

Conference Presentations

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Why go to conferences?

- **Meet Reviewers**
- **Meet Editors**
- **Meet Co-authors**

Bad conference presentations

You've seen poor conference presentations.

The speaker:

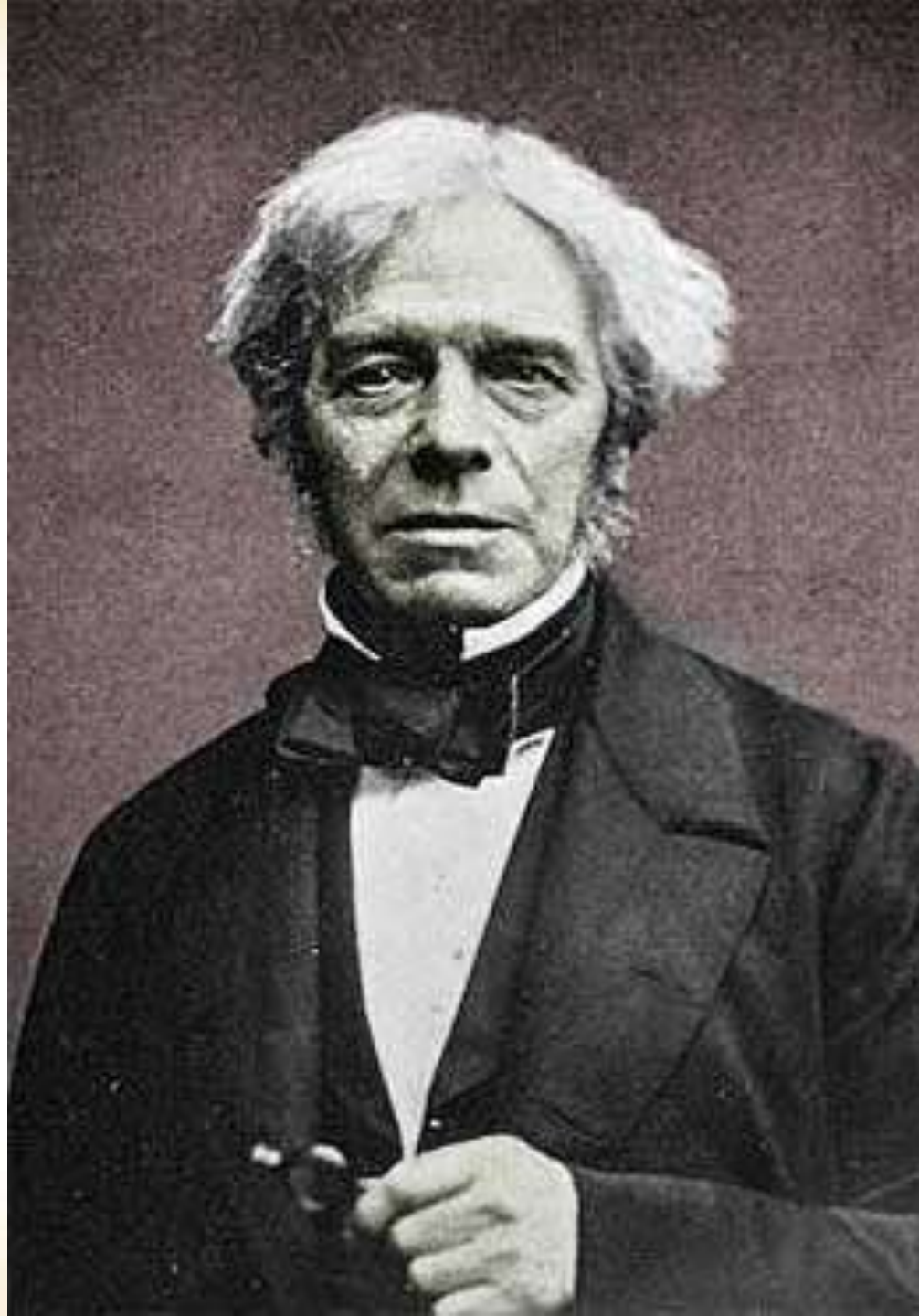
- Sits
- Reads
- Speaks in a dead, low voice
- Uses sentences that are long and complex
- Uses technical words and phrases
- Emphasizes complicated details
- Runs out of time

An effective talk must do two things:

- 1. Persuade the audience with evidence**
- 2. Be interesting and entertaining**

