The Unofficial Guide to the Academic Job Search in English

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Contents:

Introduction

Searching for an academic job in English is, to say the least, difficult. It inevitably requires a lot of time and effort, and even a successful search will present the candidate with moments of rejection. However, it also has certain benefits. The search often helps candidates to articulate the real stakes of their teaching and research, motivates them to think about their plans for publication, and connects them with interesting people from other institutions who share their interests. Of course, the ultimate hope is that the search will have the benefit of placing you in a satisfying academic position.

What is here represents only a beginning of a long series of conversations that you should be having with your academic advisor, the job placement officers, and your peers. One of the things you will quickly learn is that everyone who has been through this process has inherited a different set of anecdotal wisdom and added to it from the results of his or her experience. What this means is that opinions often differ about matters related to the job market -- from everything to the best time to "go on the market" to what to include on your vita. You need to weigh such opinions and decide which to follow. In addition, there is more material on-line each year. While some specific web sites are mentioned below, one more general site is an archive maintained by the Chronicle of Higher Education of articles pertaining to "presenting oneself on paper." Of course, the advice there is, still, often simply the position of one person. You can find the site at the following URL: http://www.jobs/archive/topical/present_paper.htm.

One more piece of general advice before proceeding to the specifics: You want to anticipate each step of this process, and be prepared for it as well as possible ahead of time. Why? Because you will better perform many of the tasks required of you if you can take them through several different drafts, and if you can consult several people on them. This is the one stage of your academic career when deadlines matter, and if you are teaching while you are on the market it can be especially difficult to meet them. Start by being early getting your materials to your letter writers, which is crucial because at least one of them will take forever to write your letter. Then, if you can, be early in getting your application letters to departments. I've heard a number of people say that early letters get more attention (though that surely varies by department). Finally, the amount of time that you will have to reply to requests for writing samples is usually minimal -- so be early in preparing them.

A tentative calendar in a year of the academic job search:

August and early Sept.: Contact letter writers. Set up dossier with credentials office at career center. If necessary, agree on schedule for completing dissertation with advisor. Begin drafting cover letter and dissertation abstract. Subscribe to MLA Job Information List (and join the MLA if you haven't already).

September: Begin reading the Chronicle of Higher Education for job ads. Distribute application materials (drafts of cover letter(s), abstracts, vitae, and statements of teaching philosophy) to advisor and job placement officers and incorporate their suggestions for revision. Consider what you would like to use as a writing

sample, and whether there are changes you can make to that work to make it more polished. Follow up with writers of letters of recommendation. You may also wish to start making MLA travel plans by the end of this month. (You get better deals on hotel and airfare that way.)

Beginning in late September, the MLA begins posting job ads on-line. You can access the Job Information List through www.ade.org. You will need a password that the Department can provide. These ads continue to be updated weekly. However, I highly recommend referring to the print edition of the Job List as well. (The fall edition usually arrives in October.) Moreover, be advised that on-line ads disappear after two weeks.

October: You will want to keep working on your job materials through the first part of the month. Check to ensure that the dossier is complete, and contact those who have letters of recommendation outstanding. The print edition of the MLA Job List usually arrives in the second week of the month. Most ads have application deadlines of Nov. 1-15. Some will ask for a dossier up front, and a few will even ask for writing samples. Continue to check the Chronicle for other ads. Begin preparing materials to send out. If possible, begin sending out applications in late October.

November: Continue to respond to advertisements. By the second half of the month, you may start receiving requests for writing samples. Don't forget to continue checking the Chronicle. Our department usually schedules mock interviews to take place immediately after Thanksgiving.

December: Requests may continue for writing samples. Departments usually begin calling and e-mailing to set up MLA interviews around the middle of the month. In addition, the MLA Job List comes out with a December edition, and the Chronicle continues to feature ads.

January: This is usually the earliest time that you may have a campus visit. Departments that did not conduct MLA interviews may begin scheduling phone interviews.

February: February is often high season for campus visits. However, departments will be in radically different stages of their searches. Some will be running their ads, finally, in the February edition of the MLA JIL (or in the Chronicle). Others will be reviewing applications or setting up first interviews.

March-May: Many departments will be concluding their searches in March. However, ads will still be appearing. While many of the job advertisements that appear during these months are for one or two-year replacement positions, there are also tenure track jobs that are advertised during these months. A May edition of the MLA JIL appears; and department chairs, particularly local ones, will write to chairs of graduate departments at this time. A summer supplement to the Job Information List also appears in July.

