How to Research a Company

FCS 100
How can you get an edge over the millions of other job seekers out there?

Research

Research can help you uncover hidden job opportunities and greatly improve your odds of acing the interview and landing the job.

- The key is to understand how to conduct company research and how to use the information that you find.
There are many good reasons why it’s worth doing

1) Research can help you find the right contacts to land more interviews.

2) You’ll understand which are the top companies are in your industries and fields of interest, which companies are hiring, and what types of job openings they have. Research can open up a world of opportunities beyond the standard job boards that everybody’s checking.

3) Once it’s interview time, knowing the facts about the company and the industry will reduce your job interview anxiety and make you seem more confident to your interviewer.

4) You’ll know how to answer that infamous interview question: “Why Do You Want to Work Here?” in a way that makes you sound smart, interested, and well-informed.
   • Why are you interested in the company?
   • Why are you interested in the job?

5) You’ll be prepared to make the right decision about whether or not a specific company is a good match for your career goals and personal expectations.
I. Before You Apply — Company Research will Get you In the Door

These are just a few ways that company research can help YOU get that all-important INTERVIEW.

**Identifies contacts within the company.** You may find people that you know or can be introduced to
- Arrange an informational interview or ask for career advice
- If there’s a current opening (or one likely to come up)

**Educates you on the company’s needs.** Your research on the target companies will help you get a better sense of the company culture, current hiring needs, the qualities valued in employees, and much more.
- [https://www.glassdoor.com/Award/Best-Places-to-Work-LST_KQ0,19.htm](https://www.glassdoor.com/Award/Best-Places-to-Work-LST_KQ0,19.htm)
- [https://www.themuse.com/jobs](https://www.themuse.com/jobs)
- This information will help you customize your cover letter and resume and increase your odds of getting the company’s attention.

At this stage of the game, you’re looking for basic information about the company in order to go about GETTING the interview.
Step One: Visit the Company Website

The best place to begin your research and information gathering is the company website.

◦ Visit the company’s “About Us” page where you can learn about the business, its products and/or services, origins, key company leaders, latest awards and accomplishments, and mission statement.

◦ Example: Gensler

Look around for information relevant to “Job Seekers” like Careers.

◦ Example: Gensler – under “Careers” https://www.gensler.com/careers

◦ Some firms provide extensive information about the hiring process on their sites — including job profiles and sample interview questions.

Some businesses will have a dedicated page for this, while others bury the lead to some degree.
Step Two: Check Out the Company’s Facebook and LinkedIn Pages

Facebook is becoming a tool that businesses rely on more frequently
- It’s a great place to gather information from the business itself, as well as followers who post messages and queries to the web page.

Most companies have a LinkedIn presence as well as a Facebook page
- Check up the company’s LinkedIn page to see what information you can dig up, include key company players’ names (and possibly contact information).

Read the company blog if they have one. Next, sign up for any newsletter offered and check out the company’s social media presence (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.)
- https://www.gensler.com/about/contact

By now you should have the basic information you need to apply to the company you’ve researched.
Submit your resume and engaging cover letter properly in order to get one step closer to the much desirable interview.

Next, find out how to research the company to prepare for the interview itself.
II. Investigate Companies Prior to Your Interview

The minute you get the news that you’ve been invited for an interview, it’s time to begin a thorough investigation of the company. You need more than the basics this time around.

These tips will help you get the information you need in order to impress the interviewer(s) with your thorough understanding of the organization and the industry it operates in.
Step One: Identify and Research Interviewers

Most large companies have more than one person conducting interviews, though smaller businesses may only have one interviewer for various positions. The key is to learn about each of the people scheduled to conduct your interview before it begins.

There are four fast and effective methods you can use to learn more about the people who will be interviewing you.

1) LinkedIn Profiles. Here you can find information about educational histories, professional organization affiliations and memberships, and companies they’ve worked for in the past.

