

The Academic Job Interview

What to do Before You Interview

1. Do your research about each department/university that invites you to interview. Look up the school/department's home page on the Web. Check the library reference desk. There should be guides to graduate/undergraduate programs as the Peterson's guides). Ask professors and peers what they know about the school/program and the faculty. Pay attention to the names and specializations of faculty members, learn about the degree requirements, courses taught, types of students, etc. Before your interview, ask for the names of the people who will be doing the interviewing so you can find out about their work in advance.
2. Keep your professors (dissertation committee, people who wrote letters of recommendation for you) regularly updated on the status of your search. Let them know where you applied, which schools expressed interest in your application, where you are being interviewed, etc. Very often professors know each other and will call a colleague at the other school to "push" your application, or a professor at that school may call one of your professors to ask about your qualifications.
3. Practice interviewing. Arrange a mock interview with members of your dissertation committee or faculty mentor(s). It will give you a chance to practice your responses to difficult or unexpected questions, and time to think about how to better answer the questions during the real thing. If you are supposed to give a presentation on your research during your campus visit, schedule the job talk and give it in your department first. Invite colleagues, undergraduate students, and faculty members. If they will want you to teach a class, discuss it with your advisor and/or a faculty member you respect as a teacher. Another tip: Have someone videotape your presentation, watch it, and get feedback.
4. Take each interview seriously. Psych yourself for each one, even if you are less than attracted by the position or the school. Your preconceived ideas may be wrong, and more importantly, this may be the only offer you get. Give each school a fair chance.
5. If you speak to a secretary on the phone, put him/her on your side. Ask for his/her name and use it. Give your name and contact information. Be respectful. If they leave a message on your machine, call them back rather than making them call you. If you get a campus visit, make sure you introduce yourself to the department secretaries/staff if this isn't done by one of the faculty members.
6. Things to bring with you for all interviews:
 - extra copies of your vita
 - writing sample(s)
 - syllabi (of courses taught or courses you'd like to teach, including an upper-division course for majors)
 - summary of student evaluations.
 - your teaching/academic portfolio

You will not necessarily distribute all of these, but you will be prepared to offer them and come off as organized if the interviewing committee expresses special interest in one of these areas (or if they have misplaced your materials). Make sure you have spell checked all of your material. If you have material in a language that is not your native language, have a native speaker check it.

Other tips:

- Pack an umbrella
- Pack accessories or repair materials (buttons & thread, glasses or extra pair of contact lenses) to avoid little disasters.
- Don't check anything important through the airplane. Pack light and if possible, keep everything with you as carry-on. I suggest bringing a briefcase with all your paperwork and interview materials in it, and a small garment bag with toiletries & clothes. Mix and match. You can wear the same suit (jacket & pants/skirt + nice pair of slacks) and shoes (comfortable ones a must) during all interview days, and wear a different top every day. Have everything color-coordinated with several scarves/ties & accessories so you can travel light & still look different every day. Wear something comfortable but not too casual on the plane.
- Something to do during delays in traveling.
- Something to help you relax the night before (exercise clothes, bubble bath, escapist novels)

During the interview

- Bring with you a written list of questions to ask interviewers (see below for examples). You may take some notes to make sure you will remember the important information.
- Don't say anything negative about any school (especially your own) or about anyone.
- Always sound enthusiastic, but don't appear cocky, too eager, or desperate. You want to come off as a potential colleague, not as some graduate student.
- Don't talk too much; let them talk too. Be direct and concise, and don't give extra information unless you know it will help you. You can answer their question, & then ask a question of your own so the process will feel more like a dialogue than an interrogation for all concerned. Make sure you have questions to ask about the school; otherwise you'll appear uninterested. When you sense the interview is winding down, don't chitchat, don't give them the impression you're making them waste their time.
- Match your strengths to the job description and to the needs of the department. Insist on specific strengths. Make them talk about the position so you can say more specifically how well you would fit in.
- Make eye contact with everyone, talk to all of the people present. Keep a sense of humor, don't show you're annoyed if an interviewer looks bored, or tired, or whatever.
- Be personable and keep a professional persona at all times. Don't relax too much during the informal parts of the campus interview. Consider that meals and parties are also part of the interview. Know yourself. For example, don't drink until you've eaten if you're not used to alcohol.
- Send a thank you note to each person you've interviewed with and/or the search committee chair. After you have accepted a job, take time to thank everyone who has been helpful in the process.

Questions to Ask on the Phone When They Invite You for a Campus Visit

- Dates of campus interview and duration (they may ask you to stay over Saturday night for a cheaper fare, which is OK. Most places will make sure someone, often students, will have some activity for you to do like visiting the town or the area). Bring something to do (work, book) in case they don't have anything planned.
- Ask for a detailed schedule with the names of people who will meet with you (typically, the chair & faculty of the department, the search committee, the dean, members of other departments).
- Find out about transportation to campus from airport and back. Who will come and pick you up? Who should you call in case there is a travel-related problem? (You may want to invest in a long-distance phone card just in case).

