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Preamble

I was on the faculty job market during the 2018/2019 season. It was a busy and uncertain time, and this document contains what will hopefully be helpful advice. At least, “2018” me would have found it very helpful. Though please note that this was based on my experience and circumstances and may not apply universally (and subject to my own biases, privileges, and disadvantages). When I asked faculty for advice during my search, I was surprised by how inconsistent and divergent the advice was. I frequently saw senior people give opposite advice for the same question. My sense is that the job search experience now is very different than what many senior faculty experienced and I generally found the advice for more recent faculty (0-10 years in the job) the most helpful. This is to say, seek out the advice of several people, but know that some of it won't be worth following (probably, including some of the advice in this document). Finally, I applied and interviewed primarily in the US (~85%) and secondarily in Europe (~15%) with a focus on the bio-sciences, so this advice may be less applicable for applications to elsewhere.

Other Resources

Though it is slightly outdated, I would recommend “Strategies for Obtaining a Faculty Position in the Biomedical Sciences: Views from Both Sides of the Job Search Process” by Erik Snapp. It can be downloaded [here](#).

Another great resource is the *BioRxiv* preprint [Insights from a survey-based analysis of the academic job market](#).

This preprint from Bob Goldstein and Prachee Avasthi focuses a bit more on setting up your lab, but also contains helpful information on the application process: [A Guide to Setting Up and Managing a Lab at a Research-Intensive Institution](#).

Kara McKinley also [posted a fantastic document](#).

Arjun Raj additionally [made a very help document](#).

Lots of resources are available online and frequently updated. So worth googling and compiling a list.

Are you ready to apply this year?

When is the right time to begin applying? Ultimately, you will have to make this decision. First of all, you will need the full support of your post-doc advisor. Second, it is generally helpful to have at least one significant post-doc paper published, and have established enough of a niche, that you can convincingly lay out why a university should hire you and why you are the very best person for this body of work. I would suggest talking to several people that know you well and getting their feedback (though don't expect everyone to have the same opinion). Moreover, the resources listed above contain information about this, and the preprint contain information about the statistics of papers/accomplishments of successful applicant during the 2018/2019 search.

Some people do a “mini search” first. As in, “I will apply to a handful of jobs this year; and if it does not work, I will do a full search next year”. While this might occasionally be a good idea, I would not recommend it. First, putting together all your application materials, perfecting your chalk talk and job talk, getting letters from advisors/mentors/collaborators, etc. is so much work, that if you are going to do it you might as well do a full search. Second, what can often happen in a mini-search is that you end up with a solid job offer, just not at one of your ten “dream schools”. Now you end up in a very tricky position: do you “settle” for what you have now, or do you gamble and repeat the search next year knowing that you might end up with no offers at all then?

Finally, what are some of the things that help? Great publications. Many publications. “CNS” papers. Stellar educational credentials. Fancy post-doc fellowships. K99s and Burroughs Welcome transition awards. Glowing letters of reference. Having collaborators in the department. A fantastic research proposal. Great teaching and diversity track records and statements. Having your research be seen as “fundable”. Filling a gap in the department. This is just a partial list. However, while being strong in each of these categories does help, it is important to realize that essentially no one is strong in all of these, or even most of these. Thus, while many things help, there is essentially no single thing that is required. You will find many recent hires who, at least

from the outside, might seem inadequate in several of these categories. Presumably, they stood out in other areas and so can you. Therefore, don't despair and don't compare yourself too much to other people. In short, there is no necessary and sufficient list of accomplishments.

Timeline

Faculty jobs are posted all throughout the year. That said, the majority of the deadlines are in August-March, with a few in July and a few after March. I would recommend having the application materials and reference letters ready by mid-July to ensure you don't miss out on job openings. Depending on how fast you write and how quick your reference writers are, it may be prudent to start getting things together a few months earlier.

Putting together the application materials

Each application is somewhat idiosyncratic and get ready to type the same personal details into a never ended number of forms. That said, the majority of applications require:

1. Research Statement/Proposal
2. Cover Letter
3. CV
4. 3-5 Letters of Reference

In addition, some openings also require:

5. Diversity Statement
6. Teaching Statement
7. Various small things (e.g. describe your most important paper)

More information on these are given below. But before you start writing, it's important that you think through how you are going to "present yourself".

"Presenting yourself" or finding your niche

Before writing an application, it is worth thinking through how they will be read. Typically, a university will assemble a search committee of ca. 4-8 faculty members, with one person serving as the chair. How many applications the university receives per position will depend on a lot of factors. From my search, the lowest number I heard was just around 100 for a position and the highest number I heard from more than 900 applications for a position. I think 200-400 applications for each position is pretty typical.

Since the number of applications per position is so high, the search committee will often do at least two rounds: First, a quick round to weed out the majority of the applications and get the number down to a more manageable 20-50 applications. It's worth keeping in mind that the search committee will have a limited amount of time to do this, and that they are doing this on top of all of their normal research/teaching/traveling/service obligations. What this means is that they are unlikely to spend more than 5-10 minutes on each application during the first round. What this means is that your application has to appeal and stand out to someone who has no more than 5-10 minutes to glance at your application. So, make it aesthetically pleasing, perhaps bold the key points, make your proposal and CV easy to navigate. 3 pages of 0.5-inch margins with Times New Roman size 10 with no paragraphs and no figures is unlikely to work.

Second, once weeded down, your application will likely (though each search committee is idiosyncratic and does things differently) be read by several/all members of the search committee and discussed at a meeting. Search committees are composed of faculty from many scientific areas. So, you need to write a proposal that is simultaneously exciting to an immunologist, a cognitive neuroscientist, a chemical biologist, a biophysicist, a *Drosophila* geneticist, a computational genomics person, and an *in vitro* biochemist. So, you need to explain your research in a very clear and simple manner, and it is crucial that your proposal will seem exciting to scientists regardless of background. Finally, the committee will typically invite a shortlist of 2-6 people for full on campus interview (more about this later).

Finally, this should not be read as an endorsement of this process. In an ideal world, the search committee would read the full application and a few of the most relevant papers from every single applicant. However, it is worth thinking deeply about this process and putting yourself in the shoes of the committee. Imagine how you would go about this if you got 400 applications and had to produce a shortlist of candidates in 6 weeks, while juggling all your normal responsibilities, and 98% of the applications were outside of your field and each application contained 10 new acronyms with which you were unfamiliar.

Accordingly, you will want to make things simple. To be selected for the interview, you will often need a committee member to advocate for you and “sell” you to the committee. Since you generally won’t know who is on the committee and since there often won’t be someone from your sub-field, you will need a clear pitch that someone far outside the field can use.

This is perhaps a bit of a silly comparison, but US presidential candidates tend to distill their platform into a few slogans that sum up who they are at their core, e.g. “Yes, we can”, “Hope and Change”, and “Believe in America”. Obviously, academic applications are a bit more serious. But it helps to distill things down to its core, how you will present yourself. If you do this before you start writing, you can make this core message come through in all of your documents with redundancy, and it is more likely that the search committee will get who you are. How to do this is obviously very specific to you, your field, and your approaches. But here are some examples (assuming your primary focus is not technology development):

1. *New technique in old field*: Maybe you have developed a new method that can begin to answer questions in a well-known field. Then your pitch would be: X is an important field. Unanswered question Y has remained unanswered due to technical limitations. My new technique Z will finally allow us to answer Y with big impact on field X.
2. *PhD-PostDoc Hybrid*: This is often the most straightforward pitch. You became an expert in X during your PhD and an expert in Y during your postdoc. No one else is an expert in both X and Y. In your own lab you will combine X+Y for a unique approach/take on your chosen field. If you can convincingly lay out why X and Y synergizes, this can be a great pitch.
3. *New Resource in old field*: For example, you may have established some difficult mouse models or an *in vitro* reconstitution system that will be powerful for answering questions in a field. This can be another great pitch. The key is to convincingly lay out why this puts you in a unique position.

