

## Mike's Tips for Career Fair & Interviewing

Career Fairs and interviews are some of the most nerve-wracking experiences we go through in college, but are essential to finding the right job after years of hard work. The following tips are intended to offer a little help in these often confusing and anxious areas. If you've spoken with me one-on-one regarding resumes and career fair, you've probably heard several of these.

### RESUME TIPS

1. **Focus on content and proofing.** Don't get caught up on format over content and ask three people you trust to critically review your resume to minimize the chance of errors. Always print on standard resume paper (ask any copy store); do not try to be original here.
2. **Have two versions.** You should have one polished, final copy of your resume (preferably one page) to hand out and a second copy for yourself. The second copy should contain elaborated bullet points of EVERYTHING you did for each project / job / activity you felt was important enough to put on your final copy. When making a resume, it's always helpful to start with this second copy and then condense it to create the final copy that fits on the target page limit. Reviewing the second elaborated version before a career fair or interview will remind you of everything you did at each job or on each project, and allows you to pull from those experiences much more effectively to answer questions. Most students don't take the time to follow this tip and it's evident during the interview.
3. **Be clear and concise.** Use bullet points, never paragraphs. Start each point with an action item (analyzed, designed, improved, collaborated, assisted, taught, mentored, manufactured, ...) and always leave more to talk about if you are asked a follow-up question. If you have nothing more to say about a point, it shouldn't be on your resume.
4. **If you have space, include a company-specific objective.** If you have so much good content you don't have room for an objective, don't worry, as everyone knows your objective is to find a challenging job with a great company (duh!). But if you have room and can tailor your objective to include some of the language used in the company's mission statement, it won't go unnoticed. Just make sure you give the right resume to the right company (use Post-it notes and always print at least two copies for each company you are targeting)!

### CAREER FAIR TIPS

5. **Decide going into this YOU ARE GOING THERE TO DOMINATE.** This is not the typical personality trait we exhibit when we step into the building for Career Showcase, but it has to be your mindset if you want to be successful. This is not the day to be humble, meek, quiet, or shy. This is the day to demonstrate **everything** you've learned about being a great TA: be enthusiastic, professional, organized, calm, confident, and knowledgeable (about each company), and demonstrate the strongest command presence and communication skills of anyone each recruiter will speak with the entire day. Decide up front you are going to try it my way, or stick with your old plan, because you can't be half-in.

6. **Out-research everyone else** they will talk to in that same line over this very long day. Impress them with how much you know about the company. Write down the company's corporate philosophy / mission statement, memorize it in your own words, and incorporate it into the objective statement on your resume. Yes, this means a different resume for each company you want to speak with. Such is life if you want to dominate the introduction instead of just blend in. While in the research phase, conduct research into current events of the company to learn if they've released any new products in the past two years, successfully launched any rockets, or achieved anything noteworthy. Charisma is being able to incorporate your knowledge of these events into your brief interaction with the recruiter.
7. **Understand what YOU are looking for. Be specific**, not generic like most objective statements on resumes. Are you looking for a challenging internship where you can grow? Of course you are. Are you looking for an opportunity to apply what you've learned in your classes on real-world projects? Sure. Are you looking for projects that provide more computational experience (i.e. analysis) or hands-on experience (i.e. R&D or testing)? Do you want to do design work? Do you have a strong interest in manufacturing? You have to know what you want so you can tell them; as **only by doing so can you stand out as the only person in that line who knows what (s)he's looking for**. In addition, understand how every experience you have listed on your resume, in whatever way, contributes to equipping you for success in the position you are seeking: communication; technical drawings; team, time, project management; DFM; teaching; supervising high-risk environments; etc.
8. **Review current openings for each company you want to talk with to figure out which positions you like most** (you don't have to be in love with any of them; just find the ones you dislike the least!) and **write down three questions** you can ask about the positions, related responsibilities, who you'll be working with, if they provide dedicated mentors or formal training, etc.
9. Have two or three **BOMB questions** ready to drop at a will. These are questions that when you ask them, the recruiter's eyes widen and they remember you for asking them. I like to lead-in with, "How long have you been with XXX and what would you say the most valuable skills for success are for new hires?" And then, "What are the most common weaknesses you observe in new hires?" Or, "if you had it to do all over again, what would you have done in college to even better equip yourself for a successful career at XXX?" Think about it and come up with your own.
10. **If you do these things and apply the same tips that make a good TA, you will do great!** Be enthusiastic, yet focused and serious. Be organized (which comes by preparing the **best** resume possible and performing earnest research for each company you want to talk to). Be honest and prepared to admit some weaknesses and things with which you struggle because no one can be great at everything. Be careful with joking, as something you think is funny can be taken as inappropriate based on the recruiter's background. Realize that because of your preparation, there will be no reason to be nervous (easy to say, right?), and in turn, speak slowly, clearly, and to the point. Demonstrate a strong command presence: take pride in how you look; make the introduction with a firm handshake while looking them in the eye with a clear greeting; speak with good volume, projection, enunciation, and speed; don't fidget; talk with energy and purpose while maintaining strong eye contact; keep your hands out of your pockets. And inspire confidence with your knowledge of who you are, what you've learned from each past experience, why you are there talking with them (i.e. what you are seeking from their company), and what you feel you can offer them.

