

Communicating

If you have worked in a public or nonprofit agency for any length of time, you are already experienced at social marketing, whether or not you recognize it as part of your job description. If you work directly with clients, you are helping them make positive changes in their behavior. If you supervise employees, you work with them to improve their skills and performance. If you communicate with funders or governing boards, you inform them of your organization's needs so that they will advocate for you or provide more resources. If you promote your organization's programs to the public, you aim to motivate them to use your services appropriately to improve their lives. Doing any of these things effectively requires you to take into account what your audience already knows about your organization, what change they're willing to consider, what the incentives and barriers are, and how you can support them in making the change you want.

Much of a community planning process is about "communication with intent." That is, the goal of all your communications with the world outside the planning group is to bring about some change in behavior or to perpetuate a beneficial change that has already happened. You may be seeking community members to participate in the process or sponsors for your activities or the continued collaboration of another organization. All of these—and much more—benefit from an awareness of why and how people change and what strategies you can use to help them change.

Although it has been most often used in public health efforts to reduce unhealthy behaviors (smoking, unsafe sex), Prochaska and DiClemente's analysis of how people change holds for making positive changes, as well. When you communicate about planning, it's important to understand what your audience knows and feels about the issues. They may know

1. nothing at all
2. a little, but it's not important to them
3. some, and it's becoming important to them
4. a lot, and they're beginning to do something about it
5. a lot, and they're working on it all the time.

Admittedly, some people will stay in one of the first two states, ignorant of or indifferent to your planning effort, no matter what you do.

Four Ps

The key to getting people in each stage to be willing to support your effort is to have a clear idea of exactly what you want them to do (the "product"), what the financial or psychological barriers are for them to do what you want (the price), where you can best reach them (the place), and what meth-

Social Marketing



4 Ps
Product
Price
Place
Promotion

More Ps
Positioning
Publics
Partnerships
Policy
Purse strings



ods of reaching them they prefer (promotion). You can easily imagine that all four of these would be different if you were trying to entice citizens to come to a public forum than if you were trying to develop a collaboration between agencies that serve the same clientele.

In addition to those four elements, it is important to consider positioning (what else is going on that competes for attention with your planning process), publics (the range and diversity of audience for your messages), partnerships (the role of and constraints of the other entities with which you are collaborating), policy (legal constraints), and purse strings (requirements of your funders).

The facing page shows a sheet that you might use as a basis for planning all your external communications.

Resources

- Alcalay, Rina, and Robert Bell 2003. [Definitions of social marketing concepts.] University of California at Davis, Center for Advanced Studies in Nutrition and Social Marketing, <http://socialmarketing-nutrition.ucdavis.edu/somark.htm>
- National Cancer Institute. 1989, rev. 2002. *Making Health Communication Programs Work: A Planner's Guide*. <http://cancer.gov/pinkbook>
- Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development. 2003. *A Short Course in Social Marketing*, http://www.foundation.novartis.com/social_marketing.htm
- Prochaska, DiClemente, and colleagues on change at <http://www.uri.edu/research/cprc/TTM/detailedoverview.htm>
- Robinson, Les. A 7-step social marketing media approach, <http://media.socialchange.net.au/strategy/>
- Weinreich, Nedra Klein. [Articles on social marketing], <http://www.social-marketing.com/>

<i>Product</i>	<p>To whom is your message addressed? (Be as specific about the target audience's demographics and characteristics as you can.)</p> <p>What specifically do you want them to do?</p> <p>How ready are they to do it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A little, but it's not important to them <input type="checkbox"/> Some, and it's getting important to them <input type="checkbox"/> A lot, and they're beginning to do something about it <input type="checkbox"/> A lot, and they're working on it all the time <p>If your audience is in the first or second stage, how important is it for you to get their attention?</p>
<i>Price</i>	<p>What will it cost your audience to make the change you want? (Consider practical things like transportation, time available, and family needs, as well as such psychological costs as admitting to a "problem," working with a government entity, giving up personal time. How will you minimize these barriers or offer incentives?)</p>
<i>Place</i>	<p>Where are you likely to find members of your audience? (Beauty parlor? Grocery store? Civic group? Religious organization? School? Medical setting? Senior center?)</p>
<i>Promotion</i>	<p>What medium will capture their attention best? (Face to face, newspaper, flier—consider reading levels—radio, TV) How frequently do you need to repeat your message?</p>
<i>Positioning</i>	<p>What other similar events might distract your audience?</p>
<i>Publics</i>	<p>How uniform are the recipients of your message? (One group or many? How are they alike? How do they differ?)</p>
<i>Partnerships</i>	<p>Who can help you get this message out? What do they need from you to help?</p>
<i>Policy</i>	<p>Are there legal constraints you must honor?</p>
<i>Purse strings</i>	<p>What do your funders require?</p>

Marketing and public relations (PR) are essential to all parts of your community's strategic planning process. Your planning team will use marketing and PR approaches in almost everything it does, from recruiting potential team members, to advertising focus groups and community forums, to informing the community and stakeholder groups about the team's progress and recommendations. Developing a marketing/PR plan can be extremely helpful to your team in focusing its publicity efforts effectively.