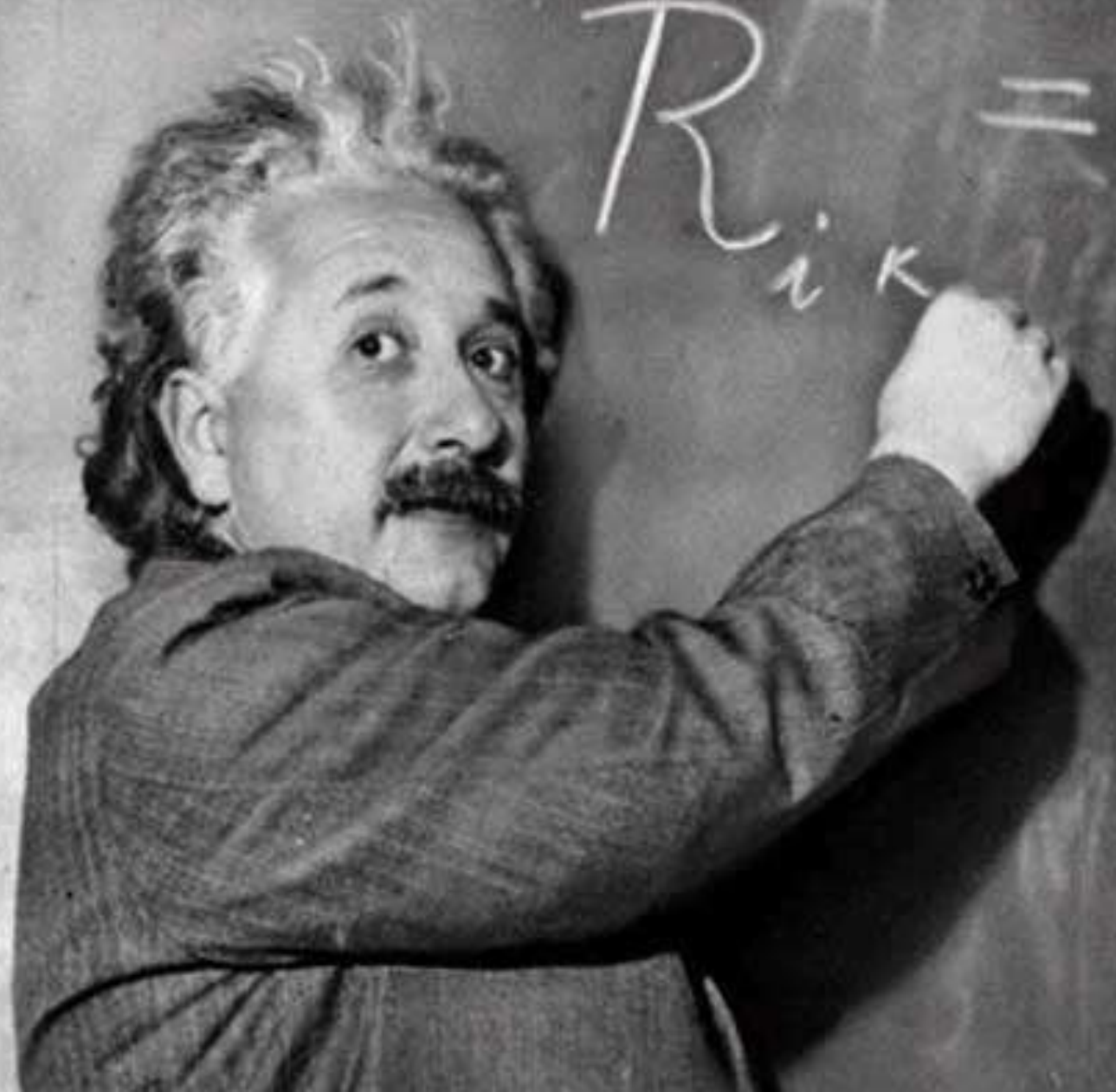
Principles of effective conference presentations:

- ✓ Talk, instead of read**
- ✓ Stand up**
- ✓ Move around**
- ✓ Make eye contact with your audience**
- ✓ Don't look at one side of the room only**
- ✓ Imitate excellent speakers**



Michael Faraday on presenting

- “[Lectures] depend entirely for their value on the manner in which they are given. It is not the matter, not the subject, so much as the man.”

