

# THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO ACADEMIC INTERVIEWS

How to Navigate the Academic Job Market Without  
Ripping Out All of Your Hair and Suffering Daily  
Breakdowns

Compiled by K. Anne Watson  
PhD Candidate  
Department of International Affairs  
University of Georgia  
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# Here Be Dragons

So. This is it. You have made it through graduate school. You passed your classes. You survived your comprehensive exams—written and oral. You have led discussion sections and instructed classes and served as a data monkey for various projects that are not your own. It feels like you have consumed more written and spoken words in the last several years than there are grains of sand in all the beaches or stars in the sky (and you can't recall most of them by this point in time). You pulled a dissertation idea from the depths of your overworked, overflowing, exhausted brain, and then you defended it. You (hopefully) are making good progress are bringing that idea to fruition. And now it is time to start job hunting.

Maybe you feel completely at peace about the job market. You feel like the proverbial sun is shining upon your head and your life choices, and tiny, chirping birds help you get dressed in the morning (with special assistance on job interview days). You sleep like an old, mossy log in a still forest where no trees are falling, so there are no noises to be heard (thereby waking you up). You have no stress at all about the job market, not even a quivery feeling in the pit of your stomach. This guide probably isn't for you (and also, nobody likes you).

However, if you're anything like me, you're hearing every theme from every horror movie playing every day at constantly increasing volume. *Jaws*, *Psycho*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*—you've got them all. You may have watched more advanced graduate students proceeding through the job market, with their faces becoming more haggard and the bags under their eyes getting darker by the day. You may have heard whispers of conflicting information—or seemingly no information at all. (What is a teaching philosophy statement? What is a *diversity statement*? How do people even find their dozens—or scores—of jobs to apply for?) And heaven help you if you're a woman approaching the job market, because you've likely been inundated with conflicting advice and/or downright scary anecdotes of other people's experiences. You may feel lost and confused and inclined to start day drinking. This guide is for you, with my sympathies.

Below is a list of general tips for starting out. It certainly isn't exhaustive, and we all have our own approaches to organization. But these are some things that I have gleaned from my own time on the job market.

## 1. Start early.

This is key. The academic job market starts around mid-August. I promise you, you do not want the panic associated with not having any of your materials prepared or letter writers accosted before this time. If you happen to be early in your graduate school career, the time to start gathering documents and writing statements and filling out key areas of your CV is now (and also, my sincere congratulations for being so far ahead of the game). If you're planning on going on the job market in the upcoming fall, my strong recommendation is to start preparing absolutely no later than the summer—and having everything ready by the beginning of August.

That being said, you really start preparing for the job market on the very first day of graduate school. We were told that the bare minimum bar for publications and classes taught for the job market is one each. This is generally (but not always) what it takes to make it through the first cut of applications. You should also be considering things to give you skills—or to document these skills—that will make you competitive on the market. Do you love to teach? (Or are you terrified of teaching and desperately want to be better at it?) Consider checking with your Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to see what kinds of classes, workshops, and certificates they offer. Are you completely uncertain about what it takes to write an application for a grant? There are workshops and certificates for those, too. Does your department or your school offer awards to graduate students? Request to be nominated if you fulfill the criterion—often, so few people ask for these awards that they aren't particularly competitive, but, wow, do they look nice on a CV.

## **2. Get used to asking for things.**

I hate asking for things—help, favors, etc. I far prefer to feel like I can handle everything life throws at me on my own. This is incredibly difficult for grad school in general—and it's impossible for the job market. Most jobs are going to require three letters of recommendation to complete your file. As a brand-new PhD, these letters will generally come from your advisor and two other members of your dissertation committee. They are expecting you to ask them to write letters for you—it's part of the job. But you do have to ask. Furthermore, you won't always get a job with letters alone. This is the time to rely on your committee members' networks (and possibly the networks of other members of your department). If they don't mention reaching out to people they know at the institutions to which you are applying, it's okay to ask. Sometimes a quick e-mail on your behalf to a search committee member (or even a member of the department who isn't on the search committee) is enough to get them to take a second look at your file. When committees are shuffling through hundreds of applications for each job, sometimes a second look is all it takes.

Additionally, if you haven't already gotten used to reflexively consulting your advisor (or other mentors) when new situations arise, now is the time to develop that habit. They've already successfully navigated the job market—and they may have done so multiple times. They should have a sense for how the whole thing works, and if they don't know the answer to a question, they know people who do. My advisor has answered panic e-mails from me on everything from “The search committee chair just called me, my voice is gone, and I don't know what to SAY!” to “A member of the search committee asked me to get coffee at a conference. What should I do?!” to various forms of word vomit and no questions, followed by “Help?” If you and your advisor don't have that kind of relationship, try your graduate coordinator, graduate advisor, another committee member, another member of the department, or even friends who have graduated and found the kinds of jobs you would like. Find someone. No one does this alone—and you don't need to.

### 3. Have a system in place.

It doesn't really matter what this system is, as long as you have one (and it works for you and for your committee members). As with gathering your documents and filling in your CV, this is best done before sending in the first applications. The method I prefer includes multiple spreadsheets and a weekly e-mail update for my letter writers. As job postings start coming in, I add all of the relevant ones (institution names, position types, and other relevant details) to a master spreadsheet, listed by due date. I share this spreadsheet with my committee, and then each week, I send them an update about changes to my dissertation, other projects, and CV (regarding awards and certifications). At the end of my e-mail update, I include a table of the applications coming due in the next couple of weeks (with the applications I have already submitted highlighted) and how to submit each letter, so they can prepare for what's coming up. They let me know when they have submitted their letters, which I add to the master spreadsheet so I can track which applications are complete and which ones require additional e-mails.

