

Preparing and delivering a talk

All the great speakers were bad speakers at first.

Emerson in Mohan, McGregor & Strano 1992, p. 331.

It is not okay to be boring.

An orator is someone who says what he thinks and feels what he says.

William Jennings Bryan

Why are public-speaking skills important?

Although talking comes naturally to most of us, public speaking remains one of the most frightening things many people can imagine. And believe it or not, lecturers do appreciate the fact that public speaking is intimidating. While some lecturers have grown accustomed to speaking before a large audience, many still feel some trepidation about speaking to an unknown class, a professional gathering, a community meeting or even a wedding party. They do understand the sleepless nights, sweaty palms, pounding heart, cotton mouth, and jelly-legs that sometimes precede a talk. So, when you are asked by your lecturer to give a prepared talk in class, it is unlikely that the assignment has been set lightly. Lecturers usually have two fundamental objectives in mind when they ask you to give a talk in your geography or environmental studies class.

First, preparing for, and delivering a talk encourages you to organise your ideas, to construct logical arguments, and to otherwise fulfil the objectives of a university education (for a discussion, see Jenkins & Pepper 1988, p. 69).

Second, your lecturers also have your vocational interests in mind. Many of the jobs in which university-educated geographers, environmental managers, and social scientists find themselves require them to make public presentations. While business and educational leaders acknowledge oral communication and public speaking skills to be among the most important abilities a university graduate can have (see, for example, Hay 1994a), a number of international surveys indicate that these skills are also among the most poorly developed. Consequently, your future employers are likely to be impressed if you can point out to them that, through your degree, you have given twenty multimedia talks to audiences ranging in size from five to fifty, particularly if you can explain that you have used each of those opportunities to refine your presentation skills.

Given the importance of these skills, it would appear that, despite any fears of speaking you might have, you will probably not be spared from having to give one or several 'public talks' of, say, ten to twenty minutes duration throughout your degree. The 'mechanics' of giving such a talk are outlined in this chapter which is subdivided into three main parts. The first of these parts deals with the essentials of preparing for the talk; the second with delivering the talk; the third with coping with post-talk questions. Throughout the chapter, reference is made to the use of Microsoft's PowerPoint software. This widely used aid to spoken presentations may help you to produce high-quality graphics and handouts for your talk.

The discussion which follows is not intended to be a 'prescription' for a perfect talk. Instead, it offers guidelines to help you prepare for and deliver your first few 'speeches'. With experience you will develop your own 'style'—a form of presentation which may be very effective and yet may transgress some of the guidelines discussed here. Practice will help you to develop your own approach, but you may also want to keep a critical eye on your lecturers and on other people who give talks which you attend. Pay attention to the form and manner of their delivery. Try to identify those devices, techniques and mannerisms which you believe add to, or detract from, a presentation. Apply what you learn to your own talks. You might also find it helpful to look over Figure 8.1 to get some idea of the sort of criteria which are important to giving a successful talk.

Figure 8.1 Assessment schedule for a talk

Student Name:	Grade:	Assessed by:
<p>The following is an itemised rating scale for various aspects of a formal talk. Sections left blank are not relevant to the talk assessed. Some aspects are more important than others, so there is no formula connecting the scatter of ticks with the final percentage for the talk. A tick in the left-hand box means that the criterion has been met satisfactorily. A tick in the right-hand box means it has not.</p> <p>If you have any questions about the individual criteria, final comments, final grade or any other aspects of this assessment, please see the assessor indicated above.</p>		
First impressions		
	✓	X
Speaker appeared confident and purposeful before starting to speak	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaker's personal grooming and dress standards of high quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speaker attracted audience's attention from the outset	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presentation structure		
<i>Introduction</i>		
Title/topic made clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Purpose of the presentation clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisational framework made known to audience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unusual terms defined adequately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Body of presentation</i>		
Main points stated clearly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sufficient information and detail provided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appropriate and adequate use of examples/anecdotes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussion flowed logically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Conclusion</i>		
Ending of presentation signalled adequately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Main points summarised adequately/ideas brought to fruition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Final message clear and easy to remember	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 8.1 (cont.)

