MLA Interviews  
(Updated 4-30-08)

Before the Interview:

1. Try to arrive at least a full day before your first interview. Weather and other factors can delay your arrival, and you want time to “settle in.”
2. Be sure you know whom you are talking to and where they can be reached. Keep careful track of phone numbers and hotels. Ideally, keep all of this information in one place, and close by you. When you get to the convention city, you’ll probably have to call the interviewers to find out the room locations; hotels are not allowed to give out room numbers.
3. Scout out the exact location of each interview. Take some time to visit the various hotels your interviews may be held in, including individual rooms.
4. Don’t schedule interviews less than one hour apart. Even if the interviews are held in the same hotel, you can never count on them starting or finishing on time.
5. If you are offered a choice, try to schedule interviews for later in the morning or early in the afternoon. Early morning and late afternoon interview scan be a little punchy (the former before the coffee has kicked in, the latter after it’s worn off).
6. Wear something that makes you look professional. Preferably choose clothing that won’t distract the committee from you face. Wear your outfit and shoes several times before the convention to make sure they are comfortable enough to get you through the week. Have extra clothing as a backup.
7. Have extra copies of your CV and abstract with you, and a copy of your teaching portfolio. Your CV and abstract are useful just in case your interviewers ask to see it, or in case you meet a representative from a college or university looking to hire. If your interviewers ask you about the kind of courses you’d like to teach, it would be useful to have a sample course description or two to share with them.
8. Research your interviewers. Find out the basics about the places interviewing you: the demographics of the student body, kinds of courses offered, concentrations, etc.
9. Warm up just before the interview. You may want to warm up your voice before your first interview. You may find that your best performances come after you’ve already been talking for a while (sometimes in the second or third interview of the day).

In the Interview

1. Get there on time and knock on the door. You will be greeted there and asked to wait; they’re most likely finishing an interview. When the previous candidate leaves the room, you’ll be asked in. The next few seconds are important: you’ll be introduced to your interviewers, you should shake their hands firmly and say their names aloud while looking in their eyes (this improves your chances of remembering them later).
2. Try not to hold anything in your hands that might distract the interviewers. Also, avoid wearing too much perfume or cologne, or getting either on your hands (you don’t want to be remembered for your smell).
3. You’ll probably be in a smaller hotel room- sometimes a suite. You’ll have a chair, but don’t be surprised if a committee member has to sit on the bed. Most likely there will be interruptions: phone calls, possibly knocks at the door. The calls/knocks will be answered; don’t let these interruptions fluster you.
4. The committee will invariably ask you if you’d like something to drink. If you are thirsty, accept, but realize that you may not have any place to set down the coffee cup; you may wind up holding it in your lap during the interview, which can distract the committee.
5. The first thing to do when you sit down is to move the chair, however slightly. Even if the chair is already in a comfortable position, this shows that you are in charge of yourself and the surroundings. It will also help you remember not to sit as though immobilized during the interview.

6. Speak clearly, get your points across, and keep eye contact. If you can remember the interviews’ names, this will help you presentation, and make your time there seem more like a genuine conversation.

7. Use your hands, if only to keep them away from your face. Avoid imitating (unconsciously) the interviewers’ posture and gestures.

8. Come with questions—at some point in every interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. “No” is the wrong answer. Be prepared to ask you interviewers a question. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of and interest in their department and institution. You might ask:
   a. About the collegiality of the members of the department.
   b. About the library resources.
   c. About a particular program that you think sets the department apart.
   d. How many majors there are and what they do after graduation.
   e. Do NOT ask about the teaching load.

9. Be yourself. Speak formally, but without affectation. Let your own personality show itself. This is an opportunity for you and your potential employer to determine your compatibility with one another.

10. Listen to the questions before answering. Do not interrupt. Answer the question that was asked. When in doubt, ask if your answer was satisfactory; don’t be afraid to follow up.

Common Questions to Prepare For:

1. “Tell us about your dissertation.” How you answer (especially the length of your answer) should depend on the phrasing (“tell us a little…”) as well as the length of the interview. Make sure you use simple works (“my thesis shows/asks/is about”) rather than the written language of your abstract. Be prepared to shorten or lengthen your response depending on the interviewers’ responses.

2. “How does your work fit into other work on the same subject?” This is a good opportunity to show that you are thinking of others in the profession, and of yourself as already part of the profession. Make sure that your differences with others come out as positive that will advance dialogue and help the profession, and not as things which work only to set you off in isolation.

3. “What kinds of courses would you like to teach?” You should have syllabi in your head for at least a dozen courses, from basic composition to graduate seminars. The committee might press you for titles if they’re interested, so it’s best not to start rattling off book titles. It can be a good idea to have sample course descriptions that you can pass around, if the committee is responsive to your offering them.

4. “We have a composition component; how would you teach composition?” How could you make it new and relevant?”

5. “We have a diverse student body. How would you teach a survey course in literature to make it relevant to such a population?” (and, alternately) “We have a very homogenous student body. How would you bring in issues of cultural diversity when teach a literature survey?”

6. “Describe your biggest success [or failure] in teaching. What did you learn from it?”

7. “Describe your future research plans.”