

The Stages of the Search and Interview Process

This guide will walk you through the stages of the interview process for a variety of post-graduation academic and non-academic careers.

1: Before You Apply

- First, you must begin by narrowing down your career interests, which can only be done by asking yourself some difficult questions.
- Do you want to work on something similar or different?
- If you work on a specific topic, do you want to expand your knowledge or continue to work on the same topic?
- In the Sciences and Engineering, ask yourself if you want to continue doing laboratory, research, and project work, or would you prefer to move to related work, such as “big data”?
- Are you planning to stay in academia, as either faculty or a staff member? What is it about academic work that attracts you?
- Once you have an idea, start working on a focused job search, and track all your applications in a spreadsheet, journal, or other format.

2: The Application

- Application materials will generally include a resume, a cover letter or letter of interest, a selection of references, and sometimes additional question responses, an exam, or a certification requirement.
- Other positions will require a CV, primarily in certain research, university staff, and clinical fields.
- Have your materials reviewed by another person in order to catch small errors that you may pass over, as people typically interpret their own writing with the correct language and intent.
- Revise these materials for each position you apply for. It is often helpful to have a “master” resume and CV with all your information, then you can cut-and-paste to tailor it for a given position.
- In the public sector the process begins at local, state, or federal job sites, which often have quite complex and specific requirements. If you are applying for one of those positions, be sure to review the process steps thoroughly.
- See section 7 for more details about how applications can vary by industry.

3: Pre-Interview

- Increasingly, many businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies begin the interview process with a brief phone interview, then a follow-up interview in person.
- Some organizations, especially in certain engineering or scientific disciplines, will use a task-based interview in lieu of, or in addition to, the standard interview.
- Get your professional clothes cleaned and be aware of the dress standards of the organization. Even for an informal workplace, they often expect a level of formality in the interview.
- Be sure to sleep well the night before and get up well before your interview to get ready.
- Gather information--learn about what to expect by examining the organization’s website, especially sections regarding their history, about section, or mission statement. This gives you a feel for how the organization sees itself and can offer clues to the people they are looking for.
- Remember that organizations want people with more than just the technical skills they asked for—they want people who can work with who they already have.

4: Interview Overview

- It is important to be mindful of the non-question aspects of the meeting.
- In phone interviews, it can be challenging because you cannot react to body language and expressions or benefit from friendly gestures and expressions, unless it is a video call.
- Take advantage of the format to have a small set of notes, as well as a notepad to jot down thoughts.
- Talk in a calm, measured manner, because on the phone interviewers will be quick to notice nervous speech.
- Also give longer pauses than you would in person, so that interviewers have the verbal space to ask new questions, seek clarification, or respond.
- In-person interviews, on the other hand, have their own set of challenges, and they begin once you are in the office. Be sure to greet whoever is at the front desk, as well as others that say hello.
- Ensure that you greet the interviewers properly, with a handshake and greeting. Try and keep note of their name and title if they mention those as well.
- Be sure to make eye contact, and be mindful of your body language, including hand gestures.
- In interviews with multiple interviewers, it helps to turn slightly and respond to each interviewer, especially if they asked you a question. Avoid only talking to the primary interviewer—people can tell when they feel left out from the conversation.
- Be careful to avoid discussing benefits and salary unless the interviewers discuss it with you.

5: Interview Questions

- Some people recommend looking for specific questions and preparing those; look for questions in your field, but also prepare broadly.
- As you look for questions, don't be afraid to ask colleagues, faculty advisors, or people in the industry (usually via LinkedIn or your alumni network) to help you prepare.
- Please see our other guide to faculty interview for further information, including lists of potential questions.
- Think through scenarios and moments in your academic/professional career that demonstrate certain experiences, strengths, or skills you have. As a graduate student, you develop content knowledge, but be mindful of the skills that you are also learning, whether those are interpersonal, budgeting, project management, team collaboration, or something similar.
- For example, many organizations will ask you a question about how you organize your time and meet deadlines. But they don't all ask it the same way.
- In this case, think about a story showing your organizational method—perhaps it was an experiment under a tight timeline, or an internship where you had to put together a project, or even the deadlines you set for yourself to complete dissertation chapters.
- Planning specific stories is useful because they can be used to answer related questions as well, if you utilize the story in a slightly different way.
- A potential pitfall of interviewing is focusing too hard on telling, not showing. Interviewers want to see examples because they analyze the way the story is told, the way you handled the issue, what you perceived to be the issue, etc.