Finding and Reading Advertisements

The main source of job advertisements is the MLA Job Information List. This is available in both a print edition (published four times a year) and on-line. You can access the on-line edition through the ADE web site -- www.ade.org. However, it is crucial to read the print edition as well. (There have been discrepancies in the past, and the search engine is not ideal.) You can use the department's password to access the JIL on-line. The department also subscribes to the print list and keeps copies in the lounge. In the past I have recommended that candidates considering subscribing to the list as individuals; you may want your own copy to scrutinize.

The other main source of job advertisements is the Chronicle of Higher Education, available both in print and on-line editions. The on-line edition -- www.chronicle.com/jobs -- features a service that enables you to receive new job postings via e-mail. However, I do not know how reliable that service is. (In other words, I might sign up for it and still check the on-line edition myself regularly.) Many of the jobs in the Chronicle will also appear in the JIL. However, this is not always true, particularly late and early in the academic year.

Wherever you see an advertisement, you will want to consider carefully whether the job advertised is really appropriate to you. If a particular area is advertised it is probably not enough that you could teach in that area. In other words, if the ad says the department is looking for someone who specializes in the Victorian novel, it is probably not worth applying if you are producing a dissertation on the Modernist novel or on Victorian poetry. There are enough people out there working on the Victorian novel that the department will probably be able to find one who truly specializes in that area.

On the other hand, job advertisements are sometimes ambiguous enough that there may still be some question of whether your research and teaching interests are really appropriate. For instance, the job advertisement asks for a specialist in nineteenth-century American literature, but only two of your four dissertation chapters are on the nineteenth-century. In such a case, you need to make sure your application materials speak for the specialties that the department in question desires. (Another example: You work on contemporary Irish drama. The job ad asks for a specialist in "modern and postmodern British drama." In that case, describe how your dissertation has implications for the wider field of dramatic studies; how you desire to develop classes that look at the larger British dramatic tradition; etc.)

Job ads are usually very specifically what materials they require. "An application" means a vita and a cover letter; I usually recommend sending a dissertation summary as well (see below). Do not send any of the following unless they are requested, either in the ad or in a request from the department: a dossier, a writing sample, a teaching philosophy statement, or syllabi.

Finally, job ads can sometimes seem indecipherable. Feel free to ask your advisor or a job placement officer to help interpret one if necessary.

The Dossier

Your dossier is simply the letters of recommendation that you have solicited on your behalf. You set up the dossier through Career Services for a small fee, and then request that the dossier be sent out to the relevant departments elsewhere when necessary. We have had very good experiences with Career Services at Emory, but it is always best to give the dossier service as much lead time as possible when requesting your dossier be sent out.

Dossiers usually have 4-6 letters. Of course, you will ask your dissertation advisor and your other dissertation readers for letters. It is a good idea to ask someone to write a letter that focuses specifically on your teaching. Candidates sometimes also ask a person from another institution that they have had professional contact with to write a letter. The number of letters is less important than their quality. In other words, three letters from people who know you well, and who can speak about your research in detail, are better than six mediocre letters from people who simply think you are a great person to have around.

In the fall, it is expected that you will remind (read: gently nag) your letter writers until your dossier is complete. You should make sure that they all arrive safely at the dossier service. Then, when they all are there, you can ask the dossier service to assemble the letters in a particular order. Generally, the advisor's letter should be first, and then you should proceed through the rest of your committee.

If you are going on the market for the second (or third) time, you should ask your referees to update their letters.

The application (cover) letter

The job application letter is, in my opinion, the most important part of your application. People differ a good deal on how long a letter can be. My sense is that it should be less than two full pages (and definitely no more than two).

The tone of the letter is crucial. It must be thoroughly professional; remember that you are speaking as a potential colleague. In addition, do not worry about repeating things from your CV or your writing sample. Few people read all three documents with care. Finally, be sure to have your letter read by at least one faculty member for matters of content and by at least one person who sincerely cares about typographical errors. Be sure to spell the name of the chair correctly.

While you will probably have one or two models from which you work, you must tailor each letter to fit each job.

I recommend, to start, a five-paragraph format:

1. The introduction paragraph. Name the position for which you are applying and where it was advertised. Give your current status and the title of your dissertation. If you have not completed

your degree, explain that you will submit the final draft of the dissertation in March and receive your degree in May.

