

How To Survive That First Faculty Position Interview?

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How well you perform on the interview provides the interviewers an idea of the quality of work they can expect from you in the future.

The Art of Interviewing:

- **Convince them that you are the right person for the job.**
- **Convince yourself that this is the right place for you.**
- The interview is a **two-way street** and **fact-finding mission** for both sides.
- **Their goal:** To determine whether you have all the best qualities and skills the institution needs to be successful.
 - How do you present yourself?
 - What research and teaching experience do you have?
 - What are your short- and long-term goals? Do you have defined goals?
 - Are you results and performance driven?
 - How can you contribute to the environment of the department?
- **Your goal:** To determine whether you want this position at this institution.
 - Is this a place where I would like to work?
 - What is the culture like and do I fit in?
 - How long have faculty been here?
 - How diverse is the department?
 - What is expected of me?
 - Do my goals and attitudes match those of other faculty?
 - What are the values of the institution?
 - Is the start-up package competitive and sufficient to support my research?
Can I keep what I don't spend?
 - Is it the right balance of research and teaching?
 - How do they support the career development of young faculty?
 - Do the resources support my research interests?
 - Are there colleagues here that I can interact with?

Preparation for the Interview:

- Prepare a CV that opens doors in academia.
 - Your CV is your own personal “marketing material.”
- Do your homework!
- Get an itinerary beforehand (communicate with the administrative assistant).
- Become familiar with the individuals on your itinerary:
 - The best way to impress someone during a one-on-one interview is to show interest in their work
- Perform a literature search/know their research. Be able to ask one intelligent question in each area.
- Download pictures of faculty from departmental websites to recognize faces.
- Be familiar with core facilities and centers.
- Have a preliminary start-up list ready to go. Don't be afraid to ask for what you need, but don't make outrageous demands.
- Triple-check your CV for mistakes... you will be asked about them.
- Dress appropriately, you should look professional.

During the Interview:

- Be confident, but not too assertive.
- Act spontaneous, but be well prepared.
- Be polite.
- Make eye contact.
- Use a firm handshake, but don't break any hands!
- Sell yourself with integrity.
- Listen carefully:
 - To what is said and unsaid, and be attentive
- Be smart about money questions:
 - Attempt to postpone a money discussion until you have a better understanding of the scope of responsibilities of the job
- State your previous experience in the most positive terms:
 - When you speak negatively about another person or situation in which you were directly involved, you run the risk of appearing like a troubled person who may have difficulty working with others

Ask questions during your interview:

- Ask questions of current faculty such as:
 - “What is the average teaching load?”
 - “With whom do you collaborate?”
 - “How many students do you mentor?”
 - “I read your recent paper in _____.
 - While this is not my direct area, I found it interesting. Can you explain_____....”
- Where will you fit in the general scheme of the department? What is the chair’s vision for the department and new hires?
- What type of position is this? Research, Teaching, both? – make them articulate departmental expectations!
- Is the position a 9 or 12 month appointment?
- Ask to see your laboratory space! Will it require any renovations and what resources are available for this?
- What is the departmental policy on grant “indirects”/RIF allocation?
- What is the departmental policy/philosophy on teaching buy-out?
- Is there departmental support for graduate students or post-docs? NIH T32 grant? Assistantships?
- How big is the lab—how many grad students/how many postdocs?
- What is the environment like in lab—collaborative/independent?

Meeting the Search Committee:

- Yet another opportunity to show you’ve done your homework!
- Be familiar with the undergraduate and graduate aspects of the department.
- Be prepared to answer questions:
 - What type of courses would you like to teach?
 - How do you see yourself “fitting in” with regard to potential collaborations?
 - What is your five year plan? Grant mechanisms?
- Be prepared to ask questions:
 - How are resources shared?

- Are there university “seed grant” programs to help get your research program off the ground?
- Be ready to present a funding strategy:
 - To whom will you apply for research grants, and when?
 - What evidence can you present that your work is fundable?
 - Are YOU, personally, fundable?
 - Have you written grant applications? Did they do well?

The Seminar Presentation:

- Tell a story! Provide context and knowledge of field.
- Practice! Practice! Practice!
- The seminars are your chance to show that you:
 - Have great communication skills
 - Can think on your feet
 - Have knowledge and skills that could benefit their lab
 - Can engage in meaningful discussion
 - It is also great time to show your shining personality
- Know your audience.
- This may be the only interaction you have with future colleagues: highlight your teaching skills!
- Distinguish yourself from your current mentor: demonstrate independent thinking, but don't take credit for that which is not yours!
- Provide a direction for future studies.
- Don't use “cutesy” fonts like comic sands!
- Obtain information on the type of room in which you will be presenting (large vs. small)
- Ask how much time you are given (if you are not sure).
- Stay within time allotted and allow time for questions.
- Be prepared to answer specific questions, and let people know you're prepared.
- Anticipate and be able to answer any technical and scientific objections your interrogators might raise.

The Social Do's and Don'ts

- **Be careful! Many good candidates lose the job at these “social events.”**
- The dinners/lunches are NOT social events!
- When you are taken out to dinner, lunch, a casual tour of the campus, etc.
 - You need to relax... be yourself.
 - Answer their questions honestly.
 - Ask questions about the lab/PI.
 - Engage your potential future colleagues in conversation.
 - Be cordial, easygoing and friendly.
- Keep your guard up! Now is not the time to weigh in on departmental politics or share negative information about your current employer – keep it positive.
- Don't expect to eat too much.
- If you consume alcohol, no more than one drink. Common sense!
- Plan ahead to ask questions, silence is painful:
 - Cost of living, quality of schools?
 - Popular housing developments?
 - Community recreational services
 - Reflect on your day, ask appropriate questions from prior interviews.
 - Listen.

The Follow up: After the visit

- Follow up with a Thank you letter within 48 hours:
 - Avoid overly effusive language.
 - Express enthusiasm.
 - Emphasize the unique contributions you will make to the department.
- Get input from senior investigators in the field about the chair/department to solidify your impression.

How do faculty assess a candidate post interview?

- What they are looking for?
 - First and foremost an **outstanding research scholar, mentor, and teacher**
 - A person with **defined research goals**
 - **A colleague** who will contribute to the environment of the department

- Candidates are evaluated based on:
 - Competencies
 - Technical expertise
 - Work history and references
 - Motivation
 - Passion for their work
- Most institutions today are using **competency-based interviews** to determine which individual best fills their needs.
- **Competency-based interviews:**
 - Use behavioral questions to help interviewers evaluate candidates based on critical competencies identified for a particular position.
 - Are based on the theory that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.
- The **top 10 competencies:**
 - *Initiative*
 - *Integrity*
 - *Information seeking*
 - *Interpersonal understanding*
 - *Impact & influence*
 - *Conceptual thinking*
 - *Achievement/results oriented*
 - *Customer service orientation*
 - *Organizational awareness*
 - *Analytical thinking*
- The biggest mistake faculty witnessed during postdoc-interviews is candidates who presented data that they couldn't interpret.
- The most annoying faux pas that almost all of the candidates make is trying to convince everyone that they collected 100% of the data themselves. Modesty is the best policy. Be honest. Keep your claims honest, because understatement comes over well, even nonspecialists can smell exaggeration.

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