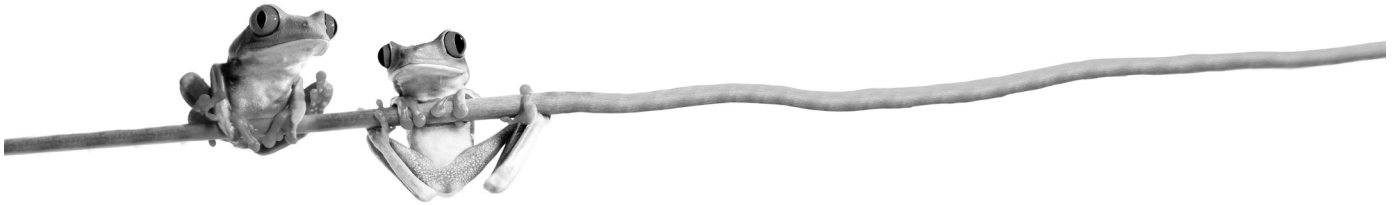# NINE
Saying it out loud
Presenting your paper

Many journal articles and book chapters begin their lives as a presentation at a scholarly conference. Presentations also extend the life of published works; scholars are often invited to present a paper they have already published – sometimes to very different audiences. There is just no getting around it: giving presentations is as much as a part of research as writing is. Indeed, giving a presentation can be seen as part of the writing process: it forces you to put your ideas into words, and you get an immediate response from your audience. But we seldom dwell on the benefits of giving presentations because most of us associate them with either boredom (if you are the listener) or terror (if you are the speaker) – or both.

When we put children to bed at night, we often read them a story. We pick up a book and read word for word what's written on the page. Our voices washing over them have a hypnotic effect; their eyelids get heavier and heavier, they struggle to stay awake, but the monotonous sound of our voice is relentless and finally they give in and sleep overtakes them. This is a tried-and-true method. Perhaps doing the same thing from a podium is not the most effective way to present your material to an audience who you hope will still be awake when you finish.

But one reason scholars persist in reading from a prepared manuscript is that most of us hate the very idea of speaking to a live audience. Quipped comedian Jerry Seinfeld, 'According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. … That means to the average person, if you have

to go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.' Because making a presentation is so terrifying, we spend as little time preparing as we possibly can. Thus, we resort to picking up our published article, breaking into a cold and clammy sweat, and reading it verbatim to an audience that looks as if it has had its collective brain sucked right out of its head. Both we and the audience are counting the minutes until the torture is over.

Another reason is that we have internalized the notion that scholarly lectures are supposed to be boring and that neck injuries from nodding off during a presentation are an occupational hazard. True, multimedia shows with bouncing balls, spinning text, a choir singing in the background and elaborate pyrotechnics are out of place at a scholarly conference. But there is an important difference between *entertaining* and *engaging*. To entertain means you cause time to pass in a pleasant way. You distract your audience for a while, perhaps giving them a laugh or two, but when you leave you (or at least your message) may be quickly forgotten. To engage means that you give people something to think about. When they leave, they take something with them.

When you present your work to a live audience, you have an opportunity to engage your listeners so that they take your research home with them, think about it and perhaps build on it. What's more, switching from a written to a spoken medium may help you hone your argument, and perhaps explore the ramifications of your work in a different way. Just as holes in your thinking become more obvious when you try to write them down, holes – and other problems – in your writing become more obvious when you try to say it out loud.

Presenting your work orally is an important way to participate in the scholarly dialogue. Drawing on some lessons of rhetoric (see the textbox 'Contributions from classical rhetoric'), this chapter describes not only how you can give more effective presentations, but also how you as an author can get the most out of them – whether you have been asked to present your work at a conference, or you are invited to be a guest lecturer at another university, or you simply wish to get feedback from your colleagues.

Contributions from classical rhetoric

Rhetoric is a discipline that focuses on the science of persuading through the use of language, and is thus a natural place to turn to when looking at what makes an effective presentation. This chapter is structured around an admittedly liberal interpretation of the following elements from classical rhetoric:

Intellectio: Doing the groundwork. In its strictest interpretation, this step is limited to choosing your topic. I argue that preparation involves far more, particularly defining your audience.

Inventio: Finding your argument and evidence. This step is generally considered a continuation of the first step, where you narrow down your topic to a specific argument. For scholars, it focuses on identifying and refining your core argument.

Dispositio or *collocatio*: Structuring your presentation. In classical rhetoric, the structure involves providing a factual background and then refuting contrary arguments. I argue that in a scholarly context, structure must do more than this.

Elocutio: Choosing your words. In this chapter, as in classical rhetoric, the focus is on the words you use rather than what you say with them. However, classical rhetoric explores this area in far more depth than I have done here.

Memoria: Remembering what you want to say. Having originated a couple of millennia before the invention of teleprompters and PowerPoint, classical rhetoric naturally focuses on tricks to help the speaker memorize the presentation. I use this step to focus on the types of visual aids most scholarly presenters use to jog their memory and help them tell the story.

Pronuntiatio and *actio*: Using your voice and body language effectively. As in classical rhetoric, this chapter uses this step to focus on the use of voice and gesture in delivering the presentation. I have limited my discussion to the areas most relevant for scholars, especially scholars speaking in a non-native language.

Analysis: Analyzing your performance. Although often left out, this step is important if you want to not only become a better public speaker, but also get constructive feedback on your work.

DOING THE GROUNDWORK

You have just published a groundbreaking paper on black holes and you get a phone call asking you to speak at a conference. You agree, and set about making transparencies of your complex line graphs and equations. When you arrive at your destination, you realize that you are not facing a group of fellow astrophysicists, but rather a group of game designers and science fiction authors. By the time you realize your mistake, it is too late. You were already nervous; now you are petrified. (See the text box 'Managing nervousness'.) If only you hadn't skipped rule number one for giving presentations: Know what you are getting yourself into.

Managing nervousness

Nervousness need not spell doom for your presentation. The trick is to learn how to make it work for you, and not against you. Realize that it does not mean that you are

(Continued)

(Continued)

incompetent, but rather that you care about what you are doing and are not indifferent to your performance. The resulting adrenaline boost you get can help you focus and stay connected with your audience. Likewise, a complete lack of butterflies may make it hard to concentrate on what you are talking about. Some of the best presenters are always nervous before they speak, but they know how to act confident even when they don't feel that way (see 'Using your voice and body language effectively' below). And because they do not fear the nervousness itself, and are able to make use of that adrenaline boost, they come across as committed and sincere rather than terrified.

