

The Academic Interview Tip Sheet

The Phone Call (Invitation to Interview)

- Who will call you? Typically the Chair of department or search committee
- What should you do when you receive the call?
 - Express enthusiasm, then call back!
 - Provide a valid excuse to postpone this call for a few minutes: “You caught me just as I’m loading my protein into the column. May I call you back in 10 minutes?”
 - Decide on a valid excuse days in advance.
 - Find a quiet location, have your list of questions (you should have prepared these in advance; some examples are below), pen, and paper; take a deep breath.

What is Discussed During the Phone Call?

- Potential dates for your visit
- Advantage of being one of the first who they interview: You will set the bar of their expectations for the rest of the candidates.
 - Advantage of being one of the last who they interview: Your visit will still be fresh in the search committee’s minds.
 - If you get an invitation to interview at your top choice institution, try to schedule that interview during one of their later time slot. This will increase your chances of having another interview visit first (which can provide you with more practice before visiting your top choice school).
 - Itinerary for your visit
 - They will provide you with a general idea of the itinerary, including the types of talks that you will be giving (see below).
 - A detailed itinerary (similar to the attached sample interview schedules) will be sent to you a few days before your visit. You can ask during this phone call when you should expect to receive this itinerary.
- Process for making travel arrangements: booking, reimbursement, etc. (Prepare your personal budget so that you can cover these expenses; reimbursement may come months later.)
- Questions to ask about the types of talks you are asked to give:
 - Research seminar (“job talk”)
 - How many minutes are allotted?
 - Who will attend? (Open to department? Other departments?)
 - PowerPoint & other AV available?
 - Chalk talk (your future work)
 - How much time will be allotted?
 - Who will attend? (Search committee or department? Open to a public audience?)
 - Do you prefer that I focus on the big picture of long-term goals, or more specifically focus on my 5-year plan?
 - Teaching talk – see section below for a list of questions to ask
- Who to contact if other questions arise?
- End the conversation with “Thank you...” “I’m looking forward to the visit.”

Preparing for the Interview Visit

- Re-read the job description
- Website research
 - Get to know your audience, department, institution
 - Have a good idea of breadth of fields within the department
 - Look for connections to your research, and potential for collaborations
 - Look at courses taught, interdisciplinary programs - what courses might you be able to teach? Create?
 - Opportunities to contribute to dept. through service
- Obtain an itinerary for your visit (if not provided 3 days before departure, ask for one!)
- Prepare for individual interviews!
 - Think through the main points you want to convey about yourself. Remember, they will be looking to conclude whether you (1) will succeed in your position, (2) will be a good colleague, (3) will be a good fit for the department's needs.
 - You will be meeting faculty, chair, and dean. Be prepared for these different types of conversations.
 - Be prepared with questions to ask *them*.
 - Sample interview questions are available at: <http://www.ucsf.edu/career/pff.jobsearch.shtml>
- Prepare AND PRACTICE your job talk, chalk talk, and teaching talk!
 - Be optimistic: begin preparing job talk and chalk talk before the invitations come!

Bring to the Interview Visit

- Extra copies of your application materials (CV especially)
- Reprints of your published articles
- Laser pointer for your job talk
- Computer/Projector adaptor
- Photocopied handouts for talks (if necessary)
- Extra clothes
- Stain remover (carry at all times)
- Comfortable shoes
- Mints
- Umbrella
- Bottled water

At the Interview

- Typical interview itinerary: (samples available at <http://www.ucsf.edu/career/lifesci.samples.job.shtml>)
 - 1-2 full days
 - 12+ hours per day
- Two typical types of itineraries at research universities
- Job talk on Day 1, chalk talk on Day 2
- Job talk on Visit 1, chalk talk on Visit 2
- People you are likely to meet with...
 - All (or most) search committee members

- Chair of the department
- Dean (Provost/President/Chancellor)
- Graduate students / postdocs / undergraduates
- Potential faculty collaborators (if there is someone who you would like to meet with, arrange this ahead of time)

The Job Talk

**To improve your design and delivery of a research talk, attend the PASS workshop on “Giving a Dynamic Research Talk.” Offerings are listed at www.ucsf.edu/career/pass.

Things to remember:

- Know your audience - expect experts in your field (perhaps) & outside your field. This may be a very broad, and even inter-departmental, audience. And your audience may include undergraduate students!
- Your goal: get them excited about your research! So, be an engaging speaker!
- Decide on the 3 take-home messages of your talk... and REPEAT THEM!
- Talk outline:
 - Roadmap for talk
 - Introduction to field & motivation
 - Objectives of research (main conclusions or questions)
 - Data
 - Conclusions
 - Future Directions/Aims
- Be concise and selective! Only include your *most key* results. (They can ask you later about everything else.)
- Slides:
 - Only include what is necessary (in words and data!)
 - Acknowledgements on bottom of slide
 - Choose a clean, readable, cohesive color scheme/layout
- Delivery
 - Body posture, movement (look at the audience!)
 - Memorize your opening sentences & key transitions
 - **Use “I”, “my” (NOT “we”)... be very clear about what work YOU did**
 - Clearly state the importance of your work, providing a broad context
 - Define technical terms or methods (your audience may include computational biologists and ecologists!)
 - Decide ahead of time what can be cut out
 - Be enthusiastic!
- PRACTICE !
 - schedule at least 2 practices with an audience (including faculty!)
 - begin preparing weeks ahead (save the last few days for interview practice, etc)
- Attend faculty candidate seminars at UCSF!
 - Listen beyond the science...

- Observe their introduction (first sentence), organization of talk, delivery, types of questions asked, how candidate answers questions
- Ask UCSF faculty (your advisor, mentor) how they think the talk went

The Teaching Talk

If you are interviewing at a school that emphasizes excellence in teaching, then they may ask you to give a sample lecture during your interview.

- The teaching talk may be a lecture in a real course, or a simulated situation.
- Questions you should ask ahead of time:
 - Topic (provided or you choose?)
 - Who will the audience be? (undergraduate majors, nonmajors, Masters or PhD students, faculty?)
 - How many students? (400? 5?)
 - What concepts have they already learned in the course?
 - What textbook is used for the course?
 - Important concepts that need to be covered? Copy of prior lecture notes?
 - What visual aids are available? (chalkboard, overhead projector, PowerPoint projector)
 - Who is the current instructor? (someone you can contact)

After the Interview Visit

- Reflect on your experience
 - Take notes about particular discussions you had with individuals (do this THROUGHOUT YOUR VISIT if possible!). This will help you write personalized thank you notes.
- Give yourself a day off...
- And write thank you letters! (see examples at career.ucsf.edu)