

CHALK TALK

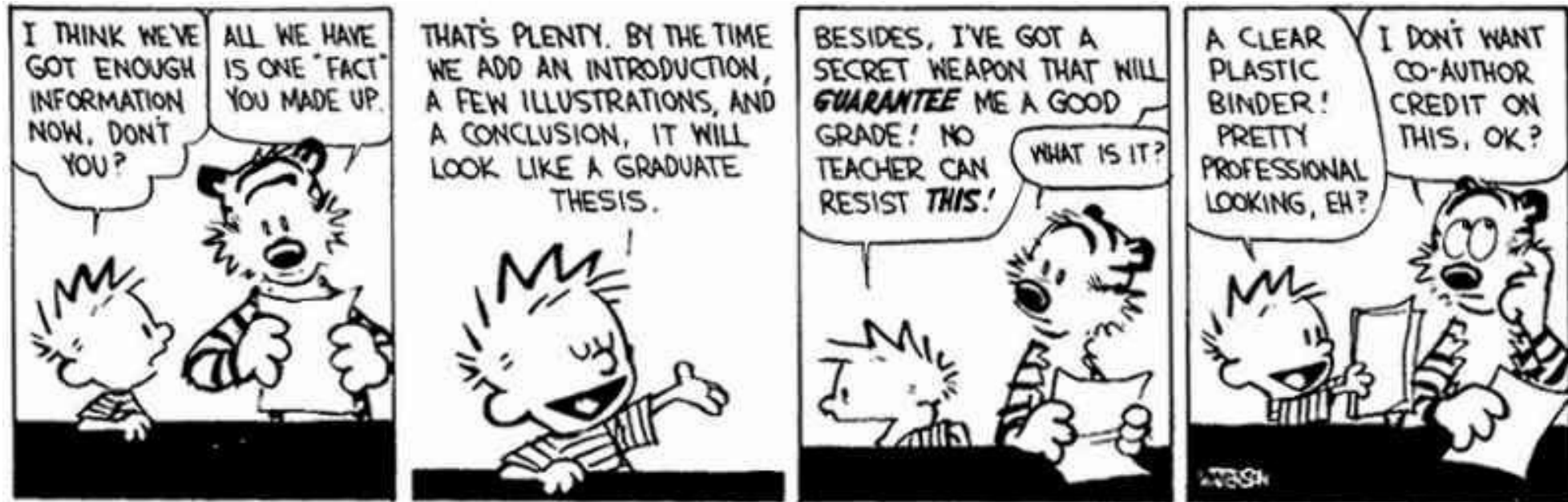
AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A
CONVERSATION IN WRITING

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When do people give a chalk talk?

Oral portion of some kind of exam (*i.e.* prelim exam)

