At the MLA stage of the process

Practicalities

• Contacts and location:
  - Make sure it’s clear in advance when and where you’ll be meeting for the interview, and how you can reach the interviewers, or how they can reach you, in case of confusion or unforeseen events. There is a board at the MLA check-in area where you can see where the different institutions and programs are interviewing (often these are in hotel rooms). But before the MLA starts the interviewers will know at least which hotel they’re interviewing in. Find out whose name the room will be in. Shortly before your interview you can ask the front desk to call the interviewers for X institution/department, who will then tell you which room to come to (yes, it’s Kafkaesque, but the hotel generally isn’t allowed to just give out a room number, for privacy reasons). You might want to give the interviewers your cell phone number before the MLA, just in case.

• Dress:
  - Obviously you’ll want to choose formal/professional clothes, but it’s worth thinking about what you feel comfortable in (mentally and physically). One way to approach it is to consider how you would dress to teach a large lecture class; i.e. you want to make a good impression, but you also need to be able to move around without feeling constricted, visibly sweaty, etc. Hotels/convention centers can be hot (especially in cold parts of the country!), so it’s a good idea to have layers that you can add or shed as needed. A formal suit feels comfortable for some people, but is by no means de rigueur. Probably it’s best to avoid jeans and nose-rings, but there’s no need to go to the opposite extreme, if it’s not how you would normally dress for professional purposes.

• Food:
  - Being hungry is no fun, and travel delays, nerves, and interview timing can make regular meals difficult (and play havoc with digesting junk food!), so you might think about packing some healthy snacks (apples, dried fruit, nuts) to take with you to the convention, just in case!
FLL Professionalization: things to consider in the interviewing process

Self-presentation at the interviews

- Be yourself! They are impressed with you on paper already, so the interview is a chance for them to see what potential you have as a colleague and teacher of their students. But you don’t need to convince them that you have superhuman powers... Just that you’re a reasonable, thoughtful human being!

- Be ready to answer questions at different lengths. Some interviewers will truly only want a quick run-down of your dissertation (e.g.), a minute or so, while others will expect you to go on in detail for 5, 10 minutes or more. Start with a short answer, and then look for visual and verbal clues about how to follow up. Pause often in order to give them time to interject, ask a question, or change the topic as they choose. Interviews involve listening on both sides. This applies to questions about teaching as well as about research.

- When describing your research, it’s worth remembering that a chat about the dissertation may be the interviewers’ main opportunity to see how you present ideas and information, so that part of the conversation will influence how they perceive you as a teacher, and not only as a researcher. This doesn’t mean explaining your dissertation to potential colleagues as if they were first year undergraduates, but it does mean keeping your teacherly skills (clarity, explicitness, responsiveness, enthusiasm, etc.) in mind.

- An interview is like any other conversation: a chance to think out loud in response to new questions/approaches suggested by others. It’s a good idea to be prepared with specific answers to common questions (your research, the courses you’d like to teach, textbooks you favor – and the pedagogical logic of your choices, how you meet challenges/problems in the classroom, etc.). But that doesn’t need to mean throwing large chunks of pre-packaged speech at your interviewers. It’s a conversation, not an exam (and a good oral exam is often a good conversation, too!)

- If you have specific reasons for being particularly enthusiastic about a job, it’s a good idea to make that explicit (e.g. location, type of department, type of teaching expectations, etc.). If you can do so honestly, it’s good to make it clear what excites you about this job, as well as a job.
FLL Professionalization: things to consider in the interviewing process

- Some people like sending a short thank-you note after the interview. It doesn’t need to be long, but you can include something you learned about the program/institution that is of particular relevance to your teaching, research, or service interests.

At the campus visit stage of the process

Practicalities

- Think about the weather where you’re interviewing and dress accordingly. Many campuses are covered in snow during on-campus interview season, and high heels (e.g.) might be difficult and even dangerous. Most visits include a campus tour, even in the depths of winter, so good boots and warm coats may be useful! Or for us in Indiana, going south can be just as big a change in Jan/Feb.

- If the department has a schedule for you in advance (where you’ll be when, with whom you’ll be eating meals, etc.), study it before you arrive and ask any questions you might have about it in advance or upon arrival. You may be having a meal with people from outside the department/program, so it might help you feel more comfortable in advance to do some quick research to find out who these people are and what they might be interested to know about you. Help from administrative staff is usually critical at this stage, and you can make friends among staff, students, and faculty before, during and after a visit, whether or not you end up being offered and accepting the job!

- See MLA notes for further practical suggestions about food, dress, etc. Most of what’s said about the MLA stage applies to campus visits, too.

Self-presentation

- Think positively and relax as much as possible! You are now a “candidate” rather than just an “applicant” and have been chosen as one of a tiny handful among dozens of applicants, so you have made a great impression already. In many cases, they are trying to impress you and convince you that their institution is somewhere you want to start or continue your career (whether or not they end up being able to offer you the job!). Again, listening responsively is as important as talking.
FLL Professionalization: things to consider in the interviewing process

- If you’re giving a “job talk” (i.e. a research presentation) find out as much as you can about the expected audience, length, etc. Consider how to make your work accessible for people outside your field, or for undergraduates and graduate students. Many campuses ask for a talk and no teaching demonstration, or vice versa. Even when you are asked to do both, not everyone will be able to attend both events, so your research presentation will often serve as your teaching demo, too. When answering questions after the talk, let the audience see that you’re interested in what they have to say, and that you enjoy thinking on your feet about the topic you’re researching.

- Do your research about the institution and department/program (even more than you did at the MLA stage) and have as many tailored, not generic, questions prepared to ask as possible. It does not make a good impression if you have no questions, especially for the Dept Head or Dean. This may be perceived (even if falsely) as a lack of genuine interest in the position (this is true at the MLA stage, too, of course!).

- Thank you notes afterward are nice, especially as a lot of individuals are likely to have gone out of their way to make you comfortable during your visit.

Good Luck!

Profs Alejandro Cuza, Keith Dickson, Antonia Syson, and Jen William (February 2011).

Two web-links that help demystify the job search process:

http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/wsweb/Anne_Donadey/prep.html