

College of Arts & Letters

Best Practices for Virtual Zoom/Skype Interviews (with a specific focus on “on-campus” interviews)

Many of the suggestions below are designed for both screening and “on-campus” virtual interviews. Some are more pertinent to “on-campus” virtual interviews. Thank you to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this tip sheet. This tip sheet is taken from the *CAL Guidelines for Faculty Searches*.

Checking/testing prior to the interview

- *Implicit bias in virtual settings* - Consider how implicit bias in the virtual space (technology hiccup, candidate background, candidate interview interruption, first impressions) might influence the quality of the interview. Be vigilant to new types of implicit bias that take place in this space. Consider watching the following, helpful 15-minute video on “implicit biases in virtual interviews” from the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC): <https://vimeo.com/443088643>
- Address requests for sign language interpreters or other accommodations for the interview beforehand. Many accommodations are inexpensive or free and easy to provide particularly in a virtual space.
- Provide the entire Zoom invitation that includes phone numbers and international phone numbers along with the Zoom room URLs as backup options to dial into the Zoom meeting. Also consider additional information on installing the Zoom mobile app on a mobile device as another backup. <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362663-Joining-a-meeting-by-phone>
- Candidates should be provided with a list of all search committee members in advance. This can be included on the interview schedule. Some search committees also provide the interview questions and unit bylaws in advance to all candidates as well.
- If holding initial screening interviews, remind the candidates that the committee could be running behind as much as 5-10 minutes because of multiple interviews scheduled.
- Review any interview materials before starting such as the schedule, questions, etc.
- Make sure your device is fully charged, that you have its cord, and that there is an outlet nearby in case you should need to plug it in.
- Check your internet speed. You can do this at SpeedTest.net. Have a back-up option like a hotspot or cell phone should the Wi-fi connection become problematic.

- Participants should download and test the Zoom client and room in advanced from the location they will use for their interviews in order to make sure there are no issues. <https://zoom.us/test>
- Troubleshooting tips during interview for audio issues:
 - Leave room and come back
 - Unplug headset
 - Check audio/video settings <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362283-Testing-computer-or-device-audio> Note: Audio settings sometimes revert to default settings when Zoom updates.

Adapted from suggestions from Adam Gacs (LGSAAL).

Recording virtual interviews –

- For reasons of search confidentiality, only research and administrative presentations/talks may be recorded so that department/unit faculty/staff/students who were unable to make the presentation may view it later.
- Candidates must give their written consent to be recorded ahead of the “visit”. For the purposes of equity, if one candidate does not give their consent, then none of the candidates can be recorded.
- Job talk recordings should be deleted once the search is complete and not archived for future use.

Setting, lighting, attire, muting –

- *Setting* – It is the most helpful to have all committee members access Zoom individually rather than sitting at a collective table where candidates cannot see all of the search committee members well. (Of course, the latter does not allow for social distancing).
- *Lighting* – Being backlit by a window or light fixture will cast a shadow over your face and you will be viewed as a silhouette. If you have lighting behind you, please add lighting in front of you so that the interview participants can see a brighter image. Generally, your best strategy is to sit opposite an open window. If your space is dim, try adding floor or desk lamps.
- *Eye contact* – Please be sure to look directly at the camera (as opposed to your monitor) when you are speaking. Preferably, your camera will be at eye level.
- *Body language* – Please be aware of your body language and facial expressions as they can be highlighted when on video. Movements appear exaggerated and are distracting to the other participants and speaker. Try to stay still and be attentive – or at least act attentive!

- *Interview attire* – When dressing for video interviews, solid colors are best. You may want to avoid plaids, stripes, or prints, as the movement of these patterns may distract the viewers on the other side of the video connection.
- *Background* – Try to provide a nice, plain background. You can't control everything in a mobile environment but give some thought to background prior to the meeting. Ensure that the background is professional to the extent possible. Remember that you are trying to recruit the candidates that you will be interviewing.
- *Video* – Please keep your video turned on if at all to the fullest extent possible. Consider others who might be in the same location. Make them aware that you will be interviewing during the appointed times.
- *Muting* – Be prepared to ask your assigned interview question in the order it is assigned. If you are not asking a question, please place yourself on mute to minimize distracting background noise or interference.
- *Mute device notifications* – Please be sure to mute any notifications on your device and shut down any applications, such as email, that may be distracting during the interview. Please also turn your phone to silent or vibrate.

This above section was provided courtesy of Isaacson, Miller executive search firm with a couple of additions.

