

## **The Official Public Accounting Recruiting Guide**

I was going to wait and make this a celebration of 10,000 subscriptions to [/r/accounting](#) , but I felt it better to provide this information to you now in light of recruiting season's imminent start. This guide is split into three parts, continued in the comments section below (it is far too large to fit into one post). Be sure to refer to this guide frequently throughout the entire process this fall for the best results.

To start, a big thank you is in order to [/u/computanti](#) for the idea and providing a place for me to start in creating this guide. This guide was put together by myself and the acquired help from a fellow colleague that is an expert on the networking and recruiting process. We have recently been on both sides of the public accounting recruiting process as students as well as professionals recruiting for our firms. Questions and feedback are more than welcome.

**Disclaimer:** This guide is based off of our experiences in the recruiting process and some aspects may differ at your school or region. The following is put together based on two schools in separate regions that are highly targeted by the Big 4 and regional public accounting firms. The information provided here is intended for your purposes to assist in the recruiting process only. *(If you would also like to offer advice, please provide your qualifications)*. Also, please note that fall tax season is fast approaching as well, so I apologize if there is a delay or I am unable to answer all PMs. I encourage you to post here in order to allow others to help as well.

By now, you have heard time and time again how important networking is in order to obtain an internship or entry-level full-time position in the accounting field, but usually it is not thoroughly discussed on how to network. The purpose of this guide is to bridge that gap between the process of knowing about networking and how to properly execute it. There are two different types of students during the recruiting process:

### **Prepared Recruits & Unprepared Recruits**

This guide is provided to help inform you on how to best become a *prepared* recruit. Successful networking requires building a good rapport with firm representatives and this cannot be done by simply going to one or two events. The most prepared and successful recruits are the ones that go to every recruiting event. Firms pre-identify students through these events, so the more they meet you, the more you will stand out.

### **How to Prepare**

**Use your resources to the fullest** – Networking is all about building relationships. Use your professors, fellow students, alumni network, graduate students, accounting organizations, and school's Career Management Center in order to learn how to prepare and create connections. This field is as much about the people you know as it is what you know. With this in mind, do not ask someone to pass along your résumé without getting to know them first, as that person will be vouching for you.

**Build up your LinkedIn account** - If you do not have one yet, shame on you! Create one immediately and fully build your account with information on your education and experience. This is an exceptional tool to use in order to expand your network and staying connected with those that you meet. Most of the professional business world is on LinkedIn now and there are ample recruiting tools and opportunities available through the site. Be sure to use this to your benefit in order to grow your reach. With this in mind, make sure your Facebook page is secure and tame to the public eye. You will be searched online during the recruiting process and you do not want the wrong images or information to be broadcasted for all to see.

**Join one or more student accounting organizations and get involved** – These organizations provide exclusive access and opportunities for firms to meet students and identify potential recruits. Firms are looking for well-rounded students in leadership positions on campus that is outside of the classroom.

**Continuously improve your résumé** – Your résumé is always a work in progress and it never hurts to have others take a look at it. The more feedback you get, the more developed it can become. Firms receive thousands of résumés each recruiting season and likely hundreds just from your school's career fair alone. Small details stand out when being compared to such a large candidate base. Know everything that is on your

résumé and be prepared to talk about it in detail.

**Elevator Speech** – Have a well-rehearsed brief summary about yourself that lasts about 20-30 seconds. It is key to make a proper first introduction to professionals. State your name, major, year, expected graduation date, and position you are interested in (intern/full-time, tax/audit/advisory).

**Know your Goals** – You should have an idea of some of your short-term and long-term goals. For example, some short-term goals might be to obtain an internship or finish your degree, while long-term goals might be to pass the CPA Exam, decide on the service line you want to go into, and where you want to be in 5-10 years.

**Be able to answer the question “Why Audit or Why Tax?”** – The firms are looking to see if you have put significant effort into deciding what you want to do with your career. While you probably do not know what you want to do for sure, it is extremely important to pick one or the other during the recruiting process. Firms do not like to see candidates that are undecided. Generally during career fairs, firms have three piles: Audit, Tax, and Undecided. Most only take into consideration two of those piles.

**Stay current with news about firms of interest** – Most firms will either frequently be cited in the news or actively post their own articles on their firm’s website. Be sure to keep up with this information to provide relevant conversation topics and show that you are interested in the firm.

**Professional Attire** – This topic is often talked to death, but it is very important. Never be underdressed, it will never look bad to dress more professionally (make sure your clothes fit well). Conservative is always better, be sure to conceal tattoos and do not wear anything too revealing. When attending single firm events, try to match your attire with the firm’s colors, the firm representatives you meet will take noticed and be very impressed.