You can try picking up tips from guides on presentations skills, or by talking to other presenters to learn what they do to get their nerves under control. Some people listen to music, perhaps even a 'theme song' they use every time, before they present to help get themselves in the right frame of mind. Others might wear a particular piece of clothing that makes them feel more confident. Figure out what works for you. But by far the best way to get your nerves under control is to be prepared: arrive early, have a plan B if things don't go as planned, and focus on the main parts of your story. Remember, people are listening to you because they want to hear what you have to say, not because they want to judge your speaking skills.

Knowing what you are getting yourself into means first finding out exactly to whom you will be speaking. Even if you are asked to present a published paper, you may be addressing an audience different from the one for which you wrote the paper. Perhaps they are friendlier; perhaps they are more hostile. Perhaps they are less interested in the academic aspects of your work and more interested in the practical implications. It's almost impossible to overdo the groundwork. The more you find out about your audience and what they expect from you, the more able you will be to give it to them. This applies to any presentation, from scholarly conferences, to teaching, to brown-bag lunches with colleagues, to dinners at the Rotary Club. It may be time-consuming, but the success of your presentation is directly related to the work you put in beforehand. You can probably reach more people by doing one presentation properly than stumbling through five poorly prepared.

Just as important as finding out what your audience wants from you is figuring out what you want from them. Perhaps you want to present a fully developed argument and try to convince your audience of its validity, or perhaps you want to present an idea that is not fully developed to try to get useful feedback from the audience. Maybe you just want them to learn something. Knowing exactly what you want to achieve will determine how you shape your presentation. If you want to convince, you emphasize the validity of your evidence and argument; if you want feedback, you may want to emphasize the problematic aspects and uncertainties; if you are teaching, you should think about not just the message, but how people learn. If you work in applied research you also need to think about how you

want to communicate to a non-academic audience and decide whether you want to inspire action or reflection. Do you want them to jump up, bang their fists on the table, and shout, 'By gum, he's right! To arms, men!' Or do you want them to nod sagely and say, 'Point taken. I think I'll take this into account in my work.'

In addition to learning about your audience, groundwork may include looking into any or all of the following.

Location, location, location. The venue, the way the room is set up, and the available equipment matter for how you interact with your audience. This is why many scholars prefer smaller workshop-oriented conferences.

What kind of room will you be in? Is it a big room? A small one? Will it be filled to capacity? Can you move the chairs and tables around to your liking? Where will you stand? The more accurately you can picture the room beforehand – how many people will be in it, where they are sitting and where you will be – the more likely you will be able to enter the room with confidence. If you are especially nervous, try to visit the room a day or two before your presentation, preferably when no one else is there. Walk around it, stand where you plan to stand, and generally give yourself a chance to feel like you own the room. This way, when the big day comes, you'll be less likely to feel that you're walking into hostile territory.

What kind of working equipment is available to you? The projector you saw attached to the ceiling may not be in working order. Find out what you can borrow, and what you yourself need to bring. If you are doing a computer slide show, do you need to bring your own laptop? Or can you bring just your file? Can you bring a memory stick? Do you have access to the Internet? Can you play a sound file? Find out what other equipment is available: overhead projector? flip chart? chalkboard? whiteboard? Do the pens work? Is there chalk? How about an eraser? Do you need an extension cord? There are few things more disconcerting than technical glitches. Even a seasoned presenter will be thrown off if she finds herself standing there with a laptop that has a cord too short to reach the nearest outlet, or a memory stick and no place to insert it.

When will you be speaking? Will you be speaking early in the day? If so, be prepared to deal with stragglers and to compete with coffee cups. Will you be speaking just after lunch? If so, be prepared to deal with the notoriously sleep-inducing post-lunch sugar rush. Will you be speaking at the end of the day? If so, be prepared to deal with people who may have reached their saturation points and be looking forward to dinner.

Who else will be speaking? If you can, find out who will be speaking before you or after you – and try to find out what they are talking about. Experienced speakers learn how to use other speakers to frame their arguments – even if

they are presenting opposing views. Keep in mind that some people sign up for a conference just to hear one person speak – and that one person may not be you. And if there is a wide variety of speakers, the audience is likely to be varied as well. You may have to work extra hard to capture the interest of such audiences. (See the sections on structuring your presentation in this chapter and in Chapter 4 on hostile and mixed audiences.)

All this advance preparation may seem an unnecessary nuisance – until the first time you walk through the door and discover things are not as you expected : 'I was expecting a much smaller group! I only have enough handouts for half these people!' Likewise, it may not seem important who will be speaking before or after you, until you learn that the person who spoke right before you made a very good argument for precisely the opposite of what you want to say – or said the very *same* thing you want to say. If you are prepared, you can weave responses into your presentation. If you are not prepared, your self-confidence may take a beating. There are no shortcuts to quality: do your homework. And the more prepared you are, the more confident you will feel.

FINDING YOUR ARGUMENT(S) AND EVIDENCE

Once you know who your audience is and what they want from you, you can begin to find your argument. If you think you did this once and for all when you wrote your paper, think again. Remember, your audience may be more interested in the policy implications of your work than in the scientific implications. Or vice versa. One thing you can be certain of: you have more in your paper than you will be able to get across in your presentation. This is because writing can support a level of detail that speaking simply cannot. And if you try to present the same level of detail in your lecture as you did in your paper, you run the risk of overwhelming your audience, perhaps to the point where they get nothing at all out of what you say.

If you want to engage your audience, you are going to have to make some tough choices about what to include and what to leave out. Since you have done the groundwork and now understand who your audience is likely to be, and you have thought long and hard about what you want to get out of the presentation for yourself, you can narrow down the field. Go through your paper with a fresh sense of purpose and figure out which aspect of it you want to focus on. Perhaps you want to focus on your case study. Perhaps the method will be particularly interesting to your listeners. Maybe you want to draw attention to your conclusions – or one conclusion in particular. Perhaps it is a more specific formulation of your research question that is interesting. The most important thing to remember here is that the core argument of your paper may not be the best core argument for your presentation.

If you have narrowed down the focus of your argument, you will also have to be selective about the evidence you use to support the argument you are making in your presentation. Again, go through your paper with a fresh set of eyes. Which of your findings are relevant to the argument you are trying to make in the context of *this* presentation? If you have summarized your evidence in tables or figures, choose carefully which ones to use. As a rule, tables and figures make effective visual aids, as long as you are able to explain them sufficiently and the point they make fits into your overall argument.

