

Top Ten Tips for Success in The Job Interview

In the last top ten tips I explored how to prepare for an academic interview. Now, here's how to get the best result on the day itself.

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1. Arrive on time, but not too early

If you are invited to an interview for 9am say, arrive between 8.45 and 9am, no earlier. You might inconvenience the staff who are meeting you: it's just as stressful preparing to interview candidates as being interviewed yourself! So if you arrive early walk around outside to clear your head and get some fresh air.

2. Be prepared to meet other candidates

In many academic interviews the American all-day format is used, which means that you will meet and have to interact with the other candidates. Try not to let yourself be intimidated by them, conversation will naturally move towards your current position, your jobseeking history, how many interviews you have attended recently and so on, but try to play things close to your chest, while remaining calm and friendly. Be open about your area of specialism for example, but not about what makes you stand out from the crowd.

3. Speak Slowly

In both the presentation and the interview, speak more slowly than you would normally. You will probably have good public speaking skills from lecturing experience and giving conference papers, but because you are unusually nervous you might speak too quickly.

4. Maintain eye contact

Again nerves can lead presenters to stare at their notes or the projector screen rather than their audience. Remember, as with a lecture, seminar or paper, make eye contact with your audience, especially when answering question. You will come across as confident and assured. But equally, don't stare at people! Be natural.

5. Admit when you don't know

In the presentation and the interview if you are faced with a question that you are unsure of, admit it. Do not try to bluff your way out of it 'politician-style' by changing the subject or answering a different question. It is much more professional to ask the speaker to rephrase the question, or to be light-hearted and admit you don't know the answer. Your interviewers will respect you more for being honest.

6. Discussing your research confidently

It is important to discuss your past, present and future research plans confidently and if you have prepared well for the interview this should be no problem. Make sure you take time to explain your plans without rushing, and always relate them to the post they are interviewing for. Remember that the panel are highly educated but not necessarily subject specialists in your field, so pitch your research plans accordingly.

7. Offering teaching

For a teaching post you will have prepared some relevant responses about what you can offer in terms of teaching, but in some cases this may be 'sprung' on you unexpectedly. It is important to come across as a confident, enthusiastic teacher. Under no circumstances discuss the confidential history of any students (although you can use general examples of, say, where you have given pastoral care) nor should you be critical of your current or previous institutions.

8. Show enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is key, make sure you smile a lot! Because of nerves, some people can appear subdued at interview, whereas in fact they are just naturally quiet. Don't let this be mistaken for lack of confidence or even being aloof. It is worth going that extra mile to show how enthusiastic you are about the job. For example, visit the university library or research labs during a break in the interviewing, show you have researched something relevant to your field.

9. Be friendly

Being friendly sounds obvious, but it is easy to forget that above all, the interviewers will be looking for a human being who will fit into their department. You will be spending a lot of time working with them and they want to know that you are down-to-earth and approachable. Academic interviews are incredibly competitive, all the candidates will be very highly qualified (if not over-qualified), so it is the personal touches that can make a real difference.

10. Finish on a positive note

Even if you feel the interview has gone badly, try to leave on a positive note. Thank the panel for their time and say that you look forward to hearing from them soon. Perhaps say that you have found the day very challenging but rewarding. Give a firm handshake and look the panel members in the eye. This will linger in their minds and will leave a better impression than slinking off with barely a word.