



Demystifying the Chalk Talk

Handout summarizing PFF event on Nov. 9, 2007, featuring Michael McManus, Margot Quinlan, and faculty panelists

Let's be clear...

You can't really accurately mimic an interview chalk-talk.

Some places don't even have a chalk-talk requirement.

Some places have a power-point, overhead transparency, or chalk-board style chalk talk.

Best to prepare several forms and be ready for anything (although you should ask the chair of the search what style they prefer).

What is a chalk-talk?

Think of it as an "updated graduate qualifier".

The chalk-talk should be organized similar to an R01.

You must be able to explain:

- the significance
- why your approach is the best
- what are the alternate/back-up strategies

The chalk-talk will include the members of the search committee, and potentially faculty from other departments.

It may be as few as 2-3 people or as large as an entire conference room.

It may be friendly, or it may be aggressive.

Practice diplomacy and suavity--it can be fun!

Way to be!

Be cool and collegial.

Be exceptionally clear in your voice. Use the right decibels, be lucid.

Be confident but not arrogant.

Be yourself! (unless of course you can't be the above)

Using a chalk board

If you plan to use a chalk or white board...

Practice your talk with a chalk board ahead of time, so that you can chart out how you'll use the board (and practice the techniques described below!).

Have some information written on the board before you begin the talk (allow 5-15 minutes to do this):

- Specific aims
- Complex (or even simple) illustrations
- Leave space on the board where you plan to add text or drawings during the talk
- Leave plenty of extra space where you can draw figures spontaneously to help answer a question.

Always face the audience when speaking (wait to finish writing or drawing on the board before you start speaking again).

Be aware of where you are standing: don't block the chalkboard.

Write using large, printed letters (not cursive). Stand at the back of the room to be sure it is legible.

Do not write on areas of the board that will not be visible (ex., behind a podium, at the bottom of the board where heads may block it).



Handouts

Consider providing a handout to each person in your audience, for example a complex illustration or piece of data (if absolutely necessary).

If you are doing a PowerPoint presentation, you may want to bring a handout listing your basic specific aims. This can help remind your audience of the scope of your research, to help manage tangential discussions (see below).

Controlling the crowd

Be aware of time:

- try to direct questions in the right directions
- be in control, move the discussion forward
- however, also be flexible: faculty may jump in and ask questions along tangents. Go with it. However, if you feel the conversation is straying too far, direct the discussion back to your other aims. If you have your specific aims written on the board ahead of time (or on a handout), then this may help keep the discussion on track.

Excite those who are familiar with your field AND those who have no idea of your area.

Don't get overly-complicated, make sure everyone appreciates the big picture.

When all your proposed work is done, what is the 5-10 year vision?

Take care of the body

Get plenty of rest the night before: it's true, sleep affects your memory, ability to remember names, etc.

Sometimes there will be food there (but don't expect to eat too much). Bring a power-bar or energy-snack.

Hope you can write legibly!

(and spell)

Good luck! ;)