

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS



GET STARTED BY PREPARING

Effective communications is a skill that must be honed. Winging it doesn't work unless you're a natural born talent, and there are very few of those.

Know Your Audience

Find out who your audience is going to be ahead of time.

- ✓ Who are they? Age, Profession, Attitude, Personalities, Interests
- ✓ What do they know about the subject?
- ✓ What do they need/want to hear? What's in it for them?

Know Your Subject

If you're not already an authority in your subject, become one.

- ✓ Check out any recent trends, future projections (to be current).
- ✓ Check out recent controversies (to be prepared for Q&A).

Define Your Goal

Know where you're going before you start.

- ✓ What are you trying to communicate?
- ✓ What is your purpose? To inform? To persuade? To problem-solve?
- ✓ What is your goal? What is a "win" for you?

Now you're ready to develop your message.

PUT IT DOWN ON PAPER

“If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.”

Albert Einstein

Main Message

Think about what you really want the audience to walk away with.

- ✓ Put this in 25 words or less.
- ✓ Use plain words the audience can understand.
- ✓ Keep the message direct and simple.

Brainstorm for Bright Ideas

Let your imagination go. You can edit later.

- ✓ List the points you want to cover. Fill one page.
- ✓ Review ideas, prioritize and get rid of what doesn't work.
- ✓ Tell your audience only what they need to know.

List 3 Points (and only 3 points)

People process information in 3s.

For each point use:

- ✓ Headline (to engage the audience)
- ✓ Facts, statistics, studies (backs up your point)
- ✓ Anecdotes, examples, personal stories (helps audience visualize your point)

Write the Ending First

Know where you want to end up, or you won't know how to get there.

- ✓ Give a 30 second summary, hitting your 3 key points and conclusion.
- ✓ Draw attention to the end, "In closing," or "Let me sum up by saying,".
- ✓ Craft compelling closes: a call to action, future prediction, a challenge.

Go for the "Grabber" Opening

First impressions are crucial to your success.

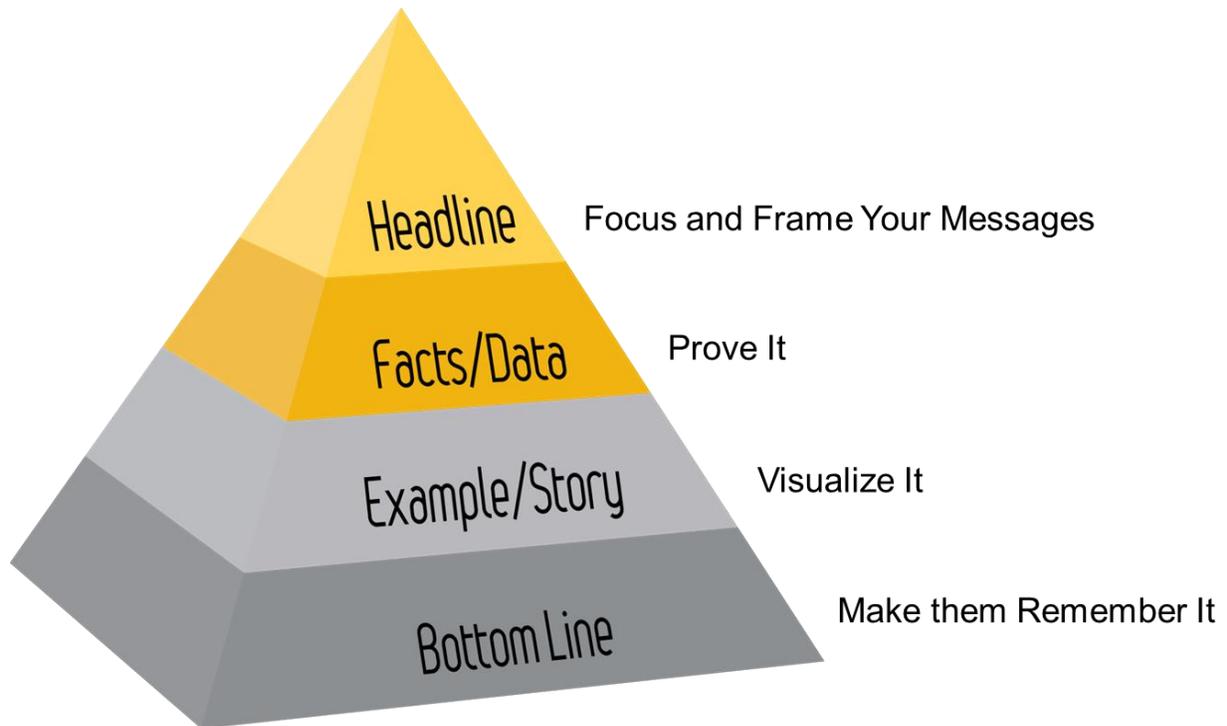
- ✓ Deliver a new, dramatic, startling fact to give importance to your message.
- ✓ Use a prop to dramatize your message.
- ✓ Start with a human-interest story, anecdote, joke (if you're funny and it's relevant).

