

Academic Job Talks

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>