Faculty job interview

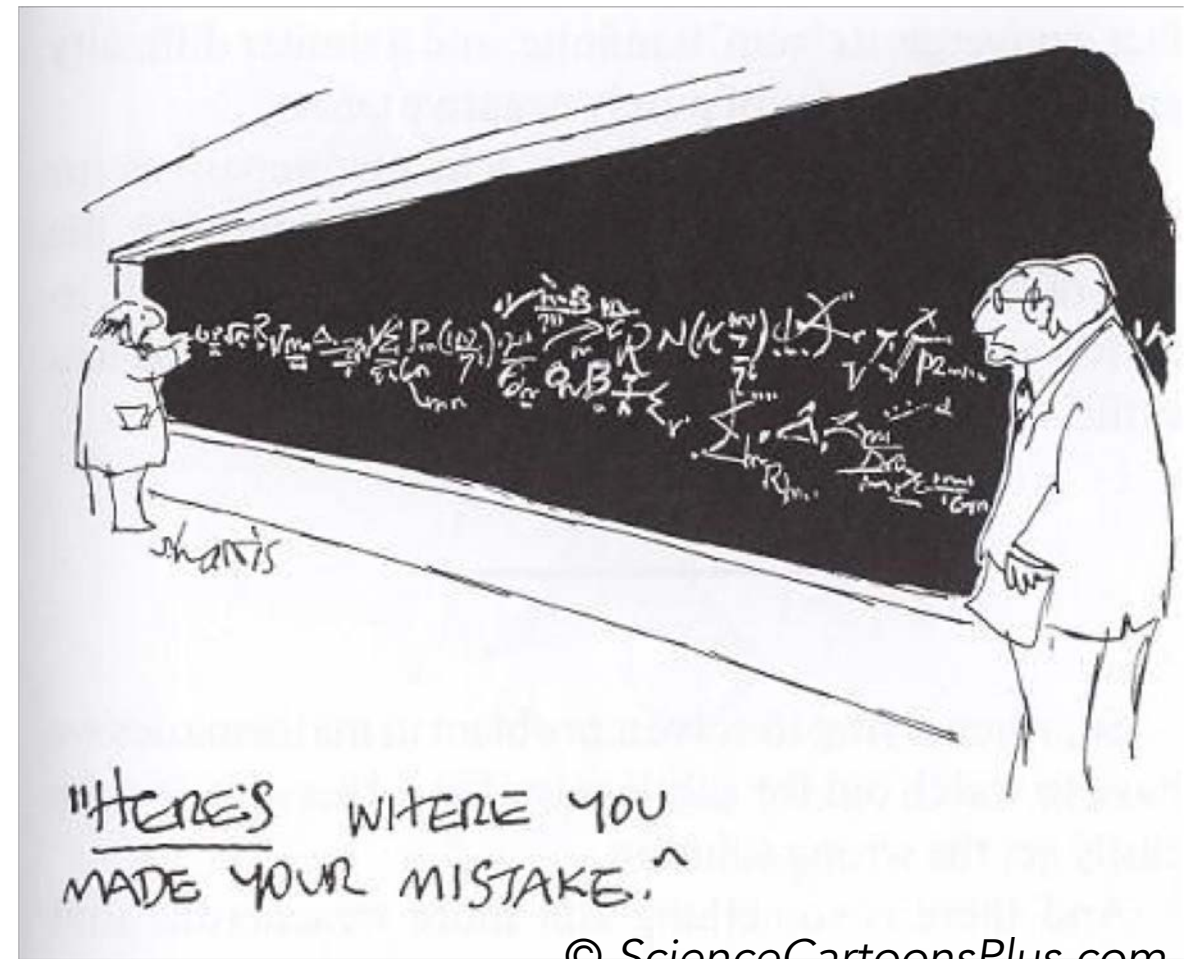


Purpose of a chalk talk:

Convey your ideas and discuss them with *potential future colleagues*
this is true regardless of whether you are at an exam or interview)

Opportunity for your future colleagues to see how you think and respond to questions in real time

But also....its a sales pitch combined with public performance and mental gymnastics



Regardless of whether its for a job interview or prelim exam, the goal of the chalk talk is the same:

*(1) To **EXCITE** your audience about your ideas*

*(2) To convince your audience that you can **IMPLEMENT** your ideas*

*It is **NOT** to demonstrate your mastery over a body of knowledge (although to give a good chalk talk this is a prerequisite, but a chalk talk is much more than just knowing all the facts)*

*It is about convincing people that the facts that **THEY** know are wrong. Or to put it more mildly – that their knowledge is incomplete and **YOU** have the missing piece of the puzzle*

What makes a good chalk talk?

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1. What is the problem you are going to solve?

The chalk talk is your way of describing your future research *vision*

State your overall question or hypothesis or title in a way that articulates the problem

2. How are you going to solve it?

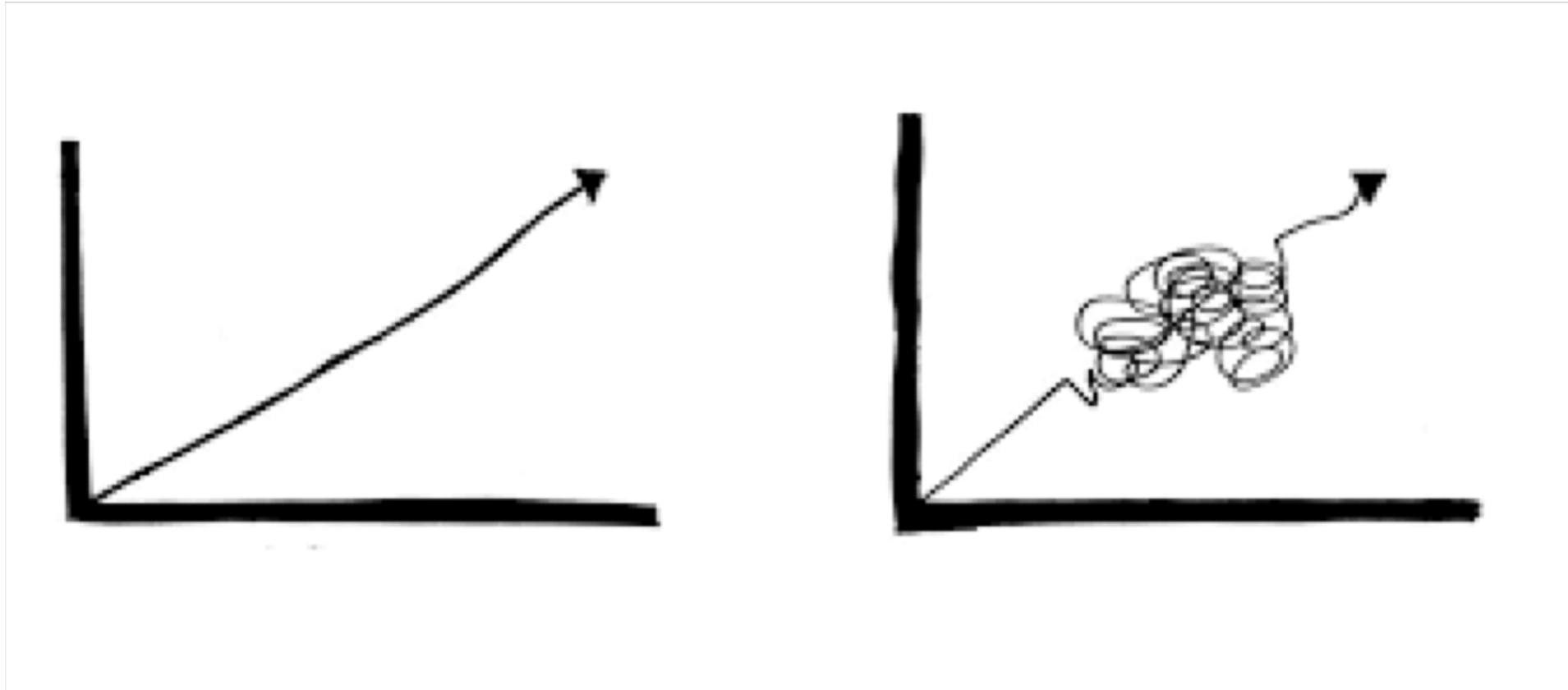
This is where you state your research 'Aims' and describe as briefly and concisely as possible while providing key experimental support and rationale, how you are going to approach the problem, and what key tools, resources, or insight you have that makes *you* the right person to solve this problem.