And when you are reviewing your evidence, remember that in a presentation, less is sometimes more. One principle of rhetoric is that three pieces of evidence are not only sufficient to make your point, but are also easier for both the speaker and the audience to remember. If you have seventeen good reasons why non-governmental organizations can be more effective than international organizations, you will not convince your audience any more thoroughly than if you had presented only three. Instead of becoming more convinced with each piece of evidence you throw at them, they will become overwhelmed, and after a while impatient and thus sceptical – especially since some of the reasons are bound to be rather thin. Then they will go away not only thinking that some of your reasons were thin, but possibly not remembering the evidence that was solid. Pick a few of your best reasons. You may want to suggest you have more, but keep your focus on the best ones.

In addition to the core argument for the presentation, you need to think about *how* you will persuade your audience that your points are valid. Rhetoric identifies three argumentative approaches to persuading your audience: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*.

Ethos is persuasion on the basis of your credibility. When you appeal to ethos, you are saying, 'Believe me because *I* say so.' Your use of language, your appearance and your mannerisms all help you establish authority. What constitutes 'authority' will vary from context to context. Most of the time your academic authority will be the most important, which you can demonstrate through any previous research you have done, your understanding of the current research, your position in your field and your demonstrated familiarity with your research subjects. But authority can also be derived from your practitioner experience: 'As a practising clinical psychologist working with substance abusers for the past 20 years …' One way to draw on ethos is to explicitly state your institutional affiliation, title and experience. Another way, however, is to work it more indirectly into your presentation through the use of images (Figure 9.1).

Pathos is persuasion through the emotions of the audience. When you appeal to pathos, you are saying, 'Believe me because your gut tells you to.' You connect with the beliefs and values of your audience. In academic writing and presentation, this is perhaps the most risky approach. On the one hand, people tend to understand things first through their emotions while their intellect needs a

Figure 9.1   Ethos is persuasion on the basis of your credibility

Here, the researcher is photographed in a minefield in Sri Lanka wearing mine-clearing protective equipment. By adding this fieldwork slide to her presentation while she is talking about her methods, the researcher makes an appeal to ethos: 'Believe me because I was there!'

Source: Photo by Wenche Hauge

little time to catch up. So, showing a picture that plucks a string in the viewer means that you've captured their interest long enough to substantiate your point (Figure 9.2). When you first see pictures that are full of pathos, your critical mind is momentarily shut down. You are simply thinking, 'Holy cow! That's awful!' or 'Isn't that wonderful?' But because you are an academic, you will quickly move to critical thinking: 'What is actually going on here?' A skilled presenter will answer your questions before they are fully formed in your mind. This is how pathos can help you create engagement in your audience.

On the other hand, pathos can backfire when you do not follow up the images with relevant scholarship. This can leave the audience thinking, 'This isn't research! This is sensationalism!' In an academic setting, people trust reason more than they trust emotion, so use pathos with caution – perhaps limiting it to your introduction where it is likely to do the most good. Those of us working in fields inherently filled with pathos – war, poverty, crime, healthcare, child abuse, addiction and so on – have to work hard to strike the right balance and not overdo it. For those of us who work in fields that have less pathos – discourse analysis of government documents, urban settlement patterns, attitudes to public transportation, median incomes, for example – we might have to work hard to find any pathos at all. Pathos is not 'academic' in nature, but an argument or an image that generates an emotional response allows the

Figure 9.2   Pathos is persuasion through the emotions of the audience

Launching straight into statistics about child soldiers might simply cause your audience to tune out because statistics are harder to see than individual people. This picture of child members of the Fatah-affiliated youth organization 'al-Ashbal' taken in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon in 1982, however, puts faces on those statistics.

Source: Photo by Are Hovdenak

audience to 'get it' at a visceral level before they 'get it' intellectually. And used with caution, this instrument of persuasion can be powerful even in an academic context.

Logos is persuasion through logic. When you appeal to logos, you are saying, 'Believe me because the evidence is indisputable.' In an academic setting, this is the gold standard. You believe me not because of who I am or how I make you feel, but because my argument is so good that you simply have no choice. The structure of the academic article is built on an appeal to logos: you identify a gap in the knowledge, define a relevant research question, and answer that question on the basis of evidence you have gathered from your well-described method (see Chapter 6). In an oral presentation, (relevant) images can help you make your point better than words alone (Figure 9.3).

Compare the two slides in Figure 9.3. Which one gives you a better mental image of what is happening? With the first slide, the presenter can tell you the exact numbers if necessary, but most importantly allows you to look at the different shapes of the curves. The second slide just gives you the numbers but without letting you see the shapes of the curves and making it difficult to get a visual of how they fit together.
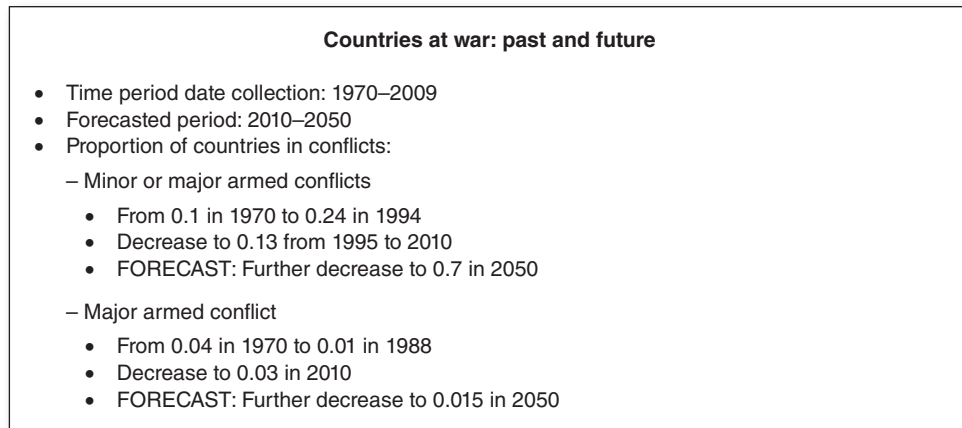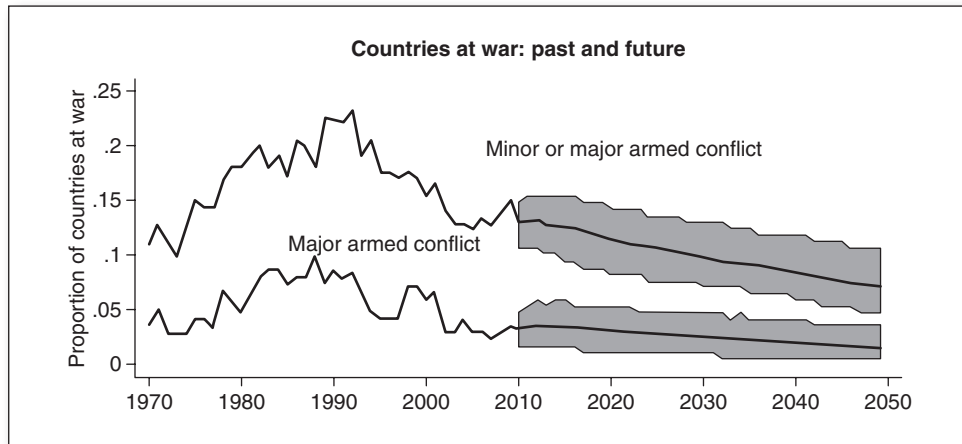
Countries at war: past and future

