

STYLE

Deciding on Style

Another important element in your planning is the style you choose. Will you present a formal speech in an impressive setting, with professionally produced visual aids? Or will you lead a casual, roll-up-your-sleeves working session? Choose your style to fit the occasion. The size of the audience, the subject, your purpose, your budget, and the time available for preparation all determine the style.

In general, if you're speaking to a relatively small group, you can use a casual style that encourages audience participation. A small conference room, with the audience seated around a table, may be appropriate. Use simple visual aids. Invite the audience to interject comments. Deliver your remarks in a conversational tone, using notes to jog your memory if necessary.

On the other hand, if you're addressing a large audience and the event is an important one, you'll want to establish a more formal atmosphere. A formal style is well suited to announcements about mergers or acquisitions, new products, financial results, and other business milestones. During these formal presentations, the speakers generally stand behind a lectern on a stage or platform and use a microphone so that their remarks can be heard throughout the room. These speeches are often accompanied by multimedia presentations showcasing major products, technological breakthroughs, and other information that the speakers want audience members to remember.

STYLE AND TONE

The tone and the style of writing changes with a change in readership. Different types of styles and tones could be adopted for different occasions. Style of writing could be formal or informal. When it starts leveraging towards the informal, it may tend to become colloquial or too informal. Different occasions necessitate a different style of writing. While the highly formal prose is acceptable for reports or documentation, a slightly informal style could be adopted when it comes to business correspondence. Once again this would be contingent upon the relationship between the sender and the receiver. If styles of writing were viewed on a continuum which is extremely formal on one side and extremely informal on the other, it would be seen that almost all business writing falls as a cluster in between the formal and somewhat informal points of reference. This cluster could then be “used to understand, the tone used for communicating messages that would vary from active to passive, personal to impersonal, colorful to colorless. The choice of the tone for depicting these styles would be dependent upon the, sender (who), reader (to whom), the occasion (when and where), and the content (what). With a change in anyone of these components, there is bound to be a change in the tone through which the message is expressed.

Let us consider a few examples of formal and informal words.

Formal	Informal
1. subsequent to	After
2. with respect to, the possibility of	whether we could
3. we trust	I hope
4. consulted	checked
5. undertake	handle
6. rearrange	juggle

In the first three examples, the extremely formal phrases lend gravity to the message. If they could possibly be replaced by the informal words or phrases as suggested in the opposite column, the written message would be more convincing and appealing” Contrast this with the last three examples: “checked”, “handle” and “juggle” are too colloquial and are right only for spoken messages. They definitely need to be replaced by more suitable words as are suggested in the formal column, viz., “consulted”, “undertake” and “rearrange”.

Let us take a look at the various styles that can be used to reflect different moods.

1. Active. An active tone reflects a desire to get things done at the earliest. There is also a sense or responsibility for what is being communicated. In this style, the simplest of sentence constructions is used, that is, the subject--verb-object (SVO) ordering. Messages are short, pithy, and normally imperatives are used. The tone is commanding and is used by people at the helm of affairs who are in the habit of issuing directives. Direct statements are used and no efforts are made to camouflage the impact of a direct

utterance that could have a negative impact. For example: Project Report should be completed by 12 November 1999.

2. Passive. This is a rather soft style and is used in situations when some negative message is to be communicated and the sender does not wish to hurt the receiver. This style is also used in reports where the statements are not universal truths but need to be studied and critically examined. Hence, words and statements such as, “maybe”, “perhaps” and “possibly” are used. Nothing is stated that would communicate a feeling that this is the ultimate truth. Compared to the active style, the sentences are longer since many are cushioned in suppositions. Even the sentence ordering is reversed. It follows an object-verb-subject patterning. For example: The date for completion of the Project Report is 12 November 1999.

3. Personal. A personal style is used when an individual wishes to be personal in communication. It is much like the spoken message and part of the personality of the communicator gets translated into it. Use of pronouns like “I”, “you” is made, and the receivers are referred to by their first names instead of their surnames. Personal references are also made that indicate ties between the sender and the receiver. Sentences, in this form of writing, are brief and short and the overall tone is conversational. The active voice for communication of messages is used and on occasions even direct questions can be asked to the reader, e.g. I want you to complete the Project Report immediately.

4. Impersonal. In contrast to the personal style, the impersonal style is tedious. It is withdrawn and is more pompous. Personal pronouns such as “I” and “You” are avoided and are replaced by a more corporate word, “we”. The names of receivers are not mentioned and the tone is passive. Occasionally the sentences are long and complex, making the written message complex and weighty. For instance, We would greatly benefit as a result of completion of the Project Report.

5. Colorful Style. Normally used for literary purposes, it increases the impact of the written message. Adjectives and adverbs are frequently made use of so as to add weight and give color to the written message. Further, concrete words or those that add to the visual impact of the written message, e.g. metaphors, similes and other figures of speech are used. In the colorful style of writing, the choice of words is extremely important. As the impact of the message being transmitted is contingent upon these, proper care should be exercised in interjecting statements with appropriate words, e.g. Preparing the Project Report is a challenging task ahead of us. If it is completed by November 12, 1999, it would be a tremendous feat accomplished.

