

# CHALK TALK

AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A  
CONVERSATION IN WRITING

Frederick Diversity  
Committee  
February 15, 2019

# Independent thinker

- A chalk talk is an opportunity for a search committee to see how an applicant thinks on the fly with a stick of chalk or whiteboard marker in hand or, increasingly, a shared screen over Skype.



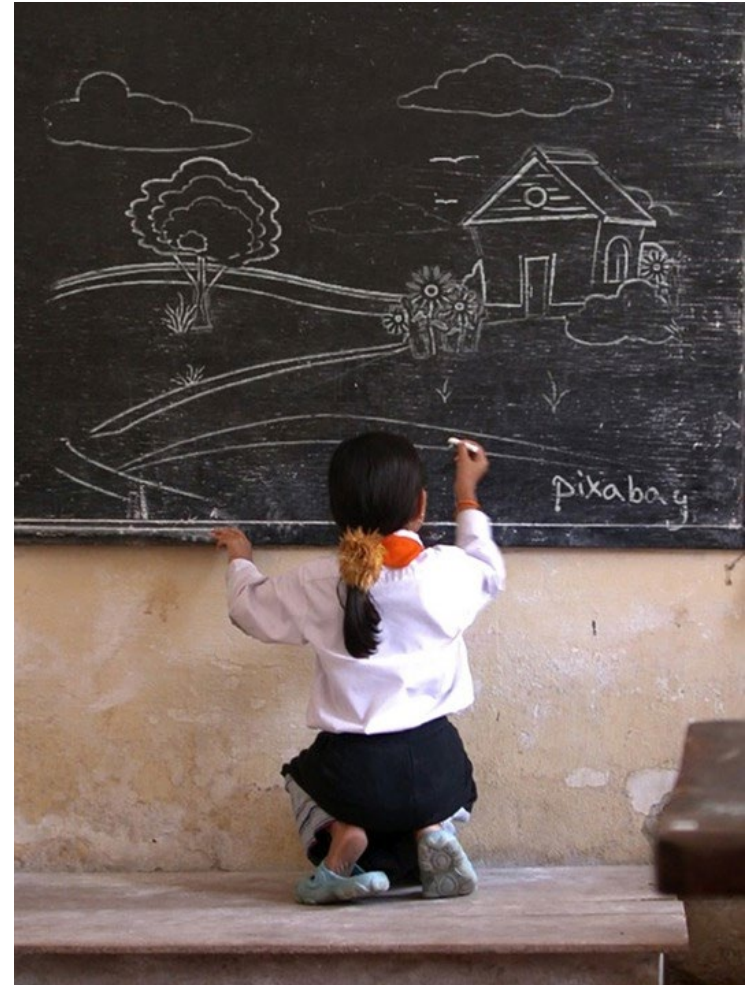
# Fundable

- In a chalk talk you should provide a window into your plan for your research career. You want to give a high-level view of what you'll start working on immediately once you're hired, and 5 years from there.



# Personality

- Audience should have some idea of who you are as a person, your acumen, mature judgment skills, and definition of the most important gaps that you will be able to address in your chosen field.





# Engaging

- It's also your chance to show the committee how excited you are about your work, and get them excited about it as well.



*Remember, if you are giving this talk it is because you are hired*

## Steps- Introduction

- Begin by writing out your title. This should be one sentence that they will use in the future to associate with you and your work (no acronyms)
- Write 1-2 bulleted list points to outline the major previous findings from your postdoc. Keep this general (i.e. no details, enzyme names, mutation sites, etc.)
- Write out the titles of BOTH of your TWO aims

## Steps- AIM 1 (Project)

- AIM 1-This is the project that you will start your lab, it must be feasible and fundable (your Ro1)
- Describe in detail the project with which you will give to your first graduate student. This demonstrates your commitment to teaching and that you are prepared to hit the ground running
- Summarize by telling them how the results from this aim will lead to novel, important, and exciting questions. This leads you straight into aim 2

