

APAs and APA Interviews

David Braun (lightly edited by Tom McKay)

0. General Information

- A. In 2010, the main program of the Eastern APA meeting begins in the evening of December 27. Some departments may want to start interviewing that afternoon, but I suspect most departments will not begin interviewing till the afternoon of December 28. If you can afford it, I suggest that you arrive during the early afternoon of December 27. If you can afford not to share a room, do so: this may help you to sleep better. I think it's better to get a room in the convention hotel, so that you can run to your hotel room during breaks to "chill out".
- B. Most interviews end by mid-afternoon on December 30. You should plan to be around the APA till 5:00 pm on December 30.
- C. You should bring extra copies of your CV with abstract (maybe 20) and a few copies of your syllabi and writing sample. (See "late breaking jobs" below.)
- D. You must register *for the convention* to get an APA badge and to use the APA placement services. This is so even though you will be an APA member. Register in advance to avoid long waits at the onsite registration counter (and to save some money).
- E. There will be a room in the convention hotel containing the APA placement service center (or candidate placement information services). It will have a bulletin board, which will contain "late-breaking" ads for jobs (if any). The APA staff there may also have information about the locations of some interviews.
- F. There will also be a message board that can be used by all APA members to leave messages for anyone else. You might want to check it occasionally for messages (though email and mobile phones have made this much less important).
- G. Most interviews take place in hotel rooms or suites. Some take place in a large room in the convention hotel that has many tables, the "interview tables" room. The tables in this room are usually prominently numbered.
- H. Most interviews are ½ to one hour long.

1. Scheduling interviews

- A. Some departments make requests for interviews by e-mail, while others do it by phone. Requests may begin as early as November 15.
- B. At least one of the phones listed on your CV should have voice mail or a message machine. If you have a cell phone, list it on your CV.
- C. Some departments begin contacting candidates as early as November 20, while others do so as late as December 23. Usually the chair of the department or the chair of the recruiting committee will contact you.
- E. When scheduling interviews, be sure to ask how long the interview will be, and be sure to leave enough time between interviews for you to get from one to another. Keep in mind that you may have to wait a long time for elevators. Some departments hold interviews at nearby non-convention hotels.
- F. Be sure to get the full name of the school correct. (I once nearly missed an interview because I confused Trinity College with Trinity University.)

- G. If the interview will take place in a hotel room or suite, ask the hiring department's contact person how you should find the location of the interview once the convention starts. Some will leave the room number at the placement service. Some will leave a message for you on the "all APA members" message board. Some will ask you to call person X at X's hotel room once the convention begins (if so, ask when you should call so that you don't interrupt interviews). Some will want to contact you after the convention begins. If your interview is at an interview table, then you will be able to get information about the table(s) you want from the placement service. The lines to get information at the placement service are sometimes long. Take that into account in your plans.
- H. You should tell your contact how he/she can reach you during the convention (e.g., whether you will be staying at the convention hotel or some other hotel, a cell phone number, and so on). You should ask your contact how you can contact him/her at the convention.

2. Late-breaking Job Interviews

- A. If you registered in advance, and said that you would be a job candidate, then you will have a job-candidate number on your badge. If you register onsite, you will get a candidate number then.
- B. At the candidate placement service center, there will be file boxes containing numbered file folders. The placement staff will leave any messages for you from interviewing departments in the folder with your number.
- C. Some departments will tell you to get the location of their interviews from the placement center. The staff there may put this information in your folder. If not, ask a staff member for the location.
- D. Check the job bulletin board at the candidate placement service center. There may be some departments that are advertising their jobs for the first time on this bulletin board (though this is unlikely, given JFP Online). Some will want to interview candidates at the convention. If you would like one of these departments to interview you at the convention, submit your CV to the placement service staff. After that, check your placement folder regularly to see if there is a response from the interviewing department.

3. Arriving at the interview

- A. Dress professionally.
- B. Give yourself plenty of time to get to the interview location, in case you have a hard time finding the room (some hotels have confusing numbering systems, or rooms in two different towers, etc.) or getting an elevator, etc.. Some interviews may take place at non-convention hotels.
- C. If the interview is in a hotel room, you should arrive at least a couple of minutes beforehand, and knock on the door at precisely the scheduled time for the interview. If it is at an interview table, you should arrive at the entrance of the interview tables room a few minutes in advance and look for the right table. If there is no candidate there, walk up and say 'hi'.

APA interviews tend to follow a certain script. I will describe a stereotypical one, and make suggestions about what you should do.

4. Beginning the interview

- A. There are two to five interviewers at most interviews. Some have more, and a very few have only one.
- B. The interview will start with introductions all around. Shake hands firmly with each interviewer. Look each in the eye. Say “Nice to meet you” or something like that. Be pleasant. Smile.

