Chalk Talks
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What are Chalk Talks?

• Part of the interview process for most tenure track academic research positions
• NOT the same as your job talk
• “Informal” 1-2 hour evaluation of “worthiness” for the position
• Not applicable to every job interview
  o you should ask if you will be expected to give one
• Formats can vary (ask about the format)
  o Research aims
  o General knowledge
  o Teach a class

What do they want to know about you?

• Do you have a plan?
  o What is your plan for the next 5 years?
    ▪ Specific aims/goals/projects
    ▪ Preliminary data
  o How are you going to accomplish this?
    ▪ Experimental plan/tools
    ▪ Sources of funding
  o Do you have the right balance of safety and risk?
  o Do you have a back-up plan?

How are you different from your advisor?

• Distinguish yourself as an independent investigator
• Preliminary data from your postdoc lab: who is first/last author?
• Have you discussed boundaries and which projects you can take with you?

Can you teach?

• Know your audience
• Can you bring everyone on the same page?
• Do you explain things clearly?

Can you think on your feet?
• Expect interruptions
• Expect that you will not finish, don’t waste time or words
• Expect to be taken off topic, tactfully regain control

Are you the person I want down the hall?

• Will I be able to work with you?
• Will students and postdocs be able to work with you?

“Suggested” format for a research based chalk talk

1) What to bring
   a) 2-5 power point slides (back-up on email & portable drive)
      i) Check in advance if a projector will be available.
      ii) outline
      iii) background (1-2 slides max)
      iv) specific aims / projects
      v) preliminary data
   b) White board pens (two colors, not red & green)

2) Start with “Big Question” and a little background on what motivates you as scientist (<5 min).
   a) Don’t assume they remember your talk (or were even there).
   b) What is your big question?
   c) Why is this an important area of research?
   d) Why are you the best person to address this question?
      i) Background
      ii) Skills/techniques
   e) How are you going to address the question?
      i) Short-term goals
      ii) Long-term goals

3) Outline your “5 year plan” (25-35 min)
   a) specific aims (NIH R01, NSF style) or 2-3 parallel projects
   b) state hypotheses, specific tests/experiments (not all the details)
   c) expected outcomes, identify pitfalls and potential solutions
   d) present preliminary data if you have it
   e) If you need a specific piece of equipment, justify here
   f) Have a blend of safe and risky projects,
   g) Have a timeline (regardless of funding)
   h) have a back up plan or suggest how you can “tweak” your research to pursue alternate avenues for funding
4) **Questions you should be able to answer:**
   a) When do you plan to submit your first grant?
   b) What if project A, B or C doesn’t work?
   c) What is your hypothesis?
   d) What will be your first manuscript? How long will this take?
   e) What is an appropriate project for a grad student, post doc etc?
   f) Where do undergraduates fit in? (if this is component of the program)
   g) How will you staff your lab?
   h) What are your potential funding agencies (NIH/NSF/Private foundations)?
   i) How do you see yourself fitting in here?