

Unsolicited Job Market Advice

Luis Pérez

University of Minnesota / Southern Methodist University

May 2024

As all the things I do, you should take this advice at free disposal. The items listed below are things I wish I knew before starting my market. But, as I'm sure you've heard now a thousand times, the academic job market is largely idiosyncratic and unpredictable, so many of the things I say may not apply to you. I thought I should emphasize this not only for that, but also for two other related reasons. First, because the market is often times random, it is hard to draw conclusions from this experience. And second, because even if we do draw conclusions, we can only do so with a certainly limited level of confidence. So, do not only take this advice at free disposal, but also with a grain of salt.

1. **Always be aware of the timeline of *your* market, and plan accordingly.** Needless to say, this is key to a successful market. If you are not ready when the time comes, things are likely to not go your way. Notice the emphasize on "*your*" market. I'll share the timing of my market and the deadlines I wish to have met for reference, but you should watch out for the specific timing of your market. The general feeling is that the market tends to move earlier each year. I would also say that it is important to keep in mind that every year there is a non-negligible group of people which ends up missing application deadlines. Obviously, you don't want to be one of those guys, so check the deadlines often and plan accordingly. A good way to keep track of deadlines is to fill in the JM spreadsheet that the department will share with you—if not, create your own—and update it daily after checking the job boards (e.g., econjobmarket.org, [JOE listings](#), etc.)

Table 1: Timeline of 2023/24 Economics Job Market.

	TIMING / DEADLINE	NOTES / RECOMMENDATIONS
Work on JMP draft and slides	May–	Keep updating
Have a website up and running	Sept. 1	Keep updating
Post draft and other JM materials	Sept. 1	Keep updating
Set expectations with advisors	Sept.	Be honest with yourself and with them
HHEI Alumni Conference	Sept. 7–8	Take notes on Qs, work on comments
Work on JMP spiel and presentation	Early Sept.–	Keep updating
Submit Applications	Sept.–	Earliest deadline 10/06
UMN JM Jamboree	October 4–6	Take notes on Qs, work on comments
Discuss spiel with main advisor	Early Oct.	Update spiel
Mock interviews	Early Oct.–	Practice until your last interview!
Real interviews	Early Nov.–Mid. Jan.	First, good luck! Second, take notes and try to improve! (first industry interview on 11/12; academic on 12/06)
Job Market Signaling	Nov. 10–29	Choose wisely!
Flyouts	Early Jan.–April	Good luck! 1st rounds in January and February
Offers	Jan.–	Good luck!
Scramble	March	Best of luck!

2. **Talk to your advisors frequently, and listen to them.** Have an honest conversation with your advisors before your market starts to set your expectations for the market. It is important that you tell them what you *really* want: type of job (academic, organization, industry,) geographic markets you want to target (e.g., US vs. Europe,) and any constraints you may have (e.g., two-body problem.) Also ask them which places they think would be a good fit for you and what positions, if any, are not in target. This is an important conversation to have: it will help your advisors write your letters, and it will also help you, knowing what to expect and where to put your time and effort during the market. During the market, keep your advisors posted. I reached out three times: before interviews to tell them all the positions I was interviewing for, before the flyouts to see if they had any advice, and after the flyouts to tell them my impressions. I think this is the minimum you should update your advisors. It worked well for me, and I believe for my advisors too. But ultimately, you should ask your advisors how often they want to receive updates. Some advisors like to be updated very frequently and also discuss each interview and flyout before and after these happen. You should also tell your advisors if you have none or little interviews and/or flyouts. There is probably something they can—and will—do about it. To get a sense of how much the market has moved and thus detect the time to talk to your advisors, talk to your classmates first and try to get a sense of how many interviews and flyouts they have been invited to so far—you don't need to ask about the institutions they are interviewing or doing flyouts with. You can also check the [EJMR Wiki](#), where you can often see with a high degree of accuracy the dates in which interview and flyout invites were sent by different institutions. This information may be helpful for you to make assessments on whether you're being left behind by the market and for deciding when to tell your advisors. You don't want to tell them you have no many interviews or flyouts if the market has barely moved.
3. **Work on your spiel.** This is one of the four key steps—papers, spiel, interviewing, flyouts—for a successful job market. As most people, I followed the 5-10-20-minutes rule for the spiel, and I think this worked well in general. Most interviewers will only let you give a 5' spiel and then bomb you with questions, but you should also be ready to give 10' and 20' spiels, since some interviewers will want to talk more in depth about your JMP. How much you talk about your job market paper will depend on the place in question. For most positions I interviewed for, I did a 10' spiel: 5' uninterrupted, then some questions, then another 5' uninterrupted, and then some questions again. In a few places, I had to give a 20' uninterrupted spiel. Hence, the 5-10-20-minutes rule. You should prepare a spiel that can be easily broken in three parts. In the first 5 minutes, try to attract the interest of the interviewers by motivating why the topic of your JMP is important for the profession and the world at large, tell them your research question(s), mention the methods you use to answer such questions, and state your main results. Don't forget to say what is new with respect to the existing literature. Then stop, and ask if everything is clear or if they have any questions. If everything is clear and there are no questions, tell them "since there are no questions, let me tell you more about the contributions of my paper and discuss in some detail the method and results." Assuming they let you do so, go ahead and do it, but try not to bore them. This is really hard: you want to demonstrate that you are a good, competent economist without using technicalities, but also make sure that they understand the contributions and technical challenges (if any) of your paper. How you prepare this extra 5 minutes is clearly dependent on your paper. In addition to the now