Interview scheduling, structure –

- *Pace through the day* – Schedule in 45-minute blocks to enable a 15-minute break between each appointment. Make sure to keep this strict schedule and do not routinely go over the time limit for the benefit of all concerned and especially the candidates. Also make sure to give the candidates a longer break during the day at some point for lunch and to prepare for other portions of the interview as you would during a regular campus visit.
- *“Interview escort”* – Consider having one person “accompany” the candidate from meeting to meeting to break the ice, facilitate introductions, and troubleshoot any technical or other difficulties. This person stays in each Zoom room only for the first few minutes and then exits quickly and gracefully for the interview to begin. They then join the person in the next room at the correct time. This might be the search committee chair or a search committee member.
- *Questions* – Collect committee questions ahead of time to create a standard list and assign a question to each search committee member in a numbered order to facilitate the interview process. Make sure that the questions align with the rubric so that the various rubric criteria are addressed. Ensure that each member has the full schedule and full list of questions for their reference and transparency. Some search committees choose to send the question list to all of the candidates ahead of time to facilitate a more advanced dialogue in the time allowed. Address questions directly to the candidate, even if a sign language interpreter is present in the room.

- *Time intervals* – Split the interview up into sections ahead of time (committee introductions, questions, candidate questions, wrap-up). At the beginning of each interview the search committee chair should explain the format of the interview to each candidate saying that the committee has a series of questions that will be asked during the first 30 minutes and that the candidate will then have 10 minutes to ask questions of the committee. Again, it is important to keep to these time intervals and not run over. Usually in such a format there is not time for a follow-up question. The search committee chair might also mention, should there be a technological hiccup for anyone participating in the interview – committee member or candidate – that the everyone else will just accommodate the glitch without impact on the interview, and that everyone understands the circumstances under which the interview is taking place. That can help to reduce the stress for the candidate.
- *Zoom functions* – Search committee members should discuss ahead of time with the search committee chair how they will indicate their interest in answering a candidate’s question. If the committee is large enough, then consider using the “raise hand” function that is under the list of participants in Zoom. Do not forget to lower your hand once you have asked your question.
- *Answering questions* – Provide good information and be succinct in your answer. If not, all committee members present have asked a question, allow them to answer questions first. Do not dominate the interview. Remember broad and diverse committee participation is important in establishing a good impression with the candidate.
- Have the following information/materials ready for each candidate:
 - Interview schedule.
 - Login information (if applicable).
 - Welcome script.
 - Interview questions.
 - Contact information for tech support.
 - Applicant’s contact information (as a backup option if disconnected)
- Some suggested virtual interview starters
 - Welcome
 - Make sure that the candidate can both see and hear you.
 - Facilitate introductions. Candidates should have the list of interviewers beforehand on the schedule.
 - Acknowledge the unusual circumstances of the interview, which should help to put the candidate at ease. This might be the candidate’s first virtual interview.
 - Remind the candidate how long the interview will take, how long is foreseen for committee questions, and how long the candidate will have to ask questions.
 - Remind the candidate that you might be taking notes during the interview or referring to prepared materials. This might interfere with eye contact and should not be seen as an indication of disinterest.

- If there is the chance that someone might be interrupted by a call or other urgent matter during the interview, mention that potentiality at the start so that it will not unsettle the candidate if it happens.
- *Near the end of the interview*, thank the applicant for their time and be prepared to mention next steps if the meeting is with the search committee and the search committee chair deems it appropriate.
- *Do not forget* to end the interview punctually as the candidate has a strict schedule to follow and does not want to make a bad impression by arriving late to the next meeting. It is also important for the candidate to have the full 15 minutes allotted for their break between some meetings.

Be mindful of the following –

- Not every candidate will be able to access virtual interview technology and may need to reschedule or determine an alternate method for interviewing.
- Not every candidate will be able to access the most ideal interview space and may need to attend to the occasional interruption without having it impact their interview.
- Be accommodating of technology hiccups and audio/visual delays. A 15-minute window between interviews will also help everyone to test out their technology/links.

Resources used for this tip sheet, if not cited above, include:

Yale's "Conducting a Virtual Interview Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak" <https://your.yale.edu/work-yale/manager-toolkit/recruiting-and-hiring/conducting-virtual-interview-amid-covid-19-outbreak>

"Virtual Interviews: Tips for Medical School Interviewers" American Association of Medical Colleges https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-05/Virtual_Interview_Tips_for_Medical_School_Interviewers_05142020.pdf

See also the Modern Language Association "Recommended Guidelines for Interviews for Academic Positions" - <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Career/Career-Resources/Recommended-Guidelines-for-Interviews-for-Academic-Positions>

Modern Language Association "Disability and Hiring Guidelines for Departmental Search Committees" <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Career/Career-Resources/Disability-and-Hiring-Guidelines-for-Departmental-Search-Committees>

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