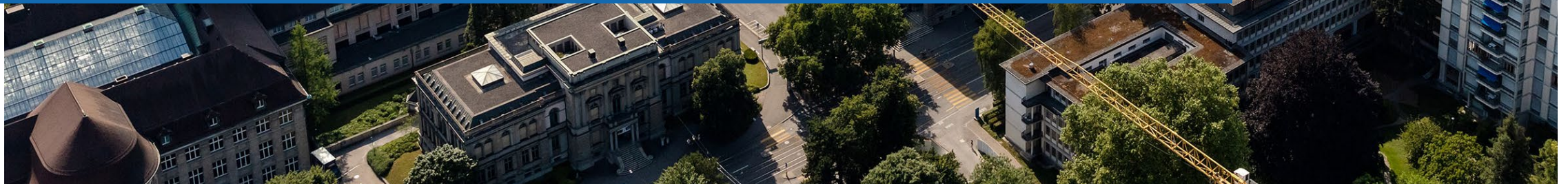


Tips and Tricks for your Oral Exams

Counselling & Coaching / International Student Support /
Student Exchange Office

Regula Cinelli, Dr. Daniel Köchli, Prof. Dr. Andreas Vaterlaus
Sean Douglas, Nicole Tobler
29.11.2021



**How confident am I when
it comes to passing oral
exams at ETH?**

On a scale from 1-10

1 = not confident

10 = super confident

Agenda 6.15 – 8.00 pm.

1. Introduction

2. General thoughts about oral exams

Prof. Dr. Andreas Vaterlaus (D-PHYS)

3. Staged scenes

Nicole Tobler, Sean Douglas, Angela Kosturanova / Dr. Daniel Köchli, Regula Cinelli

4. Questions

General Thoughts about oral exams

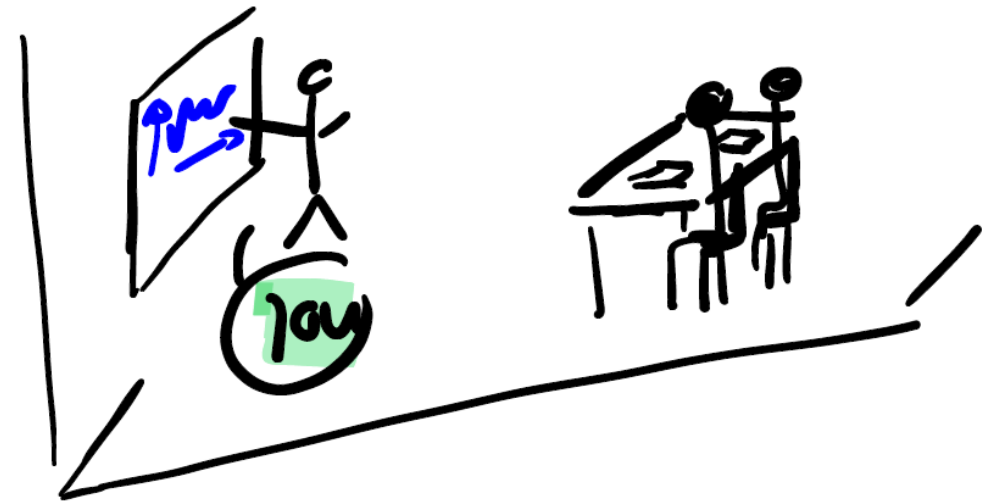
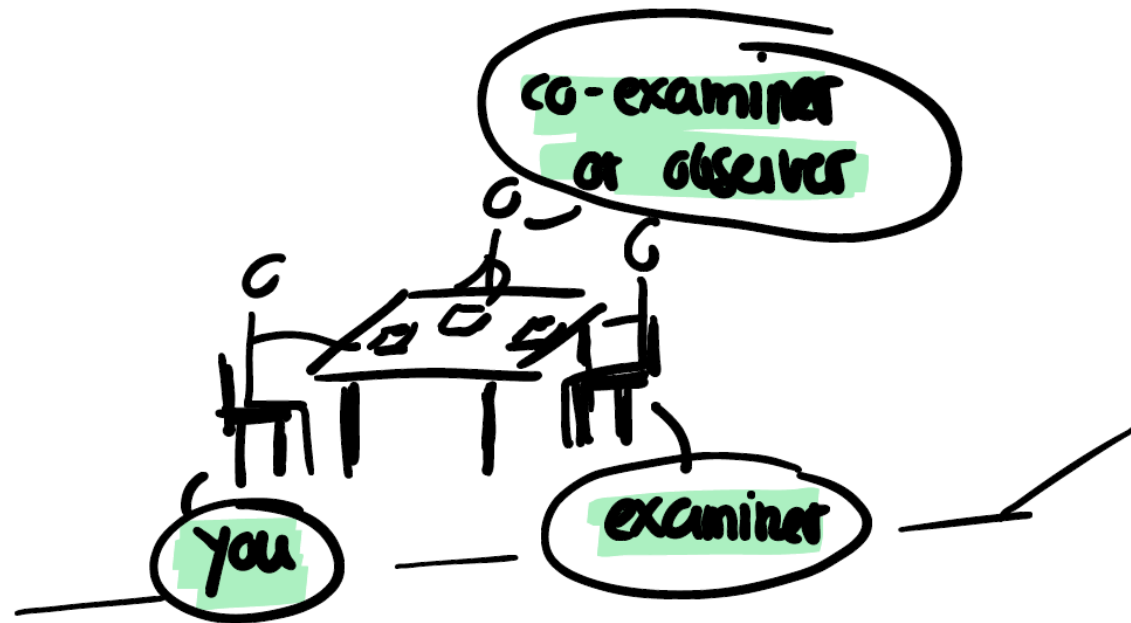
- The setting
- Preparation
- Arriving
- During the exam
- At the end.