In general, it helps if you can convince the search committee that you have established a “platform”, upon which your lab alone will be able to build many new projects and answer important questions. If you propose to do X in field Y and there are already 10 labs doing X in field Y with 15 people per lab, the committee will understandably be worried about whether or not you can establish yourself and compete with those labs. If you can convincingly make a case that you have a unique niche – which no other lab currently has, however small the niche – it is much easier to persuade a university to hire you. With start-up, lab renovation, etc. a university will typically need to invest millions of dollars in a new hire. Many universities are fundamentally conservative and risk-averse, and want you to present a convincing case that you can establish your own unique and externally funded program and be successful enough to get tenure. If they sense there is a significant risk you won’t get tenure, they may be too scared to put in the investment and hire you. Though of course, the three examples above are just suggestions and there are many other ways to put together a successful application.

So, before you start writing, my suggestion would be to think deeply about how you want to present yourself, keep it simple (i.e. you should be able to lay it out in 2-3 sentences), and then organize all your application materials around this core pitch.

Writing process

This is of course deeply personal and will depend on your circumstances. But my suggestions would be to: 1) start early (e.g. May); 2) find yourself one or two writing buddies; 3) keep iterating.

Some people get competitive and secretive when going on the job market. In a sense, it is a zero-sum game. However, it is just not worth being this way. Thousands apply each year, and you are much better off being nice, open, friendly and collaborative. The whole process can take a year, and it is best to have a peer group. I would find one or two people who are also applying, and – if possible – write together. This way you can exchange ideas, give each other feedback and insights, and make the whole process less stressful and more enjoyable.

By starting early, you can focus on one document at a time (e.g. one week for cover letter or teaching statement). You can then leave the document for a couple of weeks and come back to it with fresh eyes. Expect to continue to iterate throughout the whole process.

Before you start writing, it is worth it to contact 5 or so people from your network who applied for jobs the last few years and to get their application materials (promise to keep this confidential when you ask, and strictly abide by this). You will likely notice that the materials, style and approaches differ a lot. While this means that there is no guaranteed formula for success, it also means that there are many ways to be successful.

Research Statement / Research Proposal.

This is perhaps the single most important document. You will likely need to write both 2-page, 3-page, and 5-page versions of this, but most places will ask for a 3-page proposal (for the most part, references do not count). Writing the proposal is difficult. What should the proposal contain and what is the right style? Ideally, it should feature all of the following:

1. Start with a short ~150-300 word abstract or executive summary, that summarizes you and the entire statement and allows a busy reader to get the gist in 1-2 minutes.
2. Introduce your field and convincingly lay out why your research is important, urgent, and why you are the single best person.
3. Briefly summarize your educational history (e.g. PhD/post-doc advisors and research etc.)
4. Lay out 2-3 major aims, directions, projects or objectives. These should
 - a. Clearly lay out your first 2-3 years and make clear what the first few projects in your lab will be, why they are important, and why they will be successful.
 - b. Lay out the medium-term projects (year 3-8).
 - c. Lay out a long-term vision and perhaps have the 3rd aim be this. This would answer the question, if your research is successful how will your field have been fundamentally transformed 10 years from now?
 - d. Thus, in terms of scope you may be outlining 50-150 person years of research, whilst at the same time clearly laying out why the projects taken on by your first two PhD students will be successful.
5. The proposal should be written in simple and accessible way, where after reading it, it would be clear to someone totally outside your field why it is important, how you bring in a new approach/perspective/niche and why you are the right person to do it, and with enough detail to persuade them that you will be successful.
6. At the same time, it should also be convincing to a specialist in your field.

7. Strike a careful balance between Big Picture and feasibility (if you have written an NIH R01 or K99 grant, this is more or less the opposite of what you need here; Reusing your K99 is unlikely to be successful, since they tend to be too narrow in scope and risk averse).
8. While you want to make it clear that you have fully thought through the details of the projects, most people err on the side of too little Big Picture and too much detail.
9. Preliminary data is not necessary. But it can be fine, especially if significant parts of your work are unpublished. But this is not an NIH grant and you want to only include the key proof-of-concept data, if any at all.
10. Contain beautiful figures that synergize with your text.
11. I personally like “overview” figures that summarize your whole research program in an outline pictorial format.
12. End with an Outlook or Conclusion that summarizes you, your program, and gives an indication of your long-term and Big Picture goals.

I am sure I have missed a few things. Needless to say, doing all of these things and doing them well, in 3 pages of text and figures is extremely challenging. But trying to “cheat” by using tiny margins, font sizes etc. will most likely not help your case. Stick to no smaller than size 11 and 0.5-inch margins. Very few search committee members, who have to read 50 research statements, will complain that the statements were too short. What this means is that you might only have 3-5 sentences per project if you have 2-3 projects per Aim/Objective. In other words, you have to introduce a direction, frame the key question, make clear how you will answer it, and why it is important in 3-5 sentences. This is difficult.

Given the space constraints, you will not be able to address all your pet peeves. Instead, it will serve you well to focus on your unique niche and the most important points (and perhaps emphasize them in bold), and avoid tangents. Finally, this primarily applies to research intensive major universities. If you are applying for a faculty position at a college without PhD students that is focused on undergraduate teaching and research, you will want your research program to fit in appropriately.

Cover Letter

The cover letter should be short (no more than 1 or 1.5 pages) and will likely be partially redundant with your other materials. You may want to put it on your current institution’s letterhead. There are many different ways of doing this, but this was approximately the structure that I used:

Letterhead (from your current institution), with your name, title, affiliation, institution at the top left and your address, email, and phone number (many search committee chairs prefer to have phone calls) and perhaps your website on the top right.

Who you are addressing it to: E.g. “Faculty Search Committee, Department of X, university of Y”.

Opening paragraph 1: very short paragraph stating generically that you are applying for position X at department Y at University Z. Your current info (e.g. I am a postdoc with X at University Z, and my research focus is Y. Optionally, you could then add a sentence of why you fit the search criteria or Job Ad.

Paragraph 2: Introduce yourself (e.g. educational background, past and current advisors). Introduce your research field. Highlight your most important publications. Explain in a few sentences the gist of your past and current and why it is important.

Paragraph 3: Now lay out your future proposed research program, why it is important and why you are the right person.

Paragraph 4: Say something nice about the place you are applying for, and explain why you are excited to go there. This can be fairly generic (e.g. exceptional research environment at university X; how Department Y is well-known in the area of Z that synergizes with your program). This is also an opportunity to mention that you are excited about collaborating. If there are specific labs, you can mention them here. Just be careful. A department may have 60 labs, 20 of which have totally outdated websites. People might feel left out, if they feel you should have mentioned them, and you never know who is on the search committee.

Paragraph 5: A generic “end paragraph” such as, “I would welcome an opportunity to further discuss my future research plans with you” etc. While not required, here you could also name your reference writers and are put in any special circumstances or additional information you might find to be relevant, but which did not fit in elsewhere in the application. Finally, you can finish with something like “Sincerely, {your name}” and a digital scan of your signature.