## Steps- AIM 2 (Project)

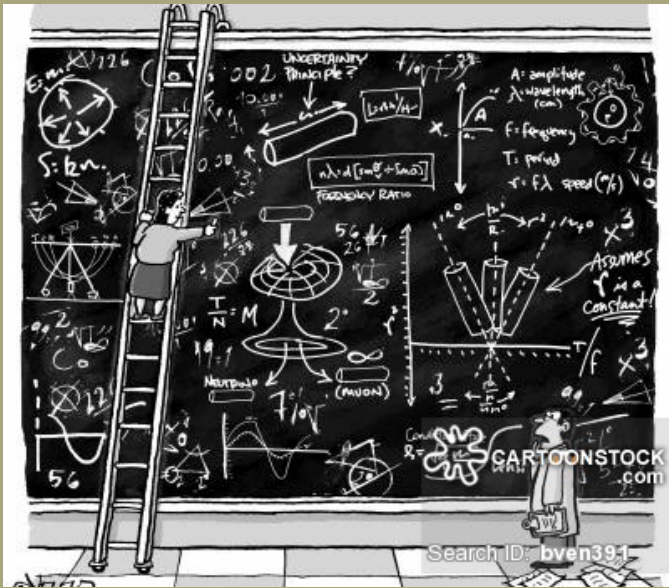
- AIM 2- Is the “big picture”
- This is your opportunity to let your passion for research show. What problems do you intend to solve or gaps in knowledge do you intend to fill through your career as a researcher?
- Opportunity to propose use of new techniques or a new model system
- You get major bonus points for composure, clarity and cutting-edge approaches to problems that will move your field forward



## Steps- Summary

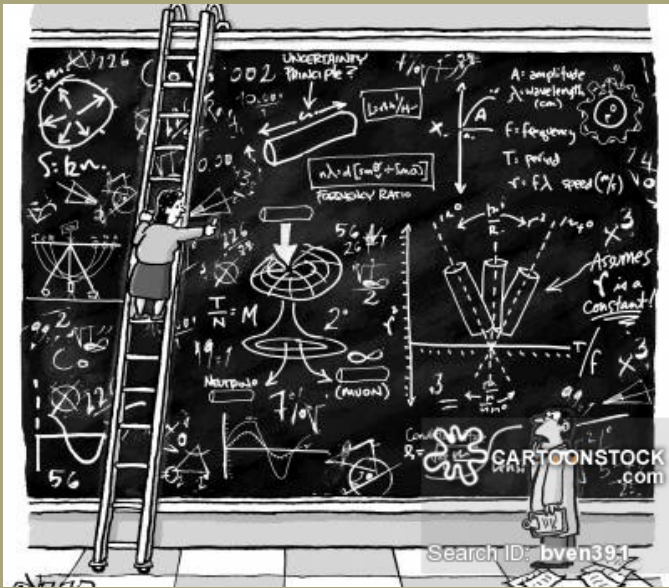
- Recap and bring your audience to the same page.
- Conveniently point to the AIMS (projects) you had written.
- Now is the time to point at AIMS (projects), resources and future plans.

# Use the blackboard wisely

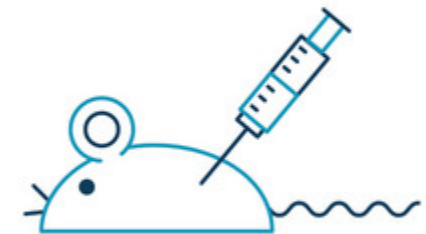
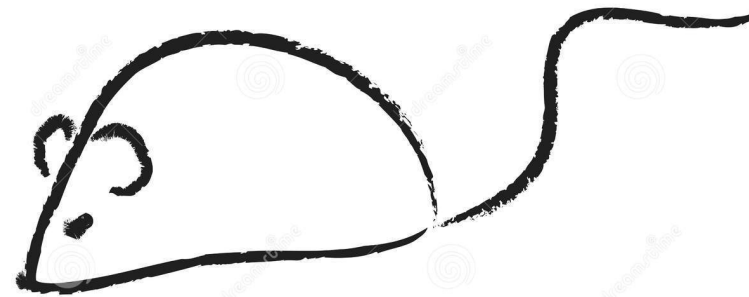


- The blackboard is a tool you should use wisely
- Practice many times (ask what surface you will be using)
- Use the space provided in an efficient way
- Build the story progressively so that at the end you can look at it and recap. People walking in at the last minute should be able to understand the drawings

