

A Polemic After a Conference**Jeremy Montagu**

I wrote this on the day after I returned from a conference, and I wrote it for several reasons:

- 1) Perhaps I am old enough to do so without causing too much offence;
- 2) Every fault noted below was perpetrated by more than one of our members at that conference, and at another a year earlier (by our members – not just visitors – I could add names but it would be unkind);
- 3) Before I became an academic, I earned part of my living on the public lecture circuit, and doing some of the things noted below to a public audience would have led to them walking out and not asking me another year;
- 4) And, finally, we've all done them in our time, and most of us have only noticed that we did so when somebody else (me, in this case) pointed it out.

First, to Chair/men /women of sessions:

If you have two hours and four speakers, each speaker is entitled to a 30-minute slot.

If they speak for 20 minutes, you have 10 minutes for discussion. If they speak for 25 minutes, you have 5 minutes for discussion. If they speak for 30 minutes, you have no time for discussion. "One quick question" always takes several minutes to ask and more to answer -- these are minutes taken from the next speaker's time.

If you take two minutes to introduce a speaker, recounting his or her virtues, status, and publications, you have stolen two minutes from his or her time.

If you start ten minutes late, each speaker has lost two-and-a-half minutes from their slot, either from the paper or the discussion.

Similarly, if you take five minutes to introduce the session or to be a 'pro-active' chairman, you have stolen their time.

I can think of no way to stop a questioner rambling on, but it is not fair to others of us when they do so -- maybe you can think of a way. At least try to stop them going on with supplementaries and hogging the whole 5 or 10 minutes.

Never believe that if you end the session ten minutes late, you can reduce the break between sessions by that time. The members know that social interchange is

just as important as the sessions, and they will take their full allowance.

They'll take more if you let them. It's no good asking them at 11 o'clock to return -- they have to be called at least five minutes ahead, otherwise you start late.

For speakers:

If you are asked for a 20-minute paper, it is discourteous and unprofessional to take 25. It is even more unprofessional, when you have come to the end, to say, "Can I just show two-minutes video, thirty-seconds tape, or whatever". Still worse is then to spend more than the two minutes introducing it.

It is unprofessional to produce a wad of papers and proceed to fumble your way through, cutting it to 20 minutes as you go. Even if you end, with great skill, exactly on the dot, it is still obvious to all of us that you could not be bothered to write a special paper for this occasion, an attitude unlikely to please either audience or organisers.

When running your paper at home with a stopwatch, time not only the paper and the illustrations, but also mime the movements involved. A presentation needs almost to be choreographed, for every fumble inserting tape, separating OHP films, takes time, time that is part of your 20 minutes. One speaker there gave us a brilliantly controlled presentation -- every move, every sentence, was timed to the second. It was a highly skilled and highly professional presentation.

Always allow a margin for those wonderful parenthetical thoughts that occur to you as you speak.

When you speak, speak to us, not to your sheaf of papers -- they know what's written on them and don't need to be told -- we don't know and we came expecting to be told.

Don't speak to the screen -- the screen doesn't want to hear you -- we do.

When you speak to us during your music example, none of us can hear you. Either use the Pause button or the Volume control, or save comments till after or make them before (but make sure you had them included on the stopwatch).

If you read in a monotone it shows that your paper is dead-boring to you. Try not to show it or it will bore us, too.

If the only reason for speaking is to get a grant from your own institution, tell the

organisers so and ask them if they can provide a special slot on the programme, which will make sure that you are on the published programme but won't waste our time or keep out someone with something genuine to say.

Speak in front of a mirror at home. If your teeth are close together while you speak, practise opening them to speak – it may feel funny but it does let the sound out.

If you can remember all this we will all go home saying how wonderful your paper or your session was. If you can't....