

Research methodology and effective writing

Lecture V - Presenting your research

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Suggested reading:

- Dudenhefer, P. (2009). A guide to writing in Economics. EcoTeach Center and Department of Economics, Duke University.
- Neugeboren, R. H., & Jacobson, M. (2005). Writing Economics. Harvard University.
- Johnson, J. B., Reynolds, H. T., & Mycoff, J. D. (2015). Political science research methods. Cq Press.
- Friedman, S., Friedman, D., & Sunder, S. (1994). Experimental methods: A primer for economists. Cambridge University Press.

Ideas Are the Currency of the Twenty-first Century

- Ideas, effectively packaged and delivered, can change the world.
- There's nothing more inspiring than a bold idea delivered by a great speaker.
- While you may never speak at a big conference, if you want to succeed in business you'd better be able to deliver a conference-worthy presentation.
- If you can't inspire anyone else with your ideas, it won't matter how great those ideas are. Ideas are only as good as the actions that follow the communication of those ideas.

The most engaging presentations are...

- EMOTIONAL—They touch my heart.
 - passion, storytelling, body language and verbal delivery
- NOVEL—They teach me something new.
 - uniqueness and novelty, wow moments, humour
- MEMORABLE—They present content in ways I'll never forget.
 - People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. Don't think just about what you want people to know; think about how you want them to feel.

Connection - Get personal

- Knowledge can't be pushed into a brain. It has to be pulled in.
- You can give the most brilliant talk, with crystal-clear explanations and laser-sharp logic, but if you don't first connect with the audience, it just won't land.
- Even if the content is, at some level, understood, it won't be activated but simply filed away in some soon-to-be-forgotten mental archive.
- Your very first job as a speaker is to find a way to build a trusting human bond with the audience so that they're willing—delighted, even—to offer you full access to their minds for a few minutes.
- It can be as simple as walking confidently on stage, looking around, making eye contact with two or three people, and smiling.

Pathos

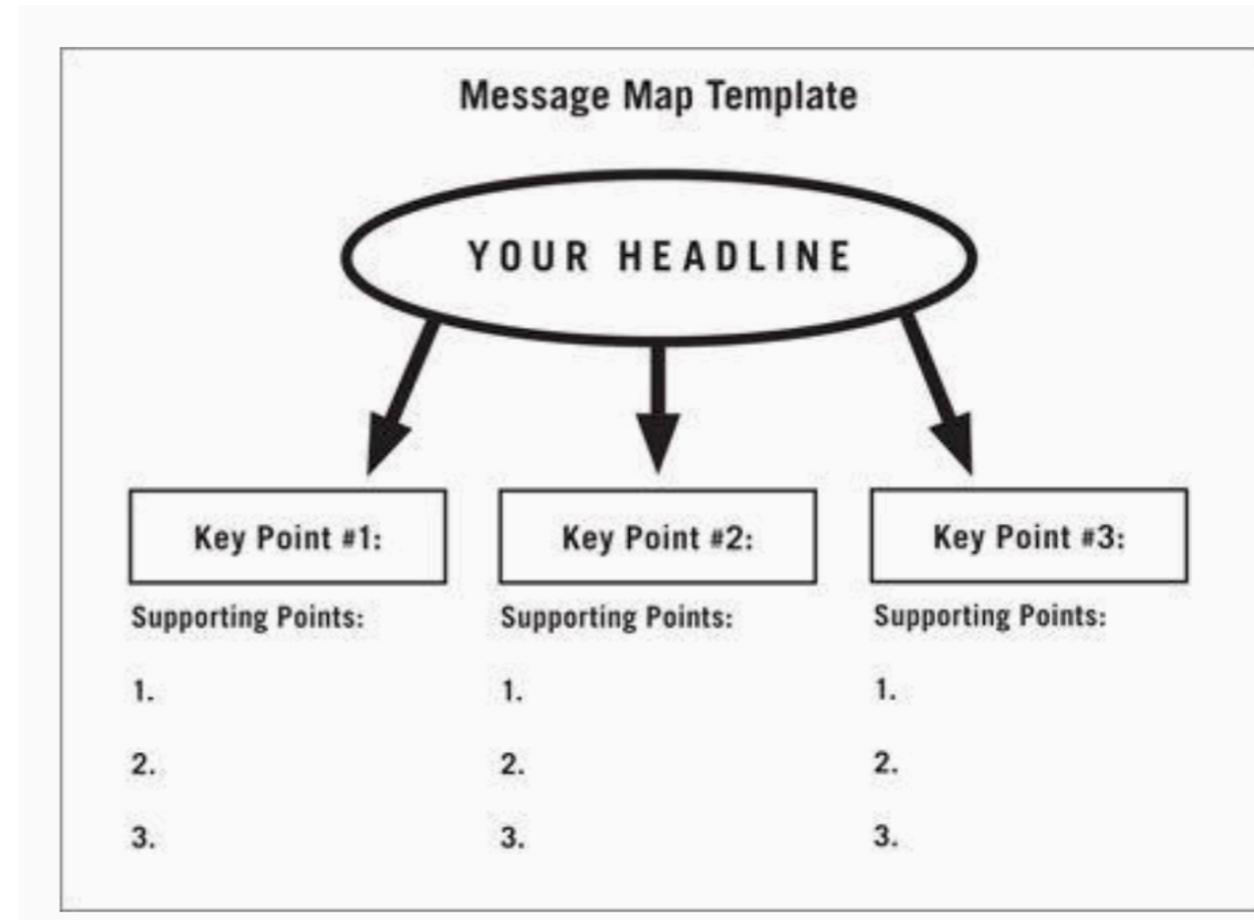
- The Greek philosopher Aristotle is one of the founding fathers of communication theory.
- He believed that persuasion occurs when three components are represented: ethos, logos, and pathos.
 - Ethos is credibility. We tend to agree with people whom we respect for their achievements, title, experience, etc.
 - Logos is the means of persuasion through logic, data and statistics.
 - Pathos is the act of appealing to emotions.
- Take one of your recent presentations and categorize the content into one of the three categories we just covered: Ethos (credibility), Logos (evidence and data), and Pathos (emotional appeal). How does your pathos stack up against the rest? If your emotional appeal is minimal, you might want to rethink your content before you give this presentation again, like adding more stories, anecdotes, and personal insights.

