



# **GRADUATE STUDENT INTERVIEW PREPARATION RESOURCES BOOKLET**

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## GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This section consists of general interview questions that are typically used to help candidates settle their nerves, help interviewers learn more about their transferrable skills, and start the conversation.

- Tell us a little about yourself.
  - Tips: If you have heard of an elevator pitch, this is an example of when you can use one. You want to keep this brief and focused, about 1-2 minutes.
- What strengths would you bring to the position?
  - Tips: Focus on personal strengths that are transferrable to the position (organized, outgoing, etc.) and academic strengths (strong content knowledge, passionate about area of expertise, extensive research experience, etc.). Provide examples with each strength to help the committee see how your strengths can strengthen the team.
- What weaknesses do you have that you need to work on?
  - Tips: This is one of the most notorious interview questions because you want to make a good impression and pointing out a weakness can seem counterintuitive. When answering this question, you want to stop and reflect on what the interviewer is asking. No one is expecting you to be perfect, so interviewers are looking for your level of self-awareness, authenticity, and if you can exhibit how
- Why are you interested in this position and this university?
- Describe some specific constructive feedback you have received from a supervisor and what steps you took to improve.
- What do you think it was about you and your experience that got you selected for a GTA or GRA position?
- How do you handle pressure that may come from the position you are applying for?
- What past life, school, or work experience do you have that would assist you with this position?
- What can you offer us that someone else cannot?

## TEACHING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What courses would you be interested in teaching in our curriculum?
  - Tip: When researching, familiarize yourself with the undergraduate and graduate curriculum to prepare for this question.
- What type of instructional environment do you think you develop in your classroom?
- How do you encourage students to actively engage in the learning process?
- How do you create an emotionally safe learning environment in your class?
- How do you see diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) fitting into your instruction?
- What types of assessment do you utilize in your courses?
- In this field, what skills, knowledge, and attitudes do you think a graduate of this program would need to be successful?
- How do you use student assessment in the instructional process and what kinds of assessments do you use in your classes?
- What kinds of professional development to enhance your teaching have you engaged in?
- What kinds of instructional technology are you comfortable with? Provide some examples of how you use instructional technology in your courses.
- Do you consider yourself a good teacher? Why?
- Tell me about a time when a student became disruptive in the classroom and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time that a discussion in your class became controversial and/or emotional. How did you handle it?
- Describe some specific constructive feedback you've received from students and what steps you took to improve.
- What have you learned about yourself from the teaching experience you've had so far?

- The faculty member in this position will be asked to advise and mentor graduate students in their thesis/dissertation research. Please describe your experiences related to these advising and mentoring roles.
- What is your approach to teaching \_\_\_\_\_?
  - Tips: Plan for answering for teaching basic service/survey courses in your field.
  - Any of the courses on your C.V. that you say you can teach.
  - Many committees will want to know which specific books you would use:
    - This may be an indirect way of ascertaining whether you already have the course ready to go.
    - Do you know what the latest/cutting edge texts are?
    - Be prepared to have a diplomatic conversation if some of the committee members like the text, as well as those that do not.
  - Be prepared to talk about several courses, after having sized up the institution's needs.
  - Do your homework to anticipate what the department needs.
  - Be ready to talk in detail about an innovative course or two that you think the Department might really go for, such as something new and within your expertise.
- How do you motivate students?
- How would you encourage students to apply to our programs?
- In your first semester you would be responsible for our course in \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., Introduction to Student Affairs, Impact of College on Students, Research Methods, etc.). How would you structure it? What textbooks would you use?
- Many of our students are probably (less academically talented; working full-time) than those you have become used to at your institution. How successful would you be with working with them?
- What is your teaching philosophy?
  - Tip: Consider the type of institution and curriculum when answering this question as your answer might be different for the small liberal arts college, state regional university with a heavy service teaching load, or a graduate-degree granting institution.
- If you could teach any course, what would it be and why?
- Have you had any experience with the case study teaching method?
- What do you think is the optimal balance between teaching and research?

- Have you had any experience with distance/online learning? If so, please explain.
- We offer opportunities to teach undergraduate courses. Would you approach it differently from graduate course? In what ways?
- Have you supervised graduate students or research projects or taught specialized skills?

## RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What are your overall research interests?
  - Tips: Have a 1–2-minute elevator speech. Be brief, focused, and provide examples from your experience.
  - Examples of how you could start your respond include:
    - My overall research aims to.....
    - I have 2 lines of research which include.....
- Why did you choose your research topic?
- Why is your line of research (or dissertation) important to your field?
- How is your research theoretically grounded? How does this theory help you answer your big research questions?
- Tell us about your dissertation research. What are you doing? What have you found?
  - Tip: Be critical of your dissertation research. What are the strengths of it, and what are the limitations of it?
  - Also, have multiple answers to this question prepared as you may need to tweak your response based on your audience, such as search committee members unfamiliar with your area of research.
- What do you hope to find when your dissertation is over? Why is that important?
- How will you have contributed new knowledge to the literature at the end of your dissertation?
- If you were to begin again, are there any changes you would make in your dissertation?
- What manuscripts do you think will come out of your dissertation?
- Once you graduate, what are your 1 year, 3 year, and 5 year goals for your research agenda?