- Ask if certain things can be included in the program (any department/resources related to your own interests, visit to the library). Opportunity to meet with students? Visit the city?
- Expenses: what exactly will the department pay for? Will they make arrangements and send you the plane ticket or do you have to get the ticket yourself and have them reimburse you afterwards? Be optimistic, enroll in a frequent flyer mile program. (If the department is the one making the arrangements, you can suggest your airline of choice if prices are the same & if plane schedules are convenient.) Make sure you keep all receipts and give them to the person responsible for reimbursing you.
- Will you be giving a job talk/presentation?
 - approximate length expected
 - formal or informal?
 - what type of audience will attend?
 - suggest a suitable topic and title. Of course, if you have already sent them a writing sample, your presentation should be different (typically, from a different chapter of your dissertation).
- Will you give a teaching demonstration or have an opportunity to teach a class?
 - what is the level of the class and number of students?
 - content of class
 - text used (which lesson will you be expected to cover, or will you be expected to teach something else altogether?)
 - course syllabus

Types of Questions to Expect During Interviews

- Can you talk about your dissertation? How did you get interested in this topic?
- Prepare your summary ahead of time & practice it. Have a 2-minute and a 5-minute version (in case they want more detail). Don't assume they've all read your writing sample. Display enthusiasm & confidence about your dissertation. Remember that you know more than anyone else in the room about the topic. Focus on the significance & originality of your dissertation, free of jargon. Be ready to repeat this speech many times during the campus visit. For research institutions, mention you plan to revise it for publication in book form ASAP. Be ready to talk about how your dissertation relates to the work of famous people in the field, to your future work, and to the wider academic world in general.
- What are your plans for future research?
- Even if you can't see further in the future than surviving until tomorrow at this point, spend some time thinking about what your next project might be. You won't be held to it later, you just want to show you're thinking ahead. It should be different enough from the dissertation, but still related in some way (don't be all over the place with possible ideas or they won't take you seriously).
- How would you teach XYZ (intro to lit class, language class, survey course)? A related question is: if you could teach your dream course, what would it be? (this is a "trick" question: make sure your answer fits the needs of the school interviewing you).
- Describe what your approach would be first: conceptualize the intellectual content around a theme/topic/angle of approach, goals of class, method of teaching, and only then give a list of books you would use. It's useful to have copies of possible syllabi. Prepare some course descriptions for general, typical courses you may be asked to teach as well as a few original, exciting courses & seminars. Prepare some course syllabi at undergrad and some at grad levels if applicable.
- If you do research and teach material dealing with minority groups/women/other countries and you're not a member of the group/country, be ready to answer questions about how qualified you are to teach this material.

- What attracts you to our institution? What assets will you bring to our program? What are your major accomplishments?

Questions to Ask During the Campus Visit

- Try to find out what the school's pride is before you go.
- Try to get a sense for how they treat their untenured faculty: what kind of support do they provide for junior faculty (special summer fellowships, leave of absence before tenure review, course release in first year, research assistant). What percentage of tenure-track faculty get tenure? What kinds of administrative responsibilities will they expect from you (student advising, student activities, committee work)? Will they protect you from too much committee work or overburden you with it?
- Do all faculty have the same teaching load?
- What kind of contract will you get until tenure? (Usually, 3-year renewable; but can also be 2- or 1-year renewable).
- Ask about the salary range (ask the dean and the department chair). Remember you can always try to negotiate for more after they offer you the job. Look at cost-of-living indexes on the Web (such as www.homefare.com) to make regional salary comparisons.
- Ask the dean for a brochure outlining the university's benefits package. Do you qualify from the date your contract begins? Do the benefits include dental/vision/domestic partner? Is there tuition waver for dependents? What about retirement plan (do they participate in TIAA-CREF)?
- Ask the dean and the chair of the department to give you some details about what the tenure criteria are (for research/teaching/service). Does the tenure decision usually come in the fifth or sixth year? How will your work be evaluated? If you already have full-time teaching experience after the PhD, will it count toward tenure? Does each junior faculty have his/her own tenure line, or will you have to compete against others for one tenure line?
- Ask if you can get: a moving allowance, computer equipment, a research assistant, a library carrel...
- Find out about office space situation. Will you have your own office?
- Ask what the average number of students is per class. What is the make-up of the student body at the university?
- Find out from faculty and from the students you will meet what the housing costs are. Try to get a sense for how high the cost of living is in the area. Ask about cultural life, community (and quality of schools if you have children). If you have time, drop by Women's Center to get some of that information.
- Repeat important questions to chair, other members of department, dean, & other faculty members with whom you have the opportunity to talk.
- Finally, make sure you ask when a decision will be made.