Storytelling

- We're born to love stories. They are instant generators of interest, empathy, emotion, and intrigue. They can brilliantly establish the context of a talk and make people care about a topic.
- You're telling stories every day. In a business presentation, you're telling the story behind your campaign, company, or product. In a job interview, you're telling the story behind your personal brand. In a marketing pitch, you're telling the story about your idea. By simply telling a story, the you can plant ideas, thoughts, and emotions into the listeners' brains.
- Stories are just data with a soul. Tell stories to reach people's hearts and minds. Stories turn abstract concepts into tangible, emotional, and memorable ideas.
- What are the elements of a great story? The classic formula is: A protagonist with goals meets an unexpected obstacle and a crisis results. The protagonist attempts to overcome the obstacle, leading to a climax, and finally a denouement.
- When it comes to sharing a story from the stage, remember to emphasize four key things:
 - Base it on a character your audience can empathize with.
 - Build tension, whether through curiosity, social intrigue, or actual danger.
 - Offer the right level of detail. Too little and the story is not vivid. Too much and it gets bogged down.
 - End with a satisfying resolution, whether funny, moving, or revealing.

Message map

- What's the first thing you should do when creating a PowerPoint presentation? If you're like many people you'll say, "Open PowerPoint." Wrong answer. You should plan the story first.
- Step One: Create a Twitter-Friendly Headline
 - What is the single most important thing I want my listener to know? If you can't explain your big idea in 140 characters or less, keep working on your message. The discipline brings clarity to your presentation and helps your audience recall the one big idea you're trying to teach them.
- Step Two: Support the Headline with Three Key Messages
 - Include the three supporting messages that support the overall theme. The human mind can consume only about three "chunks" of information in short-term, or working, memory. If you add more items, retention falls off considerably. It's one of the most powerful concepts in writing and communication.
- Step Three: Reinforce the Three Messages with Stories, Statistics, and Examples
 - Write a few words that will prompt you to deliver the story.



Talk as a journey

- The number-one reason for failed talks is that the speaker never had a proper plan for the talk as a whole. The talk may have been planned bullet point by bullet point, or even sentence by sentence, but no time was actually spent on its overall arc.
- There's a helpful word used to analyze plays, movies, and novels; it applies to talks too. It is throughline, the connecting theme that ties together each narrative element. Every talk should have one.
- Since your goal is to construct something wondrous inside your listeners' minds, you can think of the throughline as a strong cord or rope, onto which you will attach all the elements that are part of the idea you're building.
- This doesn't mean every talk can only cover one topic, tell a single story, or just proceed in one direction without diversions. Not at all. It just means that all the pieces need to connect.
- Think of a talk as a journey that the speaker and the audience take together, with the speaker as the guide. But if you, the speaker, want the audience to come with you, you probably need to give them a hint of where you're going. And then you need to be sure that each step of the journey helps get you there.

