

Wednesday 24th June, 2015

**Summary: CICASP Seminar 06**

**Asking and Answering Questions after a Presentation: Student Practice 2**

In this Seminar, we listened to two students introduce themselves and their research. The audience came up with testing questions for the speakers. Everyone asked at least one question. Students put a lot of careful thought into their questions and the speakers gave answers 'on-the-spot'. There will be two more seminars in this block giving as many students as possible the opportunity to practise answering questions after giving their presentation.

We welcomed some first-time attendees to our CICASP Seminar in Science Communication. For this reason, the information given in the first seminar on the topic of 'Asking and Answering Questions after Talks' is given again on pages 2-4.

**Note:** The CICASP Seminar to take place on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June was cancelled due to low attendance with students attending a compulsory course.

Wednesday 1st July, 2015

**Outline: CICASP Seminar 07**

**Asking and Answering Questions after a Presentation: Student Practice 3**

The CICASP Seminar next week will be a continuation of the theme: 'Asking and Answering Questions'. Three more students will face the challenge of presenting a short 'bio' and then facing three 'good' and three 'bad' questions from the audience.

Everyone at the seminar has different levels of ability and experience, both in speaking English and in science communication skills. The aim of taking our seminars is to enhance your own ability over time; to see improvement when comparing your skills and confidence level after the seminar course to your earlier performances. The interactive style of the seminars allows practice in a friendly, relatively relaxed and supportive environment, readying you for presenting, asking and answering questions at professional, formal meetings/conferences.

## **Asking Questions after Talks**

- 1) What to ask?
- 2) How best to ask it?

Before you ask..

- Okay to ask for Clarification
- Is your question appropriate/relevant/likely of interest to most of the audience?
- International Conference – remember, you can also ask after the session

How to ask Questions?

- Brief, clear, loud
- Respectful: wording, tone, body language, voice, smiling
- Non-confrontational
- Be careful not to openly criticise
- Avoid being judgemental, sarcastic, sneering, self-righteous etc.

Examples...

"Should that be X, instead of Y", *not* "that should be..."

"You just said x, but the text seems to say y. Could you talk about the difference?"

"I didn't understand how you went from step A to step B"

"You covered x earlier, but I'm still not quite clear on.... Please, could you explain?"

A Controversial Issue...

Should you compliment the Speaker before asking your question?

- "great talk,..."
- "really enjoyed this talk,..."
- "you're studying a very interesting question,..."

Yes

- Offsets a question that may sound critical
- Only if your honest opinion
- Compliments from well-established, well-regarded scientists boost to junior scientists
- If yes, keep it very short!

No

- Question time is too short
- Can sound insincere/offhand because brief
- Compliments can be made after the talk
- Can become repetitive/trite
- Use tone of voice, etc., to express appreciation indirectly

## **Answering Questions after Talks**

Contexts

- Departmental/Section Seminar
- International Conference
- Specialist Panel
- Talk to general public/high-school
- Presentation – part of job interview

First of all, if you get any questions then that is already a good sign:

- Your audience is still awake
- They are interested and engaged with your talk

Aim?

- Answers as 'polished' as talk
- Stay calm
- Short, clear answers (limited time!)
- Avoid 'bluffing'
- Be prepared

## How to 'Ace' Question-time?

### A) Advance Preparation

1) Think about likely questions

- Any study weaknesses?
- Remind yourself of reasoning
- Future directions?
- What has been asked about this study before?

2) Additional 'back-up' slides (not part of main talk)

- extra detail (if complex topic)
- figures/Tables
- details of method

Think: Have I left anything out due to time limit that might be of interest?

3) Paper Sheets/tablet with extra numbers, etc., that you can refer to

4) Find out Q & A Format

5) Prepare Yourself Mentally

6) Give contact on end slide

7) Sleep well

### B) Strategies to use 'on-the-day'

- Respond in a calm, positive and enthusiastic manner.
- Keep answers brief and focused.
- Address whole audience

1) Listen

2) Understand

3) Respond

- Short answers are best.
- 30 sec – 1 min

Some challenges you might face...

Difficult Questions

- Take your time
- Don't have data to hand? – explain and offer to follow-up later
- Okay not to know the answer  
(better to admit you don't know than

- to give an uninformed answer)
- You could give some related information

Examples...

"I don't know"

"I'll get back to you on that"

"That's an interesting point of view, I haven't really thought of this aspect yet".

"We haven't looked into that yet, but it is [on our to-do list / one of our future lines of research / the next idea we want to explore]".

### Stupid Questions

- 1) Is it really a stupid question?

Maybe...

- one word incorrect?
- they have misunderstood something?
- they know something you don't?
- You have misunderstood it?
  - Ask for clarification
  - Think before you answer
  - Questions are not always what they seem

- 2) What if you are *sure* that it is a stupid question?

- Always be respectful
- Answer it seriously
- Tell the facts

Example...

"Assuming I've heard and understood you correctly, the answer to your question is X. I'd be happy to elaborate - can we take this up after the talk?"

Question that is not a question...

"I'll take that as a statement, rather than a question."

### Aggressive Question?

Suggestions

- Respond as if no aggression
- Avoid letting it upset/fluster you
- If you can, refute their points calmly
- Audience will probably be on your side

Examples

e.g., "Actually, Smith and Jones showed in a paper last year that this method works quite well"

e.g., "The jury is still out on that question, but our results show it's worth investigating further".

"Maybe we can discuss those details individually later. "

[References/Acknowledgements: information and some direct quotes taken from: 1) questions and comments on the discussion forum: <[www.academia.stackexchange.com](http://www.academia.stackexchange.com)>; 2) University of Leicester Guide to 'Responding to Questions Effectively'; 3) David Pannell of the University of Western Australia <<http://www.pannelldiscussions.net/2011/03/181-answering-questions-after-presenting-a-seminar-or-conference-paper/>>.]