On the other hand, a friend of mine simply keeps all of the job postings he's interested in pulled up in a browser and closes them as he applies to them. He now has a job. We're all different in how we work, and that's okay; just be sure you have some method for keeping your applications in order, because...

### 4. The job market is hell.

It's true. Everyone knows it—the people applying, the people watching us apply, and the people judging our applications. If no one has informed you of this truth before now, they have failed you. In my first year on the job market, I sent out approximately 70 job applications. I received five video or phone interviews, one flyout, and no job. I received dozens of rejection letters (some of them nicer than others). For most of my applications, however, there was simply silence.

Many of the jobs I heard back from said they received anywhere from 200 to 400 applications. If you don't get anything else from me, hear this: *Rejections on the job market, particularly at the application stage, are not personal.* It feels like it, I know. But it truly is a numbers game at this point. The committee has to weed down the numbers somehow, and the decisions they make are often going to be semi-arbitrary. You can help yourself in this process—make sure to have a publication before you go on the job market and to have taught at least one class as instructor of record, for example, and try to tailor your applications to the specific positions (and avoid typos!). But some things are simply out of your control.

Rejection at later stages in the process—after phone interviews or flyouts—are still not personal. These often feel even worse. The committee has now seen your face. They've talked to you. They've asked about your passions and have made some measure of your personality. You are vulnerable and probably a little scared about putting a roof over your head in the next academic year, and being rejected at this stage can begin to feel intensely personal, like they are judging you as a person and

finding something lacking. Remember, just like during the application stage, their choices often have very little to do with you at all—and rarely have anything to do with you as a person.

Search committees are often looking for some unquantifiable *something* that they don't include in their job postings. Maybe they're looking for a specific concentration. Maybe they really do want someone who is further along in their career, so they can tenure them more quickly. You will likely never know why they choose other people, so the single best thing you can do is:

## **5. Do your best, and then let it go.**

Even if we all got tired of hearing it, Elsa had it right. Let it go. Do everything you can—take care of your dissertation, your other research projects, your cover letters, your slides for lessons and practice talks and presentations...and then let it go. Let the typos go. Let the rejections go. It's so much easier said than done sometimes, but you can't carry all of it with you, because it will eat you alive.

This is the time to really lean in to that work-life balance. If you haven't already picked up a calming hobby (running, yoga, knitting, baking, reading smutty romance novels, etc.), this is the time. Put in your work hours. Progress on your dissertation and your other projects. Get your grading done. Send in your applications. But carve out time for yourself, too. Get plenty of sleep. Drink enough water. Eat a vegetable. See the sunshine occasionally. And give yourself time to relax. We all love academia (or we wouldn't be in this situation), but it can't be our whole lives. That's a quick route to burnout. Try to take care of yourself, especially when it gets hard.

## **6. Consider all of your options.**

A friend of mine once told me that he was constantly worried about living up to his advisor's career—and then he admitted (like it was a dirty secret) that he wasn't sure that he wanted that kind of career anyway. We are generally trained to work at R1 universities and to display patterns of R1 tenure-track productivity, but the R1 life isn't for everyone—and there aren't enough R1 jobs for all (or most) of us even if we did all want one. It's totally okay to pursue other options if you think you're better suited for them. Maybe you're drawn to liberal arts institutions. Maybe you want to work with non-traditional students at a community college (and I am here to tell you that some of the professors who had the most influence on my life and well-being worked at a community college). Maybe you hate teaching and want to leave academia to work for a think tank or be an analyst for a company or government agency. Maybe you love teaching so much that you would like to help others develop their own teaching and you'd like to work for a university's Center for Teaching and Learning. Any of these (and many others) can be a viable option with the education you now have. Make the choices that will be most fulfilling for yourself, even if they won't lead to a life that looks like that of your role models. Life is both too short and too long to be unhappy in a job you hate.

## **And one last thing:**

Although I did ask around for comments and contributions from others, I am an unmarried, white, American woman with no children applying to jobs between 2018 and 2020. Although my field (international affairs) is male-dominated, my subfields of interest (human rights and women in politics) display a fair amount of gender balance (comparatively speaking). Everything included in this guide is reflective of my own experiences. That being said, most academic jobs ask for similar application materials, and the practice questions provided here have been crowdsourced and are broadly applicable across fields. I hope you find something that helps make the process a little easier for you—even if it is printing out this document and shredding it into confetti by hand.

Good luck, and may the gods of academia and a kindly Reviewer 2 be with you.



# Application Materials

The exact materials for any given academic job will vary somewhat, but they all draw from the same general pool of potential materials, which are described in more detail below: cover letter, CV, teaching statement, research statement, diversity statement, student evaluations, writing sample(s), sample syllabus(es), and letters of recommendation (usually three). Sometimes they will ask you to combine some of these things—some positions ask for a combined research *and* teaching statement, for example. Others will ask you to provide something along the lines of “demonstrated excellence (or effectiveness) in teaching,” which may refer to teaching evaluations, sample syllabus(es), and/or your teaching statement. Occasionally, they will include page limits for either the statements or the writing sample(s). Always, always, always read the job ad carefully, and be sure to check with your advisor or department for your field’s standards regarding length and content!

If you’ve never heard of one or more of these things, a good place to start asking questions is with your university’s Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Ours has workshops, classes, and other resources for creating these materials (as well as for conducting pedagogy research, designing classes, conducting evaluations, and much, much more). If your institution doesn’t have a CTL or you hate the thought of talking to real, live people, many CTLs have resources posted online. I have included links to some of the pages I have found particularly helpful at the end of each section.