Your team's plan should be developed early in the process and updated every six months or when situations change. Although your team can develop its marketing/PR plan as an entire group, will likely be more efficient to have a committee devoted to that task. If possible, include representatives from your local media and working or retired marketing or PR professionals. Some marketing professionals are required to do pro bono work, so you may wish to contact firms in your area to see if someone on their staff will assist your team.

The Plan

During a presentation at the ASA/NCOA Conference on April 16, 2004, Palmer Pekarek, with the Seniors' Resource Center in Denver, Colorado, noted that *all* marketing goals and strategies should support your team's overall mission statement, be specific and measurable, and be able to be evaluated at least annually. He suggests

1. Make a list (by month) of all the activities that will need marketing or PR support. Determine how much time each activity will take. For example:
 - Write a feature story to publicize in local newsletters and media**
 - 1 week to interview participants and stakeholders
 - 3 days to take and develop photos
 - 1 week to write the story
 - 2 days to have it approved by the committee
 - 2 days to send out to organizations and media
2. Determine costs associated with each marketing/PR goal. For example:
 - Feature story costs**
 - 2 weeks staff time
 - mileage to and from interviewees, photo shop, etc.
 - photo developing costs
 - postage
3. Develop ways to evaluate whether the strategy worked. For example:
 - Feature story evaluation**
 - The story ran in 3 provider newsletters and in one local newspaper

Developing a Marketing and Public Relations Plan

10 interested people phoned the organization/
agency as a result
2 new volunteers were recruited directly from the
story

4. Develop a year-long timeline for activities.
Pekarek suggests taking a one-year calendar and
writing in it when each marketing/PR activity needs
to be completed in order to keep the big picture in
mind and avoid last-minute deadlines.

At the end of the year, Pekarek notes that you would like to
be able to say “We did this marketing/PR activity _____,
it cost \$_____ to do, from it we received this outcome, and it
netted us \$_____.”

More Tips from Pekarek

- ◆ Marketing/PR plans must be flexible. Politics, budget
cuts, and the like can quickly change the way your
committee needs to publicize its work.
- ◆ Census data are extremely helpful in developing
marketing plans. From them you can determine
where your target populations live and work and
therefore where you need to do the majority of your
publicity work.
- ◆ Marketing/PR’s biggest drawback is that it takes
time. He suggests devoting half an hour per day to it
so that it is not such an overwhelming task.
- ◆ Sometimes, you will have marketing/PR goals that
cost more than they may bring in, in terms of volun-
teers, donations, clients, etc. However, if the goal
creates a more positive image of your team’s work,
sometimes the cost is worth it.
- ◆ Human services providers are wary of marketing
their services for fear that more potential clients will
call than they can accommodate. Instead of thinking
about marketing in that manner, Pekarek suggests
using the increased interest in services to advocate
and bring attention to the need for more assistance
with your local and state policymakers. If you begin
getting too many clients or volunteers from a cam-
paign, do less marketing and more things to raise
awareness in the community.

Resource

Pekarek, Palmer, APR, MPA, MS. *Marketing and Public Relations
Planning*. Workshop at the ASA/NCOA National Conference, San
Francisco, April 16, 2004. Contact information: Seniors’ Resource
Center, (303) 235-6968 or Ppekarek@SRCaging.org

Gaining and maintaining the community's engagement and enthusiasm over the course of a year or more is a considerable challenge. A key to getting diverse participation at the start and keeping people involved is developing a marketing/PR plan, as described in the last chapter. This chapter briefly examines how to develop effective relationships with the media and some guidelines for press releases and public service announcements.

Your organizing committee has been carefully selected to provide access to local stakeholders. You may wish to include a journalist on the committee, but some refrain from covering stories about issues in which they have a personal stake. Alternatively, you may want to recruit someone for the organizing committee who has extensive connections to the local press and experience in public relations. Even if there is no likely candidate, though, it is still possible to prepare a good campaign.

Early in your work in organizing the planning process, it is a good idea to designate at least one member of your committee as the group's communicator. This is the person who answers questions from the press, is responsible for carrying your "message" to the public, and sees that your marketing/PR strategy is carried out.

It is important to examine your timeline for the planning process to identify when you are most likely to have "hard" news to report and when you most need the help that media attention can provide to gain participation and buy-in from your stakeholders. The sample press release and public service announcement (PSA) at the end of this chapter show two events that would benefit from good publicity to get input from the community.

Because you want to keep your stakeholders informed and involved over many months, it is also helpful to identify external newsworthy events to which your planning can be tied. Although you will take advantage of unforeseen opportunities as they arise, others may be evident from the start. For example, May is Older Americans Month, and November is Family Caregivers' Month. The greeting card companies have established Grandparents' Day. Your senior center may be planning its anniversary celebration or a health fair. Senior Games may be holding local finals. Any of these can provide a springboard for publicizing the progress of the planning process or an opportunity for soliciting input.