Quelle: <https://www.express.de/koeln/querbeat-spielt-konzert-in-koeln-ansage-an-querdenker-79426>

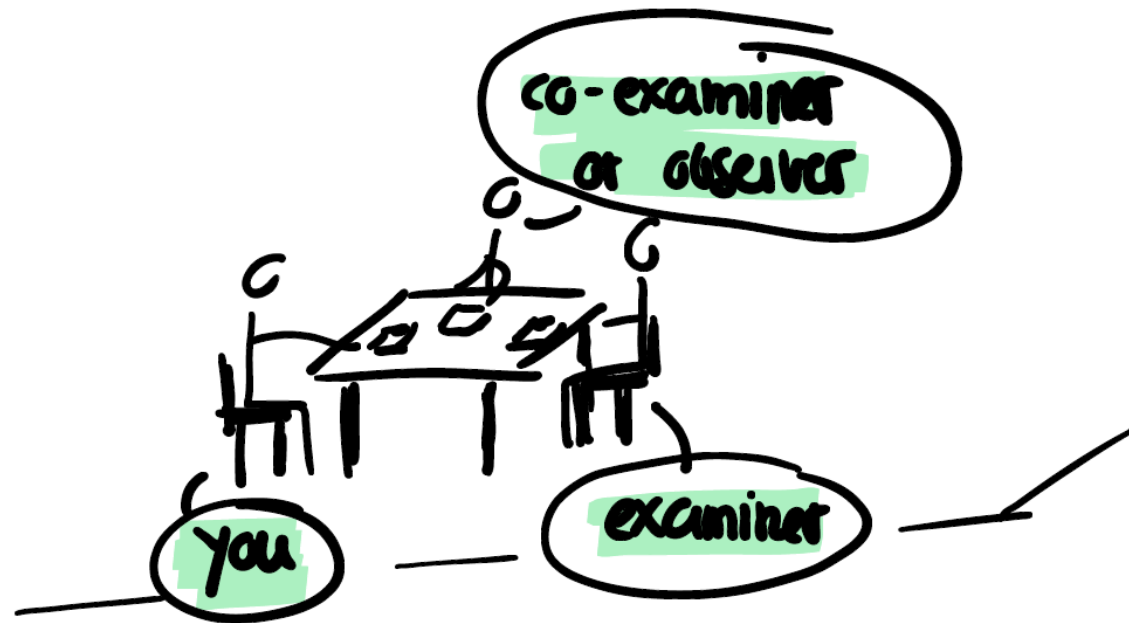
General Thoughts about oral exams

- **The setting**
- Preparation
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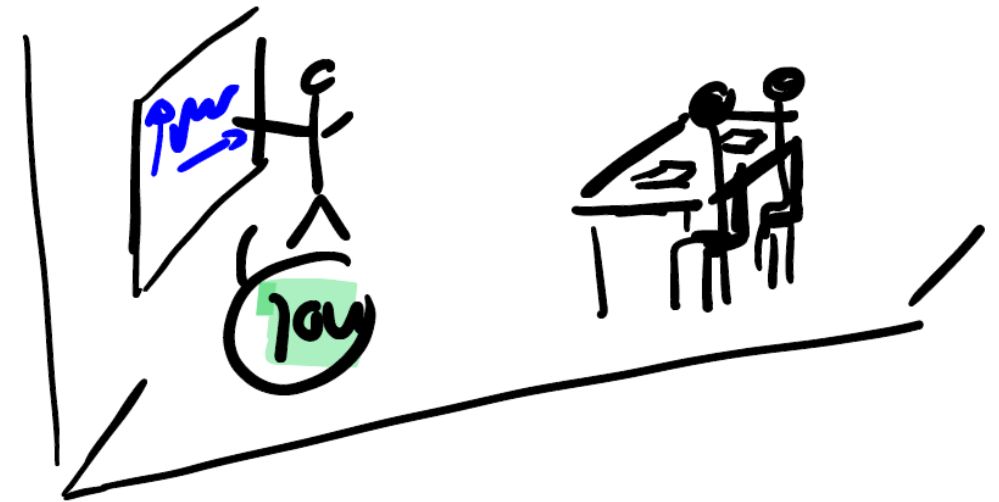
General Thoughts about oral exams

- **The setting**
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- Arriving
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You have to be ready to:

- Talk about the topic of the course
- Show what you know
- Make notes on a pad or white (black) board



General Thoughts about oral exams

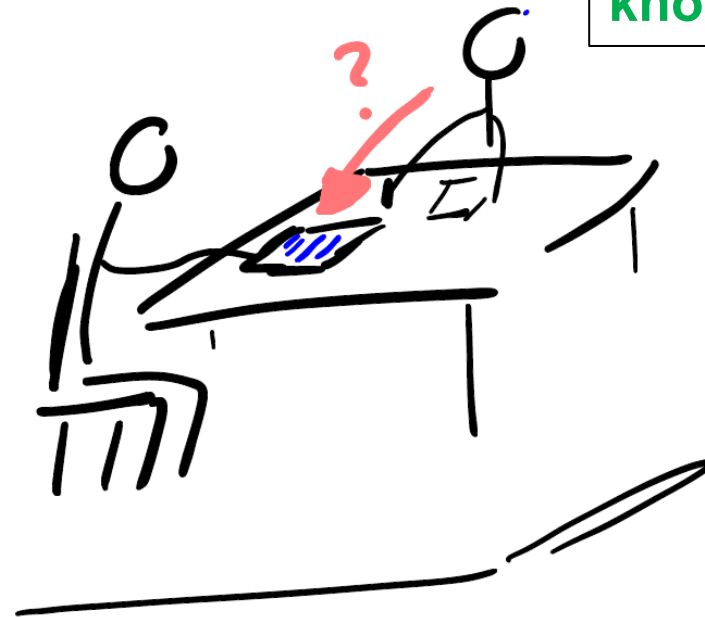
- **The setting**
- Preparation
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Co-examiner and / or examiner take notes – that is normal