As you are creating and compiling your materials, remember that search committees are digging through hundreds of applications. You want to reduce their mental load, not make them set your application on fire for being poorly written, loaded with jargon, and exceptionally long. When in doubt, simplify and shorten. Use tables and headings where appropriate. Don’t include a bunch of empty language or false promises—but it *is* okay to mention things that you would like to do in the future if you haven’t had the chance to do them yet. Proofread, proofread, proofread—and then have other people proofread for you, too. Each statement or document is evidence for your skills as a writer, researcher, and communicator; don’t waste these opportunities to build a case for yourself as a coworker.

Finally, there are some things that committees are extremely unlikely to ask you for but that will still be important or helpful for you on the job market. These include other teaching materials that you might include in a portfolio and your online presence. I have tacked these on to the end of this section as bonus content.

## Cover Letter

Every job posting is going to ask you to submit a cover letter (and a CV). This is an approximately one-page (and whatever you do and whatever the posting asks for, absolutely not a single bit longer than two pages—and really aim for less than one and three-quarters) introduction to who you are and how you are qualified for the job you’re applying for. Generally, this will include an introduction

paragraph about where you are in your program and the broad strokes of why you are well-suited to this particular job, a paragraph on your dissertation, a paragraph on your research, a paragraph on your teaching, and a paragraph on your fit in this particular position. Research-oriented jobs will contain that information first; teaching-oriented jobs will switch the order. The more or less a specific job requires of either, the more or less space those topics should take up in your letter. A 100 % teaching job search committee probably won't want to see endlessly long paragraphs about your research agenda, particularly if you don't connect it to your teaching at all.

This should not be a regurgitation of your CV, which they also have, and it should take you at least a little bit of time to research and tailor. Some search committees throw out all applications where the letters don't show any degree of position-specific information—don't let this happen to you! My preferred way to deal with cover letters is to keep two Word documents (one for research jobs and one for teaching jobs) with position-specific elements highlighted. As I start a new application, I resave the appropriate form letter in a job-specific folder with a job-specific name, and then I edit all of the highlighted bits (date, institution name and search, date, specific subfield requests, etc.) and customize the rest for the position.

Pro Tip: Try your best to acquire letterhead from your department or university. It isn't mandatory, but it sure does add a bit of professional flair.

## CV

The single best way to develop your CV is to look at the CVs of your role models (keeping in mind that they will have been in the field much longer than you have, so they will have more content to include). There is no single right way to format these things, as long as you have clear section headings and no typos. But you will want to keep two versions of your CV, one for research-focused jobs and one for teaching-focused jobs. As a general rule, academic CVs include your education/degrees earned, research (divided into published, under review, working papers, presentations and workshops given, and experience as a researcher/research assistant), teaching (experience—with instructor of record coming first—presentations, and relevant training), academic service (service as a reviewer, association memberships, and other professional activities, such as events you have organized), and grants and awards. Your research CV will list research activities and experience first, where your teaching CV will list those activities and experience first.

It is vital that you keep this up to date, especially while on the job market. If you don't update it for months at a time, it is hard for people looking at it to tell if you simply haven't been active during that time period or if you aren't making time for record keeping. Additionally, if departments are considering you for a position, you *want* them to know that you won that most recent award or that a piece has shifted from working paper to under review—or even better, to being published! (As a tip, it also helps to save each new version of your CV with the date tagged onto it, so you always know which one you should be sending to people or uploading.)

## Teaching Philosophy Statement

The teaching statement is a summary of what you think it means to be an instructor. Readers should get an idea of your overall approach to teaching, what it would look like to step into a class you're teaching, and what you think it means to be a successful teacher. Specific examples are important here—be sure to include concrete anecdotes, activities, or practices to ground your philosophy (even if they are things you haven't gotten to try yet but would like to implement in the future). It is meant to be a living document, one that grows and develops with your teaching experience.

Length of these statements varies. Occasionally, you'll see positions ask for a one-page document. Others will ask you to include posting-specific elements. Generally, length isn't specified—but remember the mental load of the search committee addressed above! Try to stick to one or two pages, even for more teaching-oriented positions, and make sure it tells a coherent story. A thesis statement is never a bad thing.

### Resources

- Iowa State University's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching:  
<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/document-your-teaching/writing-a-teaching-philosophy-statement/>  
*This is a good summary.*
- University of Georgia's Center for Teaching and Learning:  
<https://ctl.uga.edu/grad-student/resources-and-ta-handbook/teaching-statements/>  
*They have examples, idea-generating worksheets, and slides.*
- Western University's Centre for Teaching and Learning:  
<https://teaching.uwo.ca/awardsdossiers/teachingphilosophy.html>
- Teacher Portfolio & Preparation Series (TiPPS) by Kenton Harsch and Jim Yoshioka:  
[http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/tipps/?page\\_id=53](http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/tipps/?page_id=53)
- Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching:  
<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-statements/>
- "How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy" by Gabriela Montell:  
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Write-a-Statement-of/45133/>
- R. Neill Johnson at Penn State University (sample rubric for assessment):  
[http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Teaching\\_Philosophy\\_rubric\\_r1.pdf](http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Teaching_Philosophy_rubric_r1.pdf)  
*This has a sample rubric for assessment.*

- University of Pennsylvania’s Career Services:  
<https://careerservices.upenn.edu/application-materials-for-the-faculty-job-search/teaching-philosophies-for-faculty-job-applications/>

## Research Statement

The research statement is meant to give a look at your ongoing projects and your overall research trajectory. If you are wrapping up your PhD, it will likely include (or focus on) a very detailed summary of your dissertation and the projects that will come out of it. Just like with the teaching statement, the length and content of these vary because they are so intensely personal. However, as a graduate student, 2-3 pages is probably reasonable. Also like the teaching statement, make sure you’re telling a coherent story about yourself as a researcher. People do actually read these things, and they can tell if you have simply thrown words on a page. Connect the threads of your various projects. Include your elevator pitch about your work as a thesis statement or theme, and place your work in the broader context of your field.

