

FIRST ROUND FACULTY POSITION INTERVIEWS

Congratulations, you made it to the first round of interviews for a position!

The interview is a screening process to decide who will become a finalist for the position. First round interviews usually take place at conferences, or via Skype or Zoom.

“Professor Is In” Karen Kelsky describes the first-round interview as a way to find out:

- Can you speak engagingly and coherently about your research and plans for publication?
- Can you describe your teaching vision and a class you would like to teach without stumbling, meandering, or lapsing into grandiosity?
- Are you genuinely interested in the position — evidenced by things like your having done homework on the department and asked informed, strategic questions of the interviewers.

The interview usually lasts 20-30 minutes, and consists of a few (4-7 or so) standard questions that are asked of all candidates.

Questions are usually general (e.g. tell us about you, tell us why you think you’re a fit for this position, tell us about your dissertation, tell us about your teaching philosophy, tell us how you’d teach a course in X ...)

When preparing, pay attention to the kind of institution that has invited you for a first round interview (e.g. some are research-focused while others are teaching-focused; some are public while others are private) and tailor your planned responses accordingly

Every question should be used as an opportunity to tell the committee about your experience and credentials, and show your “fit”

Yes, they already read your letter and materials, but tell them again what you wrote and anything else you want to add

You can’t give every detail: in advance, decide key points you want to share for each possible question. Be concise and on point, no digression. Time is short.

Research the committee members and the department. Don’t get caught in nitty gritty details, but know who are the faculty and their general areas of research, what they offer as courses, which existing courses you could teach if they need, and what courses you could add.

Practice questions they might ask and how you can best answer in ways that are concise, describe your credentials, and show your fit

If you're being interviewed over zoom or Skype, make sure you're familiar and comfortable with this technology. Check what's visible in your background and adjust if needed. Check the lighting is good and they can see your face.

Do not speak to them as if they're your dissertation committee. Instead, speak to them as if you're their junior colleague. They're interested in you because your work brings something they don't have or know about, so you're the expert

Be cordial. Be professional

Have a question ready for them. It should be sincere but general and non-controversial. For example, "how exciting that you have this position. How does filling this position fit into where your department sees itself going over the next 3-5 years?"

Send a short note afterwards to thank them for taking time to meet you, and the opportunity to learn more about the work their department does

Based on your performance and the search committee's priorities, you may be selected as a finalist for the position. Finalists usually present a job talk, offer a teaching demonstration, and meet with the search committee, faculty, Dean, and other stakeholders (though there's some variety; the search committee will tell you exactly what they require). These activities usually take place in person (though colleges and universities started doing them over Zoom during the pandemic) over 1-2 days. Beforehand, you need to prepare materials, and try out your job talk and teaching demonstration in advance.

Read more about first round interviews online. E.g. Karen Kelsky, The Professor Is In: First Round Interview Versus the Campus Visit, Chronicle of Higher Education, November 13, 2018

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-professor-is-in-the-first-round-interview-versus-the-campus-visit/>

Michael O'Toole, Interviewing on the Academic Job Market, Grad University of Chicago
<https://grad.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GRADTalk-Academic-Interview-Best-Practices.pdf>