2. The dissertation paragraph. This is the most important paragraph of your professional life. I recommend a single paragraph, though others suggest two. (I fear that many readers may not make it to the second paragraph.) In four to six sentences you must show what makes your dissertation compelling and original. Do not, however, waste time situating yourself among other scholars. If you have room, you might end this paragraph by referring to the enclosed one-page summary. Remember: People from outside your specialty will be reading this description—and you should emphasize the aspects of the dissertation that fit the particular job.

3. Teaching paragraph. This paragraph should include three things: a one or two sentence explanation of your teaching philosophy (you might show how your teaching relates to your research here), a description of your teaching experience, and information about the kinds of courses you hope to teach in the future. This last element, obviously, is one that you can easily tailor to the specific position.

4. Publications, papers, awards. You might combine this paragraph with the previous one. Basically, point out that you have had the chance to share your work with scholars outside the Emory community and/or that your work has received some recognition.

5. Final paragraph. If you have instructed to dossier office to send the dossier, say so here. Mention that you will be at MLA, that you would welcome the chance to meet with this committee there, etc. If there's any place that you will be in December that is not listed on your CV, give the information here.

You may wish to change the order and emphasis of this model if you are applying to institutions that you think are more interested in teaching than in research. (Although it can be tough to figure out where an institution stands on the research-teaching continuum.) In such instances, you should mention your dissertation, but proceed directly to the discussion of your teaching experience and methods. You might then return with a brief dissertation paragraph near the end of the letter.

The real trick to writing these letters are the transitions between paragraphs. In other words, you are going to have to think hard about the connections between your research and your teaching. But the better you can articulate those connections, the better off you will be in the interview stage.

The vita

There are lots of models for writing a vita available. One interesting place to look on-line are the columns written by the "CV doctors," which are archived at www.chronicle.com/jobs. The key thing is that your vita should present the information that the department seeks, organized in a clear manner. Here, too, less information can actually call more attention to what is on the vita.

Obviously, you will want to include your graduate and undergraduate degree experience. Most people include their dissertation title, and perhaps a list of the dissertation committee members. Include any awards and honors you have received; publications; conference presentations; and teaching experience. You should conclude the vita by explaining that your references are available on request from the Dossier Service of Emory Career Services.

One item that deserves special attention is your teaching experience. You may wish to amend the list of the courses you have taught in order to explain the kind of course (first-year writing class; upper-level course for majors) in question, as well as your role (teaching assistant or the primary instructor).

Sometimes candidates question whether articles that they have submitted for review should be listed on the vita. This is a question on which people differ, but I recommend not listing such items. I say this largely because I dismiss "under review" publications when I read them on a vita. (Anyone can submit something for review.) I also worry that the item may be rejected before, say, you have an interview. On the other hand, listing publications under review can be a way of further demonstrating your research agenda, particularly if the items under review are especially relevant to the position in question.

Finally, you may have experience that you would like to incorporate into your vita that does not fit neatly into these categories. Perhaps you had employment prior to graduate school you would like to mention; perhaps you worked in administration while finishing your degree. Definitely put such items in, perhaps under a "non-academic experience" or "miscellaneous" category. But keep these items succinct, unless you feel they are directly relevant to the job you are applying for. You will probably also want to include a record of any departmental service you have performed while you have been at Emory; again, keep such entries brief. Departments are mainly interested in your research and your teaching experience, after all.

The dissertation summary

You should develop a summary of your dissertation that is 1-2 pages in length. (In fact, it should be no longer than one-and-a-half pages.) Single space the summary, but leave a line between paragraphs. Of course, everyone's summary will be quite different, but I can offer some general guidelines. First, you want to think not only about the dissertation that you are actually writing, but the dissertation that you wish you had written. What are the broad implications of your project? What is your methodology? Here is where you can mention some of the things that you did not fit into the dissertation paragraph of the cover letter: what are the critics that you are building from/against; where do you see the dissertation contributing to literary studies; etc.

You will want to name the major figures and/or text that you address in your dissertation, and to explain how the chapters are structured. Chapter-by-chapter summaries can be a little dull, though. It can be helpful to emphasize the narrative of the argument that you are making. What is the problem you are trying to solve -- and how does the dissertation go about solving it? Again, think of this summary as an advertisement for the larger work. Like a book jacket, you are trying to tempt people to read more, all the while showing that you can substantiate the

claims you are making. (Sometimes a brief example can be useful in both the dissertation paragraph of the cover letter and in the dissertation summary.)