### *Resources*

- Cornell University’s Graduate School:  
<https://gradschool.cornell.edu/career-and-professional-development/pathways-to-success/prepare-for-your-career/take-action/research-statement/>
- University of Pennsylvania’s Career Services:  
<https://careerservices.upenn.edu/application-materials-for-the-faculty-job-search/research-statements-for-faculty-job-applications/>

## Combined Teaching and Research Statement

Every once in a while, just to mix things up, positions will ask for a combined research and teaching statement. They are not simply looking for your other two statements copied and pasted into a single document, I’m sad to say (although much of the content will remain the same). This document will still include your teaching philosophy and research agenda/trajectory, but it should also connect the two. How does one inform the other? How do you pull your research into the classroom—and your students into your research? Do you use fancy methods in your research? How do you communicate these fancy methods and their results to your students? And so on. Length is trickier here because they include so much, but plan to shoot between 2 and 4 pages.

## Diversity Statement

Diversity statements are becoming an increasingly common request, and they may feel more than a little intimidating to write, particularly if you are uncertain if you yourself bring any kind of diversity to the table. *That's okay.* The best approach is to acknowledge your own identities, and then focus on how you support and work with a diverse population and build an inclusive environment in your classroom. Be sure to be specific in your examples! It can really help (if you can) to look up the initiatives and relevant populations of the position to which you are applying.

If you haven't thought much about your own identities before, I have included a link to the University of Michigan's Social Identity Wheel exercise below. Take some time. Really think it through. (But *never* make claims about your own identities that are false or are not genuine.)

### Resources

- University of Michigan's Inclusive Teaching:  
<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/social-identity-wheel/>  
*This page has the social identity wheel exercise.*
- Tanya Golash-Boza's "The Effective Diversity Statement." (*Inside Higher Ed*):  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/06/10/how-write-effective-diversity-statement-essay>
- University of Georgia's Center for Teaching and Learning:  
<https://ctl.uga.edu/grad-student/resources-and-ta-handbook/teaching-statements/>  
*This page has a starting-off worksheet and examples.*
- Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching:  
<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/developing-and-writing-a-diversity-statement/>

## Student Evaluations

Student evaluations are...complicated. There is all kinds of evidence that they are more based on the instructor's gender, race, age, and physical attractiveness and students' expectations regarding their grades than on actual teaching effectiveness (see sources below). However, academic jobs are still going to ask you for them, so be sure you save and summarize them as you go.

A table is a really good idea here (particularly for keeping the length at 1 page). Include all of the classes you've taught in chronological order and a final column for your averages over time. Specify the number of students and/or the number of students completing the evaluations. If your institution's evaluations include a large number of questions with number ratings as answers, consider selecting several that you consider particularly important or indicative of you as a teacher

(including the overall rating question) and then highlighting them with a selection of student's qualitative responses on that theme underneath. Be strategic! Don't share things that make you look bad (but also, it has to be said, don't edit student remarks, either; they can be excluded but never altered).

#### Resources

- John W. Lawrence's "Student Evaluations of Teaching are Not Valid" (AAUP): <https://www.aaup.org/article/student-evaluations-teaching-are-not-valid#.XNm-JI5KjIU>
- Michelle Falkoff's "Why We Must Stop Relying on Student Ratings of Teaching" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*): <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-We-Must-Stop-Relying-on/243213>
- Colleen Flaherty's "Same Course, Different Ratings" (*Inside Higher Ed*): <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/14/study-says-students-rate-men-more-highly-women-even-when-theyre-teaching-identical>
- Victor Ray's "Is Gender Bias an Intended Feature of Teaching Evaluations?" (*Inside Higher Ed*): <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/02/09/teaching-evaluations-are-often-used-confirm-worst-stereotypes-about-women-faculty>

## Writing Sample(s)

Ah, the writing sample. If you're a graduate student, this is likely going to be a chapter of your dissertation, because the committee is going to want a signal that you've made substantive progress. *Send them as close to a finished (very highly proofread) draft as possible.* If a chapter of your dissertation is already published, this is all the better! Send them the article (or even the page proofs, if it isn't quite out yet).

Posting requests (as always) vary from job to job. Sometimes they will ask for one sample. Sometimes they will require two samples (or give you the option for more). They may specify that they want to see one of your publications or that chapter of your dissertation. They may also include a page limit (generally around 30 pages). Make sure that your writing sample is indicative of your overall research trajectory, and try to make them solo works, if possible—the less explaining you have to do about the work you contributed to this piece and how it fits into your broader research, the better.

## Letters of Recommendation

Nearly all jobs will require either three letters of recommendation or contact information for the people who will write you those letters (name, title, phone number, and e-mail address). As a grad student, these letters usually come from your advisor and two other members of your committee. This is a quirky part of the process. As a general rule, postings that specifically request letters will automatically e-mail your letter writers with a request as soon as you submit your end of the application, and postings that specifically request contact information will only reach out if you make it to the next round of the application process. This does not always hold, so it's a good idea to keep your letter writers posted about which applications you have submitted and which you expect to send them prompts. If they do not hear from a posting that requested letters in their ad, it is a good idea to send a polite e-mail to the contact for the posting to check on that institution's process.

Some notes here: First, it is unlikely that you will ever see these letters (unless one of your letter writers asks you to write or outline the letter for them, which they will then approve and sign, which does happen sometimes). Second, if at all possible, have your letter writers (or one of them, at the very least) observe you in the classroom. Their support for your teaching skills and experience means a lot more if they've actually seen it with their own eyes. Third, it is highly recommended to give your letter writers two weeks to get their letters in. This depends somewhat on your relationship with your committee. If they have told you less is fine (or you get overwhelmed), then less is fine. Even the friendliest of committee members, however, is likely to need at least a week (or as close to it as you can manage). Search committees will often consider your application even if all of your letters are not in place by the deadline, but it's best not to test this assumption. If you have a particularly busy committee, it's worth checking to see if one of your admin people can submit letters for them—just be sure that they have more than one e-mail address for requests. Finally, be sure that you communicate updates to your professional life to your letter writers. It is helpful to them to know that you finished another chapter of your dissertation, published a new article, fulfilled the requirements of a certificate, or received a grant or award. If they don't know, they can't update their letters accordingly.

