

Job Talks

A Talk

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Overview

- **Orientation:** the job talk matters
- **What it is:** your contribution, and your ability to communicate your contribution
- **Preparation:** practice perhaps 30 times.
- **Structure:** it is not a paper, it is a talk
- **Presentation:** actually think about your slides
- **Style:** it is not a recital, it is a talk
- **Strategy:** good ways to signal incompetence, weakness
- **Wrapping Up:** variations on a theme

Orientation

- the job talk is the **single most important event** of your season on the market
- it is the one you have **most control** over
- it showcases your ability as a **researcher**, and as a **teacher**
- giving a **bad** one will guarantee you will **not** get the job
- **fortunately**, most people (the enemy) give bad talks
- **unfortunately**, most people are their own worst enemy
- **fortunately**, getting the basics right will help a great deal

Preparation

- go to **other people's** talks: what are strengths? weaknesses?
- you must **know** your talk back-to-front and upside-down
- write the first draft at least **4 weeks** before your first practice talk
- practice the talk **every day** you are on the market
- do as many '**dress rehearsal**' talks as you can (faculty in attendance, job market conditions)
- plan for **40 minutes**
- talk must be as **broad-based**: appeal to as many people as possible (you are hired by coalition)

Structure (generic)

- **opening example:** newsworthy, 'big case' that is of importance for your JMP
- **overview:** what will you talk about? typically give preview of puzzle and results/findings.
- **puzzle:** what is the question ? who cares?
- **literature:** (very short) what have people said before you? what's wrong with it? where do you fit?
- **data:** what is your data? why is different to that before? what's 'better' about it?
- **methods:** what did you do with the data? why is different to that before? what's 'better' about it?
- **results:** what did you discover? how do you interpret these results with respect to your puzzle?
- **discussion:** what have we learned? how does this paper connect to your other papers/chapters? what would you like to do going forward?

Structure: Variations

- some people talk about *entire* dissertation (instead of one paper)
- ⇒ this is harder to pull off, so be sure you can tie everything together
- opening example not always feasible, but often very helpful for formal and methods papers
 - this is not how business is done in political theory/history (but I've never understood why not)

Your audience

- your audience is honoring you with their **time**: do not **waste** that time with a poorly prepared/boring talk
- your audience is honoring you with their **questions**: they have every right to seek clarification of your work, and to do so in a direct manner
- your audience is honoring with their **equal** attentiveness: do **not** direct your talk/discussion to particular members of that audience.

Presentation: General

- you will **know** your slides (you will have practiced 10+ times)
- therefore, your slides can be '**minimalist**' in detail:
 - a few bullet points
 - some pictures
 - a graph, plot
- **clean** slides are better than busy ones
- use **colors** minimally and **sensibly**
- **beamer** is the \LaTeX package of choice

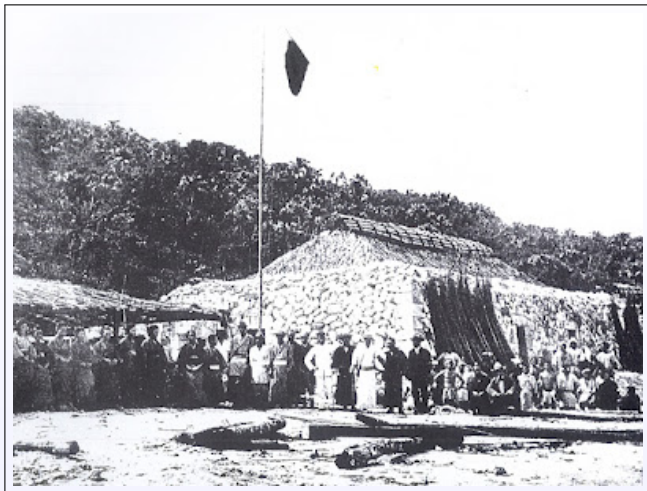
Presentation I: Setting the Scene

- your audience may be diverse in terms of **background**:
academic, disciplinary, sub-disciplinary
 - need to emphasize/explain the general **importance** of your work to motivate **interest**.
 - examples '**in the news**' may be the best way to do this. . .
- e.g. suppose you are interested in China-Japan relations between 1850–1950.

A Puzzling Dispute...



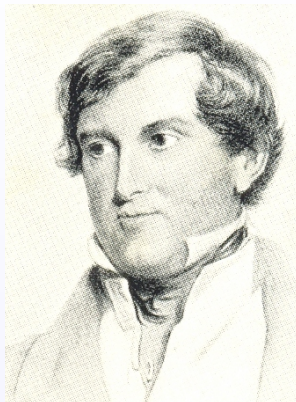
A Puzzling Dispute: Where it Began



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- examples ‘**in the news**’ may be the best way to do this. . .
- e.g. suppose you are interested in China-Japan relations between 1850–1950.
- alternatively, try to find **interesting thread that unites disparate** examples. . .
- e.g. suppose you are interested in development of backbench rights in Britain

Puzzle



Thomas Dyke Acland (1812–1857)
could. . .

- make **speeches** (no germaneness restrictions) when introducing **petitions**
- introduce **private** business (on any day) and take as much time as needed
- ask **questions** to anyone, no bounds on how many, no notice required
- move **amendments** any day
- **raise issues** as Commons moved between roles
- speak for as **long** as desired

Puzzle



... put a **question** on the order paper (24hrs notice), and get a ministerial answer.

Francis Dyke Acland
(1906–1939) could...

Presentation II: Notation etc

Outside of methods/formal talks. . .

- we almost **never** need to see notation
- it typically does more harm than good
- candidates think it makes them appear “serious”
- But it grates.
- Big time.

Be clear about what is and is not ‘**standard**’ knowledge in the field (explaining CLARIFY, logit or multiple imputation can be very annoying).