Coping with questions		✓	X
Whole audience searched for questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Questions addressed in order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Questions handled adeptly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Full audience addressed with answers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaker maintained control of discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delivery			
Speech clear and audible to entire audience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Talk given with impulsion (engagement and enthusiasm)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Presentation directed to all parts of audience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Eye contact with audience throughout presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaker kept to time limit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Good use of time without rushing at end	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pace neither too fast nor too slow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Visual aids and handouts—if appropriate			
Visual aids well prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Visual aids clearly visible to entire audience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaker familiar with own visual aids (for example, OHTs, PowerPoint images, blackboard diagrams)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Effective use made of handouts and visual aids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Handouts well prepared and useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Assessor's comments: was this an effective talk? 			

Preparing to give a talk

You cannot expect to talk competently off-the-cuff on any but the most familiar topics. Effective preparation is critical to any successful presentation. Preparation for a talk should begin some days (at least) in advance of the actual event and certainly not just the night before. Give yourself plenty of time to revise and rehearse. But before you can prepare your talk, several things must first be done.

Establishing the context and goals

- **Who is your audience?** Target the presentation to the audience's characteristics, needs and abilities. The ways in which a topic might be developed will be critically influenced by the background and expertise of your listeners (Eisenberg 1992, p. 333). Find out how big the audience will be as this may affect the style of presentation. For example, a large crowd will make an interactive presentation somewhat difficult.
- **Where are you speaking?** If possible, visit the venue in which the talk is to be held. Room and layout characteristics can have an effect on the formality of the presentation, the speed of the talk, attentiveness of the audience, and the types of audio-visual aids that can be employed. Check, for example, to see if the talk is to be given in a large room, from a lectern, with a microphone, to an audience seated in rows ...
- **How long will you speak?** Confirm how much of the time available is for the talk and how much is intended for audience questions. Avoid the embarrassment of being asked to conclude the talk before it is finished or of ending well short of the deadline.
- **Why are you speaking?** The style of presentation may differ depending on your purpose. The purpose may be to present information; to stimulate discussion; to present a solution to a problem; or, perhaps, to persuade a group of the value of a particular view or course of action. Depending on the purpose of the talk, you may have to alter the style and content of your presentation.
- **Who else is speaking?** This may influence the audience's reaction to you (Eisenberg 1992, p. 332). It may also require that you take steps to avoid repeating things someone else might say.
- **What is your subject?** Be sure that your subject matches the reason for the presentation. A mismatch may upset, bore, or alienate your audience. A clear sense of purpose will also allow you to focus your talk more clearly.

- **Do your research.** Keeping in mind the purpose of your talk, gather and interpret appropriate and accurate information. Make a point of collecting anecdotes, cartoons, or up-to-date statistics, which might make your presentation more appealing, colourful, and convincing.
- **Eliminate the dross.** If you have already written a paper upon which your presentation is to be based, be aware that you will not be able to communicate everything you have written. Carefully select the main points and devote attention to the strategies by which those points can be communicated as clearly and effectively as possible. Courtenay (1992, p. 220) makes the following suggestions.
 - List all the things you know or have found out about your subject.
 - Eliminate all those items you think the audience might already know about.
 - Eliminate anything that is not important for your audience to know. Keep doing this until you are left with one or two new and dynamic points. These should not already be known to your audience and they should be interesting and useful to them. These points should form the basis of your presentation. Similarly, Stettner (1992, p. 226) makes a very good argument for organising a talk around no more than, and no fewer than, three main points.

Organising the material for presentation

Most presentations seem to adopt one of the following five organisational frameworks:

- **chronological**—e.g. the history of geographic thought from the nineteenth century
 - **scale**—e.g. overview of national responses to desertification followed by detailed examination of responses in a particular area
 - **spatial**—e.g. a description of Japan's trading relations with other countries of the Pacific
 - **causal**—e.g. implications of financial deregulation for the New Zealand insurance market
 - **order of importance**—e.g. ranked list of solutions to the problem of male homelessness in Perth.
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- **Choose the right framework.** Ensure that the framework used is appropriate and that the organisational framework helps make the point of your

presentation clear. For example, if your main aim is to discuss potential solutions to male homelessness in Dunedin, it would probably be less useful to spend most of the time discussing the historical development of social security policies in New Zealand as a prelude to that.