Overall, you will want to keep it fairly high-level and big picture and not too long. You will want to come across as an exciting and qualified applicant, and you want your excitement for the department to come across too. People debate about how specific you should be about the department. My view is that the most important things are to show that you are sincere and have done a little bit of research, and that one or two sentences specific to the department will likely be sufficient.

CV

The CV is typically fairly standard and leaves less room for creativity, but still very important. My suggestion would be to make it short (2-3 pages) and easy to navigate. A 12-page CV listing every single thing you have ever done, is not worth it in my opinion since it creates too much work for the search committee. 2 pages is easier to quickly scan. The two most important things are your educational and research background (universities, degrees, subjects, and advisors) and your publication list. Typical components include:

1. Your name, contact information (address, email and phone number). Perhaps your website, Google Scholar profile, Twitter handle.
2. Educational Background: Universities, Subjects, Degrees, Years.
3. Research Experience: Mainly graduate and post-doc. While you can highlight your undergraduate research, there is no need to list all of your rotation projects etc.
4. Honors and awards: e.g. fellowships, awards, prizes. These can be both for research, grades, or teaching.
5. Academic Talks: If you have given a handful or so talks at major conferences you can list them.
6. Teaching and Mentoring: these two will be primary responsibilities in your faculty jobs, so listing how many people you have mentored (including undergraduates and rotation students) can be helpful, as can a list of the courses that you have taught.
7. Service: here you could list refereeing activity (especially if you and not your advisor was asked to review papers/grants), professional memberships, any conferences or similar that you helped organize. In the future, your tenure case will be partially judged based on your service record, so showing that you are community oriented can be helpful. If you have been involved in efforts to promote diversity in science, this is also a great thing to include.
8. Publication list. This is the most important. You may want to bold your name and make the paper titles or journal names active URLs to make it easy for someone to quickly access your entire paper. You may also want to have two lists: one for first/co-first author papers and one for collaborative papers. Do include preprints. While there are still some old-fashioned people, preprints are increasingly recognized and actually allows people to read and assess your work. Having multiple “*in preparation*” papers is generally not a good look and can be viewed skeptically. But if they truly are in preparation, you can write “please email me for latest draft”. This will make it seem more credible, and people really do email.
9. References: Finally, you can list the people and contact information for the people who serve as your reference letter writers. Make sure you ask them which email they want you to use.

There are several other things that you can add. And it certainly helps if the CV is aesthetically pleasing. Make sure your educational background/advisors and your publication list is very easy to find.

Letters of reference

You will need letters of reference from your PhD and Postdoc advisors. If either of these letters are missing, it will be seen as a big red flag under most circumstances. Typically, you should not use letters from people who knew you as an undergraduate, since this will be viewed as too long ago. With you PhD and Postdoc advisor you will have two letters (or three if you were co-advised). For your third (or fourth) letter, you could pick a collaborator or someone who knows you well from your postdoc work. Typically, you would want to focus on your more recent work and have most letters pertinent to your recent postdoc work rather than your graduate work (with exceptions). Additionally, it helps to have at least one or two letters from senior people who are very well known.

Asking for letters of reference and for specific things to be mentioned in them can be awkward, but letter writer typically appreciate this, since it makes them easier to write. When you ask for the letter, write them a brief update (if they are not your current advisor), provide a bullet point list with things/anecdotes/achievements that they could mention, and send them your CV. Often, they would expect at least 4-6 weeks notice before you would need the letter. Some may ask you to draft the letter. Now that I am on the other side and writing letters of reference, I find that the more information – and especially specific information – people include, the better and the easier it is to write the letter.

It can sometimes be good to be strategic about any specific points. For example, if your proposal relies critically on your ability to use method X and one of your reference writers is an expert on method X, then you could ask them to substantiate that you would be able to use method X in your independent lab.

Finally, one of the most challenging aspect is to keep track of all the letters and which has been submitted to which school and when. I would recommend that you ask your reference writers to upload their anonymous letter to Interfolio and then you can largely automate the reference letter submission. This will cost a few tens of dollars to use Interfolio (or at least it did in 2018), but it will make everyone's lives much easier and getting to know Interfolio (or a similar service) as early as possible is really worth it.

Diversity Statement

Though quite new (in 2018), Diversity Statements are increasingly required when applying and increasingly emphasized. Since the requirements for diversity statements are rapidly changing, I would suggest googling and finding up-to-date guides and to take the diversity statement very seriously. As a faculty member, you will be mentoring and teaching a diverse group of students and a part of your service role will be to contribute to an inclusive environment and to increasing participation of group traditionally underrepresented in STEM. During your interviews, you will also likely be asked about how you will contribute to an inclusive environment. 2021 edit: Diversity statements are increasingly important and from what I have heard, I believe some universities specifically screen based on the diversity statement and filters out candidates, before reading the research sections and CVs. I would recommend google the guidelines from the University of California schools.

Teaching Statement

Many, but not all, universities require a teaching statement. In contrast, medical schools and research institutions without undergraduates typically do not. In the teaching statement, you should write about your teaching experience and why you are excited to contribute to the teaching mission of the institution you are applying to. It is also helpful to lay out which course areas you would be qualified to teach. Universities may ask you to teach existing courses and/or ask you to develop a new course. Therefore, I think it is helpful to simultaneously come across as excited to teach existing courses and to develop a new course (and both have their pros and cons when you start teaching). You could highlight some existing courses you would like to teach (with course numbers for extra points; but mention at least a handful so people don't feel usurped), and you can also describe what a potential new course would be like that you would like to develop if asked. Finally, you can describe your teaching philosophy.

Various small things

Many applications also ask you for other specific things. This could be describing your 1-3 most important papers, which achievements during your PhD/post-doc you are most proud of, etc. These are difficult to generalize, but quite common.

How much should you tailor the application to the specific department.

There will be a lot of different opinions on how much to tailor your application to each department. My view is that it unless you are much better connected than I was, it is very difficult to really 'know' a department from the outside and above all, it is not good to come across as insincere. So unless you know the department super well, I would suggest to keep it brief and only write a sentence or two about the department and why you are excited about it, but to keep it fairly general. Scan through the faculty list before your application and see who you recognize. If someone is in your subfield, it would be best to mention that you would be excited to work with them.

But in general, my view is to keep it relatively short and vague (though please note that many people may disagree on this and you should make your own assessment). To illustrate this: Say you have a project where you would like to collaborate with an expert on method X. You could scroll through the department website and faculty research pages and find a person or two who uses method X and mention it in your cover letter. But many faculty pages are outdated and you might miss someone, and that person could be chairing the search committee, in which case they would wonder why they were not mentioned and why you only mentioned their colleagues. So instead, you could say that the department is renowned in area X, which would be safer, since you won't accidentally leave someone out.

In summary, my view is that a few sentences in the cover letter (or research statement) about the department is sufficient, and that if you don't know the department well it is better to err on the side of being less specific to avoid coming across as insincere. At least at the initial application stage this is less important. When you do a full onsite interview, you will want to come prepared and know about everyone with whom you will meet.

Small notes

A few practical suggestions:

1. Include your name, document title (e.g. CV or Research Statement), and page number in the header or footer of all your documents. Make it easy for someone who printed out 10 applications to separate the pages and applications in a stack of papers.
2. Google yourself and see what comes up. People will be typing your name into google, and if possible, the first few hits should be useful to you and your application.
3. It is a good idea to make a website. Does not have to be fancy. A simple free WordPress website is fine. Here you can outline your past, current, and future research; your CV; your publication list; and any other information that will help your case. E.g. when you visit a university and your talk is announced, very likely many people will google you to find out more about you and they may not have the documents that the search committee has access to.
4. Make sure you have a Google Scholar profile and that it is updated.
5. Use Interfolio (or similar service) to manage your reference letters. If you reference writers have to manually email and upload the letter each time, you are unfortunately likely to have many incomplete applications.

