

# Acing the Job Talk: An Evidence-Based Approach

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# My Approach

- Created survey of common job talk questions and mistakes
- Ran in 2020; re-ran in 2023
- Sent it to 305 OB/HR faculty, got 137 responses
  - 28% Assistant; 34% Associate; 38% Full
  - 86% quantitative; 14% qualitative
  - 80% North America; 15% Europe; 5% Asia and Australia

# The Survey

- 50 items across six sections
  - What to present, start of the talk, the research presentation, handling questions, wrapping up, qualitative talks
  - Open text responses after each section
- 1 = strongly disagree → 5 = strongly agree
  - >4 = pretty safe
  - 3-4 = probably okay, but it depends
  - 2-3 = risky, think long and hard
  - <2 = heavens no

# A caveat...

*Every one of these questions should have “it depends” as an answer, because the goal is to communicate the research...for some that means every hypothesis, for others moderation w/tables.*

*What we need to teach students is to know and understand what’s important for THEIR research...that will determine what’s on the slides!*

# What to Present

**Although the dissertation is often presented, it is also acceptable for an ABD candidate to...**

Present a paper other than their dissertation	<b>3.7</b>
Present a paper that has already been accepted at a journal	<b>2.6</b>
Present a paper that is in the review process at a journal	<b>4.2</b>
Present two research projects (instead of just one)	<b>3.8</b>
Present a paper on which they are not the first author	<b>2.1</b>
Present their dissertation if they do not have data	<b>3.0</b>

# What to Present - Comments

- *All things equal, I would much rather see a student present their dissertation. It's unequivocally their own work.*
- *Dissertations usually crash and burn so I like to see research other than a dissertation.*
- *I think it's okay to do a non-dissertation paper as long as the candidate is a first author.*
- *Present on two research projects if they are connected and show a trajectory.*
- *The most important thing here is to ask your point of contact what they are looking for.*

# The Start of the Talk

## During first few slides of the job talk, ABD job candidates should...

Describe what motivated them to pursue a PhD	2.9
Describe why they are interested in their research specialty	4.2
Begin the talk with something lighthearted	3.4
Explain where the research idea came from or how the project began	4.1
Provide an overview of their current research portfolio	4.0
Invite audience members to ask questions at any point during the talk	4.1
In a 90-minute job talk, how much time should be spent on the start of the talk, before getting into the actual research presentation?	7.8

# The Start of the Talk - Comments

- *Being lighthearted works if you can pull it off and it doesn't seem forced or fake, but if it does seem fake it's worse than just not doing it.*
- *I always like it when they provide a very brief overview of their research interests. I already have their vita...I don't need a detailed overview of each project and where the papers are under review.*
- *I like to hear a little about the candidate's personal life.*
- *I'm pretty uninterested in the person's life story.*



# The Research Presentation

When presenting their research in a job talk, ABD job candidates should...	
Have a slide that “sets the hook” just like they would in the intro of a paper	4.6
Connect their research ideas/questions w/popular press pieces, topics, video clips	3.6
Spend time explaining the theory(ies) that will be used	4.5
Present a figure that summarizes their theoretical model	4.4
Cover all of the hypotheses that are in their dissertation or research project	2.9
Include a slide for each correlation matrix	2.5
Present the moderation plots and other figures, as applicable	4.3
Present a single summarizing slide of results (e.g., path model) for easy viewing	4.2
Include citations, roughly in the same manner as one would in a paper	3.1
In a 90-minute job talk, how much time should be spent on research presentation?	60.1

# The Research Presentation - Comments

- *Think carefully about if/how to present opening examples for your research. A well-chosen example can be attention-getting and a powerful way to show the importance of your research; a poorly-chosen example can derail the rest of the talk.*
- *If you have a traditional "big" dissertation, stick to what's interesting.*
- *The best talks I've been to are where the candidate has really focused on the "story telling."*
- *I like it when candidates have slides prepared that provide more detail, without necessarily showing them unless asked.*
- *Theory is important, but I've seen many job talks where the presenter gets bogged down in theory and runs out of time to sufficient talk about the methods/results. You WILL get questions about the theory - plan accordingly!*

# Handling Questions

When questions are asked, it is acceptable for ABD candidates to...	
Admit that they do not have an answer if that is the case	4.3
Ask questioner how they would deal with it if the ABD does not know answer	3.3
Make up the answer as best they can if they do not know	2.1
Politely redirect a discussion that goes off on a tangent	4.2
Let the questioner know the answer is coming up in a few slides if that is the case	4.4
Move on w/the presentation even if hands are still up b/c too many questions	2.9
Tell questioner that they would be happy to discuss later	3.8
Wait until someone asks something if there are no questions	2.5
Take notes with pen and paper as questions are discussed with audience	4.1

# Handling Questions - Comments

- *Questions are a conversation--use them to help you, show respect to the audience, and engage with them without defense.*
- *You can only do each once successfully: say I don't know, ask what you would do, happy to discuss it later.*
- *NEVER try to BS your way through a question you don't understand or don't know the answer to...people will see right through you!*

# Wrapping Up the Talk

**As ABD candidates near the end of the job talk, it is acceptable for them to...**

Not get to the results of their study due to audience engagement

**1.8**

Talk about the limitations of their research project

**4.1**

Skip the discussion and implication slides if time is running out to take remaining questions from the audience

**3.5**

Go beyond the allotted time limit by a little bit (5 minutes or so)

**2.5**

Finish a little bit early (5-10 minutes)

**3.6**

# Wrapping Up the Talk - Comments

- *Time management is an under-appreciated skill in delivering high quality job talks.*
- *Being able to control the room is a major issue both for research talks in general and as a preview of teaching style.*
- *People want to see results!!! Skip other stuff if you have to, but not getting to your results is a deal breaker.*
- *Build in "skip ahead" points and "exits" into your presentation that allow you to manage time.*
- *I often find general discussion of a paper to be boring, and even more so in a job talk.*

# The Qualitative Job Talk (n = 116)

For ABD candidates presenting qualitative research, they should...	
Start with an engaging introduction to the phenomenon (not the theoretical domain)	4.2
Minimize time spent reviewing the literature in the front end	3.1
Discuss rationale for why they chose the methodological techniques they did	4.4
Walk the audience through a coding example (e.g., from raw data to code or theme)	4.0
Read aloud every quote presented on slides	2.5
Provide graphical representations of data (as opposed to just quotes)	4.1
Focus data presentation on the most novel/unexpected parts of the model	3.9

# The Qualitative Job Talk - Comments

- *For qualitative job talks, it's really important to keep the frontend streamlined so that you can get to the data/findings.*
- *As a quantitative researcher, I'm most interested in knowing that the qualitative methods were rigorous. If you can quantify your results in some way, that'll appeal to the quant folks.*
- *Please don't read quotes. Nothing is worse than having to wait for you to finish.*
- *I personally prefer it when people read the full quotes...audience members are going to be reading the full quote anyway, so you might as well read it aloud if you have it on the screen.*



# Overall Advice

- *Practice, practice, practice.*
- *Accordion ..... be able to shorten or length your talk by 25% either way.*
- *Balance competence and warmth. New PhDs often think they are only demonstrating competence but they are also showing whether they are warm which matters more than they think it will.*
- *Show interest in your own work. Be enthusiastic.*
- *Be YOU.*

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**Thank you and  
GOOD LUCK!**

