

The Interview Process

How To Standout From The Crowd *and* Make Your Interview Memorable

Finding The Best Faculty Job For You
J. Timothy Lightfoot



Academic Career
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- ▲ Chaired Or Sat On 35+ Application Committees**
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INTERVIEWING: THE REAL KEY

You put in your application materials and you've been waiting patiently to hear about those applications. Suddenly, an email pops up in your inbox informing you the Search Committee is inviting you for an interview. Celebration time! You made the first cut! And then maybe just as suddenly, panic will set in as you realize the importance of the interview and how the upcoming interviews may well determine whether or not you get the position. That's why the purpose of this Bitesize Guide is to walk you through the interview process from what happens during the different types of interviews, what you need to be prepared for, how you should dress for these interviews, and what questions you should (and shouldn't) ask and answer. We'll also talk about when it is appropriate for you to call the Search Committee Chair during the whole process. But first, a general overview of the interview process and an overview of how the Search Committee and hiring Department sees this part of the job search.

The 'Process' from your vantage point

As a candidate, the interview process is usually straightforward: once your application has made the first cut, the University will conduct at least two interviews (sometimes three) with the top candidates to get down to the person they are going to offer the job to. The first interview – which is used by the Search Committee to get the potential candidate list down from 5-10 names to the top 3 names – is usually a telephone or a video interview. Given the effects of the pandemic over the last two years and the ready availability of Zoom®, telephone interviews are rarely done anymore. So, the first interview will probably be a video interview (but you can still use all the tips below on a phone interview).

Info to Know – 6.1 Steps in the Interview Process

1. You apply.
2. The Search Committee cuts down to the top 5-10 candidates using application documents.
3. The top 5-10 candidates are interviewed for 30-60 mins through video/telephone.
4. The Search Committee cuts down to the top 3 candidates.
5. The top 3 candidates do a 1-2 day on-campus face-to-face interview that includes a job talk.
6. The Search Committee recommends to the Department Head and the Dean who to hire.
7. The Department Head/Dean select the candidate to appoint.
8. The job is offered to the chosen candidate.
9. If the chosen candidate turns down the job, the Department Head/Dean repeats steps 7-8.

After the Search Committee conducts all the video interviews, they will cut their potential candidate list to usually three candidates and these candidates will be brought on campus for a face-to-face interview (called an 'on-campus interview' – witty, eh?).

As you progress up the academic career ladder, especially as you get to the Dean's level, instead of video interviews, these preliminary-cut interviews will be 'airport interviews' where they actually fly you to the nearest major airport, do a 1-2-hour interview, and then fly you back home. But, we're getting ahead of ourselves – let's focus on getting through your first interview!

After you go through the video/phone interview, it will probably take 2-3 weeks for you to hear from the Search Committee whether you have made the cut to do an on-campus interview. If so, you will set up a time for an on-campus visit with the Search Committee Chair, which will be a one- or two-day visit. For Assistant Professor positions, one standard option is to fly you into campus in the morning, start your interviews in the afternoon, have dinner with Search Committee members, then have a full day of interviews the following day, after which you will fly home. During these interviews, you'll meet with the Department Chair, the Search Committee (usually at an Exit Interview), you'll meet various faculty members, and you'll give a 'job talk' related to the primary focus of the position. If the primary focus of the position is research, your job talk will be about your research agenda; if the primary focus is teaching, your job talk will probably involve teaching an actual class a specific topic designated by the Search Committee Chair (more details on the job talk later in the chapter!).

You are being interviewed and judged from the time you walk out of security at the airport until the time you walk back into security on your way home.

That means everything you say and do, as well as the way you present yourself and your work, will be used to determine if you are going to be the one that gets offered the job. I've seen jobs lost because of what candidates said or did at dinner, in the hallway, or at the airport.

At some point, either the Search Committee Chair or the Department Head will tell you what the timeframe of the search process will be after your on-campus interview (if not, be sure and ask before you leave campus!). Depending upon the time of the year and the academic calendar, it will normally take 2-3 weeks before the University is ready to make an offer to their top candidate. That will often be a magic phone call when the Department Chair (usually) calls to offer you a position – and that's where the negotiation process begins.. Just know that while all you had to do was wait for the phone call offering you the position, there was a lot going on at the University in order for the Department Chair to make that call. To help your nerves while you are in the 'waiting mode,' it may help to understand what is happening on 'the flip side' – what the Search Committee is doing to finish the search so they can offer you a position.

The Flip Side

From a Search Committee's standpoint, the flip side of the interview process consists of a bunch of paperwork usually agreed upon before any interviews are conducted. Then, after each round of interviews, the search committee has to deal with the reports and justifications that have to be written to allow a job offer to be made.

As implied in both Bitesize Guides 4 and 5, before the search begins, the Search Committee will have made up a matrix based on the required and preferred credentials listed in the job advertisement.

The designee of the Human Resources department (usually the Dean or an Associate Dean) will have approved this matrix so it can be used in screening the application packets. Each Search Committee member will have used this approved matrix to evaluate and score each application packet. These score sheets are then discussed by the full committee and usually averaged to give a rank order of the applications (this process can be more complex than just averaging the results, with the process used depending greatly on the requirements of the Human Resources administrators). It is these final scores that are ranked with the top 5-10 application packets being chosen for the first set of interviews – usually the video/phone interviews. But, before they can do these interviews, the Search Committee must get the total pool of candidates ‘approved’ by Human Resources. This approval is needed to validate that the Committee worked to get as balanced an applicant pool as possible, which would include appropriate gender, cultural, and racial proportions. Having the pool approved is sometimes a difficult process and so this approval process can take varying amounts of time. I’ve seen approvals take as little as 24 hours and as long as four weeks, so you should not necessarily stress out if you do not hear from the Search Committee for 2-3 weeks after the date when the committee starts looking at applications. It can take a while for the Committee to get approval to start the video/phone interviews!

After the applicant pool is approved, the Committee will usually move quickly to set up the video/phone interviews.

The Committee will usually arrange to do several of these in one day, allocating 30 - 60 minutes for each interview. In preparation for these interviews, the Committee will usually adopt a set of standardized questions they will ask all of the candidates that are interviewed. These standardized questions are also part of the packet that has to be approved by Human Resources. This may seem like micro-management, but this is one way the Institution can be sure inappropriate questions are not asked (more on that later), and each candidate is asked exactly the same questions. It also provides a way for the Committee to compare and contrast candidates’ responses to help determine the finalists for the position. (See the later ‘Answering Questions’ section to see examples of some standardized questions.)

Once all the video/phone interviews are completed, the Committee will meet and rank the candidates with the purpose of identifying the top 2-3 candidates they want to bring in for on-campus interviews. Once this ranking is complete and voted on, the Search Committee Chair writes up a justification for this ranking and requests permission from the Human Resources designee to bring these candidates on-campus for interviews. The justification memo often highlights the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the candidates, and in some instances, Human Resources will require the Search Committee indicate why the Committee is not recommending certain candidates for further interviews. This is another step you as the candidate will never see, but it is a critical step that has to be completed before the Search Committee Chair can set up any on-campus interviews. Again, much like the initial applicant pool approval process, the process of approving the candidates for on-campus interviews can happen very quickly or very slowly. Thus, just because you’ve had a video interview and haven’t heard from the Committee for several weeks doesn’t necessarily mean you are out of the running; it may simply mean the Committee is trying to finalize internal processes before setting up the interviews. But the day comes and the Committee Chair starts to set up interviews. As noted above, these interviews will take 2-3 days each and are very labor intensive from the Search Committee’s standpoint.

The Committee is responsible for chaperoning each candidate throughout their visit from pick-up at the airport to drop-off at the airport, so there are many people who work hard to make sure the on-campus interviews go off smoothly. Don't ever forget all the work that has gone on behind the scenes of your visit and make sure you are the type of guest the Committee would want back. I've seen candidates on interviews act like total prima donnas and even if they are spectacular, the candidate's attitude still leaves a bad taste in everyone's mouths. This type of behavior leads to comments from faculty and Committee members like "I'm not sure they would be a good department citizen because they seem more concerned with themselves than anyone else." That comment will kill a candidacy immediately!

After the on-campus interviews are completed, the Search Committee meets one last time and ranks the final 2-3 candidates. The Committee develops a justification memo advising the Department Head and Dean who make the final hiring decision. In other words, the Search Committee doesn't make the decision, but it provides crucial advice to the Department Head and Dean. In most cases, at this point, the work of the Search Committee is complete and now the Department Head and Dean work to put together an offer and then contact the chosen candidate with the offer. In most cases, the candidate will be given about one week to make their decision (and this is when negotiations occur – see Chapter 7!). If the first candidate does not take the job, the Department Head and Dean will determine if they should offer the position to the second-place candidate and if they do, they'll start the job offer/negotiation cycle again. The Department Head and Dean will repeat this cycle until they either hire someone or until they feel they have exhausted the available candidates they thought were appropriate for the position. To my knowledge, twice in my career I have been the third-place candidate in job searches and both times, I wound up with the job (for various reasons). So, don't feel dejected if you find you aren't the number one candidate; until someone takes the job or the Department closes the job search, you've still got a chance!

In the end, remember there are a lot of moving parts behind the scenes that are required to make the job search go forward. As an applicant, you see none of those moving parts and as a result, the search process can seem to take a long time. But you should remember the only thing you can control in the process is the effort you make and so let's turn to some specifics to help make your interview experience a success.