Finally, many people end the summary with a list of chapter titles. Send the dissertation summary (after you have everyone you know read it six times) along with your vita whenever you apply for a job.

The teaching philosophy statement

Unfortunately, it is becoming more commonplace for departments to request that candidates send statements of their teaching philosophy. Since this is a relatively new phenomenon, there are fewer protocol in circulation than for other requirements of the job application process. While this gives you more latitude, it also leaves you (and your job placement officer) a bit more at sea.

Most statements of teaching philosophy that I have seen are between 1-2 single-spaced pages. The real difficulty is to try to write about teaching in a way that speaks to your genuine aspirations without sounding too corny or boastful. Most of us teach because we believe in nebulous ideals (justice, peace, etc.), because we think other people should learn to think like we do, and because there's no other way to get people to pay any attention to us. These things, sadly, don't play too well on paper.

So, try to extrapolate from your experiences in the classroom. What kind of learning are you trying to promote? What kind of skills do you want your students to take away? How do you see the role of humanistic inquiry in undergraduate education? All of these things are connected to the nuts and bolts of what you do in the classroom. While you don't want to dwell on minutiae or give too many examples, it is good to make some connections between broad principles and concrete practices. It's also okay to distinguish between the teacher you are and the teacher that you hope to be. In fact, many statements of this time talk about goals for future development. You probably should address the teaching of writing somewhere in the document, as writing is a skill English departments are usually charged with cultivating.

Remember, this is a professional document, not a confessional. This is not the place to parade your most hilarious teaching story. This is the place where you show that you take your pedagogy seriously, and that you have thought a good deal about not only <u>what</u> you teach but <u>how</u> you teach.

Professor Nickerson, moreover, has written a good guide to the statement of teaching philosophy that is available on line at: http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/WC/philofteaching.html.

My feeling is that you should send a statement of teaching philosophy only if requested to do so. However, once a department has asked for something like this, it has opened a new door -- so consider sending them a syllabus or two, as well, if you like.

The writing sample

Many, though not all, departments will request a writing sample at some point during the application process. (Sometimes this will even be part of the initial application, but more often it comes in a separate request, after or along with a request for a dossier.) Departments often specify a particular length, generally 15-25 pages. (I have always had a rule of thumb that you can send up to five pages more than their length limit. The important thing is that you cannot totally ignore their length limit.)

The best writing sample is published article -- or an article submitted for publication -- that you have developed from your dissertation. Even if you don't have an article, you might think about the article as a model for developing a writing sample. The sample cannot simply be a random 25-page chunk from your dissertation. Like an article, the sample needs to be comprehensible as a contained unit. For this reason, you might insert an extra explanatory note at the beginning or end of the sample explaining the sample's place in the dissertation, or how the chapter continues. (You can also excise a portion from the middle and put a note there.)

Most importantly, the sample needs to articulate its argument in a clear and provocative manner near the beginning. Remember that your readers will be sitting down with a stack of, say, 40-60 of these. Are they going to read all of them through from beginning to end? A successful writing sample quickly grabs the attention of those committee members and keeps them interested enough to continue reading.

You will want to talk to your advisor about what parts of your dissertation might be most suitable for a sample. Keep in mind that your sample cannot be the same as your job talk (see below), and that you may want to use different samples for different jobs. It is important that your writing sample be as polished a piece of writing as possible. Revise, revise, revise -- and get started right away, because when departments request these samples they often want them immediately.

When candidates send their samples, they often include a very brief summary letter ("Enclosed is a sample...") that explains how the sample fits into the larger project. (Did you notice that last word? You aren't just working on a dissertation any more, you are working on a project -- because of course you are thinking about turning the dissertation into a book. But that's another story.)

MLA Interviews

Traditionally, departments conduct their first interviews at the MLA convention. There is no standard routine, but interviewing committees range from a single person to groups of 8 or 10; most of the time, though, they will made up of three or four people. And a department at MLA might interview somewhere between 8 and 12 candidates for a position.

First, you will want to make plans to attend MLA in the fall. Unfortunately, you will not know if you have any interviews until much closer to the date of the actual convention. Generally, departments begin arranging interviews in December, often not until the second or third week. (And stories circulate of departments calling candidates just days before the convention.) If you are going to be traveling somewhere in December, you might want to include that telephone

information in your cover letter. Otherwise, be sure that you have reliable access to voice mail and e-mail.

