The Academic Job Talk

Graduate and Postdoctoral Professional Development (GPPD) Seminar
February 27, 2019

Panelists:
• Lisa J. Rapport, Professor, Psychology
• Allen C. Goodman, Professor, Economics
• Janet R. Hankin, Ph.D. Professor, Sociology
Learning Objectives

• Identify best practices in job talks for post-doctoral and academic positions
• Avoid practices that detract from maximizing the positive effect of your talk
• Graciously incorporate constructive input before and during the talk
• Create and deliver a competitive job talk to colleagues and potential employers
What is an Academic Job Talk?

- **Purpose:** The job talk is a presentation of your research to prospective employers
- **Types of Job Talks:** Context dependent
  - Typically academic setting and research focused
  - Can be a teaching sample / lecture
  - Professional settings, an integration of experience and vision for the specific position
- **Generally occur in the final stages of the selection process**
Preparing the Talk: Gather data

• Know your audience: Who will be attending?
  – All expert (rare, except for medical center or think tanks)
  – Undergraduate, graduate, faculty from one department
  – How many will be attending?

• Ask about expectations for the talk specific to the host
  – How long for presentation (typically the talk is an hour)
  – Emphasis (showcase theory, program of research, teaching, etc.)
  – Do they expect handouts?
Prepare your three pitches

You will be asked about your work many times prior to the talk and after it.

Among your most powerful self-marketing opportunities:

1. One- or two-sentence description of your work
2. Elevator pitch: Describe your work in 20 – 30 seconds (it’s longer than you think)
3. 1 – 3 minute description with planned/canned segments to add as requested
Rule #1: Never go long on the job talk

The Job-talk Hour (Myth/Trap)

Talk time

L.J. Rapport (2019)
Rule #1: Never go long on the job talk

The Job-talk Hour (Reality)

- Audience trickles in...
- Brief introduction of you (possibly announcements)
- Talk time
- Q&A (early departures for next meetings)

L.J. Rapport (2019)
Rule #1: Never go long on the job talk

The Job-talk Hour

- Audience trickles in...
- Brief introduction of you (possibly announcements)
- Talk time (~40 min). Include disruptive questions
- Q&A (early departures for next meetings)

L.J. Rapport (2019)
Rule #1: Never go long on the job talk

- Audience members must leave on the hour
- Don’t worry about “going short”:
  - It’s unlikely to happen (or would be appreciated)
  - They aren’t most interested in fine details of your work
  - Going long appears self-involved, insensitive, poor planning

- **Tip:** Omit fine details about your Method and leave them for (easy/low-hanging fruit) Q&A
  - Place details in slides after the last/acknowledgements

- **Tip:** Have (high probability) canned segments ready to add in the Q&A

L.J. Rapport (2019)
Rule #2: Market *yourself* with your research, not your research

- The talk is more about *you* than your work
- Focus on the broad picture and the “so-what” factor of your work
- Big picture: Explain how and where your work fits into the field
- Why your work is important and unique
  - Practical aspects
  - Potential generalizations to things *relatable* to the public

L.J. Rapport (2019)
Rule #3: Gauge the Level & Content

• Target an intelligent lay audience; gear content to upper-level undergraduates
  – Experts will use Q&A or meeting time later
  – Most of your audience may not be expert in your area
  – Gauge your snooze factor and jargon level

• Convey the essence of your research program in a pleasant nutshell

• Translate complex concepts to understandable language, analogies, and examples
Rule #4: Showcase Yourself as a Colleague, Speaker, & Teacher

- *Will they want you around as a colleague?*

- They are evaluating the quality of your science and your ability to present, teach, and handle queries and constructive feedback

- Show enthusiasm and interest in your own work and in the field

- Be as animated during your talk as your level of comfort allows
Rule #4: Showcase Yourself as a Colleague, Speaker, & Teacher

• Over-rehearse the first 5 minutes of any talk (autopilot) but do not read your talk
• If possible, keep the lights on during your talk and make eye contact with the audience
• Create your slides so that they would show well in a lighted room
• Don’t put too much on a slide
  – (Allen Goodman will cover slides)
Rule #5: Convey your plan for a future beyond your dissertation research

• Convey that you will “hit the ground running” with your research at your new job
• Plan for interesting, feasible, productive work to come (next steps)
• Opportunities for funding (e.g., grant targets) and/or collaborations
• Work in “good fit” points about this job site (e.g., complements, colleagues, resources)

L.J. Rapport (2019)
Rule #6: Prepare for Q&A
– Content and Process (Openness)

• Prep any parts light on detail (because you ensured that you would not go long)
• Prep responses to likely critiques
• Read up on site colleagues’ related work
• Present yourself as open to critique, non-defensive about your work, interested and grateful for insightful questions
  – More important to appear open to improve your work than to be “right” about this work

L.J. Rapport (2019)
Edited excerpt from a host’s email

• …Most importantly, please be sure to clearly articulate your program of research. The talk is used as an in vivo probe of the sophistication and likely success of your program of research, as well as your potential as an effective teacher. The most successful talks: 1) provide an overview of the scope and nature of the problem under study; 2) articulate a guiding theory/model to help understand that problem; 3) present rigorous theory/model-guided data (published and in progress) from that individual’s lab that shed light on the problem under study (this is usually the bulk of the talk); and finally 4) briefly project short- and long-term goals of that emerging program of research and the ways that those complement/extend the Department/University’s current research/teaching portfolio. The audience of the talk will be faculty and students from across the …programs here. So you can assume a high level of general research/methods sophistication, but folks may be largely unfamiliar with the specifics of your population and methods.
The Job Talk

Allen C. Goodman
February 27, 2019

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Great Start!