Talk structure

- You can picture the structure of that talk as like a tree. There's a central throughline, rising vertically, with branches attached to it, each of which represents an expansion of the main narrative.
- Many interesting talks follow this simple structure:
 - A. Introduction—getting settled, what will be covered
 - B. Context—why this issue matters
 - C. Main Concepts
 - D. Practical Implications
 - E. Conclusion
- There's an old formula for writing essays that says a good essay answers three questions: What? So What? Now What? It's a bit like that with talks too.

Making things clear

- Author Richard Bach said, “Great writing is all about the power of the deleted word.” It’s true of speaking too. The secret of successful talks often lies in what is left out. Less can be more.
- It’s seductive to think about how much you can fit into few minutes. The better question is: What can you unpack in a meaningful way in few minutes? You will only cover as much ground as you can dive into in sufficient depth to be compelling.
- A speaker has to be sure that listeners know how each sentence relates logically to the preceding one, whether the relationship is similarity, contrast, elaboration, exemplification, generalization, before-and-after, cause, effect, or violated expectation.
- What this means is that some of the most important elements in a talk are the little phrases that give clues to the talk’s overall structure: “Although . . .” “One recent example . . .” “On the other hand . . .” “Let’s build on that . . .” “Playing devil’s advocate for a moment . . .” “I must just tell you two stories that amplify this finding.” “As an aside . . .” “At this point you may object that . . .” “So, in summary . . .”
- Equally important is the precise sequencing of sentences and concepts so that understanding can build naturally.
- It’s especially important to do a jargon check. Any technical terms or acronyms that may be unfamiliar to your listeners should be eliminated or explained.

Explanation

- If the core of your talk is explaining a powerful new idea, it is helpful to ask: What do you assume your audience already knows? What will be your connecting theme? What are the concepts necessary to build your explanation? And what metaphors and examples will you use to reveal those concepts?
- Unfortunately, this isn't that easy. We all suffer from a cognitive bias for which economist Robin Hogarth coined the term "the curse of knowledge." In a nutshell, we find it hard to remember what it feels like not to know something that we ourselves know well.
- Overcoming the curse of knowledge may be the single most important requirement in becoming a clear writer. If it's true about writing, when readers have a chance to pause and reread a sentence several times before continuing, then it's even more true about speaking.
- You have to expose your drafts to friends or colleagues and beg for ruthless feedback on anything they don't understand. The same is true for talks, and especially those talks that seek to explain something complex. First share a draft script with colleagues and friends. Then try it out in front of a private audience. And specifically ask the questions, Did that make sense? Was anything confusing?

Being authentic

- If you don't believe what you're saying, your movements will be awkward and not natural. No amount of training—unless you're a trained espionage agent or psychopath—will allow you to break that incongruence between your words and actions.
- If your voice, gestures, and body language are incongruent with your words, your listeners will distrust your message. It's the equivalent of having a Ferrari (a magnificent story) without knowing how to drive (delivery).
- Authenticity doesn't happen naturally. An authentic presentation requires work—choosing the right words, delivering those words for maximum impact, and making sure that your nonverbal communication—your gestures, facial expressions, and body language—are consistent with your message.
- Ask for help from the people who know you best. All too often you're simply too close to the content. You might be immersed in the details when the audience might need to see the big picture first. You might assume that the audience knows exactly what you're talking about when they could really use a simpler explanation.
- Ask friends and colleagues to watch your presentation and to give open, honest feedback. Use a recording device, too. Set up a smartphone on a tripod or buy a dedicated video camera. However you choose to do it, record yourself. It doesn't have to be professional-broadcast quality. Unless you decide to show it to someone else, nobody's going to see it except you.
- You might be surprised at what you catch—vocal fillers like “ums” and “ahs”; distracting hand motions like scratching your nose or flipping your hair back; lack of eye contact, etc. Pay careful attention to the pace of your speech and ask others for their opinions. Is it too fast? Too slow? The video camera is the single best tool to improve your public speaking ability.

