**Analysis of typical student problems in the Academic Communication exam**

**1. COMMUNICATION, BODY LANGUAGE**

**A. Speed**: Easy, most students get 5/5, some lose a mark for volume

**B. Posture, gestures, confidence**: Standard is 5/6 but many get 6/6. You should *sound* comfortable even if you’re not.

**C. Eye contact, facing audience, avoid reading**: Big problem. Some students get only 1/6 or 2/6 because they just read and never looking at audience. **Do NOT turn to look at the big screen. DO look at your audience at least once each slide.**

**2. LANGUAGE SKILLS**

**A. Pronunciation** (general plus problems): Biggest problems are TH, R/L/N, [i] vowel, and **syllable emphasis**. 6/8 means “good enough”. Some get as low as 2, particularly if problems combine to make it unclear what they are saying. 8/8 is rare.

**B. Tone, expression, fluency**: “Good enough” = 6/8. Many people have fluency problems made worse by lack of practice and/or nervousness. Being “choppy” is a common problem; you want to have flowing sentences. 8/8 is rare.

**C. English words & sentences:** Vocabulary, key words, grammar, sentence structure: Typical 3/4. Many lose marks for mispronouncing key words like “parameter”, “equation”, “comparison”, “variable”, “mechanism”, and “component”.

**D. Proved ability to explain using own words**: Typical 3/4. To get 4/4 you need to seem comfortable making your own good English sentences during your talk and during questions. Those who just read a transcript often get no more than 2/4.

**3. CONTENT**

**A. Introduction Section**: Many students do a poor job of giving the context and start off with very complicated technical terms as if they were talking to experts who already knew the paper. Be sure to have an interesting start (an attention-getter, not a presentation outline), give motivation, and **clearly identify what question this research answers**. ~~Reading a long title and author names~~ is a boring start; get to a picture or something interesting *quickly* (usually, the second slide).

**B. Body Section**: Most do fine here because they are comfortable talking to experts. Make sure, however, that you prove you can use **O-I-L with pointing** so experts understand your material faster. There’s a big difference between saying “This graph proves X” and giving an explanation so an expert can quickly see **why** the graph proves X. Make sure the audience realizes how each point relates to the central idea. What seems obvious to you, may not be obvious to your audience who are seeing this for the first time. Your job is to help them! **You must point at things on the slides** (use the mouse [best] or a laser pointer [OK, but don’t keep facing the big screen]) as you explain things so they keep paying attention and understand precisely. **If you use PowerPoint’s “Presenter View”, then you must enable the “laser pointer” function.**

**C. Conclusion**: Many students lose marks because they put ~~long sentences~~ (or even ~~paragraphs~~!) on slides and just read them. You should summarize concisely. Short sentences (<12 words) are OK but point form is better. **Never just read a sentence on a slide**; instead, say the idea in slightly different words. Pay attention to the class information about good Conclusion sections. Do not forget “application”, “open questions”, and having 3-4 slides. Do **not** say “~~That’s all~~.”

*For the Introduction/Body/Conclusion sections, “****well-practiced****” means there is little or no hesitation when you present these sections, even if you are nervous. Many students lose a mark or two through forgetting what they were going to say and stumbling through rather than confidently presenting their material.*

**D. Timing** [8-10 minutes]: Many students lose at least 2 marks here, mostly because they get nervous and speak faster or slower than in practice. Some risk failure by not timing themselves during their actual exam presentation. This *should* be an easy 6 marks. Just time yourself and be ready to adjust if it turns out you are going too fast or too slow.

**E. Overall impression**: Most people do fine here, getting 2. Some lose marks for seeming too “amateur”.

**4. VISUAL AIDS** (use of slides, neatness, clarity): Almost all students lose a mark or two here. **You will lose marks for having ~~long sentences~~ and ~~paragraphs~~ on slides (e.g., ~~long figure captions~~ copied from the paper). Use point form!** Spellcheck your slides by machine and by hand many times. Perfect spelling is a mark of professionalism and helps people to trust that you are a careful and trustworthy scholar. Be careful with aligning numbered/bulleted lists and do not let things get too close to the edge of the screen. If you are using the classroom computer, arrive early enough to check your slides thoroughly (even a week early) to see if they look right. Most students lose some marks for bad formatting, usually because of **capitalization errors and bad spacing around punctuation and brackets (e.g., periods, commas, and semicolons have NO space before and one space after).** Some students lose marks through having small figures and/or small text. Look at each slide… how much space is showing useful information? What could you make bigger so people at the back of the room can see it more clearly? Always respect and be considerate of your audience. There should be NO Chinese characters on your slides, including Chinese font commas. Use only English fonts. Be sure you know how to get your title slide onto the screen **quickly**, so the audience has something to look at. Fumbling with your program (“How do I start this? Where’s the start button?”) is unprofessional. Whether you use your own computer (a good idea) or the classroom computer, know how to point on slides. YOU may see the cursor on your screen, but the audience may NOT see the cursor on the projected image!

**5. QUESTION AND ANSWER**

**A. Handling questions**: Average 4/5 but many get 5/5. Remember that you do not have to answer all questions, but you DO have to respond reasonably even if you do not understand the question. See the Lesson 9 handout about responses. Minus 0.5 marks for showing the PowerPoint edit mode instead of the full-screen view of the slides while answering questions.

**B. Asking questions**: Average 4/5. In your session, you must ask **at least two or three** questions. (The teacher will specify the number.) Even a simple question is better than no question (to prove you can pronounce clearly) but to get top marks your questions should be interesting, showing some understanding. Your pronunciation and meaning should be clear, and you should be concise, not rambling. Know which slide your question refers to.

**6. PARTICIPATION & BEHAVIOR**: Almost everybody gets 5/5 but some lose a mark or two for talking to neighbors, noisily rustling papers, twirling pens, or not arriving at least 10 minutes early.