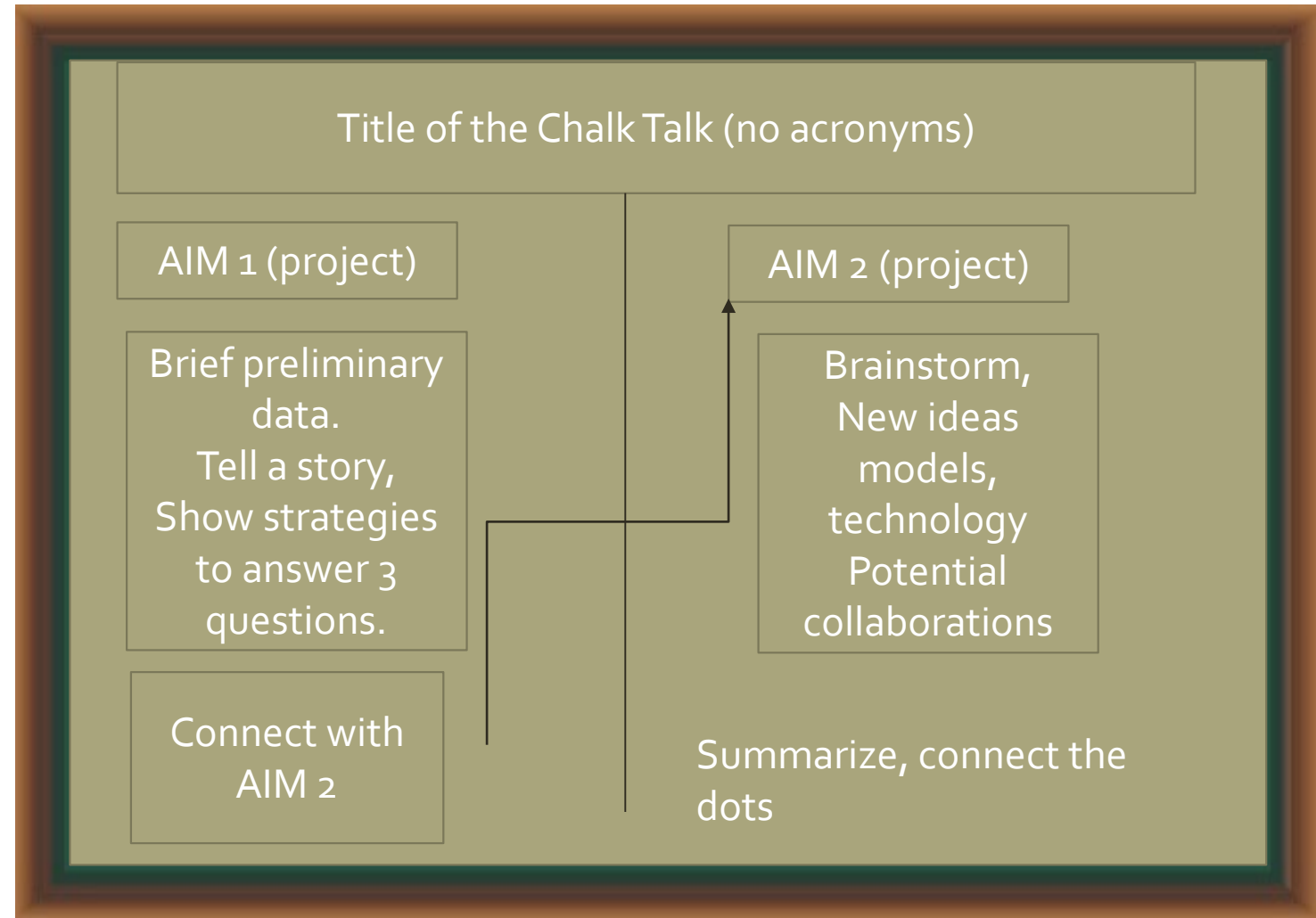
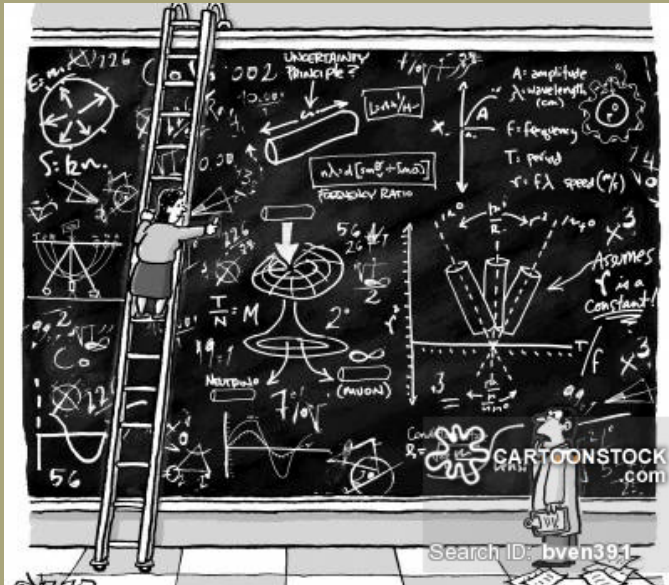
# Use the blackboard wisely



