

ESM 438 Week Four

Fielding Questions in Talks & Interviews

Instructor: Alex Phillips



UC SANTA BARBARA

Bren School of Environmental
Science & Management

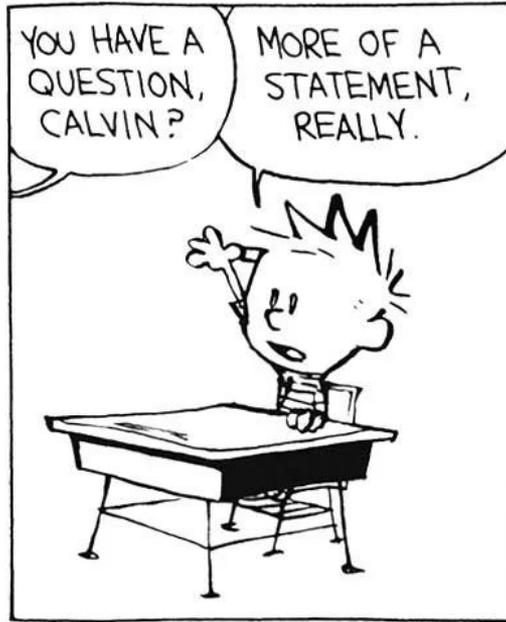
By the end of this class you will have a completed 10-15 minute presentation

Lecture

Lab

General Public Speaking Skills	Movie Monologues & Elevator Pitches
Outlining Presentations	Short Story & Introductions
Presenting Data & Slide Design	Methods & Results
<i>Answering Questions</i>	<i>Conclusions, Q & A, Interview Blitz</i>
Student Choice!	Full Presentations

You're not done with your presentation until you are done answering questions!



General Steps:

1. Listen and prepare: *listen, don't interrupt, take a breath, think*
2. Clarify or restate: *restate for you/audience, okay to clarify*
3. Respond: *show gratitude, enthusiasm, ~60s, one person*

How can you start the response to a question?



Activity!

Grab a partner and write down a list of alternatives to “*that’s a great question!*” that you could use in a talk.

Share your favorites with the the class.

How can you start the response to a question?

- Thank you, that's a great/thoughtful/interesting question
- I like where your mind is at...
- Funny you asked!
- Let me answer that question with another question
- What I think you're getting at is...
- Thank you for bringing that up
- That's a little outside my expertise/the scope of the project
- That is a question / a lot of ideas
- I was hoping someone would ask that
- I've given that a lot of thought
-

General do's and don'ts while fielding questions after a presentation

Do's

- Designate a leader in a group
- Admit when you don't know
- Keep tone similar to presentation
- Maintain posture and pacing
- Directly answer + restate - avoid tangents
- Practice common questions!

Don'ts:

- Use filler words
- Spend too much time on one question or one person
- Just say "I don't know"
- Gaslight the audience
- Be too defensive
- Use jargon
- "Does that make sense?" (?)

General do's and don'ts while fielding questions after a presentation

Do's

- Maintain professional posture/tone
- Pause and think if needed!
- Respect your audience
- Express appreciation of feedback
- Be open to new ideas/perspectives
- Brainstorm questions in advance
- Have backup slides ready
- Ask “did I answer your question?”

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Don'ts:

- Throw *anyone* under the bus
- Make something up!
- Guess without letting people know
- Make someone feel bad for asking
- Avoid *obviously, clearly, and simply*
- Turn a question into a joke
- Be defensive in your response (even with combative questions)

Unfortunately, combative questions are common, especially for women presenters

Tips for combative questions:

- Diffuse their anger with empathy
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Invite their input afterwards
- Control your defensive response
- Take the professional “high road”



Remain professional with challenging or combative questions

Other people have already made these estimates. I don't understand what you're adding.

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Response idea:

You're right, there's a lot of great research in this field, and we're lucky to have learned so much from that. Our group specifically focused on adding Indigenous knowledge, which hadn't been included before in estimates.

Remain professional with challenging or combative questions

You clearly just don't understand fisherman's needs. There is no way they would go for this management plan.

