

Setting the Stage and Writing the Finale

In addition to writing the speech, the public relations writer must provide a written introduction of the speaker. How the person with the message is presented is important to audience acceptance. Content has to be controlled. For example, it's common for the person inviting the speaker to ask for a résumé. The problem is that the résumé is often *read*. Such an introduction is lethal. In public relations practice, you should offer to write the introduction for the person who will be presenting the speaker. There are problems in writing for a speaker you don't know. So keep it short and simple and easy to read. Think about what this particular audience wants and needs to know about the speaker. What will best set the tone and context for the speech? The slant will change for each audience even if the speech is basically the same.

Another part of the presentation that you'll need to write for the speaker is what she or he says immediately following the introduction. The speaker needs to acknowledge the introduction and say something nice about the person who invited him or her to speak, or about the person in charge of the gathering or the members of the audience. It's not only good manners, it's good public relations. You'll need to do some research to write something meaningful, such as finding out who issued the invitation and why. The reason to prepare this is because some speakers have destroyed the positive atmosphere for their speech before they begin by some extemporaneous inappropriate remark. The acknowledgment comment does need to sound sincere but planning and rehearsing it should accomplish that.

The other major writing job is to prepare a news release about the speech. Because the audience for the speech may be limited, a news release gives the message broader circulation. For a major address, an institution usually includes publication of the speech in the promotion budget. The format is similar to a brochure, with the introduction of the speaker included, along with a description of the occasion on which the speech was presented. Copies are then mailed to lists of important publics for the message who were unlikely to have been present, usually with a cover memo (rarely a letter) or simply a business card. Specifications for reprint are also usually included. Reprinting the speech is usually permitted, although in some cases the speech is copyrighted. When the latter is the case, it should be made clear so that those who want to use the speech or large portions of it will know that permission for use is required.

Presentation Scripts

Speeches, as discussed here, are presentations that a person delivers before a live or electronic audience. Scripts are formats for integrating visuals from a computer projection, slides, film or videotape into a presentation by one or more persons.

Differences and Similarities

Another major difference between preparing a script and a speech is the audience consideration. A script is not tailored as specifically for a single audience or single event as a speech. Many audiences may be seeing it *individually* (as in the case of employee videotapes on benefits) or *collectively* (as when salespeople all over the world see it in their own company group). Ordinarily, these pieces are expected to have a longer "shelf life" than a speech, even one given frequently. Furthermore, the audiovisual presentation may be an educational tool from which the listener/viewer expects to gain a skill or information to progress in the workplace.

Approach script planning by first determining what you want to accomplish. Then think about the various publics who might be exposed to the presentation. After you have identified these publics, make a list of what each needs to know about the subject.

Types of Presentations

Basically there are two types of presentations that involve public relations writers: the primarily informational and the primarily persuasive.

Informational presentations are generally to employees and/or organizational advisory groups, external advisory groups such as government regulatory or supervisory bodies or nongovernmental groups (NGOs) who are a special public because of their interest in issues related to the organization, educational organizations or associations or trade and professional groups. Some informational presentations are instructional, and these are usually more repetitive in content than strictly informational scripts. For example, safety instructions or how to use new equipment presentations are in this category.

Persuasive presentations may be directed to any of these groups too, but usually persuasive presentations are a call to action or a particular point of view. These presentations are often given by lobbyists to governmental staff or elected officials themselves or to special-interest groups that the organization is trying to enlist in a joint effort to affect policy. Persuasive presentations may be given to employees too, especially those given in connection with a campaign to get them involved in and supportive of the effort before going to other publics. One type of persuasive presentation that public relations people in agencies or firms are always involved in is new business solicitations in which it is the organization itself that is being promoted with the idea of persuading the prospective client to hire them.

Planning

List the principal ideas you want to convey in the presentation. Arrange these logically so development is easy to follow. Use a narrative approach if you can. Make a master chart of the ideas, listing under each, as you would for a speech, the points you want

to make. Beside each, describe in detail how you might present the point visually. Be sure each point has these elements: something to set the scene for the idea, something to carry the action of the line of thought forward and something to relate to a common experience that audiences can identify with.