take notes!

Normally it is more about your understanding of the basic concepts and not about detailed factual knowledge!



Be prepared to explain in more detail what you say or what you write down

General Thoughts about oral exams

- **The setting**
- Preparation
- Arriving
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- At the end.



**Ask clarifying questions
when needed!**

You can also repeat the
question in your own words
(to make sure you
understood it right and this
also gives you time to think)

General Thoughts about oral exams

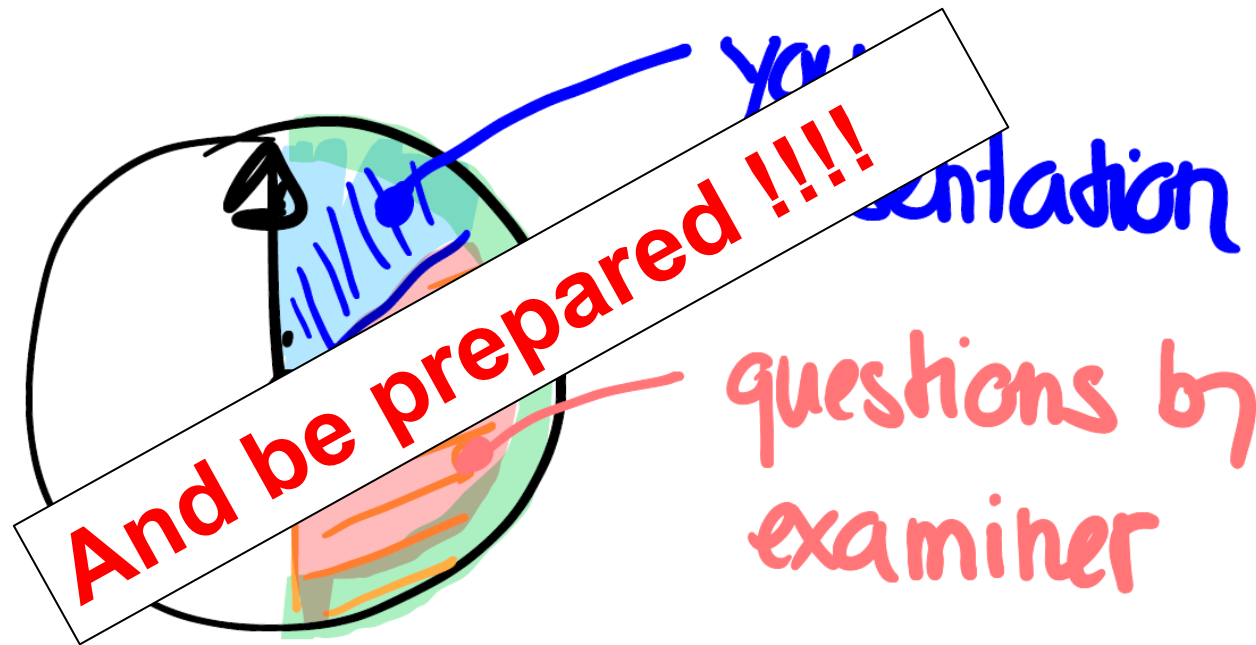
- **The setting**
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- If you do not know it, tell them! – they will ask another question (most likely)
- Do not talk in loops to burn time!!
- Think aloud!

