



# CAREER DEVELOPMENT

*Toolkit*



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA  
CAREER SERVICES



*Table of*  
**CONTENTS**

01	Before, During, and After the Career Fair PAGE 02
02	Communicating at a Career Fair PAGE 03
03	SMART Goals PAGE 04
04	Interview Preparation PAGE 05
05	Job Search Documents PAGE 06
06	Cover Letter Example PAGE 07
07	Resume Examples PAGE 08 - 09
08	Reference Page Example PAGE 10
09	Thank Letter Example PAGE 11
10	Interview Attire PAGE 12
11	Job Search Preparation Resources PAGE 13
12	Job Search Document Resources PAGE 14

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# *Before, During, and After the* **CAREER FAIR**

Don't just show up for career fairs! Prepare before you go and get the most out of the opportunities they provide to connect with employers, learn about job and internships opportunities, and practice your interviewing and networking skills. There are three stages to your career fair participation: The Before, During and After stages.

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## BEFORE THE CAREER FAIR

- Practice your “elevator speech” out loud. An “elevator speech” is the quick summation of who you are and what you can offer. Prepare and practice a 60-second response to “So, tell me about yourself.”
- Plan your attire. As a rule of thumb, business attire (i.e. a suit) is appropriate if you are looking for a job. If you are looking for an internship, business casual (i.e. a blouse or dress shirt, slacks, a skirt) may be appropriate. If you are unsure, it is best to err on the side of professional.
- Research, research, research. Beyond knowing which companies will attend the event, you should be familiar with what the companies do, their cultures, if they are currently hiring, etc. This will help give you background information so you can ask relevant, well-thought questions about specific organizations.
- Keep it manageable. You do not need to know the “ins and outs” of every organization at the fair. Spend your time getting to know the organizations that interest you most. Take note of those organizations so that you will be ready to seek them out on the day of the fair. You should be knowledgeable about those organizations that matter to you.
- Decide what to bring. Although some companies will only accept online applications, bringing multiple paper copies of your resume is still standard procedure at career fairs. Carry them in a portfolio, or professional-looking folder as backpacks and gym bags make your overall appearance less professional.

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## DURING THE CAREER FAIR

- Survey the room and make a game plan. Use your time wisely so you can visit your priority organizations first. Once you've visited each of your priority organizations, spend the rest of your time meeting with other recruiters at the event. You may surprise yourself with interest in organizations you had not considered earlier.
- Anticipate speaking with each recruiter for about five minutes. You want to be respectful of the recruiters' time, as well as of the other students waiting to speak to the recruiters. Approach each recruiter confidently, introduce yourself with your first and last name, give your elevator speech, ask your prepared questions, answer any questions posed by the recruiter, ask for a business card, say thank you for your time, and then move along to the next booth. Your interaction should be professional, focused, and brief.
- Do a little eavesdropping. Listen to the questions from students in front of you when waiting to speak with a recruiter. This way you can avoid asking recruiters to repeat themselves. It may also trigger another question you did not know you had; for example, ‘Could you tell me more about the training program you offer for new hires?’
- Write down notes after each visit with a recruiter. This will help you organize your thoughts, remember any specific application instructions, and add personalization to your thank-you notes.

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## AFTER THE CAREER FAIR

- Follow up within two days to stand out after the fair. Mention your visit at the event, thank him or her again for her time, and use your notes to include specifics from your conversation at the fair. If you are following up via email, attach an electronic version of your resume. Do not be shy about staying in touch with recruiters, as they can become valuable members of your career network.
- Apply online. If a recruiter indicates the organization accepts applications online, submit your application materials online, even if you provided a paper copy to the recruiter at the fair.



