Ace your Forum 2020

Stephen Fischer, Career Counselor/Staff Trainer
EPFL Career Center
Most years...

“Who’s got a tie I can borrow? What do I do with my raincoat?”

WHAT TO WEAR AT A CAREER FAIR

- Conservative suit
- Light-colored blouse
- Closed-toe shoes
- Subtle jewelry and makeup
- Simple hairstyle

- Business suit
- Light-colored dress shirt
- Conservative tie
- Polished dress shoes
- Well-groomed hairstyle

WHAT to wear?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Professional</th>
<th>Business Professional</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Natural makeup</td>
<td>- Fresh haircut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pressed suit</td>
<td>- Clean shaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Light button up shirt</td>
<td>- Appropriate tie</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Appropriate length skirt or suit pants</td>
<td>- Pressed suit</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Polished, closed-toe shoes</td>
<td>- Portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Polished shoes</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Casual</th>
<th>Business Casual</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Natural makeup</td>
<td>- Clean shaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Nice blouse</td>
<td>- Button up shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No bulky jewelry</td>
<td>- Matching belt and shoes</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Appropriate length skirt or dress pants</td>
<td>- Pressed slacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Polished, closed-toe shoes</td>
<td>- Polished shoes</td>
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Ace your Forum EPFL Career Center
Re-Forum-atted version for 2020

Be patient: there will be only one or two reps at each stand, and the “traffic flow” of attendees is also likely to be heavily controlled. You will undoubtedly have to wait longer to speak to future employers at this year’s Forum than in the past. Bring two masks and sanitizer, and something to watch, read or listen to on your Smartphone.
**Viral imperatives**

**Corporate presentations** will not change significantly compared to 2019, apart from the reduction in room capacity (this reduction could be mitigated by using larger rooms in some cases). Most presentations will be given face-to-face, though some will do the presentations will be given remotely but will be broadcast in the usual presentation rooms.

**The stands will be divided into two sectors.** Each sector will have slots of 1h15.

So a student will have 1h15 to visit stands in the zone selected.

At the end of the slot s/he must leave the STCC for at least 30 minutes while the building is cleaned and disinfected.

S/he can then either return to the same area or go visit the other area, but will need a new ticket to do so, and will again have 1h15 minutes to visit stands.

**Registration will be available on our platform** *(hopefully by the end of this week).* Any remaining places will be available at the STCC entrance during the slot in question.

Reminder: a student who enrolls for example for the slot of 9:00-10:15 for Sector 1 for example, must wait for the slot of 10:45-12:00 (or another later slot) to go in another sector.

Basically a student cannot go into two different areas during the same slot time, he has to wait for the area to be disinfected between two slots.

finally, students are encouraged to book a single slot (to maximize the number of students).

- **NB:** some slots may still be available on site, but why take the risk?
Tourist, fact-finder or job-seeker?

Your goals will focus your preparation.

- Are you going only because it is free and on campus?
- Or are you seeking to confirm certain ideas about your career options while eliminating others?
- Finally, if you are clear on making the transition to industry, are you already in candidate mode?

**NB:** dress professionally, bring business cards, and copies of all of your normal application documents (CV, etc.)
Forum 2020: a wee bit smaller than previous years, but still impressively large for the COVID era

142 companies + 49 presentations
+ 129 exhibitors
+ 56 start-ups (Start Up Day, 6 Oct.)
+ 5 contact-lunches
+ 21 workshops
+ 1 Industry Roundtable (17:15, 7 Oct., on Zoom)

Carpe Forum: seize the opportunity!
Planning tools

- «Livre des entreprises» (Employer’s book) online & in print
- EPFL Campus app (tab added about 10 days prior to event)

Also: [https://twitter.com/forumepfl?lang=fr](https://twitter.com/forumepfl?lang=fr) and [https://www.facebook.com/forumepfl](https://www.facebook.com/forumepfl)

For your top 10 companies, also look on their websites and Glassdoor for profiles and competitors.
It’s all in the prep

Create a three-tier selection, with the “A List” being your preferred employers, the second group acceptably attractive ones, and the third those of some professional interest, but not necessarily employment targets.