General Thoughts about oral exams

How will it be??



- **The setting**
- Preparation
- Arriving
- During the exam
- At the end.

A possible setting could be that **you present something** (perhaps 10 minutes out of 30 minutes).

This is followed by questions addressing an other topic of the course or by questions about what you explained

Make sure you know the setting!

General Thoughts about oral exams

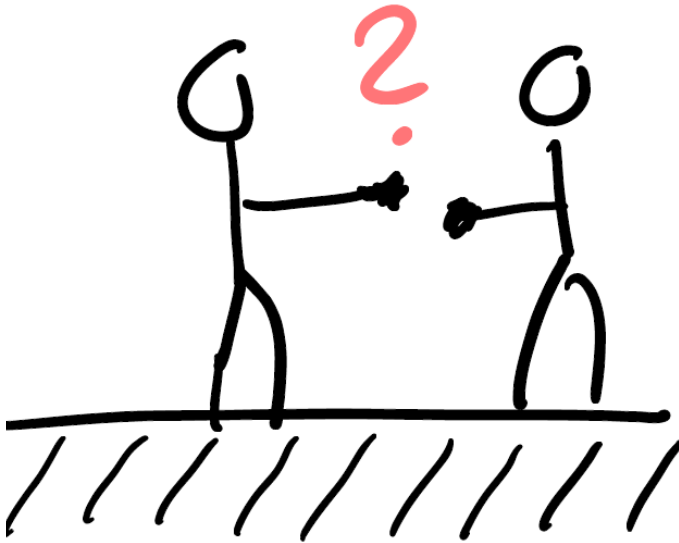
- Be ready to talk about the topic of the course!!
- Prepare the first part well if you are allowed to present for example your favorite topic of the course.
- Practice your presentation! – Think about the plots you want show or draw!
- Think about possible questions of the examiner or relations to other topics.

- The setting
- **Preparation**
- Arriving
- During the exam
- At the end.



General Thoughts about oral exams

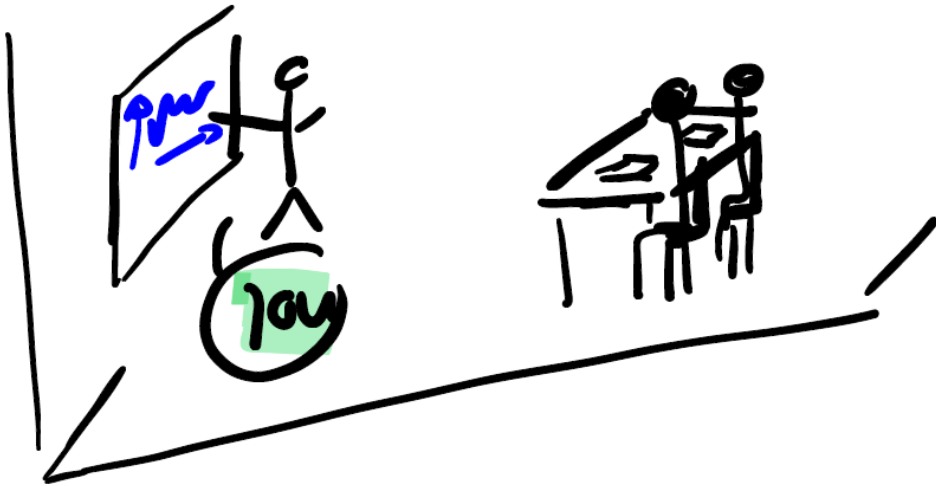
- The setting
- Preparation
- **Arriving**
- During the exam
- At the end.



