

PREPARING YOUR PERSONAL SUMMARY

by Denise Bissonnette

What is a Personal Summary?

Talking to recruiters at a job fair is a mini-interview. When a recruiter asks, "Tell me about yourself" or "What brings you to the fair today?" you are being given a 1-3 minute opportunity to present yourself in such a way that will entice them to want to hear more. It's important to be ready and prepared to respond to these questions with calm and confidence. There is no better way to do that than to carefully consider and draft possible responses in advance so that, when voiced, they sound natural, effortless and conversational.

What do employers want to hear?

What appeals to employers most is genuineness, authenticity, and sincerity. No one wants to hear a "canned speech" when someone is asked to describe themselves. As trite as it might sound, they want you to be yourself, and trust me, they know the difference! Sure, they want to know your name, what field you are in (or what you are graduating from) and what you are looking for, but beyond that, they want to know what lights you up, when gets you excited, what you are proud of, what experiences you have had that taught you something important, and what inspires you. They want to see the person behind the resume!

Is there a formula for writing my personal summary?

If you are looking for the typical "elevator speech formula" or the recipe for "the classic one minute commercial", you can find lots of information on both by Googling either topic. What we are offering below is something different. We think it is more helpful to simply provide questions and prompts that will get you thinking about and identifying some of the things you most want to include in your own "personal summary" rather than providing a formula. We suggest that you take some time to respond to these questions and draft some notes. Once you have gone through these questions, consider which of these things would you include if you had only a minute to describe yourself? What if you had two minutes? And what if you had three?

Is it necessary to limit myself to a single summary that I use with everyone?

Absolutely not! After all, what you choose to share about yourself with one person may differ from what you say to another, depending on the situation. The key is to have a good handle on the aspects of yourself and your background which are most important to you - so that you can trust yourself to speak about them readily with a sense of calm and confidence. As with most things, practice does make perfect, so you may want to try out a few different ways of summarizing your interests, goals and background. Get feedback from people you really trust. If it helps, write them out beforehand.

Should my personal summary be a basic overview of my qualifications?

No, it shouldn't. Remember, employers can read all about your qualifications and educational background on your resume. You want to give them something in person which cannot necessarily be written on paper – a dose of your personal style and character. Talking about what you love and what you are good at is a great way to open a window to your personality. It is said that the best answer to any question is the truth – take some time now to assess *the true you*, so that when you are asked to say something about yourself, you can speak your truth with the pride and confidence you deserve!

Prompts for Your Personal Summary:

What are some of your strongest personal qualities or attributes?

What gifts, assets or strengths are you known for, or do you have a reputation for bringing to any situation?

Job Fair Tips from Denise Bissonnette

What have teachers and/or past employers appreciated most about you? How about your family and friends?

What industry or job-related skills do you have that would be of interest to the employer?

How did you choose your major (or your chosen field of endeavor)?

What are some of the most valuable work or educational experiences you have had and what did they teach you about what you want to do next?

What are you passionate or excited about? What inspires you?

What is your ultimate career aspiration? What is your immediate employment goal?

Job Fair Tips from Denise Bissonnette

What unique combination of skills/interests/abilities do you have to offer an employer that could benefit their workplace? In what way(s) do you think you could bring a benefit?

What would you most like to contribute to a workplace (a team, a project, the field)?

What challenges are you proud to have overcome and what have you gained through those experiences?

What do you most want a prospective employer to know about you?