

How to Learn to Stop Worrying and Love the Job Market

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Abstract:

This paper conveys information and advice about the job market process for candidates completing their PhD's in economics in the United States. I discuss the mechanics of the job market process in great detail, from the preparatory work before the market starts to the steps after accepting an offer. Throughout, I answer common job market-related questions and discuss ways to make the process more manageable and less stressful. The focus is on students from non-top-tier universities, although the advice applies nearly as well to students from top schools.

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¹ This paper attempts to reflect excellent advice collected from many trusted friends and advisors. I have received very useful direct comments on this paper from Laura Razzolini, Neha Khanna, Jon Rork, Denvil Duncan, Andrew Hanson, Menna Bizuneh, and Mike Sinkey.

1. Introduction and contributions

This paper aims to provide job market-related advice and information to current economics PhD candidates. My focus is on candidates from non-top-tier schools, although the lessons conveyed apply equally well to most candidates from top schools as well. I focus on the mechanics of the process and answer questions that I and my cohort found ourselves asking throughout the process. I also do some meta-discussion of things that seem to make for a successful candidate coming out of this kind of school. Finally, I discuss briefly what happens after the market.

The contributions of this paper are to provide detailed advice, focus on candidates from non-top-tier schools, and speak from the perspective of a colleague. This paper is intended to augment, not replace, other advice. Much of that advice, however, will focus on the experience of students from top-tier programs. Some of that will still be applicable to students from lower-ranked programs, and of course we need to remember that rankings have their limitations. Nonetheless, candidates from lower-ranked schools must be aware of special challenges they face. It is very unlikely that you will get a job at an institution ranked equally to your school, and even less likely at a higher-ranked institution. Every job gets hundreds of applicants, and you want to stand out. Your school does not provide a strong signal of your quality, so you need to work to show how good you are. Don't give up: you'll still probably find a good job. But you must let realistic expectations guide you, and you may need to work extra-hard at the job search.

The rest of the document will go into details, but here are a few high-level pieces of advice.

First, the biggest factor in job market success is the quality of your work: your research, and (for some jobs) policy work, teaching, etc. The goal of your job search process is to remove barriers between you and the best job that your work can earn you. You will lose 4-6 months of work to the job search process. But never forget that employers are looking to hire someone based on their work, not their ability to do a job search, and never mistake the job search for real work.

Second, faculty will help you get a job. Ask for their help, and help them help you. Your advisor should be your main booster (so choose your advisor carefully). This also pertains to other members of your committee, and other faculty you know at your institution and elsewhere. (All through grad school you should be trying to make contacts—this will also be important once you start your career.) Even faculty you don't know may know something about you (faculty do talk about you amongst themselves) and may help you unexpectedly.

Third, you'll be tempted to make guesses about the state of the world from very noisy signals. Try to avoid doing this because it will make you crazy and no good can come from it.

Fourth, there are many stochastic elements and things outside your control. For example, an institution may have an unadvertised preference of some kind, or a job's funding may fall through. Don't bank on specific jobs, and don't take negative outcomes personally.

Fifth, be gracious and considerate to your department's faculty and staff, other candidates, faculty and staff of potential employers, and so on. The job market is time-consuming for everyone, so work to make your corner of it more pleasant. Also, the people you meet will talk about you, and you'd rather have them say nice things. Finally, this is a repeated game. Contacts made through the interview process may yield interesting fruit even if no job comes of them.

2. Are you ready? What you should have before entering the market.

The most important indication that you're ready to go on the market is the support and buy-in of your advisor. You should have a relationship with your advisor such that each of you is honest with and trusts the other. Your advisor should know more than you do about whether you're marketable right now. Other faculty (particularly your committee and your job market advisor) may also be able to weigh in. They will defer to your advisor's opinion, of course, and rightly so.

If your opinion about your readiness differs from that of your advisor, reconsider *your* opinion. Your advisor might not stop you from going on the market if she doubts your readiness, but her buy-in will make your life easier. Plus, she has more perspective so she's probably right.

The most important elements of readiness are: whether your dissertation is nearly done and whether your job market paper is ready. If you are successful on the market, you won't have much time to work on your dissertation between the time you start the job market and the time you defend your dissertation, particularly if you plan to graduate in May.

One chapter from your dissertation will be your job market paper (a.k.a. "JMP"). It must be a standalone piece (not excessively long). It must be well-written and have solid content. Your job market paper is the main basis for evaluation of your research. Most job market papers are submitted to journals in the first year on the job. It's good for it to be published already—that demonstrates market value—but it also means it's not new work, so you need to demonstrate that you have a pipeline. It can be co-authored, but it must be clear (in your presentation of the paper and in your advisor's letter) that you are the major contributor. If you have multiple papers, you can use two papers for different types of jobs, if both are good. This may be a good strategy if you're broad (to appeal to two different markets). But don't use a paper that's not ready.

Your advisor's buy-in and a strong job market paper are the minimum. Your readiness (and luck) will determine the quality of your first job. Careers have some path-dependence, so you want a strong starting point. If you barely meet the market readiness bar, consider waiting a year.

Common wisdom is that there is no penalty for going out a year "late" (in your sixth year). The issue is often funding. Talk to your advisor—she may be able to fund you directly. Some people get an outside job, e.g. teaching, to fund later years, but of course this makes it harder to finish. Going on the market a year early does not seem like a good idea to me. There seems to be no premium for going out early. If you're ready in your fourth year, you're probably only marginally ready. Why not stay another year and do more research, teach a class, or do an

internship? Your family may be champing at the bit for you to finish, but help them understand that you'd be trading off one year in the program for what is likely a better career path.

What if you go on the market and don't find a job that works for you? The world will not end. You will go on the market again the next year, and hopefully have more on your CV at that point. It's not clear whether you are penalized for failing on your first try. However, the process is somewhat onerous, so you should try to avoid this outcome.

Differentiating Factors

These factors can make all the difference in getting you a good job—they can help boost your signal above the noise and help you stand out.

- A publication or two in peer-reviewed journals. This trumps all other factors. If you have no pubs, “revise and resubmit” is great, and even “under review” is good. This means you have to plan ahead; it's best to start sending out papers (probably with your advisor) in your third year. But having submitted work is a good signal even if it was rejected.
- Really strong letters of reference. You will have three or four letter-writers, and you want all letters to be very strong. Your writers must know you well and think highly of you. A letter from a professor with a strong reputation means a lot, but if he can't dedicate much time or effort to you, he may know you less well, write a less effusive letter, and be more hands-off in your job market process. If someone doesn't think highly of you he should refuse to write the letter; worry about the borderline case where he agrees but writes a modestly complimentary letter. (Employers read between the lines). You won't see your letters, so attend to signals from your faculty about what letter they might write for you.
- A grant or a fellowship, even if it's an internal (your school) grant. External (NSF, NIH, EPA, foundation, etc.) funding is best because it shows that you are “entrepreneurial.”
- Projects in your pipeline. List working papers and works in progress on your CV, but only include serious projects that are already going forward. Use papers from your grad classes as springboards for new projects. You need to be able to talk intelligently about “what's next” in both specific (near-term) and general (long-term) terms.
- Teaching experience (for jobs that emphasize teaching). Having good teaching evaluations is great, but mediocre or even poor evaluations are actually fine. Of course, teaching eats up a lot of time, so it may push your PhD completion schedule back. Teaching expectations and opportunities vary across schools, so if you haven't taught and that's normal for your department, you can explain that if you're asked.
- TA experience. You must be pretty active in the course (give a lecture or two, have office hours, hold review sessions, handle quizzes, etc.) for this to do much for you. Faculty for whom you TA will probably help get the students to do evaluations of you.
- Policy experience (e.g. with a policy center or a government agency). You may get publications from this, too (they will probably be non-peer-reviewed, but you may be able to turn them into peer-reviewed publications later).

- Conference and workshop presentations, starting early in your grad program. This gets you feedback on your work, gets you out into the academic world, lets you meet people, and shows that you're an active scholar.
- A scheduled dissertation defense date (set in consultation with your committee). This is signals that you're ready to finish, and is stronger if your advisor mentions it in her letter.

