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Skype or phone interviews:
a guide from experienced job-seekers

Your goal: You want to appear vibrant and interesting, willing and able, as well as flexible and easy to work with.

1. Timing:

- a. Give yourself plenty of time to set up and get situated. If you feel anxious, walk around a bit or practice breathing exercises to relax.
- b. If possible, try to be one of the last people interviewed. It gives you more time to prepare and you will be the person they remember most in deliberations.

2. Know whom you are talking to:

a. You should find out who is on the call and how long they expect it to be.

b. Then you need to research that person as well as the department and the college so that you can answer with knowledge and in a way that positions you for the job. You should also know the backgrounds of those on the call.

c. You need to know what kind of institution you are interviewing for:

- Is it a research 1 university where your research and publishing is going to be very important or is it more of a teaching school where they will be more interested in what classes you can carry?
- Does the department have a grad program or will you be teaching undergrads? If undergraduate, is it two year or four year?
- What degrees and/or certificates are offered?

d. Sometimes the people on the call change, as some folks become unavailable and others step in.

3. Control your environment: If it's Skype or some other audio+visual technology, pay attention to your environment:

- a. Minimize noise.
- b. Create a well-lit, professional-looking visual situation.
- c. Dress in an appropriate professional manner.
- d. If you are on a telephone, you can have your notes spread out around you, provided you don't make noise by rustling papers.
- e. If you are on Skype, minimize the papers in front of you because you will be tempted to look down at the papers rather than into the screen.
- f. If you can do so without creating a distraction, write down the questions so you can refer to them as you respond.

4. Control your technology:

- a. ***TEST everything ahead of time.*** Don't be ambushed by technology failures.
- b. Place your screen so that you are looking horizontally into the camera, not down at it. No one looks good with a double chin.
- c. Don't sit in a bouncy or rolling chair – you don't want to be weaving and bobbing around like a desperate prize fighter.

5. Getting started: Always say something at the beginning like:

Good to meet you all. I appreciate this opportunity and I understand we have limited time so I am going to try to keep my answers short. If you'd like me to say more, please ask me.

6. Handing questions:

a. Anticipate questions and prepare solid but concise answers. In general, questions are research, teaching or service related, with the emphasis depending on the department and institution.

These sorts of questions are likely to be asked:

- What is your dissertation about?
- What is your teaching philosophy?

NOTE: Your cover letter can come in handy here. Crafting a good cover letter should give you practice in articulating a succinct and interesting overview of your research and your teaching. Of course you don't want to

repeat paragraphs verbatim from your cover letter in the interview, but you want to feel confident that you know your research and your teaching philosophy inside and out, and can readily show the contribution your work makes to others.

- What books might you include on your syllabus for an introductory class on XYZ and why?
- What future projects do you have in mind?
- How do you see yourself transitioning from your current place of employment to our program and university?
- What book has had the most influence on your thinking?

b. Try to be specific in your answers rather than vague.

c. Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.

d. Don't be afraid to pause and think. Don't rush in.

e. It's ok to reframe the question so you can speak to your strengths.

f. It's ok to say you haven't encountered a particular situation and are open to guidance from experienced faculty.

g. Since they are usually on a short time frame for these calls, it's good to acknowledge that in your answers with statements like: "I'm happy to say more if we have the time," or "I'll stop there but would be happy to elaborate."

h. Expect the unexpected. Some questions may seem to come out of left field. Do your best to be thoughtful and engaged, even if the question seems odd.

i. Show your enthusiasm for your work and for this job. Don't go overboard, but let them see your passion.

j. Don't be too familiar or chummy, but don't be stiff either. Talk to the faculty interviewers as though they were already your colleagues, since that is what you want them to be.

7. Asking your own questions:

- a. Always have 1-3 smart questions for them that demonstrate your knowledge of the job and their program/dept/college, as well as your experience.
- b. A useful structure for one of these questions is, "I see that you offer x, y, z, ... would you a, b, c...?"

- c. Questions about department priorities, plans for changes in curriculum, growth of majors, etc. are always good, especially if you are able to glean information from their website you can use to structure these questions.
- d. Don't ask questions that presume you are going to make the next cut or be selected for the job—i.e., questions about salary, benefits, teaching load, teaching schedule, office space, grant/travel \$, etc. If they bring these up, it's fine but you shouldn't go there unless invited to do so. You will have plenty of time to ask those questions when you get the offer.
- e. A final question can be: "Can you tell me what your process is from here" unless they have answered that already. They usually expect this and will then tell you when they are going to make the next cut. This should not be your first question.

8. **Practice:** Ask your professors and colleagues to practice an on-line interview just as you would practice a job talk.

9. **Say thank you!** Always thank them for their time and consideration.

Other sources: the website "The Professor is In" <http://theprofessorisin.com>