Identify top companies for: your job search, sector interest/trends, new career opportunities.

Adapt your research level to each tier:
  - For the C list: know their location(s) and specializations;
  - For the B list: do the above + know at least one competitor, and have one question ready;
  - For A list: all of the above + three specific questions and know where you could contribute.

Learn about product lines, research, locations and values. Get an in-depth understanding of the economic environment, the sector, trends and leaders in a given field.

Show you know

- Research the company and at least two of their competitors
- Show you can compare & contrast these
- Why (really) does this company interest you? In which role/unit?
- Have tailor-made questions ready about their sector (trends, problems, innovations), and about the role(s) you are targeting.
Don't waste a minute!

“Get Ready Day” (last-minute CV checks, Elevator Pitch practice, and more) + Opening Conference (Mon. 5 Oct., STCC)

Start-up Day (Tuesday, Oct. 6)
• 56 start-ups in 6 hrs. ➔ ~ 6.4 minutes /stand!

Company presentations (Oct. 7, 8, 9)
• 49 companies over 3 days
• If you attend 5 presentations a day, or 15 in total, you will still have missed 70% of them!

Industry Round Table (Wednesday, Oct. 7)
• “Going viral: your job search during COVID” at 18:00 online via Zoom (see details on Forum website)

Stand Days (Oct. 8, 9)
• 129 exhibitors over 2 days ➔ ~ 5.6 mins. per stand!
• If you visit 8 stands per day, or 16 in total, you will still have missed 88% of them!
Maximize your participation:

- Use your time slot to best advantage, but stay calm and focused.
- Be patient and courteous.
- Remember you are starting a conversation which may lead to a job or an internship—or to having a new person in your network.

Every minute you spend on making your transition from student to young professional mode is an investment in your future.

Organized by students, for students: the oldest and largest such event in Switzerland!
Before the Stand Days:

Plan your day
- Visits, interviews, lunch, Industry Roundtable…
> Not all companies have stands on both days!

Prepare your presence
- Self-introduction formula (“Elevator Speech”).
- Your interests, your objectives and your aspirations.
- Prepare for typical interview questions.
- Know the companies: products, tech, competitors.

Prepare your materials
- Have a copy of your CV and business cards ready.
- Bring your own mask(s), sanitizer and bottle of water.
- Bring a notebook and pen: take notes!
During the Stand Days

What to wear

• Dressing properly shows that you take the recruitment process seriously.

• Formal business attire (suits, ties) not mandatory, but “business casual” (slacks + buttoned shirts, skirts + blouses) appreciated.

Personal grooming

• Haircut, shave, nails and overall cleanliness

• At least as important than your attire...

Manage materials

• Avoid backpacks; use portfolios

• Put extra outer wear, umbrellas, etc. in the coat check downstairs in the STCC.

Bring your own mask(s) & hand sanitizer
During the *Forum*:

1. Walk around the whole fair once, noting the location of each of your target companies.
2. Approach two companies on your “C” list: practice introducing yourself.
3. Visit three stands on your B list: use your Elevator Speech (a 90-second version of your CV), and show your interest in them.
4. Visit all of your A list, but not two in a row: introduce yourself, express interest by asking pertinent questions and knowing where in the organization your skills would be welcome.
5. Get a business card from each person and ask what the next steps for exploring opportunities are. Be sure to send them all a short thank-you message within 3 working days, mentioning what you discussed and expressing your keen interest in working with them.

