

Homework 4
Room 703 Exercise Reflection

My group consisted of Benjamin Chung, Sung Uk Ryu, Jane Threefoot, Felix Wen, and myself. We were unable to solve the problem; I'll discuss some reasons after narrating our process.

First, we each read our clues aloud, as Sung wrote down the salient points of each clue. Then, we decided that a table would be the best way to organize the information, and so I began tabulating the information on a piece of paper. Due to my position, only about half the group was able to see the paper, and I suspect this may have contributed significantly to our failing to solve the problem. One complication, for example, was a combination of communication errors that somehow led us to think that Carr was a teacher and that Jacob was a Teacher's Aid. This might have been resolved if the person with the corresponding clues had been able to see the table and notice the mistake.

The exercise made clear two differences between written and oral communication:

1. Oral communication relies much more heavily on short term memory.
2. Important technical details are more easily lost in oral communication.

The first point became evident as I tried to tabulate the clues. It was very difficult to keep track of the clues in my head, and only once I had organized them in the table was I able to put the clues together to draw conclusions. This explains why I was the only group member able to implement a process of elimination to build on the given clues. The second point was clear in retrospect from the confusion between Carr and Mr. Jacobs; had I read the title "Mr." I would have immediately realized Jacobs was a teacher's name. Also, I would have realized that each of the teachers was referenced with their title, and so "Carr" would not have referred to a teacher.

Both of these points would be important for computer scientists to keep in mind when presenting technically dense material orally. The first point suggests the importance of organizing information carefully, by presenting material concisely and in a well-chosen order, alongside with helpful visuals. The second point suggests that a speaker must consider carefully what and how much technical information to include and emphasize in a presentation, as the clarity of important details should not be compromised by adding superfluous details.

Another thing I noticed is that the group began with little or no planning and thus kept changing approach, resulting in a lot of wasted time. This really hints at the importance of an outline when discussing technical material.