- **Give your talk a clear and relevant title.** An audience will be attracted to, and informed by, a good title. Be sure that your title clearly illustrates the subject matter of the talk.

Structuring your talk

In most cases a talk will have an introduction, a discussion, and a conclusion. The introductory and concluding sections of oral presentations are very important. About 25 per cent of your presentation ought to be devoted to the 'beginning' and 'end'. The remaining time should be spent on the discussion.

Introduction

- *Make your rationale for talking and your conceptual framework clear.* This gives the audience a basis for understanding the ideas which follow. In short, let listeners know what you are going to tell them. To do this effectively:

- **state the topic**—'Today I am going to talk about ...' Do this in a way which will attract the audience's attention.
- **state the aims or purpose**—Why is this talk being given? Why have you chosen this topic? For what reasons should the audience listen?
- **outline the scope of the talk**—Let the audience know something about the spatial, temporal, and intellectual boundaries of the presentation. For example, are you discussing Australian attitudes to the environment from a Maori perspective; or offering a geographer's view of British financial services in the 2000s?
- **Provide a plan of the discussion**—Let the audience know the steps through which you will lead them in your presentation and the relationship of each step to the others. It is useful to prepare a written plan for the audience (e.g. on an overhead transparency or PowerPoint slide) which outlines your intended progression.

- **Capture the audience's attention from the outset.** Do this with a rhetorical question, relevant and interesting quotes, amazing facts, an anecdote, startling statements ... Avoid jokes unless you have a real gift for humour.

- **Make the introduction clear and lively.** First impressions are very important.

Discussion

- **Limit discussion to a few main points.** Lindsay (1984, p. 48) observes that a rule of broadcasting is that it takes about three minutes to put across each *new* idea. Do not make the mistake of trying to cover too much material.
- **Present your argument logically, precisely, and in an orderly fashion.** Try producing a small diagram which summarises the main points you wish to discuss. Use this as a basis for constructing your talk. It might also make a useful handout, overhead transparency, or PowerPoint slide for your audience.
- **Accompany points of argument with carefully chosen, colourful, and correct examples and analogies.** It is helpful to use examples built upon the experience of the audience at whom they are directed. Analogies and examples clarify unfamiliar ideas and bring your argument to life.
- **Connect the points of your discussion with the overall direction of the talk.** Remind the audience of the trajectory you are following by relating the points you make to the overall framework you outlined in the introduction. For example, 'the third of the three points I have identified as explaining ...'
- **Restate important points.**
- **Personalise the presentation.** This can add authenticity, impact and humour. For example, in discussing problems associated with administering a household questionnaire survey, you might recount an experience of being chased down dark suburban streets by a large, ferocious dog. Avoid overstepping the line between personalising and being self-centred by ensuring that the tales you tell help the audience understand your message.

Conclusion

- **Cue the conclusion.** Phrases like 'To conclude ...' or 'In summary ...' have a remarkable capacity to stimulate audience attention.
- **Bring ideas to fruition.** Restate the main points in words other than those used earlier in the discussion, develop some conclusions, and review implications. Connect your talk with its wider context.
- **Tie the conclusion neatly together with the introduction.** The introduction noted where the talk is going. The conclusion reminds the audience of the content and dramatically observes the arrival at the fore-shadowed destination.

- **Make the conclusion emphatic.** Do not end with a whimper! A good conclusion is very important to an effective presentation, reinforcing the main idea or motivating the audience (Eisenberg 1992, p. 340). Use the conclusion to reinforce your main ideas or to motivate the audience. For instance, if you have been stressing the need for community involvement in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, try to 'fire up' the members of the audience so that they feel motivated to take some action of their own.
- **Terminate the presentation clearly.** Saying 'Thank you', for example, makes it clear to the audience that your talk is over. Try to avoid saying things like 'Well, that's the end'.