When can I call the Search Committee Chair?

Applying for academic jobs can be anxiety-producing because you often do not hear a lot from the University you are applying to, especially initially. In fact, at some point during the job application process, you'll probably wonder what is going on with your application so you can start deciding what you are going to do (with your life, with your home, etc.). You can see from the Flip Side discussion above, there are a lot of paperwork processes and approvals that have to be completed by the Committee, but the problem is often you don't know what is going on and that just increases your anxiety. Does 'no news = good news' or does 'no news = you are out of the running'?

To get some answers, the logical person to talk to is the Search Committee Chair but you do not want to become a pest. The Chair has enough on their plate without you calling or emailing on a regular basis inquiring about the search. Having said that, there are times it is appropriate for you to communicate with the Search Committee Chair and I would encourage you to have this type of communication.

First, before you send in your application for the position, if you have any questions about the position you should not hesitate to call the Search Committee Chair.

Part of their job as Search Committee Chair is to answer those questions whose answers are not obvious from the job advertisement or from your Internet searches. Having been both an applicant and a Search Committee Chair, I encourage you to make this call to clarify any questions you might have. For example, perhaps the job ad states the position is open for both Assistant and Associate Professor ranks. You may want to get some more background to find out if the Department is preferentially looking for either of those ranks. If they are preferentially looking for an Associate Professor and you are at the Assistant level, perhaps you need to carefully consider whether you will apply at all. Conversely, if the Department is really looking to fill the position with an Assistant Professor and you are at that rank, you know you'll have a bit of advantage in the search.

Let's say it is three weeks after the date from when the application screening began and you have not heard anything from the Search Committee. Should you call or email the Search Committee Chair? I would encourage you to do so. Three weeks after the screening date listed in the job ad will have given the Committee time (usually) to screen the applications and to complete the paperwork to have the first interviews. When you call or email the Search Committee Chair, be polite and succinct. For example, a typical query might be:

“Dear Dr. Smart: As you know, I applied for the Exercise Physiology position at MAU. Would you let me know what the timeline will be for a decision on the candidates for the next step in this position? Thanks!”

That's all you need to ask. Short, simple, and respectful. In most cases the Search Committee Chair will respond fairly quickly and then you will know. You can also take this same approach at other stages of the Search process if the delay seems to be a long time; for example, if you do not hear 2-3 weeks after all the video/phone interviews are completed, or 2-3 weeks after the completion of all the on-campus interviews. These latter two calls may not be necessary because you will have the opportunity to directly ask the Search Committee Chair during both the video/phone and on-campus interviews “what they anticipate the timeline of the next steps of the search will be.” Oftentimes, the answer to this simple question will let you know how long they anticipate the process will take, and hopefully that information will help reduce some of your ‘waiting’ anxiety!

Video/phone interview specifics

Most video/phone interviews are straightforward. In all cases, you will be asked a standardized list of questions (see Table 6.1 in a later section for examples of these questions) and then you will be given a chance to ask questions of the Search Committee. In some instances, you may be asked to give a brief (usually less than 5 minutes) review of your research to help the committee understand what you are going to do if you get the position. You should clearly understand your performance in all aspects of this interview will determine whether you move on to the next round of interviews. I have never seen (or heard of) a strong candidate on paper that blew the video interview and progressed to the on-campus interview.

Info to Know – 6.2 What is Covered in a Video/ Phone Interview?

Video/phone interviews are critical to help the Committee determine who is coming on-campus for an interview. The three basic things that will be covered are:

- 1) Your answers to a general set of questions;
- 2) An overview of your research/teaching experience; and
- 3) The questions you have for the Committee.

Therefore, it is critical you focus on the three aspects of the video/phone interview – answering questions, asking questions, and if asked, speaking clearly and succinctly about your research focus. There are specific sections on each of these items below; pay attention to the tips in those sections and use the example set of questions to develop your own answers and questions for the Search Committee.

Setting up the interview: When the Search Committee Chair (or their representative) contacts you to set up your interview, one rule of thumb is to try and get the last interview slot. You want the Committee to remember your interview the most clearly. While I cannot cite any research or statistics on whether this works or not, I do know human memory fades and I know if my interview is closest to the decision meeting for the Committee, my chance for the Committee to remember all the details of my interview increases. You may feel awkward asking for the last interview time, but it's relatively easy to do so in a polite manner. Here's an example:

Search Chair: *I'd like to set up a time and a day when we can have a videoconference with you and the Committee. What days are available for you?*

You: *My schedule is fairly flexible; could you tell me the days/dates you had in mind?*

Search Chair: *The days/dates we had set up were... (and they'll name them).*

You: *Great! Given those days/times, I'll pick... (and you pick the last interview time you can fit into your schedule).*

Info to Know – 6.3 Preparing For a Video Interview

1. What are you going to wear?
2. What background will you show in your video?
3. Learn the names and faces of the Search Committee members.
4. Learn the basics about the department – how big, how many students, what programs?
5. Read their strategic plan.
6. Read the departmental faculty handbook.
7. Compose 3-5 questions specifically for the search committee.
8. Practice a 5 min, concise and easy to understand explanation of your research area.
9. Practice answering general questions similar to what the Committee will ask (see that section in this chapter).
10. Now you're ready!

Preparation for the video/phone interview (Info to Know 6.3): While we'll cover question asking and answering below (with some examples), there are some items you need to prepare and consider **before** the video/phone interview. One critical factor is your appearance; while this topic is covered in depth in a separate section, you should remember your appearance is a signal to the Committee about what type of professional you believe you are. Whether we like it or not, humans judge other humans by appearance and your appearance will be an indelible image that may play into the Committee's judgment. You want to look professional; the term for the style of clothing for an Assistant Professor job candidate is 'business conservative.' Again, there is a specific section further in this chapter that will give you specific instruction in this area.

We've all had a lot of experience with video meetings and interviews, especially since early 2020. As you know, part of your appearance includes the background that can be seen in the video. I vividly remember a video interview we conducted where the candidate was obviously in his living room, which was a mess! Further, the kitchen – along with all the dirty dishes on the counters – could be seen in the background! While the candidate was dressed in a suit, his posture (slumped back into his couch) and the video background betrayed the image he was trying to convey by being in a suit. Especially with the emphasis on video meetings in the pandemic age, there are many sites and videos on the Internet that will give you tips on video interviewing background, but in general, make sure the lighting is good so you can be seen, make sure your background is tidy and reflective of who you are as a professional, and make sure you have controlled for potential interruptions so your time with the Committee will not be interrupted (e.g., put your cat in another room so they don't become part of the interview!).

Before any interview, you should also learn as much as you can about the Department and University. I would recommend starting a small notebook that is easily found during your interview where you can make notes about the Department and University. You should have done the basic background work - such as the size of the Department, number of degree programs, and overview of the faculty - before you applied for the position. Your background work in preparation for the video/phone interview should use this information as a foundation and be more in depth. There are several areas I would recommend you focus on as you develop this pre-video/phone interview information:

1 - Who is on the Search Committee? I would make a background sheet that has a picture and a brief background on each Search Committee member. Take the time to memorize the names of the Search Committee members in association with their picture¹; this may sound a little 'stalkerish' but it is great if you don't have to try and memorize committee member names AS they introduce themselves during the interview. Additionally, knowing a bit about their background – where they graduated from, their research areas, etc. – will help you at least start to think about what questions/concerns each might have. Most universities (and some states) require faculty to post their CV online, so you should be able to easily pull this type of professional information. For example, if you are applying for an Exercise Physiology position, but then during your preparation you find one Committee member's research is in Health Education and another is in Sports Management, you can start to think about how your work might influence/help/contribute to research in those areas. At the very least, knowing the research and disciplinary philosophical background of each committee member will help you understand the scope and overall perspective of the Search Committee.

2 - What is the general direction of the Department? Take the time to find and read the last Strategic Plan of the hiring department. This Strategic Plan should be available somewhere on the University's website, but if you look diligently for the document and can't find it, ask the Search Committee Chair for a copy. And while you're at it...

3 - What are the tenure/promotion guidelines and expectations for the Department? In most cases, there will be a tenure/promotion guideline document available for the Department (it may be on the College's resources website).

¹ There are several apps available that help you do this. I have used 'Who's Who' from Shiresmith Publishing, but I think there are several others you can use.

Like the Strategic Plan, if you can't find the document after diligently searching, ask for a copy. You also want to inquire as to whether there is a separate Faculty Roles and Expectations document available for the Department. The Department that I currently work in has official tenure and promotion guidelines that are quite ambiguous regarding what a faculty member is actually expected to accomplish. To solve that ambiguity, we also have a document called 'Faculty Roles and Expectations' that gives all the quantitative expectations for each of our disciplinary divisions (e.g., number of papers you should publish per year, what your average teaching evaluation scores should be, etc.).

4 – What is the organizational structure of the College/Department? See if you can find an organizational chart for the College and for the Department. Understanding the organizational structure of the units you may work in will help you understand who will be evaluating you, making decisions about course loads, and other critical supervisory relationships. You will also be able to see how critical services like advising, research support, and academic support all tie together within the department. Not only will this information help you understand how the department works, but it will help you to ask questions to the person most appropriate for the question. For example, you shouldn't ask the Search Committee about course loads and assignments because that is generally a function of the Department Chair!