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Response idea:

That's a valid concern and I'm glad you brought that up. There are many different stakeholders impacted by this work, and more voices would improve on-the-ground outcomes. We have done x and y and plan to do z. I'd love to talk after with you more about your ideas to improve fisherman engagement.

Most questions you get will fall into four categories

1. I know everything

3. I know nothing

2. I know some things

4. I don't understand

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1. *I know everything*

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Awesome! Breathe, don't interrupt with excitement, restate, don't give the impression it's an easy answer, 30-60 s

2. *I know some things*

4. *I don't understand*

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It's okay! More than "I don't know," don't make things up, reframe around future work or outside of scope, invite follow up

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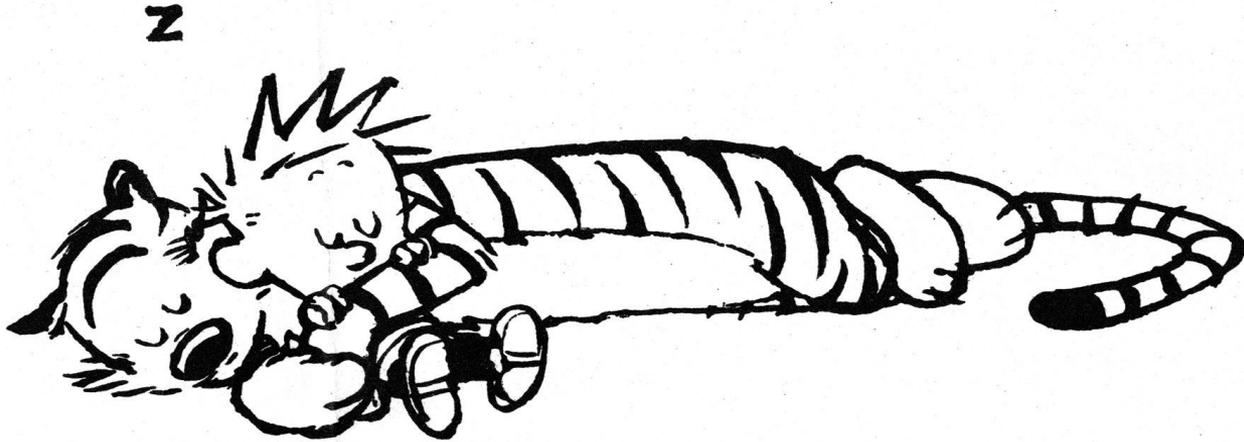
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Restate, repeat, ask for clarification, help them focus/narrow question, "about my model inputs or data outputs?"

Break!

Take five to ten minutes for yourself



Interviews are an opportunity to show off your science communication skills



Things to prepare:

1. Information about the job
2. Questions for the interviewers
3. *“Tell me about yourself”*
4. Behavioral stories from your CV

Before your interview, thoroughly research the job position and company

Who: Company info/structure, major players, committee, recent hires, contacts

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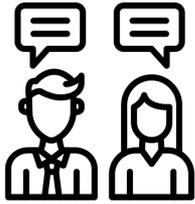
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Where: Location of company or offices, travel requirements, hybrid schedule

Why: Mission, role of position in company, why you are a good fit and interested

What are some questions to ask people interviewing you?



Interviews go two ways! Beyond showing your appreciation, asking questions help see if *they* are a good fit for *you*. Grab a partner and brainstorm!

Activity!

Share your favorites with the the class.

What are some questions to ask interviewers?

- Can you tell me a bit about your management/mentorship style?
- What are the opportunities for growth and promotion in this position?
- What are company strengths and weaknesses?
- Do you expect this position to be in the office? Telework? Hybrid? (with kids?)
- What are characteristics that you see in people in this role that find success?
- What is the work culture? work/life balance?
- How would you or I know if I found success? How do you evaluate success?
- What is your vacation policy? Do employees typically work on the weekend?
- What is the process moving forward? When will I learn more?
- How does your company handle DEI?

