



Tips for Answering Difficult Questions

When encountering a difficult question, pause for a moment and ask yourself, “What is the interviewer really looking for?” A few examples follow:

Tell me about yourself.

This is a commonly asked question that often puzzles applicants. Keep your comments focused on information that will help the search committee determine your qualifications and/or interest in this position. This can include your future career aspirations, what you have gained from your experiences and your enthusiasm for the department and position.

What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

View this as an opportunity to point out strengths that relate to being successful in the position for which you are interviewing. Back up your statements with examples of experiences in which you have demonstrated your strengths. Strategies for addressing a weakness (and only mention one) include choosing one you have overcome, or selecting an area/skill that you have not had much time to develop or an area that is not that important to the demands of the work. Search committees are impressed by people who can recognize and overcome personal challenges.

So, how do you practice? Try the following methods:

- Practice saying your responses **out loud** to interview questions. Answering potential questions in front of a mirror can be useful for assessing your facial expressions.
- Ask a friend or family member to pretend they are an employer, ask you a list of questions, and give you feedback.
- Video or audio tape your responses and review your performance. Ask yourself: how can I improve, did I look/sound relaxed, and did I sound enthusiastic?

Conclusion:

Avoid feeling like you have to be perfect or that you have to memorize answers. The goal is to become familiar with the process of presenting yourself to others and to give the impression that you have given thought to important questions. Through practice, you will become more comfortable and you will polish your presentation.