As your planning process matures, it becomes even more important to have a communicator (or even a subcommittee on communication) and to review your message regularly. Equally important is developing a productive way to handle dissent. It would be a rare (and probably useless) planning group where everyone agreed about everything all of the time.

Working with the Media



Who?
What?
Why?
When?
Where?
How?

However, one certain way to sabotage the process is to have participants who do not feel that their views are being heard and no way to make their opinions known. Dissent handled respectfully provides the opportunity to learn more from stakeholders.

Free Publicity

Newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio often have gaps in their programming. The Online Women's Business Center article (mentioned in the resources) points out that the broadcast media are required to devote a proportion of their air time to public service, and print media often need fillers to make their page layouts work. To learn what stations serve your area, consult TVRadioWorld.com's website, which has a listing of both TV and radio stations by market (Charlotte area, Triad, etc.) with links to contact information and websites.

One of the first tasks of your communicator will be to develop lists of media contacts. As you plan your PR campaign, you will identify what kind of publicity you need to reach your stakeholders effectively, and that will depend on identifying who they are and what type of publicity is most likely to reach them. Commercial media use public service announcements when it is convenient for them to do so, but you can ask for help in placing your material appropriately if you can describe your audience's characteristics (age, gender, background, time of day they are most likely to be watching/listening, or what they are most likely to read).

Not-so-free Publicity

Don't underestimate the value of other methods of publicizing your work. Newsletters, fliers, posters, and brochures all may play a role in your communications strategy, but all must be carefully developed and planned to reach a specific audience or audiences. The Online Women's Business Center suggests this about commercial marketing, but it is relevant here, too.

If you know your target market is 24- to 49-year-old men who like rhythm & blues, are frequent CD buyers, and live in urban neighborhoods, you can create an advertising message to appeal to those types of buyers. Additionally, you could buy spots on a specific radio station or TV show that appeals to this type of buyer, rather than buying general media time to "kinda cover all the bases." Make sense? In summary, when you're making marketing decisions and you say "kinda," it's costing you money. Know whom you are aiming for (your target market) and create a strategy for a direct hit.

Do You Need a Website?

How many of your stakeholders regularly use the Web or e-mail as a source of information? A growing number of older adults do, to keep in touch with their techno-savvy children and grandchildren, and people with disabilities often gain access to the larger world that way. Most public agencies and businesses have websites these days.

As this guide is being developed, websites, web logs (“blogs” or online personal journals), and discussion groups are growing in importance for political organizing, and they may prove to be increasingly important to community planning efforts as well. According to Lawrence Lessig (writing about John Dean’s campaign),

But when done right, . . . the blog is a tool for building community. The trick is to turn the audience into the speaker. A well-structured blog inspires both reading and writing. And by getting the audience to type, candidates get the audience committed. Engagement replaces reception, which in turn leads to real-space action. The life of the Dean campaign on the Internet is not really life on the Internet. It’s the activity in real space that the Internet inspires.

None of this works unless the blog community is authentic. And that requires that members feel they own their gabbing space. A managed community works about as well as a managed economy. So the challenge is to find a way to build community without the community feeling built.

Basic websites are not very difficult to create and new software makes blog sites easier, but it takes time and effort to design and maintain interactive sites. However, some Web design companies do pro bono work, and local high schools or colleges might provide students through internships. Just as you might seek a friendly local newspaper or printer to subsidize your printed materials, you might look for assistance in developing a website.

Resources

- Brabec, Barbara. How to get publicity in your local paper, and How to write a news release—and where to send it. <http://www.barbarabrabec.com>
- Chevron. What this organization needs is more publicity! <http://www.chevron.com/about/programs/pub-relations/publicity.shtml>
- Consultwebs. Press releases for print purposes. http://www.consultwebs.com/pres_release.htm
- Fortin, Michel. How to write and target a persuasive news release. <http://www.4hb.com/o249persuasivenewsreleas.htm>
- Kelly, Karen. How to: Write a news release. http://www.profitguid.com/how_to/article.jsp?=1125
- Krupin, Paul J. The proper way to write a news release. <http://1st-be-your-own-boss.com/news/a9.html>

Lessig, Lawrence. November 2003. The New Road to the White House: How grassroots blogs are transforming presidential politics. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.11/view.html?pg=5>.

National Fishing and Boating Week. This site is a case example that provides samples and guidelines for publicizing an event. http://www.nationalfishingandboatingweek.org/publicity_materials/placePSA.cfm

Online Women's Business Center. See the very helpful links and articles in their "Marketing Mall" about PSAs, marketing plans, and other strategies for publicity. <http://www.onlinewbc.gov/docs/market/index.html>

PRW. Press release content basics, <http://www.press-release-writing.com/content-basics.htm>

Workinpr.com. Tips for writing a successful press release. http://www.workinpr.com/industry/career/pr_prwriting.asp

Xpress Press. How to write and format a press release for e-mail distribution. <http://www.xpresspress.com/PRnotes.html>

Some Notes for Press Releases

Be sure to include contact information.