**Necessary Accessories** – There are a couple items you should always have with you at networking events, a *personalized name tag (under debate)* and your own *business card*. Often, networking events do not provide name tags. Always having your own will help professionals and recruiters remember your name and thus recall how often you attended networking and recruiting events. Business cards are also important because outside the career fair, résumés are too obstructive to hand to professionals at each networking event. A simple business card providing your name, contact info, position you are interested in, and status in school is much more effective for smaller networking events. After you exchange business cards at the event, go home and e-mail the person you met with your résumé.

**Good Questions to Ask** - You should be asking thoughtful and engaging questions to learn more about the people you network with and their firms. Do not simply ask yes or no questions, and definitely do not try to ask highly technical questions with the objective of stumping the professional. *Use the following as a guide to come up with your own questions, do not just copy these:*

- Give me an example of a time you made a mistake and describe how your superiors dealt with it.
- What does your firm do to prevent conflicting assignments for low level staff between two different supervisors?
- Give me some examples of how your firm distinguishes itself from the competition.
- What is one realistic thing you wish you could change about your job?
- Does your firm's culture reward employees who get outside their comfort zone and take on new challenges, even if they make mistakes while trying something new?

**Thank You Notes** – In most circumstances, e-mail is the appropriate form of sending thank you notes as it is faster and more convenient. Always send an e-mail to every professional you speak to at each event within 24 hours of meeting them. If this was at a small event and the first time you met them, attaching your résumé is a good idea. Firm professionals meet hundreds if not thousands of students throughout the year and if you do not follow up quickly, they are likely to forget who you are and the connection you made will be lost. In the e-mail, it is good to ask a relevant question in order to create a dialogue. Be sure to review your emails multiple times for errors before sending them.

## **Your School's Career Fair**

All your preparation above is to succeed at the Career Fair. **Most firms, at least in the southeastern region recruit at this event and meet most their hiring needs for the next 12 months during the fall recruiting season.** This makes it essential that you attend this event. Bring plenty of résumés and business cards, wear your best business professional attire, and prepare to network the entire time with recruiters and professionals. *The goal is to convince these people that you are someone they would like to work with.*

Do not go to your top choice of employers to start. Go to a couple firms you are not very interested in and use this as a chance to get warmed up. You are probably going to feel a little awkward and nervous standing around in a big convention center, waiting in line to talk to a stranger and hand them a résumé. That is exactly why you do not want to start out at your top choice and make a terrible impression. Get comfortable and then move to the booths of your favorite firms.

## **The Interview Process**

**After the Career Fair**, firms invite students to interview for internships and full-time positions. The campus recruiting process has two rounds of interviews. The first interview is conducted on campus. The standard format is one 30 minute interview with a single person (usually a manager, senior manager, or partner) from the firm. Some firms will have you conduct two 30 minute interviews with two different firm representatives, but this is less common.

**After the on-campus interview**, firms make some cuts and invite the remaining candidates to an office interview. This takes place at the office of the firm and usually lasts from 9 a.m. until early in the afternoon. You will go through a welcome and introduction session, receive a tour of the office, conduct three 30 minute interviews, and have lunch with some of the professionals at the firm. At least one of the interviews will be with a partner. The other two will probably be with people at the manager and senior manager level. A junior associate will act as your host for the day. Also, firms often invite you to dinner the night prior to your campus and/or office interview. They might say that this dinner is optional, but it is in your best interest to attend no matter what conflicts you might have. Professors should be more than understanding about having interviews, work with them to set your priorities in order.

**Try not to be nervous.** The goal is to find out if you can have a conversation and communicate effectively. An industry rule-of-thumb is that about 75% of candidates invited to office interviews receive a job offer, so just relax and be yourself. Be competent and able to converse about something related to the business and accounting world. If you cannot fill the entire interview session, you will appear rude or uninterested in the job. Stay current with news from the Wall Street Journal, Accounting Today, Current Accountants, your state's CPA society & AICPA newsletters, etc. During office interviews, show respect to everyone including those at the front desk, staff, and facility workers. You are being graded on how you treat every single person you make contact with at the firm.

**Throughout each stage of the process**, if you end up not receiving an offer with a particular firm, be sure to follow up respectfully with the firm to ask what you could have done better. It is all a learning process and knowing is half the battle. If you are able to identify your faults, you will have a much greater opportunity to improve going forward.

**Be sure to follow up appropriately after the interview process.** Generally, firms will provide a date when you should hear back from them. Try to be patient and not pester them prior to this date. However, firms tend to be operating on slightly different time-tables. If you happen to have an offer from one firm that will expire prior to hearing back from the other firm, make sure to notify the firm you are waiting to hear back from about your time constraints. Firms understand this situation and most are willing to do their best to accommodate for it. Do not prematurely accept and offer as you will burn bridges if you later decide to rescind your acceptance to take an offer from another firm.