Allocate appropriate time, including breaks for note-taking, drinks or meals, and for returning to any stands where you had a promising exchange. Ideally, you should plan on a *two-hour* visit in the morning, and the same in the afternoon, in addition to any company presentations.
Making contact

The “Elevator Speech,” or succinct self-intro:
(60-90 secs, about the time for an elevator to go from the lobby to the 2nd floor)

"Hello, my name is Fred Dyson, and I am completing my Master's Degree in Physics next Spring, after which I'd like to work in the Energy sector. I attended your presentation last Tuesday and was fascinated by your use of photonic gas sensors. Could you tell me a bit more about what you are doing in this field?"
The art of *Pitch*-ing

Three elements necessary for a successful pitch (think, “PCP”):

- **The public**
  - Who is the (ideal) listener, what are your objectives, and what’s at risk?

- **Contents or message**
  - A short overview of your career interests and goals, your recent work, and your values (if applicable): what, why, and how you would contribute…

- **Presentation style**
  - The manner in which you communicate your ideas to your intended listener is crucial: get to the main points quickly (preferably with few or no external support; max 2-3 slides).

https://scriberhco.wordpress.com/2015/02/13/3-elements-cles-pour-pitcher-avec-succes/
Mini-pitch (variations)

- Start with the “Me” version
- Add the “You”
- Dare to do the “Us?”

Encapsulate in just three sentences the essence of who you are as a young professional, why you are speaking to this company, and what you hope to contribute.

“Hello, I’ve just finished my Master’s internship at Logitech where I debugged codes in Adaptive Java for wearable consumer devices. My name is Alberta, and I’d like to know more about ABB’s focus on IIOT.”

Rule of the Four C’s:

**Clear – Cogent – Coherent – Credible**

«La parole est un sport de combat,» Bertrand Périé
Perfect Pitch: How to Nail Your Elevator Speech
By, Laura Katen

1. Start With a Blank Canvas
Take a blank piece of paper and number it from one to 10. Then, fill in the most important bits of information that you want to convey about yourself, your service or product, or your company. What, exactly, do you do? What have you achieved, and what are your goals? Who does your company serve and why? Focus on the most interesting or memorable facts—the ones that really make you stand out from others.

2. Red Pen It
Using a different color pen, edit what you’ve drafted with a critical eye. Eliminate any redundancies, unnecessary or unclear information, and broad business jargon. More importantly, hone and enhance the good stuff. “I’m great at sales” isn’t likely to pique anyone’s interest, but “I’ve exceeded my sales goals every quarter for the last two years” sure might.

3. Pick a Card
Grab five index cards, and label them “Who I Am,” “What I Do,” “How I Do It,” “Why I Do It,” and “Who I Do It For.” Add each item on the list you’ve created to the card where it fits best. Ideally, you’ll have two compelling sentences underneath each heading, so fill in any gaps if you need to.

4. Get in Order
Organize the cards in a logical order, making sure the most important information is first. Remember, you often only have a few seconds to communicate with someone. If you get cut off, what would you want her to walk away remembering?

You step into the elevator and find yourself face-to-face with the CEO of your dream company or the client you’ve been dying to land. She smiles and says, “Hi. What do you do?” Scary?

Absolutely. But it could happen to you—tomorrow—and you’ll want to be prepared. People are busy, and being able to communicate who you are and what you do quickly and effectively will ensure that you get your most important points across, no matter how short the conversation. Not quite ready for the elevator ride of your life?

Check out our step-by-step guide to crafting—and perfecting—your pitch.
5. Add an Attention-Getter
Add an interesting fact or stat to use at the beginning of your speech. Your goal is to immediately engage someone so that he or she is intrigued and wants to learn more.

6. Practice!
Recite your pitch to someone close who can be objective, and ask for constructive feedback (although we love our friends and families, sometimes they think we can do no wrong!). What may seem clear in your mind might come across as convoluted, long-winded, or fragmented to an outside observer.