How to say it so people will listen - speaking with meaning

- The four elements of verbal delivery are: rate, volume, pitch, and pauses.
 - RATE: Speed at which you speak
 - VOLUME: Loudness or softness
 - PITCH: High or low inflections
 - PAUSES: Short pauses to punch key words
- When you read printed text, it would be natural to use a highlighter to emphasize an important word or phrase.
- The verbal equivalent of a highlighter is to raise or lower the volume of your voice, change the speed at which you deliver the words, and/or set aside the key word or phrase with a pause before or after voicing it.
- The key is simply to inject variety into the way you speak, variety based on the meaning you're trying to convey.
- One other important aspect to pay attention to: how fast you're speaking. First of all, it's great to vary your pacing according to what you're speaking about. When you're introducing key ideas or explaining something that's complex, slow down, and don't be afraid to insert pauses. During anecdotes and lighter moments, speed up.
- But overall, you should plan to speak at your natural, conversational pace. For most speakers that's somewhere in the range 130–170 words per minute.

Body language

- The simplest way to give a talk powerfully is just to stand tall, putting equal weight on both feet, which are positioned comfortably a few inches apart, and use your hands and arms to naturally amplify whatever you're saying.
- Are gestures necessary? The short answer is—yes. Studies have shown that complex thinkers use complex gestures and that gestures actually give the audience confidence in the speaker.
- Some speakers, though, prefer to walk the stage. It helps them think. It helps them emphasize key moments. This can work well too, provided the walking is relaxed, not forced.
- Something to avoid is nervously shifting from leg to leg or walking forward and back a couple of steps in a kind of rocking motion. Many speakers do this without realizing it. They may be feeling a little anxious, and shifting from one leg to the other eases their discomfort. But from the audience's viewpoint, it actually highlights that discomfort.
- So, move if you want to. But if you do move, move intentionally. And then, when you want to emphasize a point, stop and address your audience from a stance of quiet power.

Visuals

- In presentation slides, use pictures instead of text whenever possible. Use visuals to enhance words, not duplicate.
- A picture is worth a thousand words. Often the best explanations happen when words and images work together. Your mind is an integrated system. Much of our world is imagined visually. If you want to really explain something new, often the simplest, most powerful way is to show and tell.
- But for that to work, there needs to be a compelling fit between what you tell and what you show. The key to avoiding this is to limit each slide to a single core idea.
- Some speakers still seem to believe that you enhance the explanatory power of your slides by filling them with words, often the same words that they plan to utter. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Those classic PowerPoint slide decks with a headline followed by multiple bullet points of long phrases are the surest single way to lose an audience's attention altogether.
- Kill bullet points on most of your slides. Text and bullet points are the least memorable way of transferring information to your audience. You might not be able to achieve this goal with every slide, but it's a good exercise.
- When you think about it, it's fairly simple. The main purpose of visuals can't be to communicate words; your mouth is perfectly good at doing that. It's to share things your mouth can't do so well: photographs, video, animations, key data.

Fonts/typefaces

- It's usually best to use one typeface per presentation. Some typefaces are better suited than others. We usually recommend medium-weight sans-serif fonts like Helvetica or Arial. But don't use excessively thin fonts as they are hard to read, especially on a dark background. If in doubt, keep it simple. Resist underlining and italics—they're too hard to read. Bold typefaces are OK.
- Use 24 points or larger in most cases. Use at most three sizes of your chosen typeface per presentation, and there should be a reason for each size. Large size is for titles/headlines; medium size is for your main ideas; small size is for supporting ideas.
- If you're going to place type over a photo, make sure you place it where your audience can read it. If a photo is too busy to put type on directly, add a small black bar at the bottom and put the type on it.
- Color: Here the operative words are simple and contrast. Black on white, a dark color on white, and white or yellow on black all look good because they have great contrast and are easy to read. Use only one color of font per presentation unless you want to show emphasis or surprise. Never use a light-color type on a light-color background or dark-color type on a dark-color background—for example, light blue on yellow or red on black just won't be easy to read.
- After you make your font and color choices, look at your presentation on your computer or—way better—on your TV or a projector, and stand back 6 to 12 feet. Can you read everything? Do the photos look clear without pixelation? If not, readjust.

Scripting - To Memorize or Not to Memorize?