Preparing your text and aids to delivery

Preparing notes

- **Prepare well in advance.** Mark Twain is reported to have said 'It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech' (in Windschuttle & Elliott 1994, p. 341). Twain may have overstated the case a little, but it is fair to consider the talk as the tip of the iceberg and the preparation the much larger submerged section.
- **Prepare a talk, not a speech.** Avoid preparing a full text to be read aloud. A presentation which is simply read aloud is often boring and lifeless. If you must prepare a text to be read, remember that a talk needs to be kept simple and logical. **Write for talking, not reading. Sentences should be kept short and simple. Major points need to be restated.** Language should be informal, but should not employ slang and other conventions of café conversation and barroom banter.
- **Prepare personal memory prompts.** These might take the form of clearly legible notes, key words, phrases or diagrams to serve as the summary outline of your talk. **Put prompts on cards, on the cardboard borders of overhead transparencies, or on note paper, ensuring that all pages are numbered sequentially—just in case you drop them!** If you are using PowerPoint for your talk, consider using the 'View Notes Page' option. This allows you to prepare and print out a set of speaker notes associated with each slide in your show.
- **Revise your script.** Put your talk away overnight or for a few days after you think you have finished writing it. Come back to the script later asking yourself how the talk might be sharpened.

Preparing handouts

- **Consider preparing a written summary for the audience.** In general, an oral presentation should be used to present the essence of some body of

material. You might imagine the talk to be like a trailer for a forthcoming movie which presents highlights and captures the imagination. If members of the audience want to know more, they should come along to the full screening of the film (i.e. read the full paper). Depending on the circumstances, it may be helpful, therefore, to prepare a full copy or summary of the paper on which the presentation is based to be distributed to the audience. Microsoft PowerPoint can be a very helpful tool for preparing a summary of a talk. PowerPoint includes a function that allows you to prepare handout copies of images you plan to use during your talk. With the aid of such a document, the audience is better able to keep track of the presentation and you are freer to highlight the central ideas and findings instead of spending valuable time covering explanatory detail.

- **Prepare visual aids.** Slide projections, **PowerPoint projections**, models, blackboard sketches, overhead transparencies, video tapes, maps, and charts help to clarify ideas which the audience may have difficulty understanding; hold the audience's attention; and promote interaction with the audience. Do not prepare too many aids as they may defeat these purposes.
- **Make visual aids neat, concise, and simple.** Simple and clearly drawn overhead transparencies (OHTs) and other illustrations are more easily interpreted and recalled than are complex versions. Sloppily produced visual aids suggest a lack of care, knowledge, and interest. Visual aids ought to be consistent in their style but should not be boring.
- **Consider producing a title slide.** This might set out your name, the title of your talk, your contact details and perhaps an outline of the talk to follow.
- **Make no more than five or six points on an OHT or PowerPoint projection. Make** each point in as few words as possible (say, about six words per point)
- **Do not include unnecessary text on OHTs and other projections.**
- **Produce large and boldly drawn visual aids.** Visuals that can be seen from about 20 metres should be adequate in most cases.
- **Information shown on OHTs should be typed (or printed neatly).** Type and then photocopy onto OHT acetate. The type size of the original document must be sufficiently large (or should be enlarged with a photocopier) to allow the transparencies to be read easily. Use 18- or 24-point type for the text sections of OHTs and PowerPoint slides. If you handwrite OHTs, print the text. *Do not write cursively as this is difficult for some people to read.* Use upper and lower case text because **IT IS MUCH EASIER TO READ THAN BLOCK CAPITALS.**
- **Use line graphs, histograms, pie charts (and cartoons).** Graphic depictions of information are usually more effective and more easily understood

than tables. However, tables can be useful if they are easy to read. Well-chosen cartoons can very effectively communicate a message and help to lighten the atmosphere.