Because scripts are more like a play than a speech, there must be an element of drama that builds. You can't put your punch lines first. You need to build to climaxes, give comic relief, offer suspense and/or surprise. You are more of a dramatist than a speechwriter—but it's not all that different from writing a television commercial or a PSA.

Development

At the point of developing audiovisuals, there is no single path forward. Often because the speech is composed on the computer, the writer will prepare the major points as a visual or series of visuals. If graphs or charts are important, these are added. Of course, you can incorporate other art from the computer or use art that you scan into the computer. The presentation is projected to a large screen directly from the computer. The speaker can then go from one point to another easily and back up if there's a need to revisit a point. Having visuals on the computer also makes it easy to copy the visuals onto transparencies for overhead projection if the location does not allow for computer projection.

The scriptwriter has to work closely with the person preparing the graphics and other visuals, because these tell the story. The words are just there to help. There are two ways to go about this double-track operation: Select your visuals and write a script that fits them, or prepare the script and then "illustrate." When the visuals come from outside the organization, it is logical for the script to come first.

If you are getting help with visuals, plan for a series of conferences. The first adds details not in the proposal. The writer can explain the outline of points and suggest how these might be told with visuals. If pictures are needed, a photographer then develops a shooting schedule, interpreting the intent of the script in terms of shots that need to be taken to tell the story. Additional visuals may have to be sought or created elsewhere.

After the first visuals are ready, another conference should be held to ensure that the visuals match your conception of the message. And when all are completed, another conference is needed to see what is missing or needs replacement. At this point the stronger art should be selected. The most compelling illustrations must be arranged in the best way to tell the story. In addition, the script may have to be revised at this stage. The importance of flexibility can't be overstated—although it is sometimes difficult to be objective about finding the best way to tell the story.

After the art is chosen and the sequences are planned, the script is ready for polishing, if it has been written. If it has not been written, you are ready to start.

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Matching Words and Sights

Visuals have the power to set a mood, inject drama and explain in powerful ways. The words of the script should help the visuals do this. Too many words interfere with the listener's ability to absorb the visuals. Allow time for the pictures to have an impact.

The question always arises as to whether the script should carry the same information that is being seen, perhaps on charts or graphs. Usually the audience is given the charts and graphs as a handout. These need to be in a suitable format for keeping as a reference. It's best to handle charts as they are handled in the print media. First the textual material prepares readers for the illustration by discussing it. Below the illustration there usually is a caption explaining the graph or chart. Readers then expect to see the relationship between the illustration and the point being made explained further in the textual matter. See Example 16.1.

Writers with television-writing skills adjust easily to presentation scripts. Their experience with the medium transfers easily to writing film or videotape scripts, too. Sometimes, though, they have difficulty with the time period. Television writers are accustomed to working with fragments of time. In a visual presentation, the time is usually about 30 minutes, but it can be twice that. In a long presentation, both unity and pace make the job quite different from that of writing an ordinary television script. For elaborate presentations consider the use of sound. It can add emphasis and recall. Think of music and sound effects to accompany the words.

Pace can be varied in both the script and visuals. And to keep audience interest it is essential to employ some of the techniques of the dramatist—suspense, dramatic foreshadowing and comic relief among others. In a way, the script constitutes half of a dialogue and the visuals form the other half; together both tell the story.

Just as in the case of speeches, promotion is involved in calling attention to the ideas presented in the script. Like speeches some presentations may be prepared as publications. A news release may be written if the presentation is for important or large groups or is a "traveling" presentation. If the production is a long presentation going to a number of audiences, a promotional brochure should be developed.