So what should you do in the years and months leading up to your job market year to ensure that you're ready? The most important thing is to take yourself seriously as a scholar, not just a student. Engage with research and make yourself valuable to your research advisor. Work up drafts of papers and send them out to journals, preferably with your advisor to help and guide you in the process. Pick a dissertation committee with a good mixture of gravitas and youthful energy; you want great economists who are tough questioners, and it also helps if they like you. Go to conferences and make presentations; go to conferences where you're not presenting, if they're convenient, and go to field-specific workshops—they are smaller and thus cozier. At conferences and workshops, go to social events and schmooze. Sign up for your discipline's listserv or email list (e.g. resecon for environmental, esa-announce for experimental).

Part of being a scholar is being engaged in your scholarly community. Be well-known in your department and get to know faculty. Attend seminars and brown-bag presentations, and give presentations. Do well in your classes. Be a good research assistant (your advisor will complain to other faculty if you are not good, and brag if you are good). Attend social functions like the annual picnic and regular happy hours. Meet visiting faculty and seminar presenters. This gets you feedback from fresh sources and helps you get to know people outside your department. Plus, you'll meet many of these people again, either in the job market process or in scholarly life thereafter. Learn about the interests and specialties of your department's faculty. Someone may be able to give you specialized help even if you don't know them well. For example, if you want to teach at a Christian school, if you know which faculty member is active in the Association of Christian Economists you can ask him for advice. Make friends with your department's staff, particularly the person who coordinates sending out letters. You should always be nice to this person, say "please" and "thank you," and do everything he/she asks.

Having lots of friends is useful when you go on the job market. You will ask your faculty friends to talk to people they know at your potential employers (and you will also reach out to people you've met through conferences and seminars). This can move your CV from the "ignore" stack into the "look again" stack. Some such contacts will happen without your knowledge, so the better-known you are in your department, the better it is for you.

As a scholar, you should make information about yourself accessible. Make a good CV early in grad school and keep it updated. Make sure that your page on the department's grad student website is updated with your information. Most schools let you post a picture, CV, a link to a website, and sometimes a bio. Observe deadlines and requests from the people maintaining this website. Make your own website, too. This is easy in Google Sites; also, your school probably

offers you free web space. Don't post much personal information. When you go on the job market, post your job market materials on your website, and ask your advisor to link to you. You may want a profile on professional networking sites like LinkedIn. Social networking can be a problem: purge silliness from FaceBook (etc.) and clamp down privacy controls.

International students should be aware that some American institutions, particularly schools, may be concerned (even unfairly so) if they feel a non-native English speaker has a heavy accent. Make sure your English is very good, and bear this prejudice in mind.

3. Literature review and other resources

You have many resources for the job market—so many that it may feel overwhelming. Do you need any of these resources, and if so, which ones?

First, your primary source of information should be your faculty advisors and the department's job market coordinator. These people know a lot and it's their job to help you. Start asking for advice from them and other faculty early, and take notes. Keep in mind your faculty members' perspectives—some of them know you very well, some less so; some of them know the market very well, and some less so. Get many perspectives.

Next, read and re-read “A Guide (and Advice) for Economists on the U.S. Junior Academic Job Market” (Cawley, 2011). It can be accessed from the AEA website (<http://www.aeaweb.org/joe/>) and is periodically updated. This paper contains a wealth of information about the process, and statistics that are (mostly) reassuring. There is also a very helpful glossary at the end.

The AEA Resources for Economists website (http://aea-web.org/RFE/showCat.php?cat_id=13) links to a few interesting papers. For example, there's an annual study of the results of the economic job market (including salaries) produced by University of Arkansas (Deck et al., 2011). Coles et al. (2010) covers the process in general and gives a nice treatment of signaling.

Beyond that, I suggest you limit the time you spend reading these sorts of things. More information of this type will probably not improve your search much, so it's probably better to spend the time working on your dissertation.

If you do want to read more, here are some options. Some titles address the academic job search process from a broad perspective (e.g. Vick and Furlong, 2008). Other books address particular concerns. For example, many books address topics for women in academia (see sources suggested by Cawley, 2011). There are books about how to interview (e.g. Kennedy, 2011), but I'm not sure those say anything you couldn't figure out yourself.

The one category I do recommend is books and papers about academia in general or economics specifically. These will pay dividends throughout your professional life. For example, there are books about how to write as an academic (e.g. Silvia, 2007) and excellent and useful pieces on

how to write in economics (e.g. McCloskey, 2000; Thomson, 1999; Varian, 1997). There are also papers and books on how to be a well-functioning professional economist, including wonderful work by Hamermesh (1992). Browsing *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is another good habit to get into if you're interested in the ivory tower.

Also, the best way to sound like you're following the latest research in your field is to actually follow it. A great way to do this is to subscribe to working paper announcements, e.g. from NBER. You can also subscribe to a "Table of Contents" email for journals that interest you. These are also good long term habits, not just for job search.

I strongly advise against spending time on online job rumor boards (but, like me, you may find it impossible to follow this advice). Some argue that they can be good for a laugh, but I think you'll more often be made anxious and unhappy by looking at them. The notorious econjobrumors.com is a cesspit of there is information-less babble and mistruths (deliberate and accidental). There is an associated Wiki site where call, flyout, and offer information is posted (<http://bluwiki.com/go/Econjobmarket>). The information posted there is often correct but there is tremendous underreporting. I'm ambivalent as to whether you should post your information on this site, but I advise against spending much time reading it.

A handy web resource is the NBER candidates page (<http://www.nber.org/candidates/>). This can help you prepare your packet because you can look at other candidates' materials. Don't get depressed about all the Harvard and MIT students, though. They are not your competition.

You'll also want institutional ranking sources. The research ranking of the unit in which the job lies² is what matters. This is not the same as school rank from the perspective of undergraduate education (e.g. from *US News and World Reports*). The AEA links to some rankings (<http://www.aeaweb.org/gradstudents/Rankings.php>). One of the most-referred-to rankings is Kalaitzidakis, Stengos, and Mamuneas (2003). Take all rankings with a grain of salt because the calculation of rankings is controversial, but this will help you know your chances with each job—for those institutions that are ranked. Liberal arts schools are often not in research rankings, so for liberal arts rankings you do use *US News and World Reports*.

4. Overview of time line and process

The job market process is pretty life-consuming. Candidates often get very little research done from mid-October until the beginning of March. Bear this in mind as you make your plans.

Say that you're going on the market in 2014-2015. Your timeline will look something like the timeline I give below, though of course different schools offer different training items (like practice talks and mock interviews) and follow different schedules.

² Many institutions have economists in several departments. At a university, the economics department is probably ranked much higher than the other departments, and some of the other departments may not be ranked at all.

- Early in 2014 – make sure that your dissertation committee knows of your plans. Settle on a job market paper and have a plausible draft some time in spring.
- Before August 2014 – recruit 3 or 4 letter-writers. Most jobs require three, but some require four. If you want to teach, try to have at least one who has seen you teach. They will need at least six weeks’ notice.
- August 2014 – have a really good draft of your job market paper
- August 2014 – start checking JOE
- Starting August 2014 and ongoing – compile list of jobs, with attention to deadlines.
- August 2014 – find your earliest deadline; tell your letter-writers when your admin needs the letters (usually at least two weeks before your earliest application deadline).
- September and October 2014 – prepare job market materials
- September through November 2014 – buy interview clothing and supplies
- October 2014 (or before your first application deadlines) – ask the admin whether your reference letters have arrived; politely bug letter-writers who are behind
- End of October 2014 – first application deadlines (probably—but they may be earlier!)
- Fall 2014 (varies): practice job market talk and mock interviews within your department
- End of November 2014 – get all of your applications out by Thanksgiving, even if they have later deadlines. In the US academic market, search committees meet in or before the first week of December to discuss candidates. Continue to look for and apply to new job postings (mostly non-academic and non-US) after this.
- November and December 2014 – receive calls for interviews at ASSA. Some phone interviews and even early flyouts will take place now.
- Early January 2015 – ASSA, at which you will have most of your first-round interviews
- January and February 2015 – most of your flyouts from ASSA interviews
- Through March 2015 – calls from non-ASSA-interviewing institutions
- March through April 2015 – the Scramble (basically, an accelerated job market process for employers and candidates who did not find matches in the main job market)
- March-early April 2015 – order regalia; finish, defend, and submit dissertation³
- May 2015 – graduate⁴
- May-August 2015 – move to your new home
- July or August or September 2015 – start your new job

European markets and post-doctoral positions may post and clear at different times, although some try to align themselves with the main US job market schedule. European jobs tend to be late, with deadlines in January and later. Private and government positions often have a more continuous year-round recruitment process.