Proportion of countries at war

.25

.2

Minor or major armed conflict

.15

Major armed conflict

.1

.05

0

1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020 2030 2040 2050

Countries at war: past and future

- Time period date collection: 1970–2009
- Forecasted period: 2010–2050
- Proportion of countries in conflicts:

   – Minor or major armed conflicts

   - From 0.1 in 1970 to 0.24 in 1994
   - Decrease to 0.13 from 1995 to 2010
   - FORECAST: Further decrease to 0.7 in 2050

   – Major armed conflict

   - From 0.04 in 1970 to 0.01 in 1988
   - Decrease to 0.03 in 2010
   - FORECAST: Further decrease to 0.015 in 2050

Figure 9.3   Logos is persuasion through logic

Just because an argument is based on solid research-based findings and logic does not mean it cannot be presented more intuitively for the reader through images.

Source: Håvard Hegre, 'Forecasting', available at: http://havardhegre.net/forecasting/, last accessed June 2014; and Håvard Hegre, Joakim Karlsen, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, Håvard Strand and Henrik Urdal, 'Predicting armed conflict, 2011–2050', *International Studies Quarterly*, 57 (2) (2013): 250–70 (DOI: 10.1111/isqu.12007)

STRUCTURING YOUR PRESENTATION

As suggested above, your presentation should be structured so that it rests on logos – although use of ethos and pathos, particularly in the first minute or two help establish your authority and pique the interest of the audience. So, in addition to having to adapt your core argument to a spoken medium, you will also have to adapt your structure. For one thing, you will probably need to get to the research question a lot faster. Most journal articles present a couple of pages (about 700 words) of background before they culminate in the research question. If you wait that long in a presentation, you may have to shout to make yourself heard over all the snoring. When you are speaking, your introduction needs to be simple and

concrete. If you do not manage to communicate to the audience within the first few minutes what your entire presentation is going to be about, and make them feel that what you are talking about is important, then chances are they will be lost the entire time. Likewise, once you have your audience with you, the rest will almost run by itself.

After you have introduced your research question you can dwell a bit more on the background or context. Just as in writing, the temptation here is to include too much. Restrain yourself – with force, if necessary. The only aim of the background segment is to answer the question: 'Why should you listen to this?' You do not need to go into detail about *all* the relevant work other scholars have done that might have a bearing on your own conclusions. Your job is to focus on the knowledge gap, not to demonstrate your broad grasp of the material.

Next, you present your thesis statement and supporting evidence. In a spoken presentation, it is virtually mandatory that you present your thesis statement before you present your evidence. The audience cannot rewind and listen again to what you said, so you need to make sure they get it the first time. Presenting your thesis statement before your evidence prepares your audience for the evidence that is coming. They know what it is supposed to be proving, so they are in a better position to be able to understand its significance.

Finally, you reach your conclusion. Again, remember that the conclusion of your presentation is not necessarily the conclusion of your paper. Go back to your motivation: What is your aim in giving the presentation? If your aim is to get good feedback, then your conclusion should put the focus on the areas you would like to discuss when you get questions afterward. If your aim is to convey a fully thought-out idea, then recall your main argument and focus on what it all means.

But the main thing to remember here is that you need to tell a coherent story. When we go through our material picking out what we want to cover, we tend to focus on the highlights: the key findings, the main uncertainties and so on. Here, the danger lies in focusing too much on detail at the expense of the overall story. How many times have you seen a slide titled 'Background' with seven bulleted points that did not seem to have anything to do with each other? See Figure 9.4: most of us know this as the story of Cinderella. Our misguided scholar, however, used the slide to provide unnecessary background detail (including words he would probably find difficult to pronounce) and definitions of basic concepts copied directly from *Wikipedia* without source referencing (ever notice how the definitions of simple words like 'glass' can transform a familiar substance into something unrecognizable?), and a singularly unhelpful and irrelevant figure of some sort of family tree. What's missing here is the actual *story*. What *happens* and why it happens. Nervous researchers often fear that they will forget the 'important' details, so they put all those details in the slides. And of course when they get up there and their minds do go blank, they inevitably spend the entire presentation talking about these details and completely forget the actual story, which might have made these details relevant. Details only make sense when they add something to a basic story: the basic story has to be there first. And the basic story

