SOME POINTS ON SEMINAR TECHNIQUE

(John Hutchinson)

Structure of Talk

An *Example*
(1) Significance, relevance, history, why interesting
(2) What was known until recently
(3) What is new
(4) Other comments

The amount of material needs to be planned
Dry run (at least in outline) in front of supervisor (and others)
Complete dry run for timing and blackboard layout purposes

Give ideas
avoid long calculations
use model problems and simple cases to discuss key points

Blackboard Technique

• Keep the structure ((1)-(4), say) in mind,
& make it clear to the audience by perhaps write out headings for each section

• It should be possible to get an outline of the talk by looking at the blackboard. A listener who is lost should be able in this way to gain an overview of what has happened so far, and know at what point the speaker is currently.

• Write the words: Theorem, Assumption, Proof, Definition, etc.

• Write connecting and descriptive words; hence, if, assuming, and, or, implies, etc.

• Break proofs into carefully delineated steps, preferably with headings

• Give overview of proof; perhaps listing main steps before saying a little about each

• Do not *just* write down formulae on the board. Many seminars finish with a board full of equations and symbols but without a single word of English.

Also

• Do not mumble

• Address yourself to different parts of the audience, in particular towards the back

• Do not read from notes (A good idea initially is to write out the lecture in full, and keep that as a security. Also write a one page summary of headings and sub-headings; and work from that)

Transparencies

• For *at least* a significant part of one of your lectures, use transparencies only for diagrams and data (it is possible to give a good lecture completely from transparencies; but initially you should practice the classical techniques).

• When you *do* use transparencies, avoid the windowing technique (personal opinion, J.H.).

• Do not use too many transparencies.

• Do not just read from transparencies.

• Consider using 2 projectors, or projector plus blackboard. One problem with projectors is that only a little can be displayed at any one time.

• Point to the overhead, not the transparency, in most cases.

• Don't block the view of the overhead

• Probably 10 is a maximum number of transparencies (extra diagrams etc. perhaps excluded)