**Pro Tip:** If you have strong contacts at other institutions, you may consider reaching out to them for a letter. Outside letters can work in your favor for the job market, particularly if that person is connected with the institution to which you are applying. If they aren't familiar enough with you and your work to write a full-on letter, it's also okay to reach out and see if they'd like to send an informal e-mail on your behalf.

## Bonus 1: Teaching Portfolio

A teaching portfolio is largely a place to gather all of the previously mentioned materials together. However, they can also include materials that job applications won't specifically ask you for, such as sample assessments of student work and activities or other teaching materials that you've created. Your institution's Center for Teaching and Learning or Graduate School might have a class or

program to help you prepare (and certify) the overall package, or no one besides you may ever see it. But it can be hugely helpful to think about how you give feedback to students or the activities you have created when you're writing all of the statements above or answering questions in an interview setting. These things, as well as examples of student work (included with permission or with the names stripped out) are also great to include on your website (below), to give viewers a better idea of what it means to be a student in one of your classes.

#### Resource

- University of Georgia's Center for Teaching and Learning (Excellence in Teaching Award Winners' Portfolios):  
<https://www.ctl.uga.edu/ETA-recipient>

## Bonus 2: Online Presence

Keep. Your. Web. Presence. Up. To. Date. If your department has a directory, make sure that your information is up to date and your picture is professional (and current). If you haven't updated your LinkedIn profile in five years (and have no plans to do so in the future), delete it. Double check the privacy settings on your Facebook (and consider weeding out less professional content even if it is completely private). Decide if you want a *professional* Twitter account, and carefully curate who you follow and retweet, in addition to your original content. Twitter can be a useful networking tool now, but if you aren't going to keep up with it, it is best not to start. (And keep an eye on the professionalism of your personal account, if you have one.)

This is the time to make a professional website (if you haven't already). Some universities will give you space on their server to do this. Some sites have student deals with universities, which will give you a reduced rate for the first year (or potentially for as long as you are a student), which will help with the cost. Others will let you build a site for free (or nearly so), but be careful! These sites often won't let you directly choose your domain name, and they may put ads (that you don't get to choose) on your page.

Your website should include more than just the bulleted items on your CV (although your *up to date* CV should also be included). This is the chance to give search committees, departments, students, potential coauthors, and the public a better idea of who you are as a scholar and instructor. Particularly while you're on the job market, this is a priceless chance to give search committees an even more well-rounded look at who you are as a scholar and instructor. They've already seen your materials, so if they visit your site, they'll be looking for new information, including some (carefully curated) details about who you are as a person and what you like to do in your spare time.

Try to make the content you include as complete as possible. On your research page, include links to your publications and replication files. On your teaching page, upload your most recent syllabus for each class—and maybe even your evaluations (or selected evaluations), if you are comfortable



doing so. This is a great place to showcase student work or share activities that you've designed (particularly if you have published those activities). Alternatively, I've seen scholars who are exceptionally passionate about teaching include resources for activities or pedagogical development. As with all of the other materials I've discussed, viewers will expect your website to reflect *you*, so try to invest some time in making it easy, interesting, and informative to look through.

# Phone and Video Interviews

Congratulations! You have made it to the next round of the job market, which involves either a phone or video (using something like Skype or Zoom) interview. It can be very difficult to tell exactly what search committees are looking for at this stage of the process. You know they like you enough that they've pulled you from the giant stack of applications, but many of them won't tell you much else. If you're lucky, they'll give you the names of the search committee members in advance and maybe let you know a specific class they're looking for someone to teach, so you can prepare. Most of them will not do that. The only major topic that is going to be entirely off limits is money—salary, money for research, money for teaching development, etc. Don't bring it up; it's considered *very* poor form.

You will want to check out the department and the institution in advance. What makes them tick? What are their big initiatives and commitments? What do you like about what you see? How will your research and teaching both fit in and stand out in the department? What questions do you have for them? All of these are things you'll want to think through, in addition to having answers prepared for a variety of questions that they might ask you (with examples included in the section following the one on flyout interviews). Beyond this there are several things that you might take into consideration before participating in this round of interviews, such as the technology you're using, the visuals you're presenting, preparing, the general awkwardness of academics, and following up. I've briefly addressed each of these below.

## Technology

Make sure your technology is charged, up to date, and tested in advance of every phone interview! There is absolutely nothing worse than finding out once the call has connected that your microphone or camera doesn't work—or having your laptop die in the middle. Test it before each call, because technology is tricky, and consider doing practice interviews with your friends over whichever kind of technology you will be using, because being able to watch the camera instead of your image reflected back to you is a skill that you develop over time, as is the ability to talk about your professional life while sitting down. You think I'm kidding. I'm not.

Unless you have no other choice, try to use a computer for video interviews; the sound and video quality are different on a phone. Things happen, and this isn't the biggest deal, but you're trying to eliminate all potential issues that *are* under your control. You will want to confirm how to connect with them in advance (and trade phone numbers, just in case something goes wrong). Oh, and don't call them—they'll call you.

## Aesthetics

Your options may be limited here; we don't all get nice offices (or any office) as graduate students. However, in case it hasn't come up yet, you should be performing these interviews in a professional setting and dressed in professional clothing. No one wants to see your couch, your kitchen, or your bedroom. Showcase your nicely stocked academic bookshelf and desk—or borrow someone else's and show off theirs.

