Mastering the Job Interview: Common Questions & Smart Strategies

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Happy to answer questions about publishing too!

Asking a committee member whether he is ready for the job market, the grad student suffocates in the hesitant silence.
Some FAQs about Job Interviews

1. What makes a “good interview”? 
2. How should I prepare for an interview? 
3. How much detail should I give in my answers? When should I stop talking? 
4. What kinds of questions should I ask them? 
5. What kinds of questions should be avoided in the U.S.? 
6. Should I follow up after the interview? With whom?
Big Caveat:
Get multiple opinions!

Attempting to write the first draft of his cover letter, the grad student is paralyzed.
1. What makes a “good interview”?

Jot down in the chat something that you think makes a “good interview”
1. What makes a "good interview"?

In a good interview, the interviewee is…

• prepared
• knowledgeable of the program
• ready to show how their background/experience/strengths fit with the position
• confident
2. How should I prepare for an interview?

• Review the job ad
• Review the employer’s website, including information about the specific program/unit – know their mission, strengths, etc.
• Know who will interview you
• Practice! (Do a mock interview if at all possible)
• Have notes on hand
• Have questions ready (more on this later)
3. How much detail should I give in my answers? When should I stop talking?

- Always be sure you answer the questions, at least in broad strokes, first
- Give an example, if relevant
- Be ready to go into more depth
  - “I can share another example if we have time” or “Can I share more details?” or “I’m not sure if there is time to say more about that, but I’m happy to.”

Watching a senior professor’s “brief question” turn into an interminable monologue, the grad student wishes his head would explode.
4. What kinds of questions should I ask them?

General (first-round interviews):

• Can you tell me more about _____? (the students, the kinds of projects people are working on, the campus/workplace, the kinds of courses I would be teaching)

• I’ve read/heard about your _____ and would love to know more about it. (new initiative, new lab, Center for …, Certificate in …)

• What are the courses you would imagine this person teaching in the first few years?

• Are there opportunities to _____? (develop new courses, contribute to X, engage in community outreach, …)

• Can you tell me about your timeline? (last question)
4. What kinds of questions should I ask them?

Second-round/finalist Interviews:

• What kind of support is available for ____? (conferences, research, professional development, developing new courses, community outreach, …)

• What are some opportunities for cross-unit collaboration?

• How has the program/organization/unit been affected by the pandemic?

• What kinds of changes do you imagine the program/organization going through in the next 5-10 years?

• What are the processes for promotion? (ask multiple people!)

• What are the best parts of working here?
5. What kinds of questions should be avoided in the U.S.?

What if an employer asks …

• if you have children?
• what country you are from?
• when you will finish (or defend) your dissertation/thesis?

Logging on to a videoconferencing session, the grad student squeezes himself into the one remotely clean corner of his apartment.
5. What kinds of questions should be avoided in the U.S.?

Should you ask…
• what the salary is (in the first round)?
• if you need to have the PhD (or MA) in hand by the start date?
• if there are opportunities to contribute to a particular program or initiative at the institution?
6. Should I follow up after the interview? With whom?
Remember:
(a) they are already interested in you, and
(b) everyone wants the interview to go well.

You got this!