

Alley, M.: **The Craft of Scientific Presentations**. – Springer, New York – Berlin – Heidelberg – Hong Kong – London – Milan – Paris – Tokyo 2003. ISBN 0-387-05555-0. 241 pp., € 29.95, SFr 51.50, GBP 23.00, USD 29.95.

Subtitle of this book is “Critical Steps to Succeed and Critical Errors to Avoid”. This reflects the structure of the text that is divided into six chapters with subchapters dealing with ten major errors in scientific lecturing. The main ideas could have been presented on thirty pages only, but the author, an experienced teacher, adds numerous examples not only from his praxis, but found in many biographies, memorial books, and articles of well known scientists and speakers. The reader finds exact references to these sources in the “Notes” section near to the end of the book. Due to the applied form the book presents amusing reading for everybody, even if some recollections, recommendations, and ideas are sometimes repeated (also the Fig. 2-2 is shown once more as Fig. 4-11).

Individual chapters explain advantages and disadvantages of presentations, recommended kinds of speech, words (arguments, logic, emotions) and flavours (analogies, examples, stories, personal connection, humour) used, speech purpose, speech strategy and organisation, depth of and emphasis in presentations, visual aids (slides, writing boards, films, demonstrations, handouts, models, passed objects), and delivery (styles, room, audience, paying attention).

The ten discussed critical errors are as follows: Giving the wrong speech. Drawing words from the wrong well. Leaving the audience at the dock. Losing the audience at sea. Projecting slides that no one reads. Projecting slides that no one remembers. Ignoring Murphy’s law. Not preparing enough. Not paying attention. Losing

composure.

Appendix A presents a checklist for scientific presentations, appendix B deals with the design of scientific posters. According to my opinion the last appendix is too brief and more details should have been explained.

Forty-one illustrations accompany the text mainly showing sound and weak examples of slides (by this term Alley means also individual frames of the PowerPoint presentations). The recommended clear sequence of slides is shown, *e.g.*, in Figs. 3-11 and 4-21. Alley also suggests to change some format defaults in *Microsoft’s* PowerPoint, *e.g.* Arial Boldface instead of Times New Roman, left-justified headlines instead of centred ones, white space instead of bullets for separation indicators, entry animation as appearance instead of flying from left, and not using templates as background. The Name index contains 125 items—so many successful (and unsuccessful) scientific presenters are mentioned in the text! A detailed subject index is also supplemented.

Beginners in presenting speeches will find the book a source of both useful and interesting information, experienced lecturers can learn many amazing stories from the history of science. Do you know why Niels Bohr did not succeed with his speech trying to warn Winston Churchill about an atomic arms race? Do you know why the scientists’ request asking the delay of the space shuttle Challenger in January 1986 did not persuade the NASA authority? No? Then read the book.

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