³ For F1 (international) students, there are specific rules about applying for Optional Practical Training that may affect the timing of your dissertation defense, so you may need to be strategic in scheduling your defense.

⁴ You may be able to graduate either in spring or summer. There may be subtle issues in graduation timing regarding stipend, enrollment, and tuition and fees, so look into these details before you decide.

Hiring departments often follow a timeline like the following:

- Post job ad in fall. Some departments cannot post an ad until they get funding approval; others post ads with a disclaimer that the job will only exist if they get funding.
- Start reviewing applications as a they trickle in or en masse the week after Thanksgiving
- Make calls through the end of December
- Have first-round interviews at ASSA
- Meet to decide on flyout invitations. This may happen at ASSA or weeks later (the rest of the department and sometimes the dean or provost may need to be consulted).
- Make calls for flyouts.
- Have flyouts (flyouts are mostly complete in February).
- Meet to decide on offers. Again, different agents at different hierarchical levels may be involved. Some schools will not give an offer until all flyouts are complete.
- Make offer. The candidates who do not receive the offer usually hear nothing.
- The first round offer recipient usually gets a week or two to decide.
- If s/he rejects, the school may call their “number two” candidate to make an offer. Or they may decide no-one else in their first flyout batch was good enough, and call for another round of flyouts. Or they may decide none of the other candidates was good enough, in which case they enter the Scramble or simply do not hire this year.

These steps vary, of course. European schools may post jobs late, have later deadlines, and have interview schedules that are later, briefer, and sometimes seem odd (e.g. they may see all candidates for brief on-site interviews on the same day). Some institutions do not have first-round interviews and simply fly out candidates based on their applications. This includes some European schools, some non-economics departments, and schools with smaller budgets. Some institutions may have phone interviews instead of either first-round ASSA interviews or second-round flyouts. Alternatively, phone interviews may be an additional round that happens before, in the middle of, or after the first and second rounds. Jobs can get cancelled or un-cancelled at any point in the process, usually because of funding.

Your institution may also send a packet of job market materials of all candidates (including you) to other schools. It is not clear how useful these mass mailings are, so don't bank on them for anything. But if your department's admin asks for your materials for such a packet, send them.

5. Stuff to get: A shopping list of job market paraphernalia

Buy these by December or earlier, because you don't want to scramble at the last minute.

You need one or two good suits. The ASSA conference will require four complete days, and you may have back-to-back flyouts. I liked having suits of two different colors and tops of four very different colors (and on each flyout I brought one suit and a different-color top for each day). A male candidate told me that he did fine with one jacket, two pairs of pants, and four shirts (plus

ties). Your clothing should be professional-looking and somewhat conservative, but there's no need to be either stuffy and bland on the one hand, or excessively stylish on the other. You can express some taste. You need at least one fantastic pair of shoes. They must look professional and be very comfortable. You will do a lot of walking (and maybe some running) in these shoes. If you're not used to dressing up, invest some time, money, and effort into getting good shoes. You need a good and professional-looking winter coat. You also may as well build up a wardrobe of "business casual" clothes—e.g., slacks, button-down shirts, and appropriate shoes.

Get a briefcase or satchel. A backpack looks bad, but you can get away with a nice laptop bag. You want one that is easy to carry (e.g. a satchel with a shoulder-strap), is an easy airplane carry-on, and can hold everything you need (including your laptop). Ladies, you also need a purse.

Get a good suitcase that will fit in the overhead compartment of a plane—you won't want to check it. It should come with a suiter (but you can use the garment bag that came with your suit). Consider a travel steamer. Get a toiletry bag, travel-sized toiletries, travel alarm clock, etc.

Get business cards. Your department may print them for you either for free or for a small fee. Don't get too many: I probably gave out 10 or fewer. You may want a business card case, too.

Order official graduate transcripts. You may have to pay for them. Do this in advance (it may take weeks). You might do a rough count of how many jobs request official paper transcripts (it may be 5-10). You'll break one open to scan it to send electronically with a lot of applications. Find your official undergraduate transcripts, and any other transcripts that are relevant.

Get a portfolio, organizer, or planner. It will help manage your complicated schedule and it also looks nice. A smart phone or tablet is very helpful.

Get mailing supplies. Some schools pay for mailing, printing, and copying. You may want to do your printing and copying at a copy center. If you do it at home, you need a printer that does double-sided printing and a boatload of blank paper. Get manila envelopes (at least 9x12). Get printable labels for "to" and "from" addresses. Writing addresses by hand is laborious and looks less pretty (although the look of the envelope really doesn't matter in the end).

If you're applying internationally, get a passport or renew your passport if necessary. It takes time, so look into it early.

I strongly recommend some juicy, trashy novels for ASSA and your flyouts—you'll need the distraction! (Print up some papers to read, too, but you may have a hard time concentrating.)

Finally, this is not a shopping list item, but: try to be well-rested, healthy, and feeling good before you go on the market. The job search process is rough on the body. You'll probably gain weight (and your complexion may suffer, too!) because of stress, schedule, and the way that meals are incorporated into interviews.

6. Documents you will need

There are documents you need to include in your application packet, and then there are data management tools that you will use to keep your head straight through the job market process.

Documents you need for your packet

Make sure all your materials look neat, tidy, and uniform. Use standard fonts (e.g., Times New Roman) and good font sizes and margins (e.g., 12 point, 1" on all sides). No typos. You'll send them as pdf's. LaTeX is fine but not obligatory.

Look at examples of others' documents for guidance. Junior faculty and friends from previous cohorts are often willing to share. You can also find examples on the NBER candidate page and by Googling. Note that not every document you'll find will be of the highest quality.

Have faculty and colleagues review your packet. A great way to get lots of feedback is to hold a lunch session in your department in which faculty "speed date" with students to review packets.

Each institution posting a job will specify what materials you should send them—therefore, each "packet" (which may be paper, email attachments, or a website upload) will be slightly different. A few jobs request idiosyncratic items, but nearly all ask for some subset of the following:

- Curriculum vitae. Have a nice CV, modeled on CV's you like from advanced graduate students and junior faculty (CV's of senior faculty are arranged differently). Get feedback from your advisor and the job market coordinator. There is no length limit. It's handy to put your dissertation abstracts (and/or other recent research abstracts) at the end of your CV. If you taught or TA'd, you can put your average rating from students in parentheses after each course. Indicate your citizenship. Use your cell phone number and either your home or school mailing address. Some people use multiple CVs for different job types, but I think this adds complication while giving little added value. When considering adding something to your CV, remember that anything you put is fair game for questions.
- Job market paper(s). Focus on a strong abstract, introduction, and conclusion. Make sure it looks nice. Use normal fonts, font sizes, and margins. Pay attention to things like table formatting. Many search committee members will read the abstract, skim the introduction and conclusion, and flip through the rest of the paper. Make sure that charts and graphs look fine if printed in black ink (rather than color). Tables and figures can be either at the end of the document or placed throughout.
- Other papers. If you have papers that are good enough to send as additional samples of your work, send them. If they are published, send the journal-formatted version.
- Research statement. Some places require a one-page research statement and a handful require a longer statement, so you may end up with several versions. Say what your fields of interest are, what your primary research programs are, what your research has been to date, and what's next. This is a birds-eye view of you as a research creature. If you are broad, try to emphasize a theme or themes in your work.

- Teaching statement / philosophy. This should probably be a page long. This document talks about your teaching experience and how you will approach teaching. If you're feeling cute, you can put a quote about teaching or a student comment at the document's top. Many teaching statements are uniform-sounding, dull, and uninformative.⁵
- Teaching evaluations (if applicable). Include numerical ratings (and comparisons to other course sections and the department overall, if possible), but exclude student comments.
- Scanned graduate and undergraduate transcripts. If your social security number appears on your transcripts, edit the image to block it out.
- Cover letters. Some places ignore the cover letter, but others read it with at least some attention, so it's worth taking some care. I will discuss mail merging and customization to jobs below. The letter should be well-written and in a professional tone. It should say who you are, what you do, and what your major accomplishments are so far. It should also give logistic information (e.g. I'll be at this or that conference). I am leery of a long letter so I was strict in keeping to one page; opinions may vary on this. Make an electronic signature to put on letters you're emailing (sign a piece of paper and scan it).

