



## **American Society for Photobiology**

### **Mentoring and Education Committee**

### **Pointers for Interviewing**

Prepared by Theresa Busch (Chair, 2008 – 2012), Julie Meo, Joanna Turner, and Elizabeth Gaillard

#### **Dress for the part**

The job interview, whether it be in person or online, provides opportunity for you to articulate your accomplishments and goals while demonstrating your skill at interpersonal communication. Make sure that both your appearance and mannerisms are professional. A sloppy appearance could divert attention from even a polished and well-thought-out answer to an interview question. Exercise good judgment in selecting topics of small talk. Many interviewers would likely not appreciate the humor in a story of the latest great adventure that you and your friends found yourselves in on a Friday night.

#### **Prepare for interview questions**

Anticipate and practice answers to interview questions, especially those that you would find more difficult to answer. You might want to ask for help from supervisors or colleagues who can give you examples of questions to work on. Also, some career services' offices may offer the opportunity for mock interviews with feedback. Always be prepared to answer questions on what you think your weaknesses are, as well as your strengths.

Practice the process of “thinking on your feet” and “being in the moment” by asking colleagues to give you “pop” questions around the lab or workplace. This exercise helps in preparing for the unanticipated question. And it will help you learn to maintain focus, avoiding the temptation to let your mind wander toward thoughts of “I wish I had read X again before I came to this interview...”. You need to be able to compose both thought-out and thoughtful answers, even when faced with a question that you didn't expect.

When applying for some positions, it could prove useful to ask the contact person if there is a defined list of interview questions that you could review. There is apparently no “rule” against doing this, although some companies may have policies about how they recruit. If you are uncomfortable about making such a request, you can explain that you want to be sure to provide all the information needed by the interviewing committee.

#### **Be comfortable with the web-based interview**

Web-based interviews using Skype are increasing in popularity as companies seek approaches to save time and money in the conduct of interviews. An interview on Skype should be taken just as seriously as would an in-person interview. Make sure to maintain a professional appearance, but in this case that goes beyond your attire to also

include the visual and audible background of your interview environment. Pay attention to what is on the wall behind your seat and arrange for a quiet setting, free of electronic alerts, ringing cell phones, knocks on the door, inquisitive children or barking dogs. Make sure that your computer and webcam are operating properly before the start of the interview, that your wireless signal is strong and that a laptop is fully charged. It can be useful to practice communicating via Skype by enlisting the help of another friend or colleague with an account. Just as with an in-person interview, it is important to maintain eye contact (in this case with the webcam) and avoid fidgeting.

### **Know your interviewers**

Familiarize yourself ahead of time with your interviewers- do some research on their areas of interest. In the case of interviews with other scientists, think about questions that you could pose to them about their research. Also consider questions about the work environment that will help you decide if the position would be a good fit for you. For example, if you are interviewing for a faculty position you could ask those who would be your peer faculty what they most value about the institution in which they work. You could ask about opportunities for continuing education in your field or other resources for professional development. Try to be relaxed, yet attentive in your conversations. If it helps, pretend that you are having a coffee with friends who brought new friends along. Focus on the moment and on those around you.

### **Dedicate time and effort to the preparation of job talks**

When interviewing for a research-based faculty position expect to present a lecture on your current research and its impact within its field. Take care that this lecture is clearly organized, logically presented, and geared toward your audience. Be sure to demonstrate how your line of research would integrate with that being performed within the interviewing department/institute. At some institutions, candidates for research-based faculty positions will also be requested to present a chalk talk. A chalk talk is a more informal presentation, commonly done using a white board. It may be requested, for example, for the purpose of having the candidates describe their future research plans. Use this opportunity to highlight how your work would complement existing research within the department/institute, potentially offering ideas for new collaborate projects. Yet, also emphasize what makes your work unique and avoid appearances of substantial overlap with already established research programs. Because not all research is moveable, it is important in these discussions to clearly articulate of what aspects of your research you will bring with you to a new position or how you will continue to conduct the work from afar, once established in your new position.

Online resources with advice on interviewing:

General advice written by an author from Franklin Pierce College for The Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE):

*<http://chronicle.com/article/Some-Views-on-Interviews/46104/>*

A discussion of what to do to best prepare for an academic interview from CHE:  
<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Academic-Job-Interview/44607>

A discussion of what a campus interview entails and how prepare from CHE:  
<http://chronicle.com/article/Preparing-for-Campus/45331>

A summary of what “informational interviews” are and how to get the most out of them from Science Careers (SC):  
[http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_magazine/previous\\_issues/articles/2009\\_03\\_20/caredit.a0900039](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2009_03_20/caredit.a0900039)

Advice for how to best prepare for your interview day from SC:  
[http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_magazine/previous\\_issues/articles/2010\\_11\\_19/caredit.a1000112](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2010_11_19/caredit.a1000112)

A discussion about how make one appear more professional for in-person interviews from SC:  
[http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_magazine/previous\\_issues/articles/2009\\_06\\_19/caredit.a0900077](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2009_06_19/caredit.a0900077)

A discussion of skills that can be used for a successful interview from SC:  
[http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_magazine/previous\\_issues/articles/2003\\_06\\_20/noDOI.2261328515508050220](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2003_06_20/noDOI.2261328515508050220)

Several articles from Nature Jobs on developing interview skills and dealing with “unskilled interviewers”:  
<http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/career-toolkit/interview-skills/>

Tips for Interviews on Skype:  
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahsweeney/2011/08/15/4-tips-for-skype-interview-success/>