should be the one thing you can talk about without any extra assistance. Should the projector explode and your notes burst into flames, you should still be able to take a deep breath and just tell your story. In the oral tradition of storytelling, the storyteller did not have bullet points to follow. Or even a manuscript. He was able to remember the story and the listeners were able to follow it because the story had a narrative flow: a beginning, a middle and an end. Each flowed from the other. When you are considering your structure, take a step back and try to see how your main points flow from one to the other.
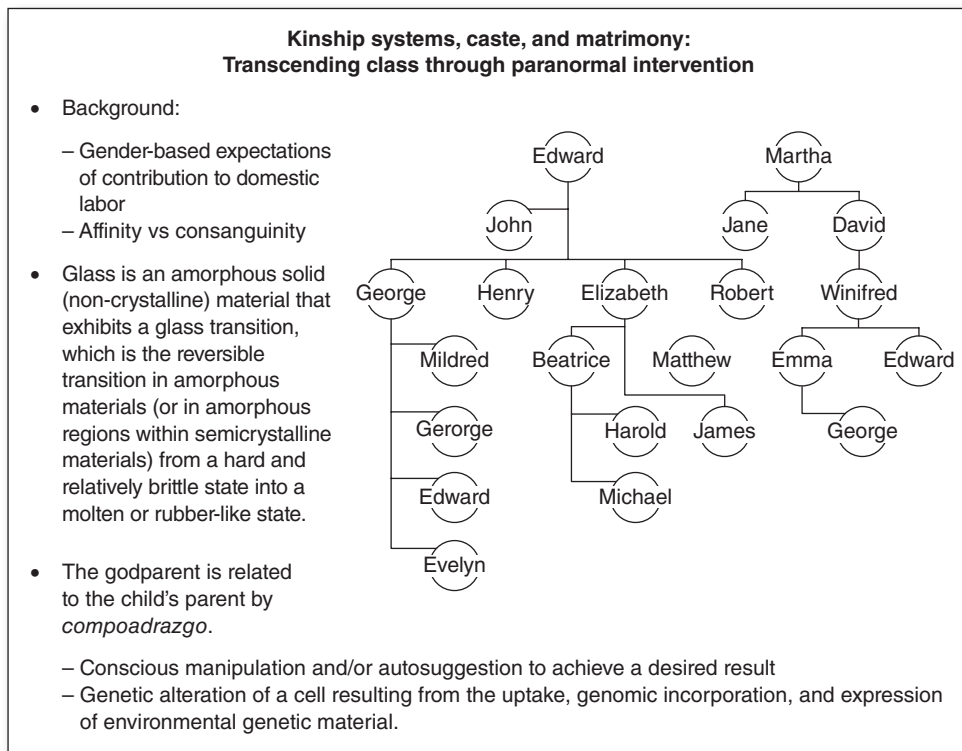

Kinship systems, caste, and matrimony: Transcending class through paranormal intervention

- Background:
  – Gender-based expectations of contribution to domestic labor
  – Affinity vs consanguinity
- Glass is an amorphous solid (non-crystalline) material that exhibits a glass transition, which is the reversible transition in amorphous materials (or in amorphous regions within semicrystalline materials) from a hard and relatively brittle state into a molten or rubber-like state.
- The godparent is related to the child's parent by *compoadrazgo*.
  – Conscious manipulation and/or autosuggestion to achieve a desired result
  – Genetic alteration of a cell resulting from the uptake, genomic incorporation, and expression of environmental genetic material.

Figure 9.4 Cinderella as retold by a scholar who focuses on details at the expense of the story

One way to do this is to take into account the audience's evolving state of mind throughout the course of the presentation. Here, we can draw on lessons from the learning cycle (see Figure 9.5).[1] We first experience things in terms of how they relate to us (moving from concrete experience to reflective observation). Then we can listen to what other people have to say about them and achieve a more general understanding (moving from reflective observation to abstract conceptualization), which we can apply in our own work or to our situation (moving from abstract conceptualization through active experimentation to a new level of concrete experience).

---

[1]Based on David A. Kolb, 'Learning and Problem Solving', in *Organizational Psychology: A Book of Readings,* ed. David A. Kolb, Irwin M. Rubin and James M. McIntyre (Englewood Cliffs, NJ:. Prentice-Hall, 1974).
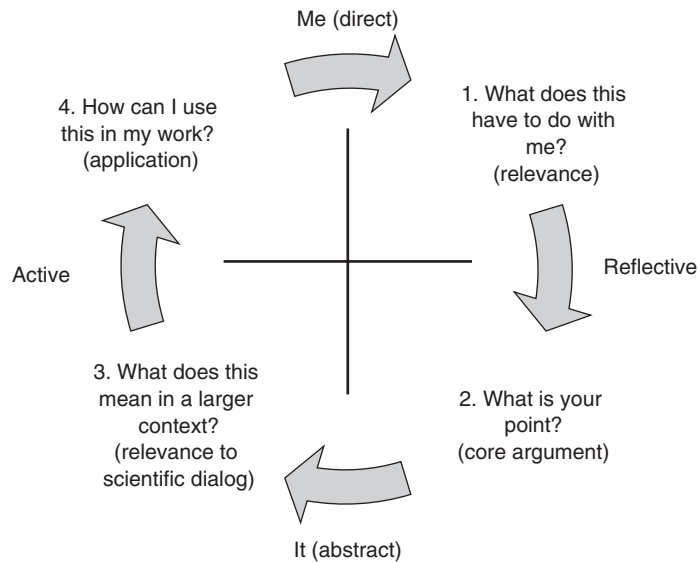
Figure 9.5 The experiential learning cycle

In a scholarly presentation, we have to respond to four types of questions from our audience, each of which corresponds to a stage in this learning cycle. First, your audience is asking, 'Why are you telling me this?' Before they can listen to anything you have to say, they need to know that your presentation is relevant to them in particular. For example, when our astrophysicist was facing an audience of game designers, he would have stood a better chance of getting them to follow his entire presentation if he had begun with: 'As gamers, what do you really need to know about black holes to make your products as realistic as possible?' By appealing to them directly, you establish a connection that will prepare them for your main message. Clearly, this is a special challenge if you have a very mixed audience. At the next stage, the dominant question from the audience is: 'What is your point?' Once they are convinced that what you say is relevant to them, they will be willing and able to hear your argument and conceptualize it. This is where you present your main message.

The final two stages require the audience to step beyond the context of your main message and think about how it can be applied to the scholarly dialogue in general and to their own work in particular. At the third stage, the question dominating your audience is: 'How is this relevant in a wider context?' They are still thinking at a conceptual level, but are actively trying to apply your argument, either to a real-world context or to the broader scholarly discourse. And, finally, at the fourth stage, they are ready to ask: 'If this is so, what does it mean for me? How can I use this in my own work?' Here, they are ready to integrate what they have learned and move forward with it. This is where they decide to what extent your presentation is valuable for their own work.