Additionally, try setting up your camera so that it looks straight into your face, rather than up your nose. You're likely going to be projected onto a screen so that everyone can see you, and while no one expects (or wants) your most flattering selfie angle, straight up the nose isn't anyone's best angle.

## Practice and Prepare

Just like it will (eventually) with your job talk, practicing will really come in handy here. Following the section on flyout interviews, I have included a list of crowdsourced practice interview questions. These are all questions that faculty members have asked or fellow graduate students have been asked in academic job interviews. Try running through the questions a few times by yourself and at least once with someone else who can tell you if you always use the same verbal pause or awkward face or hand gesture. (And if knowing you have these habits doesn't help you stop, consider holding a drink during any video interviews you have. Just holding it can stop you from making awkward gestures, and if you feel like you're about to stumble or can't think of anything to say except "um," you can take a sip instead.)

It can be surprisingly difficult to think of a one-sentence teaching philosophy or elevator pitch for your research agenda off the cuff. I know I also have a very hard time thinking of examples of activities or learning moments with students on the fly. Having these prepared in advance can be really helpful—and even if the questions you are asked are slightly different, practicing will get you used to talking explicitly about professional skills and preferences we often take for granted. If there is any specific class or program that they've highlighted in their job posting, you also want to be sure to prepare answers to questions about those—what books or major assignments would you use to teach those classes, for example, or which classes would you teach for that program?

That being said, you don't have to go into this without a safety net! Feel free to write out a page or two of notes for yourself—things you definitely want to mention to them, classes you would like to teach, notes on the search committee members (if you know their names), and questions you would like to ask. Don't read directly from them, but if you need to jog your memory about something, glance at them quickly and move on.

## Awkwardness

Academics are often very awkward. Skype and phone interviews are also very awkward. Put them together, and you end up in an epic amount of awkwardness, where no one can really read anyone else's body language and no one can meet anyone else's eyes. On a phone interview, add in the complete inability to tell if someone is taking a breath or waiting for you to answer a question. It's going to be awkward, and it isn't something you can control or improve. Prepare for that to be the case in advance, and try not to let it get you down afterwards.

## Thank You Notes

After a phone or video interview, it is expected that you will follow up with each of the search committee members with a thank-you note (in the next 24 hours, unless it's a weekend). This means that if they did not communicate their names to you in advance, you should definitely try to catch them on the call. These notes need not be overly long (everyone is too busy to read an epic saga of a thank you note from each of the ten to fifteen candidates they interview at this stage), and because the process (usually) moves fairly quickly at this stage, an e-mail note is fine.

The more you can personalize these notes, the better. But to be honest, no one is comparing their notes to see if they got original content, and this stage of the interview process flies by, clocking in at times as short as 30 minutes—or even 15 minutes. So if someone recommends a particular reading or data source to you, or if there was a particular question or topic you enjoyed discussing with that person, try to include it. Otherwise, aim for a 3-4 sentence note to each person expressing your pleasure in having the chance to chat with them, being impressed about something their institution does well, and thanking them for their time.

Oh, and don't be discouraged if no one answers your e-mail at this stage. It can be a good sign if they *do* respond, but there is basically no correlation between answers to thank you notes and moving on to the next interview stage. You still have to send them.

# Flyout Interviews

Hooray! You've made it to what is basically the boss battle of the academic job market: the flyout interview. If your department is anything like mine, you're probably pretty confident about what the research presentation part looks like and absolutely clueless about most of the rest. This section is designed to give you a little bit of an inside look at the three-day marathon interview.

As with all of the other parts of the job market, flyouts vary based on the school and the department. However, as a general rule, you will have dinner with people from the department your first and last nights there. In between, you will have a variety of meetings (over food and not) with as many members of the department that they can fit in your schedule. You will tour the campus. You will possibly tour the town a bit. And you will be required to give a research presentation, a teaching presentation, or both. Each of these is described in more detail below.

Above all else, try to think of this as an opportunity to chat about the things you love with people who also love those things. Prepare as well as you can in advance and then try (as best you can, given the stress of the situation) to enjoy yourself. Make some new contacts, meet some people you might end up coauthoring with one day, and maybe explore a little of a place you aren't familiar with (if you have time). Even if you don't come out the other side with a job, it can still be a good experience.

## Getting Dressed

A quick note: You may get conflicting advice on how to dress for flyouts. Men have fewer options in this regard, but especially for women, I stand by my opinion that departments are more interested in me being comfortable and confident in professional, well-fitting clothing than they are in me wearing any specific article of clothing (like a blazer or heels). Any department that would disqualify me based on the absence of that article of clothing is likely a department for which I would not like to work. The same goes (for women) for wearing a wedding ring. Sometimes we get the advice that we shouldn't wear that particular piece of jewelry (or mention our partners or children) on a job interview. It is illegal for them to ask you flat out about them, but it has to be up to you if you want to mention them or wear your daily jewelry or not. I feel the same way about that as I do about blazers and heels.

Regardless of gender, there are some things that always hold true. Wear clean clothing that fits appropriately. Consider practicing in the clothing that you plan on wearing. *Wear comfortable shoes* (and carry band-aids, just in case). You are going to be doing a lot of standing and a lot of walking. If you plan to wear tights or hose, carry an extra pair in case of runs. And check the weather before you go, so you know if you need to plan for rain or cold weather.

## The Research Presentation

A research presentation for an interview is relatively straightforward, because it's mostly a grown-up version of a conference talk. You'll generally be given about 30 minutes to present a paper (probably a chapter of your dissertation) and 30 to 45 minutes to answer questions about your presentation (and potentially job-related things that your audience perceives as being related to your presentation). Depending on the institution, the audience will consist of a mixture of faculty members, graduate students, and even undergraduates. If the search committee doesn't volunteer information about time limits and expected audience members when they invite you out, it is a very good idea to ask.

