

The Job Talk

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The big picture

- Your job talk is a *performance*.
- You will be sick of your talk because you will practice it endlessly.
- You will *act* interested and passionate in your research, even if you eventually hate thinking about it.
- A successful job talk will be the result of enormous commitment and practice—which starts long before you ever need to give a real talk.
- Nothing about the pandemic changes the importance or best practices of a job talk.

Two other resources

- Many things in these slides also come from the following:
 - The slightly outdated “Practice Job Talk(s)” document on the Political Science Resources CCLE page.
 - A presentation by Arthur Spirling, available online (but not such great video quality).
 - <https://vimeo.com/109600556>

What lies ahead

- General guidelines
- Opening your job talk
- Structuring your job talk
- Creating your job talk
- Practicing your job talk
- Giving your job talk
- Doing a job talk online
- Concluding thoughts

General guidelines

- This is arguably the one place where you have the most control.
- Good job talks don't guarantee jobs, but bad job talks guarantee no job.
- A talk should be about 35-40 minutes long.
- It should be of general interest and accessibility to the whole audience.
- It must win over a broad enough coalition of people.
- It is a talk, not a paper in slide form.
- Some of this advice may not apply as well to political theory...

The first five minutes are *crucial*.

- The audience should walk out “whistling the tune” of your talk.
- Need to get the attention of the audience before they stop caring.
- The audience is honoring you with their time. Their attention is not to be taken for granted.
- The job talk is not the time for cliffhangers.
- Bottom line up front. Do not trace audience members through your research process.
- Why should anyone/everyone care about your research?
 - Why should your research matter to *them*?

Opening your job talk

In the first five minutes, do the following:

- Establish the question/puzzle (using an example or diving right in)
- Present a clear thesis statement
- Preview your main findings
- Emphasize your contribution/significance

Structuring your job talk

- *Motivating question/puzzle/example*
- *Thesis statement*
- *Main findings*
- *Contribution/Significance*
- Optional: Roadmap
- Theory
- Data (which shows your experience and work ethic)
- Results (presented in interesting and visual ways)
- Conclusion
- Optional: Future steps
- Do **NOT** have a separate “Thanks!” slide!

Remember throughout: The audience should walk out “whistling the tune of your talk.”

Creating your job talk

- Your first draft will not be good. Get that out of your system.
- The slides are a guide, not a crutch.
- Should be sparse; no more than a couple lines of text per bullet.
- Minimize jargon, methods talk, and notation; use your words.
- Should *not* have boring literature reviews.
- Should *not* have full statistical tables with results... and arguably, any statistical tables at all.
- Information should be gradually spoon-fed.
- Know what you can skip or shorten if you run out of time.
- Have back-up slides that show clear thought about your work's limitations and extensions.

Example: Displaying results

- Suppose I have a hypothesis: Periods after wartime negotiations end are linked with reversals of fortune on the battlefield that favor the war target.
- In effect, the period after negotiations should have lower values for momentum than the period before them.
- I find this is indeed the case.
- How do I show my results?

Full Results (Worst Way)

	7-Day Window		Momentum 14-Day Window		21-Day Window	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Post-negotiation	-0.080 (0.096)	-0.186** (0.079)	-0.191** (0.075)	-0.304*** (0.061)	-0.282*** (0.071)	-0.404*** (0.057)
Negotiation		0.022 (0.110)		0.069 (0.066)		0.190*** (0.068)
Issue salience		-7.712*** (0.818)		-8.626*** (0.634)		-20.566*** (1.151)
Contiguity		12.149*** (0.831)		12.825*** (0.651)		24.662*** (1.183)
CINC ratio		0.334*** (0.027)		0.359*** (0.021)		0.393*** (0.019)
Nuclear initiator		-1.341*** (0.326)		-1.200*** (0.243)		-12.067*** (0.614)
Nuclear target		-7.342*** (1.189)		-8.948*** (0.892)		-20.967*** (1.317)
Post-Cold War		-32.274*** (2.760)		-34.895*** (2.173)		-27.477*** (1.374)
Completed battles		0.123*** (0.013)		0.112*** (0.009)		0.104*** (0.008)
Constant	-0.817** (0.410)	1.229 (0.865)	-0.373 (0.254)	2.591*** (0.648)	-0.190 (0.210)	14.767*** (1.139)
War FEs	✓		✓		✓	
Observations	712	712	1,323	1,323	1,823	1,823

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

■ "I'm not sure you can read this, but..." = "This is terrible."

