ADVICE FOR THE PHILOSOPHY JOB MARKET

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This document contains advice about various aspects of the job market. Gratitude to Pat Beach, John Bengson, Dave Chalmers, Becko Copenhaver, Alex Grzankowski, Bill Hartmann, Ian Hegger, Andrew Higgins, Mary Krizan, İrem Kurtsal Steen, Jonathan Livengood, David Sanson, Kristin Seemuth Whaley, Andrew Spear, Ariela Tubert, Jason Wykoff, the Facebook Hivemind, and panelists at an APA session on getting a job at a community college for points large and small that I pass along here.

I periodically revise and expand this document, so feel free to send suggestions for improvement: dzkorman@gmail.com.

1. Applying for Jobs

The Time Line. Job ads mainly start appearing around mid-October, and applications are typically due around the end of November. That said, not all schools abide by this timeline, and it would be to your benefit to have your materials ready by early October, in case of early ads and early deadlines. In the middle of December, schools contact around twelve people for first-round Skype or phone interviews. Around mid-January, schools will typically contact three or four applicants for a second-round interview, which involves a campus visit in which you meet the faculty and give a job talk or teaching demonstration (or both). There is then a “second round” of the job market, mainly consisting of openings for non-tenure-track jobs, which are posted from January through May. See here for discussion of the European job market:


Job Postings. Most jobs are posted on philjobs.org, though you should also check the Chronicle for Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, phylo.info/jobs, and www.jobs.ac.uk. Many community colleges advertise only on their own websites, and only keep the ads up for a couple weeks. So make a list of desirable community colleges and check their sites regularly. You might even contact the department chairs at attractive community colleges to see whether they’re planning to hire. Note that community colleges often require that you have at least an MA, and your application may not even make it past HR and into the hands of the search committee if you’re ABD and don’t officially have a masters.

When to Apply. You should go on the job market iff your advisor can confidently affirm that your dissertation will be completed and successfully defended by the end of the school year. It’s true that there are drawbacks of going out too early. First, if despite being in a position to defend your dissertation, your work is still relatively weak, your committee members aren’t yet in a position to write strong letters, and you have no publications, then you may be wasting time and money by going on the market—time that could have been better spent polishing your writing sample and preparing papers for
submission to journals. Second, there’s a potential danger that certain schools will be hiring two years in a row, will decide against you the first year, and then the next year—when perhaps your file is substantially stronger—will disregard your application largely because they remember having decided against you the previous year. Third, one hears that nowadays it is harder than ever to get interviews if you don’t already have your PhD in hand. Nevertheless, these costs have to be weighed against the simple fact that you’d be passing up dozens of chances at employment.

Where to Apply. Better: where not to apply? Don’t apply to a school if (i) you have none of the AOSs that they are looking for, (ii) they ask for a statement of faith that you’re not prepared to give, or (iii) you are absolutely sure that you would not take the job if offered. Otherwise: apply. You may come to have very different feelings about the University of Neverheardofem if they’re the only school that offers you an interview. What if you have the right AOS but don’t have the right AOCs? It doesn’t matter; apply anyway. For some schools, the AOC is an absolute requirement, but for others it’s just a desideratum, and it is not always possible to tell which it is just from reading the ad. More here on where and when to apply:


Teaching Schools. Some schools—chief among them, community colleges—self-identify as “teaching schools”, and place little (if any) importance on research. For these schools, you should prepare a separate CV and cover letter, which foreground your teaching experience. Start with which courses you’ve taught, then which classroom technologies you have experience with, then where you’ve taught, then service and leadership experience, any teacher training sessions you’ve attended, and then just the basic highlights of research accomplishments (e.g., not listing every conference). More here on how to prepare an application that will be attractive to SLACs and teaching schools:


Which Schools are Teaching Schools? Just because a school places primary emphasis on teaching doesn’t mean that its faculty don’t have active research programs or that research won’t play a significant role in their search and in tenure decisions, and (for this reason) ‘teaching school’ is sometimes heard as a pejorative. Community colleges self-identify as teaching schools, but not all small liberal arts collects (SLACs) do. I don’t know any general rule for determining whether a school self-identifies as a teaching school in the relevant sense, but one strategy would be to track down the school’s tenure

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1 Thanks for Ariela Tubert, Bill Hartmann, and Kristin Seemuth Whaley for help here.
requirements (perhaps in an online faculty handbook) and see what they say about the
relative weights of teaching and research in tenure decisions.

*Website.* Have an online presence. Put up a website with a photo, an autobiographical
blurb, a CV, other job market materials, and perhaps some (well-written) works in
progress. If someone takes an interest in you, they might try to track down your website,
and this can help put a human face on your file and make you more memorable. If they
don’t find a website, that only reinforces the idea of you as a faceless name in a pile of
applications. And you should make it as easy as possible for them to find your website:
include a link to it on your CV and maybe even in your email signature. Also, if you
already have a web presence, make sure everything that is under your control is in order
and up to date, not only your personal website, but also any other pages you may have
(Academia.edu, Linkedin, PhilPapers, etc.). Some discussion here:
- http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2012/05/maintaining-a-personal-web-page-
  while-on-the-job-market.html
- http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2015/05/job-market-boot-camp-part-
  11-how-to-cultivate-a-professional-online-presence.html

Women on the market may be interested in this mentoring program
- https://jobmentoringforwomen.wordpress.com
See here for a paper on disability and the academic job market:
- http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/111/111