7. Record Your Pitch (on Zoom, Skype or using special video software)
Once you've gotten feedback and honed your pitch even further, record yourself saying it. Listen to your tone—make sure it’s friendly, non-threatening, and that you’re not talking a mile a minute (knowing you only have a few moments to speak may subconsciously increase your pace). Really listen to what you’re saying—make sure you’re not repeating words and that you’re sending the message you really want to convey.

8. Ride the Elevator
The next time you ride an elevator (alone), practice your speech. First, give yourself some time by going to the highest floor. Then, try giving your pitch from a middle floor and from the first to the third floor, too. Having to make just a few brief moments count will help you to hone the words you need and scrap the ones you don’t! This week, set aside some time to craft your elevator pitch (or dust off the one you’ve used before). You just never know who you might face tomorrow morning.

Laura Katen is President of Katen Consulting, a women-owned NY-based professional development training company. Katen Consulting facilitates soft skills workshops in the areas of First Impressions + Business Success, Personal Brand + Appearance, Effective Communication, Interactions + Building Rapport, Strategic Dining, Networking Savvy, and Presentation Skills. Contact: www.katenconsulting.com or @katenconsulting.
Making contact (alt version)

Short (but formal) self-intro: sums up who you are, what you are looking for and why you are here

"Hello, I’m Marie Curie. I will be completing my PhD in photonics soon, and plan to work in R&D in the optics industry. Your company's recent breakthrough in transmissive telescope technology with diffractive optics is leading edge, and it would be a great place to contribute my skills. Do you have a few minutes to talk with me?"

Practice with us on Monday, 5 October (online via Zoom); sign up via Forum.
Be ready for an interview...

- Some companies (not many) may invite you via the “CV-theque,” or spontaneously to a first (screening) interview at the Forum.
- Others may ask if you “have a few minutes,” and do this spontaneously at the stand.
- Bring copies of your CV, your business cards, and any additional documents (work certificates, references).
- Mini-presentation re. thesis or projects a plus (USB key, I-pad or laptop)?

Order cards online (Vista Print, etc.)

Keep documents safe and neat in a portfolio or cover.
Purpose of job interviews

Recruiters look for answers to the following:
1. Can s/he do the job?
2. Does s/he want to do the job?
3. Does s/he have potential to do more?
4. Is s/he a better fit than other candidates?
5. What does s/he know about us/our industry?

To get their answers, they will ask you about
- Your skills (mostly technical, but also “soft”)
- Your experience (emphasize internships & projects)
- Your personality (includes your values)

If you have to wear a mask, your eye contact and vocal enthusiasm will be even more important than usual!
“Top 8” personality traits & skills

- Analytical reasoning
- Ability to develop solutions
- Sense of responsibility
- Maturity
- For young professionals, “business awareness,” not experience
- Motivation
- Collaborative attitude
- Adaptability
- Interpersonal skills

*During the first interview, most questions will focus on such qualities. Reassure the recruiter that you have them before s/he asks!*
Typical interview questions

1. Questions about the position and the company

These questions help seeing how well you prepared, which is an indication of your motivation. They are the easiest to prepare for.

• What do you know about your company?
• What are your reasons to work for us?
• What makes us different from our competition?
• What kind of challenges is our industry currently facing?
• What kind of tasks and responsibilities does this position incur?
• What relevant skills do you have for the job?
• Do you have any questions?
2. So-called "personality" questions

These questions help determine what kind of individual you are, and how well you would fit in the existing work culture.

- Tell me about yourself
- What is your career objective?
- Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?
- Would you rather work alone or in a team?
- Describe your ideal work environment
- What do you expect from your boss?
- What are your main strengths and weaknesses?
Typical interview questions

3. Behavioral questions

These questions are based on the fact that the past behavior of a candidate is a good predictor of his future behavior. Concrete examples are expected.

- Give me an example of a bad decision you took.
- Tell me about a conflict in which you were involved.
- Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?
- Give me an example of a time when you did more than what was expected of you.
Typical interview questions

4. Situational questions

The poor-man’s assessment center. You are put in a (more or less) realistic situation and are asked what you would do. They help validate your knowledge and how you build a response.

