Preparing Your Job Talk
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Today’s Goals

1. Preparation: What distinguishes a job talk from other kinds of research presentations?

2. Delivery: What elements of structure and communication can help your job talk to be memorable?

3. Q&A: Preparing for multiple possibilities
A job talk is not just about your research but also about how you communicate your work to the audience.

Step 1: Know your audience
- Search committee
- Faculty in and outside the department
- Undergraduate or graduate students
A job talk is not just about your research but also about how you communicate your work to the audience.

Step 2: Know your institution:
• How does your job talk not only show your best research but also how you are a good fit with the institution?
A job talk is not just about your research but also about how you communicate your work to the audience.

Step 3: Know the job description
• How does your job talk highlight the aspects of your research that speak to the position announcement?
Two things to consider before crafting the talk:

- How will your job talk build on all of your previous interactions with the search committee?
- How will your job talk enable you to convey confidence, enthusiasm, and collegiality?
Preparing Your Job Talk

Format:
• Timing

• Audience

• Objectives
Preparing Your Job Talk

- Choosing a topic
  - Seek advice from your advisors to make sure that your topic works with the search committee requirements, the overall job description, and your comfort level
  - Keep the audience in mind: How will your topic and your approach to it engage a wide range of audience members: specialists in your field, non-specialists in your field, faculty in faculty in other departments, students
Preparing Your Job Talk

- Conventions
  - What are the conventions in your field for reading a pre-written paper or presenting "off the cuff"?
  - What are the conventions at the institution you are interviewing at?
Preparing Your Job Talk

- Practicing
  - Schedule a mock job talk with your department
  - Schedule a mock job talk with GRADTalk
  - Practice as close as possible to the conditions you’ll be in for the job talk
  - Prepare to speak for a little less than the time you are given
Crafting Your Job Talk:

- Structure & Organization
- PowerPoints and/or Handouts
Structure & Organization

How do your structure and organization help you accomplish your goals?

- Presenting your work in a memorable way:
  - Reinforce
  - Think about the “take-home message”
  - Demonstrate your impact
- Write to be heard, not read
- Write to convey confidence:
  - I hope that → I will
  - I believe that → I argue that…
Structure & Organization

- Structure

  - The structure should be made clear visually and verbally at the beginning of the talk.
  - Every transition should be expressed visually and verbally throughout the talk.
  - What you say and what you show should go hand in hand (and can help you structure both).

Start broad/context
Narrow down
Your project
Your project
Your project
Specific significance
Broad significance
Structure & Organization

Introduction

• Speak directly to the audience: thank the audience for being there

• Give your audience a road map: State your topic and the basic plan of your talk clearly and directly—before diving into the details
Structure & Organization

Conclusion

- Reinforce your “take-home message” and the broader impact of your work
- As you conclude:
  - End with a thank you
  - Convey excitement about the Q&A to follow
I don't care if my PowerPoint presentation has 320 slides. You are staying until it's over.
If you put too many words on a slide it can distract your audience from listening to your job talk and force them to process too much information at once. The more words there are on the slide, the more likely the audience will focus on the slide and not you. It can also make your presentation less exciting since the audience will focus on reading rather than listening. And you will be tempted to read off of the slide rather than using a more varied approach to your delivery.
PowerPoints and/or Handouts

- Use visual aids to reinforce and amplify your argument, not to add additional information

- Use visual aids as a “road map” for your audience. Change the slide at transition points in your argument or larger structure
Crafting the Talk

- Power Point
  - Yes, please!
    - Clear, simple graphics
    - Only one or two fonts
    - Simple color scheme
    - One main idea per slide
    - Use slides to highlight transitions
Crafting the Talk

- Power Point
  - No thanks!
    - Useless graphics
    - No focal point
    - Too much information per slide
    - Letting images and graphs take over your presentation
  - Expecting audience to process information too quickly
Preparing for the Q&A
Remember: even if it’s tough, usually in job talks your audience is not “out to get you.” Rather, they want to see how they can engage with you and you with them. So,

- Be respectful
- Be courteous
- Don’t let any one question take over the discussion or dominate its tone and direction
When a question comes out of nowhere and will probably go nowhere:

- Respond to the question you want to respond to
- “That’s a useful suggestion/perspective—I’ll look into it as I move ahead. For now I chose to focus on X for reasons A, B, C…”
- “Yes, and…” (in spirit!)

Remember: the talk and Q&A are about asserting your scholarly voice and presence within your community!
Practical Considerations
What to Bring

- Multiple backups of your slides and hard copy of your presentation script:
  - a flash drive
  - backup on email/cloud server
- Equipment: dongle, remote, etc.
- Water
- Pen and paper for taking notes in Q&A
Preparation

- Getting into the zone:
  - If possible, try to see the space ahead of time
  - Know where your job talk fits in to your larger campus visit schedule and anticipate moments to rest and prepare
*BEWARE OF THE ENERGY DROP!!!

- Quite often the job talk is at the end of the day and you may be exhausted. Anticipate what you will need to maintain your energy and focus!
Questions?
Questions?

For appointments
gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu
Advising Appointments>Typ>GRADTalk

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