- **Be on time** – take one bus earlier!! – They are always late when you have your exam!!
- **Say hello!** – Normally we shake hands but this might not be a good idea in Corona times!! – And say who you are.
- **Know the name of the examiner** who taught the course!!!!
- Look at examiner and co-examiner but do not stare at them!
;-))
- Dress normally! (you should feel comfortable)

General Thoughts about oral exams

- The setting
- Preparation
- Arriving
- **During the exam**
- At the end.



- **Narrow question**
 - short and precise answer
- **Broad question**
 - give your answer a structure (do not “jump” go from the main idea to more detailed aspects)
 - ask for clarification if you are not sure whether you do it right!
- **Generally:** Think aloud – let them know where you are.

General Thoughts about oral exams

- The setting
- Preparation
- Arriving
- During the exam
- **At the end.**

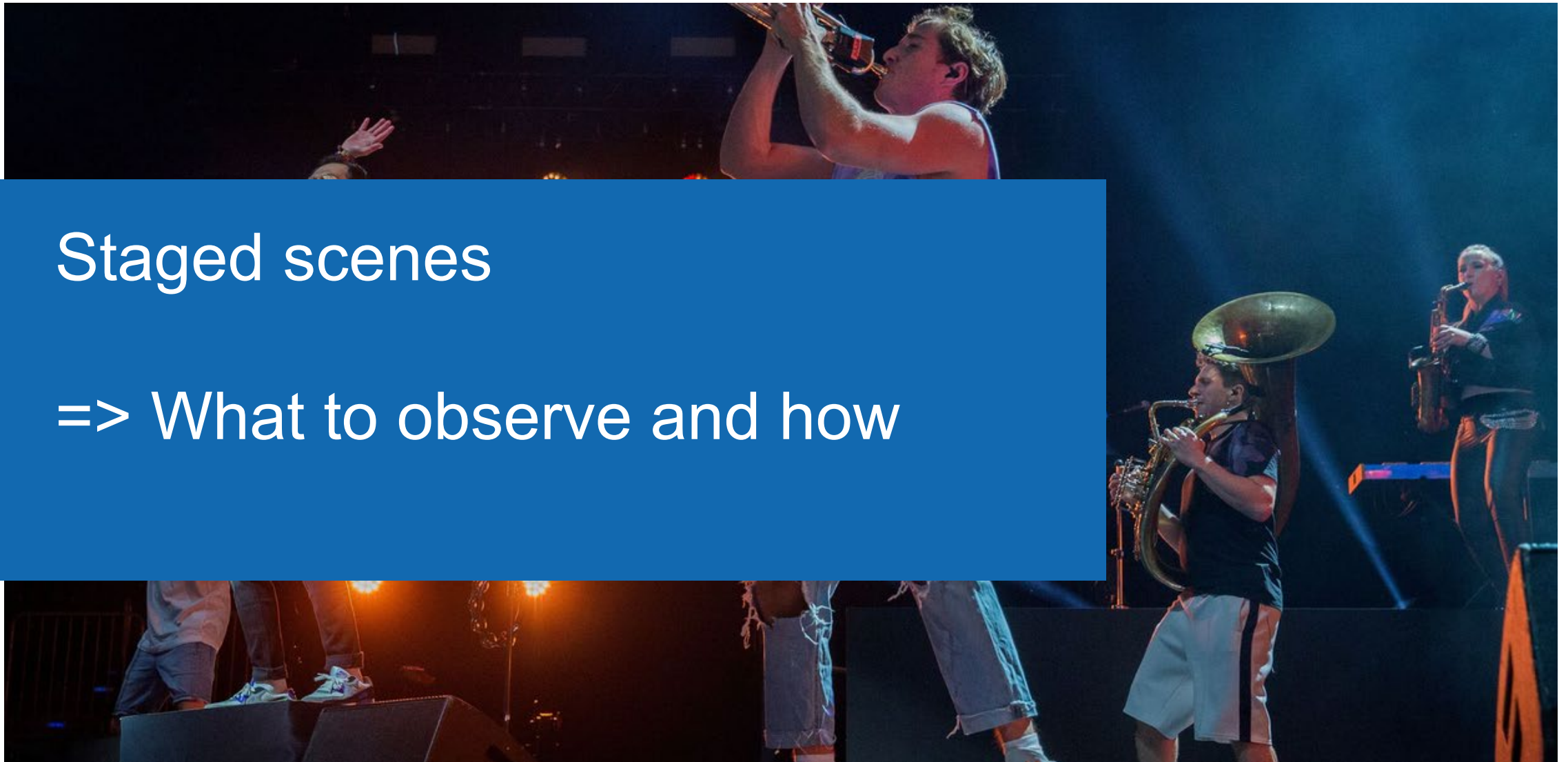
**THE
END**



- Say goodbye!
- They are basically not allowed to tell you the grade! – And the two have to discuss first!
→ Do not expect a comment regarding how you did!