In summary, prepare for your video/phone interview with the understanding the Committee will be looking for a professional who has taken the initiative to understand the basics of their University. The Committee will give you some leeway if you don't understand the daily nuts and bolts of the unit, but they will not be so forgiving if it is obvious you have done no background work. There is a saying (which we'll discuss more below) that you shouldn't ask a question where the answer would be easily found with a quick web search. So do your preparation before the video/phone interview. That preparation will pay off and will be the foundation for the preparation you'll do when you prepare for your on-campus interview!

On-campus interview specifics

The invitation to do an on-campus interview is an exciting invitation because it represents the fact you are one of the top two or three candidates for the job! Yippee!!! However, once the realization sinks in, oftentimes anxiety can follow these invitations. Suddenly, it becomes very real that your performance on this interview could very well determine the course of your professional life. (And if you weren't thinking about that yet, sorry I just planted that in your head. Believe me, you would have been there sooner or later!) Yes, the on-campus interview is critical, but the other portions of your journey to this point (e.g., your application materials and your video interview) have also been critical. Much like these other parts of the process, there are some things to think about, some things to prepare for, and some tips I think will help you be less anxious as you prepare and complete your on-campus interview.

The first thing to consider about the on-campus interview is what is the purpose of this interview? You may say, "Well, duh, it's so they can determine if I should get the job" and that is correct, but only partially so. The most critical reason for the on-campus interview is so the Search Committee can determine if you will be the best fit for the position AND so you can determine if you think you'll be the best fit for the position. The rest of the chapter will be dedicated to helping you make the best impression you can so the Search Committee – and everyone else you encounter during the interview – thinks you are the best possible fit for the job. However, you should never minimize the secondary part of the interview purpose - determining if YOU like the position, the University, and the location. Ideally, you'll spend many years in this job and it is critical for you to consider up-front whether this is going to be a place you can settle down.

Many young faculty also start families after they get their first position (some start a little earlier), so it is critical you look at the campus and area as a place where you may live for an extended period of time. When I was first looking for a faculty position, I had a job interview at a University that will remain unnamed. Given the status of the University and the faculty there, I was thrilled to get an interview invitation. The people were great and the campus was fine, but all I could see during my three days there was there was never any sunshine! In talking to the faculty, they said “yes, the sun doesn’t shine here from October to March!” I knew enough about myself to know that having no sunshine would drive me nuts – Baltimore in the winter during my post-doc had been bad enough – so I knew I would have gone insane if I took the job. So, use the on-campus interview to determine if you really want to live in that area.

Now let’s turn to specifics of the on-campus interview (*Info to Know 6.4*).

Info to Know – 6.4
Overview of the On-campus Interview

The on-campus interview requires you to:

- 1) Set a date and make arrangements for your travel (done in conjunction with the Search Committee Chair);
- 2) Do further background work on the Department, faculty, and students;
- 3) Prepare a job talk;
- 4) Practice your job talk so you are sure you meet the parameters for the talk you were given;
- 5) Plan your wardrobe appropriately for the weather and an Assistant Professor position;
- 6) Remember to conduct yourself as a professional at all times during the interview;
- 7) When you return home, email receipts and write thank-you notes!

Setting the Interview Date: When the Search Committee Chair calls to schedule the on-campus interview, you will be asked for available dates. Follow the same process I advocated for in the video/phone interview to snag the last possible date for your interview. You want to be the last face and voice the Committee hears from before they have to make their final decision. If you have a strong interview – which I’m sure you will – there will be less time for the Committee to forget the fine details of your visit: the answers you gave, your stellar job talk, and the way the students responded to interactions with you.

Another issue with scheduling the on-campus interview is who is going to pay for all this travel? In short – the University trying to hire you should pay for all your expenses for the on-campus interview. They will do this in one of two ways; they’ll either pay for everything (travel, hotel, meals) directly, or they’ll ask you to pay for everything and then they’ll reimburse you later. In most cases, it is easier and cheaper for the University to arrange and pay directly for all your travel, and if you are given the choice, always allow the University to arrange and pay for your travel. In that way, you don’t have to save receipts and wait for the University to reimburse you. When I was a student, there was no way I had enough credit to be able to buy an airplane ticket (often at the last minute), pay for a couple of nights in a hotel, pay for food, and then wait 4-6 weeks to get a check reimbursing me. It wasn’t going to happen for me, and you shouldn’t allow it to happen to you.

In many ways, I'm amazed there are any universities out there that want you to be a creditor for them! If you have a University that makes you pay for your travel expenses and will not reimburse you, you should immediately withdraw from that search. If a university treats potential employees poorly, I guarantee they'll treat you worse when they hire you! So, don't hesitate to ask the Search Chair how they will handle travel expenses – they will usually tell you that stuff, but just make sure.

Pre-interview background work: After the date for your interview is set, you'll start your preparations. Much like for your video/phone interview, you should begin your preparation immediately (and that's another reason to have the latest possible interview dates – more time to prepare!). In preparing for the video/phone interview, you made a background sheet on the Committee members, the Department Head, and the Dean. Now is the time to expand that background work to include all the faculty members in the Department, the Administrative Assistants, and other potential members of the University you may meet with. The more you know about those folks – what they look like, what research they do, where they graduated from, what do they do at the University, etc. – the more you'll be able to have meaningful conversations when you see them in-person. Additionally, don't forget to do a deep dive into the educational programs, the curriculum, the faculty promotion and tenure guidelines, and the general university background to become as familiar with the University as you can. Remember, that the faculty you'll be meeting with, have as part of their daily existence the University you may be visiting for the first time. They will probably mention things – programs, administrators, places in town – you don't know exist. For example, when I interviewed at Texas A&M, faculty kept referring to 'west campus' as the site for some programs and I had no clue that what they were actually talking about was the part of campus that was on the west side of the railroad tracks that run through campus. If I'd done a bit more studying, maybe I would have known that in advance, instead of spending most of my visit wondering where this 'other' campus was (maybe near Austin?). So, learn as much as you can before you get there because that information will come in handy and it'll help your conversations be more informative.

Business Cards: When you interview, you'll be meeting a lot of people. What will you give people who are interested in you for contact information? Your email address written on a slip of paper?

This is the place for the humble business card. While you may think that a small paper business card is out of date in our techno-centered world, that humble business card is one of the easiest ways to help people remember who you are. A simple card with your name, your current title (like "Doctoral Candidate"), and your contact information can be invaluable.

I was recently at a conference where a post-doc who is currently on the job market had been introduced to a Dean of a College at a large research-intensive University. They struck up a conversation and the Dean after some conversation, asked for this post-doc's business card so he could send her an upcoming job announcement. The post-doc had no business cards and missed a golden opportunity to give her contact information to this Dean who might hire her in the future. Whoops!

There is no excuse not to have business cards, especially if you may be in situations where you'll want to give your contact information to other professionals. Business cards are easy and inexpensive; there are several companies on the internet that will design, print, and send you cards for as little as \$10. Ten dollars is a cheap price to pay for the knowledge that you'll always have your contact information at hand, ready to be given to anyone you meet.

Preparing your job talk: One other item you'll prepare for your visit will be your 'job talk.' Your job talk is such an important topic that it has its own section below about how to put it together. But you should understand your job talk fulfills several purposes for the Search Committee:

- 1) It gives the faculty a chance to see what type of scientist you have been;
- 2) It gives the faculty a chance to see how well you teach;
- 3) It gives the faculty a chance to see how your research might fit within the department and what ideas and collaborations you may bring;
- 4) It gives the faculty a chance to see how you handle yourself in public situations where you may get hard questions; and
- 5) It gives the Committee a chance to see if you can and will follow directions.

Most job candidates assume the job talk is only to show the science they have done in the past – a way to show their brilliance by showing the wonderful things they've already accomplished, a type of 'scientific show and tell.' If you take this approach to your job talk, you may get the job, but it may not be with much enthusiasm. You have to remember this is an important hire for the Department. The Search Committee is trying to predict whether you are going to be just as 'brilliant' in the future as you have been in the past, especially when you've got to teach, do service, AND do research – a situation most junior faculty haven't done until they start their first position. And the Committee is well aware – sometimes through past examples in their department – past performance is not necessarily a guarantee of future performance. So, you've got to help the faculty and Committee see where you are going in your research, not just where you've been.

Given you'll probably have to teach classes as a faculty member, the Search Committee will be watching your job talk closely to see how well you impart information to an audience that will likely include faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, as well as some administrators. You will likely be the most knowledgeable expert in the room on your topic, so your challenge will be to present in such a way that most of your audience follows the talk and can understand it. Do this well, and the Committee will know you can teach. Further, if your science is truly advanced, the faculty may have difficulty understanding how your science will fit into and augment the other research going on in the department (and thus, is worthy of the big start-up package!). You need to help the faculty see how you fit and how your work can augment others. Recall the situation I had with the junior faculty member presenting her work on a pathway that controlled the wing shape of fruit flies (Chapter 5 for those of you that skipped that Chapter). Upon the first presentation, everyone at her job talk was wondering how wing shape of fruit flies was related to Exercise Science. But, everyone then got it when the candidate clearly showed how this pathway that controlled wing shape was also a marker of stem cell activity she had used to determine how muscle healed from overexertion. Ding, ding, ding! That simple tie-in helped everyone see how her research would fit in our department, especially since we had several faculty that did muscle injury recovery and rehabilitation research.

