

# Academic Job Talks

PDCO Career Resources

The job talk is a presentation of your research given to prospective employers in academia during an on-campus interview. The format of the job talk is similar to dissertation talks, conference presentations, and invited talks, so you are going to be somewhat aware of what to expect. Job talks give departments the opportunity to learn more about your research competencies and interests.

## What happens? Who is there?

A job talk typically includes a formal presentation of your research that usually lasts 45-50 minutes with 10-15 minutes for questions. **Do not go over the department's time limit.**

Audience members will typically consist of faculty members, students, and potential collaborators. Consider the breadth of the department you are applying to—for example, the faculty in a general biology department may be even further from your field than those in a more specific department. Gear your talk towards scientists who may not have detailed knowledge about your specialty.

After the formal question and answer session, there is often a reception or meal, where candidates may be asked additional, more informal, questions. Take this as a time to get to know your potential future colleagues.

## What should I present?

**Topic:** A job talk should cover your most significant scientific findings from your postdoctoral or doctoral research. If you discuss projects in which you were part of a team, make sure to highlight your individual contribution.

**Content:** Remember that your time is limited and that the audience members will typically only recall a few key points, so do not overwhelm them with minute details or lengthy explanations. That is not to say that you should not give substantive examples or anecdotes when necessary to better explain the “so what” of your research. You should briefly mention future projects you are planning to undertake at your new institution, but leave the details of future work for the chalk talk. If you are NOT giving a chalk talk, you may want to consider quickly discussing potential funding avenues and opportunities for collaboration. Place your work in a broader context to show the big picture and the impact of your work on your scientific field, department and institution.

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**Organization and Style:** You may choose to take time to give your audience an outline, but this is a stylistic preference and completely up to you. If you do choose to start with an outline, follow it and summarize what you just shared after each main point; this will help keep you on track and allows the audience to follow your presentation. Be professional and engaged, but do not try to be someone you are not. Practice as much as possible so that you do not need to rely on notes and can focus on the audience.

**Using visual aids:** Most people find that PowerPoint (or Keynote) helps keep them on track. It is highly recommended to have a laser pointer, presentation clicker (and extra batteries!), and a backup of your presentation on a flash drive. This way, you are not faced with any unexpected technical issues on the day of your presentation. You may assume that there will be a computer and an LCD projector—your contact will let you know if there is anything different. Make sure that your slides are clear and informative, but not cluttered. Use them as a guide, but not a script. Practice talking to the audience, not the equipment.

**Q & A:** Be prepared to answer questions of varying difficulty levels. Remember that the questions being asked are not meant to intimidate you; instead be excited that someone is interested in learning more about your work! Take the time to provide a thoughtful response; ask them to repeat or clarify the question if needed. It is okay to say if you don't know the answer—this gives you the opportunity to follow up with faculty after the session—just make sure you make the effort to formally reach out before you leave your campus visit or via e-mail after your visit has concluded.

### **How should I Prepare?**

The best way to prepare is by practicing. Job talks are a crucial part of your interview process, so you should start considering what you will say as soon as you begin writing applications. If you can, practice multiple times with different audiences before you give your first on-campus job talk. Have the practice audience ask you difficult questions that help you feel more comfortable thinking on the spot. Try to attend on-campus job talks in your department before you apply to get a sense of what the experience will be like for you.

Don't forget that others in your home department have likely already gone through a job talk. Ask them about the norms for job talks in your field, what they took with them, how they dressed, and what kinds of questions they were asked during the Q&A.

### **Additional Resources**

- [Interviews: The All-Important Job Talk](#)
- [Rules for Science Job Talks](#)

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