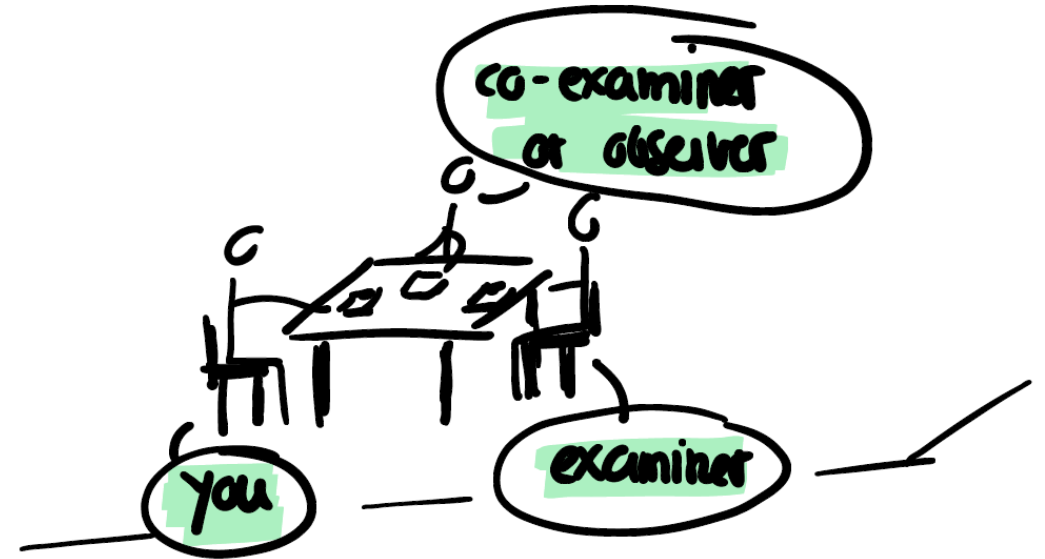
Staged scenes

=> What to observe and how



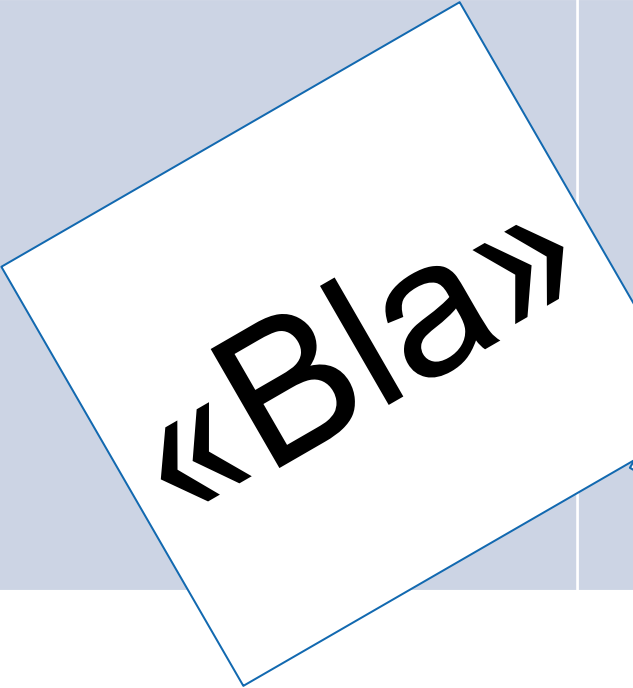

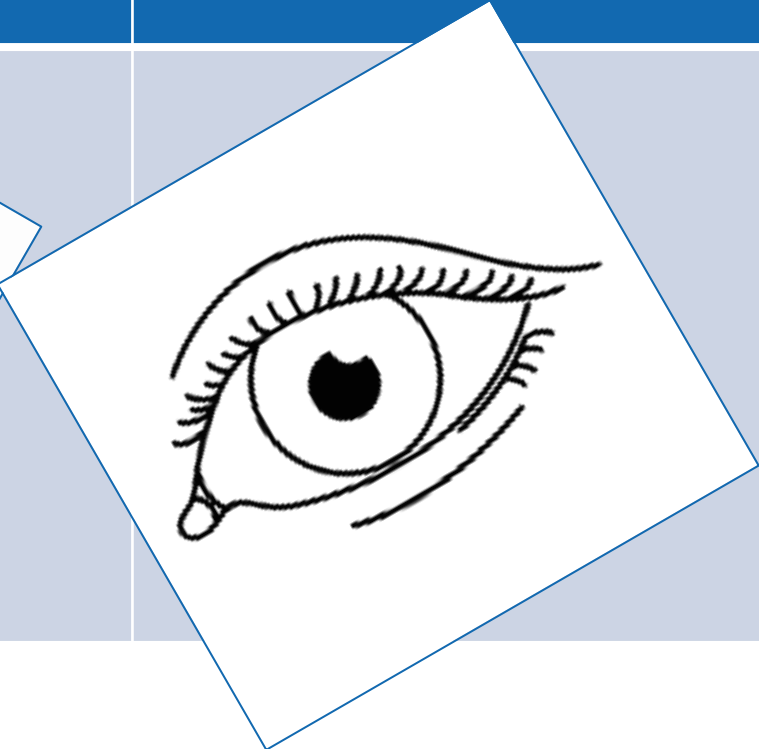
Staged scenes, what to observe and how

- Aspects of communication
- Observation instruction
- First scene
- Observation instruction
- Second scene
- Third scene



Staged scenes, what to observe and how

- **Aspects of communication**
- Observation instruction
- First scene
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1. Verbal	2. Paraverbal	3. Nonverbal
		




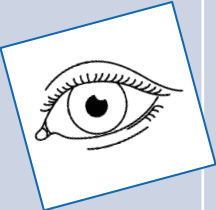
Staged scenes, what to observe and how

- **Aspects of communication**
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1. Verbal	2. Paraverbal	3. Nonverbal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vocabulary• How is the student saying things, expressing him-/herself• «uhm», ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volume• Tone• Cadence• ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Posture• Legs, arms, hands• Face• ...

Staged scenes, what to observe and how

- Aspects of communication
- **Observation instruction**
- First scene
- Observation instruction
- Second scene
- Third scene

Focus	OBSERVATION	EFFECT	WISH
1. Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary • How is the student expressing herself • «uhm», ... 		I get the impression...	Say...
2. Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volume • Tone • Cadence • ... 		It makes me think...	Do...
3. Body language & gesture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posture • Legs, arms, hands • Face • ... 		It makes me feel...	Act...
		My immediate reaction on this behavior is...	Make use of...

Staged scenes, what to observe and how

- Aspects of communication
- **Observation instruction**
- First scene
- Observation instruction
- Second scene
- Third scene

Focus	OBSERVATION	EFFECT	WISH
1. Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary • How is the student expressing herself • «uhm», ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I hear a lot of dull words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It gives me the impression, that the student does not have expertise in this research field. • It makes me wonder, whether he understands the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wish for the student to be more precise in the statements. • I think it were better, if the student would use more adequate terms that are common in this academic field.
2. Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volume • Tone • Cadence • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student speaks fast. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can hardly follow her even though I want to. • I'm getting annoyed. • I realise that I'm losing my interest and that my thoughts start wandering off. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wish for the student to slow down her speaking • I expect it to be helpful if she ensured that the examiner is following (by eye contact, by asking, ...)
3. Body language & gesture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posture • Legs, arms, hands • Face • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I see that the student does not move at all and is sitting there like a pillar of salt. • I observe, that the facial expression is frozen, there is no frowning or smiling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is disconcerting, I feel tense and immobile too. It makes me feeling uncomfortable. • I have difficulties to focus on what she is saying. • I feel unable to establish a connection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wish the student would move her hands and arms to illustrate and support her explanations • I imagine it were better if the student would breathe deeply. • I wish the student would make eye contact with the professor.