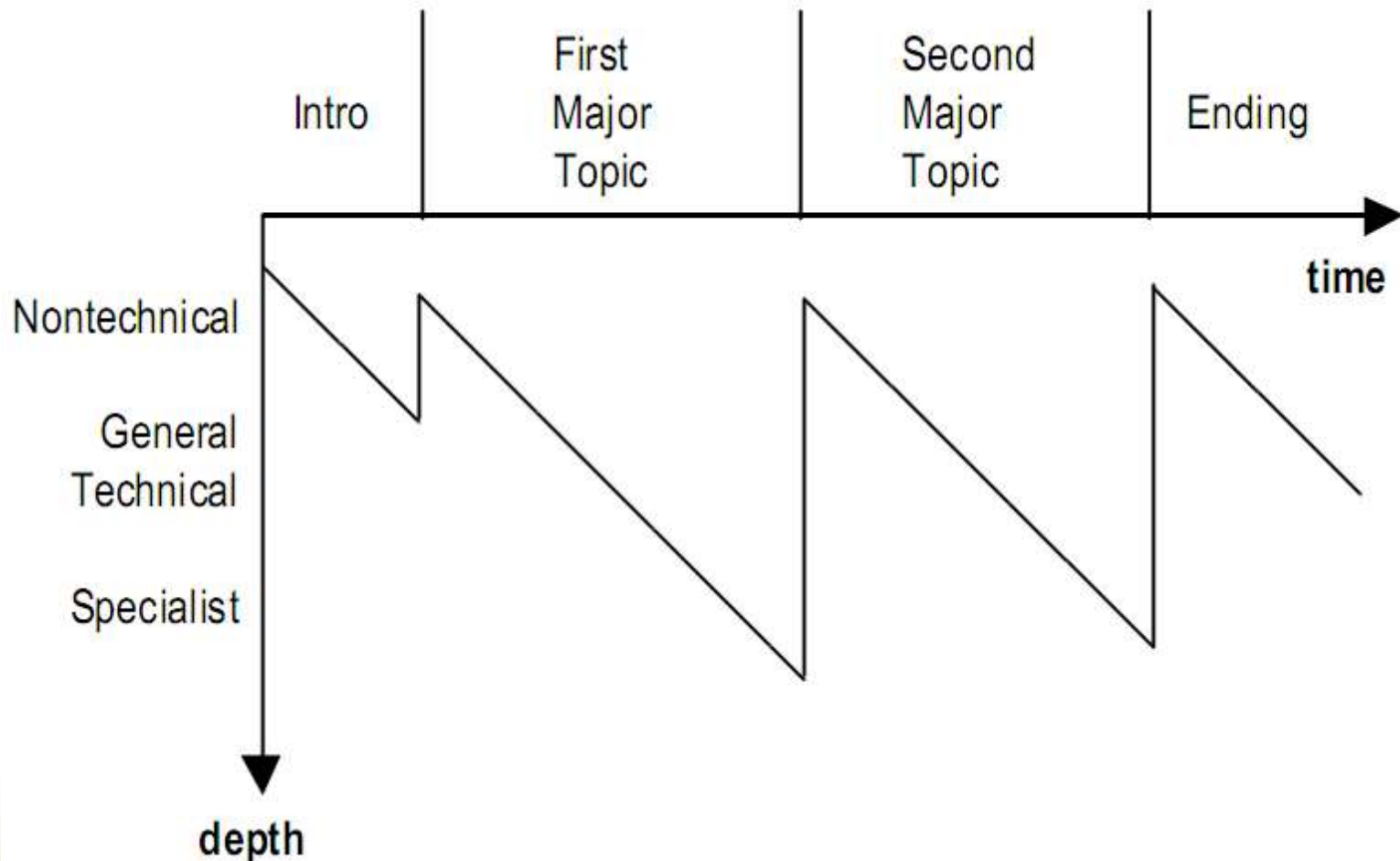


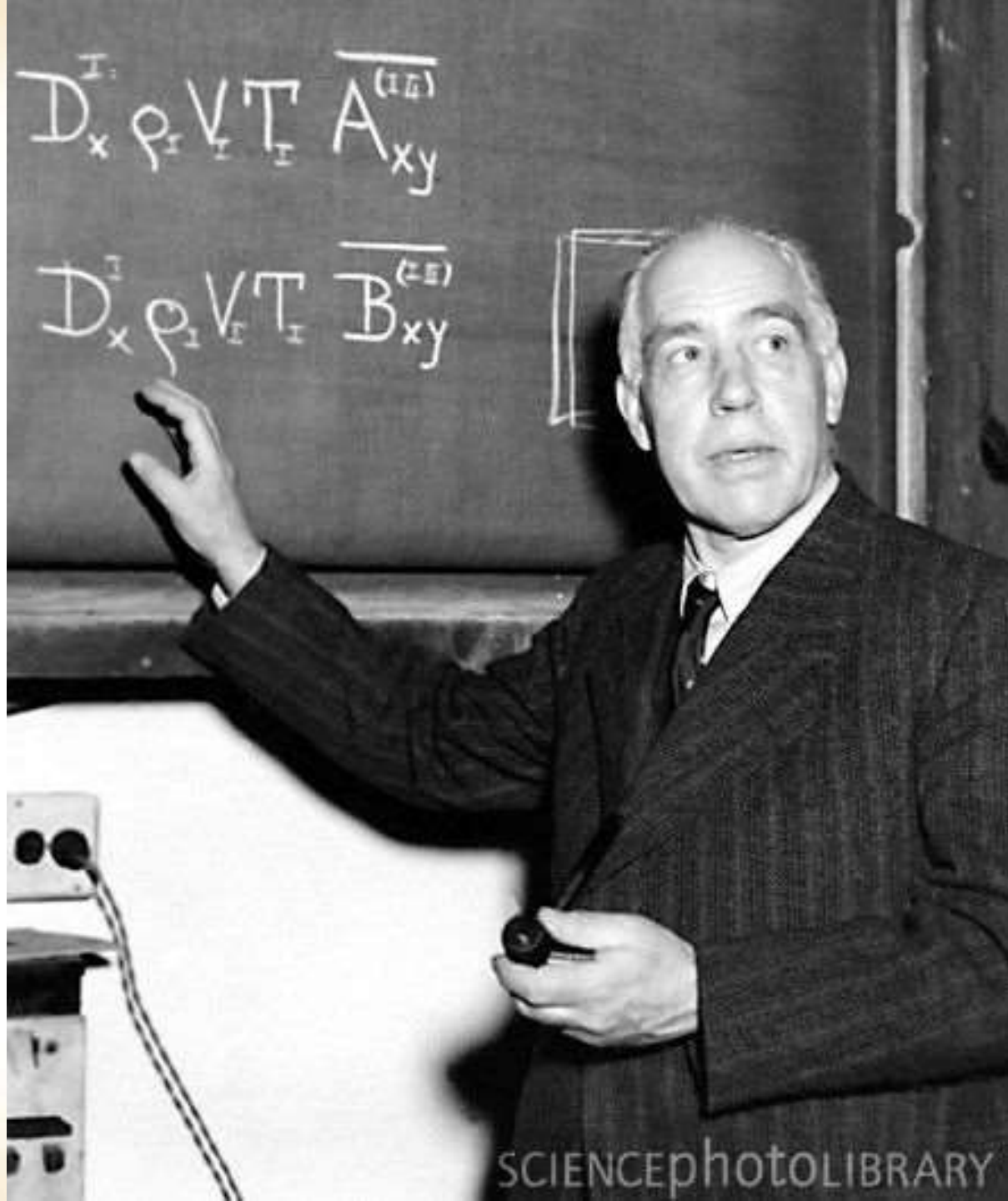
$$R_{ik} = 0$$

Einstein and Familiarity

- To describe the likelihood of producing nuclear energy with alpha particles striking nitrogen nuclei, Einstein used the analogy of “shooting sparrows in the dark”⁷

Timeline showing presenter reaching multiple audiences by beginning at surface of the topic, diving into a subject, and then surfacing to gather entire audience.





Einstein on Bohr

- Bohr stated “his opinions like one perpetually groping and never like one who believes himself to be in possession of definite truth.”

Bohr vs. Nusslein-Volhard

Bohr:

“Whereas Einstein tried to grasp a hidden essence by disregarding anything he thought irrelevant, Bohr insisted that nothing be left out.”

– Edward MacKinnon

“Bohr was much worse. His failing was that he used too many words to express any idea, wandering about as he spoke, often inaudibly.”

– Sir Mark Oliphant

Bohr's Nobel Prize acceptance speech

- “Today, as a consequence of the great honor the Swedish Academy of Sciences has done me in awarding me this year's Nobel Prize for Physics for my work on the structure of the atom, it is my duty to give an account of the results of this work, and I think that I shall be acting in accordance with the traditions of the Nobel Foundation if I give this report in the form of a survey of the development which has taken place in the last few years within the field of physics to which this work belongs.”

