

Interview Talk Guide

Microsoft Research



The interview talk

What is an interview talk?

- An interview talk teaches an audience about your research objective – it gives a research narrative which clearly defines the purpose for addressing and finding a solution to a problem
- It gives a clear, logical presentation of the hypothesis and results of your research
- It shows extreme cases, where the limits are, and what factors scope the relevance or applicability of the results
- It includes the context and background material on which it is built
- It navigates the future work and the trajectory of the research

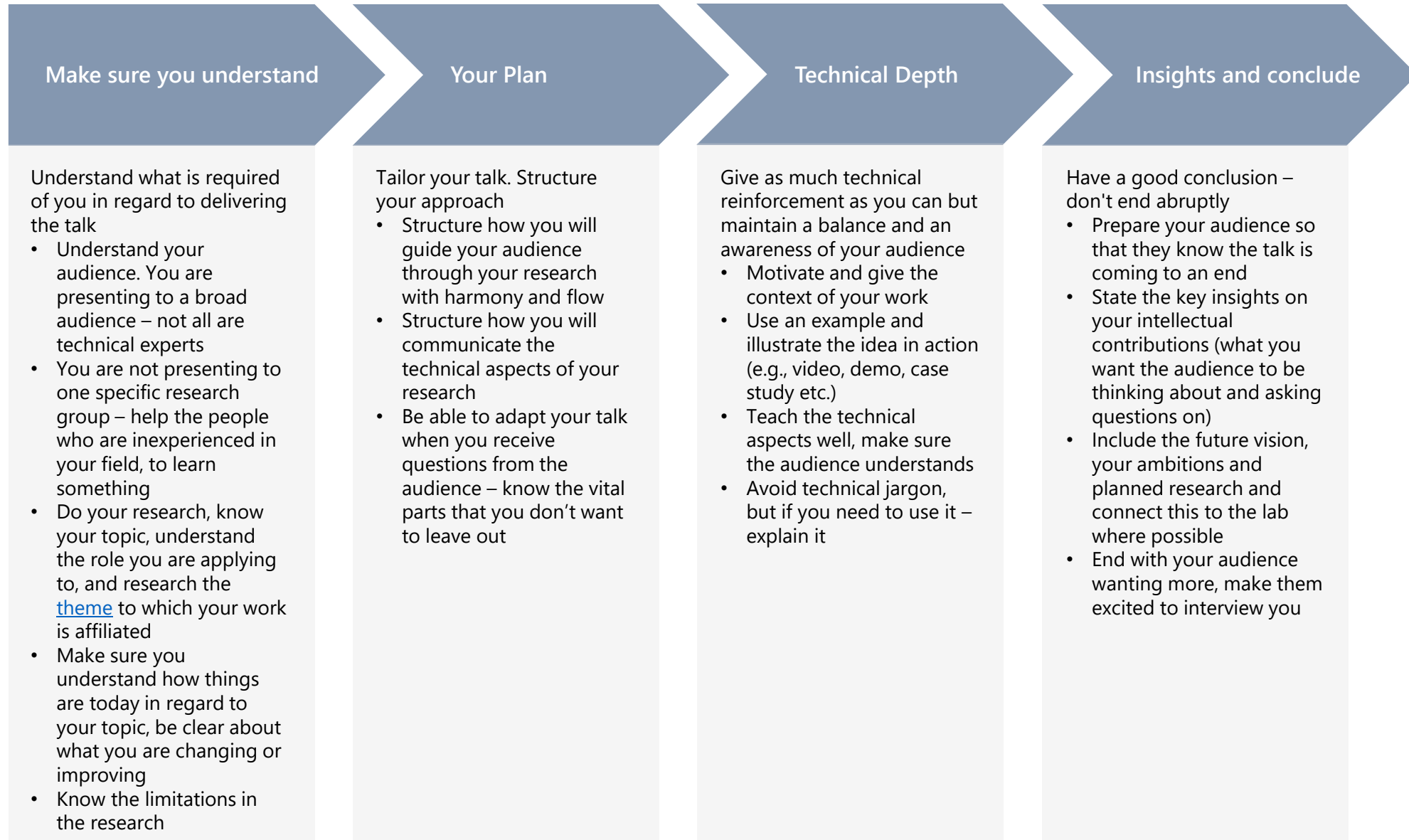
Why ask for an interview talk?