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- What experience do you have with grant writing?
  - Do you see your work as fundable? If yes, what kinds of funding mechanisms would you look at?
  - In doing your research, why didn't you \_\_\_\_\_?
    - Tip: This blank could be filled with anything from taking a different approach or using a different framework. Do not take this question personally as the goal with this question is to understand how you respond to an intellectual challenge to your work.
  - What are your plans for applying for external funding over the next few years?
  - How do you think that your research is relevant to professional practice and policy?
  - How do you see diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) fitting into your research?
  - Have you had any experience working in multi-disciplinary research teams? If so, tell us a little bit about that experience.
  - Why did you decide to job search at this time given that your dissertation is still in progress?
  - You've completed significant research with your faculty advisor. How much and in what ways did you contribute to this research?
  - How do you see your research fitting in with the department?
  - How would you involve undergraduates in your research?

## SERVICE & OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Can you summarize the contribution you would make to our department?
- Are you willing to become involved in committee work? Which types of committees interest you the most?
- Why are you interested in our type of department/institution?
- What institutional issues particularly interest you?

## QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWERS

Remember that the interview is not only the employer's opportunity to learn about you, the candidate. It is your chance to learn about the employer and position to help you make sure this is the position for you. Asking follow-up questions and preparing questions for the interviewer are a great way to learn more.

- What do you like best about the students at [Institution Name]?
- In what direction do you expect the department to move in the next five years?
- I hear the organization/program/department/College is revising its structure (or getting a new dean, etc.). How will this impact the department/program?
- How is teaching evaluated?
- How are graduate students funded in this department?
- What constitutes service in this department? In this school?
  - Follow-up: How much service is expected of junior faculty members?
- Could you tell me more about the tenure requirements at this institution?
- What resources do you provide for new faculty (both professional and personal) to help them transition to this new community?
- What are general expectations for new faculty?



## ZOOM & PHONE INTERVIEW TIPS & RESOURCES

- Some institutions are holding what would typically be considered an “on-campus” interview via Zoom, so make sure you understand the schedule and expectations beforehand.
- Prior to the interview, ask who will be on the call/meeting, so you can research their backgrounds. It will help with focus and to know how many people may be on the call. Also, consider preparing personalized questions for each interviewer.
- Background: Have a neutral background so as not to distract from the interview discussion.
- Consider doing a mock interview via Zoom or phone to give you more experience on the platform and gather feedback about how you come across on the given platform.
- Check your video, sound, lighting, and internet quality for reliability and have a plan B just in case something happens.
- When using your camera, position it so that you are making eye contact with your interviewers. Consider propping your laptop on a box or some books so that instead of looking down on your interviewer, you are looking equally at them. You want the camera to be roughly at your eye line or slightly higher, so you are not looking down on your interviewers.
- If you are using notes during the interview, consider organizing the layout beforehand and practice using them, so you know exactly where to find what you need when you need it. Also, notes are that...key ideas, figures, etc. Writing out full responses to questions could lead you to reading off a paper and interviewers are going to pick up on that. Remember that an interview is a conversation, so do not let the use of notes negatively impact the flow of conversation.
- Send your thank you note — or any follow-up questions — within 1-2 business days after the interview.

**ADVICE FROM EHE FACULTY**

- Approach an interview as a series of conversations rather than a constant round of questions.
- Frame your questions about how you're a good fit for the work rather than focusing solely on personality.
- Prior to applying, take an inventory of what you are looking for in a job. For example, what type of institution would you prefer to work for (research, liberal arts, etc.), what are your priorities?
- If you are not given much time to research the institution, program, etc. before your interview, consider these preparation strategies:
  - Try to find some friends, colleagues, faculty, staff, etc. to hold a mock interview with you. This can help you identify how much you are able to improvise on the spot and the areas that you should focus on if you have the time.
  - Have your research presentation prepared beforehand, so you don't have to create one from scratch and can focus on other aspects of preparation.
- Understand the difference between being thorough with your responses and being too wordy. Try to be succinct and focused with your responses while getting your point across. This can be perfected through practice and mock interviews.
- If an institution responds to you quickly after applying and requests an interview with short notice, this is a good sign. Positions are competitive, and they don't want to miss out on what could bring to the position.
- When you are invited to an interview, you are considered one of the best, so remember it is a two-way street. You may be anxious but remember they asked you to be here, and the interviewers are trying to sell their institution as a place you want to be.
- If asked to give a presentation, demonstration, and/or teach a topic, consider the following:
  - Consider having your research presentation prepared as you are applying since it stays relatively the same for most interviews. When you are asked for an interview, you only have to make small adjustments to fit the audience/position and will have more time to focus on other aspects of interview preparation.

