

Robert R. McComsey Career Development Center



GUIDE TO THE COMPANY VISIT

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*Hours: 8:30-4:30 Monday-Friday
Walk-in hours: 1:00-4:30 Tues., Wed., and Thurs.*

Most companies recruiting on college campuses include a company visit as a part of the hiring process, once the initial screening interview has taken place. This visit usually consists of a day of interviewing and related activities at the company site. The company visit can also be called a plant trip, second interview, site visit, or office visit. There is no way to know exactly what to expect; each company conducts their visits differently. Your experience may vary by length of the trip, number of people involved, levels of people interviewing you, types of tests conducted, degree of informality, lunch and dinner plans, etc. If you are invited to visit the office or plant, you can be sure you made a good impression during the initial interview, and that if you are properly prepared, the trip can lead to a job offer.

The company visit serves two primary purposes:

- 1. Allow the company to get a more in-depth assessment of you prior to making a job offer.** This is generally the last step in the selection process. Since you have already made the first cut at this point, the employer is already convinced that you have the skills and talents to do the job. This is a chance to show there is a fit between you and the company culture.
- 2. Allow you an opportunity to see the company and people in order to make an informed decision if an offer is made.** The company visit gives you an opportunity to learn more about the position, long-term career opportunities, the local community, and the general feel of the company. Remember that you, like the employer, have to determine whether there will be a good match.

Preparing for the Visit

Preparation for the company visit is essential if you are to make a good impression. Attempt to learn as much about the company as possible, especially in the following areas:

1. General research about products, services, etc.

- Review the notes you took after the initial campus interview
- Annual report
- Check their website – many companies have special sections for college grads
- Industry and business publications containing information about the company. Websites like Hoovers.Com or the Thomas Register are also good sites.
- Talk with former students who are now employed by the company

- Conduct information interviews with people who are in the line of work for which you are interviewing
- Talk with people who have direct dealings with the company or its products

2. Questions for you to ask on-site; insightful questions that will help you make an informed decision to accept or decline an offer.

- *for the Personnel Manager or Human Resources Director:*
 - What do employees like best/least about the company?
 - How much turnover is there?
 - How much travel is expected?
 - Child care considerations?
 - What are the chances of being relocated once on the job?
 - How are raises/promotions determined?
 - How often are performance reviews given, and how are they conducted?
 - What type of training program does a new employee receive?
- *for your prospective supervisor:*
 - What are the major responsibilities of the department?
 - What would I be expected to accomplish within the first six months/year of the job?
 - What are some of the special projects now ongoing in the department?
 - How much contact with management is there?
 - What are some of the long-term goals of the department?
- *for a prospective colleague:*
 - What do you like best/least about working for the company/department?
 - What goes on during a typical workday?
 - Do you feel free to express your ideas and concerns? Do most people?
 - What are the possibilities for personal growth and advancement?
 - How long have you been here? Does your future here seem secure?

Personal Preparation

While knowledge, insightful questions and a sharp business outlook will go a long way toward impressing the employer, a lack of personal preparation can detract from your positive image. Do not forget:

- Your appearance should be professional (attire, hair, skin, nails, grooming, etc.) Remember that perfume and cologne should be noticeable ONLY to you, and that you need to dress appropriately to the type of company. Men – leave the earrings at home, and give some consideration to your hair length. There is plenty of time for expressing your individuality after you get a job offer! Also, if you smoke, you may want to leave your interview attire in another room since clothing picks up cigarette smoke. Pick up our “Dress for Success” handout for more information.
- Leave your personal problems at home. Take the time and effort to clear your mind of school concerns, deadlines, family concerns, and any other problems.

Arranging the trip

An invitation to a company visit will usually come from one specific contact person at the company. Unless you are otherwise instructed, that person should be your source of information, to which you can address any questions about all aspects of the trip.

1. Travel

The majority of company visits are a full or half day. This generally necessitates an overnight stay in the city where the company is located. Travel will be either by air, train, or driving, depending on the distance and your preference. Plan on flying to a location of more than 200 miles away. Generally, the company will pay for everything, but not always. **See the "Expenses and Reimbursement" section of this guide for more detailed information.**

In the best situations, your contact person at the company will handle your travel for you, including your hotel, ground transportation and flight. In that case, your only real involvement should be letting them know which airport you want to fly out of. Expect the person to arrange an electronic ticket, which you can pick up at the airport after providing a photo ID. If you are arranging your own travel, use a travel agent. All you need to do is give the agent the travel dates and times; he or she will search for the best package, report back to you, and book the flight. This is done at no cost to you. If you prefer to handle your own arrangements, try a website like <<http://www.expedia.com>> or <<http://www.travelocity.com>> to handle the flight arrangements. In all cases, make sure you know up front how payment is going to be handled and how you will be reimbursed for expenses. A question like "should I save my receipts?" will usually prompt your contact person to explain, but if you have any questions please ask someone at the CDC.

After receiving confirmation of travel arrangements, you should call or send a note to your contact person, confirming reservations and travel plans. This will avoid any last minute mix-ups or confusion.