The release information can be dated some time in the future, immediate, or “use at will,” but this last option means that it may be filed and used later.

Put location and date of writing.

Write a snappy headline to capture the attention of the person to whom you send the release. (Put it in bold type.) The headline and first sentence often make the difference between publication and the circular file.

Almost universal in the resources is the advice to follow journalists’ traditional “Who, What, Why, Where, When, How” formula. Several resources point out that unless the Who is locally well known, the What and the Why should come first. Journalists cut from the last paragraph upward, so your information should decrease in importance from first to last.

Some of what your planning group does may seem important to you, but it won’t be “news” to anyone else. Ask why the newspaper’s readers would be interested.

Remember the “new” in “news”; old news wraps fish. Understand journalists’ deadlines, too.

Hard facts are helpful, with a source, as is a quote from a notable that helps answer “Why?”

It is better to show that something is appalling, important, or critical than to say it is. A quote from the mayor can express an opinion, but the writing around it should not.

If there are special arrangements or people to contact for more information, be sure to mention them.

Proofread carefully, particularly names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Have several others proofread, too.

Keep it short—under two pages.

Double-space the text. Put “More” at the bottom of the page if you go to two. -30- or ### signal the end to newspaper people.

Contact: Jane Q. Planner
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Work: (999) 999-9999
Home: (999) 111-1111
E-mail: JQP@ISP.net

COUNTY SEAT, AUGUST 1, 2004

“Dream This Community in 2020”: Planning Begins to Make Our Community Friendly and Accessible to Younger and Older Adults with Disabilities

On September 17 at Community Commons, county residents of all ages will meet from 7:30 to 9 p.m. to begin imagining how public and private service organizations, businesses, faith communities, and individuals can create a community that addresses the needs and interests of its adult citizens with disabilities.

This event is the kickoff for a planning effort sponsored by a coalition of local organizations and individuals. Susan Smith, mayor of County Seat, chairs this coalition. “Finding ways to mobilize the wealth of wisdom, enthusiasm, and expertise of our citizens, while accommodating changing needs for social interactions, health care, housing, and transportation across the life course will be vital to keeping our county a wonderful place to live,” said Smith at the first meeting of the coalition last week.

County vans will make special trips on that evening from outlying towns, child care will be provided on site during the meeting, and some in-home respite will be available for caregivers. Call 999-222-2222 to reserve a ride or inquire about respite. For more information about this event, listen for public service announcements on WRAD-AM, see Mayor Smith on the public access channel Tuesdays at 7 p.m., or call (999) 999-9998.

-30-

Some Notes about PSAs

Because PSAs are spoken, read yours aloud to an audience and reword as necessary so that the announcer won't stumble over any word combinations.

The examples shown here are typed single-spaced to fit on the page. It's a good idea to double- or triple-space them for easier reading.

The convention seems to be to type PSAs in all capital letters (though sometimes this is difficult to read). Check with your radio or TV station to learn what format they prefer.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Contact: Jane Q. Planner FOR RELEASE JAN. 15, 2005
Work: (999) 999-9999 END: FEBRUARY 4, 2005
Home: (999) 111-1111
E-mail: JQP@ISP.net

ARE YOU CARING FOR ANOTHER ADULT? TUNE IN TO CABLE CHANNEL 8 ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, AT 9:30 P.M. TO HELP US PLAN A COMMUNITY THAT ACCOMMODATES OLDER AND YOUNGER ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES. MAYOR SUSAN JONES OF COUNTY SEAT WILL TAKE YOUR CALLS AND HOST A DISCUSSION OF WHAT THE COMMUNITY CAN DO TO MAKE CARE EASIER FOR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS.

(15 SECONDS)

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Contact: Jane Q. Planner FOR RELEASE JAN. 15, 2004
Work: (999) 999-9999 END: FEBRUARY 4, 2004
Home: (999) 111-1111
E-mail: JQP@ISP.net

ARE YOU CARING FOR ANOTHER ADULT? IF SO, YOU ARE ONE OF THE NEARLY 45,000 PEOPLE IN THE COUNTY WHO DO.

WE ARE CURRENTLY PLANNING TO BECOME THE COUNTY IN THE STATE THAT DOES THE BEST JOB OF SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS. PLEASE HELP US BY LETTING US KNOW WHAT WE'RE DOING WELL AND WHAT WE NEED TO DO.

TUNE IN TO CABLE CHANNEL 8 ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, AT 9:30 P.M. MAYOR SUSAN JONES OF COUNTY SEAT WILL TAKE YOUR CALLS AND HOST A DISCUSSION OF WHAT YOU WANT AND NEED, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

(25 SECONDS)

You can do it! That's the first thing to remember. With practice—and that's the key—most people can write clear and workmanlike prose, even if they will never get the Pulitzer or the National Book Award. The goal of this brief chapter is to encourage you and provide some resources that will help you improve your writing.