10-minutes spiel, you should have material for an additional 10 minutes. This is where you tell them the nitty-gritty details of your paper—theory, data, methods, additional results—and engage in technical conversations with interviewers who are interested in particular aspects of your paper. You need to be ready to discuss everything in your paper—even the methods that you use but didn’t develop—in as much technical detail as necessary, but avoid technicalities unless the interviewers take the conversation there. You should also prepare 5-10’ spiels for your other papers. Some times interviewers are interested in other projects of yours and want to talk more about them than about the JMP. So be ready.

4. **Discuss the spiel with your advisor early on, and keep working on it until you are done with your last interview.** Work hard on your spiel, and once you are fully satisfied with it, run it by your advisor. Most likely, you will need to make substantial changes after that, so try to do this as early as possible and then update your spiel. As you start doing interviews—whether mock or real ones—you will start spotting weak spots in your spiel (e.g., parts where you always get stuck,) so keep working on your spiel until you are done with your last interview. In my case, for instance, it was clear after a few interviews that I was not generating enough interest in interviewers because I was not motivating why my JMP was important for economics and society, so I had to modify my spiel and start leading with this. As interviews kept rolling, I could also see that people had trouble to understand particular aspects of the spiel, so that suggested other areas to work on.
5. **You can never practice your interviews enough. Practice, practice, practice.** In retrospect, my biggest regret of the job market is not having prepared well for interviews. In my opinion, this is the hardest—and perhaps most crucial—stage of the market: you cannot get a job if you don’t get through the first interview. And first interviews are tough: the competition is fierce and, in many cases, less than a third (often a sixth) of the interviewed candidates make the cut for the flyout stage. So, what do I mean when I say that you need to “prepare well” and that “you can never practice enough”? The last point is obvious: you should always take the chance to do one more mock interview, even if you are already exhausted from interviewing. You can always improve and you should try to do so until you are done with all your interviews, so keep it up! The first point is were things become blurry. For me, “preparing well for interviews” means the following:
 1. *Put many hours of work into your spiel and follow advice 3 and 4.*
 2. *Schedule 10+ mock interviews with fellow job market candidates and former students, and space them out through the interview period, with at least 10 interviews before you have the real ones.* I only scheduled 4–5 mock interviews and I largely regret this. Even if obvious, I’ll say it: the more practice you get, the better you become at interviewing. So ask to schedule a mock interview to those with whom you’ve interacted the most. Also ask former students. Most of us are willing to help, recently went through the market, and may even be on the recruiting side, so we can give you a pretty similar experience to the one you’ll get. The department will also offer you 1 or 2 mock interviews, but those come too late (November 28 in my case.) I think you want to walk into those interviews in really good shape, and use those interactions with faculty to do the final adjustments on your spiel and interview strategy. Finally, space mock interviews through the interview period because you don’t want to get out of shape, and it is every easy to do so.