How much should you customize packet materials? You'll apply to a large number of jobs, and you'll have to send the right materials to the right jobs by the right deadline, so you'll already be doing some juggling. You'll also need to have some customizing in your cover letter, even if it's just the use of a mail merge (again, more on which below). Beyond that, more customization gives more chance for error and probably adds little benefit.

Data management tools:

You will be dealing with a massive amount of information. To make the process easier, you should get a data management infrastructure laid out early on. You'll need to organize materials you're sending out (e.g., cover letters) and materials you're collecting (e.g., job ads and application forms). Everyone will have their own method, but here's what worked for me.

Within the "Job Search" folder on my computer, I had separate folders for job advertisements, JOE downloads, and application forms. I also had folders for materials I generated: packet materials, cover letters, particular info about jobs for which I had flyouts, and the files for my admin saying where to send my reference letters. As a counter-example, a colleague made a folder for each job. All job folders started out in one place (say, a master folder called "Applied"). When he got an interview call he moved that job's folder to a folder called "Interviews". When he got a flyout call he moved that job's folder to a folder called "Flyouts".

You need some way (e.g. a spreadsheet) to keep track of the list of jobs you're applying to. You'll be reviewing hundreds of job listings from multiple sources, figuring out which jobs to apply to, and organizing particulars about those jobs. You must note the deadline for each, what

⁵ You can find advice (e.g. Faculty Focus, 2009) on how to write a well-thought-out teaching philosophy; this is a good exercise if you are interested in teaching, but you'll have to cut it drastically to create a one-page version.

each needs in its application, and how the application is to be submitted. Attention to these details is time-consuming but is respectful and appropriate.

You'll also need to send your department's admin information about where to send your reference letters. Jobs vary in how they want to receive letters. Some don't want them sent right away (these may request letters later). Of the jobs that want letters right away, many will get letters from your admin (except some jobs with online applications—see below). If your admin sends you a template for the letter-destination information, [use that template](#).

My main data management tool was a master Excel spreadsheet that contained all of the information I needed and from which I took information for my admin and my mail merges. The structure started from JOE Excel downloads. Useful information in a spreadsheet includes: deadlines, what materials are needed, whether it's an email, online, or physical mail application. You may want some way of rating how much you like each job. You may also want to keep track of jobs that you looked at and did not apply to (to avoid time wasted re-examining jobs).

You may also want some templates for information needed at various stages of the process. For example, I used a spreadsheet to record information about all interviews, and this helped me remember to ask all of the relevant questions whenever I got a call. Also, I laid out an ASSA schedule sheet in 15-minute increments for each day.

In addition, for every job I interviewed with, I did a fair amount of research and typed up (in Word) a page of notes to bring to each interview. I used this to study up before going in and to have questions and comments on hand in case I forgot anything. This included notes about the school and department, information about the people attending the interview, free-form notes, and a list of questions I wanted to ask. These sheets were lifesaving during ASSA.

I had a working notes document for bits and pieces of information. In it, I kept information I had entered into applications and may need again. For example, once you've looked up your information on previous jobs (dates of employment, duties, salary, address, manager), you may as well keep it somewhere handy. I also listed questions likely to be asked in an interview, and any research I had to do on them. This was mostly useful to record thoughts about classes I'd like to teach (structure, textbooks, etc.).

7. How to choose where to apply

Our field is lucky in that there are hundreds of jobs each year. How do you select among them?

Before you look

First, consider the types of jobs that exist. The main job types are: research school, teaching school, liberal arts school, private industry / consulting, private research, and government. Which kind of job do you want, and to what are you well-suited? Talk to people with different experience to try to figure out where you might be a good fit. Have preferences but be realistic.

Don't have your heart set on a PhD granting institution; if that's where you want to work, do apply, but remember that your chances are slim. Most of us will apply to several kinds of jobs.

The rule my advisors gave me was that I should apply to every job that would be better than unemployment. Other advisors are more conservative: to keep their recommendations meaningful they don't want to recommend you to unrealistically high-ranked departments. Follow their guidance. I started with a very large list of jobs and was able to cut out less preferred jobs (consulting jobs, locations I hated, and schools with teaching loads worse than 3/3) and still have a pool large enough that I was confident that I'd find a job.

The marginal cost of one more application is low, but it's not zero. This low marginal cost creates a bad equilibrium. Every job seeker sends out 80-200 applications, so most jobs receive hundreds of applications. It's a prisoners' dilemma, but you must play the dominant strategy.

Still, do everyone the favor of not applying to jobs you would simply never take. Think seriously and with your family about your location preferences. They need to understand that you have little control over precisely where you end up and that more limitations constrain your outcome. It's better to think in terms of blocking out undesired regions rather than having your heart set on particular places. Also, think about whether you'd take a job in other countries.

Think also about your life in the long term. Your first job is not your last job. But the better your first job is, the more mobile you will be because other institutions will find your resulting experience more attractive. You may be willing to stomach an undesired location for a few years so that you can publish your way to somewhere nice. Remember, too, that certain transitions are harder to make: in particular, it's hard to get into academia if you start in a non-academic job.

Where to find job listings

The JOE is your primary source. It comes out on the first of the month, every month except for January and July. You can download the job ads as pdfs by section (e.g. US academic full-time, US academic non-full-time, etc.), and you can download spreadsheets of all jobs or jobs matching criteria you specify. There is quite a bit of incorrect information in the JOE, so check everything, and don't narrow too much at first (even JEL codes are often wrong).

Augment your downloaded JOE information with listings from other sources. Be careful about the amount of time you spend searching other sources, since it takes time and there are diminishing returns. The most useful sources focus on jobs that might not appear in the JOE. The Chronicle of Higher Education (chronicle.com) and HigherEdJobs.com have a lot of listings that don't end up on the JOE because they are smaller schools and teaching schools. Also, listings arrive on these sources continuously, so they may appear here before showing up on JOE. Both sites let you set up an agent to alert you to new jobs that meet your criteria. The ERN (at www.ssrn.com) and inomics.com both provide periodic emails as well, and the jobs you'll find in these sources include more international jobs than generally appear in the JOE. Econjobmarket.org also has some (notably international) jobs that are not available on the JOE in

addition to many that are available on the JOE. You will apply to many jobs (found on JOE and otherwise) through Econjobmarket.org.⁶ USAJobs.gov is a searchable database of government jobs. Email lists for your fields are great sources for jobs (as well as lots of other information). There are also some online bulletin boards for specific fields—ask around and do web searches.

There is an online placement service called the Illinois JobLink. There is information available on the AEA annual meeting website (under “Job Placement Service”), and the ASSA-specific Illinois JobLink instructions are at <http://www.ides.illinois.gov/assa/>. You fill out a profile and then find employers that match you (and allow them to find you), with interviews to be set up at ASSA. It is not clear how much use employers make of this.

How many jobs to apply to

In general, you send out N applications; for each k_1 applications you get a first-round interview; and for each k_2 first-round interviews you get a flyout; and for each k_3 flyouts you get an offer. Unfortunately, nobody knows the average k 's for your school for the coming year. Also, your k 's will differ from the average, and there's a large error term. You only need one job, but you want two or more offers. Most places fly out 3-5 candidates per position, so unconditionally you want 6-10 flyouts if you can get them. How that translates to first-round interviews is very obscure.

You want as many first-round interviews as you can schedule, so I recommend applying to as many jobs as you can stand applying to. If you find more than 200 or fewer than 80 on your list, you may be off target. However, not all of these will come off the October JOE, or even the October and November JOE's combined—there will be a trickle of new jobs you'll add to your list each week until you finally accept a job.

Parsing the job listings

Once you have a list of jobs to start with, and you've added detailed information about each one, you can go through waves of processing with successive levels of fineness to subtract jobs.