If the position you are applying for is in a university where the primary focus is on teaching, instead of doing a research-related job talk, you may be asked to teach an actual class. In this case, the Search Committee will arrange for you to teach a class in one of the on-going courses. You'll be given the topic that should be covered that day and any parameters the Professor may set, like what media can be used, how many people are in the class, etc. It goes almost without saying you will need to hit this 'talk' out of the park and show you can successfully lead a group of students through the assigned material. Your preparation for this talk will be putting together the lecture, as you would normally teach a class on this topic.

If possible, it might be helpful to talk to the faculty member who teaches the class you are teaching so you can get a sense of the classroom dynamics; finding out something as simple as how the Professor normally teaches the class will help you determine what you need to do to teach the class. For example, if the Professor usually uses a digital presentation to go through material, you know that is the baseline minimum you should do. You may want to integrate some real-time polling in your presentation as well as some interactive sections to really engage the students. You will be judged on your ability to engage the students and lead them through the material. This type of presentation can be tough, especially if you have the Search Committee in the back of the room watching! But, if you work to know the material thoroughly and have put together a clear and practiced presentation, you will do great!

Lastly, there are always small tests candidates have no idea they are facing. When you are asked to do a job talk, whether it is research-based or a teaching presentation, you will be given some basic parameters for the talk; how long the talk should be, how much time you should leave for questions and answers, and the type of audience you'll have there. These are all parameters faculty face on a daily basis, especially those faculty that teach. If you are told you have 40 minutes for your talk, 10 minutes for the Q&A, and you'll have a mixed audience of faculty and students (and random administrators), you should prepare your talk to fit into those parameters. If you go over time, don't leave time for Q&A, or present at a level more appropriate for Nobel Prize winners, you will have failed an important test: can you follow directions? Many times, I have seen candidates lose any chance at the job because they didn't follow the simple directions for their talk that were given to them. Put yourself in the shoes of the Search Committee and the Department Chair: why would you hire someone who can't or won't follow simple directions? As a faculty member, there are literally hundreds of things you'll have to do that require following simple directions (e.g., posting your office hours on your door, using the University approved format for your syllabus, etc.). Believe me, no one will want you as a colleague if they are always having to 'help/correct' you in doing the simple things. So, very carefully follow the parameters you are given for your job talk. You don't want to lose your chance at a job because you wouldn't follow directions.

Planning your wardrobe: Much like the job talk, how to have an appropriate image is a separate section below. You may initially think being concerned about your image is trivial or shouldn't matter because after all, you're going to be an ACADEMIC! You couldn't be more wrong with either assumption. Whether we like it or not, people judge us based on how we present ourselves; there's even good research showing your brain will judge a face as trustworthy or untrustworthy in as little as 30 milliseconds². If you show up in flip-flops, shorts, and a t-shirt, you will not be taken seriously as an academic. You may protest and say, "Hey, I knew Professors that wore those types of clothes at work" but the difference is they have jobs and you don't (and whether that type of clothing is appropriate for faculty members is a topic covered in our second book, *Surviving Your First 5 Years As A Faculty Member*). You are trying to get a job and universities are notoriously conservative when it comes to clothing and the image you project; you have to remember in publicly funded universities, you are a state employee and thus, you are a public figure and represent the state, your University, and your Department. Thus, you need to make sure you present an image and demeanor appropriate for the position you are applying for. One of the things I remind my students is that "At all times, act and dress like the professional you want to be" with a special emphasis on the 'at all times' part of the statement.

² And if you're curious about how this was done, here's the citation: Freeman, JB et al. Journal of Neuroscience, 10573-10581, 34(32), 2014.

You should be ready to present a great image from the time you get off the airplane at the interview, until the time you get back on the airplane.

There is a full section below on how to dress appropriately and I would strongly urge you to follow the hints and tips there (plus, that section was written by a guest author who knows what she is talking about!).

Part of your image is your demeanor and how you interact with other people during the interview. You will get no points for being difficult, arrogant, or demanding. You will get points if you are positive, kind, and *professionally graceful*. 'Professionally graceful' is the attitude I encourage people to adopt in the academic environment and I define it as "being kind, considerate, thoughtful, and having a sense of propriety in the work environment with everyone you encounter." Being professionally graceful allows you to set up boundaries of how you will allow people to treat you (and how you'll treat others) while remaining kind and considerate to the people you work with (see Book 2 for more discussion of how you will act as a faculty member). It's worth repeating that as you interact with the Search Committee and others in your interviews and especially during the on-campus interview, you need to constantly remember these people are taking time from their lives to get to know you and you should be appreciative of that time. Believe me, when you become a faculty member, there will be hundreds of other things you could be doing versus showing a potential junior faculty member around campus or sitting through another job talk.

The same goes for the administrative staff with which you interact; treat them with kindness and respect because often they are doing all the scheduling and organizing of your visit and that is a difficult task. I'm aware of at least one Department Head search where the leading candidate didn't get the position because he was arrogant and dismissive with the administrative staff (while being chummy with the faculty). One of the sources of power in an academic department is the administrative staff and if you offend or irritate the staff, there is a very small probability you will be hired at all. Remember, you are interviewing for a place in a community that has students, staff, faculty, and administrators in it. Make sure you are respectful of all parts of that community because everyone in that community WILL make their opinions known if you are rude or arrogant during your interview.

Conducting yourself as a professional: One last warning about your image and demeanor during your interview: it is likely at some point you'll be in less-formal situations during the interview, whether it is in the car being taken to the hotel or at dinner with members of the University community. These situations may be less formal, but you should treat them the same as you treat every other part of the interview. The people you are with are not your friends (yet) and thus, you should consider carefully what you say and share. Even in these situations, you need to remember to be positive, kind, and professionally graceful in your demeanor. When ordering dinner (or a meal) always observe what your host orders and order a meal that is a similar price (and of course appropriate for what you want to eat). Importantly, take your cue for drinks from your host. If your host sticks to iced tea, it's best if you stick with iced tea! If your host drinks a glass of wine, stay with iced tea (or water!). Now is not the time for you to drink alcohol! In many instances, universities will not pay for alcohol, so any alcoholic beverages consumed (beer, wine, etc.) may have to be paid for by your host out of their own pocket. So never assume having a meal with someone is a free license for you to drink and eat anything you want. Watch your host and drink and eat appropriately (and it should go without saying you should severely limit or eliminate your alcohol intake so you maintain full control of your faculties and tongue in these situations!).

Tying up the visit: When you get back on the airplane to go home, you can take a deep breath – great job! But, there are just a couple of things left for you to do. First, make sure if you have any receipts that need to be turned in for reimbursement, that you send them to the hiring Department so they can process them as soon as possible. Secondly, and maybe most importantly, take the time to send handwritten thank you notes to everyone you interacted with during your visit. You may be tempted to take a shortcut and send a mass email thank you note; that approach is only marginally better than sending no thank-you at all. Take the time and send actual thank-you notes to those involved with your visit (and don't forget the Administrative Staff that handled the arrangements for your trip). I would suggest you start with the folks you had the most contact with (e.g., the Search Committee Chair, the Department Chair, the Administrative staff that arranged the trip, the Search Committee members, the faculty members, and the Dean if you met with him/her) and send the notes as soon as possible. A handwritten note is a classy touch because people understand if you took the time to handwrite the note and mail it out (plus, the \$0.55 or so it cost to mail it), you really appreciated their time. Sending this type of thank-you note also has the added benefit of keeping your name favorably in front of the Search Committee members, especially if you were not the last candidate to be interviewed. So, while your interview may be over, it's not really over until you take care of the receipts and thank-you notes – and then all you have to do is wait!

Your job talk – putting it all together

As mentioned earlier, the job talk is a critical portion of your on-campus interview. It is foolish to believe the only reason you are doing a job talk is so you can show off your past research accomplishments. You must understand and prepare for the fact the job talk helps the faculty of the department to understand not only what research you've done, but more critically, how well you convey information, and how well you will fit into and add to the future research environment of the department. All of these reasons for the job talk mean doing a clear, concise presentation pitched at the appropriate level should be your primary focus when you develop your talk.

What to include in your talk: During your job talk, you should cover the following topics: who you are, what area of research have you worked in and what are some of your primary findings, what area of research are you going to work in in the future, how your research area will fit into the department, your initial research plans for studies and funding, finished off with a summary and some take-home messages. That's a lot to cover in a job talk, but all of these areas are critical to provide the Search Committee, the other faculty, and the Department Chair with an understanding of who you are going to be as a faculty member!

Who you are - While it is likely all the department faculty will be provided access to your CV before your visit, it doesn't hurt to start your talk with a brief description of your educational background. Within this background, you should reiterate your excitement about the position and interview, your thanks to the Committee for their time, and why this position is appealing to you. You can use some of your verbiage from the first paragraph of your cover letter in this section.

Info to Know – 6.5 Topics to Cover in Your Job Talk

1. Who you are;
2. Your past research agenda and findings;
3. Your future research agenda;
4. How you will fit into the department research portfolio;
5. Potential collaboration partners;
6. Your plans for funding;
7. Summary and conclusion.

For example, when I interviewed at Texas A&M, part of my opening statement was to note one of the personal reasons I was excited about the potential job at A&M was the fact that I was born and raised in Texas and this position would allow me – for the first time in 40 years – be within driving distance of family. This is the type of personal information that is not too invasive, but helps the faculty know you will be an engaged faculty member because you really want to be at the University!

