



HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

Frequently Asked Questions about the Job Market (#4)

When will Practice interviews be held?

- Practice Interviews (1/2 hour) will be scheduled for **December 2 and 3**. Interviews will be 30 minutes, with about 20-25 minutes for the interview and 5-10 for a critical assessment by the interviewers (our novel addition to the usual interview).

Will practice interviews make me more competitive?

- Yes. You must be prepared with a great presentation and superb interview skills. Keep smiling. Be engaged. Look your listeners in the eye. Relax. Be confident (but not arrogant). The interviews are a great way to meet lots of nice, intelligent people. Each of you has an interesting job market paper. This is your moment to “strut your stuff” – do it with polish and intelligence. The practice interviews will be similar to the real ones. Work on your 2-3 and 5-6 minute “spiels” and keep practicing them *over and over and over again*. Do them *out loud* even if no one is listening. Go over your paper(s). Keep asking yourself the really difficult questions. Be your own worst enemy. If you won’t, someone else will.

I’ve finished my job market paper, mailed my packets, and assembled a dazzling wardrobe. I guess I’m ready for the job market and can go to the Caribbean for the next four weeks.

- Go at your own peril unless you want a job at the University of West Indies. You’ll need more than just your job market paper when you talk turkey to places in Philadelphia and at fly-out time. You’ll need to show that you will finish your dissertation by June or sometime during the summer. You may need to demonstrate that you have given some thought to a research agenda.

When will I start hearing about interviews?

- Your packets have arrived at their destination and they need to be read and judged by a committee. A few places will e-mail or call you the first week of December to schedule interviews. But most will do this during the second and third weeks of December. All the more reason *not* to head off to Aruba.

What if you schedule one place and another place calls (perhaps higher priority) that has only that slot available? What happens if your final schedule looks too tight for a particular day?

- By all means try to reschedule an interview or two. In anticipation of scheduling problems, arrange some interviews on off days, such as Sunday or Thursday afternoon, if you can.

What if you accept an interview but later decide that you don’t want (need) it?

- Cancel it as soon as you can. Don’t worry about offending anyone. No one wants to interview someone who has absolutely no intention of ever setting eyes on the place in question. All places that are interviewing have just about the same time constraints that you have. If you are not interested, by all means give up the spot.

What if I don’t get enough interviews?

- If you don’t have at least 6 interviews scheduled by the second week of December, tell us and your advisors. A few well-placed calls at that critical moment can do wonders.

What happens during an interview?

- Interviews usually begin with the comment/request: “Tell me about your work.” You will then have at most 2-3 minutes of uninterrupted time to tell the group (anywhere from 2 to 5 faculty) about your dissertation and job market paper. You should prepare a 2-3 minute version of your summary and also a longer version (about 5-6 minutes). The 5-6 minute version will include many of the details that you will be led into by the interviewers (who will interrupt). If you prepare the longer version, you will have cogent answers to many of the questions

you will be asked. The most important advice you can be given regarding the interview is “practice, practice, and then practice again.” Give the interview to your friends, your cat, your dog, even to the wall.

How should I begin my summary?

- There are many ways of beginning your summary statement. A few possibilities include:
 - (1) Begin with a sentence about the general subject matter of your paper. “My dissertation concerns various aspects of search theory” or “My general field is American economic history.”
 - (2) Begin with a one sentence “hook” into the central question of your job market paper. “Sharecropping is ubiquitous, but what can explain why shares vary across countries but generally not within countries over time?” “Corruption is rampant in many countries, but what is its impact on the economy?” “The number of languages spoken by the world’s people declined by 50% in the past century, why did that occur?”

Where do I go from there?

- Then state the issue your job market paper addresses or the question(s) you pose. Next briefly summarize the methodology, data sources, results, and so on. Do not mention superfluous, tangential subjects that will transport your interviewers to another galaxy or create a major combat zone in a hotel room. Don’t get involved in a literature review that will glaze all eyes. Make your presentation as clear as you can. Make it accessible and interesting to any economist. Be animated about your own work. If you aren’t excited, why should any one else be?

Because I’ll be giving my talk many times, I’ve decided to change it every few hours during the meetings so I don’t get bored.

- Dumb and dumber. Remember that even though you have heard your own presentation at least 100 times, your interviewers have not yet heard it once. An actor plays that same role every night (twice a day if there is a matinee). The role must be new and exciting every time. Yours must be as well. But do not radically change your summary to make it more interesting to yourself. Stick with the best one you have. Romeo must have gotten a bit bored with his lines, but he didn’t change them to bid farewell his own way. Hamlet did not decide to be part of a musical comedy.

What other questions might I be asked?

- Other questions will be asked at the interview, but the most important is a variant of “What are you working on?” and all of the related questions concerning your research. Additional questions include: “What other essays have you completed for your dissertation,” “What courses would you like to teach,” and “What is your research agenda for the next several years.” If there is any time at the end, you might be asked: “Do you have any questions for us?” It is always good to think about an answer to that question. It can be the one we generally get: “Harvard is so well-known, that I do not.” But it should not be something like, “I see you have a workshop in Macro, do you also have a Labor workshop?”

How long are interviews, and what will I be able to know in advance?

- Interviews generally last for 30 minutes but can be 45 minutes or more. You will know the length in advance and thus can schedule interviews efficiently. You can ask for the names of the interviewers, although all may not be known at the time of scheduling. The person setting up the interview should provide you with the name of the hotel and the name under which the room is listed *and/or* will give you the disclosure code that you must have to obtain the room name and hotel when you are in San Diego. Disclosure code booths will also be set up in both the Marriott (*Marriott Hall Foyer*) and Hyatt (*Douglas Pavilion D*). If employers have registered online, you can also log-on to the website for code information <https://conf.aeaweb.org/employers/codes.php>

What is the Harvard Suite and how do I find out where it is?

- We will try to arrange a suite in the host hotel, Philadelphia Marriott Downtown Hotel. Once the room number has been confirmed, Brenda will send out an e-mail. The room will be stocked with food and beverages and provides a great place to unwind upon arrival and throughout your interviews.

*With thanks to Claudia Goldin for allowing us to update this memo from those used in previous years.