First, jettison absolutely unworkable jobs: the field doesn't match you even by a stretch, or you can't stomach the location. At this point, look at the general picture of the number and mix of remaining jobs; you may need to adjust your starting criteria. Then go over the jobs in detail. Assess locations for attractiveness and rankings for feasibility. Check out the institution's website for information, and look at the job listing on their site—it may offer more information than the JOE ad, some of it crucial. You may want to develop personal rating systems for jobs. If so, try to separate out an objective sense of how good a fit the job is from how much you might like it. A numerical rating system will let you adjust how selective you are on these criteria.⁷

⁶ As of 2010, the jobs in Econjobmarket.org were hard to search so it was difficult to identify job listings that did not duplicate JOE listings. However, once an application is submitted, the job no longer appears. Thus, do your Econjobmarket.org applications, see which jobs are left, and then see which are new to you and interesting.

⁷ A note about religious institutions. Some want faculty to be actively engaged in the faith of the institution; others (particularly Jesuit schools) don't care. The ad should signal the former clearly; ask around if it seems ambiguous.

As soon as possible, look at deadline dates: some jobs have shockingly early deadlines. You may need to start sending out applications before you're done parsing your whole list. Figure out your earliest deadline. Your admin needs the letters and destination information some time (e.g. two weeks) before the job deadline. The admin's deadline is when your letter-writers must be done, and they need at least six weeks' lead time, so notify them as soon as you can.

What counts as a fit?

Apply for jobs in your field(s) of expertise and related fields, broader fields (e.g. micro general or macro general), as well as jobs coded as "any field," general econ, or teaching econ. You can apply for jobs that list fields that you dabble in but are not your primary fields—let the institution filter you. Don't apply for jobs for which you don't have even a tangential fit, though.

What about rankings? Don't apply to top-ten schools. Probably don't apply to top-20. Don't apply anywhere your letter-writers are unwilling to recommend you. But beyond that, don't worry too much. Rankings outside the top 20 are somewhat fuzzy and uncertain. And if a job thinks you're not fancy enough, they can filter you out—let them do that work. But do pay attention to the mix of job rankings you're applying to. Make sure a great bulk of your applications are to jobs that are roughly "in your league." Of course, most non-academic jobs aren't ranked, so you can apply to those without much concern for "league."

On the topic of schools that are "too good" for us: remember that the market is somewhat segmented. The best students from the top schools will take the best jobs from other top schools. For this reason, just as you do not waste your time thinking about top jobs, don't waste your time thinking about these "top candidates" as your competition, because they are not.

Do apply low, but how low? Use your discretion in cutting jobs you'd never take, but you can do some filtering later—so apply as low as you can tolerate. You can probably ignore jobs requiring a master's degree (e.g., community colleges). Also, very "low" places may assume you're not serious (since you come from a respectable PhD program), particularly if you look strong. If you are very interested in such a place you should literally or figuratively signal them (see below).

8. How to apply

For each job, send exactly (and only) the items they request, adhere to the methods and instructions (and length limits) noted in the ad, do this by the deadline, and give your admin enough advance warning to send your reference letters.

Different jobs allow submission by different methods. Most jobs are either email, online through their website, online through an aggregate website (mostly econjobmarket.org), or mail.⁸ Some jobs give you several options, e.g. mail or email. Given a choice, some people think it's nicer

⁸ When I was on the job market in 2009-10, of 209 applications I submitted, I did 23% by mail, 12% through econjobmarket.org, 21% online through other sites, 35% by email, and the rest by a combination of two methods.

(and safer) to print your materials yourself, but I always opted for the easier method (email). For email applications you have to decide whether to attach a cover letter pdf (in which case you need to figure out what to say in the email) or to paste the text of your cover letter into the email, which you can then customize and personalize if you wish. Some applications are completed in two parts, e.g. one part online and one part by mail. Econjobmarket is the easiest and most streamlined application method, and sometimes requires no cover letter. When you apply for your first job through this site, it emails your letter-writers to request their letters. These letters are stored (but you can't see them), and for each subsequent application requiring letters, you choose which to send. Other online application forms (including those from European institutions, USAJobs, and through institutions' human resources websites) can be cumbersome, so be prepared to expend time on them. Some institutions (notably UK schools) have you download and complete a cumbersome electronic form.

Once you have your materials ready and your starting job list in good shape, think about deadlines. I sorted jobs by deadline and grouped them into waves. I wanted to send out about 40 per week (more would have been difficult), to send each out at least a week before the deadline if possible, and to have them all done by Thanksgiving (except jobs posted around or after Thanksgiving). Many jobs list no deadline; do those as Thanksgiving approaches. For jobs you are crazy about, apply early in case they review them as they receive them.

For each wave, I did the following. First, I figured out the application method for each job. Next, I figured out how reference letters should be sent (some jobs require a different submission method for letters than for everything else), and how many were required (three or four). Your admin needs to get your spreadsheet some time before your deadlines. He/she may prefer one huge spreadsheet of all places you're applying or may tolerate sub-lists corresponding to your application waves. Once this is done, see which packet items each application requires. It's rude and wasteful to include materials that are not requested.

Make a master cover letter (e.g. in Word) and then mail merge it using data from your job spreadsheet. If you've never used mail merge, don't be intimidated. Try the tutorial in Word and you'll see it's pretty painless. Your admin may be willing train candidates on mail merging.

Once the mail merge is complete, you may want to go through all of the letters and make small tweaks.⁹ You can add very institution-specific or job-specific comments to try to get noticed. If you're applying to a place where they might be interested but skeptical, you could use your letter to assuage concerns. This includes cases of an attractive candidate interested in a low-ranked place, any candidate interested in liberal arts schools (show that you know what "liberal arts" means), and Americans willing to live overseas. Read carefully for errors; not all institutions read the letters, but if they do, you can easily offend them with a lack of care. For example, a friend accidentally included a sentence about teaching in cover letters for government jobs; and

⁹ Some people tweak letters using a "magic sentence," custom for each institution, that they include in the mail merge; I felt safer doing it manually.

at my school (which is a college) we hate to see how much you'd like to work for our "university." One thing I found essential was (at the bottom of the letter) an "Encl:" list of all of the items to include. This allowed me to do a final check on each application right before I sent it. Even these minor customization details are effortful, so minimize the customization you have to do, and attend to each application carefully.

If you have questions about an application process or a job, email the job's contact person, even if that person is the department chair. They are generally very receptive to this kind of contact.

Now, start sending out your applications! You'll receive some confirmations that your applications have been received, but most institutions will not acknowledge applications, so don't read anything into it.

After you've applied, have your faculty make contact with people they know at these institutions. Go over your list with your advisor and anyone else who's willing to make contacts for you. Show them a readable, well-organized spreadsheet. Respect any requests they make (they may ask you to do some parsing or research for them). Don't wait too long to do this: it will be useless if your advisor contacts them after they have completed their calls. Personal contact by your advisors is a tremendous boost for you, so work hard to make this happen.

If you know people at these departments, you should contact them also. Even if you just met them once at a conference or seminar, email anyone you know at places you're applying.

There's also a formal system of signaling hosted by the AEA (see Coles et al., 2010). Candidates can send signals of interest to up to two employers. Because these are scarce signals, they are not cheap talk, so they can catch attention and show interest. Don't waste a signal on a job that you wouldn't take. Of course, don't signal a job that is relatively high-ranked, since they will already assume you're interested. The window to send these signals ends on or about December 1.

9. First round interviews

By December, and possibly before Thanksgiving, calls for interviews start being made. Some calls are made by members or the chair of the search committee, and some are made by administrative assistants. Some calls are long and chatty: you may be asked if you have questions about the school, which is tricky if you can't remember thing one about East Flagellum State U when they call. Don't read too much into the calls: chattiness does not necessarily mean they love you, and a short call from an admin does not necessarily mean they don't.

You may also get calls for non-ASSA interviews at this point—phone interviews, or flyouts at places that don't do ASSA interviews. Advice on flyouts is in a following section.

For each ASSA-type interview, you need the following information:

- With whom am I speaking? (You may need to call back later to reschedule.)

- Who will be present at the interview? If it's not known yet, can I check back in closer to the date and find out the names?
- What hotel will you be in? Are you using a disclosure code? If so, what is it? If not, how will I find you?¹⁰
- Can I have a cell phone number by which I can reach the committee during the conference? My cell phone number is ...
- How long will the interview be?