2) Company Website. In many companies, the company website is a great place to get information about employees, management, and their roles within the organization.
   - https://www.gensler.com/people
3) **Industry Publications.** While this is not a guaranteed find for you, it will help you strike common ground with the interviewer if you’ve read articles he or she has published in industry magazines and newsletters.

4) **Social Media.** Twitter, Facebook, and even Pinterest allow unique glimpses into the person on the other side of the interview table. You can learn a great deal by following them and reading past posts or checking out previous Pins and Tweets.

- *If you know the names of the people you will be interviewing with, look them up on LinkedIn and search for information about their professional background (not private life) that might be available on the internet.*
- *It will prepare you to ask questions of the interviewer that are relevant to their background and it will help you be more engaged during the interview.*
Step Two: Boost Your Industry Knowledge

It’s important to take the time to get up-to-date on industry trends and developments, especially if you’re new to the field.

This research shows you have initiative, research skills, and a sincere interest in the company and the position.

How do you go about researching industries that are foreign to you? Start with easy access from sources like the following.

- Read recent trade publications.
- Join industry-related groups on LinkedIn.
- Follow industry leaders in social media.
- Search local newspaper archives online.

Read Up on the Field and Competitors

- It’s a good idea to be able to talk about the industry as a whole and even more impressive to be able to talk about competitors and how the company fits into the bigger picture.
- Look up competitors by going to the LinkedIn company page and scrolling down to the “Other Companies People Viewed” section. There should be a few competitors there.
  - https://www.linkedin.com/company/5812/
Step Three: Include the News

See what’s going on with the company you’re interviewing with and also with other industries within the organization.

- News and recent events/awards about the organization and industries within.
- Workforce - Gensler is the 2016 Optimas Award Silver winner for Vision
- Search popular news and business sites like Fox Business and CNBC to determine if there are any hot stories or major trends that you should know about.

The more knowledge about the company, industry, and competition that you arm yourself with, the better composed you are to show the interviewer(s) what kind of employee or leader you can be within the organization.
Step Four: Explore the Company’s Culture

“Company culture is key to placing yourself in a positive, successful environment,” reveals hiring expert Jonathan from Avery Dennison.

Company culture plays a critical role in how happy you are in any job you take.

Glassdoor is an excellent resource to use to learn about a company’s culture.

- Example: Gensler
    - Include salary information, company-specific interview hints and tips, explanation of benefits, and photographs of the business.
    - Allows people to give honest opinions and insights about the business – making it an incredible resource when conducting personal company culture investigations.
Step Five: Investigate Company Finances

Understanding the financial reality of companies you’re considering working for gives you a real advantage at the salary negotiating table, and as you decide whether this industry or business is a good match for your future goals.

Payscale.com, Salary.com, and Glassdoor.com

Public Companies

Public companies are required to file annual report information. This is a great place to begin your research into company financials.
- Hoovers
- Dun and Bradstreet
- EDGAR – U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission
You also need to know what information may be relevant to know.

- How long has the company been in business?
- Has it been profitable over the past several years?
- Is the company hiring lately or has it been going through a period of layoffs instead?
- Has the company recently merged with another company? This could signal a period of upheaval where layoffs are not only possible, but likely during the restructuring process.

Conduct an Internet search for recent news articles about company financials too. This is often the first place to go to learn information about layoffs, recent hiring, and the outlook as it relates to your local economy.
Private Companies

With private companies, it’s a little trickier to find company financial information since they have no legal obligation to file public reports about their financial status.  
◦ PrivCo provides company financial intelligence for non-publicly traded companies

Other sources you can use for research private companies include the Better Business Bureau, Dun and Bradstreet, GuideStar (for nonprofits), LexisNexis, the American City Business Journal, and the Secretary of State Office or state department where the company is incorporated.
Step Six: Gathering Country and Place-of-Living Information

The final step in your research process may be to gather information about specific parts of the U.S. or other countries — to help you decide if you want to relocate to where a prospective employer is located.

