

## ACADEMIC JOB SEARCH

- Acing a Telephone Interview
- Answering Teaching Related Questions in a Job Interview
- Creating a Memorable Teaching Statement
- How to Give an Effective Teaching Demonstration

### Acing a Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are becoming an increasingly common way to screen job candidates: to gauge their interest, assess their communication skills, address questions raised by their cover letters and recommendations, and get a sense of candidates' personalities.

How you present yourself will largely determine whether you get an on-campus interview. You need to come across as a pro: Someone who can describe one's research and its significance concisely, who is well-connected professionally, and who can answer questions about teaching confidently.

#### **1. Be prepared**

Follow the Boy Scout oath. Prepare for the obvious questions. You can find a list of sample interview questions at:

[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tat/pdfs/sample\\_interview\\_questions.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/tat/pdfs/sample_interview_questions.pdf)

#### **2. Use a land line**

Be wary of cell phones. You don't want static or a dropped call to mar the interview.

#### **3. Avoid distractions**

Make sure you won't be interrupted.

#### **4. Have notes and a pen and paper handy**

List the three or four points that you definitely want to get across during the interview. Also, jot down the interviewers' names.

#### **5. Help put your interviewers at ease**

Speak to them by title and name. Know something about them.

#### **6. Be succinct**

Attention spans are even shorter on the phone than face-to-face.

#### **7. Be prepared to fill the "dead air"**

If there is a prolonged period of silence, you might want to ask a question or use this as an opportunity to discuss a topic of your choosing.

#### **8. Smile**

If you smile, you will sound upbeat and enthusiastic.

## **Answering Teaching Related Questions in a Job Interview**

Most of the teaching questions you receive in an academic job interview are predictable. How would you teach the introductory course? How about an upper division undergraduate course? If you could teach any course you'd like, what would it be? What books would you assign?

Here are some thoughts about other questions you might be asked.

### ***1. At Columbia, you have taught well-prepared traditional students in a residential college setting. How would you adjust to teaching non-traditional students?***

Non-traditional students often bring real-world skills, knowledge, and experience to the classroom. Think about how you might capitalize on that.

Non-traditional students need to know why something is important to know. They are in the classroom because they want to be there. But they lead busy lives and have many competing demands on their time. You'll need to explain why a topic is significant.

Non-traditional students tend to be more self directed than traditional students. They are sometimes more sensitive to perceived slights, and hate being condescended to.

### ***2. How do you integrate writing into your courses?***

Many institutions have embraced "writing across the curriculum." You might consider requiring students to keep a journal. Or you might ask them, even in a math class, to explain a concept or topic in writing. Or you might have the students analyze a newspaper or magazine article.

### ***3. How do you use technology into your teaching?***

Apart from the most common applications -- such as PowerPoint or discussion boards -- consider other innovative ways to use technology, for example, having your students create a virtual museum or an electronic encyclopedia or asking them to annotate a play or a text. You might also have students create digital stories (mini movies).

### ***4. What is your teaching philosophy?***

One way to answer this question is to identify your overarching objectives as a teacher. Some are obvious: to make sure your students learn concepts and skills basic to your discipline or to encourage them to cultivate an interest in biology or French or history.

But you might have other objectives: to overturn certain widely held misconceptions; to instill your discipline's habits of thought; or to get them to think clearly and logically about certain questions.

Then think about how you motivate your students to meet these goals. Do you bring "real world" examples into your classroom? Or make use of audio-visual materials or simulations? How about role playing exercises or debates or small group activities?

And finally, consider the benchmarks you use to assess whether students are fulfilling your expectations. Are there special "capstone" projects that you ask your students to undertake?

## **Creating a Memorable Teaching Statement**

Over half of all academic jobs ads require applicants to submit a teaching statement or teaching philosophy. Most are generic: I love teaching. I care about students.

How can you make your statement stand out?

### ***1. Understand why search committees ask for a teaching statement.***

Departments want to know that you are prepared to hit the ground running. You need to demonstrate that you have meaningful classroom experience and are well prepared to take on a full teaching load.

### ***2. Ground your statement in your discipline.***

Ask yourself: What are the most important skills and habits of mind that you want students to learn in your classes? These might include:

- Developing students' problem solving strategies
- Insuring that students understand foundational concepts
- Modeling expert problem solving
- Teaching students to work collaboratively

### ***3. Explain—with concrete, specific examples—how you accomplish these goals.***

Make sure you identify the most successful assignments and activities you have used in your classes. Explain:

- How do you interest and engage students.
- How do you help students understand difficult ideas and concepts.
- How do you assess student learning.

### ***4. Identify, again with examples, challenges you have faced in the classroom and how you addressed them.***

### ***5. Integrate strong, supportive statements from student course evaluations.***

### ***6. Explain how your research contributes to your teaching and how your teaching informs your research.***

### ***7. Describe the courses you'd like to teach.***

### ***8. Explain how you continue to grow as a teacher.***

Describe the workshops you have attended and how you have used student teaching evaluations to improve your teaching.

### ***9. Keep it short and succinct.***

A teaching statement should be no more than two pages long.

## **Evaluating your teaching statement**

Five questions to ask yourself:

- 1. Does the statement come across as trite and generic?*
- 2. Do you come across as a distinctive individual?*
- 3. Does the statement reflect your discipline's concerns?*
- 4. Do you reveal your pedagogical goals and commitments?*
- 5. Does the statement provide specific examples?*

## **How to Give an Effective Teaching Demonstration**

Many search committees ask candidates to demonstrate their teaching. Sometimes, you will be asked to step into an existing class. In other instances, the situation will be artificial, and the audience will include faculty as well as students.

This is your chance to shine.

A teaching demonstration should be like a real class: It should be focused and substantive. But feel free to include "meta-commentary": Don't hesitate to explain what you are doing and why. And you might refer to pedagogical strategies that you'd do under other circumstances. For example, you can say that in a regular class session, you might include an in-class writing exercise or a small group activity.

Here's some practical advice.

### *1. Warm up your audience.*

Make a point of introducing yourself to the students even before the "class" begins. Smile and exude enthusiasm and energy.

### *2. Begin with a bang.*

Start out with something engaging: An anecdote, a story in the news that connects to your topic, a striking image, an opinion poll.

### *3. Spell out your topic and approach.*

Some academics find the words "course objectives" and "lesson plan" off-putting, but it is essential to have a clear roadmap for the class session. Everyone wants you to be organized, focused, interactive, substantive, and engaging.

### *4. Vary your approach.*

Use a variety of teaching methods. You will lecture and lead a discussion, but you might do other things as well. "Hands on" learning is great--you can bring in an image or textual passage or an artifact or a graph and have students discuss it.

### *5. Get the students talking.*

Have the students brainstorm. Survey their opinion. Ask open ended questions. Use discussion triggers (for example, an image, or artifact). You might also lead them through an inquiry or solve a problem.

**6. *Bring a take-away.***

You should definitely have a handout. It might include an excerpt from an interesting article or a cartoon or some quotations you might work with or some charts or graphs.

**7. *Have a back-up plan.***

Let's say the projector doesn't work. Be prepared with Plan B.

**8. *End with a bang.***

Is there a moral to the story you've told? Does your lesson have contemporary relevance? Is there something inspiring or meaningful that you want the students to come away with? This is the moment to demonstrate that you are not just a transmitter of content, but a thinker with an intriguing point of view.