Submitting applications

Once you have your application materials ready it is time to submit applications. This is time-intensive and logistically challenging. Moreover, keeping track of all the jobs, deadlines, which letters have been

submitted where and when, and all other loose ends takes a lot of organization. So, come up with a system that works well for you (spreadsheet etc.). This process involves finding open jobs, deciding which and how many to apply to, filling out the application, and making sure the reference letters are submitted on time. Get rid of filling your personal details into endless forms ☺

Finding job openings

This can surprisingly be disorganized and it is likely to change over time. Many faculty job openings are posted on *Nature Careers*, *Science Careers*, *AcademicJobsOnline* (yes, it looks like it was coded in the early 90s, but many universities still seem to use it ☺). Many jobs may also be posted on the university website and Twitter can be great since openings are often advertised there. Jobs are posted as early as July and as late as May/June, though most are advertised from August to January. Make a list and organize by deadline date.

How many jobs should you apply for?

This is a personal decision and people will give divergent advice. The only thing that is certain is that you get no job offers where you don't apply. Unless you are extremely well travelled you will likely see openings in cities, states, or countries that you have not visited before, and it is easy to spend many hours researching a single university/location to decide if to apply or not. You will need to talk to your family and loved ones about where they would be willing to consider before applying. This period can be very stressful and uncertain for you, but for your family since it will seem even more opaque and since they may not understand the process as well, it can be even more stressful.

My view is that it is better to apply too wide than too narrow. It is fairly common for people to cancel interviews if you get more interviews than expected (this is a luxury problem). So, you have a lot to lose by applying to too few places, and relatively little to lose by applying too widely. Moreover, deciding on a number is not realistic anyway. When you start applying, you will likely have no idea which jobs will be posted four months later, and it would in my opinion be a bit silly not to apply to your dream position just because you had set some threshold. Furthermore, there are often multiple departments at a school where you research could fit in (especially at large medical schools), and it is totally fine to submit several applications to different departments at the same school. Sometimes they will communicate internally and set up joint interviews, and sometimes not. I have a couple of joint interviews between 2 departments, I found that process to work out pretty well.

Finally, expect to be surprised when you actually visit. It is pretty common to find upon interviewing that you love a department/city that you were lukewarm on when you applied, and vice versa, it is also pretty common to interview at a place you thought would be a great fit and come away with the sense that you really do not want to go there. Moreover, the time that it takes to properly research a department (tens of hours) is much longer than the time it takes to submit an application once your materials are all ready (30-60 min). And having done a few interviews at schools you are moderately excited about, will give you the practice and confidence to succeed at your dream school. So, my view is that it is best to apply to most of the schools/departments where you think there is at least a small chance that you would want to go.

Submitting the applications

While some job openings use "standard" common platforms such as *AcademicJobsOnline* or *Interfolio*, many universities have their own systems. Expect to fill out endless forms with the same information over and over again, creating lots of login accounts, and uploading files. This can be somewhat mind numbing. Come up with a system to swap university names and doublecheck before submitting. It is pretty common to submit an application about how excited you are about University Y to University X. We have all done it, but needless to say, it won't help your chances.

One strategy is to organize all the jobs by their deadline and group them for 1st of the month (or close by) and 15th of the month (or close by). And then set aside one or two days every two weeks and submit all the

applications for those deadlines in a single setting. This tends to be much more efficient than dragging them out and doing one application at a time.

The most challenging part is the reference letters. Once you have submitted a dozen applications keeping track of which letters have been submitted and to which school becomes extremely challenging. Using a professional service like Interfolio will make everyone's life much easier, and you will get a confirmation once the letters have been submitted on your referee's behalf, which means less logistics to worry about. It may cost \$50-100, but it is well worth it.

Hearing back

You hear stories about people who get a rejection letter from a school where they applied for a position five years ago. At the same time, you can be invited for an interview *before* the application deadline if you submit early. Some schools will get back to you almost immediately, some will take many months, and from many you will never hear anything at all. This is to say, expect things to be chaotic, idiosyncratic, disorganized, and unpredictable. I think it helps to think about 100 faculty you have met. Each person is unique. Some are nice and friendly, some are generous with their time, some are super busy, some are organized, some are highly disorganized, some reply to emails immediately, others almost never reply to emails, some have strong pet peeves, some deeply distrust certain scientific areas. Now imagine each one of these 100 faculty being the single person chairing a search. How each search will be handled will vary wildly, because the people running the searches are so different. This is true for all aspects of the search, including timing and when you will hear back. So, if you have not heard from one specific school two months after applying, it is not necessarily a bad sign. If you have not heard from a single school several months after applying, it unfortunately probably is a bad sign. Apart from rejections, you can hear back in multiple ways.

Many search committee chairs like to speak on the phone. So, keep your cell phone on you at all times and don't ignore calls from numbers that you do not recognize. You may get a call inviting you to interview, and the chair may want to schedule the interview in this first 5-minute call. Some will call to explain the process to you. Also check your email spam folder.

Regardless of whether or not you will hear back via email or through phone, you will typically be invited either directly to a full two-day onsite interview (which now may be virtual due to COVID) or you might be invited for a "pre-screening" Zoom/Skype interview.

For on-site interviews, the department will typically invite 2-6 people, so if you get an onsite your chances are pretty good. For Zoom/Skype preinterviews, they will often interview 10-25 applicants and then decide on 2-6 to subsequently invite for a full onsite. So, if you pass the pre-screening, it's a big compliment.

Interviews – prescreening interviews

As mentioned above, when you hear back, you will typically be invited to either a pre-screening Zoom/Skype interview or a full onsite interview (which could now also be virtual due to COVID).

For full onsite interviews, you will typically have at least a few weeks and sometimes a couple of months from you are invited until you interview, which leaves good time to prepare. For prescreening virtual interviews, the turnaround is typically much briefer. Sometimes you are given less than 48 hours (or in one case less than 24 hours) from you hear back via email until the time of the interview. So, it helps to get prepared in advance.

Preparing for Zoom/Skype virtual interviews

Typically, the search committee will be interviewing and prescreening 10-25 people, to decide who to invite to for full 2-day onsite interviews. While stressful, this is probably in everyone's best interest. It is in no one's interest to do a full onsite interview if it immediately becomes apparent that it is not a good fit. Typically, a bit more than half of all search committees do these prescreening interviews and they seem to be increasing in popularity.

The interview will typically feature the full search committee (say 4-8 people). Often, they are doing back-to-back-to-back 20 or 30 min interviews for several hours in a row. So, they may have interviewed 4 candidates before you, and have 3 more after you. This is to say, try to put yourself in their shoes. It is tiring and it can be difficult to keep track of all the applicants and all their information. So, don't assume that they remember all the details of your application, research proposal or educational background.

The format of the interview can vary. Some are more like panel interviews, where the search committee asks you specific questions based on your proposal. Panel interviews are rarer though in my experience. More commonly, the format is something like this: you begin with a 5-minutes overview of your past, current, and future work; this is followed by specific questions about your proposal and then followed by more general questions from the whole panel. Typically, for reasons for fairness the search committee will keep the format and most of the questions identical for all interviewees and sometimes they may even tell you the questions a day or two in advance.