- [https://www.gensler.com/offices](https://www.gensler.com/offices)

Within the U.S. - [Sperling’s BestPlaces.net](https://www.bestplaces.net), where you’ll find a wealth of data, statistics, and comparisons about U.S. cities and counties.

Locations outside the U.S - [CIA World Factbook](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-worldfactbook/), which contains detailed snapshots, compiled by the U.S. government, of just about every country in the world.


Example: Gensler - location in U.S. or other countries

Step Seven: Improve on Your Bottom Line

Once you’ve found **concrete information** on the company you’re about to interview with, it’s time to reflect upon what you’ve found out and compare it to your career goals.

For example, what does the company seem to value most? What do you value most?

*Leadership?*

*Teamwork?*

*Youth?*

*Experience?*

*Forward thinking?*

*Social Ideals?*

*Environmental Issues?*
This information can help you prepare an intelligent and truthful answer to the predictable interview question, “Why are you interested in working for us?” (or one of its many variations).

Even more importantly, you’ll have a better understanding of whether it really is the right company for you. Beyond the questions above, you’ll also need to consider questions like the following:

What is the atmosphere in the workplace like?
What type of work atmosphere do you prefer?
Dress code?
Promotion from within?
Is innovation encouraged?
Is professional development available?

These are just some of the questions that may impact your initial happiness in the workplace, as well as the potential for long-term career satisfaction and growth.
Final Step: Pulling All the Information Together

When it comes to making a decision about what company to work for, it’s important to have the facts.

- After all, this decision will impact your life every day (and for 8+ hours per day) for the foreseeable future. It’s a wise strategy to take stock of your financial goals and ambitions and measure them by what this business has to offer you.

Do you feel confident that this company is the right place to help you accomplish your goals? Is this the industry you want to work in? How will this role and company position you for future opportunities?

Does the company culture appeal to you? Can you live with the climate? How about social issues? Does the company atmosphere conflict with your personal views and ideals?
While you’re not necessarily entering into a lifelong commitment to work with one company for the remainder of your professional life, this job will be a career stepping stone.

- Are you comfortable and confident with the impact this company will have on your resume from this day forward?
Class participation (38 points)

Please submit your PowerPoint in PDF format by 11/18 by 11:55pm
Compare Target and Wal-Mart

• Main products and services
• Corporate culture and history
• Organizational mission and goals
• Locations (within and outside US).
• Career paths
  • Internships, benefits, and diversity program
• Professional development
• Community responsibility
• News and recent events/awards about the organization
Compare Target and Wal-Mart

Target (8 points)
• Main products and services
• Corporate culture and history
• Organizational mission and goals
• Locations (within and outside US).
• Career paths
  • Internships, benefits, and diversity program
• Professional development
• Community responsibility
• News and recent events/awards about the organization
Compare Target and Wal-Mart

Wal-Mart (8 points)
- Main products and services
- Corporate culture and history
- Organizational mission and goals
- Locations (within and outside US).
- Career paths
  - Internships, benefits, and diversity program
- Professional development
- Community responsibility
- News and recent events/awards about the organization
Class Activity 1

Get into a group (4 or 5) with other students in your major. Compare the aspects in the previous slide.

1. How are the companies similar? Be as specific as possible. (2 points)
2. How are they different? Be as specific as possible. (2 points)
3. Which corporate culture do you prefer and why? Be as specific as possible. (4 points)
Target Corporate

https://corporate.target.com/
Wal-Mart Corporate

http://careers.walmart.com/career-areas/corporate/
Class Activity 2

Now choose two companies that hire graduates from your major and explore them as a group and repeat the exercise.

1. Please provide company websites. (2 points)
2. How are they different? Be as specific as possible. (2 points)
3. Which corporate culture do you prefer and why? Be as specific as possible. (4 points)
4. What is important to you in a corporate culture? (2 points)
5. Which company would you be a good fit? (2 points)
6. How might researching the corporate culture give you an edge in an interview? (2 points)