Computer Advantages/Disadvantages

Advantages seem fairly clear—retention and flexibility. Facts and visuals for the speech or script and various versions can all be stored on disks for reconsideration. Editing is simplified and printed copies of various versions can easily be produced. Computer graphics programs can produce excellent illustrations transferable to slides or overhead projections. Illustration can be changed easily on the computer. Some points can be highlighted, colors added, backgrounds changed and designs reconfigured. Photos can be scanned into the computer and stored. Still-store cameras can capture images for storage on a 2.5-inch floppy disk. The images can be processed as pictures, shown directly on a TV screen by connecting the camera to the screen or used for a videotape. Photographic images from 35 mm slides also can be used to make a videotape.¹

Presentation

This is a handout from a presentation to an advisory group by an organizational staff member who used exactly what is shown here, drawing on the items as they appeared projected from the computer onto the screen as prompts for extemporaneous comments. Only experienced and knowledgeable speakers can do this. Reprinted with permission of the Gas Research Institute, now Gas Technology Institute (GTI).



Natural Gas Vehicles: Past, Present, and Future

*Presented by
Rajeeva Gable, NGV Program Manager
Gas Research Institute*



Advisory Council
January 21, 1999



TOPICS

✓ **NGV Market Status**

- *1995 Perspective - What did we think would happen?*
- *Where are we now and where are we headed?*

✓ **Barriers and Solutions to NGV Expansion**

- *What are the market and technical barriers?*
- *What's been done and what's being doing to address the barriers?*

✓ **Legislative and Regulatory Actions and Impacts**

- *Federal and State Legislation - What's it doing for NGV development?*

✓ **Some Conclusions about the Future**

Computer-mediated presentations can be developed using a program like Adobe Persuasion or Microsoft PowerPoint presentation software. Computer-mediated presentations use a computer, a color LCD panel and a high-intensity overhead projector, or the computer can be connected directly to a large-screen monitor.

When the presentation version is completed, it's best to copy that and a runtime version to a disk. The runtime permits the presentation to be run on another computer without the software application, but it doesn't allow for revisions.²

Because one major advantage of computer presentations is flexibility, you always want to maintain that and keep open the opportunity for revisions, up to the last minute if necessary. Another advantage of computer-generated presentations is the opportunity to use the projected visuals as prompts for an experienced, knowledgeable speaker for whom the projection is the script. Preparing scripts for experts often means preparing just the points the speaker wants to make along with associated charts, graphs or other visuals. The speaker will use these to keep the presentation on track but will speak extemporaneously. This makes for a very persuasive presentation as long as the speaker's delivery is effective. You'll probably go through a number of designs for this sort of presentation until the speaker is comfortable with all of the computer screens that will be used. This must flow easily and nothing can be overlooked. Here the ability of the speaker to return to previous screens in a question-and-answer session following the presentation makes it necessary to have a script there for reference so the screen can be found promptly.

Disadvantages of computer presentations are not as obvious as the advantages. One disadvantage is having equipment problems. First make sure the equipment needed for the presentation is on site and working. If the presentation is to a large group, you may be using projection to large screens or even to a remote site. In these cases you need top-notch technical support. The equipment may check out fine in rehearsals and then break down while the presentation is going on. You want to be sure you have backup equipment, and someone there who knows the mechanics of the setup. That is a delivery problem, though. A not-so-obvious problem for the PR writer is inexperience in using PowerPoint or another presentation software effectively.

Presentation software offers endless possibilities, and some scriptwriters find it tempting to use all or most of them. The effects can be dazzling and dizzying. Shapes and forms that seem to melt into each other or surprisingly emerge, wonderful color for background and type often are more of a detriment than an asset to the presentation. Before attempting a computer presentation script, reread Chapter 12 on message design concepts and Chapter 14 on writing for Web sites. Much of the information there pertains to presentation scripts on the computer.

Evaluations

Public relations writers, as well as presenters and certainly management, want to know if the speech or presentation was effective. What often is used on site is a simple evaluation form. It may be handed to attendees at the presentation and either collected at the door or left behind on tables. Sometimes if the presentation is at a conference, the evaluation is sent later to those who attended and includes all of the speeches and presentations for respondents to evaluate.