When you receive a phone call or an e-mail about an interview, you will usually be asked to set up a specific time and date. Often, the person will give you a hotel and the name under which the room will be listed; this means you will have to call just before the interview to get the actual room number. (Theoretically, this room information is supposed to be available through the MLA job center at the convention, but few departments actually use this service.) If the person you speak or e-mail with does not provide information about these kind of logistics, ask. You might also provide your hotel information in case the committee would like to get in touch with you.

You are also within your rights to ask who will be interviewing you. This can be very helpful, as you can use on-line information to get a sense of the people with whom you will be speaking. At the very least, you will want to try to prepare yourself by finding out what you can about the department and the institution. This kind of preparation is key, as it will often give you a sense of the kinds of questions you will be asked, particularly about teaching.

As you have probably heard, most MLA interviews are held in hotel rooms. This is a very odd situation, about which the less said, the better. Give yourself plenty of time to get to the actual room, because the elevators during the MLA convention are notoriously overcrowded. There are some departments that will use the MLA job center to hold their interviews. This saves you the hotel-room humiliation, but you end up sitting in a large room filled with long tables of interviewers and interviewees.

The interviews themselves can be 25 to 45 minutes. You do not, therefore, have too long to say what you need to say about why you are the ideal candidate for the job. On the other hand, you should remember that committees are looking for great candidates, and that they are hoping you will be one. They want nothing better to return to their home departments excited about the prospects for hiring. Generally, I think that candidates are pleasantly surprised at how cordial and welcoming they find hiring committees. (Think of it this way: the people who usually end up on search committees are the people who are interested in meeting junior scholars; the real terrors tend to stay at home. You won't meet <u>them</u> until the first faculty meeting.)

Remember, too, that the committee has spent all day in a hotel room. That they are sifting through paper trying to remember who is who. And they are hoping someone will excite them. Don't be afraid to be yourself. Show your intellectual enthusiasm; show them why you are enthusiastic about their job.

And don't be afraid to remind them of things that they may already have read in the materials you have sent them. You may need to remind them of something on your vita or in your letter, because they will not necessarily recall everything. On the other hand, you should look over the cover letter that you wrote shortly before your interview to refresh your <u>own</u> memory. They may ask you very specific questions about what you wrote there.

Most (though, of course, not all) interviews are divided into questions about your research and about your teaching. The committee may begin by asking you to talk generally about your dissertation. This is known, colloquially, as "the spiel," and should be a provocative summary of what your project has to offer that will lead to more questions. You might think about how you got involved in this research, and where it is going. Depending on the institution, you might also be asked about how you plan to convert the dissertation into a book. People will sometimes ask you to walk them through certain arguments for them -- or explain how the arguments apply to a particular text. Or you might be asked about critics and theorists who are important to your research. Throughout, you should be aware that you are probably talking to at least one person who is not a specialist in your field, and quite possibly more than one. Be sure that your answers show the importance of your research to someone who is not as familiar with your field as you are.

You can prepare for questions about teaching to a certain extent by doing your homework on the department's web site. You will be probably asked about how you will teach standard courses in your field, and you should be ready for such questions. In fact, you should be ready to talk about, for instance, a survey of literature relevant to your specialty, at least one or two upper-level courses in your topic, and some fabulous senior-level seminar that you are dying to teach. In each case, it's not just enough to be able to name texts you wish to teach; you want to be able to talk about the general ideas that you hope the course will communicate, and how you plan to communicate those ideas.

You should also be ready to talk about your skills as a teacher. How do you manage discussion? Develop writing assignments? Select readings? Throughout the interview, draw on your experience as a teacher. The committee wants to know that you will be able to hit the ground running at their school, so prove it. Public institutions may want to know if, coming from Emory, you can motivate their students as well. There's no easy answer to this, but you should be ready to meet the question -- and to show the committee that you have thought about it.

At the close of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions for the committee. This is not the place to ask many of the things that you want to know. (For instance, do not ask here about pay.) As with everything else about the interview, this is a place to ask something that shows how you are thinking of contributing to their department. You might ask about something you found that was interesting on their web site, or about team teaching, or about the student body generally, or about an honors program, or about another program on campus. If you can make it a genuine question, all the better. You can also use the question to try to address something that didn't come up in the main part of the interview. (For instance, if you are interested in using classroom technology, and know that the institution supports such technology, you might ask about that support. Then you can explain why you are interested.)