What you have done - This section should give an overview of what your research agenda has been and why you are interested in this area. You should be able to state your research focus in one sentence, which will help your audience quickly comprehend what general area you are working in. Follow this general description with a **brief** overview of the literature with the intention of helping the faculty understand why your research area is important. This point is critical – you have to help people understand why your research focus will develop important information that will have an impact – so they can appreciate why you are doing what you are doing. Tracing the obscure metabolic pathway of a specific molecular regulator may be important, but unless you tell the faculty why it is important, chances are they won't understand why you are doing your research or why it is important for them to have your research area in their research portfolio (remember the early discussion of the fruit fly wing shape?) After you've established what your research area has been and why it is important, outline 2-3 studies you've done with the results and your conclusions from each. You can quickly see why it is important to establish the context (the what and why) before you start talking about your studies. When your audience understands the what and the why, then they'll readily appreciate your results.

You want to choose only a few studies to highlight, so pick studies that show the larger-scale progression of your work addressing your research agenda. Show data that will help your audience appreciate where you've come from (research-wise) as well as data that will serve as your launching point when you are a faculty member. Remember this is not an in-depth science talk (in most cases); therefore, you do not have to give minute details of all the methods you used. In most cases, your audience is going to be interested in your research question, the broad outline of how you answered the question, your resulting data, and then your interpretation of the data. For example, there is no need to go into a detailed description of how you did the genetic sequencing (if that is what you did); give a general overview of your method and go on! If someone wants to know the fine detail, they'll ask, you'll already know that information, and it'll be an easy question to answer. The biggest point is you are setting up a 'research story' and most of the time, the interesting point of your research story will not be the details of the methods you used; the interesting point will be the answers you found and how they fit with what we already know about your topic.

What areas are you going to research in the future? - A critical portion of your job talk is to help the Department understand where you are going in the future, research-wise. This type of knowledge will help the Department figure out how they are going to support your research growth in the future. A common mistake I've seen is for job candidates to merely show what they've done in the past and stop. With that approach, the candidate is trusting the Search Committee will be able to intuit what is next in the candidate's research agenda. While Search Committees are smart, in general, they don't know where you want to go with your research. So, don't leave it up to the Search Committee's imagination – tell them where you see your research going over the next 3-5 years. Make sure your research vision aligns with the research plans you've drafted (back in Chapter 5) and has a singular focus. I've seen too many young academics that are excited about many different research areas.

Presenting multiple research foci can lead to the Search Committee labeling you as ‘unfocused’ with a real concern about how you and the Department will support all your research efforts. So stick with a singular research focus; wait until you get tenure before you start admitting to having multiple foci!

When presenting your future research vision, if you are going to continue the research you’ve already been doing, help the faculty understand where you are going is an easy extension of the studies you’ve already done.

You should be able to use your previous work – the data you highlighted in that portion of your job talk – as the foundation for what you are attacking next. This type of build-up, where you show you have a history in a research area and then you show what your next steps will be, will help the Department understand how they are going to be able to support your future growth as a faculty member.

The more difficult path is if you anticipate having a research vision greatly different from what you did during your doctoral and post-doctoral experiences. It is true young academics change their research focus at times, but if you anticipate doing that, you are putting the Search Committee at a disadvantage because, while they can judge your past work, they really have no information on which to determine if your future work will be successful. If you are going to change your research focus as a faculty member, figure out how you can tactfully but honestly describe your transition from your previous work to your new work. Perhaps your new research area is different from but related somehow to your new area. Maybe a finding you made resulted in you considering a different research agenda (if so, make sure to show past data). For example, for several years, we did research on the genetics of exercise endurance. But as I thought about it, I thought working to understand the genetics that regulate daily activity would have a larger health impact. That point became a central discussion in my talks to help people understand why I was transitioning out of exercise endurance genetics into a different exercise parameter. So, figure out how to explain this transition to help your audience understand why this new research area is important and why you’ll be successful!

How your research fits in the department and your plans for funding - At this point in your talk, if you haven’t already talked about how your work ‘fits’ into the department research portfolio, make sure you talk about it. Maybe the department has several faculty working in your same research area; point out adding your research agenda will further consolidate a core around that research area will help develop larger program grants. Maybe the department doesn’t have other faculty working in your area; use that fact to point out how your research area can augment and complement other faculty research areas. For example, recently a colleague who does mitochondrial work was interviewing for positions and was always quick to point out her mitochondrial work would directly support researchers doing either cardiovascular or skeletal muscle work by giving them further insights on mechanisms that could influence the functioning of those systems. Whether your research area is currently represented in the hiring department or not, figure out how you will fit and make that case!

As you talk about how you would fit, It is always helpful to indicate to the audience how you would fit in and with whom you would collaborate with at the University.

In today's funding environment, collaborative research projects are more likely to be funded, so showing you already have ideas about who you will work with at the University will be a big bonus. You shouldn't name drop just to name drop; make sure the names you use – either individuals or university centers – are open for collaboration. Look at the advice I gave back in Chapter 5 about mentioning collaborations in your cover letter and keep those guidelines in mind.

In today's university setting, you would be remiss if you did not mention how you plan to fund your research. Thus, you should give an outline of the funding proposals you *expect* to submit over the first 3-5 years as a faculty member.

This outline of proposals should be appropriate for your rank, i.e., you should not propose you are going to put in an R01 (or the equivalent) immediately because most junior faculty do not have the amount of data needed to lead with an R01. So, your outline should show a trajectory of proposals starting with smaller internal grant monies, leading to smaller external funding, and building toward larger independent external grants by the end of your first five years. If you plan to go after funds from federal sources, it is always helpful to indicate which funding entities you will be approaching (and it's not good enough to say "NIH;" you need to indicate which NIH Institute you'll be targeting). It is this type of funding plan that helps the committee know you are aware of how to apply for funding and you actually have a plan. However, don't be worried your plan may have to change over five years because you are showing your *expected* funding trajectory. Most academics are sophisticated enough to know funding plans change due to a variety of circumstances. But you just need to show you have the sophistication to know how to develop funding to support your research.

Summarizing - You'll want to end your job talk with a few 'take-home messages' relating to your science and your enthusiasm for the position. You want the audience to remember that not only did you 'teach' your topic well, but you were also excited and enthusiastic about the possibility of working at this University. So, be sure to take a few minutes to relate those vital 'take-home messages'! There will be time allotted for questions after your talk, and I'll cover tips for answering those questions in a section below.

Other stuff related to your job talk - There are a few other points you need to keep in mind as you put together your job talk. First, you need to be clear about what media you can use for your talk. You should ask the Search Committee Chair about what type of media is standard in the room where you'll be presenting so you can plan accordingly. The use of some type of digital presentation is almost universal (e.g., PowerPoint®, Keynote®, Prezi®, or whatever flavor of computer-based presentation software you use). You want to take your presentation on at least one jump drive, or on your computer if you are going to use your own computer during the talk. If you 'built' your presentation on a particular type of operating system (e.g., Windows) make sure it looks good on another operating system (e.g., Mac). I have seen several job talks derailed because the candidate did not check their presentation on another operating system, which resulted in scrambled text and figures.

While your hosting Department will probably have all the media equipment you need, I always take my own slide clicker that has a built-in laser pointer³ as well as dongles that work on either HDMI or VGA projectors if I am going to use my own computer. While this all may seem like overkill, when it comes to your job talk, you can never be too prepared. You want to make the best impression you can, and sometimes being prepared for anything can help you make that vital impression even better.

And before we leave discussion of your job talk, it should go without saying you should strive to use the best presentation skills, including excellent slide construction skills, as you develop your talk. You can find many guides on composing effective presentations online; take the time to read them. I've found there are a few universal rules I remember that lead to successful presentations:

- 1) You should put no more than eight (8) lines of text on a slide;
- 2) It helps to have pictures on every slide – even if they are just pictures related to your text;
- 3) You should think about your talk in 10-minute blocks because most people can only focus for 10 minutes at a time; and
- 4) Use animations to control the flow of information⁴.

While points 1-3 speak for themselves, point 4 needs a bit of clarification. Have you ever seen a talk where the presenter puts up a slide filled with text and then goes through the slide (usually from the top)? I bet you read ahead on the slide, even if the presenter was talking about each point separately. If you were reading ahead – which everyone does – you probably weren't 'hearing' what the speaker was saying about each point. To solve this, control the flow of information. Use animations to put up one point at a time and only click to the next point when you're done with the first point! If you do this, you'll find the audience stays engaged as you walk through the information! Take the time to learn how to use animations and watch your audiences really become engaged.

Part of your presentation skill is how you actually present. We all have verbal distractors (e.g., “um,” “uh,” “hmmm,” and “okay”) and that is okay, but you want to decrease the occurrence of those distractors as much as possible. I always try to focus on speaking in complete sentences – think about every statement as having a beginning and an end. When you first try this, it'll sound a bit clipped, but you'll get the hang of it and it will begin to be natural. It also helps to video yourself speaking and then watch and learn from the video. As you watch your presentations, you'll probably pick up on other items you need to eliminate such as too much pacing around, speaking too fast, or playing with your hair. Work to eliminate all these distractors and you're now closer to becoming the best speaker you can be!

Answering questions

A part of any interview is answering questions from the Search Committee, other faculty, and your job talk audience (and asking your own). The thought you are going to have to answer questions can cause some anxiety, but there are some keys to answering questions that can help reduce your anxiety.