Written Products for the Planning Process

Although much of the planning process is just that, process—meetings and negotiations among people on the planning team, the community, funders and sponsors, and service organizations—there are many opportunities for writing. Here are a few. As you plan the process, you will discover others.

- ♦ publicity (newspaper articles, brochures)
- ♦ requests for sponsorship (letters to potential donors, information about the project, grant proposals)
- ♦ interim reports to donors or sponsoring organizations
- ♦ the final plan
- ♦ reports on outcomes (to the media, to funders)

In the chapter on public relations, we suggest that you identify a communicator (or communications subcommittee) for the planning team. You might find it helpful to find people who are good at spoken communications and others who specialize in writing. This isn't to keep others from doing either task, just to make sure that the people who have the interest, confidence, and expertise take responsibility for these functions.

Plain Language

Toward the end of the 1990s, federal agencies moved to make their documents more accessible to consumers, and they have devoted a website to strategies for doing so (<http://www.plainlanguage.gov>). As you write for your community, keep in mind their advice:

When your document is plainly written, your readers are more likely to

- ♦ Understand what you want and take appropriate action
- ♦ Focus on key information
- ♦ Believe that you are concerned with their needs

How do you know when you've achieved plain writing? Here's a checklist, based on recommendations on the federal website and supplemented with suggestions from some of the other resources listed at the end of this chapter.

- ♦ Know what you want to say. Know why you want to say it.
- ♦ Know who your audience is and what their interest is in reading what you write.

Writing Clearly



The boiled infusion of animal protein and vegetable matter is degraded by the attentions of a surfeit of culinary executives.



- ♦ Find out what your audience already knows and doesn't know. Start where they are, and give them the basics to go forward.
- ♦ Use short sentences. The online guides mentioned in the resources suggest from 20 to 30 words maximum.
- ♦ Write about only one topic per sentence.
- ♦ Similarly, keep your paragraphs to one topic, but make it clear how they link together.
- ♦ Write to one person, not to a group. Address that person as "you."
- ♦ Use the simplest tense you can, and use tenses consistently.
- ♦ Use the active voice. "Guidelines will be developed and strategies implemented," in the passive voice, gives no information about who will take responsibility for either thing. "Our agency will develop guidelines and begin work."
- ♦ Place words carefully to reduce ambiguity.
- ♦ Use tables or bullet lists, if they will make it easier for the reader to make sense of the information.
- ♦ Avoid acronyms. If you must use them, spell them out the first place they occur in your document.
- ♦ Avoid professional or other fashionable jargon and cliches.
- ♦ Use everyday words. "Fancy" multisyllabic words derived from Latin or Greek often sound stilted, draw attention to themselves, and rarely make your writing clearer.
- ♦ Don't modify nouns with other nouns by stringing them together (not *surface water quality protection procedures*, but *procedures to protect the quality of surface water*; the first is shorter, but it could be ambiguous to someone not familiar with the subject).
- ♦ Use terms consistently throughout your document. If you define "older adults" as people over 60, don't use "older adults" for other age groups or other terms ("seniors") for people over 60.
- ♦ Understand the words you use. Most of the resources contain suggestions about reducing redundancy, and others list commonly misused words.
- ♦ Check your grammar and spelling, and have several others check your document, too. If you haven't taken a course in grammar since high school or early college, and if that was a long time ago, you might consider reviewing one of the sites on grammar listed in the resources. The conventions about some things—punctuation, in particular—may have changed since you first learned them.

- ♦ Revise and rewrite according to the importance of the document. Final reports or letters to potential donors deserve very careful attention, while a quick e-mail to a colleague may not deserve as much.
- ♦ For important documents, give yourself time to set them aside for a day or two before rereading them. Change the font or the margins for your final proof copy. Making the words just a little “strange” may help you spot errors better.

Resources

- <http://www.bartleby.com/> This extensive online resource makes William Strunk's *The Elements of Style* available, as well as the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, Kenneth G. Wilson's *Columbia Guide to Standard American Usage* (1993), among many others.
- <http://www.goarticles.com/index.html>. Articles on writing. See in particular
 Alexander, Linda Elizabeth. Business writing checklist.
 Booth, Angela. Five easy ways to add punch to your words.
 Campbell, June. Tips for improving your business writing.
 Dunn, Susan. Better writing, what works and what doesn't
 Lock, Craig. What is writing style and how do you develop it?
- <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/> (Under “How To,” look at Writing User-friendly Documents. An easier way to find this page is to go to http://www.blm.gov/nhp/NPR/pe_toc.html, but the main site has many other useful resources.)
- Larson, Gary B. (Not the cartoonist.) Garbl's writing center. <http://home.comcast.net/~garbl/> See his writing resources and style guide, in particular.
- Macris, Natalie. 2002. Three rules for better writing. <http://www.planning.org/careers/macris.htm>
- Meeks, Christopher. 2001. Better writing. http://www.efuse.com/Design/wa-more_better_writing.html
- Plain Language Network. Resources. <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/Resources/>
- Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). Index of handouts. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/index2.html>
- Snively, Susan. Writing better: A handbook for Amherst Students. <http://www.amherst.edu/~writing/writingbetter/>. See her list of commonly misused words.
- Stephens, Cheryl. On plain language. (Plain Language Association International). <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/stephens/>
- Yager, Jan. 2002. Using better writing to boost your career. http://www.janyager.com/usebetter_articles.htm
- Zinsser, William. 1976. *On writing well*. New York: HarperCollins.

