

Job Talk

9. Job Talk

General Information

It is essential that you get the right bearing on the job talk. Some, if not most of the faculty, will only go to your job talk (and read your CV). The job talk, therefore, will be one of the crucial source of information about you, on which they ground their decision as to whether or not to hire you. So prepare as much as you can to show the best of you. This is likely to be the deal maker or breaker.

Often times, there will be students on the search committee and therefore at the job talk. Their input will be greatly considered. So treat them as they deserve it anyhow.

What is Your Job Talk All About?

As with the academic job interview, the job talk is about your ability to teach, your research ability as well as your match with the department and the institution as a whole. However, in contrast to the job interview, you not only have the chance to talk about but also to demonstrate those skills. For some people, this may be a merit, for others, this is a challenge, if not an obstacle. It is, however, the crucial part of the entire application / hiring procedure, and the good news is: it is manageable and there are a lot of things you can do to make the most of it, most importantly preparing as much as you can.

Your Teaching Ability

The overall question is: **Can you teach?** This includes facets such as:

- Are you exciting and engaging the audience?
- How well can you convey and communicate complex concepts and material? Do you have a red thread? Are you, regarding the language

you are using, considering the respective audience, i.e. faculty, students, non-students, etc?

- Are you organized? Are you logical or all over the place?
- Are you sticking to your time limits? Do you know how to structure your available time?
- How well prepared is your accompanying material, i.e. PowerPoint presentation, handouts, samples, etc.?

Find out in advance who will be in the audience, i.e. faculty, students, etc. Make sure you adjust your style to the respective audience. It is a mistake to use only specialized language. You want to sound sophisticated, but not overly specialized. Otherwise, you make part of the audience feel like idiots, and this will definitely be held against you.

Your Research Ability

You do not have to prove that you know the basics of your topic. Everybody is already convinced that you do have these basic qualifications. Otherwise you would not have been invited. The job talk is, however, a test of the depth and breadth of your research. The potential of leading into future research as well as the question of whether you have thought about this will also be evaluated.

Depth

This is the core of your research. Show what contribution your dissertation makes to the field and how it opens up new perspectives.

Breadth

Show that you are critical toward your own research. Perhaps you can show how your research could have been conducted differently, and what might have stemmed from that. This is also your chance to link your dissertation to other fields and show multiple applications of your results that are not immediately obvious. Also show what might have been interesting to cover, but what was not possible to include within the limits of your dissertation.

Future research

Demonstrate that you have thought about how your research can lead to future projects. What will they be? How will you go about it? Who would be collaborators? How would you fund it? It is also important to show at this point how this future research may tie in with the department's work and where and how students could be accommodated. You do not have to be overly precise and worked it out already, but leading ideas of these points are always highly regarded.

Your Overall Match with the Department

The overall match with the department does of course include your research and how it integrates as well as how this complements other faculty's work. It is, however, also about you as a person in various roles, such as a colleague to existing faculty or mentor and professor to the students. Therefore, the department is most likely to look for someone who is not obsessed with his own ego, someone who is open and communicative as well as accessible to students. Always preferred is also someone who would like to sponsor and supports extra curricular activities and who contributes to the department's development, i.e. is a team member.

However, while all of these suggestions are valid and desirable to follow through, remember that trying hard to be someone other than your self is dangerous. It will be detected soon, unless you want to pretend that you are this other person for the rest of your tenure.

General Recommendations

Preparation

- If at all possible, schedule the job talk early in the visit. This will make individual meetings more fruitful as you then have presented all of you and can go into more encompassing discussions since people know your work better.
- Timing is a crucial aspect of your job talk. Always ask your host how long they expect you to talk. However, aim for 45 minutes at the most.
- Do not try to squeeze your entire dissertation into the job talk. Choose

those elements that you are most familiar and comfortable with and that, at the same time, are able to stand alone to show depth, breadth and future research potential. Choose two elements at the most.

- Make sure you know in advance who will be in the audience. If it will be a mixed audience, be sophisticated, but avoid highly specialized language; instead, use inclusive language.
- Prepare the presentation material and handouts. Be clear and concise. Be logical. Include graphics wherever you can, but do not turn your job talk into a media show.
- Prepare for the Q&A section. Take notes of questions peers and mentors ask you when you talk about your dissertation. Take notes of your own thoughts that indicate challengeable parts of your work.
- Get into the right mindset: This is your chance to show all your qualities and skills as well as your persona. Even if people challenge you, they are interested in your work, in you as a person, and they do take you seriously.
- If you get the chance, go and see other people's job talk. It is an invaluable learning experience.

The Actual Job Talk

- Be there at least half an hour early. This way, you can get accustomed to the room and also check the technical equipment.
- Be your self. Show the best of it. Only if you are being authentic, will you be excited, self-assured and relaxed enough to handle the job talk with grace and integrity as well as to be spontaneous to react accordingly to unforeseen events and questions.
- Engage the audience. Think of examples and anecdotes.
- Show enthusiasm about your work. If you are not excited about your work, who will be, and why should they be? Communicate what it is that got you 'hooked' to your topic.
- If you want to use humor, let it flow naturally. Do not force it.
- It is absolutely essential that you stay within the time limits!
- Focus on those in the audience who are listening. Ignore those who are not paying close attention.
- In the Q&A section, do not be afraid of saying 'I don't know' unless you

do it too often. Make comments on the quality of the question and its potential as a future research project. Also, you may take your time, i.e. pause briefly, before you reply to the questions. If you do not understand the question, it is absolutely fine to ask for clarification.

- Enjoy your presentation. After all, you have a high caliber audience that is genuinely interested in your research.

Debriefing Your Job Talk

Use the following questions to debrief and summarize your job talk:

- Institution and department.
- Date and duration of the job talk.
- Who was in the audience?
- When should the position be filled?
- How will they follow up with you?
- Overall impression of your performance.
- Overall impression of the match between you and the department and faculty.
- Overall impression of your prospects.
- Things you would do differently.
- Are you still interested in the job? No matter what the answer is: Why?
- Do you think you delivered a good job talk? No matter what the answer is: Why?
- Thank you letter/s sent to / on.
- Any comments.

References

Eadie, J. [Perfecting The Job Talk](#).
Ernst, M. (2002). [Getting an academic job](#).
Marincovich, M. (1998). [The Academic Job Talk](#).