

Useful interview & hiring advice

“When interviewing product managers at Google, we ranked candidates on four metrics: technical ability, communication skills, intellect and Googliness. A Googley person embodies the values of the company - a willingness to help others, an upbeat attitude, a passion for the company, and the most important, humility.”

(<http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20130208164047-4444200-why-humility-is-essential-for-every-new-hire>)

Replace “Googliness” with the characteristics of the company or research group you are interviewing with. In particular, be familiar with their history, their goals, and their products (papers).

Advice From Your Peers

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2004/07/2004071501c.htm>

By MARY DILLON JOHNSON

CAREER TALK

Practical guidance for academic job seekers from professional career counselors

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Every spring, as director of career services at Yale University's graduate school, I present a program featuring a panel of graduate students who were on the market during the year and successful in their searches. The students tell their own stories and offer advice to their peers on all aspects of the job search.

It seemed a good idea to take their collective wisdom to a wider audience. Here is what they had to say about finding your first job.

The Application Process

It starts sooner than you think. September 15 is a big deadline for applications across the disciplines, and some departments have earlier deadlines. This summer is the time to work on your CV and cover letter, and set up your dossier file of references. Start getting ready now.

If you are going on the market with a partner, discuss and prioritize your criteria *before* you look at job announcements. Decide if it's critical that you both land jobs. What happens if only one of you gets an offer? Decide which regions of the country you're willing to relocate to, and which ones you won't consider. Decide on the types of institutions where you each want to teach. At the end of those discussions, pull out all of your trump cards: If you get an offer from a top department or from a university in a great location, will you take it, no matter the consequences?

Get friendly with your adviser. You should have thought about that long before now, but from this point on, faculty members can, and will, call your adviser to ask about you.

Prepare yourself for how hard it is -- psychologically -- to be evaluated on grounds that are out of your control. Much about the hiring process is arbitrary.

Realize that a flip side of that can be your own preoccupation with minutiae: the font you choose for your CV; the length of your cover letter (Should it be one and a half pages or one and three quarters?). It's good to exert control over what you can, but don't go crazy.

Prepare yourself for how much time the job search takes. In the emphatic words of one graduate student, "I got no work at all done in the fall."

If you are trying to finish up your dissertation at the same time you are trying to land a job, try not to teach in the spring semester. You won't even look at your dissertation if you end up with several campus

interviews. Each interview takes a couple of days, and if you are traveling far, you need to tack a day on at each end. Between trips you will be busy with your teaching and getting ready for the next trip.

On the Market

Read job descriptions carefully. Are you really a viable candidate for the position? "Know yourself, know your field, know the field," said a student in political science. "Half the jobs I applied to didn't make sense" for me to apply to.

It's good to push the envelope a little in terms of the jobs you apply to, but don't push it too far; it takes too much time.

Keep records. Develop a system for recording what you sent, to whom, and when; what was requested; what you haven't sent yet, and so on. The whole year is a test of your organizational skills.

Get your CV and cover letter vetted by all sorts of people. Get lots of opinions even though they all differ.

Don't be surprised if you hear contradictory advice from your peers. One student, for example, advised:

- "Many departments don't ask the 'tell us about your dissertation' question. So be prepared to talk about teaching at your interviews."

But another student observed:

- "At three MLA interviews, all the questions were about my dissertation -- there was almost nothing on teaching."

Practice, practice, practice your job talk. If you plan to use Powerpoint or slides, practice using them.

During your on-campus interviews, take advantage of every bathroom break that is offered, and if one is not offered, ask for it. It's your chance to be alone, to pull yourself together, to energize yourself, and to relax; perhaps to eat a PowerBar since you usually can't eat much at lunches when you are doing most of the talking.

Remember to put everything you need for your interview and job talk in a carry-on bag. Do not risk arriving in Wisconsin while your notes, teaching portfolio, and extra CV's are on their way to Michigan.

Above all, be flexible because it's hard to know how it will turn out. Just a few experiences underscore how much serendipity is at work:

- A student who really wanted the job had been "promised" that he was the department's first choice. He didn't get the offer.
- Another student went to a conference interview in a field where such interviews are not usually taken seriously. What's more, she was convinced that her interview had gone poorly. Yet the department head called her to set up a campus interview.
- A third student described how she had received no tenure-track offers in her first year on the market, so she had taken a one-year job at a major university. The next year she got a tenure-track offer from that university -- as well as three other such offers.
- A fourth student had great interviews at major universities yet came up emptyhanded.

What to Wear

Two male graduate students in history had strong views about how they selected their clothes for campus interviews:

- "I bought a suit I couldn't afford and wore it to all my interviews. I was way overdressed compared to the people interviewing me, but I didn't care. I felt great about myself."
- "I can't stand wearing a tie, so I wore a turtleneck with jacket and slacks."

A female student in economics had other criteria for her job-market wardrobe: "I took my mother shopping with me. We tested fabrics for whether they wrinkled or not. I made sure everything was comfortable and not too hot or cold for different parts of the country."

Top Tips From Peers

The hardest part of the hiring process is living with all of the uncertainty about what you will be doing in the next year and where you will be living. By being prepared for how hard that can be, you may better handle the pressure.

Don't forget an umbrella. Imagine how you would feel to get caught in a downpour between your hotel and the campus. And then, before you found a bathroom to wring out in, the department head spotted you and ushered you into the interview. It's hard to be your best when you are self-conscious about your dripping clothes and hair.

Go out of your way to be good to yourself during the year. There are enough factors working against you, things largely out of your control. Don't you get down on yourself, too.

Top Tip From Me

When I look at doctoral students who have been successful on the job market, the one factor that they seem to have in common -- besides all the usual signs of academic excellence -- is full engagement in their profession. That can take a number of forms: The students have already published articles, given presentations at national or regional meetings, organized symposia in their departments or across departments, and collaborated with other scholars within or outside their universities.

Some people see that as careerism and fear that it stifles intellectual passion and originality. I think it demonstrates lively intellectual involvement. It shows that you are an active player in the field and in the academic profession.

The alternative is to be identified more passively -- as a student who has successfully completed the requirements for a Ph.D. Unfortunately, just being a good student isn't enough anymore.

Mary Dillon Johnson, who has a Ph.D. in English from the University of California at Berkeley, is director of graduate-career services at Yale University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.