

THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW: WHAT TO DO

BRIEF JOB TALK DESCRIPTION

If a job candidate receives a callback for a day-long interview for a faculty position at a law school, she will have to give a job talk at one point during the day. The substance of a job talk is usually drawn from a published or forthcoming paper by the job candidate. The job talk serves many purposes, but it is increasingly being used as a proxy for good teaching skills.

A job talk usually involves a 20-to-25 minute presentation of a legal argument/thesis and its supporting subparts by the job candidate, followed by a question-and-answer session that lasts approximately 40 to 45 minutes. Each law school's culture, however, differs. At some law schools, a candidate will not get a full 20 to 25 minutes to present his or her talk before the faculty begins to ask questions; rather, faculty members will begin to ask their questions at any point during the candidate's presentation, and she will have to make sure that she gets back on track after each question and response.

Usually, the job candidate will send her job talk paper to the Faculty Appointments Committee Chair or her faculty-host a week or two before the talk for circulation to the law school faculty.

PREPARING FOR THE JOB TALK

- The job candidate should carefully proofread, proofread, AND proofread and then edit the job talk paper before he or she sends it for circulation to the law faculty. It is understandably hard to catch all mistakes in the paper, but working to reduce the number of mistakes in the paper is crucial.
- If the unpublished job talk paper is the only publication or is a forthcoming publication of the job candidate, he or she must work hard to get that paper in the best shape possible. Faculty will want to see an example of the candidate's scholarly writing, so this paper must be circulated to the law faculty for review.
- If the job candidate has at least one other published paper but does not have a job talk paper draft that is in good enough shape to be shared with a faculty (assuming that the job talk paper and the published paper are different), he or she should not send that rough draft of the job talk paper for circulation. Impressions of a candidate's writing, even at an early stage, are very important. In such a case, the job candidate may instead send a mistake-free, well-written, and well-organized paper abstract and a two-to-three page short description of the paper's thesis and its supporting arguments for circulation.
- The job candidate should actually write or type out her job talk on paper, writing it in plain and clear language. In writing the actual job talk, the candidate should keep in mind that only one or two faculty members at any particular law school may be familiar with her subject area.
- The job candidate should time her job talk. One double-spaced page with 18-point font tends to equal one minute of a job talk. Faculty often do not like for a talk to be more than 20 to 25 minutes.
- The job candidate should rehearse her job talk over and over again (even in a mirror). The candidate should rehearse the talk to a point that it is memorized. Such practice will give the candidate a good comfort level during the talk. Comfort level and ease of speech is often cited as a sign of good teaching; as stated previously, the job talk is increasingly being used as a proxy for good teaching skills.
- The job candidate should practice several rounds of her talk before knowledgeable lawyer and non-lawyer friends. Giving the talk to knowledgeable non-lawyer friends helps to ensure that the talk will be accessible to all faculty members regardless of their area of law. It also will make the

candidate more comfortable with answering questions on the spot, and it will allow her to get a sense of the types of questions that she may encounter during her job interviews.

- Ideally, the job candidate also will give one practice round talk in a mock job talk arranged by a faculty mentor at his or her law school or another law school (excluding those where the candidate is under consideration). It is good for candidates to have plenty of practice in answering questions, especially before faculty members who have seen and participated in many talks.
- When the candidate is invited for a callback, she should ask the person who is extending the invitation for (1) the name of her host for that interview, (2) the names of any faculty members who may be attending her dinner, and (3) the names of members of the Faculty Appointments Committee members, if the candidate does not already have that information. The candidate also should ask whether the law school's faculty will allow her 20 to 25 minutes of uninterrupted time to present her paper or whether the faculty will jump in with questions at any point during the talk.
- The candidate should explore and carefully study the law school's webpage, particularly the webpages of faculty members, before arriving for her daylong callback interview.
- The candidate should read select publications by faculty members at the law school who teach and write in her same field and become familiar with them. Where possible, the candidate should consider how those faculty members' research ties into her own.

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF GIVING A LAW FACULTY JOB TALK

THE DOS

- The job candidate should begin her talk with easily identifiable argument/thesis in the introduction. The candidate can start the talk with a simple statement such as “My talk addresses In my talk, I will argue”
- The job candidate should announce a roadmap during the introduction of her talk that details the various steps she will take in making her argument and proving her thesis. The candidate should then actually follow that roadmap during the talk.
- The job candidate should allow a member of the faculty, most likely her host, to keep the faculty queue for questions.
- The job candidate should bring a pen or pencil and a small notepad to jot down notes as people ask questions. Law professors love to ask multi-part questions and to see that their questions are being seriously considered.
- Where appropriate and sincere, the candidate should begin a response to a faculty member’s question with “good question” or “great question.” However, under no circumstances, should the candidate begin every single response with “good question” or “great question.”
- The job candidate should keep in mind that faculty members are not only examining how well she substantively answers questions, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how well she, the candidate, plays with ideas. Ultimately, faculty members are trying to figure out, “Is this a person whom I like to talk ideas with on the faculty? Is this a person who will be in conversation with other scholars in her field in her work and advance the name and mission of the law school?”
- The job candidate also should keep in mind that faculty members may use her style of responding to questions and her actual responses to questions as a proxy for how she may respond to students’ questions in the classroom. The candidate should avoid being defensive when responding to questions.
- The job candidate should feel free to ask the faculty member to more clearly state his question (in a polite way).
- The job candidate should answer the question that is asked.
- The job candidate should communicate, either directly or indirectly, that she welcomes questions from the audience and enjoys conversing with others about her ideas. In other words, she must demonstrate through her actions during the talk that she is intellectually curious.
- The job candidate should feel free to say “That issue is not central to my paper, so I have not given it a great deal of thought, but thinking off the top of my head, here is my initial reaction to your question. . . .”
- If someone’s question leads the job candidate into a future idea or piece that you plan to write, the job candidate should feel free to state so and give her preliminary thoughts. Such a response may help to demonstrate that you have a scholarly agenda.
- The job candidate should look around the room and engage the faculty as she presents her talk and answers questions.
- If two or more faculty members’ questions to the job candidate begin to feel like part of an ongoing debate between those faculty members, it likely is. The candidate should stay calm and should not take it personally. She should keep in mind that others on the faculty who are familiar with the longstanding debate between the faculty members will know what was going on and will not attribute anything negative to her as a result.

THE DON'TS

- The job candidate should not simply read her job talk. She must engage the faculty—the entire room—with her eye contact, gestures, and voice level.
- If the faculty will give the candidate 20 to 25 minutes of uninterrupted time to give her job talk, the candidate should never encourage faculty members to ask questions as she goes along with the talk. In other words, if given the time, the candidate should take the 20 minutes of uninterrupted talk time to get her argument and points across.
- The candidate should not try to cram too much into the talk. She should leave the details for the question-answer period. The question-and-answer session is a great opportunity for the candidate to show off her knowledge of the subject of her topic and her ability to “think on her feet.”
- The job candidate should not defend her thesis and arguments at all costs. The job candidate should remember that faculty members are examining not only the substance of her arguments but also her ability to discuss ideas with others, to give feedback, and to answer questions.
- The job candidate should not answer questions in an arrogant tone.