To take advantage of this learning cycle, a speaker will first establish a connection with the audience before lecturing on content, and then allow the audience to actively make connections to the larger picture, and finally encourage them to

integrate what they've learned into their own work. Most scholarly presentations take place only at stage two, lecture – which is why they can be so boring. The audience does not get a chance to feel any connection to the material, and once the material is presented, they are not given an opportunity to do anything with it. Ideally, your preparation should allow you to know your audience well enough to establish a connection before you present your material. And, fortunately, most speaking contexts will allow you to take questions from the audience, which will stimulate active processing. In most academic contexts, you probably will not be able to arrange for your audience to break up into smaller groups so that they can discuss the wider implications of your work and how it may be integrated into their own work. But you can certainly make sure you do not extend your presentation into the time allotted to answering questions and structure your presentation so that you start by establishing a connection and end by bringing it back around to the relevance to the audience, perhaps by suggesting some of the implications of your work for future research.

CHOOSING YOUR WORDS

Say 'operationalization' three times fast. For that matter, say it once slowly. Some words that are friendly on paper can suddenly become your enemies if you try to say them out loud. This is especially true if you are giving a presentation in a language that is not your mother tongue. Even if you can use such words comfortably on paper, you might want to avoid them in a talk. Sometimes, just knowing that you will have to say the dreaded word is enough to increase your anxiety to such levels that you are doomed to mispronounce it no matter what.

Tip

If a difficult word is unavoidable – say it's the name of the village where you conducted your case study – make sure you write it out on some kind of visual aid: a slide, a transparency, the chalkboard or what have you. When you get to the word, you can turn slightly and point to it. You draw attention toward where you are pointing and away from your mumbling.

Even if you are able to pronounce multisyllabic words with equanimity, you might want to think twice about using them anyway. Written language can afford to be a notch or two more formal than spoken language. (A reader can always take time out to look up troublesome words. This is much harder in a conference room, not only because it's rude, but also because by the time you've looked up the difficult word, the speaker has moved on.) And what can seem both eloquent and

distinguished on paper can sound pompous and cumbersome when spoken aloud. Not to mention boring. Written language supports both longer words and longer sentences more comfortably than spoken language. You can almost always tell if someone is reading a manuscript out loud – even if they are reading fluently. The word choice will sound unnatural, and they will often almost run out of air by the time they get to the end of the sentence. Spoken language, on the other hand, is choppier. The short sentences, sentence fragments and repetition that would seem amateurish in a piece of writing are far more effective in an oral presentation.

The difference between written and spoken language affects the ways in which you can most effectively present your evidence. The numbers and statistics that work very well in a written paper might be harder to grasp when spoken aloud (without the benefit of an accompanying visual aid). Similarly, figurative language that would seem out of place in a written paper often works very well in a spoken setting. An anecdote that isn't scientific enough to make it into print may be the perfect way to introduce your subject. Many scientists who would never dream of quoting Shakespeare in their manuscript on clinical psychology might find a line or two from *Hamlet* the perfect way to sum up a point. And a metaphor that seemed far too literary to include in a scholarly article may work perfectly well in a roomful of PhD students.

A word of caution: if you decide to venture into the world of figurative speech, choose your metaphors, similes, aphorisms and allegories with care. They work because they draw on people's common understanding of a familiar object or relationship – but using them requires that such a comparison be justifiable. The term 'the greenhouse effect' works not only because most people know what a greenhouse is, but also because it expresses a very complex climatic phenomenon in simple and relatively accurate terms: people picture a greenhouse and they get a very good idea of how heat stays trapped in our atmosphere. But if you pick an unfamiliar reference ('The relationship is like that of Eurybia to her sons') or an image that can't be grasped immediately ('The political system of Sweden is like a bicycle'), you simply confuse people, unless you are prepared to spend a considerable amount of time explaining yourself. This is also true if you bombard your audience with several different types of figurative description for the same phenomenon ('It's like a tree-house or a horse or even a bowl of fruit'). But perhaps the main reason to be careful about figurative language is that a poor choice can draw the focus in the wrong direction. Say you are describing an artist who never had more than a second-rate talent, so he channelled his frustration into politics. You think of comparing him to Hitler. However, a thwarted artistic background is not the first thing we think of when we think of Adolf Hitler, so comparing your artist to Hitler may cause your audience to read far more into the comparison than you intend.

The relative informality of the spoken language is evident even in highly formal settings. In almost any context, the speech that makes the greatest impact is the one given in language that people can understand immediately – language that

does not require rewinding or rereading. Dare to speak more directly, with less qualification, when you present your material orally. This is not to say that you cannot use your complex figures and tables. People absorb information in various ways, and one of them is visual. Explaining a complex figure in simple language lets your audience use both the visual and audio senses and can be more powerful than either of them on their own.

When you are thinking about word choice you might also want to consider how you can make ethos and pathos work for you. While your structure should be firmly grounded in logos, you can build your authority (ethos) through your word choice. Using technical terminology can position you as an 'expert' ('believe me because I know what I'm talking about'); using the vernacular can position you as a 'real person' ('believe me because I am one of you'). From your own experience, you have probably noticed that presenters in an academic context tend to overdo the 'I'm an expert, just listen to my big words!' approach. Remember, it is one thing to use technical terminology correctly and position yourself in the field through your choice of concepts; it is another thing to use a long word at every opportunity. (It is helpful to think of jargon like cayenne pepper: a little goes a long way, and too much makes the dish inedible.) Likewise, you can also appeal to pathos through language by drawing from poignant quotes from informants, anecdotes that bring statistics to life and generally emotionally charged words (for example, 'liberty' and 'equality' have more charge than 'democratic systems of governance'). It is the balance of ethos, pathos and logos that is important. If you are new to academia, you might want to err on the side of over-formality to demonstrate authority. If you are a well-established expert, you might want to err on the side of informality to demonstrate accessibility. In any case, it should be a conscious, deliberate choice.

REMEMBERING WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY

Once you have decided how you are going to present your ideas to your audience, you can start thinking about how you are going to remember what you want to say. The old Greeks and Romans who developed the study of rhetoric did not have PowerPoint. Nor did they have 3-by-5 note cards. What they did have was a clear sense of purpose when they spoke. A clear sense of purpose is your most important memory aid: knowing exactly what you are supposed to be doing, having a clear sense of your storyline, will help you regain your focus should your words fail you.

Once you feel confident about saying your central message out loud, close your eyes and imagine yourself giving your talk from beginning to end. Picture where you will stand, where you will look, how your voice will sound and what you will say. When the time comes to actually give your talk, the visualizing you did beforehand will not only make it easier to remember what you were going to say, but also make the situation feel more familiar and therefore less threatening.