Thank you, Lisa
Items

• Preparing
• The Slides
• The Talk
• The Follow-up
Before you leave town …

• Find out who will be attending.
• Find out what they have written.
• (If possible) read some of what they have written.
• This used to be very difficult. It’s not, anymore, and hosts may expect it.
• Practice your presentation … preferably in front of someone else … and time it.
Ask your host

• How many will attend?
• Do they like hand-outs?
• Are they likely to have read the paper (if provided) in advance?
Ask your host

• What is the format
  – How long for presentation?
  – How long for questions?
• Do they have a microphone, pointer?
• Is there a live WI-FI connection if I need one.
Dress the Part

• Dull and boring.

• Men
  – At least a jacket and tie (you may be the only one wearing a tie … but that’s OK)
  – No jeans

• Women
  – Appropriate suits, dresses, or combinations
  – No jeans

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The Slides

• Make the print big. No smaller than 20 points. This slide is 32 point type. 20 points looks like this.

• Use presentation fonts like **ARIEL**, **CALIBRI**.

• Don’t use **Times New Roman** (it’s a print font)

• Try to avoid full sentences, and definitely …

• **DO NOT READ THEM**

• Try not to wave pointer.
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**Impacts**

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Coefficients in bold
Standard errors in roman

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Content

• For a general interview in a department, assume that they know the discipline, but THEY MAY NOT KNOW YOUR FIELD.
• Explain briefly why this is an important question.
• … and why you are providing an important answer.
Content

• (Unless you are being interviewed for your technical virtuosity), avoid technical virtuosity.
• Avoid tables with LOTS of numbers.
• Avoid LONG literature reviews.
• NEVER … talk down to your audience.
The Presentation

• Thank the host(s) for inviting you.
• **Control** your presentation.
• You want to finish. A good host will make sure that you do, but some don’t …
• Here are some things you can say
  – “Can I limit questions to ‘clarifying questions’ during the presentation?”
  – “Here are some of my key points”
If someone asks a question ...

• He/she probably knows the answer.
• If you can answer, DO SO.
• If you are stumped, say “that’s a good question – and I don’t have a ready answer.” (When you get an answer, even several days later, you should contact the questioner directly with the answer).
• Don’t argue with questioner **UNLESS** winning arguments is a job qualification.

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Questions to Anticipate

• “Why is this important?”
  – Because it’s my dissertation 😊
  – Probably good to have a second answer.
• “What do you plan to do next?”
  – Huh? This is all I’ve been thinking about for the past 3 years.
  – Probably good to have some ideas.

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Sometimes someone will get obnoxious

- Smile … a lot.
- Wait for colleagues to help out.
- If they don’t (won’t), you probably don’t want to work there.
Follow-Up

• Thank the hosts for inviting you, again.
• When you get home, send an email to the host, and to anyone else you want to impress, thanking them for inviting you.
Thank you Lisa and Allen!

• Topics:
  • 1. Organizing Content
  • 2. How To Be a Great Communicator
  • 3. Final Tips for Success
TOTAL PRESENTATION GOALS

• 40% verbal (what you say)

• 20% vocal (how you say it)

• 40% visual (what the audience sees)
CONTENT

Picture yourself in the audience and ask yourself what you would want to listen to or learn.

Also ask yourself “what single message would I want to convey”
Respect the audience

• Never underestimate their intelligence or overestimate their knowledge
• Organize your talk in the following way:
  • Tell them what you will tell them (3 major points)
  • Tell them about your research
  • Tell them what you said: What this means to you is...
ORGANIZATION TIPS

Get their attention

Give ‘em facts - effectively!
(organization, presentation skills, technology)

Tell them the results, conclusions, benefit...
Effective Endings

• Summarize main points and review your goals
• Make a new point that pulls everything together
• Present a conclusion based on your theme
• Leave the audience with something to think about
CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT COMMUNICATORS

- Gestures
- Enthusiasm
- Good facial expression
- Vocal variety
- Sincerity
- Enunciation
- Spontaneity
TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

• Have a snappy title
• Have a point
• Emotions increase memory; be excited
• Power openings help you connect
• A loud voice promotes authority & believability
• Organization and enthusiasm are keys
• Stay on time, stay on time, stay on time
MORE TIPS

• Be candid
• Tell stories about your research
• Forget the need to be perfect
• More thinking = more anxiety
• Experience = clear thinking and confidence
• Have a memorable ending
HELPFUL DO’S AND DON’TS

Big No-Nos in presentation of verbal self

• Too Many “uhs/ums”
• Monotone
• Long pauses/not enough pauses
• Talking too fast
• Be careful with labels and be politically correct with language
PRESENTATION OF SELF: BODY LANGUAGE

• Head down
• Poor posture
• No gestures
• Too many gestures
• Back to audience
• Pan the audience; don’t stare into space. Use good eye contact
• Smile!
HANDLING QUESTIONS

1. Ask them to hold questions until Q&A unless clarifying

2. Always repeat the question

3. Don’t be defensive if hostile question or you don’t know the answer:

“That’s an important question, but I’m not an expert on that. To find out, ask...”

“It looks like the issue is...”
Handling Questions, continued

4. Watch the following:
   “Yes, but” is confrontational
   “No comment” is a guilty plea

5. Give simplest response

6. If you don’t know, say so and offer to get back to them later
SOME FINAL TIPS

• Powerful closings reinforce your message
• Improve by getting feedback. Do a practice run with an audience of your professors and fellow students,
• Don’t fidget with your watch, rings, keys
• Don’t eat or drink too much before speech
• Use the active voice and colorful language
• Don’t shuffle
• Keys are: Preparation, Knowledge, Practice