



Writing and Delivering an Effective Message

Writing and delivering a speech can be an intimidating experience, even for the most experienced educator or public relations guru. But, as with anything in life, practice will make perfect or, at least, as close as one can get to perfection. To be a successful communicator, you must be able to develop and deliver messages that effectively and efficiently convey your thoughts, position, and meaning to an audience. The length and the type of message may vary greatly from a fundraising event to a school wide student assembly to a weekly student meeting, or to a graduation commencement ceremony.

The opportunity to address one or two individuals can be just as important as the opportunity to address a large group or a crowd of several hundred. Each audience represents an opening to communicate the importance of your group and the benefits their actions have for the school and community.

Nature abhors a vacuum, so take advantage of every opportunity to make a point. What you say and how effective your message is depends on your preparation. The time it takes to prepare and deliver your message depends on you, your audience, the message you want to get across and the forum in which you will deliver it. Here are a few tips that may make the process a little easier.

Analyze

When given an opportunity to deliver your message, you should first analyze and understand your audience. Understanding the intended audience will help you select the message that will be most meaningful to that audience.

Brainstorm

Before you actually sit down and start preparing your message, let your mind run wild. Toss different ideas around before committing to a specific approach. Put those ideas to paper, creating a running list of ideas that is sure to surprise you when you take a second look. It's OK to have a full spectrum of thoughts ranging from outrageous to bland. This will help you fully develop the message that you want to express to the audience you are addressing.

Have a Point

Once you've arrived at a topic, agenda, or the approach you're going to take, decide on the main points you want to make or cover. Humor, anecdote,

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and personal experience are all great ways to drive a point home, but you need to have a point first. Be sure to focus your message on one or two main points. Any more, and you run the risk of asking your audience to grasp too much and thus waste an opportunity to drive a key point home.

Do Your Homework

Remember the purpose of a speech is to educate and inform others. Remember that you are the expert and thus the audience will be open to what you have to say. However, be sure that your message is on target, up-to-date, and pertinent. If you use an anecdote or personal experience that doesn't provide substance to the topic, it probably doesn't belong.

Who, What, When, Why, and How?

When preparing to deliver a message, consider these questions:

- Who wants this information?
- Who will be affected by it?
- What are the important facts?
- What is the best way to relate these facts?
- What might happen next?
- When did this information or event happen?
- When will it begin affecting the audience?
- Why is this information timely?
- How did this information come about?

Not all the questions will apply in every case, but they are good to keep in mind as you move forward with your preparations.

Illustrate Your Point

Human beings write and speak in words, but our minds think in images. To communicate your thoughts successfully when you deliver a message, you must remember that an audience likes to be entertained. Support your message with quotes, anecdotes, or a story. The appropriate use of humor can also be beneficial in getting an audience to be more receptive of your key points. All of these tools help the listener understand what you've said while adding a personal touch.

Dealing With a Confrontational Issue

On some occasions, you must address a confrontational issue. These situations may occur during a question-and-answer session after a formal presentation or in written dialogue on a particular issue on which you want to take a stand. Unfortunately, whatever the case, you may not always be able to choose the time or place for confrontation.

When confrontation does occur, remember that reason does not always prevail and that logic is sometimes lost to the emotions surrounding a particular issue. Refrain from using negative buzzwords and make positive statements that support positive images. Try your best to maintain a positive attitude while delivering a clear and concise message.

General Speech Outline

When delivering your message in a speech, the layout of your comments must fit appropriately into the event program. The majority of effective speeches contain the following elements:

1. General greeting
2. Recognition of hosts and key figures
3. Comments on the event at which you are speaking
4. Story or experience that can segue into speech topic
5. Introduction of topic
6. Main body of speech—covering key points
7. Story or personal experience
8. Closing remarks.

Preparation, poise, persistence in message, patience, and practice are the keys to delivering an effective message that wins support and moves a school community forward. ■

For more communication tips, please visit: www.nasc.us/prips.