2. Cover Letters

*Writing Cover Letters.* For top research schools, many people won’t even read the cover
letter, and those who do are probably either (i) just looking for a quick reminder of your
research project or (ii) looking for an explanation of something surprising about your
application (e.g., that you don’t seem to meet the advertised AOS). For these, it’s best to
keep the letter to about one page. For the rest, shoot for about 1.5 to 2 pages, and tailor it
to the school you’re applying to. You tailor it by addressing things specifically mentioned
in the job ad (e.g., AOCs or teaching needs), expressing interest in or connection to the
geographic region or type of school, showing evidence that you’ve looked at their
website, and/or saying how your teaching or research fits with the department or the
school’s mission statement. You should think of the cover letter more like a personal
letter than a business letter (while still being professional, of course). Show your
personality, and write in a way that keeps them engaged. For jobs in the UK or
Australasia, my understanding is that it’s important to indicate that you meet the various
employment criteria. Finally, double check that your cover letter is addressed to the right
school, and make sure that the title of your document isn’t something the schools might
find off-putting (e.g., Korman_GenericCoverLetter.docx).

*The Point of Cover Letters.* The main point of cover letters (for those who read them) is
to get readers excited about your application. Paint a picture of yourself as a researcher
and a teacher that will stick in your reader’s mind and set you apart from the rest of the
A cover letter simply reproducing your dissertation abstract and offering some platitudes about teaching philosophy probably won’t hurt you, but it won’t do anything at all to help you. Here’s one way to think of it. Imagine that there’s someone on the search committee who wants to advocate for you. Your cover letter should help them help you, for instance by indicating ways in which you are an exciting, multi-dimensional researcher, an experienced and thoughtful teacher, and an active part of department or university life. Additionally, schools with heavy teaching loads or in locations that aren’t obviously desirable will want to be persuaded that you actually have some interest in coming to their school. They don’t want to risk narrowing it down to four finalists none of whom have any intention of actually coming, or of hiring someone who’ll be trying to move from the moment they arrive, because the school may not be given the opportunity to do another search if this one fails. Your cover letter is your opportunity to show that you have a genuine, specific interest in their school.

**Describing Your Research.** When you describe your research, don’t just repeat your dissertation abstract. Instead, your objective should be to paint a picture of yourself as a “multi-dimensional” philosopher. Have a few sentences stating your main research project, but then mention some things outside your primary area that you’ll likely pursue in the future. This is an opportunity to reach out to search committee members outside your area and show them that you two may have something to talk about after all. In fact, you might choose which “additional interests” to mention on a school-by-school basis, by looking at what the faculty there work on, and mentioning genuine interests of yours that intersect with their research.

**Cover Letters for Teaching Schools.** For teaching schools, your cover letter is probably the single most important part of your application. You’ll want to lead with a discussion of your teaching philosophy and your teaching experience, highlighting any teaching you’ve done in areas mentioned in the job ad. You can talk about your research, but only a little and at the very end of the letter. Service is a large part of the job at community colleges, so you should talk about any service you’ve done in your own department, leadership positions you’ve had, and life experiences that demonstrate that you’re a team player and/or a leader. You should also speak to how your approach to teaching fits with the mission of the college (which you can find on their website), and your experience with diverse student bodies—that includes racial and ethnic diversity, but also diversity in ability, preparedness, learning styles, and life situations (e.g., students coming back to school after 20 years in the work force). Such experiences can include your own experiences attending a diverse high school or college. Finally, make it clear that you possess the relevant credentials (e.g., you have an MA), and emphasize any experience you have using instructional technology and/or teaching at community colleges. Community colleges often won’t ask for a teaching dossier—just a CV, transcripts, and cover letter—so you may want to have a more substantial cover letter for these, incorporating more than usual from your teaching statement.

For further discussion of cover letters, see these:

- [http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2015/05/job-market-boot-camp-part-8-the-cover-letter.html](http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2015/05/job-market-boot-camp-part-8-the-cover-letter.html)
3. Curriculum Vitae

Your curriculum vitae (or CV) is your academic resume.

Format. You should also make sure your CV is easy on the eyes—the tired eyes of search committee members working through a stack of hundreds of applications. It should look uncluttered, with normal margins, fonts, and font sizes. Also, if your CV doesn’t look like everyone else’s—for instance, if it’s in an odd font, or includes a list of your hobbies and non-academic summer jobs—it will make you look out of touch with the profession. Go to the PhilJobs appointment page (http://philjobs.org/appointments), download the CVs of some successful job-seekers, choose one that you find aesthetically pleasing, and use it as the model for your CV.

Length. There’s nothing wrong with a short, crisp CV. Resist the urge to list every little detail about the conferences you attended—the exact date of the talk, the city, your commentator and chair, your abstract, etc.—or detailed information about your responsibilities on various grad student committees. This will just look like a thinly veiled attempt to fatten up your CV, and will only make it more difficult for search committee members to quickly scan your CV for specific information they may be looking for.

AOS. Your AOSs are your areas of specialization. These are areas in which you are actively researching and expect to be able to publish. It’s common to list two, but it’s not necessarily a bad thing to list only one. Don’t list more than two: you don’t want to come across as a jack of all trades. And flip through the PhilJobs postings to make sure the AOSs you list match the AOSs that departments advertise for: for example, departments advertise for positions in ethics, not Kantian ethics; metaphysics, not metaphysics of modality; and 19th and 20th century continental, not Sartre.

