

Preparing for job interviews

(standard teaching-and-research jobs)

The basics

- You can predict, to an extent, what kinds of questions will be asked.
- If you do some homework and practise your answers, you'll do much better!
- Think yourself into the job. What would you spend your time doing? How are you going to show that you are willing and able to do those things?

You want to come across as ...

- Confident of your abilities, but aware that in some respects you may lack experience.
- Willing and eager to learn (thereby making up for any lack of experience!)
- Someone who wants the job, and not just because you want a job – *any* job!
- Someone who is reasonably well informed about what the job will involve
- A good colleague: someone who will participate in the life of the department, get on well with staff and students, and do willingly what is asked of them.

Basic homework

- Find out as much as you can about the department: the staff, teaching, assessment, research areas and strategy, the kinds of admin jobs people do, etc.
- Keep a copy of the exact CV and covering letter you sent. You may need to provide updates on thesis submission, submitted papers, etc.
- What holes are there on your CV? If you were on the panel, which areas of the job would you most need reassurance on, given what you already know from the CV? Pay the most attention to those areas.
- Try and get someone in your dept (e.g. your supervisor) to give you a mock interview.

Teaching (1)

- See what information you can find about the department's teaching from its website.
 - How are modules taught and assessed? Do you have experience of teaching/assessing in these formats?
 - Look at the job description. Does it include teaching in specific areas, or of specific modules?
 - If so, find out about the current curriculum. Would you do the same, or would you make changes?

Teaching (2): specific areas/modules

- Think about your CV. Have you taught these areas/modules before?
 - If yes: Remember what you did. Which topics did you cover? Did you use a textbook or particular readings? What worked and what would you change?
 - If no: What topics would you teach? What readings and/or textbook would you use? Why?
- You could prepare a short (1-page) handout with a suggested curriculum for a module listed on the ad.

Teaching(3): plugging the gaps

- Think about the gaps in your CV.
 - If you've only taught first-year, have something to say about the differences between what you've done and what you're being asked to do.
 - If you've never lectured to big groups, how would you approach it? Would you use presentations/ handouts? Why or why not?
 - If required areas are outside your areas of research expertise or teaching experience, you need to be able to show, if necessary, that you are competent to teach them.

Some classic teaching questions

- If you could teach a third-year module of your own choice, what would it be, and why?
- Would you be happy to supervise PhD students? (Note: don't be over-confident!)
- Which of our modules [not necessarily the ones on the job description] could you contribute to?
- Would you be happy teaching first-year logic?

Research (1): the department

Again, look at the website:

- What research areas do they cover?
- What kinds of areas do they run conferences or seminars on?
- How does your research area fit into all this?
- Are there particular people you'd have a lot to talk about with?

Research (2): your track record

- Make sure you are able to speak confidently about the content of papers you have written.
- Ditto your PhD thesis. You may be asked to summarise your thesis (in 5 minutes, say).
 - Practise this! Make sure it's clear to a non-specialist what it's about distinctive contribution it makes to the topic.
- Ditto any writing sample you were asked to submit. The panel may want to ask you some philosophical questions about it.

Research (3): Plans for the future

- Think in terms of the short, medium and long terms.
 - What are you working on now? What are you planning on doing with it? If your thesis, when will it be finished? (Check your CV!)
 - What next (e.g. after you finish your thesis)? Plans for particular papers?
 - And then what? Are you going to carry on in the general area of your thesis, or change direction, or ...?
- A philosophically interesting narrative is a good idea here – not just specific plans for particular papers. E.g. are there areas that your thesis touched on that you didn't have time to explore but would like to? (And if so, why?)

Some classic research questions

- Are you planning on turning your thesis into a book?
- What do you think your research would bring to the Department?
- What do you think is the best thing you've written/the most interesting thing about your thesis?

Administration

- Find out a bit about admin roles from the website. Are there any you think you'd be particularly good/competent at? Why?
- You can make up for lack of admin experience by coming across as willing to do whatever is asked of you, and realistic about what's expected.
- You don't need to act too enthusiastic about admin, but try not to make it look like you'd rather stick pins in your eyes.

Some classic admin questions

- You don't have any/much admin experience. How would you feel about taking on your share of the admin burden of the Dept?
- We all have a lot of personal tutees. Do you think you'd make a good personal tutor?

Some classic general questions

- Why do you want the job?
- Why do you think we should give it to you?
- What, in general terms, do you think you would bring to the Department?
- Where do you see yourself in 5/10 years' time?
- Do you have any questions you'd like to ask us?
- How can we get hold of you this evening/in the next few days? (Do not faff about at this point!)

Some classic hard questions from non-philosophers (all real examples!)

- What do you think philosophy is?
- [To an analytic philosopher] The Department doesn't teach any/much continental philosophy. Would you be happy to teach that?
- I don't know anything about philosophy. Can you explain your thesis to me?
- Would you be interested in doing any interdisciplinary teaching/research?
- What do you think the purpose of a philosophy degree is?

And finally ...

- Look smart
- Make sure you know where to go, and show up early.
- If you're e.g. invited to dinner the night before, go along! It's a good opportunity to find some things out. But don't treat it like a job interview.