3. *Prepare sharp, concise answer for questions.* Start taking notes on the questions you receive in presentations and work hard on addressing them. Many questions will come over and over again in interviews and in flyouts, so have good answers ready.
4. *Don't be dismissive with questions, and make sure you understand them well.* It can happen that you get questions that appear to not make a lot of sense. Don't be dismissive. For one, it may be that you didn't understand the question. If you think that's a possibility, ask them to repeat or rephrase the question. Even if you understood the question and you don't think is a good one, try your best in providing some insight. Always make sure to not make the person asking the question feel bad. At the end of the day, that will only hurt you, and it is your job to handle questions in the way that best helps you. Finally, if you ever receive a question and feel like you gave a bad answer, follow up after the interview (more on this later.)
5. *Work on your tone, and make sure you take pauses in the spiel and before answering questions.* Sometimes we get too nervous and, as a consequence, we overly rush. Introducing short pauses in the spiel really helps. Taking pauses before answering questions, too.
6. *If you're a non-native English speaker, work on your pronunciation and on how fast you talk.* Generally, Spanish people like myself talk too fast—a problem that is exacerbated when we get nervous or are concerned about timing. Talking fast really hurts you. If people cannot understand what you're saying, either because you talk too fast or because you are hard to understand, it is game over. Interviewers are tired and are not gonna put much effort to try to understand you. I feel like I really suffered from this, and so comes my advice: practice your pronunciation and slow down. Now, if you're a native English speaker, this is good news for you. In my opinion, you have an edge in the interview stage, so use it to your advantage.
7. *Prepare for virtual interviews.* Virtual interviews are really different from in-person ones. Some people like me hate them, some others love them. Regardless of how you feel about them, these are the new rules of the game, so learn to do well by them. Also, virtual interviews have important advantages. The most important ones are that it is more convenient and cheaper to interview, and also that you can take on more interviews than what was physically possible when interviews were in person. Obviously, there are two sides of the coin to this. The good one is that you can really do more interviews and have more time in between them since they don't occur now in a 3-day window like it was the case before in the ASSA meetings. The bad side is that the market favors *superstar candidates*. I know of candidates with 60+ interviews and 20+ flyouts. This was not at all possible when interviews were held in person. So, how to prepare for virtual interviews? Clearly, make sure you have a stable and fast internet connection. Also make sure you look right at the camera when you speak so that you can establish "virtual" eye contact with interviewers. The last point is very hard, but really important. You don't wanna give the impression that you're reading off your script. That would be game over again.
8. *If you have the chance to choose when your real interviews take place, space them out as much as possible, and set them up at the time of the day in which you're at your brightest.* Most places will invite you to interview at a specific date and time. In these cases, there is not much to do: if you're available, take the interview; if you're not, politely ask for an alternative date/time. In some other cases, you will get a link—along with many other candidates—to choose one from a limited number of interview slots. Here is

where constantly checking your email—spam included—pays off. In my experience, most interview spots are taken within 30 minutes of receiving the invite. When it comes to choosing the time of the interview, choose the one in which you are at your best, but also think that interviewers are less tired early in the morning when they have interviewed none or few people. My preferred time was early in the mornings.

9. *Avoid international travel and going to conferences during interviews.* Because of traveling to conferences in Europe—which I do not recommend—and the time difference, I took some interviews very late in the day. In general, I don't have good memories from those: I was very tired and wasn't fluid. Also because of travel and conference stress, I got sick and did some interviews with fever. This was clearly my mistake. Avoid travel.
6. **Following up with interviewers.** People have different opinions on what to do after interviews. Some say you should send "thank you" notes to those who interviewed you. I didn't send any thank-you note, and I definitely don't regret it. I think those buy you nothing and could even annoy some people. But ask your advisors what to do in this respect. What everyone seems to agree on, however, is in that you should follow up with interviewers if you feel you didn't do a good job in answering their questions. This could help in some cases if the interview didn't go too badly, your email addresses the question well, and the interviewers have some empathy. In my experience, I only followed up once, and it didn't work. But to be honest, I was not expecting it to. I knew I blew the interview in the first 5 minutes by giving a terrible response. I followed up only because I wanted to show to a future colleague that I at least knew I made a mistake and that I actually had something better to say. I think you should send "follow up" emails even if the interview went badly or you are not interested in the place if you plan to be in their line of work. These people will be your colleagues, and you want to be in good terms with them.
7. **Scheduling flyouts.** If you are lucky enough to have multiple flyout invitations, try to schedule them strategically. The rule of thumb says to schedule your less preferred flyouts first, and leave the best ones for later. To some extent, it is hard to follow that rule. Invitations come sequentially. I accepted flyout invites as they came in if I was available, and never tried to reschedule them to follow rule. What I did do was to try to follow rule when new flyout invites came in and I had the option to choose. Despite not having scheduled flyouts according to the mentioned rule, in my own experience, it is not clear that I performed better in my late flyouts. In fact, I believe the opposite is true and that I actually did best in my first flyout. But anyways, this is something to think about.
8. **Prepare for (and enjoy) the flyouts.** At this point, hopefully, you are already largely prepared for the flyout. You have presented your JMP quite a few times, have drafted good answers for questions, and have experience in talking research with other people. There are still however a few things you could and should do to prepare for the flyouts:
 - *Before your first flyout, run the slides by your advisor to make sure you are in good shape.*
 - *Before your first flyout, make a list of questions about the department culture and procedures to ask in the 1-on-1 meetings that you will have during your visit.* This is a generic list of questions that you can ask in every (academic) place you visit. Ask about tenure requirements, teaching needs, department plans for the future, seminar culture, educational programs, service to the department, junior mentoring, etc. I also think

that the flyout is a good opportunity for you to ask question about the benefits of the position—but not the salary—without insisting too much (e.g., teaching load, research funds, availability of summer funds, etc.) You will get into the details of these if they decide to make you an offer.

