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Microscopy and Microanalysis website: <http://journals.cambridge.org/MAM>

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Dear Abbe

Dear Abbe,

I have been happily using Zamboni's fixative on cryosections for years. It's excellent for proteins, but the picric acid causes our safety officer to blanch. What can I do?

Agitated in Allentown

Dear Agitated,

You have encountered one of the many hazards of research, one we don't talk about (vom Teufel spricht and all). This is not a chemical hazard as you think, nor even a biological hazard, but rather an administrative hazard. Your error was in letting people know you're using a chemical fixative! You should instead have just told them that you are using Zambonis to produce cryosections! The administrators will then imagine your lab is doing cutting-edge research (read: lots of grant dollars) inventing nano machines to plane the ice of the cryosections. Be resourceful, Photoshop an image of this, and post it in your lab.

Dear Abbe,

I have been asked to moderate a session at a national meeting. Unfortunately there are several individuals scheduled that are notorious for going overtime. Are there some hints, advice, or tricks you might have to keep sessions on time?

Irritated in Istanbul

Dear Irritated,

Schwerenot! If I had a Rentenmark for every session talk or board meeting that went over its prescribed time, I wouldn't be wasting my time writing advice columns. I'd be gallivanting around the Riviera hobnobbing with the Royalty! Your problem is confusion over what "moderation" means. Probably because of soppy old phrases like "all things in moderation." Humbug! There is no need to be moderate when windbags can't empty themselves in the time generously given. I have used several tricks myself in the past, such as a squirt gun, to liberally water the offending speaker's crotch as they drone on past their limit. You can bet there were few that dared to cross that line again without a fresh pair of knickers. I have also used the Shrinking Platform (Pat. Pend. W. Gromit, Inc.). With this, the speaker is lowered behind the podium as time expires. Many times they are too wrapped up in reading their PowerPoint slides to grasp what's happening. I have also "borrowed" an idea from the psychology conferences: operant conditioning. Dangle a grant in front of the speaker and slowly withdraw it as they near their time limit. Yank it away when time is up. Other ideas are probably illegal but equally satisfying. If nothing else works, require verbose speakers who go over their time to treat everyone at the bar after the session is over. The implied threat of spending money on academic enemies and grad students usually enforces time limits.

If your list of rewards and punishments needs some updating, consult with Herr Abbe's faithful assistant at jpsshield@uga.edu.