

For questions 14–20, you must choose which of the paragraphs A–H on page 9 fit into the gaps in the following extract from a book. There is one extra paragraph which does not fit in any of the gaps. Indicate your answers on the separate answer sheet.

## Timing a talk

When people groan that they have been to a dreadful talk, the most common reason they give for their misery is 'he went on and on and on'. A poorly presented subject can be suffered, for the sake of the topic itself, if it keeps to time. But a talk which is both boring *and* drones on for endless minutes after the clock shows that the finishing time is passed, is a torture. Even an interesting, well presented talk which goes on for too long is remembered with little pleasure. The timing of a talk is, then, extremely important.

14

Why does it matter so much? It is a question which I have thought about a great deal. It is quite obvious that speakers *don't* think it matters greatly. It is equally obvious, both from listening to others, and from observing one's own reactions when trapped in the audience for a talk which goes on far too long, that to the *audience* timing is vital.

15

The first is the different adrenalin levels in speakers and listeners. Put quite simply, they perceive time differently. The excitement and fear produced by speaking causes adrenalin to flush into the veins in large quantities. The result is that speakers have a stamina, a resistance to tiring, an endurance, which is superhuman. *They* can go on all day.

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Speakers, then, are in an abnormal state. They are indifferent to time and tiredness and while they are speaking they feel as if they could go on all day. But the audience is in quite the opposite state. Sitting down and having nothing to do but listen actually *reduces* adrenalin below its normal level.

17

The second reason is that audience and speaker probably have different emotional concerns about the subject. The speaker has been working on the topic for some time, preparing the talk. It is quite common for the effort of preparing a talk about a subject to produce a quite profound interest in the topic.

18

The audience, as usual, feels quite differently. Their interest in the subject of the talk is unlikely to be so great. They may have no more than a polite interest in it. They may have no interest at all in it and may have come to listen in the hope that the speaker will arouse an interest.

19

The third reason for the different attitudes between speaker and audience is contractual. The timing of your talk is in effect a contract with the audience. You were invited to talk for a specific time and you have agreed to talk for this time. The power of this contract is extraordinary. If you have been invited to give a ten-minute presentation, the audience will become disastrously restless after thirty minutes. They will feel that the talk was disgraceful and that the speaker is guilty of some great social crime.

20

Of these two mistakes there is no doubt that to over-run the agreed time is more disastrous than to under-run it. The explanation seems to be that the audience is quietly looking forward to the end of the talk. If that time comes and passes and the speaker is still industriously talking away, the listeners have lost their security.

- A It is physically inactive; even the mental activity of talking to others is stopped. The audience, then, is at the other end of the scale from the speaker. This goes a long way to explain why they have such different views on the passage of time.
- B On the other hand, if you end early, the audience will feel cheated. What you say may be no different on both occasions, the organization and effectiveness of what you say may not have changed, but that commitment that you made has not been honoured.
- C Why is there this difference? I have evolved three explanations for it which can be briefly summarized. Let me outline them.
- D However, this kind of behaviour occurs because the average person's span of attention is limited. The simple fact is that about five to ten minutes is as long as most people can listen without a short day-dream. After a brief holiday to catch up with all the other thoughts floating round their head, people come back to a talk.
- E Worst of all, they may be there because they have to be, because they want to be seen there or because someone else (such as a boss) demands they should be. Even if they are keen, they are unlikely to feel as strongly as the speaker. They may enjoy listening for a reasonable length of time, but then will want to do something else, like have a break or simply stretch and relax. They will certainly not have the overbearing enthusiasm speakers often feel.
- F No other aspect of the presentation can do as much damage to the way the audience thinks of the talk. No other aspect is so easy to control, since it is a simple mechanical matter of looking at a clock face. And no other aspect is so easy to get wrong. Many people seem to have a casual attitude to the timing of a talk and this can be fatal.
- G I have seen this new-found concern develop in novice speakers who had difficulty choosing what to talk about for a practice presentation but who suddenly became passionate advocates for what they finally settled on and started button-holing people at coffee breaks and meal times to talk more about it. Speakers become deeply involved in what they are talking about.
- H It is this effect, too, which produces the strange pattern of elation and tiredness when you give a talk. Typically, you feel keyed-up and ready to go before the talk and are totally unaware of growing tiredness during it. The body's responses are artificially heightened. You draw on a physical overdraft of energy. After the talk, this must be paid back and you suddenly feel worn out.