**Hopefully, if you execute everything well**, the end result will provide you with one or more offers for an internship or full-time position. If you successfully land multiple offers, be sure to follow up appropriately

with the firms you decline offers from. The accounting world is very small and you do not want to burn any bridges. You never know where your career will end up taking you and having long lasting connections in the field is very important.

### **Common Mistakes**

**Talking too long to one person** - At networking events, leave them wanting more for the next time you meet. Limit conversations to no more than 5 minutes. It is always better to talk to multiple people for a few minutes than one person for a long time. The more people you meet, the more good impressions you can make. With this in mind, make sure the few minutes you do spend are meaningful and effective.

**Asking boring questions** - Boring questions get boring answers, avoid yes or no questions. If you do it right, you can steer the conversation where you want it to go through the questions you ask.

**Poor handshake** - Give a firm handshake with proper eye contact. You hear this all the time, but this is still a very common problem with candidates and is such an important first impression aspect to the process.

**Not speaking loud enough** - It is going to be crowded and loud at networking events and the Employer's Showcase. You must talk loud enough to be heard. Otherwise, you are just wasting your breath and not appear confident.

**Assuming a strong GPA résumé are enough to get the job** - These will get you in the door, but showing your personality will get the job. This is achieved by attending as many events possible and building relationships.

**Having the attitude of finding a job instead of starting a career** - It is just as important that you find the firm that fits you as it is for you to fit with the firm. Make the due diligence to research the firms to find the one that is the best fit for you.

**Bringing up politics, religion, or other topics with strong personal beliefs** - You would think everyone knows that it is off limits to bring up these types of topics into discussion during the interview process, but it still happens every year. Be prepared to have thoughtful conversations throughout the process so that you do not accidentally use politics and religion to fall back on. You do not know what beliefs people you are talking to have and bringing up conflicting views will immediately put you in a negative light.

### **How to Build Lasting Connections**

- When you meet someone, be sure to listen to them. You do not have to talk them to death, they will often have great advice for you and have important information for you to know.
- Pay attention. Remember as much as you can, so you can engage in the conversation and recall parts later.
- Exchange business cards. If you do not have your own, get some immediately.
- After speaking with a firm representative, step away and take a moment to briefly write everything you remember about them and the conversation on that business card.
- When you get home, send each person you met a brief thank you email. Be sure to note something about your conversation so they can better recall meeting you. If you do no follow up, that is a lost connection.
- Use an electronic contact storage (Gmail is good for this). Store all your obtained information into that database including the personal info you jotted down right after you met them. Email them again about every six months to a year in order to keep in touch and retain the connection. You never know when they may be useful to you or you useful to them in the future. This is how you build a long lasting professional network.
- Next time you see them, if you have your contact database linked up on your phone somehow, you can pull up a little info about them. You can buy them their favorite drink, ask about their kids or family, ask them about their business, etc.

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### **Important Tips for Interns and Entry-level Hires**

**You can also use this information to formulate questions during the recruiting process.** Many firms treat interns the same as entry-level full-time hires, so the following information is equally relevant to both. These tips include general advice working for a public accounting firm with a focus from the Tax perspective to help ease the transition and be successful:

**Do not expect to know everything at the start.** You are going to end up knowing very little and realize that your accounting classes do not teach you for real world practice, rather provide you with a foundation of accounting. This is completely normal and expected. The firm will provide extensive training and expect you take longer at the beginning to learn the firm's procedures, software, and how to prepare the work. Do not get discouraged, just be ready to absorb new information and learn.

**Communication is the key to success.** Having strong communication skills including: being able to explain problems, update seniors and managers on project statuses, and general timely communication between coworkers is vital to becoming part of the team and firm. You will be expected to be a team player and able to appropriately communicate any issues you may have. Do not be afraid to speak up, but also realize there is a time and place for everything. If you know your senior is working on a project with a close deadline, it is probably best to wait or send an e-mail rather than walking up to them with your issue.

**Double check everything** before putting any work into review to your senior or manager. Spending an extra 20-30 minutes to go over everything and catching mistakes will save your reviewer, who bills out at a much higher rate than you, a lot of time and you will be perceived and valued as a higher performing employee.

**Bring a pen and notepad with you everywhere.** A senior asks you over to their desk to show you something? Bring a notepad. Meeting with a manager about a new project? Bring a notepad. A senior is asking you to drop by for a second without explaining why? Bring a notepad. Senior/Manager is ready to review a project with you? Bring a notepad.

**Create a reference guide for yourself.** All the notes you take while meeting with managers, or seniors showing you tips or advice, transcribe it all on a notepad, then as soon as you have time, transfer the notes into your reference guide you are making in a word document or note organizing software program. This reference guide will eliminate pestering people with repeat questions.