AOC. Your AOCs are your areas of competence. On one common understanding, listing something as an AOC means that you’re able to teach an advanced undergrad course on the topic with a moderate amount of preparation. If you’ve TA’d for early modern once or twice and/or taken a couple courses in it, that’s arguably enough for an AOC. (Though it’s true that some have a more demanding conception on which an AOC must either be a serious secondary research interest or something you’ve actually taught as the sole instructor.) More here on what an AOC is:

http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2007/05/what_are_the_cr.html

Some AOS/AOC combinations probably won’t help you at all on the market: you almost never see ads for positions in philosophy of language that want an AOC in political philosophy (or vice versa). Departments are often looking for AOCs connected to courses that they have to offer frequently: ancient, early modern, ethics, and logic. And certain
AOCs that are less commonly advertised—non-western philosophy, feminism, environmental ethics, business ethics, philosophy of race—might open doors for you since fewer candidates will be a good fit for those jobs.

Presentations. Keep the information about conference presentations to a minimum: the title, year, and venue. If it’s a recurring conference (like the Illinois Philosophical Association), there’s no need to list the city or hosting university, or that it’s the 27th annual meeting of that conference. Depending on how many presentations you have, you might consider creating sub-categories, e.g., invited conference talks, refereed conference talks, departmental colloquia or brownbags, and commentaries. You might also consider having a special subsection for in-house presentation at your home department (e.g., talks in our own grad student colloquium series or mock job talks). Some suggest that it’s best to leave these off your CV completely—the idea presumably being that they don’t “count” for anything—but I think it’s best to include them, since it at least shows that you’re active in your department.

Works in Progress. Have a “works in progress” section on your CV where you list the titles of papers you’re working on. If one of them is under review at a journal, write “(under review)” after the title. Don’t list where a paper is under review, except perhaps if it’s been given a revise-and-resubmit. Bear in mind that schools that are considering hiring you will sometimes ask to look at some of these papers, so list something as a work in progress only if you have (or are close to having) a draft that you could circulate. Finally, don’t list works in progress and papers currently under review under Publications. (As I once heard it put, that’s like listing jobs you’ve applied for under Employment.)

See here for further discussion of CVs:

4. Teaching Dossier

Your teaching dossier will include your teaching statement, information about your teaching evaluations, and sample syllabi. See here for discussion of various aspects of the teaching dossier:

Cover letter. Have a cover letter to the teaching dossier in which you list the contents of the dossier, list the courses you’ve taught (indicating whether it was TAd or sole instructor), the link to your website (if you’ve posted further materials), and maybe a blurb about your areas of teaching specialization and expressions of willingness to teach all sorts of classes.
Teaching Statement. Here, you’re meant to describe your “teaching philosophy”. The challenge is to do that without it turning into one cringe-worthy cliché after another. Be as concrete as possible. Pick two or three skills or abilities that you think it’s especially valuable to pass on to students, and give concrete examples of how you try to promote them in the classroom. Some possibilities: analytical skills; ethical reasoning skills; a capacity for independent thinking; open-mindedness; the ability to summarize and logically organize complex information; evaluating opposing views; identifying the morally relevant features of situations, actions, and policies; problem-solving; writing clearly; reasoning persuasively, both in writing and orally; offering and accepting criticism without personalizing it. You should also make sure that the teaching statement isn’t just about you, but also about your students (e.g., anecdotes and evidence regarding how they’ve responded to your teaching). Three other things it’s good to hit on: (1) How do you convince students that studying philosophy is valuable? (2) How do you get (and keep) students engaged in the sort of material you’ll be teaching? (3) How do you go about assessing whether they’re learning and whether your teaching style is effective? (Again, be concrete.) You can find some advice about writing teaching statements here:


Sample Syllabi. You should prepare syllabi for some courses that you’d likely be asked to teach. Have one for every course you’ve taught, one for each course you could teach that was mentioned in the ad (or in the desired AOSs and AOCs), an intro philosophy syllabus, and at least one that “pops”, that is, a nonstandard course that might catch someone’s eye (e.g., race and gender, or philosophy through science fiction). You might also try to include something that will be of interest to non-philosophers, since many search committees will include non-philosophers, and since departments ask often looking for ways to lure nonmajors into their classes. Try to show some creativity in the course readings; don’t just work through some one anthology or the obvious readings. Include a grad level syllabus only if the school has a grad program. Finally, you should probably abridge the syllabi, so that each is just one page front-and-back. Just have the required texts, the schedule of readings, the course description, the bare-bones information about assignments, and other course-specific info. You can explain your grading rubric, course policies, and other such generic stuff elsewhere in the dossier. (But do make it clear on each sample syllabus that it is abridged.)

Evaluations. Rather than including the hard-to-read official print-outs of your evaluation scores, better to make your own easy-to-read tables or bar graphs, clearly displaying your scores on the two core questions (Quality of Instructor and Quality of Course) and perhaps one or two other categories that you do especially well on. Make it clear whether

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2 Thanks to Kristin Seemuth Whaley for helpful discussion here.