³ I use a Keyspan by Tripp Lite PR-EZ1 presentation remote I've had for over 10 years. It has a simple USB plug-in module and the remote is small and fits easily in my hand. This remote is rugged, easy on batteries, and has a huge range. It has repaid the \$40 I spent on it many times over.

⁴ If you want a review of why these presentation tips make scientific sense in how people learn, check out the book *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School* by John Medina. If you are going to do any type of education or presentations, this is a must read book.

In this section, I'll cover some general tips about how to answer questions, we'll cover some general questions that may be asked, and then we'll talk about questions that can't be asked and how to handle those questions if they arise.

First, successfully answering questions starts with your approach to answering questions. Always let your questioner finish their question before you try to answer. That may be obvious, but nerves and anxiousness to please often lead candidates to start answering a question before the questioner is finished asking because the candidate thinks they know what the question is going to be. When you listen to the question, focus on the questioner and what they are actually asking

– in other words, don't jump to conclusions before the questioner finishes their question. Look the questioner in the eye to let them know you are paying attention to them; it can be considered rude and disrespectful to not look at an individual who is asking you a question. Additionally, be careful with your facial expression and your body language during the question.

Even if you think the question is the dumbest question you've ever heard, you shouldn't give those thoughts away by the expression on your face (also, crossing your arms in front of you can be considered as being closed off to questions). From an audience standpoint, there's nothing more frustrating than an individual not giving a direct answer to a question.

If you don't know the answer or don't understand the question, state you don't know or you didn't understand. Don't believe you'll be able to talk your way around questions in this setting. Academics in general are really good with language and know when they are being conned, so don't even try!

Lastly, it is possible you may get asked really difficult or controversial questions. In these situations, you need to make sure you aren't drawn into an argument; answer the question calmly to the best of your ability, but if the questioner continues to badger you, politely note that you will "be happy to continue this conversation after the presentation is over." The biggest point to remember is to not lose your cool and start arguing. If you are arguing with a faculty member, you'll never win! In short, as you answer questions, have a neutral expression, look at the person who is asking the question, listen to the whole question before you begin to answer, answer the question directly and completely, and remain calm.

As noted earlier, when you meet with the Search Committee – either during the video/phone interview or during the on-campus interview - it is likely there will be a set script of questions that will be used for all candidates. Knowing this, it should be apparent the Committee will ask you fairly general questions that can be applied to anyone. In most cases, these questions will probe your approach to work, the values that govern your behavior, as well as how you've handled certain situations in the past.

Info to Know – 6.6
How to Answer Questions

1. Listen to the complete question before answering.
2. Look the questioner in the eye and hold their gaze while answering.
3. Be concise and succinct in your response – others may want to ask questions!
4. Be careful with your non-verbal responses.
5. If you didn't understand the question, ask for the question to be repeated.
6. If you don't know the answer, say so – you won't be able to con your way out of these questions!

Most of the time, the Committee's questions will want you to relate an example or a scenario that will help the Committee understand how you would have handled certain situations.

Listed in Table 6.1 are a series of general questions I've used in the past with candidates. Use these questions to develop a set of general answers for yourself. Whether you get similar questions during your interview is of course, unknown. However, the questions in the table represent a range of general areas and it is likely you'll be asked questions falling into those general categories.

Understand there are no right or wrong answers to these questions; they are meant to be fairly neutral so the Committee can understand you better.

*Answer the questions honestly and tactfully and use the tips
above about answering questions!*

While you may be asked many different questions during your interview, there are some questions that cannot be asked because they touch on topics whose use is forbidden in hiring. Questions during an interview are supposed to directly relate to your capability to perform the job you are being interviewed for; questions that touch on unrelated topics are not allowable. There are several broad areas an interviewer cannot inquire about including:

- your nationality/ethnicity;
- your ancestry or birthplace;
- your credit rating;
- any disabilities you may have;
- your gender/sex;
- your health/physical condition;
- your age;
- your citizenship status;
- a criminal record;
- your spouse/children;
- your marital status;
- your religion/creed.

There are some allowable instances where you can (and will) be asked about some of these items (e.g., ethnic background, criminal background). But, the instances where you are asked about these things will be handled through confidential processes through Human Resources and should not be broached during the interview with the Search Committee.

There are extensive documents available online covering these types of 'non-allowable' questions and I would encourage you to familiarize yourself with them⁵.

*How do you handle it if a non-allowable
questions is asked?*

Because of the wide range of non-allowable questions, it is likely you will be asked one (or more) of these questions. However, before you get too excited about this possible breach, understand oftentimes the questions are asked quite innocently as part of general conversation.

⁵ A great summary is available from the University of Dayton at https://bit.ly/ACDS_Questions

Often when candidates are out to dinner with members of the Search Committee, the subject of families and children will come up, especially related to the types of schools that are located in the area.

These types of personal questions are usually just part of normal social interaction and I would encourage you to think carefully about the probable intent behind some inquiries before getting upset that you are being asked questions on the prohibited list. In the end, you have the choice as to whether to answer specific questions or not.

If you believe an unallowable question is being inappropriately asked, I would suggest you respond with a phrase something like “I am not comfortable answering that question. I hope you understand.” Most Search Committee members are now required to have some training on what questions are allowable and which are not, so if you get any unallowable questions, it is most likely from faculty members or students that haven’t had such training. Thus, while I would never recommend you answer these types of questions if they are inappropriate, I would recommend you carefully consider the circumstances and the intent of the question as you decide whether to answer or not.

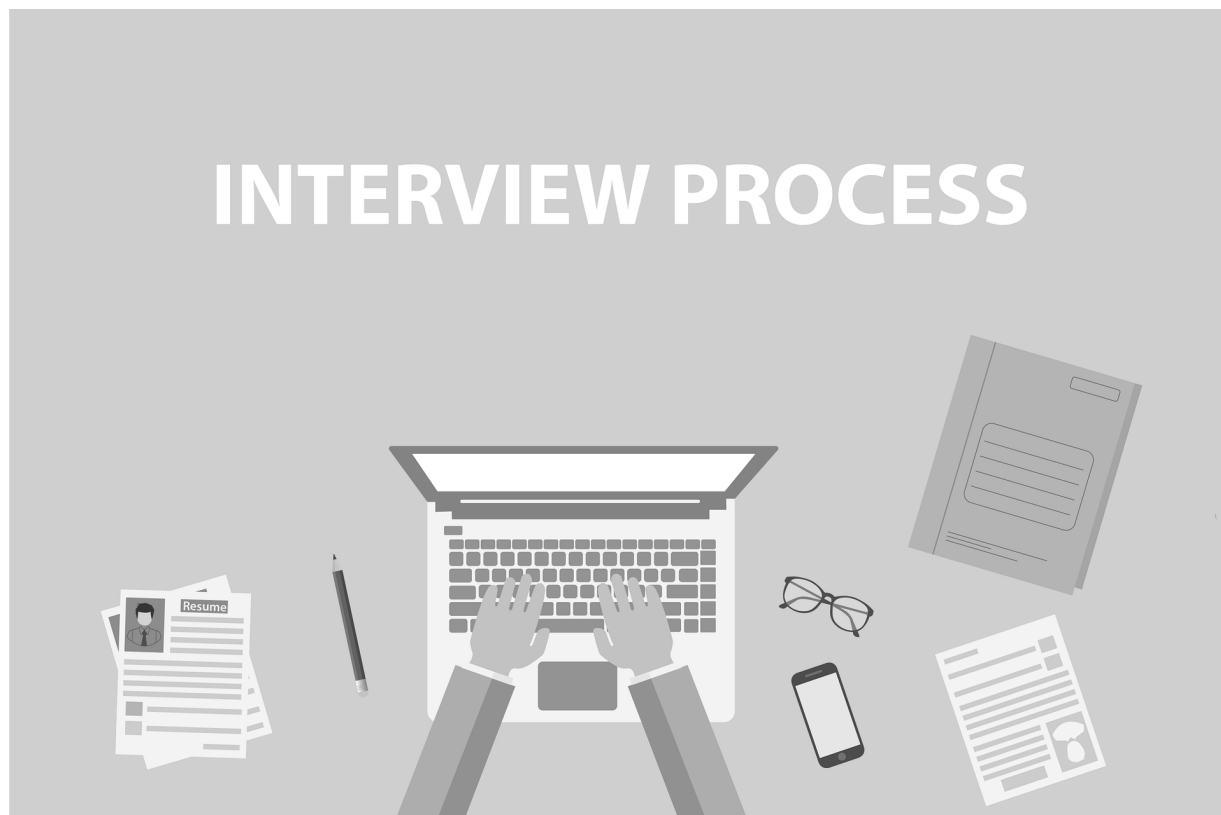


Table 6.1: Examples of General Questions You May Be Asked By The Search Committee

Question	Why they are asking this question
1. Why are you attracted to this position?	• The Committee is trying to understand why you want to work at University X.
2. What do you perceive you would be gaining and losing personally and professionally if you came to work here?	• This is a multi-part question (at least four parts) that will help the Committee understand the advantages / disadvantages from your viewpoint. This is a question you should have asked yourself repeatedly before you applied!
3. Pretend we are your aunts and uncles (we've all had at least one year of college). Explain your research agenda including some of your most exciting findings.	• How well can you explain your work to an educated, lay audience? They are trying to understand what type of teacher you'll be.
4. This job includes teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Why do you want to teach?	• This will help the Committee understand why you want to teach, especially if you've had little teaching experience in the past.
5. What uncompromising values do you base your professional decisions upon?	• This question is meant to get at your core values that guide all your decisions!
6. What do you see as the 'hot' areas in your discipline in the near future?	• The Committee wants to know how well versed you are on the current topics in your field.
7. If we met your former boss at a barbecue and asked to hear just one sentence about you, what would the one sentence be?	• This tells the Committee what you think other people think of you in the work setting.
8. Tell us about a time when you were given a job that didn't make sense and you decided not to follow instructions.	• The Committee is trying to learn how you handle situations that may challenge your core values.
9. How have you worked with difficult people in the past?	• Closely following the last question, this one works to understand how you handle conflict with other people in the work place.
10. What kind of work would you enjoy doing, even without pay?	• This answer will help the Committee understand your passions in life. A word of warning on this one: it's not necessarily correct to say "I'd still come to work" because that is probably false (you'd really work for free?). So take the opportunity to share with the Committee your passions, even if they aren't directly tied to teaching and research!

