Acing Academic Job Market Interviews
Research and Teaching Questions
GRADTalk & Chicago Center for Teaching
Today will provide a few concrete tips and frameworks for answering representative questions about research and teaching.
Today’s Agenda

I) 10 Tips
II) Research
III) Teaching
IV) Q/A
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I) 10 Tips
II) Research
III) Teaching
IV) Wrap-up
Ten Tips

- 80% of what hiring committees think of you is determined in the first 20 seconds
- Your answers are too long
- Understand what motivates the question
- Know your strengths and weaknesses
- Answers have beginnings, middles, ends
- The # of possible questions is not infinite
- It’s okay to ask for time and clarification
- Practice the way you play
- Always have good questions ready
- Always send thank you notes
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IV) Q/A
The Question: “Tell us about yourself/discuss your dissertation/current research”

Motivation: The interviewer wants to see how you situate yourself within a discipline.

Traps
- Thinking and speaking like a grad student.
- Repeating your cover letter.
- TM’s: Too much information, too much specialized information and jargon, too much monologue.

Tactics
- Brevity: Two sentences instead of three
- Use smaller “building blocks”: instead of a 3-minute response think about three, 1-minute responses.
- Focus on broad stakes of the research and not on its details.
The Question: “Why should I care?”

Motivation:
Testing your ability to sell an idea in a concise and convincing way, while assessing your ability to position potentially novel work within a broader, more establish academic landscape.

Traps
- Rehashing
- Underselling
- The Hem/Haw (lack of confidence)

Tactics
- Be excited!
- “Yes, and” / Frame contribution as doing two things: building upon existing ideas and introducing new ideas
- Take the long view: don’t be afraid to talk about future implications of your work even if they aren’t yet realized.
The Question:
“How would you envision your future research program at this institute?”

Motivation:
Interviewers want to know if you can go beyond the dissertation and whether your future plans align with the setting of their institution—specifically in the job you are applying for...

Traps
- Narrowly focusing on your dissertation topic

Tactics
- Talk about current or near-future projects that do not involve your dissertation
- Talk about your long term book goals (the second project)
- Be prepared to discuss what it will take to get your research started (including questions of funding)
- Consider ideas for connecting work with community outreach
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IV) Q/A
The Question: “How would you teach an intro class at our institution?”

Motivation: What do you know about their major requirements? What is your take on the big concepts/skills that introduce students to your field? What do you know about their students? Will students want to take your intro course (gateway to the major)?

Traps
- Not approaching the course from the students’ perspective
- Pitching the course at too high a level, or to an overly narrow audience (i.e. only majors)

Tactics
- What are the big concepts/questions/skills that should be in an intro course?
- What makes your intro course exciting?
- Link your intro course to their major/distribution requirements
The Question:
“How can you contribute to the curriculum (major/gen ed requirements)?”

Motivation:
What is your take on the broad pedagogical goals of a major in your field? What kinds of courses can you teach that align with those goals? What other forms of student learning can you help the department achieve (e.g. capstones, internships, research mentorship, etc.)?

Traps
- Overly narrow focus on your subfield
- Stepping on toes

Tactics
- Talk about advanced courses you are prepared to teach
- Think about what and how you teach develops transferrable skills
- Talk about innovative teaching strategies you can bring
- Be familiar with the major/gen ed requirements, and be ready with some (modest) thoughts on how you might contribute to curriculum development
The Question:
“Can you tell us about a time when something went wrong in the classroom and how you handled it?”

Motivation:
How do you approach classroom teaching? How can you improvise? How do you interact with students?

Traps
- Being too negative—vis-à-vis the student and your teaching.
- Not being ready with an example.

Tactics
- Have an example ready!
- Talk about what you did in the moment and what you did after.
- Consider framing your response through the lens of inclusivity.
**The Question:**
“How would you get students interested in your courses?”

**Motivation:**
Do you know how to approach your material from students’ perspective? Can you help us with our enrollments and majors? Can your courses draw students from other majors (i.e. are there connections your course can make with other disciplines)?

**Traps**
- Talking about it from your perspective
- Taking the value of your course as self-evident

**Tactics**
- Have some thoughts on how to “market” your courses (i.e. course description, flyers, etc.)
- What do you do on the first day to get people interested and stay in the class?
- Recognize barriers to interest in your field and how you motivate students
- Convey your enthusiasm for teaching and working with students.
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...and be in touch

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