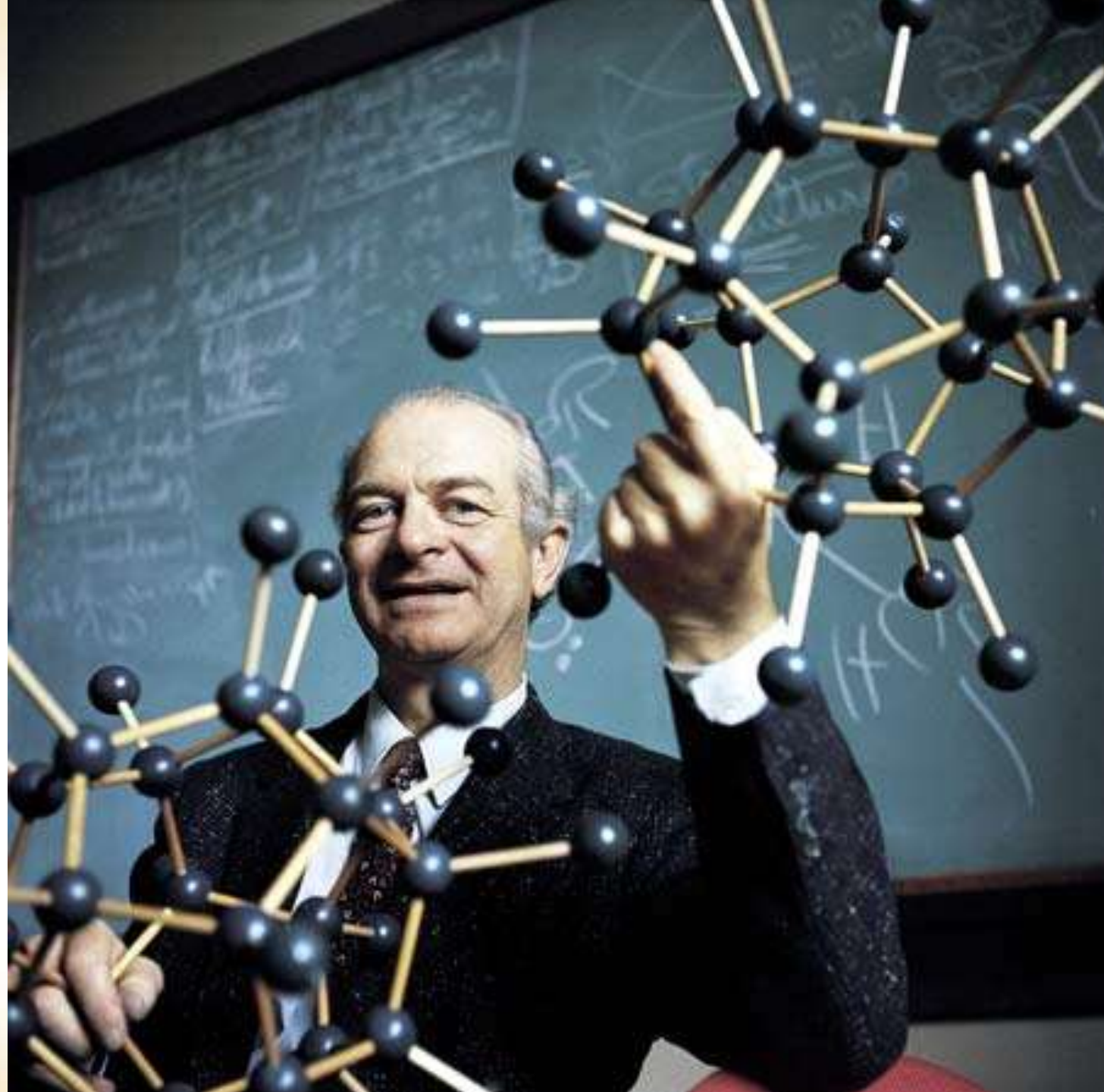
Nies Bohr: Nobel prize acceptance

- “The present state of atomic theory is characterized by the fact that we not only believe the existence of atoms to be proved beyond a doubt, but also we even believe that we have an intimate knowledge of the constituents of the individual atoms. I cannot on this occasion give a survey of the scientific developments that have led to this result—I will only recall the discovery of the electron toward the close of the last century, which furnished the direct verification and led to the conclusive formulation of the conception of the atomic nature of electricity which had evolved since the discovery by Faraday of the fundamental laws of electrochemical theory, and its greatest triumph in the electrolytic dissociation theory of Arrhenius.”