**It is extremely important to ask questions, but be smart about it.** If you come across a question that does not impede you from continuing to work, write it down and keep moving on. Make a list of questions that your senior can answer all at one time rather than periodically asking single questions over a short duration. When asking for help, be sure to ask them to come at their own convenience if it is not time sensitive. If you are completely stuck, let them know and work on something else until they have the time to help you.

**Attempt to build closer relationships with other interns and new hires.** Work with each other to solve

problems before going straight to a senior. The seniors will appreciate it, especially during busy times. Seniors tend to have the roughest time during busy season as they are responsible for helping interns and new hires, preparing their own work, reviewing others work, and progressing themselves towards a more supervisory role.

**It is okay to say you do not understand something.** Do not try to act like you know what a senior or manager is talking about if you are unsure. This will impede your learning process and cause further confusion later on. If you do not understand something or it is being explained too quickly, ask them to explain and slow down. You do not want to become lost after getting deep into a project and have it re-explained to you.

**Strive to understand what you are doing and why you are doing it.** While it is okay to not understand something, you should always be working towards realizing what purpose there is to your work. This will be a difficult task at the beginning and you are not expected to fully grasp everything as you start. Just attempt to make a conscious effort to do more than simple data entry and take note of why you are doing specific tasks. Do not just learn the work, also learn the client and how the work relates.

**Do NOT eat your time when entering the amount of time you work on projects.** You may think this will make you look better and show you are better performing, but it actually hurts everyone, including you. Future projects might start being budgeted for fewer hours if it looks like you are performing faster. This can vary between the firm you work for, but generally the budgeted hours are just estimates of how long projects should take based off of the prior year, currently known information for this year, and the level of preparer working on the project. If you eat time, the manager will not effectively know how long the project took to complete. It could have taken longer this year because there was a lot more work that they had not noticed, or there were specific complications that arose that were not present in years past. Eating time can cause an inaccurate budget for the next year, hurt the ability to judge how difficult the project is for a new employee, and probably most importantly, reduce the amount of hours billed to the client, thus reducing revenue for the firm.

**Be aware of office politics and try not to get caught up in them.** Every firm has its own office politics and you will eventually find out who you can trust and who likes to run their mouth. Be careful what you say to people, especially as an intern still trying to get that job offer. However, it is important to stay personable with your coworkers, you do not want to act like a recluse who does not talk to anyone.

**Try to keep your relationships in the office professional.** It is fine to get to know your coworkers better and to have fun sharing stories and life experiences, as well as just regular daily socializing, however you need to remember that you are also there to work and make an impression as well. You do not want to get caught talking to a coworker about your weekend when you have several projects that need to get out the door. It can be a difficult transition going from school into busy season at a public accounting firm, especially if you have not worked those kind of overtime hours before. Try and find a good balance between socializing with your coworkers and getting your work done.

**Keep a keen eye out to see who you can really connect with to have as a mentor.** It may differ depending on your firm, but you should be assigned a senior as your buddy, and a manager as your coach. You should try to confide in them as you are making adjustments into the field of accounting. It may turn out that your assigned buddy/coach ends up being one of these people, but you may also find that there is someone else you feel you can go to for advice. It is important to build these relationships to help bolster your progression.

**Work on setting a plan to manage a balance to your personal life** in preparation of busy season coming. You probably know that you will end up working long hours for several weeks which will limit your time to do things outside of work. A proper diet and exercise are important for having sufficient energy throughout the long days at work. It will be hard to motivate yourself to keep to this if you do not have any set plan beforehand. Also, it becomes more difficult to do simple tasks during those long hours that you probably would not think of until it happened. Some of these tasks include: going to the bank or paying bills, doing laundry, doing the dishes, keeping the home tidy, keeping in touch with friends and family, exercising, grocery shopping, and other routine tasks that may not get done in the absence of free time.

**If you come across ways to be more productive at work, do not be shy about it.** Time is money, especially during busy season. If you realize certain tasks are inefficient and you know of a way to expedite their completion, take the initiative to bring it to someone's attention and be sure to properly document it.

**Document your workpapers as you prepare work** so that it is clear what you have done and why you did it. References are important so that the reviewer knows where to go to see where you obtained information and what your thought process was preparing it. You want your reviewer to be able to spend as little time as possible with the least amount of confusion while they are going over your work. It is worth taking the extra time to document and reference for your reviewer. It's most efficient to document as you go along, but it can also be worth going back to reference and further document as well. Remember, your reviewer bills out at a much higher rate than you, thus their time is much more important. Make the extra effort to save them time.

**Be aware of your budgeted time on a project.** It is also important to not go over budget without communicating it. Generally, you should be preparing a project with enough time left in your budget to have it returned to you in order to clear review notes and process the return. However, as said earlier other circumstances can cause you to go over budget. It's important to be aware of the budget and speak up if you're approaching the limit, especially during busy season. You do not want to go hours over budget without notifying anyone when it turned out you were spinning your wheels over an issue that could have been done much more efficiently.