You, the presenter, are the critical element in effective presentations. Slick overheads and glossy handouts are nice, but your presence, poise, and open engagement with your audience are much more important and will make the difference between a presentation that is memorable and incites people to action and one that doesn't.

We live in what some have termed a "PowerPoint culture," because of the seeming omnipresence of this Microsoft product (even used in some churches to display hymn lyrics or the main points of the sermon). Good visual displays and handouts can enhance presentations, and poor ones detract, but effective presentations rely more on your ability to engage the audience.

A particularly rich website on public presentations is Powerpointers (<http://www.powerpointers.com/index.asp>), which goes far beyond the focus on software that its title might imply. The suggestions here are largely taken from that source. First, we'll consider your role as speaker; then, development of your presentation; and finally, aids to presentation.

Your Role in Effective Presentations

According to Marjorie Brody, "The way we deliver our message to other people is made up of three components, what I call the three V's: Visual, Vocal, Verbal. Each carries a percentage of the listeners' perception of the total message. . . . The visual component usually carries the most weight with audience members—a person's body language, posture, eye contact and facial expressions are the main areas in this equation." Effective presenters seem relaxed, yet controlled and alert. She suggests that the same sort of open position one might use in interviewing is appropriate—face on, hands open at side. Good presenters also make eye contact with the audience and use it to gauge how to adjust the presentation. Brody suggests practicing your presentation where you will give it. If possible, you might videotape yourself to look at your stance, gestures, and facial expression.

Appropriate gestures reinforce your message, but nervous presenters often assume positions that convey a different content. Apart from gestures that may seem hostile (pointing, raising a fist), Brody mentions that crossing one's arms may seem defensive, and holding hands together as if in prayer, weak.

In discussing how to get people to remember what you say, Kare Anderson asserts that motion enhances memory.

An experience is most memorable when you and the other person are both in motion, such as when you shake hands, walk together, or reach to exchange something. Pick those ripe moments to say the most vivid, specific detail you want the listener to remember and repeat to

Effective Presentations



Whoever most vividly characterizes a situation or person usually determines how others see it, discuss it, and decide on it. . . .

Even those who disagree are likely to use your description as they talk about their disagreement. Think how influential you are when you thus speak English like it tastes good.

—Kare Anderson

others. Times are next most memorable for the listener who is in motion even if you are not. Ask the person to reach or turn for something while you're saying your tasty tidbit to remember. The next most memorable movement is when you are in motion, even if your listener is not. A final valuable way to evoke a memory is for you both to watch motion from something or someone else.

She cautions, however, that the same principle applies even more strongly to forming and reinforcing negative memories.

Anderson suggests three additional ways to make your message memorable: (1) relating it to one of the three principle "hooks" that snag your audience's attention, family, homeplace, and work; (2) starting with the audience's current most pressing interest, rather than with your own; (3) using "vivid, specific details that have high emotional value for the listener." If you do this, she claims, "four amazingly powerful changes occur in how that other person relates to you. The person listens sooner, listens longer, remembers more, and assumes you have a higher IQ than if you first speak about your own interests."

Brody suggests using motion to shape your relationship with the audience: "Getting physically closer to your audience increases its attention and interest. It also encourages response if you are asking questions. The accepted public distance zone is 12 to 25 feet. In smaller group situations, you can approach within a social distance of 4 to 12 feet primarily, and occasionally get as close as 18 inches to 4 feet." Diane Diresta suggests a similar strategy for reducing disruptions: "Two or more people engage in regular conversations during your presentation. If it is a large auditorium, ignore it. In smaller groups it can be distracting. Make eye contact with the talkers and stop speaking until they look up. You can also confront them directly and ask them to hold their conversation until later. Or try the walk technique. Walk toward them, stand in front of them, and keep talking. They will get the message."



Preparing the Message

So, who *are* these people you're going to talk to? Why are you talking to them? What do you want them to do? Why should they do it? As Anderson suggested, one of the main hooks in getting people to listen and to act is to understand what their concerns are and connect your message to those concerns.

It is critical to know as much about your audience as you can before you design your presentation. For example, are you talking to the human resources directors of local companies? What are their principal concerns about planning for aging? Are their employees older or younger? Are they personally preparing for retirement? Do they have aging parents?