Once an interview is scheduled, you may want to email the contact person to thank them and to confirm details. As you get calls, you may consider updating the job market Wiki (<http://bluwiki.com/go/Econjobmarket>), but it's not clear whether this is or is not a good thing.

How many interviews will you do? You will have a hard time getting many more than 30 interviews crammed in across four days. The most I've heard of was 36. Most people will have a smaller number; many will have fewer than 10.

How do you schedule them? Sometimes, you won't have much choice—the employer (or you) may have few slots left open. However, if you do have options, you can do some smart scheduling. The biggest scheduling consideration is the ability to get from one interview to another. You want to get blocks of interviews at each hotel rather than going back and forth a lot. Within a hotel, try to leave 15 minutes between interviews (some interviews run over, but rarely; however, there are traffic jams at elevators). Assess the distance between hotels; 15 minutes between interviews may work for neighboring hotels, but at least 30 minutes between farther hotels will be necessary—you will be depending on taxis and shuttles. Beyond that, you may try to be strategic about times. Late afternoon interview slots will often find interviewers tired and grumpy, particularly on the last days of the conference, and your very first interview of the day may feel rocky. But often you don't have much choice, so don't worry too much about strategy.

Should you accept all interviews? Yes, at first. You may need reschedule later, which can be tricky but is totally expected. You may even need to cancel an interview if you are heavily booked and want to use the slot for a job you'd much prefer. This is acceptable practice: an ASSA slot is a relatively scarce resource for an employer, so you're doing them a favor by freeing it up. It's not all that scarce, however, so don't cancel unless it's really not workable. You may get grumpy responses to cancellations, so be gracious and apologetic.

At ASSA

Useful things to have with you at ASSA:

- A listing (preferably hardcopy) of your ASSA interview schedule with locations
- A map of the hotels, on which you have already figured out walking directions

¹⁰ ASSA provides disclosure codes to employers; once they check in to their room at ASSA, they associate the room number with the code so that candidates can find employers' room numbers online or at an ASSA information desk.

- A sheet of notes on each school
- Snacks (e.g. apples and granola bars)
- Mints and dental floss
- Copies of your CV
- A copy or two of your job market paper(s) (rarely needed)
- Light reading

I do not recommend bringing a laptop, but a tablet or smartphone is handy. Ladies, bring feminine products—your body can surprise you when you are under stress.

Take a moment to look at yourself before each interview, to make sure you are presentable. Read your notes for this institution so that when you walk in you can remember some facts about the institution and interviewers. I openly consulted my notes during my interviews and added notes as I talked to them. Nobody seemed to mind and it was incredibly helpful to me. It's impossible to memorize all of the details, and nobody expects you to pretend theirs is the only job you're interviewing for. All the same, knowing basic things about the institution will help avoid gaffes.

What are these interviews like? They vary quite a bit, but most of my interviews were nothing like the practice interview I did with my department. Some were fairly structured and organized but most were not. Most were very chatty and each one raced by pretty quickly. Nearly all were friendly. You hear stories of search committee members being rude, walking in or out in the middle of the interview, turning on the TV, etc.—I saw none of this. It is, however, still true that some interviews happen in regular hotel rooms with at least one interviewer sitting on a bed. Obviously, this can have an odd vibe, particularly if you're a female candidate (most interviewers are men).¹¹ In other cases you may be interviewing at a table in a large room where hundreds of interviews are going on; these may be noisy or hot or cold or otherwise awkward.

What is the ASSA experience like? It's exhausting regardless of how many interviews you have. The more interviews you have, the more like speed-dating it will be. You'll be meeting a lot of people, which is over-stimulating even if you're a people person. Take every opportunity to be friendly. Make friends with other candidates waiting in hallways even if their tag says Harvard. Go to all cocktail parties you're eligible for (through association membership) or invited to (by your school or an interviewing institution). CSWEP (the women's economist group) hosts a Hospitality Room and networking events, and these can be very nice.

Should you try to present at ASSA? It's hard to get on the program (and the deadline is very far in advance) and it complicates your schedule and headspace. But if you think you can handle switching gears, this can be a strong signal that you're a go-getter, since it is unusual.

¹¹ What if the only place left for you to sit is on the bed? This would be very thoughtless of them, and it never happened to me. Situations like this have to be handled on a case by case basis; do what feels comfortable and proper (sit or stand as you feel appropriate). Remember these people went to econ grad school, not charm school.

How should you prepare? Make a brief “who I am” spiel: “I am a such-and-such economist with interests in blah blah. I have research programs in blah and blah.” How do you tie your work together? Make several modular spiels on your job market paper(s). Have a two-sentence version for places that don’t want to hear any detail. Be flexible and be open to interruptions. If your school offers mock interviews, attend those of other candidates and take notes. Practice mock interviewing yourself. Ask yourself a variety of questions and answer them out loud, in real time. You can get lists of questions from Cawley (2011) and other sources. Think about what you’d be willing to teach and what you’d like to teach, how you’d structure each course, and what textbook you’d use. For your main areas, have an intelligent yet concise answer—they don’t want the whole syllabus, just the organizing principles. Use people’s syllabi (from your department and from web searches) for ideas. Think about your next research projects. Be able to discuss ideas about future work. Research the institution and search committee members as much as you can. Read up on faculty members who have research interests close to yours.

During the interview, there will be important content conveyed both to you and from you. When you talk about your work, be serious and engaged. Never try to snow people or feed them a line of hooey. Be honest about things that may be considered weaknesses: your breadth / narrowness of interest, your teaching experience, etc. Substance matters the most, but style matters, too. Make eye contact. Shake hands firmly. Smile. Be aware of tics you may have, such as particular gestures you repeat over and over. Be outgoing and friendly. Never make them work to draw you out (this is every committee’s greatest complaint). At the same time, be attentive to interviewers’ interests and let them interrupt you. Be practiced, but demonstrate that you’re reading from an internal script. Have lots of questions. You can have a bank of general questions that you everyone (“What are the students like?” “What kind of research support is there?” “Is it an environment that encourages collaboration?”) and then specific questions for each institution. If it fits your personality, friendly jokes are fine, especially if you use them to reflect your knowledge or interest—e.g., I told one interviewer, “I hear parking is terrible at your school!” Finally, if you really like the interviewing institution, say that loud and clear (without fawning).

What are the most difficult situations? In any tough spots, try to keep your wits about you, and above all stay pleasant and friendly. Here are some examples:

- Some interviews get technical. You may be asked hard questions. You’re the expert on your work, but these are probably smart people, too. Listen, think, and respond honestly.
- Some interviewers may seem dismissive of your work (or your field). They could just be tired and grumpy, or this could reflect disagreement within the department about what is valued. Remember that they chose to interview you, and it is unlikely that this was granted out of charity or as a result of error, so don’t overreact.
- You may read between the lines of innocuous behavior and get rattled. At one interview, my stomach dropped when my interviewers started discussing their school’s cocktail

party and did not invite me; I thought (erroneously, as it turned out) that meant I was out of the running. Stay cool and don't jump to conclusions.

- You may get questions that are completely out of left field. There are illegal questions (e.g. about age or family). Deflect these as politely as you can. Sometimes you'll get an irrelevant comment—e.g. “How does this relate to aggregation?” In responding, adhere to your personal style, but always be polite and avoid hooley.
- A common question is, “Why do you want to come here?” This question is rendered more awkward when it is framed by the interviewers in the context of their institution's negative points. Answer positively, and try to be specific.
- You may have to cut short an interview that's running over. Most interviews will be interrupted by either a member of the committee who says, “Time's up!” or a knock at the door by the next candidate. But sometimes you're the more constrained party; in this case, make appropriate expressions of regret before you rush out.

At the interview, feel free to take notes if it's your style to do so. Note down who was at the interview and what their time-frame will be for making calls. Don't get caught up in ambiguous signals. Some institutions will tell everyone to drop them a line if you're in the geographic area, while others will only say this to candidates they particularly like. Some people thoughtlessly say “Good luck on your job search!” or “See you!” and mean nothing by it. Try not to obsess either way. Importantly, many interviews that feel like a disaster to the candidate still result in a flyout.

After each interview, you need to “reset” yourself so you can go into your next interview fresh. Leave the last interview behind, particularly if it was a bad experience.