Keep your answers short, and whenever possible, be specific. Mention texts and textual examples. Don't be afraid to be funny; if you can make your interviewers laugh, you are in great shape. Be sure that you are making eye contact will all of the interviewers, even if only one or two people are asking the questions. Think of the interview as something like a classroom, where you have to keep everyone involved. Remember, once more, that you are speaking to them as a potential colleague. But you are only a <u>potential</u> colleague; do not presume too much

familiarity. Never get defensive, but do not be afraid to defend your ideas. Interviewers, in fact, will frequently challenge you (hopefully in a friendly way) to see how you respond. How you say things in an interview can be as important (even more important) than what you say.

Do your best to steer this conversation toward the places that it needs to go. If there's a part of your work or your teaching experience that is particularly relevant to this job, be sure that to work it into one of your answers. If you work on interdisciplinary subjects, be sure that a significant portion of your interview is devoted to the discussion of literature and the teaching of literary study. If you are worried that your research might be perceived as being outside the scope of the job description, you must use the interview to convince the committee otherwise by emphasizing the most relevant portions of your research to them. I can't stress this point enough; in case of a tie, the campus visit (and eventually the job) often goes to the person with the project that relates most directly (or seems to relate most directly) to the original job description.

It is also important to recognize that there may be a dysfunctional interpersonal dynamic at work in the interview room. This has nothing to do with you, but you will notice the awkward pauses -- and perhaps even some tension. Don't panic if you encounter this, just work through it as best you can and remember that all the other candidates have to face the same people. (Actually, more frequently one has an awkward , as opposed to hostile, committee. The reason for this awkwardness might be that chairs select from different constituencies within the department, so the members of the committee are not always very close to one another.)

Candidates always want to know what to wear to an MLA interview. There are better advisors on this subject than I am. You want to dress very professionally, but also feel comfortable. Some men wear suits; some wear jackets and ties. Some women wear suits, for that matter, but not all do. You probably want to look like you are dressing up a bit for this interview, but your clothes will not, ultimately, get you the job.

You can find useful lists of interview questions at both of the following sites:
http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/interview.html
http://otal.umd.edu/~sies/jobquess.html

Phone interviews

Departments will sometimes conduct interviews over the phone rather than in-person at MLA. These will usually be with a committee over some kind of speakerphone. At least you don't have to worry about what to wear.

I have never had a phone interview myself, so any advice I have is cobbled together from others who have. Phone interviews tend to involve the same kinds of questions as MLA interviews, though the institutions that conduct them are often more interested in teaching than in research. Equally important, phone interviews tend to be more scripted. The interviewer might actually be working with a list of questions, so there is even less give-and-take than a normal phone conversation. There's no real way to prepare for this format, I think, except to be prepared for a

kind of awkwardness in the conversation. Of course, one advantage is that you can have your notes in front of you, so that you can make sure to work in any points you want to address.

Campus visits

After the initial interviews, departments usually (but not always!) invite two to four candidates to visit their campus. These visits extend over a single day or perhaps two, and can include interviews, talks, meetings, meals, and even a teaching demonstration. They are exhilarating and exhausting. The best thing about a campus visit is that you get to meet a lot of people who are interested in learning about you. (Attention at last!) What is heartbreaking about the campus visit is that you will spend all of your emotional resources trying to project yourself into this new community -- and you still may not get the job.

When you are contacted about a campus visit, try to learn as many of the particulars as you can. In particular, if you are asked to do any kind of **teaching demonstration** or **job talk**, learn as much as you can about those. How many people are going to be in the room? What length of time would the department like? Pay attention to any words that the department may have chosen to tell you what they have in mind. You should ask as many questions as necessary until you are sure you understand these details. (More on these components below.) When the department representative (sometimes the chair, sometimes someone from the search committee) contacts you, you might also try to learn about who you will be meeting with during the course of the visit.

Campus visits are full of the kind of paradoxes that you would find amusing if you were to read about them, but that are not so amusing when you are going through them. You will have a lot of meals, but you won't ever really get a chance to eat. You will be constantly asked if you have any questions, but you will hesitate to speak the things that are really burning in your mind. And, of course, you will be constantly reassuring everyone that you do not find this a trying, exhausting ordeal when, in fact, it is just that.

What you are trying to do in your job visit is to convince the department that it must have you -- it needs you -- as a colleague. You are trying to help the department make that imaginative leap from life-without-you to life-with-you. They are looking at you and wondering if they really want to have to see you in the halls every day, hear you at department meetings, and sit with you on search committees as you go back to MLA on the other side of the table. During this whole time you are enabling the department to imagine you at their institution by going through your own imaginative process: You are imagining what it would be like to be a part of this place.