Since you may be asked to do a virtual prescreening interview at very short notice it is a good idea to begin preparing for these early on (I got less than 24 hours notice for one of mine). You should prepare your 5-min spiel and answers to common questions.

5-min spiel/pitch: I suggest that you have your variants of your pitches ready. Ideally, you will have your 1-minute, your 3-minute, your 5-minute, and your 10-minute versions of your pitch ready to go any time. You need to practice this over and over again. Don't wing it. Write it out, workshop it, get feedback, revise, repeat. It is extremely important to practice and perfect your pitch.

You will need to find the organization that works the best for you. You will likely partially reuse this for your chalk talks. Below is a potential organization for a 5-min pitch (always both write it out and practice speaking it out loud to make sure it flows smoothly) which is roughly what I used:

- Big picture about why your field is important and very brief introduction to main topics (25%)
 - (start very zoomed out, e.g. gene regulation is important because ..., elucidating the structures of proteins is important because ...; don't assume too much knowledge).
- Talk about the key questions in the field and why they have remained unsolved (25%)
 - E.g. this could be due to technical limitations of prior approaches, or because of a conceptual connection you are the first to make, etc.
- Talk about your post-doc work and how it maybe begins to address these questions (25%)
 - Ideally, you can strike a balance. Make clear why your post-doc work is transformative. But also make clear what remains to be done, and how you are ideally set up for doing this in your own lab (try to make the case that you are the best person for this research program). You want to strike some balance where you can ideally make a case that your post-doc work was very important, and has now set up a new sub-field which you will pursue in your independent lab.
- Outline in broad stroke what you will do in your independent lab (25%)
 - Could be something like, "in my lab, we will pursue 2-3 general directions..."
 - It is good to have a mix of short, medium and long-term. So, they get a sense both of the first few projects, and also where you hope to be going 10 years from now.

Specific questions: Below is a partial list of questions that are often asked during academic interviews. To prepare, it is a good idea to write out short and succinct answers to each one and practice them. You want to answer questions confidently and succinctly. In my view, long pauses and/or long answers/rambling come across poorly. This cannot be stressed enough – you have 20 minutes to tell them about your past, current, future research, about yourself and to answer lots of questions. If you spend 5 minutes on a tangent you find interesting, you will run out of time and most of their questions will be unanswered. If you did not get to all of the questions, because you took too long to answer each question, this will typically work against you. So, keep the answers short and sweet. Don't bullshit. If they ask a research question that you don't know how to answer,

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say something like “That’s interesting, I had not thought about this way. Let me think about it more and get back to you later” or just say that you are not sure. At the same time, try to figure out how people outside your field view your field and try to figure out the most common misconceptions about your field. These will come up repeatedly as you interview, so having prepared responses is great.

Below are some questions to practice your answers to:

- Why are you uniquely capable to do this?
- Key question(s) in your field?
- Tell me about yourself?
- What other current areas of biology, that is not your own field, are you particularly excited about?
- If you had to launch a lab in another area distinct from your proposal, what would it be and why?
- How will your field have changed 5, 10, 15 or 20 years from now if all of your proposed projects work out?
- How will you distinguish yourself from your current advisors?
- Your field is big and busy, how will you distinguish yourself?
- If you were removed/deleted from your field, how would the field suffer?
- What project are you most excited about?
- What project will you give to your first and second grad student?
- Which project is most likely to have a big impact?
- What is your long-term vision?
- What will you do if your central hypothesis turns out to be wrong?
- If you have a technical advantage, make sure you can clearly articulate why it is important? E.g. what can we learn from method X that we could not otherwise learn?
- Explain in 3-4 sentences to someone completely outside of your field why it matters?
- What is the central motivating question for your research program and why does it matter?
- What aspect of your PhD and/or Post-Doc work are you most proud of?
- Why are you interested in coming to our department/institution? (this is will almost always be asked – make sure you have a good answer). Examples of things you could ask is: How is recruiting graduate student / post-doc recruitment? You could ask about teaching. You could ask about the department culture. If you have a specific need for equipment (e.g. flow cytometry)

you could ask about this, but google first to make sure you don't ask something that could have been found with 2 minutes of googling. So for example, you could ask something like: I saw that you have {Flow Cytometry Facility X}; I need Flow Cytometry for my research, and I was wondering if this facility is accessible to department research? See also this link: <https://www.thoughtco.com/academic-job-interview-what-to-ask-1684892>

- What do you consider to be your main research strengths and capabilities at present?
- What other areas of expertise do you plan to develop in the next 5 years?
- We will have questions about your proposed future research.
- We would like to know about major equipment you will need to conduct your research (please have some idea of the cost) and whether its availability as shared is possible.
- During your first three years as a faculty member, what projects will you have your graduate students conduct?
- What size laboratory (grad students, postdocs) do you want to establish?
- In searching for a position, do you have any constraints such as geographical preference?
- What impression, if any, do you have about the University of X or Department of Y research environment?
- All of our faculty have a teaching role. We would like to know what aspects of biochemistry you are able to teach and what you would like to teach.
- Are there specific people in our department that you would like to collaborate with?
- Have you talked to your current advisor about what projects you can take with you?
- Why is our department a good fit for your research program? (here you could mention specific labs to collaborate with)
- How big a lab would like to have?

How to answer questions: Be brief, precise, and don't ramble.

Doing a Prescreening interview

Most often, you will be told who will be interviewing you. So do your research on them. Typical things to research: where did they train (PhD, Post-doc; if you went to the same institution, maybe they want to small talk about this so be prepared); What is their research about and is there a connection to what you are doing? It's good to make a 5-10 bullet point summary of each person (remember to include their picture) and have such a 1-page reminder next to you when you interview in case you need to remind yourself of something.

But don't read things out loud. Try to maintain eye contact (on a Skype/Zoom meeting this means looking into or near the webcam and not just at the people on your screen which is challenging), and try to be natural and relaxed. Make sure your internet connection is good; Make sure you have a fairly neutral and non-distracting background. Test your microphone and speakers in advance. Make sure you install any necessary software in advance (Zoom, WebEx, Skype, etc.).

While some humor is fine, but you need to be able to pull it off. Keep in mind that this is a virtual meeting and that these people don't know you, so some things may be lost across the virtual connection. Try to read the room and get a sense for how formal the interview will be and go along with the chosen style. Also remember to tailor your responses to the school. Look up current faculty and get a sense for typical lab sizes and funding rates. Don't propose a 10-postdoc lab at an undergraduate teaching college and don't talk about how much you love undergraduate teaching at a medical school without undergraduates.

Again, if you don't know the answer to something, don't ramble and don't make things up. And if you want to speculate, it's best to preface it with something like "*Huh. That's a great question. I don't know. But if I were to take a shot at it, I might say [fill in blank here with your best guess]*". If you answer most questions, but admit there is one or two things you don't know, you will come across as knowledgeable but humble. Panels don't want to see an arrogant candidate talk down to them. Unfortunately, there are also gender and minority biases from panels to be aware of here, when you do the interview. So, use your best judgement.

Finally, the last part of the interview will typically be them asking you to ask them any questions. If you have nothing to ask, it will come across as if you either don't care or you did not do your research. Prepare 5-10 generic questions you can ask during any interview (to avoid running out of questions if it turns out they do answer your question already during the interview).

Full onsite interviews

Due to COVID, these may now be virtual for a while. The advice below is for IRL onsite interviews, but hopefully much of it can be ported to the also virtual interviews.