3. What is going to be the long-term benefit to you, your institution, the community, etc. if you do solve it?

Why is doing what you are proposing to do important?

This is where you summarize what you hope to accomplish and articulate why doing it is going to be groundbreaking/new/valuable/worth doing

How are you going to get there?



Tips:

1. Provide a summary page with a brief summary/abstract-type paragraph, your Aims, brief summary of each aim, and an overall summary of the future impact of achieving your stated goals.
2. You will typically have 5-10 minutes before the chalk talk starts. Take this time to write your title/question, your aims, and **draw a model**
3. When the chalk talk starts you will probably have about 10-15 minutes of talking before you start getting questions from the audience.

you should PLAN/PREPARE for about a 25-30 minute presentation.
But it will go for close to 60 minutes with interruptions and questions

What should you convey in those 25-30 minutes?

1. In the first 3-5 minutes explain in simple language the overall importance of your research. This serves to set the stage for everything you are about to tell them. This should be big-picture/concept-oriented rather than detail-focused. Most of your audience will not be experts in your field. You need to excite them about the question you are asking and you should be able to do it reasonably fast.
2. Use the next 10-15 minutes to go over your specific aims succinctly, and again focusing on *what* the questions are, *why* you are asking them, and *how* you are approaching solving them. This is where you convey your overall mastery of the field but not with so much detail that they lose the overall big picture. If THEY lose sight of the big picture, they won't think 'This seems super interesting and important but I don't understand it.' They will think 'this person doesn't think in a big-picture way and can't convey their ideas well.'
3. Use the last 5 minutes or so to convey the long-term impact of your work and how it fits into your long-term vision for your research program, and how it fits into the field. This is also an opportunity to convey how it fits into the department, which shows you are thinking about how to be a colleague.

What you have written/drawn on the board should be a prompt or prop to help focus and frame your talk, but not a crutch

Spend most of your time talking to your audience and looking at them (eye-contact), not facing the board to draw or reading from the board

When questions are asked, it is OK to write a few things down or to draw/add more information to your model *if it helps to clarify things*, but again, the more you spend looking at the board, the less you spend connecting with your audience

How do you make sure that your chalk talk goes well?

....or at least as well as it can?

....what can we learn from people who regularly perform in high pressure situations?



If you don't know who these people are, stop reading immediately and go learn about them. That will be much more helpful to you than reading this



PRACTICE

When you realise that you probably should have done it at least once before with someone's help before doing it by yourself.

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learn to LIKE practicing

why are you doing this?

Keep your eyes on the prize – think of the long-term goals you have and the benefit of a good outcome

BUT DON'T FORGET:



During the chalk talk: Be open, friendly, engaged, enthusiastic, confident

....AND...

Be willing to accept constructive criticism/pushback on your favorite and most closely-held ideas and have an open discussion about why your view of the world is the right one as opposed to the one suggested by someone asking you questions

DON'T GET:

Defensive, aggressive, flustered, angry, dismissive
(this is the kiss of death in any chalk talk)

Answer each question directly, respectfully, thoughtfully

This is where the people who



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Really shine