# Communicating at a CAREER FAIR



A career fair is an excellent opportunity to get in front of employers who are actively looking to fill open positions and allow you to make a positive first impression with recruiters and possibly get an on-the-spot job interview. Here are some different kinds of questions you should consider asking at a career fair:

- Ask about a specific role.
- Ask about the hiring process.
- Ask about their experience.
- Ask about growth opportunities.
- Ask about the products, services or industry.
- Ask about company culture.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- In a typical day, what does [open job] do?
- Is the [open job] you currently have listed more focused on [some function of the company] or [some other aspect of the company]?
- Who's the direct report for the [open position]?
- I noticed that you don't currently have any [type of specific role] positions open currently. What kind of opportunities do you foresee in the future?
- Can you tell me about the different stages of your hiring process?
- What does the hiring process like for [open role]?
- What do you like about the company?
- What do you most enjoy about your job?
- What are some challenges you've faced in your role?
- What do you most love about working for [company]?
- What opportunities for growth are there are at [company]?
- How does [company] commit to the professional development of its employees?
- Is there a career path currently in place for the [open position]?
- I love [product]! I use it all the time. How do you think it's going to evolve in the next few years?
- I saw that you announced a recent strategy change. How has that impacted the company internally?
- I read an article about [event/product/service]. What was it like being part of that?
- What kind of technology do you use internally to communicate?
- I saw photos of [event] on the company's social media site. Can you tell me more about that?
- Do your employees spend much time socializing outside of work?

Content cited from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/questions-to-ask-at-a-career-fair>



# SMART

Goals

## What Are SMART Goals?

SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. These criteria can be used to guide your goal setting.

- **Specific:** Adding specificity to your goal makes it easier to achieve. Detail what you want to accomplish, when you would like to accomplish it, and what actions you will need to take to meet the goal.
- **Measurable:** Your goal should be something that is able to be tracked. If your goal is too vague, it can be difficult to assess how close you are to achieving it.
- **Attainable:** College students have a lot on their plate. Make sure your goal is something you can realistically accomplish within the given time frame.
- **Relevant:** SMART goals for students should relate back to academic or professional growth. When creating a new goal, ask yourself how this accomplishment could benefit your academic performance or set you up for success in your desired career.
- **Time-bound:** It's easier to stick with a goal when it has a specific deadline associated with it. Determine when you would like to meet your goal by, and consider setting target dates for each step involved in meeting the goal.

## How to Measure Your Progress Toward SMART Goals

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), monitoring your progress can increase your chances of meeting your goals. Here are some of our top tips for college students looking to track their SMART goals.

### 1. Share Your Goal With Others

Many people find that they are more motivated to achieve their goals when they have a support system in place. After setting your goal, find a trusted person who can hold you accountable. This might be a friend, family member, classmate, or coworker. In return for providing support, you can offer to help them track progress for any of their own goals.

### 2. Set Check-In Reminders

Frequently checking in with your progress ensures that your goal remains top of mind. Consider adding check-in reminders to your calendar for the duration of your goal, keeping in mind that the time frame of your goal will affect how often you want to check in. For example, progress on a semester-long goal may only need to be measured once a month, but if your goal is something you want to achieve more quickly, you may want to check in weekly or even multiple times per week.

### 3. Put It Into Writing

Monitoring your goal is particularly effective when you physically record your progress. Each time you check in with your goal, write down the progress you've made and outline the next steps you need to take. You can send these updates to a trusted friend or even share your progress on social media. Either way, putting your progress into writing can help make sure you follow through on your goal.

### 4. Adjust Deadlines as Needed

As you make progress toward your goal, you may find that you need more time than you originally thought. If the original date you set no longer seems achievable, don't be afraid to adjust your goal as needed. You may also consider breaking up the goal into smaller, more manageable steps, each with their own deadline. Pushing your completion date out by a few weeks or months is better than getting overwhelmed and giving up on the goal altogether.



Content cited from <https://www.purdueglobal.edu/blog/student-life/smart-goals-for-students/>



# Interview PREPARATION

An interview is a two-way exchange of information. While the interviewer is interested in learning more about what you have to offer, the interviewee (you!) should be interested in learning more about the organization and the position for which you are interviewing.

