

ESA's two-part Webinar on Interviewing Skills: Executive Summary

Prepared by ESA's Early Career Professionals Committee

General interviewing advice

Before the interview

- **Be prepared and do your homework.** Read up on the department/company/unit, your interviewers, and anyone else that you expect to speak with during the interview. Think of potential research collaborations with those you will be meeting with during the interview.
- **Stay on message.** Decide what message you want to send (your successes/strengths, your expertise, your vision for the position) and stick to it. Think about what questions your interviewers are likely to ask and have clear, concise answers at hand (don't ramble). Target those answers (and your seminar, if applicable) to that message, and be sure to pause for questions.
- **Summarize yourself in numbers.** Make a list of quick stats that describe your achievements (e.g. how many papers you've published, how much grant money you've received, how many talks you've given) and memorize them for quick recall.
- **Who's interviewing who?** Prepare questions for your interviewers and bring them with you. Remember, they're not just interviewing you; you're also interviewing them. Also, they're going to ask you if you have questions, and it's good to have some on-hand.
- **Practice** answering questions with a friend or better yet, someone in the field where you'll be interviewing. Also, prepare diplomatic answers to uncomfortable questions (such as questions about an employment gap), to prevent being caught off guard.
- **Reread** the job description and your application materials before the interview so they're fresh on your mind.
- **Have specific examples** on hand demonstrating your technical, problem solving, team working, and other relevant skills. You may be asked the same question by different interviewers, so it's good to have multiple examples.

During the interview

- **For phone/online interviews:**
 - Be sure to select a quiet area without any distracting visuals. Be sure to check behind you (check to see what the camera can see) and remove anything that might distract from the focus being on you.
 - It's okay to refer to notes if needed, and to ask that questions be repeated if necessary. You should also anticipate that the search committee will be writing down your answers.
 - At the end, you will be asked if you have any questions--make sure that you do have questions, because this shows interest in the position.
- **Dress appropriately for the interview (use the iron in your hotel room!).**
- **Careful what you say:** the interview may start as early as your arriving flight. Remember that the person sitting next to you on the plane could be connected to the institution with which you're interviewing (or might even be an interviewer!).

- **Science is storytelling:** be sure to know your research story and be able to relate it to different audiences.
- **Answer questions clearly and confidently,** while giving specific examples to support your claims.
- **You are demonstrating fit** the whole time; are you someone they want to work with, are you doing activities that they want someone in this position to do?
- **Limit any alcohol intake:** you don't want to start behaving in a way that will sabotage your interview.
- **Seminar:** make a case as to why you should be selected for the job. The seminar should be telling a story and be understood by a broad audience, with specific examples of your detailed research experience. Practice(!) beforehand in front of different types of people and always bring backups of your seminar.

After the interview

- Be sure to follow-up and **send a thank you note** to the organizers of your trip and the search committee that hosted you during your visit. If there is someone who had an outstanding interaction with you, follow-up with them personally.
- Be positive and expect that you may not hear anything back.

Specific advice for...

Academia

- Study the agenda for your trip: who are you meeting with, what are their research interests, when are things positioned relative to your seminar?
- Interviews often last multiple days, sometimes as long as a week, depending on whether it is at a far-flung research and extension center -- pack accordingly and be ready to "be on" the entire time except in your hotel room.

Non-traditional entomological careers

- For extension talks, be sure to give concrete examples to demonstrate how you engage with the public currently, and plan to engage them should you win this position.
- For regional comprehensive universities and small liberal arts colleges: you need to sell yourself as an outstanding teacher of more general biology fields rather than entomology (e.g. ecology, physiology, genetics, molecular, etc.).
- If applicable, demonstrate how you will tie in undergrad research into your program and have examples class curricula (or at least have thought about possible curricula beforehand) for your courses.

Industry

- Familiarize yourself with the company's mission statement. How does the position fit into this mission?
- Highlight team experiences with specific examples; show that you can be a team leader as well as a team member.

- Demonstrate to the company that you're flexible and can work on any project to which you are assigned--demonstrate knowledge in "adjacent spaces" other than your main research focus.
- Understand behavioral interview strategies (Google the "STAR technique").
- Show that you have a broad understanding of issues facing industry.

Government

- Learn some of the common acronyms that are thrown around in government, which commonly include SY (translation: full-time research scientist with own lab), RL (research leader--head of the unit), PSA (program support administrator or secretary), CD (center director), AO (administrative officer), etc.
- ARS is a research institution -- highlight your research experience and expertise first and foremost, and how that knowledge transfers to stakeholders.
- Understand whether the center is affiliated with a university, and understand what your responsibilities may be as an adjunct professor in that department.
- Every research unit is unique--get a feel for how it is structured. What financial shape is it in, how are budget allocations made, and how do you fit in with it?
- ARS positions usually come with technicians, so an important question to ask: is one already available to start in your lab, or will you get to hire your own?
- How far along is the unit in their project plan? Every unit has a 5-year project plan--will you be committed to existing milestones, is there an opportunity to add your own milestones in, or is your area of research already dictated?

And try to be as relaxed as possible and smile!