Typical Academic Interview Questions

These questions have been collected from feedback about real-life academic job interviews. Bear in mind that these are from a range of disciplines and types of job, so not all of these will be suitable for you, but hopefully they will provide some idea of the type of questions you may be asked.

FIT/DEPARTMENT

- Why do you want to work at X University?
- Why do you want to join our department?
- Why do you want this job? Why should we hire you?
- What skills would you bring?
- How would you describe the reputation of X University/this department?
- What support do you expect from an institution like ours?
- Why do you think you would be a good candidate for this role?
- How would you fit with existing activities in our department/university?
- Which groups here would you expect to collaborate with?
- Why do you want to collaborate with them (you need to know something about the scope of their work and may be asked to talk about specific ideas for useful collaboration)
- In what ways other than your subject expertise can you contribute to this Department / School / University? (e.g., public understanding of your area, committee work, graduate programme, running conferences).
- Of the future plans that you’ve listed, what is the single most important thing for you? In other words, during a period when funding is extremely limited, what is the one thing that you would continue?
- How in particular would your career benefit from being here?
- Do you know our campus? From what you know, will you feel at home in it?
- What sort of colleague would you be? What would you bring to the department?
- How would you support the admin needs of the department?

TEACHING

- You will have seen that you have to contribute to course A, how would you structure a version of this course that related to your interests?
- What would you see at the main challenge to teaching the students here at X?
- Tell me about a time when you have had to handle a difficult tutorial dynamic. What was it and how did you handle this?
- Can you give an example for a class/lecture that went well, and what can you do to achieve this?
- What do you see yourself teaching here?
- How do you think your teaching could develop further?
- I see that you were a visiting lecturer at X. You said that you ‘motivated students to participate.’ Can you tell me how you did this?
- What do you find are the main challenges when teaching a large number of students and how do you overcome these?
- Tell me about any collaborative working that you have done whilst teaching. Were then any particular challenges to working collaboratively and how did you overcome these?
- This role has a substantial amount of teaching. How do you plan to manage such a teaching load with publishing?
• If you could teach a completely new course at X what would it be and why?
• What particular challenges have you faced when teaching students at LSE and how did you overcome them?
• How would you contribute to teaching?
• Have you developed any learning materials? [Were they successful?]
• If we asked you to plan an 8-lecture series for first-year undergraduates as part of X course, drawing on your own particular specialism, what would you suggest?
• How would you attract new students to this department / your subject?
• What Masters courses would you like to develop?
• Which other departments would you like to collaborate with for inter-disciplinary course development?
• Have you offered pastoral support to students?
• Do you have any experience teaching students who have learning difficulties?
• What problems have your graduate students presented?
• Are you a successful teacher?
• What areas have you found students in your subject to be weakest in? How do you address their problems?
• How do you cope with underperforming students – give examples
• How do you engage a bored student on the back row of a class of 100?
• Talk us through one of your [proposed] lecture courses
• What have you learnt about yourself from teaching
• What have you learnt about teaching from your students
• What are the most important skills you hope your students will acquire
• What should students learn beyond the material and techniques of their subject?
• Have you supervised graduate students and how did you find this experience?
• What are the differences between teaching undergraduates and teaching graduate students? Between teaching masters students and supervising PhD students?
• How would you go about motivating a research student who was going through a particularly low point in their doctorate?
• Tell me about the mechanics of how you run your classes?
• The students at X won't have studied this type of history before, how will you teach them the appropriate methodological approach?'
• What do you do to get the two students at the back who aren't saying anything to contribute?
• You teaching grade is phenomenal, tell me how you get it. Do you know any education theory about the use of case studies?
• What would you do if you do not have the expert knowledge to the questions asked by the students?
• What innovative teaching would you bring?

RESEARCH

• Tell me about your research/PhD.
• Tell me about your research career to date? (Don't assume everyone has read your CV, and even if they have, this is a way to get you talking)
• What are the key findings of your current research/PhD?
• What is the theoretical contribution of your thesis, or where is it situated in the theory?
• Are you not concerned that the position will affect your writing and finishing your PhD on time?
• What will people be saying about your research in 10 years’ time?
Outline a project you would undertake if you were awarded research funding.

How does your research contribute to the syllabus here?

Why did you choose your research topic?

What has been your main theoretical and empirical contribution to the subject?

What publications have you/do you expect to deliver in the next 12 months/2 years?
  o Conventional routes
  o Creative routes – co-editing a book, conference proceedings

Since your academic background is X field, why do you have plans to publish your research on Y journal? Why is the multidisciplinary perspective important for your research? And how do you define your research expertise in the long run?

Which direction do you see your research going in the future and why?

What publications have you/do you expect to deliver in the next 12 months/2 years?

Which piece of work you have done best shows who you are and what you have to offer?

What did it change about how people approach this field?

What are the big issues in your field?

Which ones will you focus on, and what gives you a competitive edge there?

What research grants are you thinking of applying for? [international, national, local]

What is the overall importance of your next project?

What is the principal benefit of your research to scholarship? To the world beyond scholarship?

What does your current research project leave undone?

Who are your main competitors? What are they doing? How are you confident that you can compete with them?

How would you convince funding body x that they should fund your project rather than the hundreds of others they are considering?

What stage is your book at, does it have a prospective publisher?

Talk us through the timetable of your research / publication plans

What would you say were the most original aspects of your dissertation – in a sentence? And the most important? Why? How would you summarise its importance when describing it to an undergraduate student? Has it thrown up possible final-year or Masters Dissertation topics?

What possible Masters or PhD topics has your project / book thrown up?

How would you intend to secure and sustain constant funding for your research here? (looking for knowledge of the funding infrastructure)

What's been your most important finding and how do you know it is important?

Who would you like to collaborate with?

How do you ensure your findings have impact?

You say you are interested in x but isn't the real question y?

Where do you want to publish and why? Explain your choice of journals.

Do you only want to publish in development journals?

ENTERPRISE/OUTSIDE ACADEMIA

How will your research influence policy?

Can you tell me about a time when you have transferred the results of your research through any type of knowledge exchange activities? What did you do and how did you do this?

CAREER DEVELOPMENT
• You will have access to a mentor as well as career and development opportunities at The Learning Institute. What particular support and advice do you feel would be useful to you at this early stage of your academic career?
• Can you mention any experiences that have influenced your career choice to date?
• What are your longer-term career goals and how do you think this position will help you achieve them?
• What are your professional goals for the next 5 years, 10 years? Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

GENERAL HR-TYPE QUESTIONS

• What aspects of your work do you find particularly motivating?
• Can you give me an example where you have worked well in a team?
• Can you give me an example when you have resolved a conflict?
• Have you ever supervised another colleague work and, if so, how did you do this?
• Have you ever motivated someone and, if so, how did you do this?
• What committee work have you done and what challenges has it presented?
• You have achieved a lot of diverse things, how do you balance your time?
• In this role, ideally, how would you like your effectiveness to be assessed?
• What further training do you feel you would require to take on this role?
• What are your strengths?
• What are your weaknesses?
• How do others describe you?
• Why are you leaving your current job? (or if at end of contract: why isn't it being prolonged?)
• What did you like/dislike about your last job?
• When would you be available to start?
• Do you have any questions for us?

PRESENTATIONS

• General questions about the research.
• How do you locate your research in general field? What is your unique contribution? What are the big debates in your area? And how does your five year plan contribute to those debates?