



ACADEMIC INTERVIEWS: PREPARING FOR QUESTIONS

Generally, research institutions will focus more attention on your research, and teaching institutions on your teaching. You should always, however, be prepared to discuss both when interviewing for a faculty position.

PREPARATION BASICS: Talking about Research

Prepare different versions of a research description

- Audiences: 1) people in your field & 2) educated people outside of it
- Lengths: 1) short (~1 min; a.k.a. elevator speeches) and longer (~5 min).
- Mention results

Practice these out loud.

Be prepared to discuss the future direction of your research, after the publication of your dissertation.

Your plans don't have to be definite, but should convincingly demonstrate that you're thinking ahead. The committee will like ideas that move beyond your doctoral work. Your discussion may include plans to... apply for grant funding, collaborate with others in your field, embark on a new, related project, or other ideas that will bring recognition to the institution.

SAMPLE RESEARCH-RELATED QUESTIONS

- Tell us about your research.
- How did you select your topic? What methods did you use?
- What audience/s are you addressing?
- How does your work engage others in the field? Or, What do you think of X's work? *Usually a reference to a recent book or article that is either cutting edge or controversial in your field.*
- What is the value of your work to an educated person outside the field?
- Name three books/papers that have influenced your work. *A popular favorite.*
- How will you revise your dissertation for publication? When will you publish it?
- What publishers might be interested? OR What journals best suit your work?
- What are the limitations of your work? *Use this as an opportunity to discuss next steps.*
- What's your next project/research plan?

PREPARATION BASICS: Talking About Teaching

Discuss your teaching in specific terms

- Use tightly constructed stories/examples
- Present the situation, your action, and the result
- Mention student learning in your discipline as well as skills relevant to non-majors

Keep the needs/mission of the department and institution in mind.

SAMPLE TEACHING-RELATED QUESTIONS

- What is your teaching philosophy?
- What would you like to teach? *Consider both departmental needs & your interests.*
- Which of our courses are you prepared to teach?
- What is your dream course? *Think practically & creatively—something that fits with the department's standard course offerings and shows your innovative flair. Consider: Size? Level? Learning Objectives? Methods?*
- What (text)books would you use to teach X? Are they in print?
- How do you address diversity in your courses?
- How do you motivate students who think the topic is boring?
- In an introductory course, what three lessons of lasting value would non-majors leave with?
- How will you adapt your research to provide opportunities for undergraduate research (especially in the sciences)?
- What experience do you have in an environment like ours?
- How does your research influence your teaching?
- Tell us about your most difficult teaching situation and how you handled it.
- How do you feel about mentoring and advising?

GENERAL QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE “FIT”
Or, what else might they ask?

- Why are you interested in our institution?
- What do you consider the proper balance between research and teaching?
- How do you see yourself enhancing our department (specific) and institution (general)?
- How will you make the transition from a research institution to a small school?
- What resources will you need for this position? Start-up costs? Space? How will you fund it? *Especially important for major research institutions.*
- What kind of service would you expect to be engaged in?
- What specifically would you like to address in your professional development?
- If you get more than one job offer, how will you decide?
- Our mission is X (say, at a denominational or single sex institution). How would you contribute to that and to our community?
- Our students aren't as academically gifted/prepared as the students at U.Va. How will you adapt your teaching to this audience?
- What extra-academic activities would you like to participate in (for small schools)?
- How do you feel about: Teaching adult students? All women? Evening courses, etc.? *This is where knowing about the students comes in handy.*
- What are your strengths and weaknesses? *Think in terms of the job and your professional development.*

And, finally: So what do you think of us?

Topics to AVOID?

- Salary – this is premature until an offer is made
- Healthcare/retirement benefits (usually nonnegotiable anyway), sabbaticals, childcare, etc.
- Information you can get from the website.
- Any questions that might be perceived as confrontational.

What questions are appropriate for YOU to ask during the interview phase?

Use this opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the institution/department, play to your strengths, and gather info. Questions that refer to information you've gained during the interview reflect your attentiveness and interest. You might ask:

- Is this a new or a replacement position? (If new) How does it factor into the department's longer term plans?
- How does the department (and institution) define a good faculty member? *Very important!*
- What support is available to junior faculty for research and conferences?
- How would you describe your students?
- What role/s do faculty play outside the classroom/research? (Service?) On average, how much time is devoted to committee work?
- What is the process for tenure? Does family/maternity leave affect the clock? How are faculty evaluated?
- What is the department's tenure rate? What is the percentage of assistant professors in the department who have obtained tenure?
- What are the teaching responsibilities, course load? How much freedom would I have in designing a survey course? What requirements (major, general education, graduate) would my courses need to fulfill?
- Are there opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration?
- In what direction is the institution headed (for the dean)? How do you envision the department five years from now (for the department)?
- Does your department/institution collaborate with others in the area?
- What formal and informal structures are there for faculty to interact? Faculty mentoring?
- Describe the ideal assistant professor's first year.
- How would you describe the community?
- What is your timeline for making a decision in this search? *They will usually tell you, but if they don't, feel free to ask.*