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)

$\Rightarrow$ 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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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

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

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

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

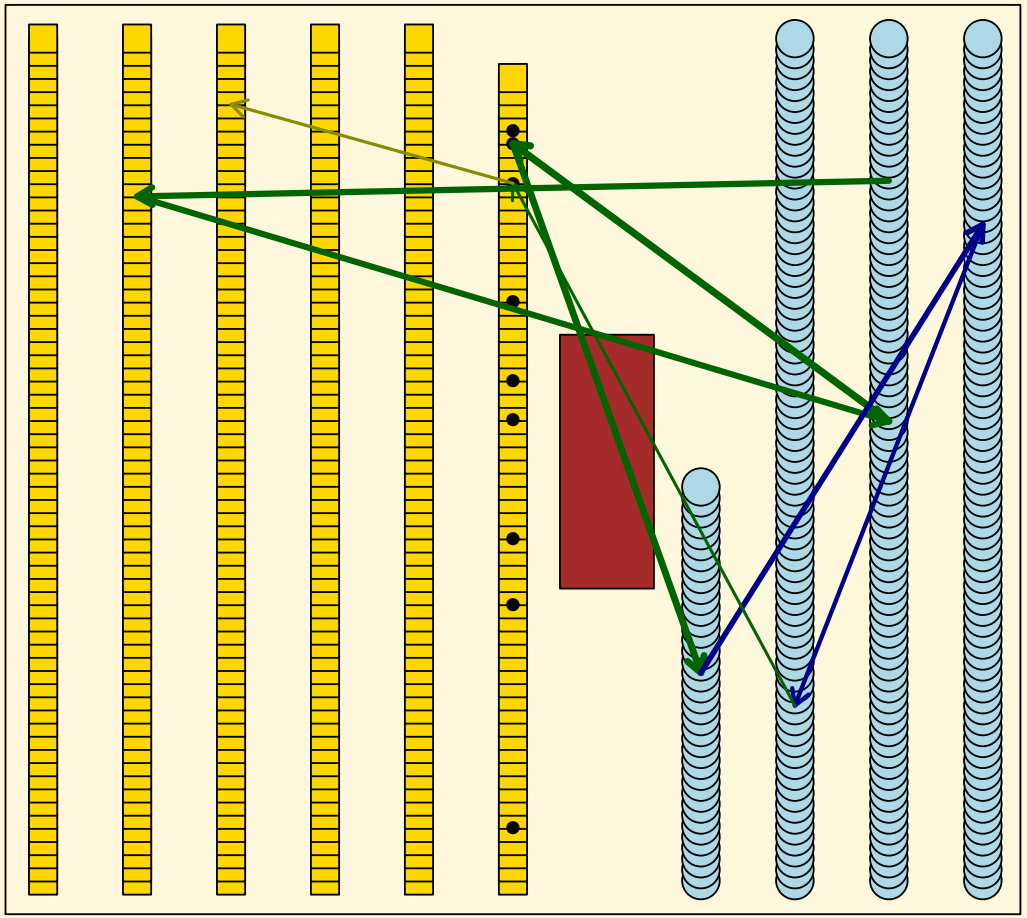
Presentation IV: Data

- 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...

debate 41630



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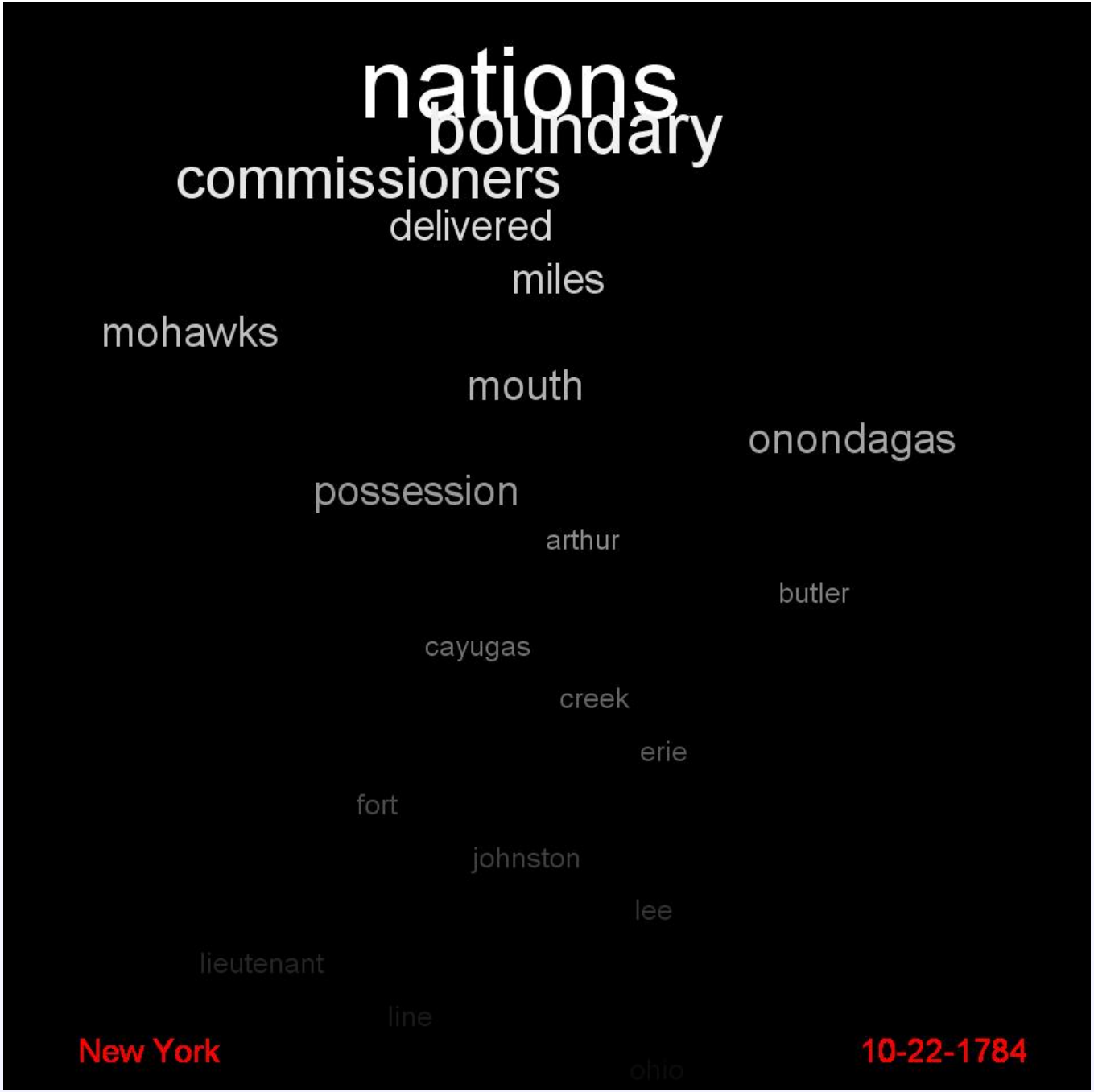
e.g.2 words from American Indian Treaties


