

## Academic Job Talks

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### WHAT IS A JOB TALK?

- The job talk is a presentation of your research to prospective employers in academia. It can be similar to the dissertation defense and conference presentations.
- Job talks generally occur during campus visits or “fly-backs.”

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

- Departments want to learn more about your:
  - Research competencies; past and present research efforts.
- Research interests; short-term and long-term research plans. You need to demonstrate your:
  - Presentation/teaching skills
  - Time-management skills
  - General professionalism
  - Enthusiasm
  - Ability to think on your feet

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Structure
  - The job talk almost always includes a formal presentation time (usually 20-40 minutes) and a time for questions (usually 20-30 minutes).
  - The formal question and answer session is often followed by a reception or meal, during which candidates may be asked additional questions.
  - Always stick to the time limits given to you by using a watch or other timepiece.
- Audience
  - Audience members can include administrators, faculty members, students, and potential collaborators from the hiring department and related departments.
  - Unless otherwise specified, gear your talk towards intelligent people who are familiar with your general discipline but do not have detailed knowledge about your specialty.
  - Find the balance – discuss sufficient detail so audience members are sure you know what you’re talking about but make sure you’re not going over their heads.
  - Be sure to make eye contact with all audience members.

## WHAT SHOULD I PRESENT?

- Topic
  - Job talks for current students or recent graduates are typically on the dissertation or other major projects from graduate school.
  - If you discuss projects that you have worked on with a team, be sure to articulate *your* contribution to the projects.
  - Sometimes schools will request that you present on anything BUT your dissertation.
- Content
  - The audience members will only remember a few key points – don't overwhelm them with minute details, statistics, or lengthy explanations.
  - Figure out what you really want them to remember – then say it in several different ways at several different times throughout your talk.
  - Place your work in a broader context or framework – the big picture.
  - Be sure to address the “so what” question. In other words, explain why your work is important and how it contributes to the field.
  - When appropriate, give examples or anecdotes.
- Organization
  - Tell the audience what you're going to tell them, then actually tell them, then summarize what you told them.
  - Before you begin, thank audience members for attending your talk.
  - Give an agenda and briefly state why your work is exciting or important.
  - Discuss your past and present research efforts. If you have done several projects, communicate the connection among them.
  - Discuss a few ideas you have for future projects.
  - Consider briefly discussing potential funding avenues and collaborators.
  - Consider discussing how you will involve students in your research and how your research relates to your teaching.
  - Summarize your main points and thank the audience again.
- Style
  - Be professional, interesting, and animated.
  - Don't try to be someone you're not.
  - Speak clearly and loud enough for everyone to hear.
  - Don't read or rely too heavily on your notes.
- Q & A
  - Be prepared to answer questions of varying difficulty levels.
  - If somebody asks a question that you do not understand, take a moment to think or ask for clarification.
  - Don't automatically think that a person who asks a question is trying to intimidate you. Instead, be excited that somebody is interested in learning more about your research!
  - Always be respectful in your answers.

## SHOULD I USE VISUAL AIDS?

- Many people feel visual aids (PowerPoint, handouts, transparencies) help them keep on track. Using various types of media during your job talk implies you can use media in the classroom. If you use equipment, consider the following suggestions.
  - Be sure to reserve any necessary equipment.
  - Use slides sparingly and do not have too many words on each slide.
  - Make sure the slides and handouts look professional & consistent.
  - Consider having a few extra slides on hand to show during the discussion section when asked relevant questions.
  - Talk to the audience, not the equipment.
  - Consider turning off projectors when not in use.
  - Finally, if you plan to use computer equipment, take a back-up mode of presentation, such as overheads, in case there is a technical problem.

## HOW SHOULD I PREPARE?

- Contact the department that invited you:
  - If you are not clear about what you are expected to present, ask.
  - Anticipated audience (faculty, undergrads, graduate students).
  - Audience familiarity with your topic.
  - Audience size.
  - Room arrangement (lecture style, conference room, lounge, etc).
  - Time of day.
  - Expected length of presentation and Q&A session.
  - Availability of technological equipment.
- Request a 15-30 minute break before your job talk so you can prepare. Contact your home department:
  - What are the norms for job talks in your field?
  - What should you take with you?
  - How should you dress?
  - What information is known about the host department that might help you prepare your job talk?
- What types of questions will likely be asked after the job talk? Practice!
  - Because the job talk is so crucial, you should start thinking about your job talk as soon as you mail your applications.
  - Practice multiple times (with different audiences) before the real thing.
  - After each practice talk, have audience members ask difficult questions and give you feedback about the content and style of your presentation.
- Try to attend the job talks of candidates interviewing in various departments at the UW so you have an idea what to expect.

## WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

- Reis, R. M. (2001). Giving a Job Talk in the Sciences.
  - <http://chronicle.com/article/Giving-a-Job-Talk-in-the-Sc/45375/>
- DelGizzo, K., & Malisheski, L. (2003). Preparing for Campus Interviews.
  - <http://chronicle.com/article/Preparing-for-Campus-Interv/45331/>
- Stanford University. Academic Job Search.
  - <http://cardinalcareers.stanford.edu/communities/graduate/guides.html>
- University of Chicago. Interviewing for Research & Teaching Appointments.
  - <https://caps.uchicago.edu/resourcecenter/academic.html>