

## Transcript: Jon Blount on ‘staying cool’ in the viva

### Edward Mills

On that topic, actually, of a robust discussion, how do you tend to encourage candidates to reach that stage? One thing that I’ve heard before from a lot of people is the value of not getting too defensive in the viva.

### Jon Blount

Yes. I think, you know, you’ve got to recognise that examiners will vary, and some examiners are just human beings, so they will have different demeanours and ways of approaching things and different manners of asking questions. But as a candidate, whatever you’re presented with, you’ve just got to stay cool and listen to the question carefully. And, you know, above all, don’t argue. Just take your time. Listen to it. Ask for a clarification if you don’t understand the question properly. Once you do understand what they’re getting at, you know, whatever it is, ‘just give a calm answer’ is the best advice really. There’s absolutely no point folding your arms and arguing.

### Edward Mills

So when you say don’t argue, it sounds like a kind of demeanour thing almost: ‘don’t snap back; just keep your cool’, if that makes sense.

### Jon Blount

Very often in STEM subject areas, you know, there will be multiple ways of doing something. And the examiners may have their own particular preference of how something should be done. And they may say to you, ‘I think you should do it like this’. And it say it’s absolutely fine to try to reason with the examiner why you feel the way you’ve done it is an alternative or adequate approach to. And, you know, a good examiner, a good board of examiners would accept that; they’d listen to and accept that. And actually, that will sort of bolster their confidence that you are in command of this, and as I said, it is your PhD. And you know more about this to anyone else. And in many cases, examiners will simply say, that’s absolutely fine, and drop the point. You will occasionally get situations where examiner is absolutely adamant that they want something done in a particular way, and you very strongly disagree, and that’s the sort of bit where the internal examiner’s role really comes to the fore there, because they ought to be experienced enough to, you know, recognise a point when, you know, ‘we’ve exhausted this, now let’s move on’. And they will potentially intervene and say, ‘I think we think we’ve covered this now. We’ll move on to the end.’ And when you see the report at the end, you’ll find out what the decision has been as to what they want you to do. That’s the point at which there’s no point arguing.

