

1 Preparing for Job Market Interviews

1.1 When should I be getting calls for interviews? Is the market passing me by? What should I do?

Most employers don't start reading packets until the Thanksgiving break. Calls are rare before the first few days of December, with calls trickling in until December 20 or so.

If you only have a handful by December 8 or so, it is important to ask your advisor to contact places directly. It is even a good idea to ask earlier. Advisors hate doing this. Cold calling/contacting is never fun. You can help this a lot. Identify places where you are well-matched on a feasibility front, and identify people (including email addresses) that your advisor could contact and give links to their web pages in a document that advisors can cut and paste from.

Please keep the placement director (Dan Bernhardt) informed when you get interviews and where. To do this keep a list of schools that you have scheduled interviews with you, and send updated lists. This gives him an idea both about how you are performing, and about how others are performing—sometimes the market moves a little more slowly than others. If you find yourself with too many interviews (for example, more than 25), consult with your advisors about possible cancellations (or rescheduling).

1.2 How do I schedule an interview?

When you get a request for an interview ask:

- The name and contact information for the person setting up the interview.
- The department (and position for multiple searches).
- Where it will be held (hotel and their “disclosure code”—the latter is used to find the room number, which generally won't be assigned until check-in by the school).
- How long it will last (most are 30 minutes, but some are 45 minutes).
- Who will be at the interview (not all places will know—you might ask if you could contact them later to get that information when the interviewers' schedules are set). Don't be pushy if they don't have this information, but if they do, great.

If possible, avoid scheduling your most important interviews at the beginning of a day, and especially not early on the first day of the meetings. You'll do better after you've already done a couple of interviews. Avoid scheduling your most important interviews at the end of the day—you will be tired or running late, and the same is true for the interviewers.

Allow time between interviews, even at the same hotel (interviewers may run late, and elevators get gridlocked during peak hours). 15 minutes between interviews at the same hotel is probably sufficient. Use longer breaks between interviews at different hotels.

Cluster by hotel when possible. It could be hard to find a cab. *Print and keep a copy of the hotel map at hand (see the AEA meetings website), so you know which hotels are close to each other when you're scheduling an interview.*

1.3 How do I cancel an interview?

Politely, and only after consultation with your advisors. While employers don't want to waste time with candidates who aren't serious prospects, you want to avoid giving the impression that you think they aren't worth 30 minutes of your time, especially when you don't know your options yet. Be sure your schedule includes enough diversity to assure some downside insurance before you start cutting out interviews.

1.4 What should I be doing between now and the meetings?

Reserve a hotel room. Most hotels are under contract with ASSA and don't have rooms available unless to register for the conference. However, you can book some hotels directly that are not as centrally located. If you cannot find a hotel, register for the ASSA and book through their website.

- Be sure prospective employers can contact you. While many employers now use e-mail, some still use the phone. Your CV should have included your cell phone number. Check e-mail and voice mail often.
- Prepare for your job interview...

2 Preparing for Job Interviews

- Practice out loud, with emphasis and enthusiasm! There is no reason for you not to own the first 5 minutes of an interview, and to have smooth responses to "standard" questions. If you haven't run through your job talk (out loud!) multiple times, do that, too.
- The first question is typically: tell me about your thesis/research. It is important to script this part, writing it out and reading it out loud. You should share this write up with your advisors *in advance* and get feedback. You want to tell a story, but make sure that it sounds natural, and not like a pre-rehearsed or robotic speech. Start with an overview, introduce who you are and what you do. Then get into your job market research. Make it sound exciting. Make sure that you convey why it is interesting and important, and be aware that there may be people who have not read your paper or are outside your area. Everyone in the room should be able to follow your presentation.
- If you are asked a question, you can answer or defer (if you will touch on it shortly), but always bring the discussion back to your research. Think of yourself as a water faucet

that will never run short of water... you do not want to stop talking about research until the interviewers prompt you.

