Nailing the Job Talk

Andrew Green, PhD
October 15, 2020
A little bit about you

• I am a …

• My discipline is in …
My primary goal is faculty at:

- Research University
- Mix of Research + Teaching
- Teaching/Liberal Arts College
What thoughts enter your mind (or your gut) when you think about delivering a job talk?
“Sadly, far too many find themselves in the midst of cringeworthy monologue, full of disconnected experiments and overly complex graphs with no central theme or story”
Agenda

• How to get your audience engaged in your topic
• How to make it easy for them stay involved
• What are some of the mechanisms you can use to ease the delivery of your presentation
  – Same logic applies for 10 min seminar presentation as it does for an hour-long job talk
Setting The Hook

Most common start to a Job Talk:

My research is about the S. Korean Auto Industry

Most common response:
Setting The Hook

• Just Because You’ve Spent All This Time on Your Topic Doesn’t Mean They Will Find it Worthy of Their Attention

• Don’t Start With a Laundry List

• They’re Leaning Back - How Do You Get Them to Lean Forward?

• What is the Surprise? What’s at Stake?

• Tell them a story
Intentionality

- What is the question, writ large, your research is intended to address?

and

What portion of it will you cover in your job talk?
Job Talk Exercise

• What is the big question you want to answer through your research?
  – Is there upward mobility in the Int’l Econ System for late developers?

• What is the specific question you address in your PhD/Postdoc research
  – Can the Koreans become players in the int’l auto market?

• What is the most surprising fact/finding/anecdote, you uncovered
  – In 1989, Hyundai dealers sold more cars per dealership than Honda dealers sold Civics

• Who is your audience?
  – Small college dept: no other pol economists in the room
  – How did you engage undergrads in your grad/postdoc research?
Structuring the Talk

• Don’t Start with a Laundry List
• Provide the Context
• Give them a Road Map
• General – Specific – General
• Less is More – Be sure to provide examples
• Brief Review & Finish With Implications - They Can’t Help but Agree
Allude to Complexity, But Keep it Simple

• Assume Ignorance

• Making it Easy for Your Audience – Visual Learners

• Making it Easy for You

• Do You Want to Address Questions in the Midst of or at the End? Decide Ahead of Time
Use Evocative, But Not Clichéd Language

• How many of you have sat through student or peer presentations?

• We most easily learn something new by reference/comparison to what is already familiar

• Use Analogies, Metaphors, and Similes to Illustrate - RR

• Means/Ends - Statistics Don’t “Speak for Themselves.”
It’s About More Than Words

- 7 Percent Rule
- Make Eye Contact
- Text vs. Notes/PowerPoint/Winging It
- Written vs. Spoken Language
- Speak Slowly - Pause for Emphasis
- Time it Out
Using PowerPoint Effectively

• Don’t Use Distracting Fonts, Multiple Graphics, Transitions & Effects

• Don’t read everything on your PowerPoint slides. Your audience can read much faster than you can articulate the words & their minds will have time to wander away while you catch up - will they ever come back?

• Most people are visual, rather than verbal, learners

• Bring Transparencies with You (art)
Handouts

• Don’t Distribute a Printout of your Slides

• Something to Take Away
  – Not an Outline of the Talk but a Recitation of Key Points and Data
Display Confidence When Challenged

- You have Reasons and Evidence to Back Your Assertions
- Apparent Challenges are Often Requests for Clarification
- Re-State Their Objection in Your Own Words
- Address the Issues Raised - Take Them Through the Steps if Necessary
- Reasonable People Can Differ
- Move On
Providence, RI was a pretty boring place to grow up, but...

Ubung macht den Meister
Have a good closing slide. Why?

So your audience will know it's time to clap.
• What was most useful?

• What could have used more time?
A friend of yours graduated last year, and has gone to work for a “mysterious” silicon valley start-up.

He offers you the opportunity to travel back in time 325 years and experience it for one minute.

But there’s a catch. The founder is from New England.

- In one minute your cell phone is going to go “Ding!” signaling the arrival of a text. (anyone...)
You have 60 seconds to explain to your partner from three centuries ago what a cell phone is and how it works without being condemned to burn as a witch.

You may not say you are a messenger from God.

You may not say you are Jesus or that your cell phone is a gift from Jesus.
Would you burn your colleague at the stake?