Throughout ASSA, you may run into members of your interviewing committees in hallways, at sessions, etc. Be friendly and enthusiastic, regardless of how the interview went (and even if you remember only imperfectly which institution they correspond to).

It is nice but not required to send thank-you notes as soon as possible to the interviewing committees (maybe copying committee members with whom you had contact with who were not at your interviews), even if the interview went poorly or you decided the institution was not for you. Email is fine, but don't use a form email—customize each to that interview and mention interesting things they said in your interview, e.g. useful comments on your paper, things you learned about the school, etc. Be most effusive with your favorite places. I sent one email per interview, but it's probably better to send one per person. Don't expect a response to your thank-you note! If you do get one, again, don't read too much into it—the words used are generally not carefully chosen and are therefore not predictors of your outcome with this institution.

10. Flyouts

Calls for post-ASSA flyouts can come as soon as the last day of ASSA, or as late as late February. (Some can come much later if institutions have odd budget issues, and, again, non-US

schools may be on different schedules.) As noted above, some institutions do flyouts without pre-interviewing, so you may even have flyouts before ASSA. You want to have as many flyouts as you can, but you shouldn't do a flyout for a job you wouldn't take. Flyouts are very expensive for the institution (particularly in terms of opportunity costs), so be considerate and respectful. (But don't be too picky—if you could see this job as a reasonable outcome, take the flyout!)

For some flyouts, the institution will make all of the reservations for you; often, you make the plane reservations and the school makes the hotel reservation). You'll be reimbursed for expenses, but it will take time—generally up to a month after your visit. Some institutions will not reimburse you for the change fee incurred from cancelling a non-refundable airline ticket. It is not uncommon, notably in UK jobs, for the job candidate to bear some of the job search risk (e.g. you may not be reimbursed if you are offered the job and turn it down). If there is fine print, read it. These costs are generally worth bearing if you're interested in the job, and you should not read them as a sign that the institution is dysfunctional or unsupportive.

A standard US academic flyout takes 24-36 hours and proceeds more or less like the following. You fly out in the evening before and you may have dinner with one or several faculty members. Early in the morning, you have breakfast with other member(s) of the faculty. Throughout the day, you have a series of meetings with faculty throughout the morning and afternoon. There is a lunch and sometimes a dinner. You will give your job talk (which will run 60-90 minutes) some time during the day, often in late afternoon. At some institutions, you may have meetings with people higher up in the hierarchy (e.g. a deans or a committee on appointments)—this may be very important. You may meet with human resources staff to discuss benefits. You may have a meeting or a meal with students, who may have some input in the hiring process. At some schools you may teach a class (they may dictate a topic or let you choose). You may have a tour of campus or the local area at some point. There may be some kind of happy hour.

Some flyouts are quite different. For example, European schools may interview you for 30 minutes and have you give a 30-minute job talk, and that's it. They may also offer a Skype interview instead of a flyout.¹²

Schedule each flyout in the earliest possible slot of those offered to you, but usually you won't have too many options. The institutions you're scheduling flyouts with will understand that you may have a busy travel schedule, but there's no need to tell them who you're interviewing with. You can do two in a tiring (but workable) week; three is possible but tough. If you can visit two institutions in one trip, do. If you get a flyout to, say, DC, call other DC institutions you interviewed with to let them know you'll be in the neighborhood—there's no harm in fishing.

Before each flyout, do your research. Learn about the institution and the department. If you or your faculty friends have contact with anyone in the department, you might drop them a line. You'll get a meeting schedule; research each person on you'll meet with, and glance at others in

¹² I personally fear that Skype would put one at a disadvantage relative to an in-person interview.

the department as well (especially those in your fields). It's nice in your interviews to be able to ask about interesting things you found on their CV's or websites. Come up with a list of questions, particularly for people like a dean, chair, or director. As you are preparing for the flyout, be sure you know what the time limit is for your job talk (minus questions), and try to get a sense of what kind of audience will attend—you may need to make changes, for example, if there will be a lot of non-economists or students in attendance.

On your flyouts, bring a USB drive with your presentation. You'll want to bring your notes and laptop to campus on your interview day (you may have a slot of free time to prep for your job talk). You may also want mints, dental floss, and other assorted personal hygiene items, just as at ASSA. Overheads of your slides (as backup in case of technical problems) are probably unnecessary in this day and age. A clicker with a laser pointer is handy but not essential.

Remember that the purpose of the flyout is two-fold. First, you want to sell the department on you. They want to get a feel for what kind of scholar and colleague you will be, in terms of both your skills and your personality. Second, they want to sell you on their institution. They wouldn't have given you a flyout if they didn't think you were a strong candidate. So take the flyout very seriously and use it to learn everything you need to make your decision. Ask lots of questions. Ask what makes for a successful and happy member of the faculty or staff there. They may ask you what you need to be productive and fruitful in your work; be ready to answer.

There's another thing you may want to ask about on your visit, but it can be tricky: tenure. You don't want to give the impression that you're a shirker. However, most people understand the need to know the expectations and norms, and it's natural to want to get a sense of whether tenure is felt to be controversial or problematic. Department chairs and junior faculty are good people to ask, if you feel that you can do this without feeling too uncomfortable.¹³

The flyouts feel as much like speed dating as the ASSA interviews do because of the number of people you're meeting. Each interview slot is 30-45 minutes and you've just gotten started when you to get whisked off to your next "date." It seems to me to be a good thing to express (honest) enthusiasm about the school or the location. Candidates who seem not to like the institution or its location do not make a good impression.

Interview meals can feel perilous to people who were not raised with strict table etiquette. Brush up on it if you think it's an issue for you. These meals are generally awkward for everyone because of their quasi-social and quasi-professional nature. Try to make it feel less awkward.¹⁴

¹³ You may want to broach other tricky subjects. For example, if an institution is religious, you may want to ask about how faculty are expected to be involved with religion; if the gender balance is amiss, you might ask about that. These may feel awkward, but you may really need this information to know how you'd fit in this institution.

¹⁴ One funny thing that happens is that you worry about what you're ordering. Do you order wine? (If your interviewers are, sure.) I had one interview dinner at a nice restaurant where one interviewer commented sadly that everyone but me had ordered safe and boring things. At another interview dinner, an interviewer told me that when he was on the market he'd intentionally ordered things that would make him look like a bold risk-taker.

You have many sources of advice about your job talk, and I only have a few comments to add. First, stay positive. If you start getting bogged down by questions that feel silly or aggressive, take a deep breath—this is your presentation, and your attitude sets the tone. Second, be open to (and grateful for) comments and suggestions. Take notes! You may get useful feedback. But don't be a pushover! When candidates humbly accept comments that are incorrect, it reflects poorly on them. Argue back, politely. And don't defer too many comments ("I'll have to think about that..."); they want to see you think on your feet. Third, before the job talk, find out the department's seminar norms (questions asked throughout or held to the end, etc.). Every department is different. Non-economics departments are generally more reserved; economics departments will often start asking questions from your first slide. You should also remember that schools that care about teaching look at the talk for clues about how well you will teach.

Immediately after your flyout, send a round of thank-you messages (email or hand-written) to the people you met. Be specific and positive, even if you felt badly about how it went! Mention comments people gave about your work, or projects of theirs that you discussed.

Just as with ASSA interviews, a flyout that you think went badly may actually have gone well from the employer's perspective, and may yield an offer. Don't prejudge.

Stay connected with email and voice mail while traveling. You probably won't have time to check inboxes during interview days, but you'll check them in the morning and at night. You can set up your inboxes to tell people that you're out of contact for the day. When you follow up with another institution, it's fine to tell them that you're "traveling"—again, they will know that it's a flyout, and that looks good, and plus they'll know that if they want you they need to move fast.

What if time passes and you don't get a flyout offer from a place that you like (where you think you stand a chance)? Drop them an email. The worst they can do is tell you they've already filled the position. Getting information this way is much more useful than getting it from rumor sources. Obviously, don't pester people, but it's reasonable to send a friendly email.

11. Offers and negotiation

Most institutions will make an offer within a few days of their last flyout. They usually won't tell you if you did not get the offer, but occasionally they'll tell you if you're "number two." If you don't hear anything from an institution you like that you had a flyout with, should you check in? If you have a "friendly source" on the inside, you may be able to make sneaky inquiries about the status of the search. It's also perfectly reasonable to email your search committee contact. Your check-in is useful information to them, especially if you have another offer.