Wake up your voice

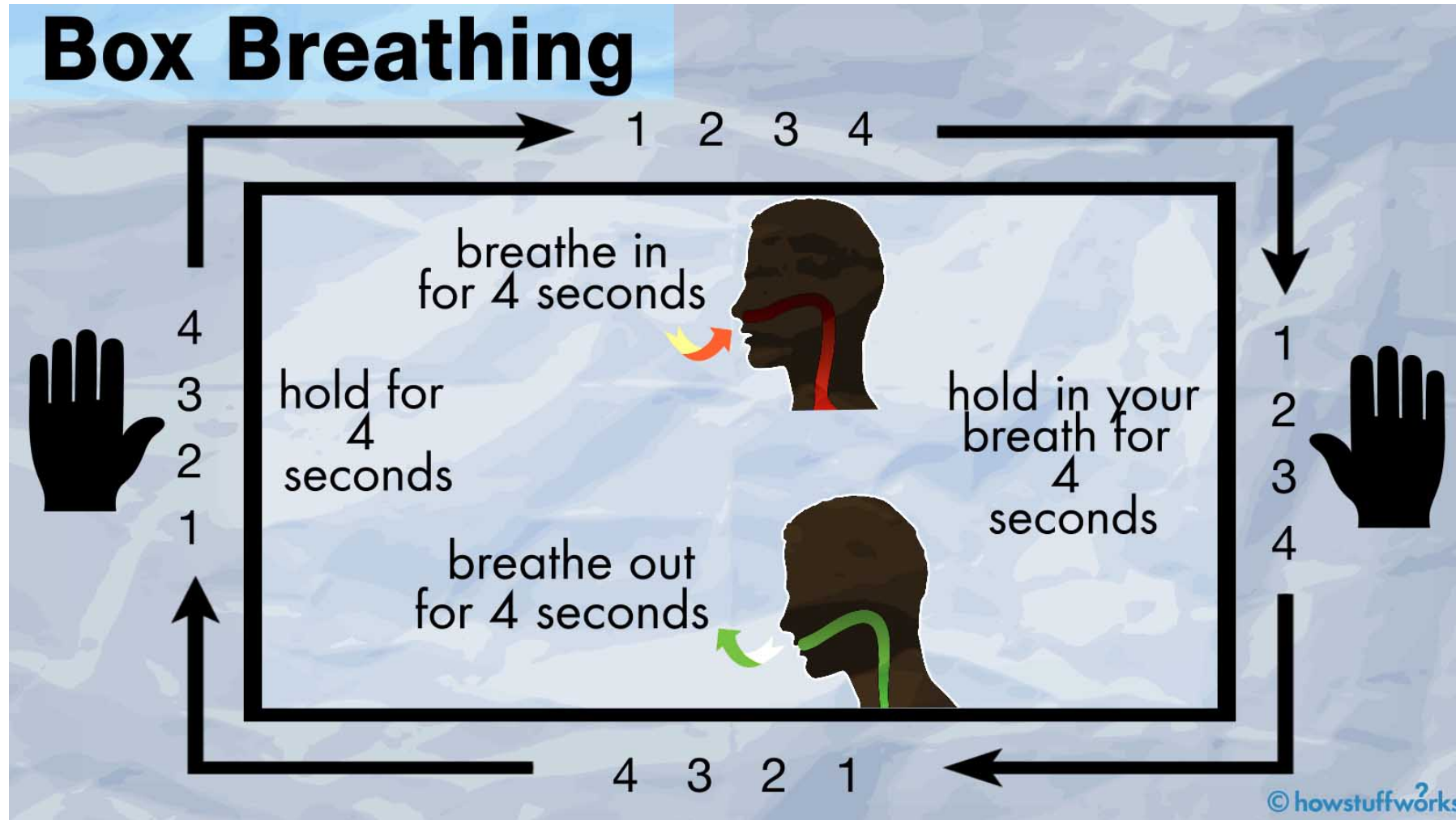
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hb1Cv7aDXmk>

- Aspects of communication
- Description, effect on me
- First Scene
- Description, effect on me, wish
- **Second Scene**
- Third Scene



Curb the freak-out moment

- Aspects of communication
- Description, effect on me
- First scene
- Description, effect on me, wish
- Second scene
- **Third scene**



Tips and Tricks for your Oral Exams

Let's sum up:

1. Experience: **Skills** already developed during past school / university years
2. Information: **Expertise** regarding the procedure of oral exams and learning techniques
3. Reflection: **Awareness** of the effects of verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal behavior

**How confident am I when
it comes to passing oral
exams at ETH?**

On a scale from 1-10

1 = not confident

10 = super confident

Foster your self-confidence

- **What insight made me shift my position on the self-confidence scale?**
- **What is my first little step to maintain this position?
... to get one point higher?**



Counselling & Coaching

Daily student life / personal concerns

www.ethz.ch/counselling-coaching

International Student Support

Practical, non-study related advice

www.ethz.ch/international-students

Student Exchange Office

Practical, non-study related advice

www.incoming.ethz.ch

Sources

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www.ethz.ch

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