- *For every flyout that you do, look up the people that work in the department and get a pretty good idea of what they work on.* I did this with an Excel sheet in which I wrote each person's name, position, alma matter, field, subfields, most recent paper, and most cited paper. For people on my field, I read (or at least skimmed through) the papers in the spreadsheet and those that were closely related to mine. I also tried to learn more about the department itself (e.g., initiatives, centers, educational programs,) the university, and the town where it was located. I think it is fair to say that you're not expected to know a lot about the place you're visiting, but I think being knowledgeable about the department shows gratitude for their invitation and can also serve to signal that you're seriously interested in them and that you are likely to accept their offer if they decide to make one.
 - *Enjoy the flyout, but don't forget that you are under constant evaluation since the moment you get in until the moment you leave.* I really enjoyed flyout visits, and you should try to do the same. It is great and rare to have the chance to talk to some many people about your research and receive feedback. People are generally very warm, try to make sure you have a good time, and also try to sell you the place, regardless of whether they already have some other candidates higher up on their list. Most importantly, don't forget that you are under constant evaluation, not only in terms of research and teaching skills, but also as a colleague. This means you are also being evaluated during breakfast, coffee, lunch, and dinner. I think what I'm gonna say is just common sense, so take it as a reminder: don't talk bad about people/departments, don't gossip, keep your manners, don't have more than 1-2 drinks during dinner, don't ask inappropriate questions or make inappropriate comments, don't make jokes or be extremely careful if doing so, and try to avoid awkward silences.
 - *In the same way that you are under constant evaluation, you should evaluate them as well.* Keep attention to everything you see and hear, try to talk to a few graduate students to have a sense of their experience in the department, ask politely to the most junior faculty about their experience so far—they are generally quite open and honest—and look for signs that may indicate whether this particular place is a good or bad fit for you. At the end of the day, you're likely to spend a few years of your life there if you accept their offer, so you want to know what you are getting into. Seek answers to questions that matter to you. Some questions that I asked include: Do people come in to the department and, if so, how often? Do faculty collaborate with one another? And with graduate students? Do faculty have lunch and/or coffee together? Are there events with graduate students (e.g., happy hour)? And mentorship for junior APs? What do senior faculty do to support junior cases when it comes to tenure? etc.
9. **Use your signals as best as you can, but don't count on them.** You have two signals through the American Economic Association's job market platform. Make sure you set these ones up before the deadline passes. In my market, you could register signals as early as November 10 and as late as November 29. The general rule here is to send signals to places where you would be happy to go to if you think these places may think they're unlikely to hire you if they try. If you send your signals to places that are too good for

you, you are wasting your signals: these places are probably not interested in you and, if they are, they surely think they can hire you. Also, I think it is fair to say that signals only matter marginally and that is hard to hit the margins. So don't get high hopes on signals. I had one interview, but no flyout, with the institutions I sent signals to.

10. **Try to make up your mind about the places you would prefer to go at different stages of the market, and be ready to change your mind.** Before the market starts, make sure to decide what you want in terms of job (research oriented vs. not) and location (US vs. Europe, urban vs. rural.) Knowing your priorities and how much you're willing to sacrifice for them can be very hard, but it is extremely important. For me it was helpful to make a ranking of the places that interviewed me before they actually did, and then rank them again after flyouts if they invited me to one. I ranked jobs in terms of academic fit, department culture, location, and compensation package, using subjective weights. Ranking jobs before interviews helped me to know what to prioritize and what to prepare for the most before interviews when time is more limited. I must say, however, that after campus visits, my ranking order sort of flipped (with a few exceptions,) and so I think it is important to update your rankings and be open to change your mind as new information comes in.

10+. **Pray you get what you want or at least something that you like.**

As you must've noticed, I didn't say a single word about working on your papers, projects, etc. This was intentionally so. And it is not because I think those things are not important—quite the contrary—but rather because for what is worth I think you already know what to do (and hopefully have done so already): *write papers! Many great papers!* Easier said than done, I know. Another reason why I decided not to talk about research work is because at this point—a few months prior to your interviews—I don't think there is much you can do: your set of interviews is already largely determined by what you've done so far and what your (main) advisors think of it. So, now, the only thing you can really do is to work with what you have and prepare around that. To that purpose, I hope you find my unsolicited advice useful.

Best of luck, and see you on the other side!