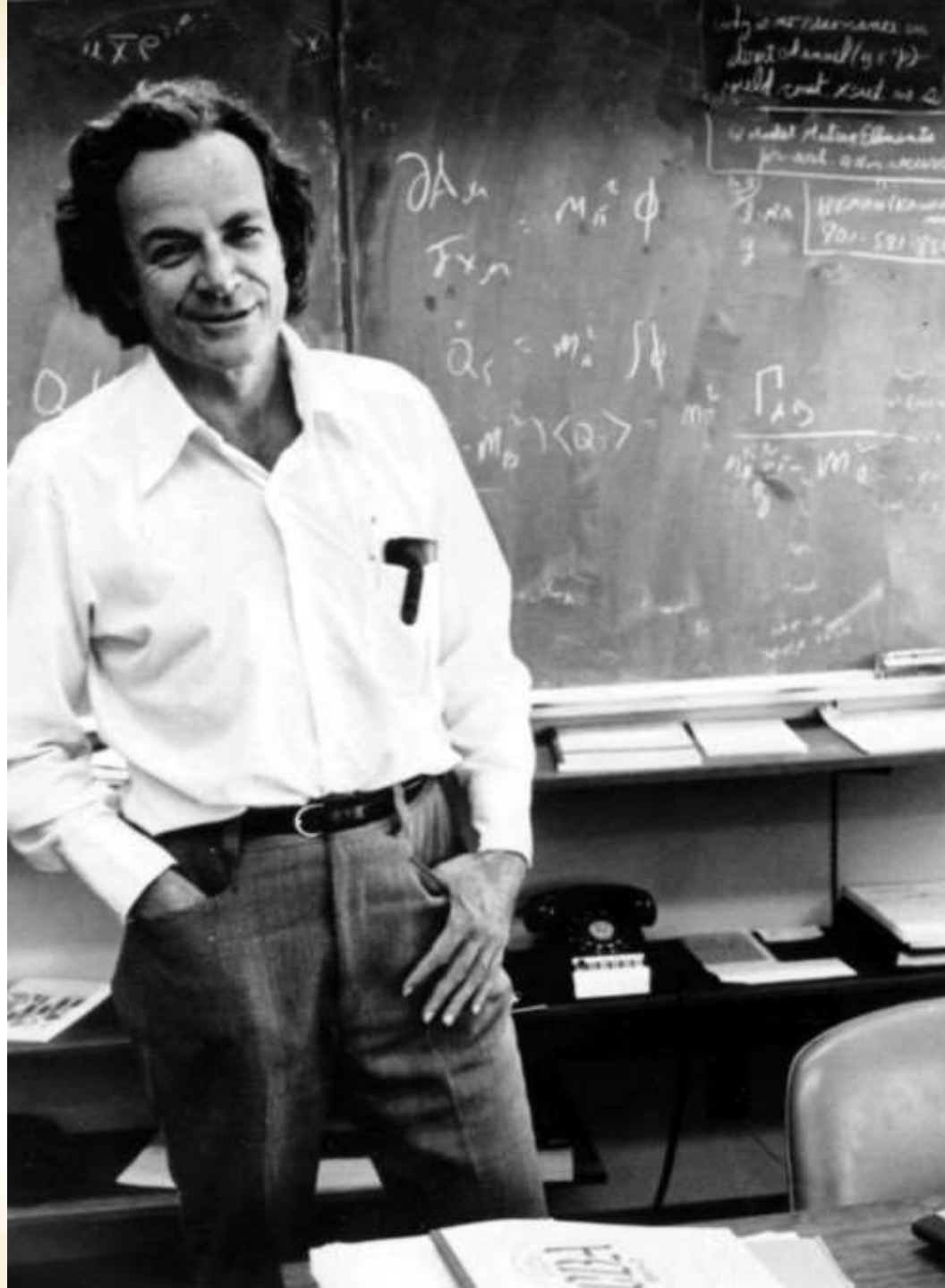
Christiane Nusslein-Volhard

- In the life of animals, complex forms alternate with simple ones. An individual develops from a simple one-celled egg that bears no resemblance on the complex structure and pattern displayed in the juvenile and adult form. The process of embryonic development with its highly ordered increase in complexity accompanied by perfect reproducibility, is controlled by a subset of the animal genes. Animals have a large number of genes. The exact number is not known for any multicellular organism, nor is it known how many and which are required for the development of complexity, pattern, and shape during embryogenesis. To identify these genes and to understand their functions is a major issue in biological research.



James Watson on Pauling's presentations

- “Pauling’s talk was made with his usual dramatic flair. The words came out as if he had been in show business all his life. A curtain kept his model hidden until near the end of his lecture, when he proudly unveiled his latest creation. Then, with his eyes twinkling, Linus explained the specific characteristics that made his model—the α -helix—uniquely beautiful... Even if he were to say nonsense, his mesmerized students would never know because of his unquenchable self-confidence.”