## INTERVIEWING TIPS

11. **Review the *CAREER FAIR TIPS* presented above**, as each applies equally or more for interviews.
12. **Portfolio.** It's not optional. Make one. Fill it with drawings, photos, and samples of each project you've worked on, whether it's design, manufacturing, training, or administrative. It doesn't need to be perfect. A simple three ring binder with section dividers for each project is all you need. Or an tablet / I-pad if you're really tech savvy. But a binder never fails. **No portfolio projects an image of average or lazy, neither of which does you any favors!**
13. **Cover letter.** Again, it's not optional. Write one. Think of it as your elevator pitch. It's everything about yourself that you couldn't fit on your resume. Use it to communicate why you're the best candidate for the job. Get personal. Be passionate. If you've had a dream of working in that industry or for that company since you were young, tell them what inspired it. If you figured out what you want to do while in school, tell them about your journey. This is your chance to bring it home and stand out from others who are also bright, hard-working, passionate, and experienced; don't waste it by not taking the time to write a **great** cover letter!
14. **Always do a dry run to make sure you can find the exact location / room / office.**
15. **Always arrive at least 15 minutes early.** It's takes unusual skill to recover from being late to an interview, so unless you like challenges, show up early. Doing so also allows you to collect your thoughts and use the restroom to make sure you look nice. Remember: first impressions matter. Do not fidget when waiting, practice being calm, even if you feel nervous inside 😊.
16. **Always ask for the recruiter's or interviewer's contact info (business card) and send a follow-up e-mail BY THE END OF THE DAY** with three simple sentences: (1) thank them for taking time to speak with you about current job opportunities at their company, (2) tell them you look forward to hearing back once they assess which candidates may best fit their current corporate needs, and (3) wish them good luck on one of the current projects they are working on (since you always ask about what type of work they are involved in, because everyone likes to talk about themselves, lol).
17. **If asked to go out with the recruiters for dinner with other candidates, be careful what you eat and drink.** This is not the time to socialize like you would with the rest of your friends. Stick to lighter, cheaper entrees and non-alcoholic beverages you know your body can handle.

## FINAL TIPS / WORDS OF ADVICE

18. **These tips are provided to guide you, but you should always do what feels right for you.**
19. **You are each very smart or you would not be here.** I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true. On top of being some of the best students in the department, you are also amazing DML TAs. You chose the proverbial road less traveled and one of the hardest jobs on campus. You worked very hard to become good at your job, and now it's time to reap the dividend for all that hard work. Many believe I work hard to prepare you to help teach this course, but it's actually for much more: it's to help each of you see how smart and capable you are and that you truly are among the very best to pass through this university. ***Together, I hope you can see that our hard work has set you up for success in your interviews so you have a lot of experience to talk about and more value to bring to the proverbial table for the companies with which you interview!***