

# UChicagoGRAD Interview Guide (Non-Ac)

You came to UChicagoGRAD and got help with your résumé and cover letter, and now you have been invited to an interview with one or more of your target companies, institutions, or organizations. What should you expect, and how should you prepare?

Many graduate students and postdocs think “Once I get to the interview, I know I’ll be able to get the job!” But interviews take precise preparation and planning. The best interviewees have *practiced* before their interviews. What follows are some guidelines to help you as you prep!

## What to Expect:

The interview serves a function for both the hiring organization and the job seeker. The hiring organization gets the opportunity to see who you are as a **whole person**, not just collections of words on an application, résumé, and cover letter. Interviewers will ask questions about your interests, skills, and experience **as they relate to the position for which you are being considered** (see list of commonly asked questions below). Your responses to these questions will provide them with more information about how well your qualifications are matched to the requirements for the job. In other words, they are looking for **evidence that you can do the job and that you will do it well**. They will also be looking for evidence that you can work well with other staff at the organization, at multiple levels.

Besides being able to elaborate on the experience you described on your résumé and cover letter, you—the job seeker—also can use the interview to **evaluate whether the organization and the role are right for you**. Will you be comfortable working there and be able to thrive as a professional?

You have the opportunity during an interview to see beyond what an organization presents on its website. If the interview is on-site, you can get a sense about the resource environment and the organizational culture. Is the organization able to provide those basic things you need to do your job well, such as workspace, access to technological tools, training and professional development? Is the workplace culture rigid or loosely structured? Do staff members work mostly independently or collaboratively? Is the work task- or project-based? Whatever the culture, you will need to decide whether it will meet your own needs for personal and professional growth and success.

## Ask:

For in-person interviews, you should have this information before the interview. Feel free to ask for this information!

- How much **time** should I allot for the interview?
- **Where and to whom** should I report upon my arrival?
- **With whom** will I be speaking?
- Could you provide me with a copy of my **itinerary** in advance (if you will meet with more than one person and/or there are other activities scheduled for your visit)?
- Is there anything specific I should **prepare in advance**?

## Research:

Have info about the role and the firm/organization ready in advance!

- Research the organization’s website, as well as bios/LinkedIn profiles of interviewer(s)
- Who do they serve?
- What is their mission?
- Re-read the job description

## Practice!

Record yourself providing answers to common questions (video or audio). Schedule time at UChicagoGRAD to do a mock-interview. When practicing, wear the outfit that you will wear at the actual interview to get used to it.

# Academic Interview Questions & Tips

Initial-round academic job market interviews—usually conducted by phone, over Skype, or at professional conferences—can be stressful and intellectually demanding. It can help significantly to know some of the most common questions and rehearse (without memorizing!) some possible answers.

## QUESTIONS:

### Humanities and Social Sciences

- Why do you want to **teach** at this institution?
- Please describe your **current academic work** and its **contribution** to the field.
- How would you organize an **introductory survey course** in your area of expertise?
- Please describe what you think will be the **most important developments** in your field in the next decade.
- Tell me about the **most difficult class** you've ever taught.
- What **textbook** would you use to teach an introductory class in your field?
- How would you approach the challenge of teaching **our students** when you've only taught UChicago students?
- Describe a situation in your program or in one of the classes you taught where there was a **conflict** and how you helped **resolve** it.
- What questions do you have **for us**?

### Physical and Biological Sciences

- Why do you want to work in this lab as a postdoc and what **expertise** would you bring to it?
- Please describe your **current academic** work and its **contribution** to the field.
- What kinds of roles have you played in labs already and what additional roles are you **prepared** to play as a postdoc/professor?
- Please describe what you think will be the **most important developments** in your field in the next decade.
- What **textbook** would you use to teach an introductory class in your field?
- How would you approach the challenge of teaching **our students** when you've only taught UChicago students?
- Tell us about your **next project**.
- Describe a situation where there was a **conflict** in a lab and how you helped **resolve it**.
- What questions do you have **for us**?

## ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Ask questions that demonstrate that you've done your homework; that you're *excited* to contribute to the department; and that reveal something about you.

Avoid yes or no questions! Begin questions with "I'm interested in hearing more about [ x]" or "I saw on the website that you're opening a center in [y] and would love to know if there are plans to develop programming there."

Show that you're informed, interested, and enthusiastic to contribute.

## IMPORTANT:

- **Marital Status or Number of Children, Citizenship, Religious Beliefs, Sexual Orientation, Gender, Disabilities:** hiring committees are not permitted to ask questions about these areas.
- **Know that they might come up in informal contexts that feel off-the-record.** Though you may be at a departmental cocktail party or gathering, it's still not permitted for interviewers to ask these questions.
- **Have responses ready *just in case*.**

# General Interview Prep and Tips

## MEN

- Neutral color suit
- Blazers can work
- Tame the beard!
- New leather shoes
- New belt

## WOMEN

- Neutral color suit
- A simple pattern or color “pop”
- Simple jewelry is okay
- Pants or skirt are both acceptable
- Heels based on comfort

## EVERYONE

- **FIT, NOT fortune**
- Fresh haircut
- Wear it all first
- Ask for honesty
- Get it tailored!

## ACCESSORIES

- Valise, not backpack
- Metal, not plastic water bottle
- Pens you like to use
- Leather padfolio for CV’s
- Notebook



## Strong Interview Answers:

- **Brevity**—two sentences instead of three
- Articulating broad **stakes** of the question
- Addressing **opposing** views
- **Positive** accounts of your department/experience

## Indicators of confidence:

- Rephrasing a question to **clarify/shift focus**
- Tying answers to **previous** questions
- Taking a moment to **think** about an answer

## Rhetorical Strategies:

### Acknowledge, Adjust, Pivot:

- “I thought exactly the same thing at first, but I think that the real concern is [x].”

### Admit a Hard Question:

- “That’s a really interesting thought. Do you mind if I take a second to think about it?”
- “That’s a tough question to unpack. What do you think would be the first step?”

### Provide Background for Answers:

- “I’ve spent some very productive time on committees in my department and I’ve enjoyed the experience. Can you say more about opportunities to do department service at University X?”

## In the Week(s) Before:

### How to Prep:

- **Do research.** Understand as much as you can about the institution and its context.
- **Record your answers (audio only and then on video).** Watch and listen with a friend or trusted colleague.
- **Practice with partners outside your discipline.** Have them ask you tough questions about why your research matters.
- **Develop strong questions.** What are you actually interested in knowing about the institution? Design questions that say something unique about you.

### Try Out Answers to Questions About:

- **Your research:** its value in the discipline and its trajectory.
- **Your courses:** What kind of teacher are you and how do you *think* about teaching? How will you prepare to teach students at particular institutions?
- **Your next project:** Where is your research heading and how will you advance the goals of the institution to which you are applying?
- **Mentoring:** How do you support students outside the classroom?
- **Tricky questions:** there are things that hiring committees shouldn’t be asking about (see reverse), but it’s important to prepare answers just in case.