So what happens when you get an offer? Don't say yes right away! Be delighted, and don't hide your delight, but ask for as much time (as long of a "fuse") as they can give you—usually a week or two. Get all of the details. Important points include: salary, teaching load (including number of preps and course reductions if applicable), whether any summer support is provided, startup

funds, regular support for research and/or travel, and whether they cover moving costs. There may be other unusual benefits such as a pre-tenure leave; find out details. Find out when the appointment starts. Also see whether you can get access to the faculty or employee handbook—this will let you learn about benefits, and probably also about terms of tenure.

Some institutions will not technically call it an offer, but rather they are informing you that they would like to recommend you for an offer. Some places get a verbal agreement with the candidate before preparing an offer letter because the offer letter is hard to change, so negotiations happen before the offer is actually inked. In some cases an “offer” can only come from the provost. Departments generally negotiate in good faith, so some trust is merited here.

Now you have an offer, although it may be just verbal. Be discreet: don’t tell too many people until it’s signed and sealed! (Do tell your parents, spouse, etc.) In the meantime, do two things.

First, get advice. Run the offer by your advisor and the department’s job market advisor. See what they think sounds good, and what’s worth pushing on. Sources inside the employer may be willing to help. Members of the department might email you to encourage you to accept and to offer to answer questions. It’s a matter of departmental norm whether or not to do this, and not a sign of anything in particular. It may be worth talking to some of them to get more information and a feel for what life would be like if you take the offer. Even if they don’t offer, if you have specific questions, you can contact the department members you think could answer them.

Second, use this offer to push on other institutions that you like (in a nice way). You can say, “I have an offer from another institution [you need not say where, although you can], and I need to tell them something by [date]. Can you tell me what’s going on with your search?” You may be able to stir up another offer or two this way. Don’t forget about the places that you liked but that never called for a flyout—they probably can’t move fast enough, but it doesn’t hurt to ask.

You may end up with several offers. You may have a clear favorite, in which case your choice is easy and you just want to improve that offer. If you are having a hard time deciding, get more advice, but let the institutions “help” you: when you call to negotiate, you can push them to sweeten their offers by honestly telling them it’s a difficult choice.

Call back as soon as you can; time is precious, and if you don’t accept, they want to be able to move forward with their search.

When you call back, you should have decided under what terms you will accept the offer. Always negotiate the offer you are considering accepting (consider evidence discussed in Babcock and Laschever, 2009). If you’re nice about it, negotiating will not make you look like a jerk, and the worst that can happen is that the employer says “no.” It helps to have another offer that you can honestly say is competitive, but that’s not actually necessary. Different institutions are able to make different deals, so consider a range of options. Some institutions are rigid on salary, but may be able to get you a bigger startup fund. Others can’t pay moving costs but can

give you an extra month of salary. Be reasonable and friendly; frame it in terms like, “If you add XYZ to the offer, I’d be really happy, and it would help me be very productive!”

Try to learn at what level concessions are made. In some cases, you negotiate directly with a chair or dean who has power to change the offer. This is good, but also bad, because you’re in the domain of non-cooperative game theory. In other cases, you’re talking to someone who might help you negotiate—for example, with a chair when concessions are made at the level of dean or provost. Such a person may be willing and able to help you frame a successful request.

Remember, if they give you an offer, they want to hire you and they want you to be happy and productive when you get there. They’ll probably try to give you as much of what you ask for as they can, even if you’re not a hard-nosed negotiator.

12. Troubleshooting

What if your market doesn’t seem to be moving? At any point, if you have this feeling, ask for advice and suggestions from your advisor, the job market coordinator, and other faculty. They might tell you that you’re freaking out over nothing—time feels like it moves incredibly slowly sometimes, and you have to let things take their course. But be alert and ready to take action.

What if you’re getting too few calls for interviews? Your advisors may be able to shake a few more interviews out of the trees for you with personal contacts. Don’t be shy about asking. Some now-famous economists were in this position until an advisor kickstarted their market. However, it may mean that you didn’t apply to enough jobs. You still have time to widen your net.

What if you’re not getting flyouts? Idiosyncratic jobs (many for visitors) and post-docs will continue to trickle out through spring. Remember that visitor jobs and post-docs are short-term, so they will require you to be on the job market again soon. Still, they may be a good way to gain experience and more time to work on your papers. Another avenue is the Scramble. The Scramble is a foreshortened and smaller version of the regular job market season, sponsored by the AEA. Scramble jobs are posted in the JOE, and you register as a Scramble participant. Information on the timing and particulars of the Scramble is on the AEA website.

At some point, if it really looks like nothing’s coming through, ask your advisor whether you can get funding for another year. There’s no shame in trying again next year—you’d rather end up with a better job next year than a cruddy job this year that will saddle you with regrets.

13. Your new job

First, once you have a job, be happy. Pat yourself on the back. You’ve just resolved a huge amount of uncertainty, and you now have a job that you’ll most likely enjoy a lot.

You have some work to do before you dive into that job. Most people finish up your dissertation and defend it and graduate before start the job. This is not always the case, though; some employers will let you defend and graduate in your first year on the job, but some will give you a reduction in salary if you don't have a degree before you start.

Before you start at your new job, you may also want to wrap up easy-to-finish research projects or start new projects. It may be difficult during the post-job-market/pre-job time to get much done, but if you have any slack in your schedule, take advantage of it. If you're starting as an assistant professor, you may find it very difficult to get much research done in your first year.

If your job is in a new location you'll be preparing to move. Your department and/or your institution may have an orientation (or a series of orientations), and this may figure in to your decision about when you want to arrive, so ask about them before you make plans. Usually the institution doesn't mind too much if you miss orientations, but they may be helpful to attend.

Your new colleagues can provide tremendously helpful advice in all the details of life in your new location, from neighborhoods to cell phone carriers to child care. When you arrive, you can invite them over for dinner to repay their kindness.

Many schools offer rental housing to their faculty; in some cases this housing is great, but in other cases it's not so great. It's nice to visit the area (with your significant other, if applicable) to check out housing, but it's common for new faculty to pick housing sight unseen. Should you buy a house in your new location (assuming this is a tenure-track position or other non-temporary job)? Obviously, it's nicer to buy after you know an area a little bit so you know where you would want to live. But also remember that you and your job might not agree with each other after a few years or that you might not get tenure. You must own a house for some years for it to be worthwhile to buy because of fixed costs in purchase. You may also have a pre-tenure leave to consider—what will happen with your house while you are on leave? It does work well for some people to buy a house when starting a job, but be cautious.

If your new job involves teaching, you need to plan your classes. Faculty in your new department (and your old department) should happily share syllabi and other materials. Obviously, some of the work is behind you if you're teaching a class you've taught before. However, you might be expected (subtly or explicitly) to use the same textbook or cover the same topics as others in your department, so be attentive to expectations. See whether your department has any guidelines for how classes in general or your classes in particular are conducted—there may be suggestions about number of exams and that sort of thing. Find out whether you get a TA. Look in the school calendar for oddities such as a very short semester or a very long fall break.

You'll get a new email address, perhaps even before your appointment starts. Students and colleagues and administrators may contact you (either through your new address or your old one). You may have obligations to fulfill quite early, probably simple things like contacting the registrar about enrollment or submitting requests for textbooks or classrooms.

Once you get there and get started, remember, you are legitimately a member of your new department, and they did not give you the job offer by mistake. Dive into your new life and enjoy the rights and responsibilities you have acquired. You may find yourself on the other side of the job market process as soon as your first year. This is a strange feeling, but you'll get used to it!

14. Conclusion

The job market is exhausting, but it can be a positive experience. The data seem to show that most economics PhDs end up with a job that they like, so you probably will, too. Try to enjoy the process and try to keep it in its place: remember, the job search is not your job, and if you handle yourself as a real “grown-up” economist you will be perceived as one by potential employers.

The hardest aspect of the job market is the deep (Knightian) uncertainty you have to live with throughout the process. This can be very stressful. Focus on the positive aspects of the process as much as you can, and try to keep things in perspective.

I wish you the very best of luck!

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