

(Department of Sociology, Ohio State University)

A GUIDE FOR CONSTRUCTING AND GIVING A GOOD JOB TALK

by

Lauren J. Krivo, Andrew W. Martin, and Donna Bobbitt-Zeher

Graduate Placement Committee

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We have put together this document to assist students who are on the job market in putting together and then giving a good job talk. We hope that the following advice is useful for those who are on the market this year and in future years. As you will see below, we have divided our advice into three sections: (1) the structure of the job talk, (2) do's and don'ts, and (3) things to consider (or find out) about the talk before you go on a campus visit. We sincerely hope that this information is helpful! *Laurie, Andrew, and Donna*

I. Structure of a Job Talk

Begin by situating your big substantive question within your broader interests. In most cases, this means starting by telling the audience what the major question is (or 2-3 questions maximum) that you are addressing with the research you are reporting on. Then, discuss how the topic of the current talk relates to your dissertation.

Proceed to tell the audience why your topic and question(s) are important in contributing to knowledge in your area and more broadly in sociology. You should also make clear then what gap in knowledge is being filled.

Next, articulate the conceptual arguments that you are making. This includes presenting your theoretical framework and then your more specific substantive arguments/hypotheses.

Following this, discuss how you are testing the arguments you have made? What cases and data, broadly speaking, are you using? Why is this case (or these data) useful for addressing the questions and hypotheses at hand?

Data and Methods - Make clear what the data source is (or are-unless there are many many sources), what your sample is, how your dependent and key independent variables are measured, and what method of analysis you are using. However, do not be too endlessly specific with detail, you do not want to lose people at this point. Remember that specialists and methodologists can always ask questions later (and you should be prepared for these types of questions so that you can show that you really know what you are doing). Also, be aware that the amount of detail that you present depends on the audience. More specifics can be give at a place like OSU than at a liberal arts college or some other types of settings.

Proceed to describe key important findings that clearly address the questions/hypotheses that you set up in the first part of the talk. In doing this, you should not overwhelm the audience with huge tables. If you have a large model (or models), you can present results for only the most central and interesting variables. You can always note/explain what else is controlled. Be very explicit in telling people which figures you are referring to when you are discussing findings (e.g., *in the top of the first column* note that political involvement has a large significant effect).

Try and convert central/key findings to graphs/figures if at all possible to make it very easy to see what you have found from a substantive point of view. Be sure to build a story in presenting your results and make it clear that your findings are directly related to the substantive arguments/hypotheses you have made.

After presenting all of your findings, draw conclusions that relate back to the larger substantive questions that you set up in the beginning of the talk. Tell the audience how your findings are important to your topic and to sociological knowledge. Here you should not just repeat the detailed findings you just told people. Rather, you should use them to draw more general conclusions.

Definitely finish by telling people where you are going in the next stages of your dissertation research, AND how you see this project feeding into your longer term research agenda.

II. Important Do's and Don'ts

Make sure that your talk is appropriate for a non-specialized audience; do not assume that everyone listening to your presentation is in your area. So overall, give a presentation that is interesting and substantively oriented toward a highly educated professional sociological audience (in small liberal arts colleges the audience may not even be all sociologists).

Do not put too much on your power point slides; use the content of them as a guide (or outline) to help members of the audience keep track of where you are and where you are going. Do not include full sentences, citations, or long quotes (unless you are reading them as part of specifically chosen qualitative interview/content data). If members of the audience are reading a lot of material, they are not listening to you and they tend to lose the flow of your arguments and discussions.

NEVER put anything that is TOO SMALL TO READ on a power point slide. Doing so, and then saying that "I'm sorry but I guess you can't see this", is VERY IRRITATING. You do not want to lose a job over something as trivial as this.

Do NOT talk to the screen behind you that the audience is looking at. Look only at the computer monitor to see where you are in your power point.

DO make eye contact and talk to the audience.

If you have detailed tables or other information that you want to hand out, do not pass them out at the beginning of the talk. Doing so encourages members of the audience to look at the tables rather than listen to you.

If you are using handouts, find out how many people will be in the audience so that you can bring a sufficient number of handouts with you.

If you personalize the introductory page (i.e., presentation at Bigtime U), make sure that you change this before your next interview. Better advise is to just not bother with this.

III. Before You Go

Make sure that you ask about the nature of the audience and expectations for the job talk:

- how many people are typically in the room at a job talk?
- who are these people? faculty in the department, graduate students, undergraduate students, faculty from other departments, administrations (e.g., deans)?
- how much time is given to the talk and how long should your presentation be, e.g, there is an hour allotted and you should talk for about 35 minutes and leave time for questions.
- is the equipment you want available?

If you are not going to a clearly research department, find out if they want a standard research talk, or something else that is more student/teaching oriented. Also find out if you are going to have to teach a class or do some other type of second teaching related presentation.

FINAL PIECE OF ADVICE

PRACTICE! PRACTICE! PRACTICE! to get the content and timing down pat. Do so first BEFORE you have a group watch you here at OSU so that a practice talk with an audience can be most fruitful for you.