

Job Market Seminar

By October of the year you plan to go on the job market you should make a seminar presentation in your field workshop. This is a practice for the seminars you will be doing later in the year during campus visits.

I have listed here some important points for you to consider while preparing your seminar presentation.

1. Time management. Your seminar should be approximately 75 minutes long, including time for discussion and interaction. You should be prepared to be flexible in length, extending the talk up to 90 minutes, or down to 60 minutes, depending on the schedule. Whenever you give a seminar, *always* ask for the time the seminar is to be finished, and *always* finish by this time. Do not go over your allotted time, despite your natural temptation to explain your work in detail.
2. Prepare slides. See the separate handout.
3. Direct your seminar at a typical economist at the institution to which you are applying. Do not direct your seminar at specialists. Assume that they know very little about your area of specialty. Do not assume that they have read the literature on which your research is based. Be prepared to explain the basics. The ability to clearly explain the fundamental issues is a highly valued attribute.
4. Be careful about introducing side issues which may cause distraction. A poorly placed bullet point or comment may open the audience to a 15 minute discussion about a side issue, and this will derail your seminar. The solution is to only introduce issues which are central to your topic.
5. As quickly as possible, get to your fundamental contribution. For example, do not spend too much time reviewing the prior literature. This might appear to be a contradiction of point 3 above (and it is), so this presents a difficult balancing-act.
6. Be very clear about the distinctions between (a) the prior literature and (b) your contribution. The audience will not be familiar with the details. You need to inform them. The audience will be looking for **your** contribution. Make it easy for them by clearly identifying what already is known, and what you do that is new. Do not hesitate to be repetitive on this point.
7. It is often good to have a summary of the main findings at the beginning of the talk. Often, some of the audience will leave early (other commitments) and you will want them to know the main message.
8. It is difficult to present all of your research in 75 minutes. Therefore you must prioritize. Decide what is important, and what is less important. Talk to your advisor and fellow students about these decisions, because it is easy to lose perspective when the research is very fresh in your mind. For example, it is typical to be very excited about some mathematical derivations which you have successfully worked out (and perhaps sweated many hours over), and you would like to present these details to the audience. However, the truth is that the audience will be terribly bored by this. Typically, it is best to leave the technical details to the paper. In the seminar, present the main results, their meaning, and their interpretations.

9. Small details matter. Learn the correct pronunciations of the terms you use, the names you reference. Know the correct names of any Greek symbols you use.
10. Practice your seminar. Multiple times if possible.
11. In previous years you probably attended job market seminars. Reflect on the details of these talks and learn from them. What worked for you as a member of the audience? What turned you off?
12. At UW and many other top research departments, our seminars are very interactive. The audience asks many questions, and the give-and-take is viewed as an important part of the interview process. In other departments, the audience is less active, and lets the speaker present their talk with little or no interruption. Be prepared for this difference.
13. Handling questions from the audience is one of the most difficult tasks to master. Here is some simple advice. When a question arises, stop your talk and listen. Be polite but assertive. Try to focus on the intention of the questioner. (For example, if the question is from someone in a very different field of research, it may be quite difficult to understand what they are asking. Sometimes asking for specific clarification will help.) Make eye contact with the questioner as you listen and respond. While you should always attempt to answer all questions, do not let yourself or your talk get distracted or sidetracked from the main theme. It is your seminar, and you should always be in charge.