

Love the Job Market

1. Make your job paper your only priority until September

If your paper is good, most other details of the market are second order. Write the first draft as soon as possible. No matter when you write the first draft, you will not feel ready. It will be terrible. And it will be necessary. Write it in May, not September. Summer is critical because fall is filled with distractions. By September 1, you should be on draft three or four and it should be very polished.

2. Understand the enemy

Your goal is to convince a group of professors that they want you as a colleague. They mostly do not enjoy the recruiting process. They mean well but inevitably will try to do the job while minimizing attention and energy. Recognize this. Everything you do should be about making it easiest for them to conclude: This person is smart, clear, competent, organized, enthusiastic, has a pipeline brimming with ideas, and I'd love to have him or her around the office.

3. Rewrite relentlessly

Because of your readers' limited attention, the abstract and intro must be perfect. The first three paragraphs should be gold. This will only happen through repeated revision. Hemingway rewrote the last page of A Farewell to Arms 39 times. Just saying. Your advisers will read drafts rarely, so have other students and people in other fields read for you. Make the rest of the paper skimmable (i.e., informative section headings and self-contained tables, figures, and propositions).

4. Make every slide a money slide

Your job talk is critical. It is when most assessments of your quality will occur. Schedule as many practice talks as you can. Draft your slides in early September. Revise them with the goal of making every slide outstanding and necessary. Make the first fifteen minutes perfect. Shorter decks are always better. Have an escape route for derailed talks (e.g., a synthesis slide before extensions).

5. Master the thirty questions

As you gather feedback, write down all the questions you're asked. Write and revise your best possible answers. Order them by importance, how often they're asked, and how uncomfortable you are with them. Then master the top thirty questions and answers.

6. Become an expert

Be the most knowledgeable person in the room on your topic. As you work, collect notes on all relevant papers in your literature. Go back and figure out exactly how your paper relates to what already exists. Showing that you know the literature demonstrates you're serious about contributing to it.

7. Perfect the spiel

For short interviews, prepare an extremely linear two minute summary of your paper: question, setting, top level finding, ordered list of results, conclusion. Have a second set of paragraphs (five to seven minutes total) to flesh out the paper. Have two minute versions of your other papers. When asked about future plans, have a concrete idea prepared and then set people up to imagine your rich, fascinating research agenda going forward.

8. Practice relentlessly

Practice everything out loud and the most important parts most often: the first two minutes of the spiel 100 times and the first fifteen minutes of the job talk 30 to 50 times. Practice the talk before every flyout and the first fifteen minutes in the morning before every talk. Memorize everything you can. Shakespearean actors memorize and don't worry about sounding natural; neither should you.

9. Keep your advisers informed and pumped up

Your advisers are your front line. They gather and communicate information and lobby for you behind the scenes. They will help you most if they know your hopes and priorities, what's going on, and what their role is in your search, and if they are pumped up about you and your work. They will only be pumped up if you are.

10. Bring your best possible self

This is a marathon. Develop a strategy for bringing your most confident, earnest, engaged self to every interaction. Maintain regular exercise and sleep habits and a good diet. Stay healthy. Have an outfit that makes you feel like a rockstar. Learn the therapeutic arts of ironing and polishing shoes. Find a bathroom and power pose before interviews and talks (it's not a joke, it's science).

11. Enjoy, treat, and protect yourself

No matter the placement, the job you're asking for is an amazing job. You get to work on whatever you want and with whomever you want. And what you're working on matters (at least to you). Keep this in mind when you're feeling down. Make time for fun. Maintain a support group of people off the market. Avoid the echo chamber of nervous grad students as best as you can.