Results (Better Way)

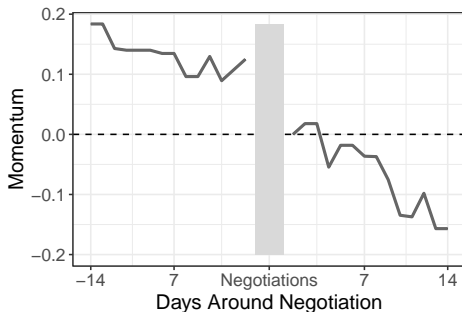
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Momentum					
	7-Day Window		14-Day Window		21-Day Window	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Post-negotiation	-0.080 (0.096)	-0.186** (0.079)	-0.191** (0.075)	-0.304*** (0.061)	-0.282*** (0.071)	-0.404*** (0.057)
War FEs	✓		✓		✓	
Controls		✓		✓		✓
Observations	712	712	1,323	1,323	1,823	1,823

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

- Much cleaner and to the point.
- You can list control variables and refer to full results if necessary.
- But there may be an even more effective way...

Results (My Way)

- Calculate average momentum on each day around each failed negotiation period.



- Failed talks are followed by reversals of fortune for the target.
- Results are not just a downward trend.
- Similar effects do not exist in pre-1945 conflicts.

Practicing your job talk

- Do not hold notes in your hand (or have them on the screen).
- Practice early and often.
- The departmental practice talk should *not* be your first practice.
- Recruit a wide variety of audiences (specialists, outsiders, faculty) to watch you.
- Record and assess yourself honestly.
- It does not need to be scripted word-for-word, but it should become second nature.
- Should have a firm grasp of time (“By slide n , I’m at minute t ”).
- Collect a list of questions you anticipate and develop answers.
- Remember this is a performance.
 - Look and sound enthusiastic.
 - Look and sound natural (even if you’ve scripted the whole talk).

Giving your job talk

- You typically get thirty minutes to prepare, check slides, etc.
- Bring your own clicker with spare batteries and adapters/dongles.
- You *have* to finish your talk.
- Be ready for interruptions and questions throughout.
 - Show competence at answering questions and interacting.
 - Ensure audience members don't shut down brooding over a nagging question.
 - But you must manage your audience to avoid feeding frenzies.
- Take questions from both faculty and grad students.

- Answer questions with confidence; (imagine) you're the expert.
 - Don't acquiesce to every criticism; stand up for yourself.
 - But avoid getting defensive or confrontational.
- If you don't know an answer, be honest but thoughtful.
 - Don't make up answers.
 - "I don't know/haven't tried that, but that would be a fascinating future line of research."
 - "I'm not sure, but if we considered the following..."
 - "I can't address that here, but in another paper, I do..."

Doing a job talk online

While most things do not change, consider the following:

- Make sure the software is set up and functional; do a test run.
- Find a professional setting (ideally not a Zoom virtual background).
- Elevate your camera/computer to be at least eye level.
- If finances permit, get a separate webcam and/or microphone.
- Close other programs or set to “Do Not Disturb” (Mac) or “Focus Assist” (Windows).
- Wear proper attire... even if it does not show up on camera.
- Do not lean on a script or extensive notes.

Concluding thoughts

- Once you get a flyout (or “flyout”), the job talk is one of the biggest moments you have to shape your fate.
- It is the *performance* of your life, so prepare like it.
- Grab the interest of as many people (coalition members) as possible in the first five minutes.
- You must be confident, clear, and concise... regardless of how much of a mess you are on the inside.
- Shake off any negative vibes from the talk once it is over.
- You can do this!

Thanks!