Job Talks

A Talk

Arthur Spirling
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

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- **Wrapping Up:** variations on a theme
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.
Orientation

- the job talk is the **single most important event** of your season on the market
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Preparation

- go to other people's talks:
go to other people's talks: what are strengths? weaknesses?
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- you must know your talk back-to-front and upside-down
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- 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 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?
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- **literature**: (very short) what have people *said before* you? what’s wrong with it? where do you fit?
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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)

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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 you with their equal attentiveness: do not direct your talk/discussion to particular members of that audience.
Your audience

- your audience is honoring you with their time:

  - do not waste that time with a poorly prepared/boring talk
  - they have every right to seek clarification of your work, and to do so in a direct manner
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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 L\A\TeX package of choice
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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.
your audience may be diverse in terms of background:
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A Puzzling Dispute...
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- examples ‘in the news’ may be the best way to do this...
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- alternatively, try to find interesting thread that unites disparate examples...
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e.g. suppose you are interested in development of backbench rights in Britain
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
Thomas Dyke Acland (1812–1857) could...
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Puzzle

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Francis Dyke Acland (1906–1939) could . . . put a question on the order paper (24hrs notice), and get a ministerial answer.
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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).
Outside of methods/formal talks...
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Presentation II: Notation etc

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- 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).
Inside of methods/formal talks, we almost never need to see notation, it often loses/alienates people. We should constantly explain (reassure) in words what notation describes. All punch-lines in text form.
Inside of methods/formal talks...
Inside of methods/formal talks...  

- we almost never need to see notation
Inside of methods/formal talks... we almost never need to see notation... it often loses/alienates people
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Inside of methods/formal talks... 

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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.

Arthur Spirling

Job Talks
for many papers,
for many papers, a key selling point is the new data that was gathered
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by describing this smartly and succinctly,
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
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
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
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,
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,
for many papers, a key selling point is the new data that was gathered

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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. It makes no sense to present outputted estimates directly. Use + or - signs, and embolden/color for significance.

Model 1  Model 2

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>−</td>
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\[ R^2 = 0.85 \quad 0.93 \]
your model has no predictions...
your model has no predictions... 
- for the precise magnitude of coefficients
your model has no predictions...

- for the precise magnitude of coefficients
- for the precise SEs of coefficients
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
your model has no predictions...
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use concept names (not variable names)
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<td>income</td>
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**hint:**
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hint: if you intro a slide with “I’m not sure if you can see that”,

Arthur Spirling | Job Talks
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<td>(0.53743)</td>
<td>(0.35711)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomacy Score</td>
<td>-1.94437</td>
<td>-1.17580**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.21137)</td>
<td>(0.82657)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic Capability Ratio</td>
<td>-0.32817</td>
<td>0.76171**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.54620)</td>
<td>(0.34911)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 2</td>
<td>-1.35213</td>
<td>-0.76753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.99942)</td>
<td>(0.60847)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 3</td>
<td>-1.35213</td>
<td>0.475511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.77010)</td>
<td>(0.964904)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 4</td>
<td>-0.09875</td>
<td>-1.47072**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.81509)</td>
<td>(0.61897)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 5</td>
<td>2.13434**</td>
<td>-0.20899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.956503)</td>
<td>(0.50120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>-0.163646</td>
<td>0.82881***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.219643)</td>
<td>(0.13201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation × Polity</td>
<td>-0.001448</td>
<td>-0.05660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.044483)</td>
<td>(0.02522)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log(GDP)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-0.19213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>random effect std devn</td>
<td>1.2968***</td>
<td>0.9225***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.2135)</td>
<td>(0.1468)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$n = 340, 589, 231$

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,
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.
summarize what this paper did,
summarize what this paper did, but reiterate the contribution,
summarize what this paper did, but reiterate the **contribution**, not the introduction
• summarize what this paper did, but reiterate the contribution, not the introduction
• some like to emphasize links between this paper and other projects:
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- 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**:
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be optimistic, expansive but not delusional about future projects:
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  - explain how you will **extend** paper: other places? times?

→ leave audience with sense that talk is ‘**complete**’
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,
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→ leave audience with sense that talk is ‘complete’: be circumspect and thoughtful, not triumphant.
Style

For the love of all that is holy...
For the love of all that is holy...

- do **not** write a ‘script’, do not learn a ‘script’
For the love of all that is holy...

- do **not** write a ‘script’, do not learn a ‘script’
- do **not** read your slides
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
Style

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- do not write a ‘script’, do not learn a ‘script’
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- two better ways:
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  → you appear stilted, inflexible, unintelligent
- two better ways:
  - conversational:
Style

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- two better ways:
  - conversational: every comment on every slide (appears)
    ‘natural’; uses conversational terms and cues (“you know”,
    “you see”, “alright”)
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- 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,
For the love of all that is holy...

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- two better ways:
  
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  - **lecture**: speaking directly to audience, little audible internal dialogue,
Style

For the love of all that is holy...

- do **not** write a ‘script’, do not learn a ‘script’
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- two better ways:
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  - lecture: speaking directly to audience, little audible internal dialogue, no jokes, more determined gesticulation
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  - **lecture**: speaking directly to audience, little audible internal dialogue, no jokes, more determined gesticulation

- project a **calm, assertive energy**:
For the love of all that is holy...

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- two better ways:
  
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  - lecture: speaking directly to audience, little audible internal dialogue, no jokes, more determined gesticulation

- project a calm, assertive energy: confident, but not arrogant;
For the love of all that is holy...

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  - **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
Strategy

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

You can signal weakness and unsuitability for employment by…

- stating explicitly that you won’t be taking questions during the talk
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?)
Strategy

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

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- 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

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)
So...

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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?)
you get 30 minutes before the talk,
Tactics/Comments

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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.
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and hide your strengths
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Wrapping Up

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
the talk is important, and its success is in your hands
Wrapping Up

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NO FEAR. NO LIMITS.