For most of us, though, a clear sense of purpose and a clear vision of what we want to do isn't enough. We almost always have with us something that will help us remember what we want to say. Fortunately, we have a wide variety of options at our disposal. Unfortunately, the ones that seem the most helpful might actually work against us.

Reading a prepared manuscript

Many of us feel our safest crutch is a fully prepared manuscript. The more terrified we are, the more we feel we need to see the words right in front of us. We fear that if the words aren't written down, we will never get them out of our mouths. But as noted above, sentences written and words chosen for the printed page are more often more difficult to say out loud. The more we struggle to get our mouths around our well-crafted but long sentences and the more we see our audience getting restless and bored, the more nervous we become – making the manuscript harder to read and the audience even more restless. As the audience starts to squirm, we start talking faster, as if we think we can physically hold them in their seats if we can only bury them in enough words. And the faster we talk, the less the audience understands, and the cycle continues.

If you simply must have a fully prepared manuscript, then at least spend the necessary time rewriting the manuscript so that it can be read out loud. Shorten the sentences, use simpler words and make sure you know how to pronounce everything. You can even include informal phrases like 'let's say', and note where you should pause. You will also need to make sure it is easy for you to see the words on paper: double-space the entire manuscript and choose a font size that you can see comfortably. Read the manuscript through from beginning to end several times to weed out any problem areas and to time yourself. Contrary to what you might think, reading from a prepared manuscript requires more rehearsal than speaking extemporaneously. The more familiar you are with your manuscript, the more natural the words will sound, and the more often you will be able to look up and establish eye contact with your audience.

The more you can wean yourself away from a fully prepared manuscript, the greater the contact you will likely be able to establish with your audience. Jot down key words and phrases on those old standard 3-by-5 note cards, just to jog your memory. The less you write down, the more you will have to say extemporaneously. This will automatically encourage you to use less formal and stilted language, which in turn will make it easier for your audience to understand and remember what you say.

But it is also possible to choose visual aids that not only help you remember what you want to say, but also actively help you get your message across to your audience. Computerized slide presentations, chalkboards/whiteboards and flip charts are all valid options.

Computerized slide presentations

Computerized slide presentations, such as those prepared using Microsoft's PowerPoint, Prezi or other similar programs, are the most modern and probably most common visual aid used today. Slide presentations allow you to write down bulleted lists of points or key words and phrases, as well as figures and tables, ahead of time. The advantage of this is clear: not only do the slides help you remember what you want to say, but they also help your audience refocus if they drop out momentarily (especially if you use animations to introduce one point at a time). The disadvantages are perhaps not as clear: you may wind up competing with it for the audience's attention – and losing. *You* are the most important visual aid you have (see the next section), and the more you draw attention away from you, the less you communicate directly with your audience. The most common problem with slide presentations is that the slides contain far too much information. Most people cannot read one thing while listening to something else. They will tend to read what's on the screen and ignore you, or maybe listen to you and ignore what's on the screen – or most likely, try to do a bit of both and end up failing on both counts.

For your slide presentation to be effective, make sure only a small amount of text appears on the screen at a time. Your bulleted points should appear one at a time (and, please, just make them appear: no bouncing, spinning, singing or dancing). If you simply must have a large number of words on the screen at once – say you are showing an important paragraph of legal text – then read the text *with* your audience: use a pointer and read the text out loud so your audience can follow along. This way, you make sure you direct your audience's focus where you want it. If you ask them to read it to themselves, as many presenters do, you risk over- or underestimating the length of time it takes to read, and most likely you will carry on talking, making reading difficult.

If you spend too much time looking at the screen, you draw attention away from what you are saying and the audience is robbed of their most important source of information: you.

The second major mistake people make when giving slide presentations is that they turn their backs to the audience to see what is on the screen, and then they end up talking to the screen. This makes it harder for your audience to hear, and it causes them to miss out on the valuable information they can get from your facial expressions. Make sure you have a monitor in front of you that is showing what is on the screen behind you. Then you won't have to turn around to check what's up on the screen, and you'll be less tempted to talk to the screen instead of your audience.

Flip charts, chalkboards and whiteboards

Far more old-school, and comparably undervalued, are flip charts, chalkboards and whiteboards. The genius of these is that you can draw as you talk – letting your ideas develop visually as they flow. Most of us remember at least one wild-haired professor waving his arms around with chalk in hand, drawing arrows in all directions, spittle flying. Chances are you never fell asleep during his classes. It's hard *not* to be engaged when the speaker is so clearly engaged, and the less you are a slave to your visual aids, the more you can let your engagement steer you. The more you want to interact directly with your audience, the more you need a visual aid that does not require prior preparation, or will not flummox you with technical glitches. If you are planning to answer direct questions from your audience, the last thing you want to have to say is: 'Wait a second, hold that thought. Let's see, if I press ESC, I get out of the slide show, but how do I start a new slide? No, I don't want the bullet points. How do I draw a line on this thing?'

USING YOUR VOICE AND BODY LANGUAGE EFFECTIVELY

Whatever system you use to help you remember what you want to say – and to help your audience both understand and remember your message – make sure you do not play a supporting role to your visual aids. Your body and your voice are your most important aids. And in a contest between your body language and the words coming out of your mouth, your body language will always win. Remember when you were a kid getting yelled at by your father for, say, putting cans of Coke in the tumble dryer to see what would happen? You knew that if he even for *one second* cracked a smile, you had nothing to fear. No matter how emphatically he said, 'Now, Bobby, I'm really angry with you', the smile overruled everything. The same will happen when you are up on the podium. No matter how often you say that your results are exciting and you have confidence in their validity, if you stand there cringing like a minion, nobody will get excited and plenty of people may wonder how much confidence you really do have (Figure 9.6).

Which one of the people in Figure 9.6 would you rather listen to? If you look like you are interested in what you are talking about, your audience will be interested, too. Likewise, if you look like you are indifferent, you are sending a strong signal to your audience about how they should feel as well. This is a serious challenge if you are terrified of public speaking. The less confident you seem, the less confidence your audience will have in what you are saying. The good news is that the more public speaking you do, the more confident you are likely to become.

Figure 9.6   The importance of body language

It is not just action that speaks louder than words: inaction and facial expressions send a strong message to the audience about your confidence and level of engagement.

