

THE 1-2-3 OF INTERVIEWS

Steps to success for researcher applicants.

1 THE ODD QUESTIONS

Here are possible ways to address tricky questions reported by early-career scientists:

- **What was your favourite story in today's *New York Times*?** If you don't actually read that newspaper, just say non-defensively that, as a scientist, you get ideas from many sources, and discuss a story or post you read that day. You could also ask the interviewer whether there was a particular story that they found interesting.
- **How would you describe yourself?** Such a vague, cryptic request can be puzzling. You can talk first about your work and research experience, but you should also bear in mind that this is a way of getting at who you are as a person. It can therefore be useful to explain how you work well as a team player — give examples of collaborations or other teamwork — and provide some personal information, such as hobbies, and how they relate to the job.
- **What is your three-year plan?** You should know from the job advert (and some background research) what the organization's mission is, so discuss how your plan aligns with that mission.
- **What do your parents do for a living?** You might ask the interviewer why he or she is asking the question as it is quite personal. The question might be a reflection of a poor or misinformed interviewer. Or it might be intended to see whether you can remain diplomatic and keep your head.

See more interview questions and ways to handle them at go.nature.com/elnmcp.

2 INTERVIEW INTELLIGENCE

Here are ways to find information about your potential employer and about the person or team who will interview you.

- Visit the employer's website (the university department, the principal investigator's laboratory page or the agency or company's website) for an overview.
- Look at business directories, scientific publications and newsletters. Read news sources to learn about research funding, corporate mergers and product launches, recommends Deb Koen, a career strategist and *Nature* Careers columnist in Rochester, New York.
- For anonymous employee reviews of companies and institutions, see sites such as www.glassdoor.com and www.jobitorial.com. But remember that postings are

the opinions of individual employees and might not accurately reflect views overall. Compare this feedback with insights from other sources, says Koen.

- To get a sense of the organization's culture, examine its social-media presence, including on Twitter, Google+, Facebook and blogs, advises executive coach Louellen Essex in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Ask the recruiter or person who scheduled your interview (by phone or e-mail) to disclose who will be interviewing you and their positions. Look at their web pages, academic publications and social-media presence.
- Reach out to contacts from LinkedIn and other social media, as well as to graduate-school fellow alumni, former labmates and colleagues from scientific societies, for information about the organization and your interviewers.

3 STAYING COOL

Winning at the interview game often depends on staying composed and calm. Below are some suggestions for mitigating stress during the exchange.

- Look at careers websites for examples of difficult or puzzling questions that interviewers across all sectors have posed in the past, says Lee Miller, a career coach and columnist in New York City. Rehearse for the interview with a friend or colleague, and practise different ways to respond to those questions.
- Bring your CV and prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the discussion. Make notes to yourself on the list to breathe, slow down and pause, and refer to these notes during the interview.
- If you are completely in the dark about how to respond to a question, say: "Before I answer that, let me ask you this," and pull out a related question from your list. Or ask for more time or for the next question.
- Counter self-sabotaging thoughts, says Koen. Change "I'll never be prepared enough for this interview. It will be a disaster with questions I don't know how to answer" into "I am prepared for this interview. If I'm unsure of an answer, I will remain calm and make a positive impression overall."
- If you're not satisfied with one of your responses in the interview, you can re-address it in your follow-up thank-you letter or e-mail, notes Koen. **K.K.**

MENTORING

Balancing act

Just one-fifth of US clinician-researchers report receiving guidance from mentors on achieving work-life balance, finds a survey (R. DeCastro *et al. Acad. Med.* **89**, 301–311; 2014). The authors polled 1,227 researchers who received National Institutes of Health career-development grants in 2006–09. They found that although 52% of female respondents and 40% of male respondents were dissatisfied with their work-life balance, only 22% of all people surveyed received advice from a mentor on balancing the two. Researchers should not fear initiating discussions about such issues with their advisers, says co-author Reshma Jaggi, a radiation oncologist at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, who adds that mentors may not be aware of their mentees' work-life conflicts. "This is not an illegitimate concern," she says.

DEGREES

Enrolment slowdown

First-time enrolment in US professional master's degree (PSM) programmes continues to rise, but the rate of increase is slowing, finds a report from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in Washington DC. Enrolment rose by 2.2% in 2012–13, compared with increases of 11.7% in 2011–12 and 14.7% in 2010–11. The drop corresponds to a slowdown in enrolment in all US graduate programmes, says Jeffrey Allum, director of research and policy analysis for the CGS. He notes that a 2013 CGS survey found that 91% of PSM graduates were working in their field of study and 68% of full-time employees had annual earnings above US\$50,000.

TRAINING

Support means success

Junior researchers need stronger career-development support and training, says *The Global State of Young Scientists*, an analysis by the Global Young Academy in Berlin. It surveyed 650 early-career researchers aged 30–40 worldwide in 2013. Respondents said that solid mentoring relationships are vital for career success, in part by providing access to research groups and opportunities for giving talks and publishing papers. But many respondents described existing adviser support as inadequate. Co-author Catherine Beaudry, associate professor of innovation economics at the Polytechnic School of Montreal, Canada, counsels researchers to seek support from many senior colleagues.