Be sure to get all your directions ahead of time. You should leave for your trip knowing how to get from the airport to the hotel, from the hotel to the interview site, and the location of the first meeting of the day.

2. Arrival

It is a good idea to plan to arrive in the city the night before the visit, avoiding last minute flights. This will help avoid the problems that can arise from airline delays, cancellations, weather problems, lost luggage or other difficulties. Once in town, check to see if the hotel has a courtesy van from the airport. If not, keep all taxi receipts in case of later reimbursement. If you are not being reimbursed, large cities like Boston and New York often have subway and bus transportation at a very minimal cost.

When checking into the hotel, ask for any messages (the company may have left information for you), and verify any pre-payment agreements. If not prepaid, the hotel receptionist will usually require an imprint of your credit card.

Here are some other tips for your hotel stay:

- Schedule a wake-up call with plenty of time for getting ready and having breakfast. If your room is unsatisfactory for any reason, particularly noise, do not hesitate to ask the hotel to change it.
- Non-smoking rooms are often available – if you have not booked it in advance, ask for one upon check-in
- Local calls are not free. They often cost anywhere from 25 to 75 cents per call.
- Do not bill any long distance calls to your room. Use a credit card or calling card, or call collect.
- Review the bill upon checkout to ensure its accuracy. Be sure to keep a copy, especially if you are paying and need to be reimbursed.

3. The Evening Before

Many companies arrange for an employee to meet the candidate for dinner upon arrival, or at a later time in the evening. The dinner is designed as an opportunity for you to relax and meet an employee in a casual setting, while getting a feel for the next day's schedule, the company, the city, and any other pertinent topics. Your dinner companion might be a manager, your contact person, a recent hire of the company, or alumnus of Alfred University. The degree of informality and nature of conversation can vary, but it's usually somewhat relaxed. Keep in mind, though, that you should still reflect maturity and professionalism, since the dinner host may be evaluating your manners, ideas and views, ability to converse, manner of speech, ability to mix business and pleasure, and maturity.

Dress appropriately for a social dinner. Eat moderately, avoid alcoholic beverages beyond one glass of wine, beer, or a single drink, ask insightful questions about the topic of discussion, and relax. Although your professionalism should come through, so should your personality.

The Day of the Interview

1. Checking out of the hotel

- As a backup to your wake-up call, you should have a travel alarm clock and/or have a parent or friend call you in the morning to make sure you're up and about. Tardiness is the worst first impression you can possibly make.
- Check out of your hotel upon leaving for the site. If you forget, it can result in the company (or you) being charged for an extra night. Take your baggage with you. Again, be sure to check the bill.

2. Interview Day: what to expect

It is impossible to predict exactly what to expect because different companies set up different types of schedules. You should receive an itinerary, but be prepared for anything. Below are some scenarios you should be ready for:

- Three to five separate interviews with various levels of management in one-on-one settings.
- The company may have scheduled multiple candidates for company visits at one time. You may engage in a combination of group sessions and one-on-one interviews during the day.
- In one-on-one interviews, expect to speak with department managers and first line supervisors of the area in which the position is available. You may also meet with a second or third level manager who has had experience in different areas of the company.
- You may be expected to undergo some type of testing. See the "Testing" section below for more details.
- Some companies will have the full day of interview content determined ahead of time; others will leave it up to individuals as to what they wish to assess. Either way, all the individuals involved will meet after the process is complete to share impressions and give recommendations.
- Often a plant or business tour will be part of your day, to be conducted by a plant or employment manager. Keep your interest high and use the opportunity to ask insightful questions about what you observe. Women, if you expect a plant tour, bring closed-toe shoes.
- You will probably meet with a human resources representative to round out your day, a person to give you information about the company and evaluate some of your more general self-management skills.

3. General tips for the big day

Anyone you meet for even a few minutes is a potential evaluator. Considering this: you need to remain sharp, confident, and professional at all times.

- Pay attention to cues around you. You may be able to obtain valuable information in unexpected settings (i.e. waiting for an interviewer to pick you up at a reception area; in the company cafeteria during lunch; speaking with a receptionist in a manager's office).
- Interviewers will have scanned your resume and be familiar with your background prior to your visit. They will be looking at your drive and motivation, and will be probing for your strengths and potential weaknesses.
- Expect to be asked the same questions by three or four different people during the day - you must give as good an answer to the fourth as you do the first. This may seem tiring, but may indicate an area of particular concern to the company.
- In some instances, companies will assign each interviewer a specific quality or skill to probe during the interview. One interviewer may look for leadership ability, another for communication skill, another for a specific technical skill, and so on.
- Most companies will design the day as to provide a friendly and relaxed atmosphere for you. Keep in mind that the interview process is a two-way street – it is important to the company that you feel as comfortable as possible about the visit so that you can make an informed choice in case of an offer being tendered.
- This will be a tiring day for you - prepare for it! Guard against growing weary and neglecting your professional demeanor.
- Be ready to be offered the position, and be prepared to discuss salary (schedule an appointment with a counselor in advance to prepare for this, or pick up our "Negotiating Salary and Benefits" handout).