The position and institution should guide the way you present your talk. If, for example, you are interviewing at a small liberal arts school where the department includes faculty members from different fields, you want to stay far away from highly technical explanations or jargon-y terms (though this is a good practice for most presentations). If you are interviewing for a methods job, you will want to dig into those technical explanations a little more (while still making them accessible).

Practicing is key. Practice early. Practice a lot. Practice in front of your department (particularly in front of every professor who has ever made a job talk hard for your department's candidates). Practice with people who know nothing about your field or have never heard of your subfield. Practice in front of communications friends who can help point out your verbal pauses and awkward hand gestures (and develop more effective habits). Practice until you could give your job talk with no slides...and with the flu. And practice until you have appendix slides for all possible questions that would require them.

Importantly, any practice talk you give for your department should be (and likely will be) the hardest, worst one you ever give. It is their job in that moment to make it as hard on you as possible. They should ask the hardest (and even the least relevant) questions. They should dig into your methods and your logic and your generalizability. They will highlight your poor public speaking habits and critique your graphs. And they will likely do all of this without starting with the social niceties we afford to actual job candidates, because they are trying to make it the worst experience you ever have (thereby making your real job talks a walk in the park by comparison). It is incredibly difficult to receive this kind of criticism from every person who has trained you, but it is an invaluable step in the process (and try to take it when you still have enough time to change your presentation to reflect their feedback...and practice some more).

A few extra pieces of advice: First, never try to present your whole dissertation in a job talk. There isn't time for that. Focus on one chapter, spend a few minutes at the end placing that chapter in the broader context of your dissertation and broader research agenda, and offer to answer questions about the rest in the Q and A. Second, pictures almost always go over better than tables. Keep the tables as backup in the appendix slides, but show and discuss the pictures. When you include graphs, make them as easy to understand as possible. This isn't publishing, where they charge for color—consider color coding for statistical significance, different models, etc. Third, in keeping with the

theme of pictures, it doesn't hurt to have something aesthetically pleasing for your audience members to look at while you're talking. There's no need to go overboard with pictures, but a photo or two to illustrate a theme and a diagram for your theory are perfectly appropriate. Fourth, if you haven't already, track down a clicker. Finally, if you have a hard time remembering some of your transitions or a couple of facts that aren't appropriate to show on the screen, consider jotting some key words (NOT a script) onto a 3"x5" notecard and placing it nearby (or holding it) during your talk. People care a lot less about you giving your talk 100 % from memory than they do about you being able to keep from panicking and completely losing your place in the middle of your talk. I promise.

## The Teaching Demonstration

The teaching demonstration is a completely different beast from the research presentation, and it is entirely position specific. Sometimes they will give you an actual classroom to take over for a day. Other times, you will be teaching to faculty members in the department—or even to just the search committee. Often, you will be given free reign over the content you teach, but sometimes the topic will be given to you. At least once, a faculty member informed me that they really prefer to see someone aim a little higher with their activity (or activities) than they can actually accomplish in the time and setting provided to them, just so they can really get a sense for their style.

If you are tasked with a teaching demonstration, be sure to ask questions about all of the above (if you can)—time, topic, audience (number, majors/nonmajors), and course (if applicable). And then I highly recommend checking with members of your cohort or your faculty to see if you can take over their class for a day for a dry run (especially if it's a lesson you haven't taught before or haven't taught recently).

*The Professor Is In* has a couple of nice blog posts on this:

- <https://theprofessorisin.com/2017/01/26/the-teaching-demonstration-3-goals/>
- <https://theprofessorisin.com/2012/01/10/how-to-give-a-teaching-demonstration-a-guest-post/>

## Meetings

Meetings come in different forms. You will definitely be meeting with professors, either one on one or in groups. You may also meet with graduate or undergraduate students (depending on the department). These are unstructured meetings, so the questions asked of you will range broadly across life as an academic. There are several goals here—to get a sense of you as an instructor and researcher, of course, but also to see how you fit in. Are you funny? Are you genuine? Do you seem like someone they'd like to coauthor with (or attend wine club with)? Do you seem like someone they will be able to tenure (if it's that kind of job)? They will ask anything from follow-up questions

to your presentation/demonstration (if you've given it already) to how you would teach a specific class to if you like to hike or not.

And then—always—they will ask if you have any questions for them. I am here to tell you that you must always have questions for them, because a failure to ask questions is perceived as a lack of interest in the job. The rules get a little more lax at this stage in the process, which should give you more material—it is more acceptable to ask about available resources for teaching and research development, for example (although asking about salary is still prohibited). By the second or third meeting of the day, you will likely have run out of novel questions. Ask the same ones again—no one is comparing notes here. If you have a chance to prepare person-specific topics of conversation in advance, that's great! If you don't, that's okay, too. I recommend keeping a cheat sheet of questions on your phone to look at in between meetings or when you get a bathroom break.

On that note, some people are better than others at offering bathroom breaks. And you may or may not spend more time answering questions than eating at meals. Carry snacks, mints, and a water bottle, and ask to stop at a restroom if you must. They aren't intentionally starving you; they're all just excited to have you there (and busy with all the other things they have to do).

Jumping back to the question of salary, it is still considered a bad sign for you to ask about amounts. However, while it is extremely unlikely that it will come up, it does happen, particularly if you have a meeting with the department chair. Be prepared to use your poker face, just in case. It is also rare, but occasionally the department chair will also ask you about your non-negotiables. A friend of mine in one of the hard sciences carried a series of lists with her to all interviews—the non-negotiables (priced and unpriced) and the fond wishes (also priced and unpriced). This is by no means necessary, but if you have non-negotiables for a job, it's not a bad idea to think them through before you show up for an interview.