As part of the campus visit, you will often have a meeting with a dean or other administrator. Sometimes this is a chance for that person to tell you about the benefits the institution offers, or about its tenure process. (And, by the way, the campus visit is a stage where you should definitely be asking about the tenure process.) You should have questions ready as well -- questions about the institution as a whole, its future, and its role in the community it serves. For deans and such, you might be ready to ask and talk about general trends in higher education (the Chronicle is a good way to keep up on such matters) more than about your specific field. At the

same time, a dean might ask you about your research interests, so be ready to explain them to someone whose background might be outside of the humanities altogether.

I think the hardest thing is to be prepared for how much conversation you will have to make. During your time on campus, conversation can move from idle chit-chat about shopping or the weather to probing, professional questions about your teaching at breakneck speeds. Moreover, the range of questions will be much greater than at MLA (after all, there is much more time to fill).

There are many awkward things about a campus visit. While you are there on an interview schedule, everyone else must meet the obligations of the day. So occasionally you will be "dumped" in a random office to talk to Professor X, with whom you have absolutely nothing in common. Ask about his or her teaching -- about his or her experience with the students. Scan the bookshelves for something that might link his or her interests to yours. Remember, this is a potential colleague.

One of the most maddening things about campus visits, ironically, is that people are frequently asking you if you have any questions. And at a certain point, you really don't. At least, you don't have any that you can either articulate or ask without offending anyone. (Again, this is not the time to ask about pay or about whether the rumors about Professor X's indiscretions are true.) But your questions will matter because they will show the department that you are thinking seriously about what it means to be a part of their department and a citizen of this community. You should ask about the quality of life in the area. You should ask about housing (though don't believe anything you hear from someone who bought his or her house twenty years ago). Ask about the student body -- and about the direction of both the department and the university. Ask about the curriculum. Ask junior faculty about what it is like to be a junior faculty. Ask about the tenure process. Don't ask any of these questions in a skeptical or high-handed way -- you don't have the job yet, after all -- but do ask them in ways that show you really are considering not just joining this department, but staying with it.

If you have children, for instance, you should ask about schools. (Even I used to ask about schools, even though I had no intention of having children in the immediate future. It's a good topic; parents like to talk about it.) And this brings us to something else. There are certain topics that schools are not supposed to be asking you about -- namely, your marital status, your sexual preference, and other private matters. However, if you bring these topics up, you are opening the door to them. There are cases where this might be a good idea. For instance, if your partner has a particular reason to want to move to the location in question, you might mention it. Or, you might want to begin the process of asking about possible work for your partner in some non-academic field. Again, it shows that you are serious about this possible move, and if you need this information, you should pursue it. However, I generally consider it a very poor idea to bring up an academic spouse or partner who might also be seeking a job at that university if you are to be hired there. This is something for you to bring up when you have an offer, but not before. If the department can help you find a position for him or her, you will find out then. However, your bringing it up before the offer can only serve to muddy the waters.

The experience of the job visit is stressful, but there are also moments of genuine pleasure. Before moving on to the "command performances" that can be part of a campus visit, let me emphasize one last point. As cynical as it may sound, you must remember to never let your guard down. There will be moments during your visit (usually after your job talk or before you leave -- or after a drink -- usually, in my experience, in a car) when you will be invited to relax and to ask any "real" questions that you have. First, don't relax. Second, don't ask the "real" questions. I have asked questions about the drawbacks of an institutions, but only very, very gently (and I still regretted it instantly). If you get an offer, you can ask more blunt questions, I think. Until then, be very careful. And don't reveal anything in these moments that you don't mind everyone in the department knowing. For example, in moments like these, people will often try to get a sense for your other prospects. That's a good sign, but you want to be vague and reemphasize your deep enthusiasm in this institution. ("Very high on my list" is a line that I have used.) Equally important, do not confess at this moment that you have lot do on the dissertation. I once heard a senior scholar say that she has heard several candidates admit this very thing on the final ride to the airport. I myself have seen a letter of apology written from a candidate to the chair trying to retract something she said after a couple of drinks. I hate to dwell on this point, but it's hard to imagine how easy it will be for you to think that someone from the search committee could become your new confidante. Remember: you will be tired, underfed, overstressed, deprived of sleep. And then, in a moment of respite (again, maybe after a drink), you will have the opportunity to bare your soul to someone who could ease all of your anxiety by helping you get the job -- maybe even telling you that you already have the job locked up. It won't happen. Don't go down that path.

