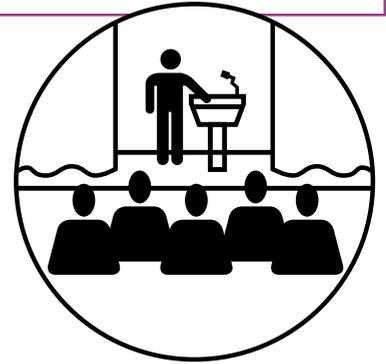


GEORGE'S GUIDE TO LOOKING SMART AT LITERARY EVENTS



by George Ding

Pretension is in the air as Beijing's literati, artist manqués and cultural snobs come out of hibernation to pontificate at literary events around the city.

But the threat of looking unlettered shouldn't keep you from attending book talks and panel discussions. In fact, by following these steps, I guarantee you'll look like the smartest person in the room.

Have Opinions

The first step to becoming a good pedant is to have opinions. This is critical because the more opinions you have, the more time you can spend telling people about them.

Don't worry, it's easier than it sounds. Opinions are formed by contemplating something and making a value judgment. I like rocks. Food is good. That's two right there. Feel free to use them.

"TALK IN THE MOST VERBOSE MANNER YOU CAN. NEVER USE A SHORTER WORD WHEN THERE'S A LONGER MORE ESOTERIC ONE AVAILABLE"

Always Ask Questions

Armed with all those opinions, you're ready to hit the town. But remember: astounding people with erudition is hard work. You can't just go to events and listen passively – you must display your wisdom for all to see.

The best opportunity for intellectual peacocking is the Q&A portion. Be the first to raise your hand, while others are still mustering up the courage.

Simple, to-the-point questions are for chumps. A two-part question is moderately impressive but the real experts aim for the hat-trick. A three-part question shows you've really considered the issues at play from many different angles.

Taking The Stand

Unlike radio stations, literary festivals don't screen people who ask questions. So once you have the floor, you can do

whatever you want. Make sure you start off by announcing how many parts your question has. If a microphone was passed to you, hold onto it. Your turn to talk isn't over until the moderator wrestles the mic out of your hands.

Properly Contextualize Your Questions

Often you'll see people stand up, ask their question, and sit down. This is incorrect. It is not enough to just to state your query – you must give it proper context. If the introduction to your question isn't longer than the question itself, you're doing it wrong.

Start off by telling the audience a little about yourself. Only after establishing dominance should you pose your tripartite question.

Before you let the guest answer, expound on your own views. If you're going to ask someone for their opinion, it's only right that you offer your own first.

Short Words Good, Long Words Better

Talk in the most verbose manner you can. Never use a shorter word when there's a longer, more esoteric one available. And never use an English expression when there's a perfectly good French *bon mot* to take its place.

If you do it right, only the most sapient audience members will be able to follow you, the rest will be left in awe of your vast vocabulary. If the guest or moderator fails to understand, all the better. Rephrase your sentence using simple, quotidian words. Make sure to speak at a condescendingly slow pace, like you're explaining quantum mechanics to a group of eight-year-olds.

When you're finished, look around and smile. Don't sit down just yet. Take a moment to enjoy that reverential silence, the adoring faces looking up at you. No matter what anyone says in the future, right now, as far as anyone can tell, you are the smartest person in the room.