- One of the first key decisions you need to make—and ideally you’ll make it early on in your talk preparation—is whether you will:
 - A. write out the talk in full as a complete script (to be read, memorized, or a combination of the two), or
 - B. have a clearly worked-out structure and speak in the moment to each of your points.
- The huge advantage of going the scripted route is that you can make the best possible use of your available time. If there are tricky explanations involved, or important steps in your persuasion process, it may be essential for you to get every word down and tweak every sentence and paragraph to perfection. But the big drawback of a script is that, unless you deliver it in the right way, the talk may not feel fresh. Being read to and being spoken to are two very different experiences. In general (and there are exceptions), audiences respond far more powerfully to the latter. When the words are read, they may feel impersonal and distanced.
- Harvard professor Dan Gilbert advises his students to speak their talks into a recorder first, then transcribe them, and use that as the initial draft of their talk. Why? “Because when people write, they tend to use words, phrases, sentence structures, and cadences that no one uses in natural speech. So when you start with written text and then try to adapt it for performance, you are basically trying to turn one form of communication into another, and odds are that your alchemy will fail.
- Unscripted talks can sound fresh, alive, real, like you are thinking out loud. If this is your most comfortable speaking style, and if you are covering material that is very familiar to you, this may be your best choice. But it is important to distinguish unscripted from unprepared. The old-fashioned method of a set of punchy notes handwritten on cards is still a decent way to keep yourself on track. Use the words that will trigger a key sentence or a phrase that launches the next step in your talk.
- Whichever mode of speaking you decide on, there’s a very simple, very obvious tool you can use to improve your talk, but it’s one that most speakers rarely undertake: Rehearse. Repeatedly.

Opening and closing

- Whether or not you memorize your talk, it's important to pay attention to how you begin and how you end it. At the beginning of your talk, you have about a minute to intrigue people with what you'll be saying. And the way you end will strongly influence how your talk is remembered.
- However you deliver the rest of the talk, I strongly encourage you to script and memorize the opening minute and the closing lines. It helps with nerves, with confidence, and with impact.
- You want an opening that grabs people from the first moment and ignite curiosity. A surprising statement. An intriguing question. A short story. An incredible image.
- Remember that every piece of content in our modern era is part of an attention war. It's fighting against thousands of other claims on people's time and energy. This is true even when you're standing on a stage in front of a seated audience. They have deadly distracters in their pockets called smartphones, which they can use to summon to their eyes a thousand outside alternatives. Once emails and texts make their claim, your talk may be doomed.
- If you've held people's attention through the talk, don't ruin it with a flat ending. As Danny Kahneman explained so powerfully in both his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* and in his TED Talk, how people remember an event may be very different from how they experienced it, and when it comes to remembering, your final experience is really important. In short, if the ending isn't memorable, the talk itself may not be. Here's how not to end:
 - "Well, that's my time gone, so I'll wrap up there." (You mean, you had a lot more to say but can't tell us because of bad planning?)
 - "I'm sorry I haven't had time to discuss some of the major issues here, but hopefully this has at least given you a flavor of the topic." (Don't apologize! Plan more carefully! Your job was to give the best talk you could in the time available.)

Other tips

- Don't take yourself (or your topic) too seriously. The brain loves humor. Give your audience something to smile about.
- Stick to your time - if 10 minutes are not enough for you to present your research, then even 60 minutes would not be enough
- Cognitive processing—thinking, speaking, and listening—are physically demanding activities. Do not try to say too much, because people will just turn off. Less is better.
- Use builds—add words and images to a slide through a series of clicks—to focus people's attention on one idea at a time. Give your audience enough time to absorb each step. Don't feed too much of the slide at a time or people will get overwhelmed.
- A simple explanation of a complex topic gives the audience confidence in the speaker's mastery of the subject. Albert Einstein once said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."
- Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction. "Leonardo da Vinci once said, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." Be sophisticated. Keep your presentations and pitches short and simple."

Giving Feedback Effectively

- Check Your Motives. Before giving feedback, remind yourself why you are doing it. The purpose of giving feedback is to improve the situation or the person's performance. You won't accomplish that by being harsh, critical or offensive.
- You'll likely get much more from people when your approach is positive and focused on improvement. That's not to say feedback always has to be good, but it should be fair and balanced.
- Prepare Your Comments. You don't want to read a script, but you do need to be clear about you are going to say. This will help you to stay on track and stick to the issues.
- Be Specific. Tell the person exactly what he needs to improve. This ensures that you stick to facts and there is less room for ambiguity.
- Use "I" Statements. Give feedback from your perspective . This way you avoid labeling the person.
- Limit Your Focus. A feedback session should discuss no more than two issues. Any more than that and you risk the person feeling attacked and demoralized.
- Talk About Positives Too. A good rule is to start off with something positive. This helps put the person at ease. It will also allow her to "see" what success looks like and what steps she needs to take next time to get it right. Try to end on a high note, too. Otherwise, she may be left feeling despondent and worthless.