- *Et votre français ? Parlez-moi un peu de vos dernières vacances ?*
- *What would you do in this particular situation (a typical situation that you could actually confront in the position)?*
- *If you were the president of EPFL, what would you change?*

Such questions are popular with recruiters, as they are difficult to anticipate and prepare for.
Typical interview questions

5. Unsettling questions

Some recruiters enjoy asking unexpected questions in order to test the candidate's reaction.

- Try and solve this little quiz...
- A dozen friends show up at your door at dinner time without warning. What do you cook?
- How frequently do you buy shoes?

Others will suddenly become aggressive towards the candidate in order to unsettle them.

- ... I don't see why you can't solve such a simple quiz. My 10-year old daughter did it on the first try!
- While listening to you, I developed the impression that the only thing that matters to you is to climb the corporate ladder as fast as you can.
- Do you really hope to land a job with such a poor command of German?

The only way to confront the situation: **Keep calm and don’t argue!**
Highly subjective

The purpose of the interview is rational yet it remains a highly subjective process for the recruiter to get a feel for who you are.

- An initial impression occurs in less than three minutes.
- The rest of the time is unconsciously aimed at confirming the first impression. This is quite difficult to change afterwards, though not at all impossible.
- Make sure to score bonus points right away, so it will be less likely to lose them later.
Logistics matter

• Make sure you understand the COVID safety regulations, and plan accordingly. **Arrive early.**

• **Company presentations:** record highlights which you can talk about at their stand.

• Ask for business cards from everyone you meet.
  ➢ If not, write down his/her details.
  ➢ Note specifics of what you spoke about and mention this in your thank-you email.
Forum 2020: the (first?) COVID-ified job fair

Some things don’t change, however:

- Keep in mind that many, if not most, of the people at the stands are not in recruitment roles (varies widely).

- Even with a restricted number of visitors, but with only two staff members at each stand, the reps will be more tired than usual especially at the end of each day.

- Start by showing interest in the company, not pushing yourself forward: good manners and good strategy!

For many companies, this has become an annual exercise in PR & branding, not recruitment…manage your expectations, but still use the opportunity to fight the monster of indifference!
Follow up & follow thru

✓ While the experience is still fresh, take time to consolidate your notes, underlining the best prospects, and create an action plan.

✓ With contact details: within 24 hours after meeting the person, send a brief thank-you message, mentioning a topic you discussed.

✓ Mention this encounter in your letter of motivation if you choose to apply, even if it is a long time later.
Shake it, don’t break it

Get customized business cards rapidly and affordably:

- **Online Printers**: 250 in 24 hours for 35-43 CHF, plus postage; [https://fr.onlineprinters.ch/](https://fr.onlineprinters.ch/)
- **VistaPrint**: 500 cards for 7.90-22.90 CHF + rapid delivery 19.90 CHF, 3 days; (standard 9.90 for 5 days): [https://www.vistaprint.ch](https://www.vistaprint.ch)
- **M-Print** (Migros): 100 cards in 48 hours, 20 CHF for standard designs; order/pick up in person; nearest in Nyon: [https://www.migrosprintshop.ch/succursales/nyon-la-combe/](https://www.migrosprintshop.ch/succursales/nyon-la-combe/)
What’s next

✓ Use all the guides on the Forum website and the EPFL Campus application.

✓ Attend the special opening conference on Monday, 5 October, 17:00 in the STCC.

✓ Elevator Pitch practice all day via Zoom, 5 Oct. on “Get Ready Day;” sign up on Forum website.

✓ Join us for “Going viral: your job search during COVID,” Industry Roundtable, 7 October, 17:15, online via Zoom.

Don’t miss any career events on campus: sign up for our Memento:

Career Center: http://carriere.epfl.ch

Forum https://forum-epfl.ch/en/
“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

-Albert Einstein

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