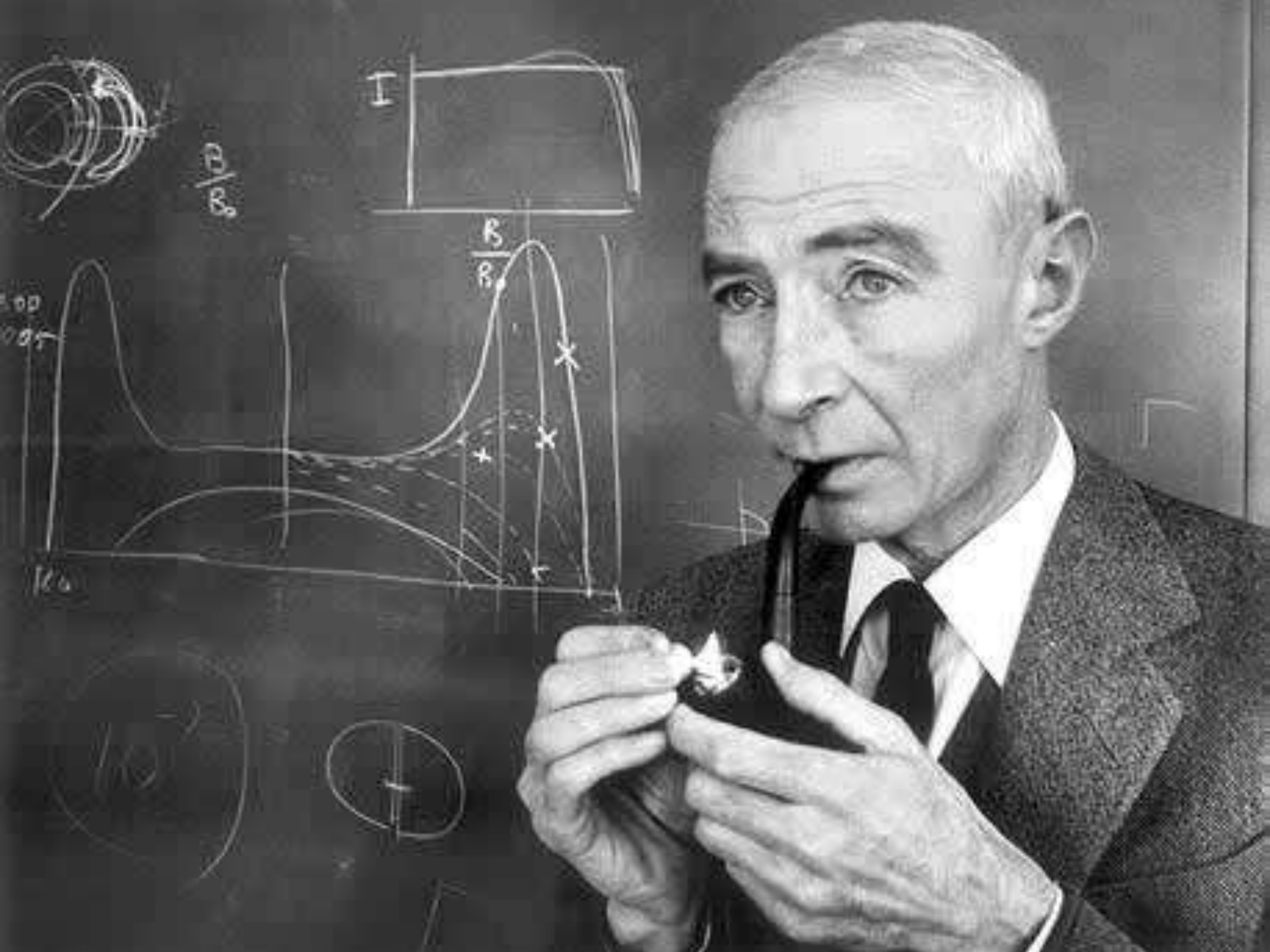


David L. Goodstein on Richard Feynman

- “[Feynman] absolutely held the attention of everyone in the room for the entire time he was there. This is what made him a great teacher. For Feynman, the lecture hall was a theater, and the lecturer a performer, responsible for providing drama and fireworks as well as facts and figures. This was true regardless of his audience, whether he was talking to undergraduates or graduate students, to his colleagues or the general public.”

Professor David Goodstein on Richard Feynman

“Even when he thought he was explaining things clearly to students, it was not always they who benefited most from what he was doing. It was us, scientists, physicists, professors, who would be the main beneficiaries of his magnificent achievement, which was nothing less than to see all of physics with fresh new eyes.”



Daniel J. Kelves on Robert Oppenheimer

- “Desperately eager to reach his students and sensitive because of his own past difficulties, Oppenheimer paid as much attention to his students as to his subject. His language evolved into a mixture of educated phrases and slang, and he learned to use the extraordinary talent for clarifying complex technical matters.”

Nobel Prize winner Hans Bethe about Oppenheimer

- “Probably the most important ingredient Oppenheimer brought to his teaching was his great taste. He always knew what were the important problems when choosing his subjects. He truly lived with those problems, struggling for a solution, and he communicated his concern to his students.”



Lise Meitner on Ludwig Boltzmann

- “[The lecturing of Boltzmann] was the most beautiful and stimulating thing I have ever heard. He was so enthusiastic about everything he taught us that one left every lecture with the feeling that a completely new and wonderful world had been revealed.”



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ace Seminars



Eve Curie on her mother Marie Curie

- “On Monday and Wednesday, my mother was nervous from the time she got up. At five o’clock on these days she lectured. After lunch she shut herself into her study, prepared the lesson, and wrote the heads of chapters of her lecture on a piece of white paper. At four thirty she would go to the laboratory and isolate herself in a little rest room. She was tense, anxious, unapproachable. Marie had been teaching for twenty-five years; yet every time she had to appear in the little classroom before twenty or thirty pupils, who rose at her entrance, she unquestionably had “stage fright.”

10 tips to develop confidence in conference presentations

- 1. Expect to be nervous**
- 2. Prepare**
- 3. Practice**
- 4. Breathe**
- 5. Rehearse**
- 6. Focus on your audience**
- 7. Simplify**
- 8. Picture success**
- 9. Connect with your audience**
- 10. Pretend to be confident**

Voice quality

- **speed:** Speak at a normal speed, faster, more slowly, and you can stop completely! You can also pause to get your audience's attention.
 - **tone:** Change the pitch of your voice. Speak in a high tone or speak in a low tone.
 - **volume:** you can speak at a normal volume, loudly and you can speak quietly. Lowering your voice and speaking quietly can attract your audience's interest.
-
- Do not speak in the same flat voice

Think about your presentation goals

- In conference talks you should have at least two goals:
 - 1.leave your audience with a clear picture of your contribution
 - 2.make them want to read your paper

A short conference talk outline

- **Title/author/university** (1 slide)
- **Abstract** (1 slide) -Give the basic problem and answer.
- **Outline** (1 slide) -Give the talk structure.
- **Motivation and Problem Statement** (1-2 slides) -Why does anyone care?
- **Related Work** (0-1 slides) -Talk briefly about this, or you can eliminate this section and refer people to your paper.
- **Methods** (1 slide) -Cover quickly in short talks and refer people to your paper.
- **Results** (4-6 slides) -Present key results with implications. This is the main body of the talk. Do not cover all the results. Cover the key result well.
- **Summary** (1 slide)
- **Future Work** (0-1 slides)
- **Backup Slides** (0-3 slides)

Using quotes in your speech

- If you quote another source, pause and indicate the quote by saying **"quote end quote."**
- **Don't use long quotes** or quote too much material Your audience wants your ideas
- **Be careful criticizing** other scholars

Using PowerPoint at Conferences

Slides Should be Short

- Slides help you, and your audience, follow the flow of the talk.
- Not too full: 6 lines of text per slide is enough; 9 lines is a lot; 12 lines is unreadable.
- Bullet points should be a few words, not complete sentences.
- If you need more space, use more slides.

Determining Font Size

72 Point

36 Point

24 Point

- Your audience may be look at the screen from 70 feet away.
- Fonts should be 24 points or larger

Choosing a Font

36 pt Helvetica

36 pt Times

36 pt Arial Narrow

- From a distance, you'll notice that the serif (Times) font and the 'narrow' or condensed font are more difficult to read. Don't sacrifice readability for style. Your job is to communicate.