During your interview, it is likely you will meet with a group of students; the students may be undergraduate, graduate, or just doctoral students. In my experiences, the majority of these meetings do not have a set agenda or a standardized set of questions. The purpose of these meetings is to get a read from the students about what they think of you as a potential faculty member. Therefore, in your meeting, you need to act as a faculty member would act with a group of students. Since faculty members guide students to their chosen career, ask questions of the students pertaining to their aspirations and/or their current research areas. It's always fun to ask the students a question to get their impression of the University and the Department in which you'll be working.

For example, asking open-ended questions like “What is the one thing you think all faculty should know about students here?” may result in some surprising answers that will give you more information as you decide whether you want to work in the University or not. But one thing to remember – even though there may not be much (or any) age difference between you and the students – you are interviewing to be an Assistant Professor and not their friend. So, keep that in mind and enjoy the time with the students!

Table 6.2 – Questions You Should Ask During Your Interview

Question (and whom to ask)	The reason to ask this question
1. What is the anticipated timeline for the rest of the search? (Search Committee Chair or Dept. Head)	This is a standard question you should make sure you ask so you know how long they think the process is going to take. It'll give you some criteria to judge when you should call the Search Committee Chair to inquire if you haven't heard in a while.
2. How would you describe the Departmental culture? How does the Department/College work to strengthen this culture? (Anyone)	This is a great question to help you understand from both individual and group perspectives how they see the culture of their Department. You can also easily inquire about the Divisional culture, the college culture, or the University culture depending on whom you are talking to.
3. What excites you most about your position in the Department (or another unit) and what do you like most about this Department? (Individual Faculty members)	Again, you are getting individual perspectives on the positive aspects of the unit you'll be working in.
4. What are the challenges and opportunities you see inherent in this position? (Anyone)	Here you are asking for what others see as the problems and/or barriers you may face if you take the position. Ask it the way it is written, and it comes off as inquisitive and positive, versus negative if you used the words 'problems' and 'barriers.'
5. I like to collaborate with other researchers. Can you give me examples of how the Department/College/ University encourages and supports collaborations? (Everyone)	Collaboration is key in today's research environment (especially for funding) and thus, most Universities are interested in getting faculty out of their silos and working with others. Asking this question will help you understand what they are doing about it, and will let them know you are thinking about that issue!
6. What are the most important things you'd like to see me accomplish in the first 30, 60, and 90 days of my joining the faculty? (Dept. Head, Dean)	This will immediately give you perspective on what your bosses will consider appropriate and successful early accomplishment.
7. What role will landing external funding play in my tenure/promotion decision? (Dept. Head, Dean)	Many Universities are changing how they feel about this topic with some saying you will have to have an external grant to get promotion/tenure, with others only emphasizing they want to see effort in this area. One thing is for sure, if you are interviewing at an R1 institute, you will have to write for funding!

Asking questions

As a candidate, you'll be given multiple opportunities to ask questions during both video/phone interviews and during campus interviews. There are few things more disconcerting than a candidate that has no questions. Search Committees do understand an interview is the beginning of a big deal for you. They know this process may ultimately lead to you having to move to a different area/region, starting a new job with big responsibilities, and trying to settle your family in a new area. Because this process is such a big transition for you, if you have no questions, this will make the Search Committee question whether or not you are even interested in the job.

The candidates I've interviewed that have had no or few questions were invariably the ones we ultimately realized weren't really interested in the position. Thus, if you are going to interview, make sure you have a few questions ready for each person you talk to.

While I'll give you some specific examples below of questions you can use, there are some general concepts you should remember when you prepare your questions:

1 - Always ask your questions as questions – don't state anything. Statements can sound judgmental. For example, instead of saying "Teaching classes while you're seated is not the best learning environment," say "I've noticed most faculty are seated while they are teaching – is that style recommended here?"

2 - It is inadvisable to continually refer to where you've worked in the past. For example, instead of saying "Back at MASU, we always helped students study," you can say, "What type of support is available for students studying for exams?"

3 - Ask questions appropriate for the person/group you are asking them to. For example, you should not ask the Search Committee about the course load you would be teaching. That type of question is better suited for the Department Chair or Dean.

4 - A good foundation for questions always revolve around what type of work environment is present. For example, you can ask, "How does the Department and College support the professional growth of faculty?"

So, what are some specific questions you can use? Table 6.2 gives some questions I have used in the past. You'll notice each of these examples revolves around a theme and are asked to get specific information. You can alter these questions to fit the person you're talking to, so use them to develop your own questions for your interview (whether it is video/phone or on-campus). Also, all the questions in Table 6.1 can be altered for your use during your visit. For example, question 1 from Table 6.1 can become "What role do you hope the person that gets this job fulfills in the department?" Think of questions that will help you glean information about the workplace and the Department functions and use those during your visit.

Your image during the interview

(from our guest writer, Ms. Faith A. Lightfoot, Certified Image and Style Consultant⁶)

Sociolinguist Albert Mehrabian discovered through his research that in a face-to-face encounter, seven percent of a verbal message comes from the words used, 38 percent comes from the pacing, vocal tone and inflection, and 55 percent from the speaker's appearance and body language. Since the first impression and message you send is created the moment you meet or begin speaking, why not strive to create a good impression through your wardrobe?

Thoughts regarding what to wear for an interview should begin when you start applying for positions. Since most Universities utilize a teleconferencing interview as the first step of the interview process, let's begin with teleconferencing and then progress to the on-campus interview.

Video interview: Although you are not directly face-to-face during a teleconferencing interview, your first impression will still include your word choice, vocal tone, and appearance. A video interview is a 'waist-up' interview, so your hair, skin, smile (teeth), and clothes will be in view. Since a teleconference interview is like being on television, the focus here is to eliminate distractions so your committee focuses on what you say and not on what is being said by your attire or non-verbal actions.

Hair - Experimenting with a new hairstyle before an interview can be disastrous if you end up with a style you don't like, so resist the urge to try something new. In the weeks prior to an interview, schedule an appointment for a haircut, trim, and highlights if necessary. If you have streaks of different colors in your hair other than highlights, it's best to let the color fade or grow out. As much as you may want to express your individuality, your interview isn't the time to do that.

If you normally pull your hair into a ponytail or use a 'chip clip' to keep it up, this is the time to let your hair down so your hair can frame your face. Hair pulled back or put up on the top of the head is an informal and casual look and that is not what you are shooting for during an interview. If you aren't accustomed to wearing your hair down, think about getting a trim and keep your hair down in the weeks leading up to the interview so you can get accustomed to the look.

Also, if you twist your fingers through your hair or pull it to one side as you talk, work on decreasing that habit because it is distracting. The focus should be on what you are saying in the interview, not on your hair.

For men in particular, if none of the above applies to you, at least get a cut or trim, clean up the beard if necessary, and cut all stray hairs from your nose and ears.

Makeup - Whether makeup is part of your daily routine or not, this is something all females (and some males) need to address. You are being viewed on a screen and without makeup most faces can look washed out. If you are not accustomed to wearing or applying makeup, then it's time to either chat with a friend who wears makeup for some help in this area or take a trip to a local makeup store.⁷

⁶ Faith Lightfoot is the President of Academic Career Development Services LLC, but also does workshops on academic dress. If you need help in this area, shoot her an email!

⁷ I recommend an Ulta store or at UltaBeauty.com.

A foundation color that matches your skin tone or is one shade darker, under-eye concealer, a bit of cheek and lip color, and some mascara goes a long way. Let the experts help you. Tell the makeup store personnel you are going for a subtle interview look. Watch what they do and then work to duplicate the look in the days leading up to your interview. Stay away from bright lip shades and glossy lip color since the gloss will reflect the light and it is a distraction. And men, if you wear makeup, follow the same advice!

Eyebrows - Your eyebrows are part of the frame of your face and they may need some attention. The ‘unibrow’ is dead, for both women and men! Here again, your local makeup store will probably have a brow bar where in less than twenty minutes, you will end up with properly shaped and tweezed brows. And guys, don’t dismiss the brows because it’s like the ear hairs – unkempt eyebrows can be distracting.