- Prepare for tough questions about your research in advance, and be willing to acknowledge limitations. Be ready to address: what is the biggest limitation of your approach, and how would you address it? What are the key unanswered directions forward or directions that you can go? Why do you think that your research topic is an interesting/important question? What model is consistent with / explains these findings? But are you capturing the general equilibrium effects of XX? What field do you see yourself working in? Don't get defensive when asked a tough question—stay relaxed.
- Future research: do not fake it. If you don't have something exciting and detailed, then just convey the general area, as in: my near term research agenda will retain a microempirical focus on electoral outcomes in Brazil. I try to cleanly identify impacts using natural experiments... It can even be more vague than this. Do not get caught trying to sell something you have not thought about carefully. This can get you into trouble.
- If you have multiple field areas (and research in multiple fields) think about how to match what you focus on to what they are looking for. Packaging and selling the same paper in different ways, or highlighting different papers can help. This also goes for future research.
- If you are asked about teaching (and you will be at an academic interview), you always mention that your students nominated you as an outstanding/excellent teacher (if true) and that you have taught independent courses. If asked about an undergraduate course that is unfamiliar (the economics of development in Iran, for example), you can say that while you are not an expert, you know that Hadi or Firouz has taught this course and that they would share their lecture notes with you, and that you are confident that you would be able to do it. Do not make claims about graduate courses if you are not prepared. You have to have a deeper knowledge base for grad courses. You should know what they are looking for (by their field interest), and you can prepare in advance by looking at syllabi here.
- People want to hire smart, productive colleagues whom they'll enjoy interacting with — the emphasis is on "enjoy interacting with." If you're dull, withdrawn, sound bored or overwhelmed, or come across as arrogant or condescending, it's going to be hard for interviewers to be excited about having you join them. The key to the interview is to be enthusiastic. Interviewers are looking for (1) individuals who would accept an offer, and (2) who would be nice colleagues. Do not be Sheldon Cooper. Try to be friendly and easygoing. You want to come across as nice and thoughtful, and not as a conceited jerk.
- You will be asked: do you have any questions for us? You want to convey that you have looked at their faculty list and know people who work in the area—as in, I know that x,

y and z do work related to mine; are there other people whose interests would overlap? You can say... you have a better idea than I about things that I might want to know that I cannot pick up from your web page [reverse the question... let them tell you things that they think are important]. Do not ask about salary, teaching load, tenure criteria, or basic questions that can be answered from the webpage (e.g., do you have a seminar in labor?) You only reveal yourself to be an outlier by asking strange questions.

- Participate in a mock interview. Interviews will be scheduled in December for those on the academic market (and others who want them). You must give your advisor your write-up and received feedback on it, and then give it to the placement director before your interview will be scheduled. You should also have practiced with each other (recording it) and with your spouse or friends countless times. Do not waste the mock interview by not preparing.
- Be sure you own (or now purchase) a professional-looking suit, at least 3 shirts/blouses, and a pair of comfortable dress shoes. You are interviewing for highly-paid professional positions; look and act the part.
- Try to make progress on research. It's hard to concentrate when you are worried about the job market. But this may be your most productive period until the end of March! Research can take your mind off the waiting game and put you in a position to discuss new work with more enthusiasm and credibility when you hit the interviews.
- Look up information on places you will interview with. Use websites to learn about faculty in your field or people you know will be at the interview. For nonacademic interviews, what are a couple big issues the organization is dealing with or has recently succeeded with (cases, policies, rulemakings)? Take notes to refer to before you head into the interview, and jot down questions you want to ask at the end of the interview. This makes you more credible.
- If you are looking extensively at non-academic employers, it may be worthwhile to register for the AEA's Professional Placement service on the ASSA meeting site.
- If you have a pre-ASSA meeting flyout recognize that any offer that results may expire before the ASSA meetings (or shortly afterward). You'll need to discuss those with your advisors.

3 The Meetings

Get room locations for all interviews before you start the day. You should have the disclosure codes (see above).

Be on time. Allow plenty of time to get to your interview. Recognize that it may take forever to get an elevator, even once you're at the right hotel. Hopefully your scheduling has allowed

enough time between interviews so that you can remain on time. If you're going to be more than a couple of minutes late, call ahead. This requires having a list of hotel phone numbers (in the directory you get at registration) and interviewer room numbers with you.

4 Interviewing for Nonacademic Jobs

These interviews may begin with a brief description of the organization, rather than launch into your paper right away. Be engaged! They're often trying to educate you about their organization and decide whether you're really interested in them (as opposed to just padding an interview schedule or being risk averse).

These interviews are likely to be less focused on the details of your research agenda (especially future work). They are more likely to probe your ability to think on your feet, especially for problems you are likely to encounter in their job. For example, they may pose a series of logic questions, a case study, or put forward a case the consulting firm handled in the past with the hope of talking through it with the candidate. Consulting interviews may feature case studies that you have to do in real time. Do not claim skills that you do not have (e.g., programming skills) that you don't have... they may test you on them.

You should take the time to look up their organization in advance, which allows you to answer and ask questions that engage them at a deeper level, improving the interview and signaling your credibility. Expect questions designed to help them tell whether you are a good fit and whether they could beat out an academic offer you might get. Are you interested in policy work? (What interests you?) Does your research have any implications for the employer's area? Why would you be interested in our job? Where else are you interviewing? If we made you an offer, would you accept it? Think about what is being asked and what your answer communicates. You should tell the truth, but not necessarily reveal all your information. For example, don't tell a place that they rank 10th in your list of interviews. This would be interpreted as "I'm not at all interested" and they'll cross you off their fly-out list. This goes for academic and nonacademic jobs.