5. The Dissertation Spiel

- A. Most interviews will begin with the request “Please tell us about your dissertation”. (See C below for interviews that do not begin in this way.)
- B. Your spiel should be well-rehearsed. It should have the form of an expanding outline. Discuss it with your adviser. Begin with a one-line description like:
“My dissertation is about the nature of justified belief / the nature of time / Aristotle’s philosophy of language / the moral permissibility of abortion.
After that:
“I argue that S” (where S is some rather short, rather non-technical sentence).
“I defend the view that S from various important and commonly accepted objections.”
After that:
“In chapter 1, I do X. In chapter 2, I do Y. . . .” (where X and Y are brief descriptions).
After that:
“Here are the details of chapter 1” (or “Here are details of the most important chapter”).
Be prepared to go on for ten minutes or more. But you are unlikely to go uninterrupted this long.
- C. Some schools will *not* begin with “Tell us about your dissertation”. They may instead say something like “You work on X. How would you explain X to an undergraduate?” This may be an indication that they think they will not understand a “full-blown” dissertation spiel from you. Or that they think you are a “technician” who can’t talk about philosophy at a level that “non-technicians” can understand. In any case, you should describe your area of research in general terms that an undergraduate would understand (as you would in an undergraduate classroom), and then try, if possible, to lead up to the topics you cover in your dissertation.
- D. You may instead get the question “How did you get into philosophy?” or “What led you to specialize in area X?”
- E. A few schools may ask you **no** questions about your dissertation or research. They may go straight into asking you about teaching.

6. Interruptions and questions,

Probably someone will interrupt your dissertation spiel within two minutes of your starting. Remain unflustered. Answer questions. Try to direct the course of the interview to topics that you are best-prepared to discuss. Admit when you don't have an answer by saying "That's an interesting question. I'll have to think about it more. Thank you."

7. Teaching

Every department will ask something about your teaching. You will almost inevitably get a question about how you would teach Philosophy 101.

- A. Sometimes you will get: "What would be your goal in teaching intro?" Or: "What would be your goal in teaching course X?" Or: "What is your philosophy of teaching?"
- B. You will be asked about how you would teach intro. Historically? By topic? Books? (Anthology of original sources? Textbook?) Exams? Papers? Group work? What would you do if you had a course of 100 people and no TA? What do you think about discussion and students' asking questions during lectures? Do you ask students questions during class?
- C. Be prepared for questions about courses in your AOSs and AOCs (and additional teaching interests, if any). For AOSs, you should be able to teach graduate and advanced undergraduate classes. For AOCs, you should be able to teach intro courses, and undergraduate beyond the 100 level.
- D. For each course, you should have in mind a syllabus, complete with books and types of assignments (exams, papers, group work, journals, etc.).
- E. It's OK (perhaps even good) to bring copies of syllabi from courses you've taught, and syllabi of potential courses. But don't rely on them when you answer questions.
- F. You may be asked: What would be your ideal schedule of four courses (six courses, eight courses) for next year?

8. End-of-the-Interview Questions

- A. You may be asked a question like "Where do you think you will be with your research (/teaching) in five years?"
- B. If the interviewers' department mentioned a school **mission** in their ad (such as a religious mission), they will almost certainly ask you about this at the end of the interview.
- C. Many departments will ask you: "Do you have any questions for us?" Ideally, you will have researched the department and will have in mind some specific questions. Try not to ask a question that might cause them discomfort. E.g., if you ask "Do you meet and discuss your research with each other?", they may reply "No", and be embarrassed, and conclude that you will not fit with them. Similarly for "Are your students really smart?" and "Are your classes small?" and "Do you have a lot of majors?" or "Is it cheap to live in your city?". Try to ask questions whose answers will make the interviewers feel good about themselves, e.g., ask about their special speaker series, or their special programs for

undergraduates, if they have them, or some such thing that you have seen on their website.

- D. Asking questions such as “How many courses do you teach a year/a semester?” and “What sorts of courses would you want me to teach if I were hired?” are safe, assuming that this is not specified in the ad.
- E. Utterly safe questions: “When will you be making your decisions?”, “Will you bring job candidates to campus? If so, when?”

9. **Leaving the Interview**

Shake hands with everyone. Look them in the eye. Say “Nice to meet you” and “Thanks!”