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There are two primary types of job interviews: Screening Interviews and Decision Interviews.

Screening interviews are usually conducted by recruiters or other human resources representatives rather than hiring managers. They are typically trying to verify facts stated on the resume and to screen out inappropriate/unqualified applicants.

Essentially, this person is trying to answer the question: Are you a viable candidate for the job? Examples of screening interviews include many telephone interviews, career fair conversations, and on-campus interviews. Screening interviews are often conducted by human resources staff/recruiters rather than actual hiring managers.

Decision interviews are usually conducted by a hiring manager; a person with authority to make a hiring decision. Essentially, this person is trying to answer the question: Are you the best candidate for the job? That is, are you qualified and how well will you fit into the organization.



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Interview scripts (prepared answers for interview questions) are an important part of interview preparation. Be sure to prepare responses for the four common interview questions provided below.

1. **Why do you want the job?** You have to be able to explain and defend your reasoning for wanting the job for which you are interviewing. “Needing a job” is not a sufficient response. You have to explain how you think this job fits you.
2. **Why should they hire you?** You are not the only candidate, so why should they select you over the others? Again, “needing a job” is not a sufficient response. You have to explain how your combination of experience, education, skills and qualities/characteristics match up with the experience, education, skills and qualities/characteristics they are seeking in candidates. You have to explain how you think you fit the job.
3. **Why do you want to work for this organization?** You must demonstrate that you have done your homework. When you say - “I’d love to work for your company!” - you have to be able to back it up. What is it about the company that you find appealing? You have to be able to explain how and why you think you will fit in with their organizational culture.
4. **Why do you want to work in this profession/industry?** You must demonstrate that you have some knowledge about the profession/industry. They aren’t going to just take your word for it. Just as every company’s culture is unique, every industry and profession has its own unique features and characteristics; features and characteristics that - depending upon what you are seeking out of your career - can be viewed as advantages or disadvantages. You have to be able to explain that you understand, and will be able to fit in, their world.

*You do not get a second chance in an interview.*

Content cited from <https://thecampuscareercoach.com/wp-content/themes/campus-career-coach/guides/interviews.pdf>



# Job SEARCH Documents



You introduce yourself to potential employers through your job search documents. They showcase your accomplishments and skills to potential employers and highlight why you are a good fit for the advertised position. Below are some considerations for cover letter and resume development.

## COVER LETTER

Many job seekers do not take the time to craft a well-written cover letter. However, the letter can pique employers' curiosity and motivate them to focus more carefully on your resume. The cover letter is an excellent way to present a professional, polished impression to employers.

### FIRST PARAGRAPH

Identify the position for which you are applying. State how you learned of the position and why you are interested.

### MIDDLE PARAGRAPH/S

Discuss how/why you are qualified for the position. Using the job description, explain how your skills and experiences make you the best candidate. Highlight accomplishments, positive characteristics, or past experiences that illustrate how you can benefit the organization.

### CLOSING PARAGRAPH

Reiterate your interest in the position, thank the employer and request an interview. Include your phone number and offer to provide additional information. Indicate when you will follow up with the employer. Use a professional closing, such as 'Sincerely'. Sign each letter in blue or black ink.

*Creating a tailored document is key.*

## RESUME

Resumes are often your first chance to make a positive impression on employers and must represent the absolute best you have to offer. These living documents reflect your professional growth. Continually develop and update your current skills and experiences. Career Services recommends the following guidelines:

- The overall tone of your resume should be clear, concise and easy to read. For example, separate each section of the resume by using bold font on the heading titles
- Target the resume for each position. All entries should demonstrate that you have the education and experience to fulfill requirements
- Resumes are typically one page in length. If you use a two-page format, be sure to have enough content to support additional pages. Resumes should never be more than two pages in length
- Use 10 –12 point font size for body of the resume. Your name should be slightly larger font
- Avoid underlining, italics, or graphics
- Resumes typically have 1-inch margins. If you use smaller margins to fit information onto one page, do not use less than 1/2 inch

Have someone proofread your resume and cover letter. USA Career Services, professionals in your field, and professors can provide assistance.