To the degree that you are able to find out beforehand, you should. What if you are asked to speak impromptu? Greet your audience at the door or in the lobby, talk to people, and get a sense of who they are. Start your presentation by asking questions that can be answered by a show of hands. You can then adjust your presentation to meet their expectations.

The second critical part in planning your presentation is knowing what you want your audience to do as a result. Larry Tracy suggests an unusual but productive strategy for planning your presentation. Although people deliver their presentations in the order introduction, body, conclusion, Tracy suggests that you prepare in a different way.

Start your draft with the "bottom line" conclusion (#3), then develop an opening (#1) that grabs the attention of the audience, spells out the benefits they will achieve by listening to you, and tells them what you are going to address. By starting with your conclusion, you now have a destination—you know where you are heading with your presentation. With the beginning and ending on paper, your task of enumerating supporting data and arguments (#2) will be much easier.

Your conclusion will contain what you want your audience to do, while your opening will start with your audience's concerns. The middle is where you connect their concerns to the action you want to see.

Bill Wilson suggests that each minute of presentation time requires an hour of preparation. This, more than anything else, demonstrates the need for one or more designated communicators in the planning group. Much of the background information about your planning initiative will be the same, whether you are making presentations to the chamber of commerce, participants at a public forum, or friends in a cafe. Spending time developing written material on the history of the process, the demographics of your community that are relevant to planning, and answering such questions as "Why plan for aging?" and "Why do it now?" can make preparation to speak to diverse groups much easier. Developing a sheet for the planning group that covers such information can keep people literally on the same page. It also may have uses in developing brochures, newsletters, and news releases, and it can help members of your group convey a clear message when they are interviewed. Similarly, having a slide show or overheads that cover the basics—and knowing them thoroughly—will leave you more time to tailor the presentation to your audience and also make you more confident.

Visual—and Other—Aids

People remember at most about 10 percent of what they hear in a presentation. To make certain that they remember even

that much, many of the writers at Powerpointers suggest repetition—as many as six or seven times, according to some. If you are not another Martin Luther King, Jr. (“I have a dream . . .”; consider the repetition in that speech), you may want to find ways other than verbal of creating repetition in your presentation in addition to doing it aloud. One key is to use other media to help you. Doing this also can use what we know about adult learning styles.

Stop for a moment and think about how you learn new things. What do you prefer? Reading, looking at pictures, listening? Watching someone demonstrate how to do something or jumping in and trying it yourself? Building a larger understanding from particulars, or understanding the big picture and then the details? You may choose different methods for different tasks, but you will probably have a favorite set of ways to learn new things.

What does teaching have to do with presentations? Essentially, the middle section of your presentation is where you help your audience learn new things that connect their interests with the actions you hope they will take. Therefore, when you are speaking to an audience of any size, it helps to accommodate as many learning styles as possible in your presentation by finding multiple ways to convey your message.

People remember:

- 10 percent of what they read
- 20 percent of what they hear
- 30 percent of what they see
- 50 percent of what they see and hear
- 80 percent of what they say
- 90 percent of what they say and do

Sinclair, Cuttell, Vandever, Menefee. 2002. <http://www.tech.purdue.edu/Ols/courses/ols252/slides/chapter11.ppt>.

In this “PowerPoint” age, overheads or slide presentations are commonly used, and they can be effective when done carefully. Such presentations can get the attention of people who prefer reading to listening or looking at charts or graphs to hearing the same information in words. They also provide at least one repetition of your major points—be sure that the 10 percent you want your audience to remember is on

your overheads. Similarly, presenting audio or video clips can help you make your point to people who learn by observation, while asking members of the audience to demonstrate something or test something out in small groups may get the attention of those who prefer to experiment (remember Anderson’s point about motion and memory). Providing a handout or some other reminder of your presentation that participants take away with them repeats your message as often as they see or use this reminder (a key-chain tag with a good slogan may be more effective than a brochure). Also, knowing your own learning styles can be helpful, because you will tend to make presentations in the styles you favor, and you may have to stretch a little to reach people who use other styles.