3 I’m pretty sure I took this list from an APA newsletter, but I can’t seem to track it down to cite it.
it was a TA section or your own class, the year that you taught the class, and what the top score on the scale is. If you’ve taught large lecture classes, make sure that’s clear as well. People sometimes include sample comments from the evaluations, which is a good addition if some students have said especially nice things about you. You can also make the official print-outs of the scores and full copies of all of your evaluations available by scanning them, putting them on your website, and listing the link somewhere in the dossier.

*Letters from students.* If, at some point, you have some especially bright and enthusiastic students in your class who seem to like you, you should ask them to write a letter of recommendation for you and send it to you. These are rare, but I imagine that they could be pretty effective at schools that place a great deal of weight on teaching.

**5. Dissertation Abstracts and Research Statement**

*Short Dissertation Abstract.* You’ll prepare two dissertation abstracts. The first is a short paragraph (about 4-5 sentences) and should appear on your CV under the title of your dissertation. What search committee members want here is an easy to digest paragraph that they can quickly scan to get a rough sense of what your project is. If they have to slow down to understand any of the sentences, then you have failed. I would recommend structuring it as follows. Sentence 1: Identify the general topic that the dissertation is about. Sentence 2: Generate interest by identifying the philosophically interesting puzzle or question about the topic that you’re trying to answer. Sentence 3 (and maybe 4): Gesture toward some typical or obvious response, and allude to its shortcomings. Sentence 4 (and maybe 5): Gesture toward the basic form of your response, and how it improves on the literature, perhaps by just asserting without argument that it doesn’t have the aforementioned shortcomings.

*Long Dissertation Abstract.* The long dissertation abstract should be about one page (single-spaced), and will be the final page of your CV. You should state the general topic and significance of your dissertation and summarize each of the chapters. Write it for a broad philosophical audience; only a small fraction of search committee members will have any real familiarity with your topic. Make every effort to make it clear and accessible. Focus less on explaining how you argue for your conclusions, or on how you respond to various objections, and more on simply stating the ultimate conclusion of each chapter, conveying why it matters if you’re right, convincing them that your work is sufficiently connected to existing discussions in the literature that you’ll be able to publish some of the chapters, and *most importantly* indicating to them that even if they don’t work in your field they may still benefit from having you around as a colleague because you’re able to explain things so clearly. Finally, do what you can to connect your topic to “big questions” that will likely be more familiar to search committees than your narrow dissertation topic. (Ditto for the research statement.)

*Research Statement.* You should also prepare a research statement, with an eye to accomplishing two things. The first is to assure departments that you’ll hit the ground
running with research and publishing. My advice would be to describe about five or six papers-in-progress (essentially giving an abstract for each): one or two that are completely finished and either published or under review, one or two that are consuming your attention at the moment, and one or two that are on the back burner but that are at least somewhat developed. Then indicate what your plan is once you finish those, in a way that shows that you have a cohesive project and that there is a lot of potential for finding new and interesting contributions within that project. The second objective (and this goes for the dissertation abstracts as well) is to convince the committee that they can talk to you about philosophy and that you can explain your research to undergrads and non-specialists. So keep it simple and, ideally, track down a nonspecialist to read over the statement and flag things they weren’t able to understand. Some discussion here:

- http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2015/05/job-market-boot-camp-part-10-the-research-statement.html

6. Writing Sample

Preparing a Writing Sample. Your writing sample should be about 4000-8000 words: long enough to seem substantial, but short enough that it won’t annoy search committee members (esp. at later stages in the process, where committees are reading the entire writing samples to prepare for interviews). If your best paper is over 8000 words, consider producing a shortened version specifically for the writing sample. If you want to use a dissertation chapter, you should prepare it as a stand-alone paper, as if you were going to submit it to a journal. So you’ll need to remove references to other chapters, and insert any relevant arguments or explanations of terminology that were given in earlier chapters. Also, many search committee members won’t make it past the first couple pages (at least not in the initial rounds of the search), so you should polish the hell out of those first couple pages, and make sure you’ve stated your central thesis by the end of page two. Finally, it’s good to have a 100-150 word abstract at the top of your writing sample.

Choosing a Writing Sample. Here are some rules of thumb for choosing a writing sample.

1) Use your most polished piece of writing.
2) Use something squarely in your main area. If your dissertation is in ancient philosophy, search committees will be primarily interested in the quality of your work in ancient philosophy, and may be frustrated if you send them a paper on ethical theory.
3) Use something that fits the advertised AOSs. This may conflict with #2: if you’re primarily an ancient philosopher but with a secondary AOS in ethics, and you’re applying for an ethics job, it may be wise to send an ethics paper.
4) Use a paper that’s of broad interest. The more people can connect with the topic and care about it, the better.
5) Use a paper that’s accessible. Better not to have anything too dense, technical, or otherwise daunting.
6) Use a single-authored paper. With co-authored papers, search committee members may be left wondering which (if any) of the impressive parts of the writing sample were your contribution.

7) Using a published paper is fine, especially if it’s in a good journal. Readers may read it more charitably if it’s got the profession’s stamp of approval on it. If it’s in a not-so-good journal, that may be reason not to use it, since that may look like a stamp of disapproval (it’s not good enough to get into a good journal). It’s also probably best not to use something that was published more than a couple years ago; search committees will wonder whether you haven’t done anything worth sharing in the meantime.

8) Use something that you don’t already plan to use for your job talk. (More in §9 about choosing a job talk about how bad it is/isn’t to use your writing sample as a job talk.) If it’s still not clear which paper to use as your writing sample, talk to your dissertation advisor or placement advisor.