**Susan Brown**

5487 Main Street North  
Montgomery, AL 01234  
(251) 555-1212

Date

Jane Smith  
ABC Resort and Spa  
P.O. Box 12345  
Mobile, AL 98765

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing to express interest in the Food & Beverage Manager position with ABC Resort and Spa, which I found on LinkedIn. In researching the resort, I learned that ABC Resort and Spa was recently added to Forbes Travel Guide with a 4-star rating and included a substantial section devoted to the luxurious dining experience offered onsite. I believe my previous background in hospitality and ongoing commitment to providing a high-quality customer experience are just a few of the reasons why I'm an ideal candidate for interview.

In my previous role as Hotel Operations Intern with Hotel Cortez, I worked directly with the Food & Beverage division. In that role, I built rapport with event planners to gain a clearer understanding of menu planning and event coordination. This included working directly with the food service team and executive chef on a daily basis to maintain a high-quality product and exceptional standards of service. While there, I assisted with 20+ events that included wedding receptions, conferences, and luncheons.

Additionally at Hotel Cortez, I was able to assist the Banquet Manager with hiring, training, and coaching service team members to achieve exceptional guest satisfaction. During my internship, our team maintained a 94% guest satisfaction rate for banquet operations and received recognition for our creative strategies regarding revenue enhancement and cost containment.

I am excited about the opportunity to interview with ABC Resort and Spa to discuss my qualifications for the Food & Beverage Manager position. I will follow up with you in the following week to inquire if there is any additional information I can provide. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Susan Brown*  
Susan Brown

Adapted from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/cover-letter-samples>

*Example*  
**COVER  
LETTER**

DO NOT COPY DIRECTLY. UPDATE AND TAILOR BASED  
ON YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.



## **SUSAN BROWN**

5487 Main Street North  
Montgomery, AL 01234  
(251) 555-1212  
sb123@jagmail.southalabama.edu

### **EDUCATION**

**Bachelor of Science, Mechanical Engineering**, May 2023

University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL

GPA: 3.9/4.0

Dean's List, Fall 2019 - Fall 2021

### **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

Society of Women Engineers, August 2018 - Present

### **INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE**

**Project Management Intern**, Engineering Inc., Mobile, AL, August 2021 - December 2021

- Developed, coordinated, and monitored aspects of production, including selection of manufacturing methods, fabrication, and operation of product designs
- Recommended design modifications to eliminate machine or system malfunctions
- Assisted drafters in developing the structural design of products, using drafting tools or computer-assisted drafting equipment or software
- Evaluated mechanical designs and prototypes for energy performance or environmental impact

### **EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE**

**Career Peer Champion**, Career Services, University of South Alabama, August 2020 - Present

- Research, create, and present workshops on career-related topics for students, including resume development, career/major exploration, internship search, and graduate school exploration
- Strategize and conduct marketing and outreach initiatives on social media accounts for the office, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Spotify

### **TECHNOLOGY SKILLS**

SolidWorks, C++, MATLAB, Microsoft Office: Excel, PowerPoint, Word

### **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Volunteer, Habitat for Humanity, Mobile, AL, September 2018 - December 2018

*Example*  
**RESUME**

Adapted from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>



## **SUSAN BROWN**

5487 Main Street North, Montgomery, AL 01234, (251) 555-1212, sb123@jagmail.southalabama.edu

### **OBJECTIVE**

Seeking to obtain an internship position with Strategic Resources, Inc.