10. **The Receptions (aka the smokers, though smoking is no longer allowed at them)**

- A. There are two receptions, one from 8:00 pm to midnight on the 28th, and a second from 9:00 pm to midnight on the 29th. They occur in large ballrooms.
- B. You will need your APA badge to attend the receptions. You can bring guests, but they will have to pay a fee for the first reception.
- C. The reception on the 28th has free beer and soda. On the 29th you must pay for drinks. More people attend the first reception than the second.
- D. Don’t drink much beer. The free beer is lousy anyway.
- E. Many universities have tables at the reception, including SU. You will get a map of tables when you enter the reception area.
- F. You should attend the receptions, and hover mostly near the SU table, on the off-chance that some interviewer will want to track you down and ask you further questions. (This is rare, but it happened a couple of times to me when I was on the job market.)
- G. You *might* want to track down an interviewer in order to follow up a question or remark that he/she made at an interview. But this can be risky. Don’t be obnoxious. The interviewers may prefer to drink beer and talk to their friends.
- H. You do not need to stay at the reception till it ends. Get some sleep instead.

The importance of the mock interview

The mock interview will give you a bit of a flavor of a real APA interview. You should treat it as much as possible like a real APA interview. Prepare your dissertation spiel, teaching spiels, and syllabi well in advance. Wear your interview clothing. Stay “in character” (e.g., do not acknowledge that you know your interviewers).

On-Campus Interviews

David Braun

September 8, 2006 (edited 2010)

The procedures for on-campus interviews are less standardized.

1. You fly to campus. Sometimes the school will pay for your ticket in advance. Sometimes they will ask you to pay for your ticket and/or hotel and then reimburse you later. If so, you will need to keep detailed receipts. Be prepared for the latter! Have a working credit card!
2. It is very common to arrive at the destination city the night before the real activities begin. Sometimes a member of the hiring department will meet you for dinner that night, if you arrive early enough. Sometimes not.
3. On the big day, you will meet lots of people in one-on-one meetings in their offices: the chairman of the department, a dean or a dean's representative, and many faculty members.
 - A. The chair will probably talk about things like teaching requirements for the job, tenure requirements, and salary. You should probably express satisfaction with whatever he/she says. (You can express your doubts after you get the offer.) The chair may ask you if you have questions. You can safely inquire about recent hiring trends in that department. You can safely inquire about things that they are proud of, such as special speaker series. You might want to ask about the dean who you will soon meet.
 - B. The faculty members will probably want to get a sense of you as a person and as a philosopher. They will want to discover whether you will be a reasonably congenial colleague. They may also want to discuss philosophy, especially your work, with you. Be prepared to discuss your **future** research plans with them (and the chair). Ask them about their own work. Display interest in what they are doing. If there are any intersections with your own work, point them out.
 - C. The dean (or dean's representative) will meet you (a) to make sure that you are reasonably intelligent and (b) to allow you to ask questions about the college/university and the department. The dean/representative will almost certainly ask you what your research is about. You should try to present some simplified and shortened version of your dissertation spiel. Or, better, consider how you would explain your general area of research to an undergraduate, and give the dean that, followed by a short description of your particular concerns in your dissertation. The dean may ask you whether you have any questions. You could ask about the financial health of the school.
 - D. Some schools may ask you to meet with a group of undergraduate or graduate students. You should appear friendly. Keep in mind that anything you say may get back to the faculty members of the hiring department.

4. Some departments will ask you to teach a class session in one of their courses. This is hard. My only suggestions are that you prepare well, be energetic, and keep things simple.
5. Most departments will want you to give a talk. You can use your writing sample, if the talk is mainly for the faculty of the department. However, some departments will specify that there will be (a lot of) undergraduates in the audience and that they want your talk to be accessible to undergraduates. In this case, you will need either to modify your writing sample, or give a very general talk about the general area of your research (something suitable to an intro philosophy course or more advanced undergraduate course), ending with some general remarks about your research.
6. There may be discussion of your talk afterwards, either at a reception or in faculty members' offices and cars.
7. You will probably be taken to dinner. Be modest in what you order. Do not order dishes that you are likely to spill on yourself. Remember that you are still being evaluated even at this point. There may be further discussion of your talk. They may ask you about personal matters, such as where you grew up.
8. At some point, you may receive questions that you are not supposed to receive, legally speaking, such as whether you're married and have children, or whether you are gay or lesbian. The inquirers may not know that these questions are illegal. You can legally answer these questions, if you wish. If you spontaneously and voluntarily reveal that, for instance, you have three spouses and twenty-five children, then they are legally free to ask whatever they want about these matters. You may *want* to talk about these matters, especially family matters, because you may want to inquire about, e.g., the prospects for a job for your spouse in the area, or you may want to ask about schools, or about housing for families. It may even be to your advantage to discuss these matters, for you then reveal that you are very serious about the job. Matters are more complicated if your spouse is also an academic. Then the department may worry that if you take their job, you will leave later when your spouse gets a job elsewhere. Or they may want to avoid pressure from you to get your spouse a job. But if they like you, they may want to find your spouse a job. It is difficult to say what the right strategy is. Discuss it with a faculty member, such as the placement director or your dissertation supervisor.