- Be sure to avoid acronyms
- You do not need to be an artist, use geometric figures to represent organisms and use arrows and other traditional graphical elements that people are familiar with



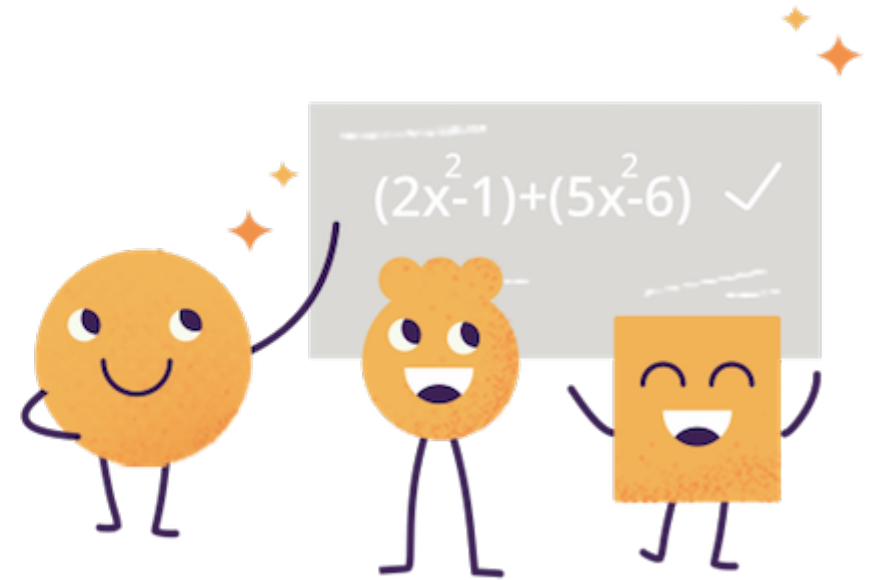
# Use the blackboard wisely



## Let's practice

- Begin with who you are, what you work on, and the wider significance of your work (aka your elevator pitch). Aim for about 45 seconds (*Personality*)
- After that, get through your most important points, even if you have to frontload them. (*Inner PI*)
- State the two aims of the first grant you'll write, then fill in the details of how you will accomplish the work (*Strategic thinker*)
- Note and share the three most important questions in your field, then how you will approach answering them (*Independent thinker*)

Let's practice





What are they  
looking for?



- Would you fit in as a colleague in their department?
- Are you an independent thinker?
- Will you be an effective communicator and teacher, even if there is not a teaching requirement?
- Is there an opportunity to collaborate with you?
- Are you able to attract/secure funds?

Would you fit  
in as a  
colleague in  
their  
department?