If you get invited to a full onsite interview, you should first take a step back and enjoy it. Out of many hundreds of applications, they found yours to be among the handful of most interesting and strongest applications. Once you have had a chance to enjoy it, the hard work of preparation begins. Just scheduling interviews, buying plane tickets, keeping receipts, processing reimbursements, and corresponding, can be a part time job. After all this, comes the interview.

The major components of the on-site interview are:

- Seminar
- Chalk Talk
- One-on-one meetings
- Dinners, lunches, breakfasts
- Meeting with the chair
- Et cetera: e.g. lunch with students, etc.

It is important to prepare extensively for each one. Typically, you will be assigned a "faculty host". Often, each member of the search committee will serve as the host for one candidate. It's a great idea to have a brief phone call with the host before the interview. Ask them about the place, how you can best prepare and if they have any specific advice. At some schools – especially medical schools – your host might be the department chair. Ask about the format of the seminar and chalk talk.

Seminar

Giving a good seminar is extremely important. Most members of the department will likely decide on whether you should get the job or not based on your seminar and chalk talk. Below are my suggestions for giving a good job talk.

Most schools will schedule 1 hour for your talk. However, keep in mind that some schools use e.g. "5-min after the hour" to start talks. Also keep in mind that someone will likely spend 3-5 min introducing you. And that you should leave time for questions. Therefore, 35-45 minutes is typically most appropriate for a job talk. Best to check in with your host about this. How should you use this time? Below is roughly what I did:

Introduction (~10 min): It is extremely important to properly introduce your research topic. Keep in mind that most faculty members will not be in your field. So, make sure your introduction is accessible. Don't assume too much background knowledge from the audience. Start very zoomed out with the very basics, and gradually introduce your more specific area. Ideally, you will pose important question(s) that you have started addressing in your post-doc and which you will fully address in your own lab. Some people also briefly introduce themselves. For example, you can briefly work in your PhD work and accomplishment if you can make it flow.

The most important thing is to generate enthusiasm. Your goal should be to persuade someone from another area, who has never thought about your subfield before, that your subfield is really interesting, that there are really important unsolved questions, and that you have a good angle to solve them.

Your post-doc research (~20-30 min): Go through your research project(s), their motivation, your findings, and why they are important.

Conclusion and big picture (~5 min): Here I would suggest coming full circle, taking a step back, and revisiting the big questions you introduced in the Introduction. A good seminar will leave the audience with the sense that they accomplished some great things during their postdoc, but that very big questions remains and that you are now perfectly situated to address these big questions in your own lab. If you have addressed all the questions with your postdoc work, it is not clear why you need to start a new lab. So, find a good balance between highlighting why your postdoc work was important, but also, why there is much exciting work that is left to be done.

I would suggest spending the last 1-3 min on your future work. Not in great detail, but just a rough overview that gives the audience a sense of what you want to do in your own lab. Often times, department faculty can make only one of your seminar and chalk talk, so it is very helpful that the people who cannot make the chalk talk, have a sense of what you want to do.

The seminar is really important. So, practice, practice, and practice. You should know the next slide throughout the presentation. And start practicing early. Long before your first interview. The feedback you get on your practice talks may help you think through how to write a better research statement and/or perform better in prescreening Zoom interview.

It can also be nervewracking to give a seminar for more than 100 people. In my experience, the more prepared you feel, the better you will be able to handle the nerves.

A good way to practice is to give practice talks. You might want to get the input of your lab, but generally speaking, the input of non-experts is more useful. One of the most common job talk problems is that it is not sufficiently accessible to people outside the field. Therefore, doing practice talks with people outside your field is often more helpful. Try to do at least a handful of practice talks and get feedback from as many people as you can. Often times, it is much more useful to give 5 practice talks in front of 4 people, than to give one in front of 20 people. If 20 people attend, it is quite limited how much feedback you get from each person, and doing many small ones allows you to iterate and experiment. At your current university, there will typically be searches almost every year. So, make sure to attend the seminars of job candidates, and see what works and what does not.

Chalk talk

The chalk talk is perhaps the most difficult aspect. Often, people have attended dozens of job seminars before they give their own. In contrast, for most people the first chalk talk that they attend, will be their own (at least it was for me). The format can vary a lot. Generally speaking the typical formats are: 1) fully chalk/white board; 2) fully powerpoint based; 3) hybrid. Most are entire white-board based. For the hybrid ones, you might give a 5-10 min overview with slides, with the rest on the board. Chalk talks are typically an hour, though they can range from 30 min to 2 hours. The chalk talk is essentially always after the seminar. Typically, the seminar is on Day 1, and the chalk talk on Day 2. But sometimes they are on the same day or even back-to-back. If it is on Day 2, then keep in mind that people won't remember the details of your seminar, and also that many people

might not have been able to go to your seminar. In many ways, the chalk talk is most similar to a Skype/Zoom pre-screening interview.

Before COVID at least, you would typically have a chalk or whiteboard with 15-45 faculty (typically chalk talks are closed and only open to faculty) looking on. Sometimes you will have 10-15 min to start writing on the chalk board before the talk begins, sometimes you won't and will be expected to jump straight in. Therefore practicing simultaneous talking, writing, and drawing ahead of time is very useful.

To prepare to give an effective chalk talk, it is worth first considering what the goals are. Broadly speaking, the goal is to outline your independent lab's research program, going from the first 1-2 projects that start on Day 1 to the big picture questions you will address over the next 10-15 years, to persuade the faculty that your program is important and worth doing, and also that you are the best person to do it, and that it is fundable.

How can this fail? The main way is running out of time and having spent your limited time on unproductive discussions or if you deliver it in a way that outsiders to your field cannot understand. If you get into a lengthy discussion about a small project or technical issue, you will waste a lot of time. Even if you ultimately convince the faculty that you are right, you still lose if so much time was taken up that you did not get to go through most of your program. Therefore, try to avoid tangents, practice crowd control (this is very difficult; but very important), and gently and gracefully steer the conversation back on track when you need to. And feel free to say: "I'd love to discuss this, but I still have a lot more to get through, so in the interest of time, can we discuss this one-on-one afterwards?". In terms of your demeanor, it is important to remember that you are interviewing to be their colleague, not doing a post-doc candidate interview in one of their labs. So, while you definitely don't want to be arrogant (this is a serious red flag), it is also possible to be too humble and accommodating. Striking the right balance is important.

To minimize interruptions, it's best to set expectations. My recommendation would be: Don't just start talking about your research. If they don't know what is coming and where you are going, they are much more likely to interrupt and the chalk talk can get sidetracked. Therefore, start by setting expectations. For example, "Today I would like to start by giving you a 5-minute big picture overview of my research program. Afterwards, I will then go into specific projects". This way, they know you will only speak for 5 minutes and they are much more likely to not interrupt you. If you can protect the initial time, properly frame the questions and get everyone on the same page, your chalk talk is much more likely to be successful.