The teaching demonstration

The teaching demonstration (like so much involved in the evaluation of teaching) is a horrible idea that has become popular over time. The problem, of course, is that no demonstration can actually reproduce the dynamics of the classroom. However, it is very important that you take the teaching demonstration seriously. The amount of preparation that you show will say something to your department.

There are basically three flavors of teaching demo. Flavor one: the candidate teaches a single session of a class already in progress. This is actually not bad, because the narrative of the course is already in place, and the class already has its own dynamic. So you can pick up on that narrative, and look both backward and forward in the class's reading.

Flavor two: the candidate teaches a mock class to a group of volunteer English majors. Faculty may or may not be present to evaluate. This is hard because it is highly artificial. Moreover, you usually select reading for the mock class, but it has to be something so short that they can read it very quickly or even read it in class. (Think lyric poetry.) The one advantage that you have here is that the students are often among the better ones at the institution.

Flavor three makes me shudder, and it is something I have not experienced myself. It is a class of faculty pretending to be undergraduates.

The basic idea here is to do what you can to teach a good class under very adverse conditions. Try to involve the students. Try to keep a sense of humor about the situation. Try to have a good time, and to look like you are having a good time. Like any class, you will want to try to build toward an interesting and provocative conclusion. Again, keep any reading that you choose very short, and be prepared to say nice things about the students afterwards. My sense is that the biggest danger here is that the department thinks you did not take this demonstration seriously.

The job talk

Many, but not all, departments ask that you present some part of your research in a "job talk." The first key is to learn as much as possible about what is expected of your talk when you arrange the visit. Learn who will be attending, and especially how long the department would like to the talk to be. While most job talks are about 40 minutes in length, you might be given a different (usually shorter) time frame. Therefore, be ready to change your talk to adapt to department's expectations. You also want to make sure that your topic is appropriate for the position -- which means that you might have to develop more than one talk.

Do <u>not</u> exceed the time limit. In fact, if you can come a little under the time limit, that's fine. You want to have time for questions, and you want an audience as eager as possible to ask them. Most talks are late in the day, and your audience is likely to be at the end of a busy day. But you do have their attention; take advantage of it.

One of the keys to the job talk is to avoid thinking of it as being just like a conference paper. Instead, it is actually more like a teaching opportunity, where you have to be dramatic and dynamic in your thinking. Good job talks often use a textual example or two to show close reading skills; a visual example, of course, gives everyone something to focus on. I find quotation sheets effective; they help the audience follow the talk, and give them something about which to ask questions.

You should not use your job talk to simply present a section of your dissertation. In fact, you may wish to present ideas that are from different sections of your dissertation. Regardless, you definitely want to begin the talk by explaining the overall shape of the project and where this particular talk figures in it. This is a good time to reintroduce the story of the genealogy of the project. Again, it helps the audience focus its attention. Moreover, keep in mind that not everyone in the will have read your job materials carefully (if at all).

There is no substitute for practicing the talk. You want to feel comfortable with its language and the logic of its argument. Everyone has his or her own presentation style; however, remember that this is an oral presentation. As you surely know from conferences, sentences that make sense on paper do not always work as well when delivered aloud.

The question-and-answer period that follows the talk can be more crucial than the talk itself. You will receive a wide variety of questions, from people who have understood your project extremely well and who want to raise complex challenges to it, to people who don't get it all but feel that they need to talk (the latter are more dangerous than the former). Treat all questions

respectfully. If a question is especially confusing, you might try restating it before answering. If someone brings up a source that you are unfamiliar with, don't pretend you know more than you do (but you might find the person afterward to get the citation). If you get a thorny question and feel that you didn't answer it properly, you might try coming back to it later. In general, in fact, tying different questions together is a good strategy -- it shows that you are trying to synthesize and that you are a good listener. The question period gives them a chance to see how you think on your feet, so it's important that you don't get rattled, that you stay good humored, etc. Demeanor is everything.

The last word

The last word is to try to do the impossible: to have a good time while you are on your campus visit and even at your MLA interview. These are deeply trying experiences, but most people are heartened to learn how many people in the academy at large are decent and intelligent people. If you can enjoy meeting them, learning about them, and introducing yourself to them, that pleasure will show. And anyone who can actually enjoy this ordeal is a force to be reckoned with.