More here on writing samples:
- http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2015/06/job-market-boot-camp-part-14-writing-samples.html

7. Letters of Recommendation

**Letters of Recommendation.** You’ll need to get letters of recommendation. If at all possible, it’s a good idea to have a letter (or two or three) from someone at another university as well. It’s impressive that someone who isn’t under any obligation to write you a letter, let alone say nice things about you, took the time to write you one anyway. See here for some discussion of whom to ask for letters:

Your departmental letter writers will (hopefully) like you and want to write you the strongest letters we can. Below are some things you can do to better enable us to do that. You might also send your letter writers a list of schools you’ve applied to, in case they know someone at those schools and want to contact them and advocate for you.

**How Many Letters?** Most schools ask for three but many applicants submit five or six or even more. Some schools will limit it to three. If it’s unclear from the ad whether the school wants no more than three, or merely wants at least three, you should email the search chair for clarification. See here for a thread on how many letters of recommendation applicants should have:
- http://leitterreports.typepad.com/blog/2013/12/how-many-letters-of-recommendation-should-a-job-seeker-have.html#comments

**Talk to Us.** Talk to us about your dissertation frequently, especially in the year leading up to the job market. This will make it more likely that we’ll have concrete, informative things to say about your dissertation in our letters—like “s/he changed my mind about X”
or “this one point in particular was especially clever”—as opposed to simply summarizing your main thesis and the dissertation outline (which is what happens in many letters).

**Teaching Observations.** Be proactive about getting faculty to come observe you teach. Your file will stand out from the pack if one or more of your “research letters” can also say something directly about your teaching skills. Indeed, some schools explicitly require that at least one letter speak to your teaching abilities. In addition to having committee members visit your classes, you should also try to find someone who’s not on your committee to observe you teach three or four times before you go on the market, so that they can write a dedicated teaching letter for you. Try to have a classroom visit at least once a semester, and try to do something extra-special during those visits, which we can then effuse about in our reports.

**Brag Sheet.** Prepare a “brag sheet”, listing achievements that you’d love for us to talk about in our letters, reminding us about which classes you’ve taken with us and what your term papers were about, and jogging our memories about other specific interactions we’ve had—for instance, maybe we had a great discussion of X over beers several years ago, and I got all excited and encouraged you to write a paper on it. We’ll be grateful if you can help us come up with talking points for the letter.

### 8. First Round Interviews

**First-Round Interviews.** The first-round interviews will likely be held via Skype or phone. When they call or email you to offer you the interview, they may give you a choice of timeslots. Googling around a bit, it seems that early morning and early afternoon are good, avoiding the first of the day (unfocused interviewers), right before lunch (low glucose levels), and late in the day (decision fatigue). There will be questions about research and/or questions about teaching, and the amount of time devoted to these will vary. R1 institutions will typically spend most of the interview grilling you about your writing sample, and “teaching schools” will typically spend most if not all of the interview on teaching. How you feel the interviews went will almost certainly have no correlation with how well you in fact did. If they were smiling a lot at you, they probably smile a lot at all the candidates; if one of them outsmarted you, she probably outsmarted all the candidates.

**Skype Interviews.** If you have a skype interview, make sure to test out the technology with the same computer and same location you’re planning to use. While you’re at it, maybe find a trusted friend or advisor to test-skype with who can weigh in on what you’ve got in the background (any embarrassing books on the bookshelf?), your position (too close or too far from the computer?), and even your interview outfit. If possible, have a back-up plan in case technology fails, for instance have a phone nearby (and have

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4 See, e.g., http://www.businessinsider.com/perfect-time-to-schedule-job-interview-2014-12. Thanks to Andrew Higgins for setting me straight on this.
the phone number of an interviewer) in case you need to switch to a phone interview. Here are some tips for Skype interviews:


**Dissertation Spiel.** Research-focused interviews often begin with “Tell us about your dissertation,” and so you will want to prepare and rehearse a five-minute “dissertation spiel”. They may wait patiently and let you present the whole thing, or they may interrupt after 2 minutes. Resist the urge to just give a chapter-by-chapter summary, and definitely don’t recite your dissertation abstract (since they may have skimmed it moments before the interview). Think of yourself as trying to start a conversation. Have a two-minute blurb in which you say something interesting: perhaps spelling out some provocative view that you defend or attack in the diss. In case they don’t jump in at that point, have a second two-minute continuation planned with a natural stopping point, which might again bait them into entering the conversation. And have a couple more such continuations prepared. In connection with the goal of starting a conversation, resist the urge to bring up objections and then explain how you respond to them. That kills conversation. Let them bring up the objections! Indeed, try to bait them into asking the questions you want them to ask. Relatively, if there’s something in your dissertation that you don’t want them to ask you about, don’t mention it in the spiel.5

**Teaching Questions.** In preparation for teaching questions, it’s good to put together a (mental) list of all-purpose anecdotes or interesting details about your teaching that might be worked into a variety of different questions.6 When they ask you about which classes you can teach, be enthusiastic and confident. If they ask you whether you can teach a class on X, where X is something you know about but have never studied closely, you can say “It’s a bit outside of my comfort zone, but I can certainly teach it, especially if I had the summer to prepare.” If they ask which courses you’d like to teach, make sure not to come across as uni-dimensional: if you’ve just spent 30 minutes talking about your research on phil mind, try to avoid spending the whole teaching portion of the interview talking about classes on phil mind. See the appendix below, as well as this link, for a useful discussion of common questions about teaching:

- philosophyjobmarket.blogspot.com/2007/12/baby-tonight-ive-got-question-for-you.html

**Questions for Us.** At the end of the interview, you will probably be asked whether you have any questions for them. Avoid questions that might have a negative answer: do the faculty get along, are the students good, do you interact with other departments, is there funding for workshops, etc. Avoid questions that may have a one word answer, leading

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5 Thanks to Jonathan Livengood for helpful discussion.
6 Thanks here to Kristin Seemuth Whaley.
to a choppy, awkward ending to the interview, e.g., how many majors do you have? Don’t ask questions that suggest you’re going to make the faculty do things, e.g., is there a faculty reading group? Or: oh, you don’t have a philosophy club? would there be interest in starting one and having monthly talks by different faculty members? So what do you ask them? Unless you actually do have something you’re burning to ask them, probably the best strategy is to deflect the question by telling them that their website answered a lot of your questions, and then mentioning one or more things that you learned from the website that you found especially intriguing. That’s the most direct way of seizing the opportunity to show them that you have genuine interest in the school, which (I think) is what they’re really after with this question. Some discussion here:


9. Campus Visits, Job Talks, and Teaching Demos

Schools will typically fly three or four finalists out for a campus visit. Some schools will have you give a job talk, some will have you give a teaching demonstration, and some will do both. Schools should tell you about the format for these, but don’t hesitate to ask for clarification if it’s unclear how long the presentations are meant to be, who will be in the audience for them, or if it’s otherwise unclear what is expected of you.

*Job Talk.* Your job talk is a normal colloquium presentation: typically a 45-50 minute talk, and a 45-50 minute question period. Make sure to be animated and enthusiastic. If the stuff you work on isn’t readily accessible to non-experts (which will often be the entire audience!), spend at least the first half hour going relatively slowly through the background of the debate you’re entering into and the very basics of your view, in a way that’s accessible to everyone. This will enable them to ask meaningful questions in the question period. Then, in the last 15 minutes or so, you can go through the more complicated “cutting edge” stuff that really constitutes your contribution to the debate at a faster pace that perhaps only the experts will be able to keep up with. If you lose the audience in the last ten minutes, that’s pretty typical for a colloquium talk. But if you lose them in the first ten minutes, that’s bad.

*Choosing a Job Talk.* Choosing a job talk is a lot like choosing a writing sample. Choose a solid, polished, well thought-out paper. Choose something that fits with the advertised AOS: so if you’re a metaphysician with a secondary AOS in phil language, and you’re up for a phil language job, it’s best to give a phil language paper. Choose something that’s of relatively broad interest and accessible. Choose something single-authored. Choose something unpublished, since it would be very weird to have a question period on a paper that can’t be changed in light of suggestions and objections. Probably your best papers each meet some but not others of these conditions so talk to your dissertation advisor or placement advisor to help decide which to use.

*Using a Writing Sample as a Job Talk.* One hears mixed things about whether it’s a bad idea to use your writing sample as your job talk. Using the writing sample as a job talk
may make you look like a one-trick pony, and may give rise to doubts about whether you will have an active research program. But better that they be worried that you’re a one-trick pony than that they be underwhelmed by an underdeveloped job talk. So I say: if you have two really strong papers, use one for your writing sample and the other for the job talk. If you only have one strong paper, use it for both, and then make a special effort in your other materials (e.g., research statement) to show that you have an active research program.

Teaching Demonstration. For the teaching demonstration, typically they’ll ask you to step in and teach a day of class, sometimes giving you a topic, sometimes letting you pick. If you do get to choose, choose something simple and accessible, and which fits with teaching needs mentioned in the job ad. The most important thing: be animated and enthusiastic, and show the committee how much you enjoy teaching. The second-most important thing: get the students involved. (Bonus points if you can learn their names and call on them by name.) You don’t want to lecture for 50 minutes straight. Use technology and use active learning, for instance, group work, peppering the students with questions, or think-pair-share exercises (where they spend a minute or two writing down an answer to some question, then a minute discussing with their neighbor, then some time sharing their responses with the class). Ignore anyone who tries to tell you that group work is a bad idea in such contexts, since search committee members may view that as an attempt to get out of “real teaching”; schools that care enough about teaching to have you do a teaching demo will care about active learning. If it’s just the hiring committee in the room, pretend they’re students; present things at a basic level, and you can even call on them to answer questions. Finally, make sure to practice your teaching demo before the real thing, just like you would practice your job talk.

Miscellaneous Tips.  
(1) Have copies of everything with you—CV, sample syllabi, teaching statement—so you can immediately put them into the hands of anyone who asks to see them.
(2) Be prepared to discuss relevant things that came up in the interview. For instance, if they told you in the interview that they’re hoping to develop a course on X, bring sample syllabi for a course on X to the campus visit.
(3) Be super energetic during all public speaking events.
(4) Don’t be weird, offensive, negative, or cranky.
(5) Be prepared, and have plans in case of lost items or technology failure.
(6) Be professional at all times: even if they say you’re not being interviewed, you are still being interviewed.
(7) If you’ve ever had trouble with insomnia, or even if you haven’t, consider bringing some off-the-shelf sleeping pills (e.g., Tylenol Simply Sleep), and taking them preemptively the night before the main day of the visit.
(8) Treat the administrative staff with respect. If word gets out that you were rude to the staff (and it will), people will think you’re an asshole (and they’ll be right).
(9) If you have dietary restrictions, let them know before the campus visit.

