

Job Market Advice
Practice Questions for One-on-One Interviews

Note: this list was originally compiled by Ashley Leeds (Rice University) and Sara Mitchell & Kelly Kadera (University of Iowa). Each year, those who gain interview experience add new questions that we hadn't heard before. We ask those who benefit from the list to pay forward by sending us new questions.

On Your Research:

1. How much of your dissertation is done and when will you finish? Describe your schedule for completing on time.
2. How did you end up writing this dissertation? Why are you interested in this question? What attracted you to this methodology?
3. Why should political scientists study [your dissertation topic]?
4. What is your future research agenda? Where do you see your career in five years? In ten years? What will you have produced? What do you intend to work on generally and what is a specific project that you would like to work on soon?
5. In the process of doing your dissertation research, have you come across any new questions or puzzles that you would like to pursue in the future?
6. If you could model your career after anyone in Political Science, who would you choose? Why?
7. What will your record look like when you go up for tenure? Who do you think would be good tenure letter writers for you?
8. What are your publication intentions? What journals do you think are likely to publish your work? What press will you submit your dissertation to? Why do you think that is the most appropriate choice?
9. What are your intentions for future development of your methodological skills? What skills would you like to develop and how will you go about doing that?
10. What was your role in co-authored work?
11. How does your work relate to [insert major foreign policy issue, e.g., the war in Iraq]?
12. Note: you will get a lot of questions about your dissertation (theoretical, empirical, methodological, etc.) and will be asked how your work relates to other scholars' research on similar topics.

On Your Background:

1. Why did you go to [your doctoral institution and/or undergraduate institution]?
2. Why did you study IR?
3. What attracted you to this methodology?
4. How did your course background prepare you for this research?
5. If you worked on a grant project, you may be asked what your role was on the project, what your responsibilities were, what you learned, etc.
6. Why did you change fields of study (from x to IR)?
7. How much time have you spent in other countries? Is this important for IR scholars?
8. For international students: Do you plan to return to country x in the future?
9. For international students: What insights has living in x given you in your work?
10. What is your opinion on [insert major foreign policy issue, e.g., the war in Iraq]?

On Teaching:

1. What courses are you prepared to teach immediately at the undergraduate level? At the graduate level? What courses do you hope to develop in the future?
2. How would you teach specific courses? What readings would you assign? How would the course be organized?
3. How much would your courses emphasize theory vs. specific facts?
4. Describe to me your teaching experience. How have students related to you?
5. What kind of teacher training have you had?
6. What would you include in the core graduate seminar in your field?
7. How well do you handle big lecture classes?
8. What interactive elements have you integrated into your teaching?
9. Describe a teaching experience that was less successful and what you learned from it.
10. How would students describe your grading style?

On General Discipline Issues:

1. What is your position on various paradigmatic debates?
2. What are the most important and interesting theoretical questions being studied in your field today? What areas of inquiry are on the decline (or rise)?
3. What is the best thing you have read recently? Alternative: what are the 2-3 best books published in your field in the past five years? What is the worst thing you have read recently?
4. What are the best journals in your field and Political Science more broadly? Which of these journals do you plan to publish your work in?
5. How would you divide the study of IR (or any other field)? What are the main divisions and which journals tend to publish research from each area?
6. What are your methodological beliefs? What is the role of pluralism, etc.?
7. What questions would you identify for your future graduate students to write dissertations on?
8. What piece of literature outside of IR do you think has made the most important contribution to knowledge in world politics?
9. If you had to recommend one book that everyone should read (in political science or generally), what would it be and why?
10. What advice would you give someone starting his/her dissertation today?
11. If you could design your own graduate program, what would be its prominent features? What type of identity would your students have externally?
12. Do you think departments need theoretical and epistemological diversity or is specialization better?

On Departmental Issues:

1. What direction do you think the department should move in? What kind of people do you think we should hire in your field in the future?
2. How do you fit in here? How does your work relate to the work being done by other scholars here? What do you add that is new?
3. How would your skills be applied to institute or research center X at this university?
4. Would you be comfortable here working as the only [game-theorist, conflict scholar, etc.]?

General:

1. Questions about lifestyle preferences and hobbies.
2. Questions about specific people from your home institution.
3. Where else are you interviewing?