- Prior to the event, request information that will help you prepare, such as who will the audience be, how many people, what is their level of knowledge on the topic, technology you will have access to, etc.
  - Consider how you can engage the audience and have them interact with the topic, so you can grab and keep their attention.
  - If someone asks you a question about your research that you do not know the answer to or do not understand what they are asking, it is okay to ask them to restate. If you don't know how to respond, it is okay to say that is a great question, you would be happy to chat with them after the presentation more. This is not a reflection of your overall performance, so don't let it throw you.
- Use your resources! Ask peers, colleagues, mentors, and faculty in your program for assistance. Can they help you with a mock interview? Do they have materials from their interviews you can review?

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

- **Career Counseling and Support Services (CCSS)**: provides relevant, on and off campus, career resources to assist graduate, professional students, and post docs in their career decision making processes.
- **EHE Graduate Student Interdisciplinary Research Initiative (GSIRI)**: offers graduate students an opportunity to collaborate in interdisciplinary research.
- **AERA Doctoral Student Cohort Program**: offers OSU EHE full-time doctoral students who will be joining AERA for the first time and any doctoral students who have not yet been AERA members a reduced dues rate.
- **University Institute for Teaching and Learning (UITL)**: hosts workshops, seminars, events, and trainings on a variety of topics throughout the semester to enhance your teaching skills.
- **The Research Commons**: hosts events, workshops, presentations, and seminars are offered throughout the year on topics including planning research, grant writing, IRB submissions, and publishing.
- **Council of Graduate Students (CGS)**: provides graduate students funding and programming opportunities to enhance personal and professional development.
- **Preparing Future Faculty Program**: connects graduate students who are one or two years away from graduating with faculty mentors at partner institutions to learn more about being a faculty member at a liberal arts or small institution.

- **Versatile PhD:** offers an online support community of PhDs for those exploring non-academic career opportunities. Get access to examples of successful resumes and cover letters. Participation can be completely confidential.
- **Diversity, Intercultural and Community Engagement (DICE) Certificate Program:** engages students in co-curricular involvement, training and experiential learning opportunities focused on diversity, social justice, service, and leadership. Upon completion of the program, students will receive a certificate to verify their experiences and training to employers.
- **National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity (NCFDD):** is a nationally recognized independent faculty development center dedicated to supporting academics in making successful transitions throughout their careers. As an institutional member, OSU faculty, postdoctoral researchers, and graduate students have access to a free institutional membership and variety of resources including: dissertation success curriculum for graduate students, webinars, weekly motivators, writing challenges, and more.
- **Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML):** Students who currently have an Ohio address, can register for a library card, and use the CML resources. The library offers many resources, particularly Lynda.com for working on/developing a variety of skills, such as Microsoft products, coding, photography, resume writing, learning an instrument, improving presentation skills, etc.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- *The Academic Job Search Handbook* by Julia Miller Vick, Jennifer S. Furlong
- *The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job* by Karen Kelsky
- *Beginning a Career in Academia: A Guide for Graduate Students of Color*, edited by Dwayne A. Mack, Elwood Watson, Michelle Madsen Camacho
- *The Complete Academic: A Career Guide*, edited by John M. Darley, Henry L. Roediger III, Mark P. Zanna

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

- **Inside Higher Ed:** provides a variety of interview advice columns

- [“Five Tips to Guide PhDs in Preparing to Pass Their First Industry Interview,” The Cheeky Scientist](#)
- [“8 PhD Job Interview Questions: What they ask vs. what they mean,”](#) Genius Lab Gear
- [The Professor is In Blog](#)
- [HigherEdJobs](#): source for jobs and career information in academia, including job postings, news, and job search resources.
- [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#): higher education journal providing higher education news, tools, career opportunities, and knowledge sharing.
- **Cost of Living Calculators:** Cost of living refers to the amount of money needed to cover basic expenses such as housing, food, utilities, and healthcare in a certain place. Before applying for a position, it is a good idea to have a basic understanding of the cost of living in the area, so you know if the salary for the position aligns with your priorities. The cost of living variations can be significant depending on the locations you are comparing and can change quickly over time. While cost of living calculators vary, here are some examples to help you learn more about the cost of living in your location of interest.
  - [CNN Cost of Living Calculator](#)
  - [Bankrate Cost of Living Calculator](#)
  - [City Rating](#)
  - [Salary.com Cost of Living Calculator](#)
  - [Cost of Living Calculator](#)
  - [Department of Labor Salary Surveys](#)
  - [Glassdoor](#)
  - [NACE Salary Calculator](#)
  - [NerdWallet Cost of Living Calculator](#)
  - [Salary.com](#)