- **Choosing a color**
 - Yellow with black letters is considered the most readable.
- **Color blindness**
 - Unwanted light affects color contrast by turning dark reds and greens much lighter.
 - About 10% of people have difficulty with reds and greens.
- **Use contrasting colors**
 - A dark background with light text is easily readable
 - Use drop shadows
 - Avoid busy backgrounds
 - Avoid using red text
 - AVOID ALL CAPS!

Don't Apologize for Errors

- Don't apologize for poor English speaking, it wastes time and adds no value to your talk. Don't comment on spelling, grammatical, or other mechanical errors in your presentation. Most of the audience won't notice unless you apologize.

Buy a Laser Pointer and Wireless Mouse

- They are inexpensive, and are extremely useful. It is helpful to be able to change pages from across the room and point out key graphs and charts.

The Last Thing on Your PowerPoint

- At the end of your presentation while answering questions, leave up a contact info slide containing your name, e-mail, address, and website URL related to the talk if you have one.

Handling Q&A

Why Are Questions and Answers Important?

- Questions and answers are important for several reasons:
 - Get attention
 - Create interest
 - Get feedback
 - Make points easy to remember
 - Create audience interaction
 - Promote new thoughts
- To get comfortable with Q&A sessions and questions, start asking questions throughout your presentations.

Before the Presentation

- Prepare for criticism by telling your ideas to a critical friend
- Bring a list of references when answering questions.
- Take notes of questions and suggestions
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a particular question
- If you are using slides, save several slides and use them to answer expected questions

At the End of the Presentation

- There are two endings to a presentation with a final Q&A session.

Example:

*“At this point, I want to get your opinion on this approach.
This side of the room first.”*

- The second close is after the questions to summarize the main points of your presentation.

Example:

“As you can see from the questions and comments, this topic is confusing and we don’t have all the answers but here is what you can do for now...”

After the Presentation

- Sometimes question time is so exciting that you can't answer all the questions with the time you have. Tell people ways to contact you and when and how you will respond. Think of ways to share these questions and answers with all members of the audience through an e-mail list or Web site.

12 Ways to Encourage Audience Questions

- 1. Announce the question session in an open, conversational way.
- 2. Design questions into your content and delivery:
 - **Title:** Why Knowledge Management? —and Why Now?
 - **Opening:** What is the biggest problem facing researchers today?
 - **Content:** “My presentation is about four key questions.”
 - **Ending:** Considering these facts, how can you not act?

- 3. Ask a question, pause and then give the answer yourself.
- 4. Bring up questions you have been asked by other audience.
- 5. Let the audience know in the beginning there is a Q&A session, and “when” it is and “how long” it is.
- 6. Provide a seating arrangement where the audience can see each other.
- 7. List questions in the presentation announcement or brochure.
- 8. Provide a white board for the audience to write a question at any time. Start your Q&A session by answering these questions.

- 9. Pass out paper for the audience to submit their questions. They may forget what they were going to ask earlier. This is often used at public meetings and when the audience is large.
- 10. Don't ask for feedback and then start to pack up your laptop or your notes. This sends the clear signal that you are done and ready to go.
- 11. Arrange for someone in the audience to ask the first question to start the process.
- 12. Ask yourself what questions you hope no one asks and then prepare to answer them.

Why Do People Ask Questions?

- Because they want to know the answer
- Because they want to make a point
- To impress the audience
- To see if you know the answer
- To see how you handle questions and the stress
- To attack your methodology
- To make you look bad (for example, if they are competing with you for a job)
- Some ask questions that are in fact a personal attack (but not often)

- Don't let an interesting but unrelated question start you on a new speech
- Don't let your presentation continue on thinking the Q&A time is extra time for your presentation
- Consider questions as an honor your presentation. Good ideas create questions

3 Step Template for Answering Questions

1. Listen to the entire question before you answer
2. Thank each person for asking the question.
3. Then follow the template below.

Repeat→Respond→Review

What If You Don't Know the Answer?

- Suggest someone in the audience more qualified answer the question. “Professor M. has studied this extensively.”
- Delay, “That’s a good question...”
- Ask a question: “Can you clarify what you mean?”
- Admit you don’t know but will research it for them.
- Repeat the question in a different way: “Is this what you are asking?” [Then say a question you can answer]
- If you don’t have a good answer after these delaying tactics, say: “Let’s talk about that after my talk.”

What If You Don't Understand the Question Because of the Speaker's Poor English?

- If you don't understand the English, ask the speaker to repeat the question.
- If the questioner still asks and you still don't understand, say, "Great question, but it quite specific to your field and does not concern everyone here, see me after the talk and we can go into more detail about it."
- Quickly move to another question or conclude your session.

Your Final Solution to An Attacking Attendee

- You need to say loudly but firmly, as strongly as you can: “Sir, please allow me to finish my talk.”
- Then, proceed and ignore further interruptions from that person.

Remain After Your Presentation Session

- Be available to answer additional questions if you can.
- Make notes about the questions, suggestions, new thoughts you can use these comments to improve a paper for publication and your reviewers may be in the audience.

Notes

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- Lise Meitner, “Looking Back,” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, vol. 20 (November 1964), pp. 2–7.
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For More Information

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- Three Stage Translation