The last truly important thing to note about these interviews is that there are certain lines that it is illegal for your interviewers to cross. They are not legally allowed to ask you questions about your age, marital status, children, sexual orientation, religion, national origin or citizenship, or disabilities. Yale's Office of Career Strategy has a useful summary of illegal questions, their legal doppelgangers, and strategies for responding here: <https://ocs.yale.edu/get-prepared/illegal-interview-questions>.

## Thank You Notes

As with phone/video interviews, thank you notes are expected after a flyout. In this case, I would try to gauge where they are in the process when deciding whether to send e-mails or handwritten notes, with two exceptions. First, if your handwriting is illegible, stick with typing. And second, if you had to travel a significant distance to get there and can't finish them before you leave, stick with e-mails, so you know they'll get there before final decisions are made. Again, no one is comparing their notes to see if you come up with unique content for each of them, but the more you *can*



personalize (without taking forever), the better: reading or data recommendations, particularly funny stories or meaningful compliments, serving as tour guide, etc. And make sure you try to send them to everyone with whom you interacted, because even students and staff can (and likely will) be asked about their opinions of you.

# Practice Questions

## General Questions

1. Tell us about yourself.
2. Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What are some potential challenges for these goals?
3. Have you had any conflicts with colleagues? How did you go about resolving them?
4. **What questions do you have for us?** (Always asked. Always have 3 or 4 prepared.)

## Research Questions

1. What is your research agenda? (What do you see as your research trajectory?)
2. Please discuss your dissertation/current research projects.
3. Further explain the research coming out of your dissertation and in your early years of work.
4. When are you defending your dissertation?
5. What future research projects do you have planned?
6. Would you conduct any research specific to this region?
7. How do you plan to fund your research?
8. How does your work tie into important research in your field?
9. How do you see your research fitting into the department?

## Teaching Questions

1. What is your teaching philosophy?
2. If I came to your classroom, what would I see?
3. How would you structure your average 1-hour (or 90-minute) class?
4. What are your teaching interests?
5. What courses can you teach—and/or which courses have you previously taught?
6. Please discuss the courses you are interested in developing in the future.
7. What upper-level courses would you be most interested in teaching?
8. What *elective* courses would you like to teach?
9. What would be your dream course to teach?
10. How would you teach [some specific course, likely to be posted in the job ad]?
11. What skills do you encourage your students to develop?
12. How do you encourage your students to develop their critical thinking skills?
13. Aside from those in academia, what jobs do you think these skills will help your students pursue?
14. How do you incorporate your researching into your teaching?
15. Do you make your methodologically intense work accessible to undergraduates? If so, how?
16. Tell us about a difficult experience you had, either with a student or between students. How did you handle it, and what did you learn from it?

17. How does your past experience enable you to teach (or how would you approach teaching) a general audience for a required class?
18. Can you teach [any specific course]? (The answer is always **yes**.)

## **Diversity Questions**

1. How do you approach working with a diverse student body?
2. How would you increase diversity and inclusivity?
3. How would you approach a student with deeply held beliefs that contradict either your own beliefs or the course content?

## **Mentoring and Outreach Questions**

1. What is your advising philosophy?
2. Reflecting back on your mentor throughout your graduate education, what aspects would you change and what aspects would you take with you?
3. How have you worked to make your research relevant to communities outside of the university?

## **Posting-Specific Questions**

1. Why are you interested in this particular position?
2. Why are you qualified for this position?
3. What useful resources can this department/institution offer you?
4. Who would you like to collaborate with?
5. What does a liberal arts education mean to you?
6. How do you feel about working at an R2, with equal emphases on teaching and research?
7. We are asking you to teach a 4-4 load, as well as balancing service and research responsibilities. How will you handle this and manage your time productively?

# More Resources

Since I first created this resource, Duke University has put together a kick-ass set of professional development resources. They've done an incredible job compiling way more resources than I've provided to you. You can find it here:

- <https://postdoc.duke.edu/resources/professional-development>

I also highly recommend Amanda Murdie's fabulous series of *Duck of Minerva* posts on the academic job market:

- Before You Go on the Market  
<https://duckofminerva.com/2015/08/gearing-yourself-up-for-the-academic-job-market-before-you-go-on-the-market.html>
- No Dabbling  
<https://www.duckofminerva.com/2016/08/gearing-up-for-the-academic-job-market-dont-dabble.html>
- Getting Your Packet Together  
<https://duckofminerva.com/2015/08/gearing-up-for-the-academic-job-market-getting-your-packet-together.html>
- Skype Academic Interviews  
<https://duckofminerva.com/2015/03/skype-academic-interviews-what-not-to-do.html>
- Getting THE CALL  
<https://duckofminerva.com/tag/phone-calls>
- Waiting  
<https://duckofminerva.com/2015/07/gearing-yourself-up-for-the-academic-job-market-waiting.html>

And Michael Flynn's series of posts on *The Quantitative Peace*:

- So You're on the Job Market, Part 1: Preparation  
<http://quantitativepeace.com/blog/2014/06/so-youre-on-the-job-market-part-i-preparation.html>
- So You're on the Job Market, Part 2: Expectations  
<http://quantitativepeace.com/blog/2014/07/so-youre-on-the-job-market-part-ii-expectations.html>

- So You're on the Job Market, Part 3: Coping  
<http://quantitativepeace.com/blog/2014/07/so-youre-on-the-job-market-part-iii-coping.html>

As well as a couple of helpful twitter threads:

- Liz Bucar's Dos and Don'ts for Job Talks  
<https://twitter.com/BucarLiz/status/1096485248785936385>
- Andrew Whitehead's Tips for Cover Letters, Job Talks, and Interviews  
<https://twitter.com/ndrewwhitehead/status/1142091185193803777>