**“Tell me about yourself” is the most likely
first question you will get asked**

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Considerations:

- There is no excuse to not have this one prepared and ready!
- Many versions of this question: “*Walk me through your resume*” “*What led you to this job*” or “*I’d love to learn more about you*”
- Scaffold your answer with the **Present, Past, Future** method
- Tailor the “past” section to include relevant experience or skills
- Make it feel like this job is the obvious next step for your career
- Feel free to add personality or humor, but keep it minimal
- Great way to direct predictable follow up questions

Examples of tailoring the present, past, future model to a *policy* job

Present:

I currently work at UC Santa Barbara as a science communication and policy officer, where I help scientists maximize their impact by training them and connecting them to decision makers. For example, I have worked with eight state agencies this year, including the CA Ocean Protection Council.

Examples of tailoring the present, past, future model to a *policy* job

Past:

Before this, I got my PhD in geochemistry from Caltech. But throughout my PhD my favorite moments weren't the midnights in the mass spec labs, but the times I got to communicate my results, from group meetings to public talks. I embraced many opportunities in science communication and policy, including a one year science policy fellowship with AGU. In my fellowship, I got to visit DC, meet with people in congress, and bring this knowledge to my university, where I led congressional visits for my peers. This experience really solidified my passion in policy and led me to my current job with UCSB.

Examples of tailoring the present, past, future model to a *policy* job

Future:

Although my current job allows me to work with state decision makers, I am really craving the experience to work with the federal government. And that's why I'm applying for this job. I would be really excited to apply my skills and learn more about policy at this level.

Examples of tailoring the present, past, future model to a *teaching* job

Present:

I currently work at UC Santa Barbara as a science communicator. Here, I use my scientific training to teach other scientists how to best reach their audience. I do this through developing and hosting a series of workshops and guest lectures.

Examples of tailoring the present, past, future model to a *teaching* job

Past:

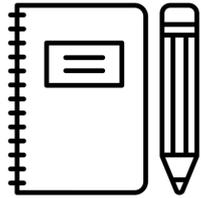
Before this, I was a student at UCSB. During my undergrad I worked extensively in K-12 education, participating in numerous campus programs. That gave me the foundation in graduate school at Caltech to focus on improving my university teaching. I TA-ed six classes, co-developed curriculum, and took classes on pedagogy. As a postdoc I was an instructor of record for courses that I designed, including a seminar on DEI issues that was requested from students.

Examples of tailoring the present, past, future model to a *teaching* job

Future:

Although I get to do a lot of workshops in my current job, I miss working full time in the classroom on longer scale learning. That's why I'm applying for this teaching position. I would love to get to apply my skills and experience to fit the needs of your department.

Brainstorm a generic answer for “tell me about yourself”



Using bullet points, take a minute to jot down notes using the *present, past, future* framework for two to three different job types you might want to apply for.

Activity!

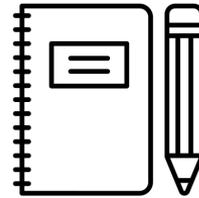
Share your example with the class.

Behavioral interview questions usually fall into broad, predictable categories

Tell me about a time when...

1. You were a leader
2. You worked with a team
3. You made a mistake
4. You reached a goal
5. You solved a problem

You cannot prepare for every behavioral interview question out there!



Homework!

Prepare 1-3 broad examples of each of these.

You can use the STAR framework to prepare and answer behavioral questions

Situation

Provide any needed background and context

Action

Explain what you did and how you did it

Task

Describe the problems and challenges

Result

State benefits, lessons, outcomes, relate to job

Example of STAR method for: “Tell me a time you failed as a leader”

Situation

I was advising a younger female student in my lab

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Task

She told me about sexist comments from a supervisor

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Result

I learned to slow down before acting, prioritize others' needs

Lab this week will give you practice fielding questions in talks and interviews



Assignment One

Look over your resume and prep anecdotes for common behavioral interview questions



Assignment Two

Present the final section of your powerpoint. Instead of slide feedback, we will ask you questions!

If you haven't already...

Fill out week five topic survey!

Fill out teaching evaluation!

(Probably) No office hours Thursday!