Remember, these forms are generally distributed and collected by the organization where the speech or presentation was given, and when that organization is different from your own, you may or may not know the results. To assess the evaluation, you need a copy of the questionnaire used, the method for soliciting responses and how many completed responses were used in the assessment. Why? Because your job may be on the line. A presentation can get "bad reviews" that you get blamed for when your part of the job was fine. Or it may be that the opinion "survey" is not a good indicator.

When a presentation is an informative one, the best assessment is an evaluation some time after the presentation to test recall of information as well as what was best appreciated or liked about the presentation. This helps you design better presentations.

If the presentation is a persuasive one, the measures are more complex. You can't always judge long-term effects by short-term reports. However, you certainly can tell something about the presentation by the verbal and written responses the organization gets. You can document these and draw some conclusions from them, so long as you remember that those you don't hear from may be significantly different from those who make the effort to express themselves. Be alert to any pointed criticisms about bias or insensitivity that a presentation may have aroused. Even one critic's message can be important here.

Conclusions

- Writing speeches and scripts for presentations is a demanding task because of the combination of words and images and the performance element.
- Direct interaction with an audience in either a speech or a visuals/words presentation brings out the best in most of us.
- Preparing material especially for specific audiences is the key to pleasing them.
- The person preparing the material must remember that, although the audience is the ultimate receiver of the information, the person presenting it is most important. The speaker is both medium and message.
- Speech subjects need to be thoroughly researched, but the main points must be pared to three.

- The effect you want the speech to have on the audience should be the governing factor in how it is constructed.
- You need to be sure you are using words and symbols that are meaningful to the audience and appropriate for the speaker.
- Most public relations people are in the business of preparing materials for others to use, so they must be skilled in this task.
- Preparing material for presentation by others is a hazardous task, but a highly creative one.
- Scriptwriters must be able to visualize the combination of pictures and words that will occur when messages are presented.
- Speeches and scripts must have a sense of pace—a rhythm appropriate for both the material and the speaker.
- The script is a dialogue with visuals. Scripts are more like plays than speeches and are closely akin to television commercials and PSAs.
- Presentation of any kind of audiovisual or speech is a public relations function that demands rehearsal.
- Part of the public relations function is to prepare the introduction for a presentation, releases about the presentation, and brochures (which in the case of a speech may be a reprint of the speech or important graphics from the presentation with captions, to be sent with a cover memo).
- Evaluations of speeches and presentations are important because your job may be on the line. When other organizations do the evaluating, you may or may not get the results, so you need to build in mechanisms for your organization to evaluate the value of speeches and presentations.
- Informative speeches and presentations are easier to assess than persuasive ones because the long-term effects of persuasion are more difficult to measure.
- Be alert to any pointed criticism of bias or insensitivity in speeches or presentations, even if it's from only one critic. Sometimes only one word can cause public relations problems.

Exercises

1. You are the vice president of communication at O. Joyitz Funn Manufacturing Systems. OJF is a major producer of children's toys made of plastics. The management team recently got a confidential staff medical report confirming that OJF employees have a much higher incidence of respiratory illnesses than is normal in the surrounding community and region. The report cites as the probable cause a key ingredient used in the manufacture of several OJF products, although more study is necessary to confirm this chemical as the offending agent. Management immediately ordered more study for definitive answers. But it also decided to keep the information confidential until the results of these studies are known. Your task now is to

come up with a persuasive rationale that will give support to running a story about the staff medical report in the company magazine now. What arguments will you use? Consult Chapter 3 on persuasion for some clues.

How would you treat this subject in writing a speech for the CEO to present to:

- a. employees?
 - b. a local civic group?
 - c. an activist group for clean air in your city?
2. Develop a presentation script to recruit students to your school.



Use *InfoTrac® College Edition* to access information on topics in this chapter from hundreds of periodicals and scholarly journals such as *Public Relations Journal*, *Public Relations Quarterly* and *Public Relations Review*.

Notes

¹ Barbara A. Ross, Sarah V. Beckman and Linda V. Meyer, "Learning to Produce and Integrate Presentations, Videos and Stills." *T.H.E. Journal* (September 1995): 78–81.

² *Ibid.*

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