Teeth - You are in an interview and even though it is a serious situation, you will certainly want to smile and be yourself. Brush, floss and check those pearly whites before you sit down for the interview. I am sure you don't want to find out after the interview that a remnant from your breakfast or lunch was part of your smile. If you utilize teeth whitening products, continue to use them because your teeth are part of the view from the other side of the screen.

Jewelry and Piercings - If you wear earrings, choose earrings that are small hoops or studs and leave the shiny or dangling earrings and bracelets in your jewelry box. And if you have other piercings, remove them all. Regardless of what you think about your piercings, the last thing you want is to have a shiny object flashing on the screen distracting the committee. You also don't want someone on the committee to dismiss you as a non-viable candidate due to your piercings.



Undergarments - Ladies, if your bra strap keeps slipping off your shoulder, it tells you two things. One, you don't have a bra that fits you properly and two, you will distract the committee every time you move to adjust the strap. Make sure your straps stay put before you get in front of the camera. If your strap does fall off your shoulder during the interview, leave it down.

Clothes - Enhance your appearance by wearing the best color for ‘television’ as well as your skin, hair, and eye color. Women, it is best to stay away from loud colors such as bright pink, yellow, red, or orange. Light colored pastels will wash out your skin tone and paisley or mixed color schemes will be distracting. Consider solids like a black or navy suit jacket or deep jewel tones in the blue, brown, and green family. A dark suit coat jacket with a hint of color under the jacket will be professional and soothing for the Committee. Wearing a crisp white or light blue blouse or scoop neck top under the jacket is always a safe bet. If choosing to wear a blouse, iron the entire blouse even though it will be under a suit jacket because the screen picks up every wrinkle! Further, if you want to wear a multi-color dress you can put a solid colored suit blazer over the dress and button the blazer. Here again, let the color of the dress slightly show through but not overtake the screen. The blazer offers a serious and formal look while still allowing your style to shine through.

If you plan on getting up and writing on a whiteboard during your interview, be sure your pants, skirt, or dress is ironed and your blouse is tucked into your pants or skirt.

Men, a suit coat jacket in dark blue, gray, or brown with a crisp, white shirt and complementary tie color is your best bet. Be sure the suit coat is a 'structured' suit jacket, which is a jacket that has a clear defined line in the shoulder area that prevents it from slumping on the shoulders. The shoulder strength will add to how you are perceived during your interview. If your suit jacket is a solid color think about a tie with a small pattern that complements the suit color. A red tie will cause the committee to look at the red and not on your face.

Here again, you want to keep the attention on what you are saying, and not on bright colors or clothes. Remember to button the top button of the suit coat and keep it buttoned during the interview. The goal here is for you to maintain your professional look.

On-campus interview: Once you have been contacted for an on-campus interview, you have jumped over the first hurdle of the interview process. Now, you are on to the second stage of the interview process. This is the time you will be viewed and judged not only by the committee but also by the students and entire department. This interview is where the rubber really meets the road with your wardrobe. So, in addition to the items mentioned above, here are a few more items to think about for the on-campus interview.

One week before your on-campus interview - A week before you are to depart, take out all the clothes you are taking on your interview and try them on. Put on each day's entire outfit to see how you feel. Women, that means trying on the dress or suit, undergarments, jewelry, and heels; men, that means putting on your suit, shirt, and shoes. Stand in front of a full-length mirror and slowly turn. Look at your entire outfit from head to toe. If you have VPL (vertical panty lines) or can see your undergarment lines, purchase the appropriate undergarments. Sit down and make sure your dress (or pants) doesn't ride up your leg. Do you feel comfortable wearing everything? This is the time to double check all your clothing options so if you need to make a change, you still have the time.

Pack light - Everything you need for an on-campus interview should fit in one carry-on roller bag. You want to make sure you do not have to check a bag because you don't want to wait at baggage claim when you arrive and, most importantly, you want to make sure your bag doesn't get lost on the flight. There's nothing worse than having to do a job interview without the clothes you carefully picked! You may think it challenging to pack suits (both men and women) into small bags – not so! There are numerous websites that show how to fold your suits so they pick up minimal wrinkles and fit into a carry-on roller bag (business people do this all the time).

Additionally, pack and carry a very small toiletry bag or zip-lock so you can freshen up before you meet the person picking you up from the airport. This bag should include a toothbrush, small toothpaste, floss and anything else you may need to freshen-up as you duck into the restroom before you walk past security and meet the faculty member picking you up. Remember, airline carry-on rules specify personal hygiene items must be less than three ounces per container.

Plane attire - When you arrive and go through security, you will most likely be picked up by a faculty member. If you are arriving at the end of the day, you may be meeting other Committee members over dinner, so you'll need to wear clothing on the plane you will feel comfortable immediately interviewing in. In this case, for women, a dark pantsuit with pumps is a great option for the plane. Men, blazer and dress slacks without a tie will work for you.

Keep your clothing in the dark colors because if something should spill on your clothes, it is easier to clean up and the dark colors will help hide the stain.

Nails - Since most individuals talk with their hands, the state of your nails is seen as part of your wardrobe. Manicures are inexpensive and well worth the money spent. Consider a clear or very pale polish to finish off your look (leave the neon and bright colors at home). Men, if you don't want to get a manicure at least be sure your nails are clean, trimmed, and filed.

Shoes - Ladies, choose a pump shoe, with a maximum heel height of 1-1 ½.” This is not the place for stilettos, sandals, flats, wedges, or thin skinny heels of any kind. The heel of your shoe should be a 1-2” square wide platform that will support you and allow you to stay in the shoe from morning to night. If your shoes are new, break them in *before* you leave for the interview. The last thing you want is to be limping on the second day on campus due to blisters on your feet. If you purchased your heels on clearance be sure to remove the sticky sale tag from the bottom of the shoe because as you walk the sale tag will be visible.



Women's shoes



Men's Shoes

Men, George Frazier, a columnist for Esquire magazine once said, “If you want to know if a guy is well dressed, look down.” What’s his point? Shoes clearly make a statement about a man’s sense of style and his attention to detail. Be sure to wear shoes that are appropriate for a suit such as a leather dress slip-on or wing-tip.

For both men and women, if your shoes are not new, have them polished or polish them yourself and check if the rubber heel tabs need to be replaced. Get new shoestrings if necessary, and be sure your shoes are comfortable as you’re going to be spending a lot of time in them!



Job talk attire

Job talk attire - The day you give your job talk is the day you should wear your best outfit. Women, this is when you wear the dress with the suit jacket, or pantsuit with hose and heels. I know pantyhose are not popular; however, if your legs look like they haven’t seen the sun in years or if it is winter, wearing hose in a shade a bit darker than your skin tone will not only complete your look but will keep you warm.

Men, this is when you wear your two-piece dress suit with a structured suit coat, with a white or light blue shirt and complementary tie with appropriate shoes will do the job. You’ll want to wear a coat and tie for the rest of the interview, but make sure your job talk attire is your most professional attire!

Outer coat - If you are flying to a cold weather location and you arrive with no outer coat you may spend your interview days shivering. Ladies, don't attempt to put a short casual jacket over a suit coat or dress because it looks sloppy and inappropriate. Men, toughing it out without a coat just makes you look like you are trying to be a macho-man. If you do not have money in your wardrobe for a dress coat, then visit a local consignment store or ask your friends if they have a coat you can borrow.

You may not want to purchase or borrow an outer coat for one interview, but I assure you, having your teeth chatter as you walk across a campus claiming you aren't cold is just one more distraction, and it makes you look like you didn't think ahead and plan properly for the trip.

Purses and computer bags - Ladies, your purse should be simple, small, and work with your outfit colors. Here again, check the condition of the bag or purse. If your bag is tattered or seen better days hit the sales or consignment store for an affordable option. What about backpacks? Backpacks, in general, do not look very professional. Men, if you are taking your computer, try to slide it in your roller bag or at the very least, clean out your backpack. Carry the bare minimum needed for the interview. Women, get a simple, lightweight computer purse that allows you to put in your computer and a small purse so you meet airline regulations of one personal and one carry-on piece. You do not want to be lugging a backpack on your shoulder over a dress or suit. You are leaving the world of being a student and are entering the academic world, so make that statement with your wardrobe and accessories.



Perfume and aftershave - Leave your perfume and aftershave at home, regardless of how much you love your 'scent.' You don't want to show up smelling like a rose or the forest because many individuals have reactions to fragrances and the fragrances can be very off-putting to someone on your committee. You do not want to offend in an olfactory way!

Earbuds and phones - You are being judged the moment you are greeted by the university representative at the airport, so once you arrive at the destination airport, put your earbuds away. Send a text to let your friend or spouse know you have landed and then turn your phone off. Do not take out either your phone or your earbuds again until it is the end of the day and you are in your hotel room.

As you walk to meet your ride, remind yourself of how prepared, capable, and equipped you are. Remember you are packed and dressed for success. All that is left is to put your best-polished shoe forward, be yourself, and do your best.



Wrapping It All Up

As you can see, there's a lot to consider when it comes to interviewing. Not only do you need to do extensive background work, but you've got to be cognizant of the impression you make – whether it is your image or your demeanor – in addition to showing you know how to teach and have a viable and fundable research agenda. This all may seem a little overwhelming, but if you prepare in advance and do a little bit every day, you'll find these tips and hints will come naturally once you start preparing physically and mentally for your interviews. I'm confident you'll do well in your interviews and will then just have to wait to find out the outcomes! And then you'll get that magical call!

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website for tips and
tools designed to
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