Presentation III: Notation cont'd

Inside of methods/formal talks. . .

- we almost **never** need to see notation
- it often loses/alienates people
- constantly explain (**reassure**) in words what notation describes
- all punch-lines in text form

Presentation IV: Data

- for many papers, a key selling point is the **new data** that was gathered
 - by describing this **smartly** and **succinctly**, you communicate your **work ethic** and ability to **execute future projects**
- you might emphasize newness in terms of **size**, **process**, **depth** etc.
- e.g. 1M+ speeches from UK parliament, 1803–1918. Interest is in '**debate structure**' in terms of way different MPs choose to speak at different times. . .

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- e.g.2 words from American Indian Treaties

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- e.g.2 words **from American Indian Treaties**
- e.g.3 **maps** work well

Presentation V: 'Results'

- your model has no predictions. . .
 - for the precise magnitude of coefficients
 - for the precise SEs of coefficients
- makes **no sense** to present outputted estimates directly
- use + or - signs, and embolden/color for significance
- use concept names (not variable names)

| | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|----------|----------|----------|
| constant | + | + |
| income | + | + |
| state | | - |
| R^2 | 0.85 | 0.93 |

Not

| | War | non-war | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Polity | 0.08165** (0.03948) | 0.127268*** (0.02310) | 0.16296*** (0.03591) |
| Polity ² | 0.01128*** (0.00433) | -0.00731 (0.00277) | 0.00340 (0.00728) |
| Major Power | 0.91055* (0.53743) | 0.42478 (0.35711) | 0.88532 (0.96532) |
| Diplomacy Score | -1.94437 (1.21137) | -1.17580** (0.82657) | -3.33958* (1.82339) |
| Dyadic Capability Ratio | -0.32817 (0.54620) | 0.76171** (0.34911) | 1.13730* (0.73663) |
| Region 2 | -1.35213 (0.99942) | -0.76753 (0.60847) | 0.04184 (0.95706) |
| Region 3 | -1.35213 (1.77010) | 0.475511 (0.964904) | 1.15381 (1.31665) |
| Region 4 | -0.09875 (0.81509) | -1.47072** (0.61897) | -2.05290* (1.24664) |
| Region 5 | 2.13434** (0.956503) | -0.20899 (0.50120) | -0.57676 (1.01989) |
| Initiation | -0.163646 (0.219643) | 0.82881*** (0.13201) | 0.76292** (0.25643) |
| Initiation×Polity | -0.001448 (0.044483) | -0.05660 (0.02522) | 0.01932 (0.04222) |
| log(GDP) | | — | -0.19213 (0.49147) |
| random effect std devn | 1.2968*** (0.2135) | 0.9225*** (0.1468) | 1.242*** (0.2390) |
| n | 340 | 589 | 231 |

hint: if you intro a slide with “I’m not sure if you can see that”, chances are it’s a **bad slide**.

Presentation VI: Concluding

- summarize what this paper did, but reiterate the **contribution**, not the introduction
 - some like to emphasize links between this paper and **other projects**: fine in principle, but be careful about losing momentum
 - be optimistic, expansive but not delusional about **future projects**:
 - explain how you will **deal** with shortcomings: more data? better estimation?
 - explain how you will **extend** paper: other places? times?
- leave audience with sense that talk is '**complete**': be circumspect and thoughtful, not triumphant.

Style

For the love of all that is holy. . .

- do **not** write a 'script', do not learn a 'script'
- do **not** read your slides
 - you appear stilted, inflexible, unintelligent
- two better ways:
 - **conversational**: every comment on every slide (appears 'natural'; uses conversational terms and cues ("you know", "you see", "alright") jokes appear (as if) off-the-cuff.
 - **lecture**: speaking directly to audience, little audible internal dialogue, no jokes, more determined gesticulation
- project a **calm, assertive energy**: confident, but not arrogant; charming, but not crawling.

Strategy

You can signal weakness and unsuitability for employment by...

- stating explicitly that you **won't be taking questions** during the talk (why not? because you can't cope?)
- being **defensive** when you get questions
- being haughty, smug and superior when responding to questions
- **ignoring** grad student questions (making them even more determined to bury you)
- allowing a **feeding frenzy** to begin
- using the words “**my advisor**” at some point in the talk

So...

- be **respectful**, **direct**, **calm** in response to questions (make eye contact)
- if you don't know the answer try to **say something intelligent** in response that shows you've thinking about the issues
- give a brief response and say “**perhaps we can come back to that in a minute**” to avoid getting your talk swallowed
- **shut down** any potential dialogue between audience members **immediately**
- you can **direct questions** to whatever you want by choosing your slide content carefully (no one asks about the method in detail if that isn't the focus of your talk)

Tactics/Comments

- you get 30 minutes before the talk, set up the laptop, check slide transitions, get water etc.
- you don't need a lectern/podium
- bring your own slide clicker, check batteries etc
- feeling nervous is good: you will be on form
- 'sudden calm' pre-battle is common too
- be careful with "that's a good question. . ." (as opposed to what?)

Tactics/Comments II

- every talk has **strengths** and **weaknesses** . . .

- maybe best to **own** the weaknesses early on

e.g. “obviously, given this is observational data, making causal inferences is difficult. . .”

→ immediately cuts down obvious critique of talk

- and **hide** your strengths

e.g. “this dataset is on the larger side, at around 1.2 billion observations. . .”

→ often more impressive (to the right people!) when delivered calmly and without too much fanfare

Wrapping Up

- the talk is important, and its success is in **your** hands
- be **clear** and **coherent** and **clean** and **concise**
- once done, **put it out of your mind**, get on with 1-on-1s
- whatever happens, try to act like a fundamentally normal human being