See the threads here for further discussion of various aspects of campus visits:

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7 Thanks to Mary Krizan and Kristin Seemuth Whaley for helpful discussion here.
10. Delivering Your Job Talk

Presenting vs. Reading. Your paper should be a well-rehearsed presentation. By “well-rehearsed”, I mean that you’re not simply improvising from a handout or some powerpoint slides. Do at least five trial runs of the talk (aloud and in private). These practice runs give you a chance to try out various tempting digressions, and see whether they lead somewhere interesting (in which case you can incorporate them into the talk), or whether they’re a dead end. By “presentation”, I mean you’re not simply reading the words off the page. It’s increasingly uncommon for speakers to read their papers, and audiences are becoming increasingly annoyed by such behavior. If you absolutely must read your paper, spend some time beforehand simplifying the sentences to make the paper easier to follow. And make sure to practice reading it out loud; you don’t want to be stumbling over difficult sentences. Finally, make sure your paper is within the time limit—audiences get annoyed when you cut into their question period or bathroom break.

Preparing a Presentation. In preparation for the talk, spend some time rewriting your paper, with the aim of making the wording more casual and “auditorily digestible” (but without sacrificing precision). Think about what it’ll be difficult for people to understand, and devote a little more time to these points. For especially complicated bits (e.g., addressing subtle objections that won’t occur to most people), consider leaving them out of the talk, and just letting them come up in the question period if they occur to anyone. And anyway, it’s nice to have some worked-out responses to objections you’ve anticipated “up your sleeve” for the question period. (Though, in the case of conference papers, don’t make any substantive changes to the content without first consulting your commentator.) Finally, it’s fine to have a copy of the rewritten paper in your hands as you give the talk, though if you’ve rehearsed it enough times you should only need to peek at it once every couple sentences.

Presentation Style. Your presentation should be articulate, sober, and deliberate. Articulate: Choose your words carefully, and give clear official statements of every thesis, premise, and objection under discussion. Sober: Treat your opponents with respect—not least because some of them, or some of their friends or colleagues, might be in the audience. If someone in the question period jumps on the bandwagon and starts ranting about your opponents, you be the level-headed one, defending your opponents against any misguided bits of the rant. Deliberate: Know what you’re going to say, and say it with confidence. It’s disorienting when speakers leave it unclear whether they actually endorse certain things coming out of their mouth—for instance, when they reveal their insecurities about some argument they’ve just given. It’s also annoying when you
get the impression that the speaker still hasn’t sorted out exactly what they want to say or how they want to put it (e.g., when they keep trailing off into digressions that they don’t finish).

**Handouts.** Always have a handout. The handout should (i) display the structure of the paper, (ii) enable the audience to catch up if they zone out for a few minutes, and (iii) enable them to revisit and scrutinize the exact wording of your central theses and arguments. Whenever there is an important chunk of text on the handout, it’s a good idea to read it out loud, verbatim. Don’t expect your audience to be able to simultaneously read what’s on the handout and listen to what you’re saying about it. Also, make sure you have more than enough handouts: 30 or 40 is usually a good number.

**Powerpoint.** Using powerpoint is fine in principle, but there are lots of ways to screw it up. First, don’t simply cut and paste your entire talk, word-for-word, onto the slides as a series of bullet points, which you then read off the screen. It’s ugly, and it makes you look lazy. Second, just because you’re using powerpoint, that doesn’t mean that you don’t need a handout; see points (ii) and (iii) just above. Third, make sure that your handout syncs up with the powerpoint slides. For instance, make sure the section headings are the same, the theses and arguments are worded the same, and all the same information is on both. When they don’t sync up—and worse, if what’s on the handout, what’s on the slide, and what coming out of your mouth are three different things—this can be very disorienting for the audience. I would recommend simply distributing a printout of the slides themselves as a handout. If that’s what you do, you should prepare the slides in a such a way that they’ll double as a good handout.
Appendix: Actual Interview Questions

These are questions my past students have been asked in interviews.

CC = Community college
SLAC = Small liberal arts college
TT = Tenure-track

Assignments
• How do you assess students? How do you assess your own methods of assessment? (CC)
• Explain your expectation for student learning outcomes. (CC)
• In our required course for majors, 40% of the grade is from participation. How do you inspire and assess discussion in your classes? (SLAC-TT)
• What is a typical first assignment that you give in the semester? (SLAC-TT)

Courses
• We teach an introductory course called ‘Search for Meaning’ that is co-taught by a theologian and a philosopher. What kind of philosophical issues and resources would you discuss in this course? (SLAC-TT)
• What would be your ideal course to teach? (SLAC-TT)
• We’re working on developing our gen ed program around five different themes or tracks – sustainability, world citizenship, equality, peace, and innovation. What kinds of courses would you develop to fit those themes? (SLAC-TT)
• What kind of topics course would you teach? (SLAC-TT)
• We offer a 4-week course in the winter term, and faculty teach courses outside their areas. What kind of course would you teach that isn’t related to Philosophy? (SLAC-nonTT)
• Our current offerings are fairly traditional, and we’re interested in pursuing curricular review to improve our offerings. What kinds of courses would just suggest developing that would update our current offerings? (SLAC-nonTT)
• We offer a freshman seminar on Critical Thinking. How would you feel about teaching a class like this, and what would you cover in such a class? (SLAC-TT)
• If there were no restrictions and you could do anything you wanted, how would you design a class for freshman? (SLAC-TT)
• What is your experience teaching 100% Distance Learning classes? (CC)