### **EDUCATION**

**Bachelor of Arts, Advertising and Public Relations**, May 2024

University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama

Major GPA: 3.65/4.0

Dean's List, Fall 2014

### **RELEVANT COURSEWORK**

Relational Communication, Advertising Media Planning, Public Relations Crisis Management, Strategic Publication Design, Public Relations Communication Methods, Branding & Visual Messages

### **INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE**

Intern, May 2022 - August 2022

Hummingbird Ideas, Mobile, AL

- Wrote press releases or other media communications to promote clients
- Studied the objectives, promotional policies, or needs of organizations to develop public relations strategies that influenced public opinion or promoted ideas, products, or services
- Prepared or deliver speeches to further public relations objectives
- Consulted with advertising agencies or staff to arrange promotional campaigns in all types of media for products, organizations, or individuals
- Updated and maintained content posted on the company's website

### **EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE**

Student Assistant, August 2022 - Present

Office of International Student Services and Admissions, Uni. of South Alabama, Mobile, AL

- Assist in processing International student applications for admissions
- Provide customer service and resolve customer requests

### **COMPUTER SKILLS**

Microsoft Office: Word, Excel, PowerPoint

Apple Final Cut Express

Google+

*Example*  
**RESUME**

Adapted from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resume-samples>



**SUSAN BROWN**

5487 Main Street North, Montgomery, AL 01234, (251) 555-1212, sb123@jagmail.southalabama.edu

**REFERENCES**

**Crystal Ball**

*Director of Event Planning*

Hotel Cortez

1234 Fortune Blvd.

Mobile, AL 36695

(251) 555-4697

cb1234@fortuneblvd.xyz

**Horace Cope**

*Banquet Manager*

Hotel Cortez

1234 Fortune Blvd.

Mobile, AL 36695

(251) 555-9988

hcope@fortuneblvd.xyz

**Arty Fischel**

*Special Events & Promotions Manager*

Ocean's Royale Hotel & Casino

1234 Fortune Blvd.

Biloxi, MS

(251) 555-9977

artfichel@royal.xyz

**Justin Thyme**

*Guest Services Representative*

ABC Resort and Spa

P.O. Box 12345

Mobile, AL 98765

(251) 555-6745

jt1234@abcresort.xyz

*Example*  
**REFERENCE  
PAGE**

DO NOT COPY DIRECTLY. UPDATE AND TAILOR BASED ON YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.



**Susan Brown**

5487 Main Street North  
Montgomery, AL 01234  
(251) 555-1212

Date

Jane Smith, CEO  
ABC Corporation  
77 Accounting Firm Drive  
Mobile, AL 98765

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you regarding the position of Account Manager with ABC Corporation. I am excited about the opportunity to join such a reputable organization and really enjoyed learning about the innovative approach that ABC Corporation has recently implemented with clients.

As I mentioned during our meeting, I have gained relevant accounting experience through my internship at Bloom Accounting, LLC and worked on a team of twenty-seven individuals. While in this role I was able to use Intuit QuickBooks to perform financial calculations, reconcile and report discrepancies, and complete and submit tax forms and returns. Additionally, during my internship, I was able to maintain compliance with federal and state regulations. Based on our discussions about ABC Corporation, the duties required of the Account Manager, and my previous experience I believe I would be an ideal candidate for the position.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to interview for the Account Manager position with ABC Corporation and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

*Susan Brown*

Susan Brown

*Example*  
**THANK YOU  
LETTER**

DO NOT COPY DIRECTLY. UPDATE AND TAILOR BASED  
ON YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.



# PROFESSIONAL

*Future*

How you choose to dress for a career fair, interview, or networking event can have a substantial impact on how others perceive you. Often lasting impressions are formed within the first 30 seconds of a meeting. Therefore, how you present yourself is as important as what you say during these situations.