6: Afterwards



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- It is helpful to send a thank-you note later that day or the next. Sometimes people deliver these or leave them at the front desk, but emails are also acceptable.
- In addition, you should reflect on the interview. If it would be beneficial, we are able to help with that process at Graduate Support; otherwise we recommend jotting down your impressions from the interview, what went well, what questions they asked, and what you could improve.
- A week or two after the interview, you will hopefully get another message, offering you the position.
- Here you have the chance to discuss terms, benefits, and salary with the employer—remain flexible, and consider the money relative to other circumstances, such as commute, housing, moving, etc.
- Remember that there will be a set of onboarding procedures which include more forms, trainings, and perhaps meetings before you officially start.

7: Additional Considerations by Career

Faculty

- If you are applying for a faculty position, make sure you understand the teaching, research, and administrative demands of the position.
- Consider how your time will be divided and the expected teaching load. Think about how you will address questions aimed at this issue.
- Depending on whether the position is tenure-track, visiting, or adjunct, the expectations and demands of your time can vary significantly.
- Practice your interview talk several times before your interview and be aware of your audience (often made up of graduate students and professors, maybe some undergraduates).
- Be prepared to meet with graduate students and discuss how you will address their concerns and/or add to the department.
- A crucial part of the interview process is often a research talk, otherwise known as a “job talk” or “chalk talk” depending on the discipline. There, professors and graduate students listen to your current research, grants and funding, and related materials. From here, they ask questions and make recommendations based on your ability to conduct novel research, obtain funding, and contribute to reaching the department goals.
- If you are applying to a faculty position that involves leading a research group or institute, make sure you develop a research strategy and funding acquisition plan.

For-Profit

- For these positions, you may be contacted first by a recruiter, especially if you have a well-developed LinkedIn profile or other job site profile. They are outside firms/agents who look for suitable candidates for large businesses.
- Be aware that in private industry there is more variation with application and interview requirements.
- For instance, some industries (esp. in technical and engineering disciplines) will include a problem-or-task-based interview, where you are provided an issue and asked to walk through a potential solution to the issue.
- These are designed so they can see how you think and solve problems—there typically won't be a single right answer to them.
- Some private businesses will ask why you are moving from academia into their industry; have a response for this question before you enter the interview.



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Government

- If you are planning to work at a Federal government agency; be mindful of the procedures of USAJobs or the international regulations you will be working under, as well as the standards of the particular agency.
- Most Federal agencies use a system of competitive civil service, though a handful, including the FBI and Library of Congress, are exempted and set their own criteria.
- State and local governments have their own hiring sites and portals, so you will have to search them individually.
- Be prepared to produce any necessary legal documents; locate them far in advance, especially if you will be engaging with any citizenship, security clearance, certification, or similar issues.
- Stay in contact with the designated individual as these positions often require more materials than academic or private industry jobs. The interview process may take longer as well, due to the pace of budgeting, HR and hiring practices at many agencies.
- Be aware of the opportunities for current and newly graduated students, including the Recent Graduates Program and the Presidential Management Fellow Program.

Nonprofit

- A distinguishing feature of most nonprofit interviews is a focus on values-based questions; be mindful and aware of the values and mission of the organization beforehand.
- Understand the programs/services they offer, and their target populations or issues they address.
- Passion is a more significant part of nonprofit work, but excessive or overly emotional passion can come off negatively; be thoughtful and restrained.
- If you are coming from academia or for-profit spaces, understand how your work and skills translate to the nonprofit world.
- Group interviews are common in nonprofits, as collaboration and team building are highly regarded in this space.