My suggestion would be to start with the 5 minute big picture overview, and use a very similar structure to the Zoom/Skype interview:

- Big picture about why your field is important and very brief introduction to main topics (1 min)
 - (start very zoomed out, e.g. gene regulation is important because ..., elucidating the structures of proteins is important because ...; don't assume too much knowledge).
- Talk about the key questions in the field and why they have remained unsolved (1 min)
 - E.g. this could be due to technical limitations of prior approaches, or because of a conceptual connection you are the first to make, etc.
- Talk about your post-doc work and how it maybe begins to address these questions (1-2 min)
 - Ideally, you can strike a balance. Make clear why your post-doc work is transformative. But also make clear what remains to be done, and how you are ideally set up for doing this in your own lab (try to make the case that you are the best person for this research program). You want to strike some balance where you can ideally make a case that your post-doc work was very important, and has now set up a new sub-field which you will pursue in your independent lab.
- Outline in broad stroke what you will do in your independent lab (1-2 min)
 - Could be something like, "in my lab, we will pursue 2-3 general directions..."

- It is good to have a mix of short, medium and long-term. So, they get a sense both of the first few projects, and also where you hope to be going 10 years from now.

After this overview, I would launch into specific projects. I would outline 2-3 projects (in terms of scope, this could be a PhD student's main project) per aim on the board and then say that you will initially go through one project from each aim and then acknowledge that you may not have time for more than one project per aim but that you will try. If you practice saying the projects out loud and drawing (you very much should), then expect to cover 20-30 min of material in a 60-min chalk talk.

I suggest you organize your general aims by short, medium, and long-term, and then do a project from each initially so the audience get a sense of both your first project for a PhD student as well as more risky long-term work. And what you draw on the board should match your structure.

For each project, you will not have more than 3-5 minutes of speaking time. So be very judicious in how you present it. You have to introduce the background, and why it is worth doing, you have to explain how you will do it, and finally why it is important. Thus, you will not be able to cover everything and you have to make peace with leaving out some of the technical details that you might find very exciting. But make sure you have fully thought through every single technical aspect of how you would do the project, such that you can address any questions that come up. E.g. know what techniques you will use, what equipment will be required, what collaboration – if any – will need to be set up, which cell line you will use, etc.

It is really important to practice, practice and practice the chalk talk. You have very little speaking time, and you don't want to ramble or go on tangents. Practice going through each project, cut out unnecessary detail, practice drawing the relevant sketches and figures while you are speaking (this is much harder to do in real life, than you might think), and workshop your script. Make sure to write out your chalk talk script, but practice saying it out loud: our written and spoken voices are often different.

Chalk talks are stressful, and although the vast majority of faculty are nice and want you to succeed, you may encounter a few antagonistically minded faculty. However, remember that the department is both evaluating you as a scientist and as a person. Would you be someone they would enjoy serving on committees with for the next ten years? Would they like to have you on their student's dissertation committees? So, try to relax and not get flustered. Try to smile and have a can-do attitude. And if you can relax, chalk talks can really be quite fun. You get 20 really smart people to brainstorm your research program for an hour. They may actually have some great ideas and suggestions! This is an exceptional opportunity, and if it is clear that you are having fun and enjoying it, you will come off great. Finally, keep in mind that the faculty are not united. If one person is being a bit mean, keep in mind that this might be their general demeanor and that the other faculty might not like this person either. So, if one person was a bit mean, it is not necessarily a bad sign.

Finally, a few practicalities. I would recommend bringing a handout which outlines your research program. This will make it clear that you came prepared. And if you don't have enough time to go through a few projects, if your handout has a few bullet points on it, this might be enough to give someone the gist of it nevertheless. But keep it short, full of figures, low on text, max 1-2 pages. If you have time before the chalk talk, you can distribute them to each person's table. Otherwise, you can hand them out while you speak. A lot of time can pass from you submit your research proposal until you give your chalk talk. It's totally fine if a few projects in your chalk talk are different from your research proposal. Also, bring extra markers in several colors – the room where you will be presenting might be out. Moreover, it is really important that you make clear that you have talked with your current post-doc advisor about what you can take with you. As you lay out your research program, mention explicitly that you have your current advisor's permission to take these projects with you.

One-on-one meetings

These meetings tend to be very idiosyncratic. Sometimes the person will have prepared some slides and you will be listening to them talking about their research. Sometimes they will want to ask you questions. Sometimes it will be a more free-flowing conversation. Sometimes it will mostly be about life in general, and not about science or the department. Sometimes, they will be very passive and sit back and wait for you to steer the conversation. It's ideal if you come prepared for all of these. You will likely go from meeting-to-meeting with the only interruptions being lunch meetings and your own seminar and chalk talk, the whole day from morning until late evening. 8am to 10pm is not uncommon. And you might be jetlagged and have had a bad nights sleep. Needless to say, it can be very exhausting. Extremely exhausting. So, it is important to prepare.

It is probably not realistic to read several papers from each person you will meet. Instead, what I would recommend is to prepare a printout with their picture, name, biographical details (where they trained, how long they have been there, etc.) and some bullet points on their research. On the plane there, you can read these and refresh your memory. During one-on-one meetings, they will be evaluating you for whether or not you are likely to be a good colleague. So be nice, be positive, and be interested in their work, ask questions that show genuine interest, but don't try to explain their own research to them.

This is also an opportunity for you to ask questions: ask about the department culture, what it is like to start a lab there, what the teaching expectations are, what the tenure process is like, what it is like to live in the city, what the grad students are like, how easy it is to recruit students and post-docs, etc. If you need specific instruments or facilities, you can ask about these. Ask these questions in a nice way, and show enthusiasm. Asking questions like this shows that you are picturing your own lab at the school, that you are interested, and that you are thinking ahead. And it is surprisingly common for different faculty to give divergent answers to the same questions. Therefore, asking the same question of many people can be very informative. Also be prepared for people who missed your talk. They might ask you to recap it. This is where your 5-min spiel comes in. Another good idea, is to make a 5-10 min version of your talk, and have it ready on your laptop, so you can give it if anyone asks. You can also ask them to walk you through their lab space, especially if the open space is nearby.

Often times, either a dedicated person will bring you to your next meeting, or the last person you met with will bring you to your next meeting. Remember to ask for bathroom breaks. Sometimes, just taking 3 minutes to clear your mind, look over your notes to remember the next person you are meeting, can be helpful. And expect last minute changes. It happens frequently that someone has a last minute obligation and that you will meet with someone new that you did not have time to research in advance. This is where having generic questions about the place can also be helpful, especially if the conversation does not naturally flow.

Dinners, lunches, breakfasts

Most meals during your interview, will be with faculty and will be a part of your interview. They want as many faculty as possible to meet you, so expect to be talking the whole day and long into the night. Often times breakfasts and lunches might be you and one or two other people, whereas the dinners are often bigger groups (e.g. 4-6 people). They will often offer you wine and drinks at dinner, but remember that you have a long day the next day and it is best to drink in moderation. Dinners can be a great way for you to get a sense of inter-faculty dynamics. It's also a great chance to ask some of the questions about the place. Try to read the room and follow the lead of the other faculty. Sometimes, they will want to talk mostly about science and the department, but other times they will want to talk mostly socially. But remember you are being interviewed. If you are not sure if you should divulge something, it might be better not to. While they are legally not allowed to ask you about you family and children, many still will. Often their intentions are very good; they may want to let you know about the great school district or affordable house prices etc. But you may want to decide how much you want to talk about your family background, and how to handle those conversations in advance.

And make sure you are positive. Don't talk bad about other schools, your advisors, or other scientists. A dinner can be a great way to ask about how faculty interact, both inside and outside of the department.

Meeting with the chair

Typically, your last meeting on your last day will be with the department chair or the search chair. This is one of the most important meetings. By this point, the faculty will have gossiped, and while they may not have made up their mind, chances are that they have either decided to not consider you further or that you are one of the frontrunners. And the chair will likely know. So, this can be a good meeting to gauge what your chances are.