4. Departure

The last meeting of the day will often be with the contact person or human resources/personnel manager. This session is to answer any final questions, explain follow-up procedures, discuss reimbursement for the company visit, talk about salary and benefits (in some cases), and take care of similar details. After the visit, be sure you know how to get back to the airport. Most companies will structure the day to allow you to depart the facility between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m. You should be sure all of your questions have been answered prior to leaving, and you know what to expect regarding follow-up to the visit.

After the Visit

As soon as possible after your visit, you should send a personal letter of thanks to all the people you met and talked with that day. While it may not affect the probability of getting an offer, it is a common courtesy and may help the company make a difficult decision between candidates.

Write an additional letter to your contact person, thanking him or her for the effort it took to arrange your visit. This letter should reaffirm interest in the position, highlight one or two qualifications, and show your understanding of etiquette. This letter provides one last opportunity to stand out among your competition. The thank you letter is a business communication; in most industries this means it should be typed or emailed instead of handwritten. Tips on writing the thank you letter can be found in the CDC handout,

On average, you should hear within two weeks from the company with an offer or a rejection. However, you should find out how long you can expect to wait regarding an employment decision, and feel free to contact the company to check on delays if you do not hear within the estimated time.

Finally, do not be afraid to turn down a job offer if, after careful consideration, you feel it is not the right step for your career goals. If this is necessary, do so with courtesy, since you never know what personal or professional ties the company may have with other people in your field. Our **“Thank you and No Thank You letters”** handout gives an example of a rejection and a withdrawal letter.

Expenses and Reimbursement

Expense handling and reimbursement will vary by company, and it should be discussed ahead of time. If you have a major credit card, it will ease a lot of worries by avoiding any potentially embarrassing situations (for example, if you have been told your hotel room was pre-paid, but the hotel staff says it is not). Never turn down a company visit because of lack of funds - by talking to the contact person in the company, you may be able to work something out. Companies may be able to assist you by:

- Pre-paying airline tickets and having them waiting at the airport for you
- Pre-paying the hotel room
- Providing cash up front for use during travel (be prepared to account for all of it through receipts and to return any amount that you don't use)
- Arranging for ground transportation

Generally, most major expenses (travel and lodging) will either be pre-paid by the company or the company will expect you to put them on a credit card and reimburse you later. Incidental expenses that the company may also reimburse you for include: parking, cab fare, business phone calls, meals, and tips. You should not expect reimbursement for room service, newspapers, personal phone calls, gifts, in-room movies, and other personal items. Always collect receipts, and have the means to pay for expenses in case there is confusion during the day.

Use common sense and good judgment regarding expenses during the day. The company will see the expense report, and unusually high expenditures may be frowned upon. Although you don't have to eat at a fast food restaurant, you should exercise good judgment about ordering alcoholic beverages, expensive meals, etc. Use the hotel restaurant prices as a guide to a reasonable amount to spend. The company wants you to enjoy the visit, but not to be extravagant.

Pre-Employment Testing

Many companies test candidates prior to extending employment offers. Testing can include drug/alcohol, agility, personality, and leadership tests. Background screening can include a credit check, criminal records investigation, driver's license check, academic credentials verification, and reference checks (academic, employment and personal references). While students and job applicants may think of these tests and investigations as an invasion of privacy, there is nothing illegal about employers seeking this information. However, there are legal guidelines that an employer must follow. Here is a general guideline – please see a counselor in the CDC for more details.

- You must be advised of the purpose of pre-employment investigations or tests, how the information will be used, and to whom the information will be disclosed.
- Information should not be given to anyone in the company or organization other than the person making the final hiring decision.
- Under federal and state employment discrimination laws, all job candidates must be treated equally in the hiring process. All candidates for a specific position must receive the same tests and undergo the same reference checks. Candidates from a particular protected classification cannot be singled out for background checks or testing.

- Tests must measure the skills/abilities required to perform the job.
- Under requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), testing must be done in an accessible location and accommodations that make the testing format accessible should be offered.

The Community/Relocation

You will need to make an effort to learn about the surrounding community. During the day of the interview, you can ask people about housing, entertainment, cost of living, or other personal concerns. Before and/or after the interview, you can take advantages of the following resources:

- Write to or call the city's Chamber of Commerce to request information on the area. See if they have an apartment or home guide to assist you with relocation.
- Subscribe to or purchase a few weeks worth of the city's newspaper. Browse the classified ads or just get a feel for the city.
- There are several websites you can use to research. Pick up our Salary Negotiations guide with a section on relocation, or ask a CDC counselor for recommendations. Recommended sites include <www.homefair.com> and <www.ersys.com>.

¹Taken from <www.naceweb.com>, Employers Using Preemployment Testing As a Hiring Tool, by Rochelle Kaplan, Esq.

Some of the material in this handout is from "The 2nd Interview - the On-Site Visit" by Douglas Muha and Ronald Orgiefsky, Planning Job Choices: 1996.