- **Avoid taking graphs or tables directly from a written paper.** These often contain more information and detail than can be comprehended readily. Redraw graphs and redesign tables to make the small number of points you wish to convey.
- **Use a limited range of colours on OHTs and other projected images.** Up to three colours should be employed. Judicious use of colour on complex illustrative material can help clarify the message. Remember that some colours may evoke certain feelings which add to or detract from the case you are arguing. For example, black can be symbolic of death, green of envy and white of purity. This is explained more fully in Chapter 5. You should also take care to use dark colours on OHTs. Light colours such as yellow and orange cannot be seen clearly. For the sake of colour-blind members of your audience, avoid using red and green together, black on red, and black with blue.
- **Ensure that all of your OHT will be displayed through the projector.** Leave some space around the margins of each sheet of acetate to avoid the problem of text overlapping the edge of the projector unit.
- **Number your OHTs.** If you drop your OHT collection in the middle of your talk, it is much easier to recover if the slides are numbered!
- **Plan to leave a good impression.** If you are using PowerPoint, consider preparing an attractive and relevant final image that can be left on the screen when you have finished speaking and are answering audience questions. It is sometimes useful to restate the title of your talk and your name in this final slide.

Rehearsing

Rehearse until there is almost no need to consult prepared notes for guidance. The purpose of rehearsing is not to commit the talk to memory but to ensure that you have all the points in the right order and that you have a clear sense of your talk's trajectory.

- **Speak your material out loud!** Not only may you begin to **hear problems of logic in your presentation** but you will also have the opportunity to **practise pronouncing** some of those complicated disciplinary terms, such as 'existentialist' or 'distanciation', that you might have to employ.
- **Time rehearsals.** Most novice speakers are stunned to find out how much longer their presentation takes to deliver than they had expected, than it took to read quietly or than they felt had elapsed while they were talking.

Match the time available for the talk with the amount of material for presentation. Allow for a few extra minutes to compensate for impromptu comments, technical problems, pauses to gather thoughts, or the breath-taking realisation that the audience is not following the tale! If your talk is too long, decide what material can be removed without affecting the main points. It is better to do the pruning beforehand than to be forced to stop your talk, or make the revisions in midstream.

- **Make full use of the visual aids to be used in the talk.** Visual aids can consume time rapidly as you move from one medium, say the overhead projector, to another, the blackboard. Consequently, pay careful attention to the use of time in the delivery of multimedia presentations.
- **Record one or two rehearsals.** It is often useful to make a video recording of a trial presentation. Video cameras do not 'pull punches' in the same way that an audience of friends and family, sensitive to your feelings, might. If that option is unavailable to you, try an audio recording. Find out if you enliven your talk through variations in pitch, tone and pace or if you use those annoying saboteurs of a good talk: 'umm', 'err', 'you know', 'like', and 'ah' ...

Final points of preparation

- **Are you dressed and groomed for the occasion?** Although the audience's emphasis should be placed on the intellectual merits of your argument, your appearance may affect some people's perceptions of what you have to say. Looking rough suggests that you have no respect for your audience and even less for yourself. You might not have to go as far as Reece (1999) suggests and wear business attire, but you should look as if you have taken some care about your appearance.
- **Take water.** No matter how well prepared you are, there is a possibility that you will suffer from 'cotton mouth' during your talk. This unpleasant affliction causes your mouth to dry out and your tongue to swell to such a size that you can scarcely speak. Water consumed during the talk seems to help!
- **How do the visual aids work?** Be familiar with the function of any aid that you will be using. Do not be so unprepared that you must exasperate your audience with stupid questions like: 'How do I switch this projector on?' or 'Can anyone work the video player?' You should have checked before your presentation.
- **Be prepared for technical problems.** Ensure that you have a strategy for dealing with computer, overhead projector and slide projector glitches. For instance, if you plan on using PowerPoint, take along OHT or

hardcopy copies of your slides in case there are problems with your computer or the data-show projector.