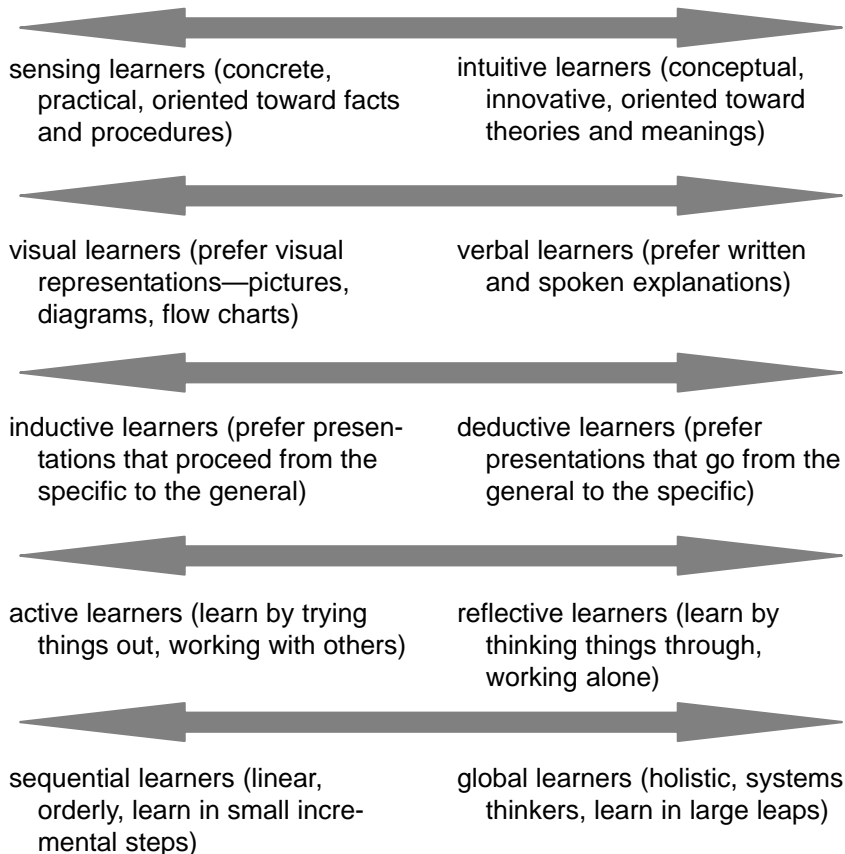
Although overheads and slide presentations are familiar to people in business or academic settings, with other audi-

ences and in small groups, they may be less effective than posters on the wall, prepared flip chart pages, or handouts.

Resources

- Kare Anderson. Speak English like it tastes good. <http://www.powerpointers.com/showarticle.asp?articleid=1>
- Brody, Marjorie. 1999. Capture an audience's attention: Points on posture, eye, contact [*sic*] and more. <http://www.powerpointers.com/showarticle.asp?articleid=17>
- Diresta, Diane. How to handle difficult audiences. <http://www.powerpointers.com/showarticle.asp?articleid=49>
- Felder, Richard M. 1996. Matters of style. <http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Papers/LS-Prism.htm>
- McKenzie, Jamie. Scoring power points. <http://www.fno.org/sept00/powerpoints.html>
- Tracy, Larry. 2000. Preparing a presentation. <http://www.powerpointers.com/showarticle.asp?articleid=216>
- Tufte, Edward. PowerPoint is Evil. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2.html>
- Wilson, Bill. 1999. Quick tip: Preparation time. <http://www.powerpointers.com/showarticle.asp?articleid=195>

Does Your Presentation Accommodate Both?



Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model. See the discussion of how to accommodate many styles at <http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Papers/LS-Prism.htm>

If the only product is a slide show, the software can subtly channel teams toward compression and oversimplification. The very physical nature of slides can lead toward a kind of fragmentation and deconstruction of an argument. We may end up with a trail of segments and bits and pieces instead of a carefully constructed arch way standing in clear view.

In place of sentences and carefully constructed paragraphs, we start writing phrases. Big ideas appear on their own slides. Details appear on their own slides. We may lose sight of the big picture. We move from stepping stone to stepping stone, unaware of the garden around us. We move from bead to bead without seeing the necklace. We lose touch with context. Out of sight is out of mind?

—Jamie McKenzie

Some Guidelines for Visual Aids

1. Your final product is only as good as your last output device.
Whether you are using a computer for a PowerPoint presentation, transparencies on an overhead projector, or a paper handout, test it using the projector, printer, or photocopier. Colors that look good on a computer screen may not project well, print well on a transparency, or photocopy well. When possible, test slides, overheads, and prepared flip chart pages in the room where you will use them. Can you read them from the back?
2. Proofread and check your grammar in all your material. Have other people do the same.
Typographical and grammatical errors are distracting and reduce the credibility of your presentation.
3. Practice your presentation using your visual aids.
This allows you to make a smoother presentation and also to make sure that technology is not overshadowing your message.
4. Have at least a Plan B, and maybe a Plan C for using your aids.
Computers—well, they follow Murphy's Law. Projector bulbs burn out. Consider what you will do if your plans don't work out.
5. Don't read your slides or handouts to your audience.
Use your slideshow, transparencies, or printed matter as cues for your talk. If you expect your audience to read a slide or handout, though, give them a moment to do so before you start speaking.
6. Unless you are making a policy statement, where the exact wording is important, don't read your presentation.
Practice until you can make your presentation with only occasional reference to your notes.
7. Match your visual aids to the setting and purpose of your presentation or meeting.
Tufte and some other critics suggest that PowerPoint channels thought into narrow categories that may not be suitable for discussing topics that are multifaceted or "messy." (See what happens to the Gettysburg Address at <http://www.norvig.com/Gettysburg/> and McKenzie's comment in the margin here.)