, industry appropriate work wear could be an alternative option.*

Tips on Dress

- When in doubt, opt for more professional / conservative attire
- Black, blue, gray, no fancy patterns, keep it plain
- Clean and polished appearance - omit or limit accessories; omit or limit use of cologne/perfume; avoid food or smoke smell; fresh breath but no gum or mints when speaking
- No mini-skirts, shorts, sandals, flip-flops, leggings, or t-shirts; cover tattoos or piercings

Presenting a Winning Image - Additional Resources:

- [Networking](#) (video) – CES website: Job Search Resources
- [Career Fair Prep](#) (video) – Racine Workforce Development
- [Networking](#) (guide) – CES website: Job Search Resources

KNOW WHAT TO SAY

Introduction / Elevator Pitch

One typical method of preparing for meeting potential employers is to have an *elevator pitch* ready. In essence, this is a short (30 sec) verbal summary of:

1. Who you are.
2. What you have accomplished.
3. What you have to offer, or the value you bring to the company.

Short Presentation

Take the time to develop talking points with regard to your work, your career aspirations, and your contributions to potential employers. (Use your display to provide tangible examples.) Consider highlighting the following topics:

- Related work you did in your classes (projects, presentations, etc.)
- Your interest in the career industry you are targeting
- Related extra-curricular activities
- Knowledge of the employer
- Your future aspirations in the industry

Prepare as If It Were an Interview

Do your research on the employers that will be attending the fair.

Review related job descriptions and know the job responsibilities, requirements, and duties going into the fair. Be able to speak directly to the desired qualifications listed on the job description.

Practice answering sample questions that you may get from the employers and be prepared with a few insightful, intelligent questions for them.

Rehearse your *elevator pitch*, *presentation*, and *sample interview questions* before the event, paying attention to the following:

- Sound natural and confident; be engaging and poised
- Be prepared to talk about your work
- Highlight accomplishments and unique strengths
- Share on-topic examples/stories in a concise and clear way
- Frame everything within the construct of “what I can do for you”
- Be careful not to talk too much or about topics that are of no interest to an employer

Know What to Say - Additional Resources:

- [Elevator Pitch](#) (video) – CES Job Search Resources
- [Creating an Elevator Pitch](#) (guide) – CES Job Search Resources
- [Interviewing](#) (guide) – CES Job Search Resources

SHOW YOUR STUFF

Bring Copies of Your Resume

Make sure your resume is updated and targeted to the employers/positions you have researched. Be sure to follow a few basic guidelines:

- **Sell yourself and your brand** – communicate who you are, what you offer, and what makes you different from other applicants
- **Keep it simple and concise** – limit your resume to one or two pages
- **Prioritize information** – organize your information to present the most relevant first
- **Design for easy reading** – bulleted text allows you to highlight key points, adequate white space makes text easier to read, and consistent spacing gives your resume a uniform look
- **Use keywords** – lead the description of an experience with an action verb; address qualifications from the position description
- **Use tense correctly** – use past tense for all action verbs except those describing present work
- **Format consistently** – use standard fonts that are easy to read and a reasonable size (10, 11, or 12); format must be consistent throughout your resume
- **Absolutely no errors** – ensure there are no spelling, grammar or punctuation errors; have others proof read your resume
- **Don't...** include personal information, use pronouns (I, me, my), or exaggerate your experiences

Create a Display or Portfolio or ???

Tailor your booth (table) to be eye-catching and unique to your style. There are unlimited approaches to take, but here are a few of the basics:

- ✓ A standard approach is to have a poster board or **trifold poster board** as a display.
- ✓ A **traditional portfolio** is another option that is often project based, or a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements.
- ✓ An **e-portfolio** or personal website may include various kinds of electronic media, using elements that are interconnected and easy to navigate through hyperlinks. (requires computer or tablet)
- ✓ A unique or **creative approach** could be more engaging if done appropriately. Examples include:
 - A "wheel of fortune" wheel that employers would spin to land on a skillset that the student would explain
 - An "Apple ball" manipulated by an Apple iPhone to get the attention of business representatives walking by
 - A set of oversized cardboard dice with employable skills written on them to help prompt the student to talk about the skillset that the die landed on

Regardless of how the information is presented, it is important to target the information toward potential employers. Here are a few ideas for what to include:

Project samples	Certifications
Presentation samples	Testimonials
Physical evidence of your work	Strengths
Photos of a finished product	Brochures
Demonstration video	Resumes / Cover letters
Evidence of your success (i.e. awards, productivity, earnings, etc.)	Business cards

Show Your Stuff - Additional Resources:

[Resume](#) (guide) – CES Job Search Resources

[Resume Guide](#) (website) - CareerOneStop

[What is a Reverse Career Fair](#): Meet the Engineers at St. Thomas (video) – University of St. Thomas

[Creating a Portfolio](#) (guide) – CES Job Search Resources

LEAVE A LASTING IMPRESSION

Hopefully this guide will help you create an engaging impression with prospective employers. The reverse career fair is just the beginning. The worst thing that can happen is for a prospective employer to forget about your meeting. Therefore, a follow-up plan is essential.

Your Contact Info

Most importantly, employers need to have your contact information. This can be given via a resume, business card, brochure, or cover letter. Make sure your email is professional, your phone number is your direct number, and your full name is used.

Employers Contact Info

During your conversation, request a business card from a prospective employer. This will allow you to then remember his/her name and contact information, making it much easier to send a follow-up thank you letter.

Say Thank You

At the end of your conversation, be sure to thank the prospective employer for his or her time. Consider sending an email thank you as a follow up to remain on the forefront of a prospective employer's mind. Include a reference to your conversation and a desire to follow up.

Explore Job Postings

[Company Websites](#) will your best bet for researching employers and available jobs, so it will be important to find out in advance who will be attending.

[Handshake](#) is an online job board and a great tool for Gateway students to search program specific job and internship postings.

Here are a few other tools that may be helpful:

www.indeed.com

www.linkedin.com

www.careerbuilder.com

www.monster.com

jobcenterofwisconsin.com

Please Note: This document was created by Career and Employment Services (CES) at Gateway Technical College. It is intended to be a guide and may not be all-inclusive to meet your specific needs. Check out the CES website at www.gtc.edu/ces for additional resources or to make an appointment please call (800) 247-7122.