- **Can the audience see you and your visual aids?** Before your talk, sit in a few strategically placed chairs around the room to see whether the audience will be able to see you and your visual aids. Consider where you will stand while talking and take care to avoid the problem of your silhouette obstructing the audience's view of OHTs or the blackboard.
- **Is there a clock in the room?** If not, make sure you can see your watch or have some other way of checking the time.
- **Is everything else ready?** Are summaries ready for distribution; are note cards in order ...?
- **Make absolutely clear in your mind the central message you wish to convey.** *This is critical to a good presentation.* Knowing your message will give you the confidence your audience will need if they are to have faith in what you are telling them. It also means that if for some unforeseen reason something goes wrong, or you 'stall' and lose the plot momentarily, you can take a breath, reflect on your central message and resume your talk with the minimum of fuss. Importantly too, if you do not have the message of your talk firmly established in your own mind, you are unlikely to be able to let anyone else know what that message is.

Delivery

Directive for lulling an audience to sleep

Wear a dark suit and conventional tie; turn down the lights; close the curtains, display a crowded slide and leave it in place; stand still, read your paper without looking up; read steadily with no marked changes in cadence; show no pictures, use grandiloquent words and long sentences.

Booth 1993, p. 42

People in your audience *want you to do well*. They want to listen to you giving a good talk and they will be supportive and grateful if you are well prepared, even if you do stumble in your presentation or blush and stammer. The guidelines outlined here are a target at which you can aim. No one expects you to give a flawless presentation.

It will make your presentation more convincing and credible if you remember and act on the fact that the audience comprises *individuals*, each of

whom is listening to you. You are not talking to some large, amorphous body. Imagine that you are telling your story to one or two people and not to a larger group. If you can allow yourself to perform this difficult task, you will find that voice inflection, facial expressions and other elements important to an effective delivery will fall into place.

- **Be confident and enthusiastic.** One of the most important keys to a successful presentation is your enthusiasm. You have a well-researched and well-prepared talk to deliver. Most audiences are friendly. All you have to do is tell a small group of interested people what you have to say. Try to instil confidence in your abilities and your message. Do not start by apologising for your presentation. If it is so bad, why are you giving it?
- **Talk naturally, using simple language and short sentences.** Try to relax, but be aware that the presentation is not a conversation in a public bar. Some degree of formality is expected. Do not use slang or colloquial language unless you have a specific reason for doing so.
- **Speak clearly.** Try not to mumble and hesitate. This may suggest to the audience that you do not know our material thoroughly. You can sometimes make your speech clearer by slowing the rate of delivery.
- **Project your voice.** Be sure that the most distant member of the audience can hear you clearly.
- **Engage your audience.** Vary your volume, tone of voice and pace of presentation. Involve the audience through use of the word 'you' e.g.—'You may wonder why we used ...' (Lindsay 1984, p. 55)
- **Try to avoid nervous habits.** Be conscious of distracting behaviour, such as jangling money in your pocket, swaying, or pacing back and forth, which you may have detected in your rehearsals. Find alternative, good speaking habits.
- **Make eye contact with your audience.** Although this may be rather intimidating, eye contact is very important. It also allows you to gauge audience response.
- **Face the entire audience.** Do not talk to walls, windows, floor, ceiling, blackboard or projector screen. It is the audience—the entire audience—with which you are concerned. If you are using an overhead projector, remember that you can see your OHTs on the glass in front of you. If you are using PowerPoint, you should have a print-out or the screen image of your slides in front of you. Avoid turning your back on your audience to look at the projection screen.
- **Pay attention to audience reaction.** If the audience does not seem to understand what you are saying, rephrase your point or clarify it with an example.

- **Direct your attention to the less attentive members of the audience.** This may not be as reassuring as focusing your presentation on those whose attention you already have, but it will help you to convey your message to as large a part of the audience as possible.
- **Write key words and unusual words on the blackboard.**
- **Avoid writing or drawing on blackboards or overhead acetate for more than a few seconds at a time.** Long periods devoted to the production of diagrams may destroy any rapport you have developed with your audience.
- **Stop talking when a diagram/slide/map is first shown.** This is to allow the audience time to study the display.
- **Do not obstruct the audience's view of completed diagrams.**
- **Be sure that overhead and other light projections are sufficiently high for all the audience to see.** As a rule of thumb, make sure the projection is screened higher than the heads of people in the front row of your audience.
- **When you have finished with an illustration, remove it.** The audience's attention will be directed back at you (where it belongs) and will not be distracted. Do not talk about a topic which is different to the one on your visual display.
- **Switch off overhead projectors and other noisy machines when they are not being used.** If this is impossible, it may be necessary to speak more loudly than usual in order to compensate for the whirring of electric cooling fans.
- **Keep to your time limit.** Audiences do not like being delayed, but you should take care not to rush at the end. Last-minute haste may leave the audience with a poor impression of your talk. Watch the time as you proceed. If it is apparent that you will run out of time let the audience know the key headings you planned to cover and then jump straight to the conclusion. This is likely to be the fastest, most effective, and polished way of summarising the balance of your talk. Of course, if you have rehearsed properly, this problem should rarely occur!