Diversity
• Identify the most significant non-Western influence on you. (CC)
• Explain how your previous teaching experience has prepared you for instructing a diverse population of students. (CC)
• How would you diversify the image of Philosophy, and how would you reflect this in the courses you teach? (SLAC-TT)
- Our students have diverse levels of preparedness for college. Do you have experience with this kind of student population, and how do you address it? Or if you don’t have experience with this, how would you address it? (SLAC-TT)
- Diversity is very important to us. How would you foster and model inclusiveness in your classes? (SLAC-nonTT)
- Have you had any experience with high school students taking college classes? If not, how do you feel about this? (CC)

**Interdisciplinary Activity**
- We have very small departments and work closely with people from other backgrounds. What kind of experience do you have with interdisciplinary work? (SLAC-TT)
- We offer a 4-week course in the winter term, and faculty teach courses outside their areas. What kind of course would you teach that isn’t related to Philosophy? (SLAC-nonTT)
- Previously we had a Philosophy and Religion major, what kind of experience do you have interfacing with theology and religion? (SLAC-TT)

**Motivating Philosophy**
- What strategies have you used in making the concepts and theories come alive for students who may not have the interest level in the subject? (CC)
- We have very few Philosophy majors and minors. How would you make your courses appealing to students who don’t study Philosophy? (SLAC-TT)
- Suppose I’m a concerned mother of a student who is considering majoring in the Humanities. What would you say to be to convince me that studying the liberal arts is a good choice, considering future career prospects? (SLAC-TT)
- Suppose someone questions why philosophy is even relevant today. What would you tell them? (SLAC-TT)
- We have a Philosophy and Religion major, but most students don’t come to college knowing they want to major in these fields. How do you respond to those who think Philosophy is not a useful degree, and how do you show them the value of studying it? (SLAC-nonTT)
- Liberal arts funding is often cut and faculty are reduced. What would you do to attract majors and high enrollments in your classes? (SLAC-TT)

**Religion**
- In your cover letter you said you have a “deep personal investment in the connections between faith and reason.” Could you elaborate on what you meant by that, especially in the context of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition? (SLAC-TT)
- Our identity is also very important. How would you contribute to our identity as a Catholic University in your teaching? (SLAC-TT)
- What would you do if there was a Fundamentalist Catholic student in your course who is very resistant to Pope Francis? How would you react to having such a student in your class? (SLAC-TT)
• What would you do if a student wanted to drop your class because it conflicts with their religious beliefs? (CC)

Research
• How do you distinguish your work as a scholar from your teaching and your service, and how do these roles relate to one another? (SLAC-TT)

Service
• What community activities are you involved in outside the college? (CC)
• Have you ever participated in sponsoring student organizations? If not, would you be willing to? (CC)

Teaching Style
• Do you agree or disagree with the statement “A good instructor should be an entertainer”? (CC)
• How do you understand the relationship between a student and an instructor? (CC)
• What was your greatest teaching moment? (CC)
• How do you encourage an engaging and exciting educational experience, either in the classroom or through experiential learning? (SLAC-nonTT)
• How have you increased your teaching capacity and how do you continue to develop as an instructor? (SLAC-TT)
• What kind of innovative experiences have you incorporated into your classroom to enhance student learning? (SLAC-TT)
• How do you manage to keep topics in metaphysics and epistemology rigorous but yet make them understandable to the students? (CC)
• In our required course for majors, 40% of the grade is from participation. How do you inspire and assess discussion in your classes? (SLAC-TT)

Technology
• How do you use technology in the classroom? (CC)

Troubleshooting
• What would you do if, after an exam, half or more than half of the students failed the assignment? (CC)
• What would you do if a student wanted to drop your class because it conflicts with their religious beliefs? (CC)
• What was your worst teaching moment? How did you handle this? (CC)
• Suppose you have a student in your class who is very engaged and contributes a lot to discussions, but she turns in papers that aren’t very good, and they don’t reflect her knowledge and engagement with the material. What would you do in that situation? (SLAC-TT)

Why Us?
• Why do you want to work at a community college? In what ways do you think teaching at a community college will differ from teaching at a university? (CC)
• What do you see the benefits of a small liberal arts institution are, as opposed to a large research university? (SLAC-TT)
• This is a very small town. We don’t even have any stoplights. How would you adjust to living somewhere like this? (SLAC-TT)
• Can you tell us why you’re interested in this position? (SLAC-nonTT)
• Now that you’ve visited our small town, what intrigues you about living here, and what worries do you have about living here? (SLAC-TT)
• What is your academic background and your teaching experience? How does this prepare you for teaching in a community college setting? (CC)

Miscellaneous
• Is there anything you’d like us to know about you that isn’t in the materials you sent us? (SLAC-TT)
• Suppose I give you $500 million and you can build a university from scratch any way you want. It doesn’t have to look anything like current universities. How would you design your university? (SLAC-TT)
• What is your favorite novel, poem, album, or film? (SLAC-TT)