



The Job Interview

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Preparation is key:

- **Do your homework:**

- *Read about the company / institute, working group, their vision and mission, projects, the job, the people who you would work with. Be prepared!*

- **Prepare an elevator speech:**

- *Present yourself and your research, and its significance in the field*
- *Be clear, avoid jargon, put **your** work into the big picture*



Preparation is key:

- **Prepare an elevator speech**

Now do it again for your grandparents, without reading!

- *Convince **all** committee members, even those who are not experts in your field*
- *Especially important when applying to generic fellowship positions*



Preparation is key:

- **Think about your strengths / weaknesses:**
 - *For the job and the interview*
 - *Weaknesses: what do you do about them?*
 - *Be aware of potential weaknesses in your project – **Data? Plan B?***

- **Prepare take-home messages for the committee:**
 - *How do you want to be remembered after the interview?*
 - *What are the details / assets you want to convey to the committee?*
 - *Why are you interested in this position? **Really think about this!***



Preparation is key:

- **Think about how to handle dumb or inappropriate questions:**
 - *Handle them calm, with grace (see later)*

- **Think about questions you have for the committee:**
 - *Write them down - or you will forget them*
 - *At the end of the interview, ask them by decreasing order of importance*
 - *Not asking any question can be perceived as disinterest*

 - *e.g., mentoring students, campus life, job selection process, work-life balance, office space, benefits & health insurance, visa process ...*



The Interview



- **Before the interview:**
 - *Silence your phone and put it away*
 - *Take at least 5 minutes to calm down and focus*
 - *Don't be afraid to ask who is on the panel in advance*

- **Be on time**
 - **Online** interviews: *get out of your cave! Avoid public / noisy spaces.*
 - **Online:** *test your video connection, test that you can share your screen*
 - *Dress appropriately: show that it's important to you*
 - *Thank the committee for their time*

You shall not underestimate the importance of the first impression!



Body language:

- **Non-verbal communication dominates** – gestures, posture, facial expressions, eye movement, touch, tone of voice, ... they convey your emotional state

What do you associate with

- *folded arms,*
- *slouching,*
- *avoiding eye contact,*
- *a firm handshake?*

- *The tone of the voice is important – intensity, rhythm, intonation, ... **speak up!***

Mind cultural differences!



Body language:

- *Have an open body language*
- **Be honest and natural.** *Don't be a fake: your body language will reflect this ("something is weird ...")*
- **Be confident:** *Be proud of your achievements!
Remember: you've already made them curious to invite you for an interview*

You shall not underestimate the importance of the first impression!



- **The committee knows how it is to be interviewed**
 - *They know that you might be nervous (they were in this situation many times)*
 - *Some of them might be even nervous when asking questions*
 - *Good interviewers will guide you through the interview*

- **Good interviews are not an exam, but to find out if:**
 - *you are a good match for the job / working group*
 - *the job is a good match for you*

The Job Interview



- **Why should we hire you?**
Why do you consider yourself the best candidate?
- Where do you see your field in 5-10 years?
What do you consider the most important *recent* discovery in your field?
- List your strong and weak points. **What is your main weakness?**
- Given that the position will have teaching / observing duties, how will you keep your science going?
- How will your work complement what is being done in the group?
- **How would you personally define "professional success"?**
- ...



- **The interviewers have already an idea about you**
 - *They will spend looking for things to confirm that idea*
 - *They will try to **spot your weaknesses** and check if you are aware of them*
 - *They will check if you fit in into their team (personality, soft skills)*

- **Practice, Practice, Practice!**



Tips and Tricks



- **Answer concise, to the point (< 1 min)**
 - *This reflects confidence and experience*
 - *It's very tiring for the committee when the applicant does not stop talking ...*
 - *Don't get lost with details; providing one example might be sufficient*
 - *Don't leave questions unanswered! (except for inappropriate ones)*

- **Don't be afraid of what you don't know**
 - *Maybe you are not expected to know the answer at all, so you can still give a very good & smart answer*

 - *Admit that you don't know the answer; try to figure it out on the fly.*



- **Don't read your presentation:** the interviewers will notice that
- **Instead, put a few post-it's next to camera with the key take-home messages for the committee**
- **Overconfidence is bad**
"this scenario will never happen",
"for sure I will publish my pending 10 first author papers next year"
(Overconfidence conveys immaturity and inexperience)
- ...



Inappropriate Questions

Inappropriate Questions



- **Don't get into a fight:**

- *if you understand the question is being asked with innuendos, answer the original question – you may even ask them to rephrase the question*
- *Keep calm and you win*
- *Some questions are simply a test **how you react under stress** and **how you handle difficult situations!***
- *so: don't take questions personally. Always stay **professional***

Use the interview to show what you cannot show on paper: soft skills!



Inappropriate (= illegal) questions are about:

- Religion, Race
- Gender or Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy Status, Family Planning
- Disability. Medical Treatments
- Marital Status, Number of Children
- ...

~~"Would your partner agree if you took the job?"~~

~~"Do you have children? Do you plan having children?"~~

~~"Have you ever been treated for psychological problems?"~~

Inappropriate Questions



Remember: Some interviewers might not be aware that they are asking an inappropriate question

- Maybe they are just trying to break the ice

~~Do you have children?~~ (still inappropriate!)

Inappropriate Questions



- **Protect your personal boundaries with grace and confidence**
 - *Use this as an opportunity to show your soft skills*
 - *You can even laugh (provocative) questions out*
 - *Turn the tables: Ask them about the relevance of the question for the job*

"I feel that this question is not relevant for this position"

"I think that this question goes beyond the scope of a job interview"

"The relevance of this question is not clear to me. Could you explain to me how / why this is relevant for the job?"

Inappropriate Questions



- **Don't let a prospective employer bully you into disclosing something that you are not comfortable with.**
- NEVER talk bad about previous employers / colleagues / institutes ...



Final Remarks

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- **An interview is not a one-way road:**
 - *it is for both sides to find out if they could work together*
 - *if you feel uncomfortable with them, think twice before accepting*

- **After the interview is before the interview:**
 - *learn your lessons from the interview ... they are a training ground!*



Once you receive an offer: Negotiations



- **A job offer is not a “take-it” or “leave-it”**
- **You can negotiate certain benefits & conditions:**
 - *starting date*
 - *money for moving, computer equipment, travel money ...*
 - *extra health insurance (US), office space (if you bring your own money)*
 - *visa type; sponsoring your partner's visa ...*
 - *software, students? ...*

You really have no questions for the interview? ;)



- **Be realistic / clear about what you want to negotiate**
 - *Prioritize*
 - *It's a negotiation, so you may not get everything*
 - *Always be respectful – you want to work with them (and they with you)!*

- At most public institutions (also ESO) you cannot directly **negotiate** the salary, but a higher **starting grade / step** level on a salary scale
 - *Depends on the years of working experience, additional experience, ...*

Prepare yourself!



Practice, Practice, Practice!

Good luck with your interviews!



Summary

- Think hard why you really want the job
- Read about the team, the institute, their mission & projects, ...
- Address all committee members: Prepare an elevator speech
- Be aware of your strengths & weaknesses (you, the project, ...)
- Have a strategy to handle dumb or inappropriate questions
- Have an open body language
- Answer concise, clear, to the point. Less is more!
- Convey your take-home messages to the committee