Coping with questions

The post-presentation discussion which typically follows a talk allows the audience to ask questions and to offer points of criticism. It is an important part of the overall presentation which can completely change an audience's response to you and your work. Take care to be thorough and courteous in your response to comments and questions.

- **Let the audience know whether you will accept questions in the course of the presentation or after the talk is completed.** Be aware that questions addressed during a presentation may disturb the flow of the talk, may upset any rapport developed with the audience, and may anticipate points addressed at some large stage within the presentation.
- **Stay at or near the rostrum throughout the question period.** Question-time is still a formal part of the presentation. Act accordingly.
- **Be in control of the question and answer period.** However, if there is a chairperson, moderation of question-time is their responsibility.
- **Address the entire audience, not just the person who asked the question.**
- **Recognise questions in order.** Take care to receive inquiries from everyone before returning to any member of the audience who has a second question.
- **Search the whole audience for questions.** Compensate for blind spots caused by building piles, the rostrum, and other barriers.
- **Always be succinct and polite in replies.** You should be courteous even to those who appear to be attacking rather than honestly questioning, for two reasons. First, if the intent of the question has been misinterpreted—with an affront being seen where none was intended—embarrassment is avoided. Second, one of the best ways of defusing inappropriate criticism is through politeness. If, however, there is no doubt that someone is being hostile, keep your cool and, if possible, move closer to the critic. This reduction of distance is a powerful way of subduing argumentative members of an audience.
- **Repeat aloud those questions which are difficult to hear.** This ensures that you heard the question correctly. Repetition is also for the sake of the audience who may not have heard the question either.
- **Clarify the meaning of any questions you do not understand.**
- **Avoid concluding an answer by asking the questioner if their query has been dealt with satisfactorily.** Argumentative questioners may take this opportunity to steal the limelight, thereby limiting the discussion time available to other members of the audience.
- **Deal with particularly complex questions or those requiring an unusually long answer after the presentation.** If possible, provide a brief answer when the question is first raised.
- **If you do not know the answer to a question, say so.** Do not try to bluff your way through a problem, as any errors and inaccuracies may call the content of the rest of the talk into question.

- **Difficult questions may be answered by making use of the abilities of the audience.** For example, an inquiry might require more knowledge in a particular field than you possess. Rather than admitting defeat, it is sometimes possible to seek out the known expertise of a specific member of the audience. This avoids personal embarrassment, ensures that the question is answered, and may endear you to that member of the audience whose advice was sought. It also lets other members of the audience know of additional expertise in the area.
- **Smile.** It is over!



Coping with exams

Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared, for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer.

Charles Caleb Colton, 182

Some people flourish in exams, completing their best work under conditions that others might find highly stressful. In part, good performance may be the consequence of a person's particular response to stress, but it is more likely the result of good exam technique. This chapter discusses exams, their types, and strategies for test success.

Why have exams?

Exams serve three main educational purposes. These are to test:

- your level of factual knowledge
- your ability to synthesise material learned throughout a teaching session and
- your ability to explain and justify your informed opinion on some specific topic.

These reasons provide some indication of the sorts of things an examinee is likely to be looking for when marking a test. Some tests may seek to fulfil only one of these objectives (e.g. some short answer and multiple choice tests may only be examining your ability to recall information) while others will be looking for all of them (e.g. essay questions or oral exam of a thesis).