- It shows us evidence of a research narrative and goal
- It gives us a high-level overview of what you have been researching and where your interests lie
- It helps us understand your contributions to the research, your collaboration, and your determination to reach the research objective and goal
- It shows us your technical depth and competence
- It helps us to understand your thought process and how you solve problems
- It helps us to understand and correlate the relevance and diversity of what you have been researching, and whether it is complementary and transformative to Microsoft

How you present your interview talk shows us certain capabilities

- The ability to structure your research and communicate it effectively
- The ability to clearly articulate and communicate complex ideas so that your audience can grasp your research concept
- The drive, passion and vision for your research and the ability for it to have lasting impact
- The ability to think strategically and independently, as well as confidence in your material
- Your adaptability to challenging circumstances
- The ability to answer questions to a broader audience, as well as beyond your immediate specialism

How to approach an interview talk



Structuring your interview talk



Introduction (5 min)

- Introduce yourself
- Set the theme and explain why it matters
- Overview of the area you are interested in and the objective - why it is interesting and why it is an important problem to solve
- Catch your audience with your overview – give them an intuitive feel for your idea
- Excite them to stay engaged



Main Idea (35 min)

- Convey the main intuition of your idea
- Frame the background on which it is built, how it is done today – give the context of your research
- Use an example to illustrate your idea in action, show how it works
- Deep dive into the technical details (If you use 2 examples - explain why they are related)
- Support your research with as much technical reinforcement and detail as you can but remember to maintain a balance
- Show extreme cases, highlight any short comings and challenges
- Be specific and draw attention to the important technical bits



Key Insights (3 min)

- State key insights, give overview of the vision and trajectory of your research
- Distinguish the novelty of your work and how it will have impact
- Highlight how your research can be transformative to Microsoft



Conclusion (2 min) Questions (15 min)

- Prepare your audience so that they know your talk is coming to an end (Finally; In conclusion, In closing etc.)
- Finish on time
- Be open to questions. If you have had a lot of questions, it is up to you to adapt your talk
- Give short concise answers to your questions. If a question requires a long answer, try to give a short one and deflect to a conversation later

Tips for your interview talk

- Remember you are presenting to a highly skilled audience that will include specialists in your area (your future colleagues). However, not all will be technical experts in your research:
 - Be mindful of technical jargon, if you need to use it – please explain it
 - The non-specialists in your area should come away from your talk with some understanding of your research idea. It's OK if they get lost when you get into some detail, but they should take away something useful and interesting to them
- Speak about your key idea for 80% of the talk time (briefly broad and then deep)
- Show interest and curiosity in your research – try to imagine how you can get someone enthused about your work who knows nothing about it. Consider emphasising:
 - What research problems you are interested in, why they are important and what research ideas you bring to the table to try and address those problems
 - Your research agenda and vision for the future i.e., what problems are you passionately keen to solve (on a timescale of 1-5 yrs), what ideas do you plan to develop in order to solve them, and what promising work have you done that makes those ideas seem likely to succeed?
- Craft your talk appropriately, tailor it to show how your research skills best suit Microsoft and the projects the theme is currently working on – correlate your work to the Lab
- Avoid the following pitfalls:
 - A detailed description of your research career. That is in your CV and will come up in your 1-1 interviews
 - A detailed account of the projects you have done, with all the intermediate steps. Organise your talk around ideas rather than around history
 - An exclusively broad-but-shallow overview of your work. A brief summary of things you have done is fine, but then pick one, or two, or three (it's up to you) and dig into the research ideas and technical "meat"
- Pace the material appropriately. Teach well. Practice teaching the technical aspects
- Know your slides so that you can always face and engage with the audience
- Guide your audience through your talk
 - Give them sign posts
 - Say things like, "if you only remember one thing today make sure it is this!"
- Remember that your talk complements your one-to-one interviews. Do not consume the time of a broad audience of 20 for a topic that is better discussed with an audience of one.
- Do your research on Microsoft in Cambridge
 - Know what Microsoft Research are doing
 - Know what the theme the role is affiliated to, is doing