Interviewing for Academic Jobs

Whether you’ve received an invitation to interview or you’ve decided to explore this page even before landing an interview, congratulations! This page outlines how to prepare for an academic interview effectively and efficiently.

1. Find out what is expected of you

You may be asked to give a job talk about your prior research, a “chalk talk” about your future research, or a demonstration of your teaching. You will typically talk to many faculty one-on-one about their research, and you may be asked to meet with graduate students. In addition, you will almost always be taken out to dinner with members of the search committee.

That said, there is no such thing as a completely standard job interview. Every department conducts interviews a bit differently, so effective preparation depends on your ability to sleuth out as much info as you can about your hosts’ specific expectations.

- For starters, read our Academic Interview Tip Sheet [1].
- Attend our workshop on “Applying to Faculty Positions” (offered twice annually, see Events [2]) or you may prefer to borrow a recording of our Academic Job Search Symposium (from 2010) from OCPD’s Resource Library [3].
- Then try to gather information about that specific department. For the job talk, for example, who is the anticipated audience, how will the room be set up, etc.

2. Prepare

Below, we suggest how to prepare for the most common components of campus interviews.

Job talk

- Read this detailed handout on Job Talks [4] from the University of Washington’s Career Center.
- Schedule a practice talk with your lab at least 1-2 weeks before the interview.
- Also practice your talk with researchers who are outside your discipline, since it is critical that your work be easily understood by all members of the search committee and department. One way to do this is to register to attend one of our Research Talk Clinics [5].
• Watch a video: "How to Give an Effective Job Talk," a workshop offered by the NIH’s Office of Intramural Training & Education (2 hours). Complete listing of videos is found here (scroll down to “Academic Careers”).
• **Avoid temptation.** In the lead-up to a campus interview, it can be tempting to spend all your time obtaining that last piece of dazzling data to put in your formal job talk. But don’t neglect the other facets of your preparation, described below.

**Chalk talk**

• Read some of the best resources for giving a chalk talk:
  - A SBMB gives a great overview of a chalk talk.
  - APS summarizes the different between a chalk, science and teaching talk under the section 'Understand the Rules'.
  - Wiley’s Online Library has slides for a sample chalk talk.
  - Istevision talks about why ‘chalk talks are a dreaded academic pastime’.
• The year before you go on the market, ask if you can attend chalk talks in your department to see what they are like.

**Teaching demonstration, if requested**

• Read this handout explaining Teaching Demos, from the University of Washington’s Career Center.
• Read this article from CBE-LSE: The Teaching Demonstration: What Faculty Expect and How to Prepare for This Aspect of the Job Interview.
• Not sure how to approach your teaching demo or guest lecture? Schedule a confidential appointment with an OCPD counselor.

**Do your homework**

Learn all you can about the department and the people you are likely to meet on campus. Read their research profiles, browse their lab websites, and perhaps skim a recent paper or two. Jot down a couple questions you could ask each of them, and note any possible opportunities for collaboration.

**Look the part**

Decide what you are going to wear and go shopping if necessary. Buy or borrow a professional-looking bag for your laptop and other materials, as well as an advancee/laser pointer, if you will use one during your talk, but make sure to practice with it so you are comfortable with it by the time you give your talk.

**3. Take care of yourself**

Preparing for an on-campus interview is exciting but also quite stressful, and is often done under intense time pressure. Interviews themselves require tremendous energy and endurance. Try to get enough sleep and exercise in the weeks before your interview, as these basics are the foundation of peak performance. Pack snacks that can be eaten quickly and won’t get stuck in your teeth or make a mess. You may also want to bring breath mints, kleenex, and a water bottle or a coffee cup.
4. Follow-up

As soon as you return from your interview, write thank yous to everyone you met with or who helped organize your visit. In the interest of speed, these can be sent by email; you may also send an additional handwritten note if you wish.

Source URL: https://career.ucsf.edu/grad-students-postdocs/career-planning/academic-jobs/interviewing

Links
[2] https://career.ucsf.edu/node/391
[3] https://career.ucsf.edu/ocpd-library
[5] https://career.ucsf.edu/grad-students-postdocs/events#Professional_Skills_for_Researchers
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