

Communicating on the Job

Tips for effective writing, speaking, and listening

Vol. 1 No. 4

Language:

Build a pyramid of purpose and action with goals, objectives, activities, and tasks

When planning a project or developing a proposal, strengthen your plan by clearly defining your purpose and actions. Distinguish *goals* from *objectives* from *activities* from *tasks*. Filling in the specifics under these headings carries the project from a higher to a lower level of detail and shows the depth of your understanding.

Goal: the project's "end" (the ultimate answer to *why we are doing this*)
Objectives: the major steps to achieving the goal (phrased as actions—to *define*)
Activities: sets of actions to reach each objective (*interview, observe*)
Tasks: the nitty-gritty comprising activities (*prepare interview questions*)

Using these terms properly in a plan eliminates vagueness and gaps. The hierarchy forces the planner to distinguish ultimate from intermediate purposes (goals are not synonymous with objectives), and to specify just what action will be taken for what purpose. For instance:

Goal: Speedier flow of information from A to B
Objectives (in achieving the Goal):
1) to determine the optimum flow
2) to identify changes needed to reach that level
3) to implement those changes
Activities (in reaching Objective 1):
a) interview users
b) observe current procedures
c) conduct benchmark study for alternatives
Tasks (comprising Activity a):
i) identify appropriate users
ii) prepare questions for interviews
iii) create response forms

Using terms correctly and in the proper hierarchy helps you organize your plan. The pyramid enables you to convey your plan to others effectively and persuasively.

For more on building proposals, see *Writing on the Job*, by Cos Ferrara, published by Prentice Hall.



Writing:

Get the most out of each good idea

Writers waste good ideas by not explaining them, or by burying them in a mass of distracting material. To get the most out of your ideas, devote a full paragraph to each one. State the idea in a lead, or topic, sentence, and explain it with details, examples, or facts:

Consumers have less time today than ever before. The number of women working outside the home grew 39 percent since 1950. Married couples work 717 hours more a year than their counterparts in 1969. Professionals working 49+ hours a week jumped 116 percent from 1982 to 1999.

The main idea comes in the lead sentence—unadorned—so readers know in general terms what the passage is about. Readers can then put the detail that follows into context, thus distinguishing “the forest from the trees.” All the information in the supporting sentences helps make the case for the main idea. There is no distracting extraneous matter.

The unified paragraph helps the writer develop each idea and helps the reader grasp them all.

When you need...

...help writing reports, proposals, manuals, and brochures, or your people need a refresher class in business writing or speaking, contact Cos Ferrara at 201-391-0178 or drcff@aol.com, or visit my Website: www.cosferrara.com

Presenting: Start strong: tell what, why, who

To grab your audience's attention right from the start—without jokes, gimmicks, or startling disclosures—tell:

- what you will talk about
- why they should be interested in what you have to say. (Don't assume a person's being there implies whole-hearted interest. Clarify the need and highlight the benefit.)
- who you are to be making this presentation (your qualifications)

For most topics you can address these three concerns quickly, though not necessarily in this order:

Even if you don't like doing business over the Internet, many of your customers probably do. So to

compete for them, you're going to have to learn how it's done. Having helped many companies like yours get started, today I'll outline six essential steps you can take to do business over the Internet.



This opener:

- identifies the topic (*steps to take to do business over the Internet...*)
 - tells why people should listen (*your customers...do. To compete, you're going to have to learn...*)
 - gives the speaker's qualifications (*having helped many companies...*)
- Get your audience involved at the beginning. Shape your opening remarks around the *what, why, and who*.

For more, see Powerful Presentations, by Cos Ferrara. Order the CD-Rom directly from MicroMash at 1-800-272-7277 or www.micromash.net

Speaking: "Let me introduce you to what's his name."

Addressing people by name is a big plus in business. Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, once said, "A person's own name is the sweetest and most important sound."

Here are some tips for remembering names.

1. Keep focused. Be attentive to the name during an introduction. Make getting that name your first priority in this initial encounter. If you don't hear it, ask that it be repeated.

2. Say the name. During your conversation, say the name often. ("Nice to meet you, **Lauren**. How long have you been in systems, **Lauren**?")

3. Dramatize faces. Focus on the person's face, on some interesting feature. Commit that feature to memory by exaggerating it. Red hair? Set it aflame. Bushy eyebrows? See them as wriggling like worms. Place the person's name over the image, enabling your brain to realize this face and name are to be remembered.

4. Make associations. Tie the name to the person through some rudimentary connection. For example:

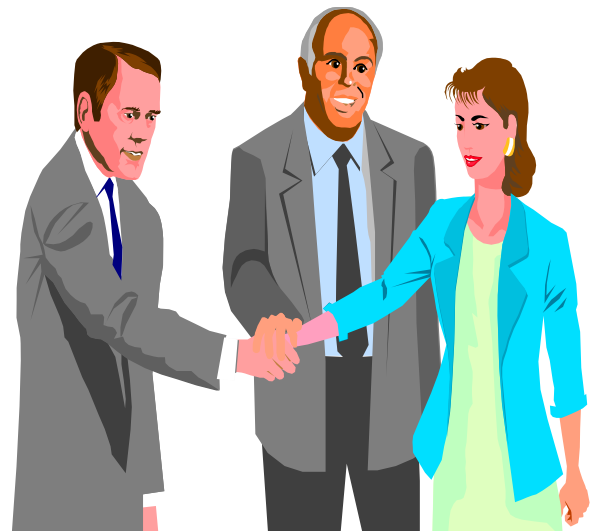
color: Jeff Black
sound: Joan - phone
occupation: Nancy Carpenter

Amusing, off-the-wall associations can also help you remember names:

Marcia Braun (as well as brains) James T. Bovington (Jimbo)

Use whatever techniques work best for you. Remembering names may give people reason to remember *yours*.

Source: How to Remember Names, Thomas Crook and Christine Allison, HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.)



"Don't put me on speakerphone!"

That's the way one out of two executives from among the nation's 1000 largest companies feel. Their chief objection to speakerphones? Fear of losing privacy.

Source: Accountemps Survey

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