



## Academic Job Presentations and Interviews

This tip sheet provides tips and general advice for preparing and giving academic job presentations and interviews.

### Presentations:

Final candidates for academic jobs are typically invited to present. This is typically a presentation on teaching or research, but may also be on impact (UK), grant plans, a combination of these, or something else. Typically, you'll present to (some) philosophy faculty with a few invited others.

Presentations may be online or in-person. If online, ensure an appropriate background, adequate equipment, and a strong signal. Your current institution may be able to provide these, if necessary.

Give careful consideration to presentational aids, ensuring that they enhance and do not detract. Confirm the preferred format. If using PowerPoint, use a clear and large font, with professional images. If using a handout, make it succinct. If using both, make sure they are complementary. Rigorously check all presentational aids for errors. Avoid unnecessary complications. Choose a style which showcases your particular presentational virtues. Silence all phones and notifications.

- *For research presentations:* Aim to offer a snapshot of your research and its aims that allows you to fully present a single stand-alone argument, ideally for a positive constructive thesis, which highlights the range of your potential research and its relevance to contemporary research and issues. Present on an aspect of your research within the advertised area of specialisation which *complements* that of existing faculty. Focus on something about which you are truly expert; it's not a platform for trying out new things. Present the research in an accessible way appropriate to the entire audience.
- *For teaching presentations:* Aim to offer a stand-alone presentation that highlights your skills in introducing, clarifying, and evaluating a key



philosophical text, idea, or argument. Pay careful attention to the level specified; e.g. first-year undergraduates. If there is no specified level, clarify its openness, select and make one explicit at your presentation's start. Consider displaying or distributing a syllabus. If giving *both* research and teaching presentations, give your teaching presentation on a different topic, outside your specialisation but within your competence. Otherwise, focus directly on your specialism.

*Note that teaching presentations differ from teaching demonstrations which involve being observed while teaching. While many of the tips for teaching presentations apply, one crucial difference is that demonstrations should exemplify your skills for getting students *involved* and appropriately *interacting* with them, so these should be more directed towards active discussion. You may choose to split students into groups, "flip" the classroom, or engage in other non-traditional methods of delivery. Similarly, demonstrations may devote proportionally more time to motivating the topic.*

- *For impact presentations:* Aim to offer a presentation which explains the research on which the impact is based, achieved, and expected. Impact requires a direct connection from research to policy or practice, so it is crucial to make this explicit. Remember that impact must be demonstrable, so clearly explain how the impact of your research has been demonstrated so far and how you plan to demonstrate further expected impact, i.e. what is the *change* and how is it *measured*.
- *For grant presentations:* Aim to offer a presentation which clearly identifies the proposed project and identified funding scheme(s). Be sure to make clear the project's research questions, required resources, timeline, and intended deliverables. Be specific about which funding scheme(s) are suitable for the project and exactly when you plan to apply for them. Highlight how this grant fits into your overall research and impact (UK) aims, along with those of the faculty you are aiming to join.



### General presentation tips:

- Stick to the brief; e.g. give the specific type of presentation you are being asked to give.
- Stick to your allotted time!
- Practice, practice, practice your presentation. Out loud and in front of others.
- Dress and speak professionally and appropriately.
- Be sure you understand and respond to questions as asked—repeat them back if necessary.
- Be equally courteous and respectful to everyone in attendance.

### Interviews:

Final candidates for academic jobs are typically invited to interview. Interviews may be held with the institution's philosophy staff, a broader panel including other stakeholders in the University, or both. Typically, more than three and less than ten people will be present. Anyone at an interview, including non-philosophers, is likely to have a say in your appointment, and this should be remembered when answering questions.

As with presentations, your interview may be held online or in-person. If online, be sure to have adequate equipment and signal, and ask your current institution for support if necessary. Silence all phones and notifications.

Interview questions will vary, especially depending on the nature of the position and the institution, but it is wise to prepare generic versions of answers to commonly asked questions which you can tailor during each interview. *Always be sure that you have done your homework on the institution and that you give specific and tailored answers to every question.* Give specific examples. Before interviewing, practice (aloud and ideally in front of someone) tailored answers to expected questions.

Typical interview questions that you may be asked for any academic job in philosophy include:



- Why do you want the job?
- What is a challenge you have faced in your professional life and how did you manage it?
- What are your research plans?
- What is your teaching experience and what are your teaching plans?
- What are your plans for grant capture?
- What are your plans for impact or public engagement (UK only)?
- What is your experience or interest with interdisciplinary work?
- What do you think are your biggest strengths and weaknesses, relevant to the position?
- How do you approach equity, diversity and inclusion?

Two final questions will often be asked:

1. *Do you have any questions for us?*
  - You should have a tailored answer to this question prepared for each interview.
  - This should be a genuine question, which doesn't express any negativity, and which shows that you've done your research on the institution.
  - Especially in the US: this should ideally highlight a potentially positive aspect of your fit for the post. For example: "I heard that you do X amazing thing here. Can I get involved?" In the UK: if you adopt this strategy, you need to be subtle about it.
  - Whatever you ask: remember that you can ask problematic or difficult questions later during negotiation, after you have been offered a post, e.g. how often you need to be on campus.
2. *If you were offered the job, would you take it?*

Barring extremely exceptional circumstances, you should always say yes. This is non-binding and you can always change your mind later during negotiation.

Interview panellists have a range of idiosyncratic backgrounds and concerns and they will vary in their experience and knowledge hosting interviews. *In all*



cases, remain calm and courteous, clarify the question as necessary, and answer the question as well as you can.

*If you are being aggressively challenged* about your research, courteously stand your ground, unless you have been given a reason to change your mind—in which case, tell them that you've done so. Vociferous disagreement is often a sign of philosophical engagement and intensity may vary. Try to ignore the affect of the questioner and focus directly on the substance of their question.

*If you are being asked about something beyond your expertise*, be honest about your limitations and find a way to move the conversation back to firmer ground. Be explicit if you attempt to shift the focus. For example, you might say: "I'm not familiar with X part of your institution, but I have experience working collaboratively with researchers in other disciplines including..."

*Illegal questions.* Some questions are not only inappropriate, but illegal. While this shouldn't happen, it does. In the UK, these include questions concerning any protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act. It is, for some examples, illegal for UK employers to ask questions pertaining to race, age, gender, caring responsibilities, or disabilities. In any such cases, you can calmly assert your right not to answer the question.

General interview tips:

- Practice, practice, practice tailored answers to typical questions. Out loud, in front of others.
- Get comfortable speaking positively about yourself and your accomplishments.
- Take a beat to process each question and let the questioner feel heard. Ensure that you understand the question, repeating it back if necessary.
- Be clear and concise. Don't ramble.
- Whenever possible, give concrete and specific examples, avoiding vague generalities.
- Speak at a steady, measured pace. Take a deep breath if you find yourself going too fast.
- Be yourself, but also be the best version of yourself—be kind, collegial, clear, and positive. You don't want to be affected or robotic, but you also don't want to let it *all* hang out.



- Dress and speak professionally and appropriately.
- Be equally courteous and respectful to everyone in attendance.
- You probably can't accurately tell how well the interview is going (or went)—not least because this is comparative to other interviews you can't access. Stay confident.
- If you are unsuccessful, ask for any feedback and learn from it.