nations
boundary
commissioners
delivered
miles
mohawks
mouth
onondagas
possession
arthur
butler
cayugas
creek
erie
fort
johnston
lee
lieutenant
line
New York
10-22-1784
ohio

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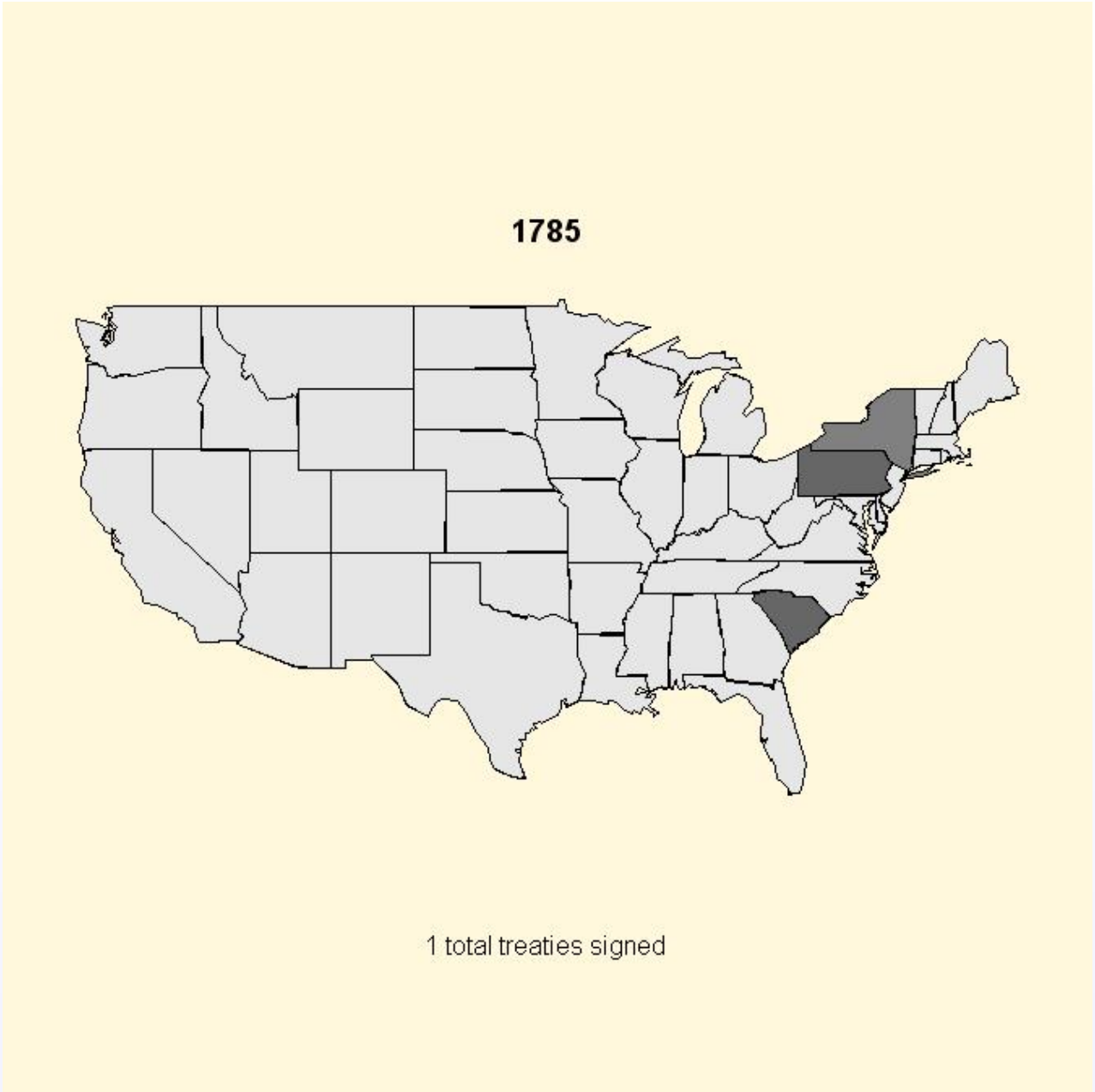
e.g.3 maps work well


1785
1 total treaties signed

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

$\rightarrow$ 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
  $\rightarrow$ 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're 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


NO FEAR. NO LIMITS. NO EQUAL.