

Support Your Message

When preparing your presentation, be sure you have several ways to support and enhance your message. Great persuaders use presentation aids that will clearly, concisely, and efficiently deliver their main points. Visual aids will enhance your presentation and help keep people's attention, but visual overload will distract from your message. Find the balance between the two. When we think of visual aids, we envision the common ones like charts, graphs, pictures, or PowerPoint presentations. During your presentation, you can also use handouts, video footage, or even a physical object if it is relevant to your message.

We are finding that many audience members are developing a strong dislike for the use of PowerPoint. They see such visual presentations as a way in which you, the presenter, can read everything off the screen. They may also conclude that you are using PowerPoint to impress them with your ability to make the text fly around while simultaneously making irritating noises. The flood of information is often too much for your audience to handle.

The reality is that average presenters use PowerPoint to make up for a lack of preparation or a lack of confidence. Sure, PowerPoint is a great tool, but understand that you, not the computer program, are the presenter. As I interview audiences, I discover that PowerPoint usually sucks the energy out of them while simultaneously destroying the presenter's spontaneity, passion, and conviction. To succeed as a persuader, you must trust in yourself and not hide behind PowerPoint. This great software and technology takes over as the major source of communication and leaves you behind to fight as the second source. You have given the control of your presentation to a machine. Presenters can become robotic, and their true personality is then buried. My rules of thumb for PowerPoint are: (1) if your presentation is under one hour, don't use PowerPoint at all, and (2) when you do use PowerPoint, don't average more than one slide every two minutes.

Visual aids are effective persuasive tools because they are optically stimulating. Most people are visually oriented, but sound, smell, touch, and taste should not be ignored. Learn to combine all the senses to increase mental involvement. The more senses you can involve, the better. Combining auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modalities will dramatically increase comprehension and retention. As a general rule, the shorter your presentation is, the simpler and fewer your visuals should be.

It's Not Just What You Say, But How You Say It

Words are just words and without heart they have no meaning.

—CHINESE PROVERB

The words we use and the way we use them can have a huge impact on how we are perceived by our audience. Different words mean different things to different people. In fact, it is hard to find a neutral word. The right words are captivating; the wrong words are devastating. Effective words make things come to life, create energy, and are more persuasive. Contrarily, ineffective words dull, alienate and repel. Numerous studies have shown that speakers who possess greater verbal skills are seen as more credible and competent. Speakers who hesitate, use the wrong words, or lack fluency, on the other hand, have less credibility and come across as being weak and ineffective.

I refer to the skill of knowing the right words and how to use them as “Verbal Packaging.” It is often not *what* you say as much as *how* you say it. For example:

Wrong Word	Right Word
Bill	Invoice
Salesperson	Representative
Price	Investment
Expensive	Top of the line
Cheap	Economical
Problem	Challenge
Pitch	Presentation

Another way in which successful persuaders increase the impact of their message is to use vividly descriptive language. Pretend you are standing in a beautiful, sunny kitchen. You reach across the counter and grab a bright, juicy lemon. You can feel it is heavy with sour juice. You can smell the powerful lemon scent as you rub the oil of the skin on your hand. Reaching for a knife, you slice the lemon in half. One of the halves drips bright, sticky lemon juice over your finger. You raise half of the lemon to your lips and take a bite. As your teeth sink into the fruit, you feel the juice burst out around your teeth and tongue. The liquid is incredibly sour! You start to cringe, and then you swallow.

Did your mouth water? Almost everyone's does. The extraordinary thing is that if I had simply instructed you to produce saliva, it would not have been nearly as effective. One of the reasons vivid descriptions and vivid images are so powerful is because the subconscious mind cannot distinguish between that which is real and that which is vividly imagined. You can use this knowledge to your advantage by helping your audience see, hear, feel, and experience exactly what you are talking about.

It's not the same to talk of bulls as to be in the bullring.

—SPANISH PROVERB

A utilities company, trying to sell customers on the advantages of home insulation, learned to use vivid verbal packaging to enhance its message. It sent auditors to point out to homeowners where energy was being wasted and to provide them with money-saving, energy-efficient suggestions. In spite of the clear financial benefits over the long term, only 15 percent of the audited homeowners actually went ahead and paid for the corrections. After seeking advice from two psychologists on how they could better sell the advantages of home insulation, the utility company changed its technique by describing the inefficiencies more vividly. With the next audits, homeowners were told that the seemingly minute cracks here and there were collectively equivalent to a gaping hole the size of a basketball. This time, 61 percent of the homeowners agreed to improvements

When choosing your words, be sure to leave out unfamiliar technical language and jargon that may not be commonly understood. For maximum effect, your message must be easy to understand, memorable, and useful to your audience.

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