## **BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL**

- Wear a conservative tailored suit or dress suit (black, dark blue, gray)
- Skirt should hit the top of the knee—avoid extreme slits
- Wear well-shined basic medium/low-heeled pumps or shoes
- Limit jewelry and select subtle options
- Choose a small handbag or portfolio
- Have well-groomed hair
- Select white or blue cotton shirts—avoid other colors or stripes
- Wear a tie and match belt with shoe color

## **BUSINESS CASUAL**

- Choose casual pants (pressed slacks or khakis) or skirts that aren't too tight
- Choose skirts that come to the knee while standing and cover your thighs when seated
- Select tailored shirts, blouses, sweaters, and sweater sets
- Have well-groomed hair
- Select long-sleeved shirts (dressier) or short-sleeved in summer
- Wear leather shoes, (no sandals, athletic shoes, or boots)
- Typically less is more when accessorizing- choose a conservative watch and jewelry





# Job Search Preparation RESOURCES



## **ii Handshake**

The #1 college-to-career network.

Use Handshake to:

- Build a professional, online profile that spotlights your achievements, experiences, and academic career
- Find and apply for job opportunities
- Register for career fairs and interview schedules
- Learn more about organizations and industry partners that hire University of South Alabama students



## **biginterview**

Mock interviews made easy.

When preparing for a job interview, it's not enough to only read advice - you need to put that advice into practice! That's why Big Interview isn't just a training course. You'll also get hands-on practice with mock interviews tailored to your specific industry, job and experience level.



## **LinkedIn**

Access knowledge, insights and opportunities.

Use LinkedIn to improve your network, keep in touch with colleagues, find that perfect job, and make new connections that offer exciting opportunities. Be sure to leverage the alumni feature to connect with USA or other institutions of interest to grow your network and learn about organizations that hire graduates from those institutions.



# Job Search Document RESOURCES



Create a professional-looking resume in just a few minutes.

Need some inspiration? Check here for some great examples of more than 100 occupations. Additionally, use the Resume Builder feature to create a tailored document based on the position/field of interest.



**O\*NET OnLine, My Next Move, and My Next Move for Veterans** to highlight occupational knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Search on occupations to list top KSAs and transferable skills on resumes. **O\*NET OnLine** allows for summary, detailed, and customized reports to aid in the identification of KSAs to list within a resume.

Use occupational description and task language found in **O\*NET OnLine** to highlight key qualifications and accomplishments in a resume.



Need more help with crafting marketable documents to use for career or graduate school applications? Schedule an appointment with a career advisor to:

- Discuss standard format and content for resumes, CV's, cover letters, references, and thank you letters
- Learn how AI and ATS are used to scan your documents
- Review your documents and make suggestions on how to increase their overall strength



## Need more assistance with interview preparation, job search, networking, or resume development?

For new college graduates, career development is key to ensuring successful entry into the workforce. Career development is the foundation upon which a successful career is launched. Our office has created a Career Development Google Drive full of valuable tips and resources to better assist college students preparing for life after graduation.



[https://bit.ly/USoALCareer\\_Drive](https://bit.ly/USoALCareer_Drive)

This Google Drive includes folders of additional resources for:

- Elevator Pitch
- Strategies For A Successful Job Search
- Tips For Navigating Networking Events
- Resume Development Tools

Use the QR code or URL provided to access the Google Drive.

*Career Development*  
**CAREER**

# *Schedule an* **APPOINTMENT** Career Advising

Our career advising staff help Jaguars discover who they are, what they want, and how to get there!

Let us help you with:

- Exploring careers & majors
- Searching for practical-related experience prior to graduation
- Preparing you for your professional career
- Graduate or professional school preparation assistance

Contact our office via email or phone for appointment scheduling assistance. Additionally, feel free to log into Navigate South and schedule an appointment based on your availability.

*Let's get in touch*

Career Services  
Academic Services Center  
111 Student Services Drive, ASC 1370  
(251) 460-6188  
[careerservices@southalabama.edu](mailto:careerservices@southalabama.edu)  
[www.southalabama.edu/careerservices](http://www.southalabama.edu/careerservices)

**USA** UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA  
**CAREER SERVICES**