Until then, however, you may have to learn to fake it until you make it. Here are some things you can do to seem more confident and in control:

Practice 'power poses': Avoid crossing your arms, sitting hunched over with your legs crossed or any posture that makes you smaller. Practice standing with your shoulders relaxed, with your arms wide open, loose at your sides or your hands on your hips. (See Amy Cuddy's TED talk, 'Your body language shapes who you are', available at: www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.) Do this for a few minutes before you speak, and when you are speaking, you do not need to strike a Superman pose, but remembering to stand up straight with your shoulders back and your arms uncrossed can send a signal not only to the audience but also to yourself that you have this under control.

Avoid apologizing: If you are late, simply say, 'Thank you for your patience.' If you have forgotten to bring the handouts you prepared the night before, just say, 'If you would like additional written material, contact me afterward.' And whatever you do, do not begin a speech by apologizing for what a bad public speaker you are. You may feel like you are scoring points by bonding with the audience on a human level, but what you are actually doing is calling attention to a shortcoming the audience probably would not have noticed until you brought it up. See for yourself: next time you have people over for dinner, halfway through the meal apologize for the uncomfortableness of the chairs and watch them suddenly squirm in a newfound awareness of how they are sitting. And the worst thing you can say is: 'I'm sorry I didn't have time to prepare.' You might think you are telling them, 'No, really, I'm better than this. Don't

let my bumbling performance fool you', but what you are actually saying is, 'I couldn't be bothered to prepare properly. You are not a high enough priority.'

Dress to mirror your audience: One of the best ways to inspire confidence is for your body language to say, 'I'm one of you.' If your audience is in jeans, you can wear jeans. If they are in business attire, you should be, too. It is safer to err by being a bit too formal than a bit too informal. One other note regarding clothing: the best clothing to wear is the kind that is not remembered afterward. If your audience pays attention to what you are wearing, they are clearly not paying attention to what you are saying. This means that all loud, jangling jewellery of any kind should be left at home.

Keep nervous tics to a minimum: Do you feel you have to do something with your hands at all times? Hold on to a pen, a piece of chalk, a pointer or something. This might keep you from scratching various body parts or fiddling with your hair or clothing – any of which are infinitely more distracting. And while moving back and forth a bit can help keep both you and your audience more awake, try to avoid rocking or swaying, which can have a less-than-desirable hypnotic effect.

Maintain eye contact: The more you look at your audience, the more confident you will appear. Even if they seem like a blur to you, just lifting your face to look in the general direction of where people are sitting helps tremendously. Sometimes, you will find some people who look particularly interested in what you are saying; if you focus on them, you can boost your confidence, in addition to achieving better contact with the audience in general. But please avoid staring at just one person in particular; in addition to making that person feel extremely uncomfortable, you make everyone else feel left out.

Speak loudly and slowly: Nothing inspires confidence more than a clear, resonating voice. And for most of us, the more excited or nervous we get, the faster we talk. Slow down! This is especially true if you are speaking in a non-native language.

Use silence: Do not be afraid of pauses. Most people find silence uncomfortable and rush to fill it. But if you show that it does not scare you, then your audience will cave first – and instead of tuning you out, they will focus their attention on waiting for you to say something. So, instead of saying 'umm' or 'uh' or whatever filler you favour, practice just letting silence descend. This not only lets your audience think, it also shows them that you are in charge.

And if you are speaking at a conference in a foreign language, or if you in any other way feel intimidated by the other speakers or audience, try to interact with them as much as you can beforehand. Ask questions, circulate, mingle. This will give you both an opportunity to warm up in speaking the language of the conference and a chance to learn something about your audience.

ANALYZING YOUR PERFORMANCE

The final step in giving a good presentation is to analyze how it went. First, ask yourself what went well, and what went less well. If you take just a few minutes to think about what worked and what didn't, you can apply this to your next presentation. Next, you can ask someone from the audience how it went. It is always a good idea to ally yourself with a partner at every speaking occasion. Get someone from the audience to pay particular attention to how your presentation went *as a presentation*. And like any feedback situation (see Chapter 8), the more background you can give your partner on what you need help on, the better the feedback you will get. Are you most worried about distracting mannerisms? Your pronunciation of some words? Your visual aids?

When it comes to scholarly presentations, however, the most important aspect to analyze is usually the content. The feedback you can get from a presentation, where people can ask you questions directly about your work, can be far more valuable than almost any other kind of feedback. If you use the opportunity to integrate this feedback, then presenting your work becomes more than just an unavoidable part of being a scholar – it becomes an invaluable tool.

Remember

Giving presentations does more than help you reach a wider audience with your message. It is also an important part of the writing process. Presenting your material out loud and answering questions from your audience both help you further hone your ideas.

FURTHER READING

- Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. Sometimes it is useful to go back to the beginning. In this case, Aristotle is the undisputed father of modern rhetoric. Aristotle's pamphlet on rhetoric is available in any number of forms: I have a Kindle version by Acheron Press. What is amazing about Aristotle's writing is how much of it is still relevant today, after more than 2,000 years.
- Curry, Mary Jane and Lillis, Theresa (2013) *A Scholar's Guide to Getting Published in English: Critical Choices and Practical Strategies*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters. Curry and Lillis discuss the reasons why you might want to attend a conference and give a presentation.
- Duarte, Nancy (2010) *Resonate: Present Visual Stories that Transform Audiences*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons. A follow-up to her previous book *Slide:ology*, which focuses on the visual presentation of slides, this book focuses more on the art of connecting with an audience. Although scholars are not the main audience, we have a lot to learn from some of the ideas that she offers. She also has a website that is worth taking a look at: www.duarte.com, last accessed June 2014.

- Reynolds, Garr (2012) *Presentation Zen*, Berkeley, CA: New Riders. In *Presentation Zen* and its follow-up book *The Naked Presenter*, Garr draws from lessons he learned about simplicity by living in Japan. Like Duarte, Garr does not explicitly target academics here, but he has a lot to offer. He also has a blog worth visiting: www.presentationzen.com, last accessed June 2014.
- Thody, Angela M. (2006) *Writing and Presenting Research*, London: Sage. This is one of the few books on scholarly writing I have seen that explicitly talks about presentations. See chapter 13 'Becoming a presenter'.
- Tierney, Elizabeth P. (1996) *How to Make Effective Presentations*, London: Sage. Most books on presentation skills focus on presentations in the context of business, which as we all know is not the same thing as a scholarly conference. As part of the Sage 'Survival Skills for Scholars' series, this book focuses on the important issues of giving presentations in the context of academia.