Write Out the Entire Communication

*Remember the goal is to **communicate** your message.*

- ✓ Write the way you talk.
- ✓ Write in the present tense. Use short sentences and dynamic language.
- ✓ Use flag phrases to draw attention: "Most importantly", "Let's make this clear."

3D'S MESSAGE PYRAMID



CREATE EFFECTIVE VISUALS

Help the audience understand the visual and they will better understand you.

- ✓ 85% of information stored in the brain is received visually.
- ✓ People retain information better if it's seen as well as heard.
- ✓ Only use visuals if they clarify and add to your message.

KISS (*keep it short & simple*) Your Visuals you.

- ✓ Use simple pictures and graphs.
- ✓ Use one major idea per visual.
- ✓ Use more than one color, but not so many to make it distracting.

Text Slides

- ✓ Use bullet points for easy reading.
- ✓ Use 3X4 guideline: 3-4 bullets; 3-4 words per bullet.
- ✓ Use simple, bold type.

Charts and Graphs

- ✓ Keep them simple. Show only necessary numbers.
- ✓ Label the horizontal and vertical axes and trend lines.
- ✓ Make sure labels are legible.

Highlight Your Headlines

- ✓ Keep them short.
- ✓ Make them active & declarative.
- ✓ Have them sum up slide's message.

Flip Charts

Good for small, informal meetings to create graphics as you talk.

- ✓ Use block letters 2 inches high.
- ✓ Use dark and heavy ink.
- ✓ Tab sheets to help flip pages.

Practice with Your Visuals

Remember you control the visuals, they do not control you.

- ✓ Do a complete run-through of your communication with your visuals.
- ✓ Get rid of any visuals that don't add to your point.
- ✓ Use your visuals as aids to make your points, not as a crutch.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Practice Messages Aloud

This teaches you syntax and grammar.

- ✓ Talk slowly with conviction and expression.
- ✓ Change phrases so they sound like you talk.
- ✓ Speak louder/softer/pause/ change inflection.

Mark Words for Emphasis

This reminds you to speak with conviction and vocal diversity.

- ✓ Use / for a brief pause, X for a full stop after a sentence.
- ✓ Make marginal notes: "slow down", "speed up", "smile", "gesture".
- ✓ Practice changing emphasis.

Practice in Front of a Mirror

Imagine the audience is watching you.

- ✓ Note your facial expressions and hand gestures.
- ✓ Use a tape recorder to check how you sound.
- ✓ Use a video recorder, if possible.

PROJECT A POWERFUL AND POSITIVE POINT OF VIEW

Make a Dynamite First Impression

- ✓ Envision yourself communicating effectively.
- ✓ Start with a smile on your face. Excitement & boredom are contagious.
- ✓ Carry yourself with warmth, energy, authority. Communication is 93% non-verbal.

Take Control of the Room

- ✓ Create one-to-one intimacy. Engage the group by looking them in the eyes to establish rapport.
- ✓ Include everyone in the room. Criss-cross the audience.
- ✓ State your bottom line. Tell them what you're going to tell them.

Use Hand Gestures

- ✓ Start with hands at waist level, hold apart. Let natural gestures come.
- ✓ Don't grip or lean on a lectern.
- ✓ Don't put hands in pockets, behind back or folded in front.

Know Your Equipment

- ✓ Face the audience with the screen on your left so audience looks at you first.
- ✓ Use your left hand to point to the screen.
- ✓ Stay near the screen when you talk about the visual so you're the focal point.
- ✓ Use full room lighting so you're clearly seen.

Talking Through Slides

- ✓ Headline the message in each slide to focus audience.
- ✓ For Charts & Graphs
 - Identify the horizontal and vertical axes and trend lines.
 - Explain any variables.
 - Explain what's important and why.

Final Word

- ✓ Keep it simple.
- ✓ Keep it conversational.
- ✓ Keep it moving.

HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

Know Your Audience

- ✓ Keep in mind what they care about and what they need to hear.
- ✓ Stay alert, pay attention, listen to the questions closely.

Learn Your ABCs

- ✓ Anticipate the questions you might receive and answer as directly as possible.
- ✓ Bridge to your message points. (To deliver your messages no matter what the question).
- ✓ Conclude on a positive point. (People remember best what they hear last).

Practice Until You're Comfortable -- Then, Practice Some More

- ✓ Practice aloud.
- ✓ Practice in front of mirror with a tape recorder/video camera/coach.
- ✓ If you're presenting with a team
 - Decide who is taking what question.
 - Practice answering questions with your team members.

Pay Attention To Voice Tone And Body Language

- ✓ Speak with enthusiasm and conviction.
- ✓ Use hand gestures to emphasize important points, shake off nervous energy, and add diversity to your voice.

Handling Tough Questions

- ✓ Don't repeat the negative.
- ✓ Diffuse the situation by keeping your cool, smiling, responding patiently.
- ✓ If you don't know the answer, promise to try to get the answer or the right person.
- ✓ Stay positive and in control.