The meeting might be very different at a 'regular' university and at a medical school. At a medical school, the chair can decide to make offers on their own and they may even offer you a position on the spot. At a regular university, things tend to be much more slow and bureaucratic. The search committee has to vote, then the whole department has to vote, then the dean has to approved. And each step can take weeks and involve lots of paperwork.

At this meeting, it is a good idea to ask about next steps (e.g. they may be able to tell you when you can expect to hear back). If you have other offers, perhaps with deadlines, this is a good time to discuss them. Be nice and diplomatic about it and don't be pushy. But if you have a deadline, they may be able to rush through an offer more quickly.

At this meeting you might also want to discuss lab space and major equipment. Ask to see what might be your future lab space. If you have specific equipment needs, you can also discuss this here. But be realistic. If you ask for 5 cryo-EM microscopes, you won't seem serious. This can also be a good time to ask about support: how long are graduate students supported by the department before you have to pay; what PhD programs can you join; are there internal fellowships for PhDs and postdocs; what fraction of your salary will you be expected to cover yourself (ask many people the same question; at many places, different people may not give the same answer); how much will you be expected to teach; what are the expectations for tenure; what is the timeline for tenure; etc. Ask the questions in a nice way: e.g. if you ask about teaching load, it should not come across as if you hate teaching and want to do the lowest possible amount.

After your interview

After your interview, email at least your host and the chair and thank them for taking the time to host you and for making your visit enjoyable. If you like the place, also affirm how much you like the place and say how you think it would be a great fit for you. Show enthusiasm.

If you have the bandwidth, it is also nice to personally email each person you met, though in my experience this is definitely not required. Otherwise, you generally just sit back and wait for them to contact you. You may have been the first person and they might have 2 more months of interviews. Some places may forget and never get back to you (yes it happens; sometimes even for schools that give you an offer). Once it has been a month or two, it is fine to email and ask for an update. Sometimes you might be the second choice, and they will be waiting for their first choice to make a decision before they tell you – some schools will be open about this, and others will try to hide it and make excuses for delays. However, being the second choice is still great and still means that they want to hire you! So, if you are the second choice, it is still a huge compliment.

Offers and second visits

Congratulations on getting offers. Now begins the very brief period where you hold the power (before things go back to the way they were, and you will be trying to get tenure). After getting your offer, the next steps are negotiations and second visits.

The timeline can be challenging. E.g. you might be very lucky and get first offer in September, but you might still be interviewing in March. If you do have an offer, other places may be able to expedite their decision, but only by a little bit. So, it is fairly common to have to decide on an offer and have to say Yes or No, before you know if you have another offer. This is very stressful. At the same time, remember to be nice. If you have an offer and you are pretty sure you won't take it, it is better to politely decline as early as possible so they can move on to their second choice.

Also beware of verbal offers. Verbal offers are great, but they sometimes fall through (maybe the dean does not approve of the offer; maybe there is a sudden budget shortfall). So, you need to get the full official offer in writing before you can count on it.

After receiving the offer, you will typically be invited for a second visit. The format is similar – mostly one-on-one faculty meetings and dinners – but now they are trying to persuade you to come there and you will typically be invited to bring your family. They may connect you with a real estate agent, who will show you houses and apartments.

To make the most of the second visit, you will need to think through carefully what you need ahead of time. Seeing your lab space is a must. Talking about lab space renovations, if necessary, and who will pay for them is also important. Make a list of all facility access you need (e.g. flow cytometry, microscopy, mouse, other animal facility, computational cluster, BSL3, etc.) and ask for a tour in advance. Also ask about the pricing structure. You should also ask about post-doc, grad student, and technician salaries and overhead and fringe+benefits and make a budget for the first 3 years, which includes salaries, equipment, facility fees etc. Generally speaking, it is expected that your start-up package is enough to fund the first 3 years of your lab assuming moderate growth (compare with current junior faculty to see what is typical), but that you will be funding yourself after this. Ask people you know who recently started labs for their budgets. It can be really difficult to remember all the many pieces of equipment you will need (centrifuges, freezers, pipettes, etc.). Also, for these budgets, approximate is fine. There is no need to get formal quotes (except for perhaps for very large pieces of equipment). In general, when it comes to negotiations, saying that you need an extra \$200k just because is much less likely to be successful, than if you can document it in your budget. Additionally, remember to be reasonable. Negotiate well, but don't burn bridges and ruin the relationship with your future chair.

In general, long-term support is much more useful than startup money. If grad students are supported for an extra year, that might be worth millions of dollars over your career, and is worth much more than an extra \$100k of startup. Similarly, long-term salary support for yourself is also worth much more than a bit of extra startup. However, make sure to get written in your contract that your startup will not expire. Similarly, some medical schools can be very vague about how much salary they will support for you. Make sure to get it in writing. And if they say "up to XX%", then ask them to remove "up to" in the offer letter. Therefore, if you are lucky enough to be comparing multiple offers, I would focus more on the long-term support than on the \$-amount in the offer letter.

If you have multiple offers, that will certainly help your negotiations. Often times, you might be able to improve your startup package by ~15-25% overall, though this can vary wildly from school to school, but doubling the package is rare. Try to frame negotiations as a 'collaboration' between you and the chair on how to achieve the goals in your 3-year budget, instead of as a zero-sum antagonistic fight.

Other things you can bring up: salary improvements; help with mortgages and housing financing in general (this is especially important in high cost-of-living areas); lab space and lab renovation; large pieces of equipment; help finding a job for your spouse; anything else that is important to you.

Generally speaking, it is very difficult to get a department to spend large sums of money on you once you are there (except, perhaps, if many years later you are being pursued by other universities – but this is a topic for later in the career). So, make sure you ask for what you need during the negotiations.

In terms of negotiations, it's good to ask for more salary, but universities often have fixed pay scales and it may not be successful. However, it is common to get relocation expenses paid and/or to get a "sign-up" bonus. Similarly, you may want to buy a house/apartment early on after moving to your new workplace and many universities will help you through loans/payments, especially for the down payment. Financial housing assistance can often be easier to negotiate than salary increases, so it is worth asking. Another thing is teaching relief: you might be able to negotiate an extra semester without teaching to help you set up the lab (setting up a lab is a lot of work, so a semester or two of protected time is extremely helpful). If the department has a graduate student training program, you might also be able to obtain a slot or two there.

Finally, if you have established a good relationship with some of the junior faculty, you can also ask them what they negotiated for and if they have any advice for the specific school. Most schools genuinely want their junior faculty to succeed and do everything they can for them, but you do also hear horror stories.

How to choose between multiple offers? This is often very difficult, and it is a deeply personal decision. Remember that many/most people end up spending the rest of their working lives at the university where they start their lab. So, it should ideally be a place where you could see yourself for the long term.

Epilogue

To reiterate: if you ask 10 current faculty for advice, you will likely get 11 different pieces of advice. So, take any given piece of advice – including what is written herein – with a pinch of salt, and remember there are many different ways to be successful and to get a nice faculty job, and for every “rule” there are numerous exceptions. I would also note that everyone is different and the advice herein is colored by my own experiences, and subject to my own biases and privileges and disadvantages. However, there are some things that are constant – giving a good job seminar and good chalk talk is always going to help. I personally found the lack of information and lack of clarity about the whole process to be very frustrating. I think if the job search process could be clearer and demystified, it would be significantly less stressful. So, I hope this document at least contributes to demystifying the process and that it contains at least some useful advice. Good luck and all the best with your search!