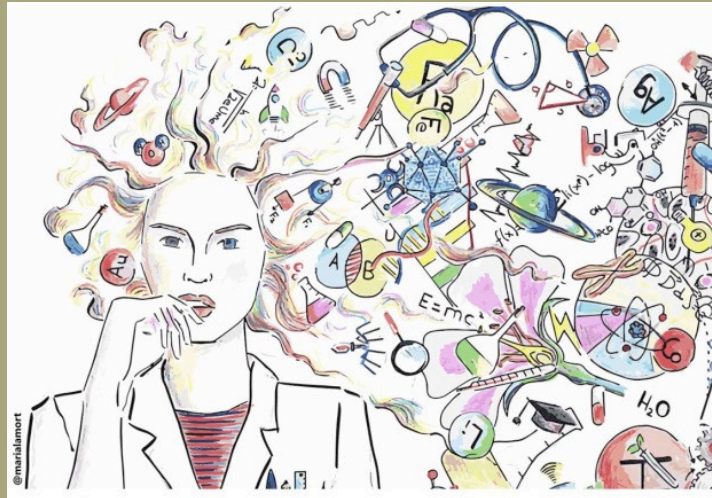
- Speak your mind and contribute ideas. You want to come across as a nice person who is enthusiastic about your work.
- When you are speaking, try saying things like “this experiment yielded the exciting result that...” or “I think this is incredibly important because...”
- You want to demonstrate your passion for science and discovery.

## Are you an independent thinker?



- Through the course of your postdoctoral training, you matured into an independent thinker.
- Spend time reviewing the literature in any fields you propose to enter.
- Expect someone to ask you how your research will diverge from your PI's work. You should prepare for this by having a conversation with your PI *before* you interview.
- You can also show maturity and independence by the way you answer questions. Anticipate some of them and have an answer prepared.

## Channel your “inner PI”



- Never interview as though you are a postdoc with only your two hands.
- Project your inner principal investigator, who is capable of defending a progressive research plan to successful colleagues and who appears capable of directing a small research group.
- Faculty will interject freely during your presentation, in part to get their key questions answered and in part to see how you interact and think on your feet. Your ability to interact as a peer is paramount.

Will you be an effective communicator and teacher?



- The chalk talk will inform your audience whether you are an effective communicator.
  - Clarity is essential. Organize your thoughts.
  - Even if the institution does not have a teaching requirement, this is a valuable trait because you must train your lab members and share your research in multiple scientific venues

Is there an opportunity to collaborate with you?



- If applicable, discuss how you have worked with others in the past to further your research.
- Credit those who actually performed the experiments that you are describing.
- Be aware of the research going on in the department, mention some areas of synergy.
- The same is true in reverse, mention how one of your research goals could benefit from the expertise of a particular faculty member.



Is there an opportunity to

Do your homework, identify the research each member of the department is doing. Use the NIH Reporter to see what grants have been awarded to these individuals

<https://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm>

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MATCHMAKER

SEARCH PUBLICATIONS <sup>BETA</sup>

SUBMIT QUERY

CLEAR QUERY

Fiscal Year (FY):   
Current FY is 2019

Active Projects

SELECT

## RESEARCHER AND ORGANIZATION

Principal Investigator (PI) /  
Project Leader:  
(Last Name, First Name)

Greider , Carol

Use '%' for wildcard in PI names

Enter several PI/Project Leader names OR PI Profile IDs

Organization:

LOOKUP

Please enter at least 3 characters to use Lookup.

Contains  Begins with  Exact

Department Type:

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Use '%' for wildcard

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T: Application Type; Act: Activity Code; Project: Admin IC,Serial No.; Year: Support Year/Supplement/Amendment

<input type="checkbox"/>	T	Act	Project	Year	Sub #	Project Title	Contact PI/ Project Leader	Organization	FY	Admin IC	Funding IC	FY Total Cost by IC	Similar Projects
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	R37	AG009383	26		<a href="#">STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF TELOMERASE</a>	<a href="#">GREIDER, CAROL W</a>	JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY	2016	NIA	NIA	\$392,455	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	R35	CA209974	03		<a href="#">TELOMERES AND TELOMERASE IN CANCER</a>	<a href="#">GREIDER, CAROL W</a>	JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY	2019	NCI	NCI	\$942,624	

## Other questions



- They will be wondering how you plan to organize your laboratory
- What types of experiments you plan to do first
- What your funding plans are (including sources)
- What your relationship is with your current principal investigator
- Who you think your major competition is and how well you have thought out your research plans in case things don't work out the way you think they will

# Resources

- ASCB-Preparing your Academic chalk talk
- ASBMS- Demystifying the chalk talk

Questions