6. Colourless style. A colorless style is a composite of an impersonal and passive style. This is a dull and monotonous way of communicating the message. It avoids concrete in favor of abstract. The message is absolutely colorless without any similes,

metaphors or figures of speech. In fact, it is one of the most depressing styles as there is neither vigor nor intellectual or emotional appeal in the writing. For example: The completion of the Project Report at the earliest would be appreciated.

REASONING

Using Good Reasoning

There are two common types of reasoning that form the basis of content development. These two types of reasoning are deductive and inductive logic. As a presenter, you should examine your content as well as the “action” you want your audience to take. Then, based upon these two items, you should be able to select the reasoning strategy to use in your content development.

Deductive Format

This is the most popular format for presentations. The deductive format is based on a structured lecture. The presenter simply presents his content and recommendations for actions. This direct method does not allow for an abundance of audience participation. Usually questions are limited and held until the end of a presentation.

Deductive Example

When using the inductive format, the presenter encourages the audience to come to a logical conclusion on their own. This type of presentation is recommended when you want group dialogue and participation. The presenter usually offers issues, examples, and factual information, and leads a group discussion to come to a logical conclusion.

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Inductive Example

The salesperson shows his customer a model of a fast engine and transmission and a set of wide tires. He explains that these components are found in the fastest cars around. Then he shows the customer the car with these parts on it. The customer comes to the conclusion that this car is probably one of the fastest around. By showing the parts that make a car very fast, the sales person allows the customer to come to the conclusion that a car with all those parts must be very fast. This is an inductive presentation.

Mixed Format

There are some instances when you may want to use both forms of reasoning. For example, you may want the group to come to a consensus on a particular issue. Based on the audience’s conclusion, you may suggest the recommended course of action to take. This format is the most complicated and takes real planning to execute well.

Say it with Style

Examples of Creative Use of Language

You will present a more memorable and dynamic speech by using three aspects of style.

This page also links to speeches that exemplify effective use of language style.

Figures of Sound

Rhythm, parallel sentence structures, alliteration, and rhyme.

Figures of Meaning

Metaphorical language, overstatement and understatement

Sensory Imagery

Concrete images that engage the senses of the listener

The audio examples in this module are in RealAudio format. To listen to them, you need to download the RealPlayer plug-in from Progressive Networks. The plug-in is free and works with most browsers.

Listen to Harris' speech and read a text of it from the Library of Congress American Memory Archive.

Figures of Sound

Alliteration: Repeating the same or similar consonants in a phrase.

In a speech on civic participation in 1920, Will Harris, Chairman of the Republican Party, used alliteration in the phrase "I plead for patriotism in peace as well as in war."

Listen to Kennedy's speech from Broadcast.com.

Antithesis: Repeating a parallel syntactic structure with contrasting terms or a reversal of words.

Senator Edward Kennedy's eulogy to his brother Robert, presented at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on June 8, 1968, set up a parallel structure of contrasts ending in one of Robert F. Kennedy's favorite quotations by George Bernard Shaw: "Some men see things as they are and ask 'Why?' I dream things that never were and say 'Why not?'"

Listen to a portion of Jackson's speech from a page for the program Frontline on NPR. A text of the audio segment and the whole speech are also available.

Rhythm, rhyme and play on the sounds words: Rhythm is created by alternating sentence length. Rhyme and wordplay are created by using words with the same or similar sound in close approximation with one another. A play on words can also be accomplished with homophones, words that sound the same but have different meaning.

In a speech to the Democratic National Convention in 1984, the Rev. Jesse Jackson used each of these sound devices, along with alliteration and antithesis.

Listen to Johnson's speech from the History Project Outloud at Oyez.

Parallel Sentence Structure: Repeating the same phrase, often to serve the same grammatical function in a sentence, creates parallel structure and enhances rhythm.

In a speech to mark the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson repeats the phrase "We believe..." at the start of a string of sentences, and

another phrase "... forbids it" to end another sequence of sentences to create a parallel structure.

Listen to Stevenson's speech from the History Channel.

Rhetorical Questions: A rhetorical question is answered silently in the mind of the listener. A sequence of repeated, rhetorical questions creates a rhythm.

Governor Adlai Stevenson, a candidate for the Presidency in 1952, asked a series of rhetorical questions beginning with the phrase "Who shall say..." and culminating with the question: "Who shall say that the American Dream has ended?" To access speeches on the History Channel, click on the icon for the Speech Archive for the full list of speeches and scroll down to find the speaker you want to hear.

Listen to Churchill's speech from the History Channel. A written text can be found at the Winston Churchill Home Page. To access speeches on the History Channel, click on the icon for the Speech Archive for the full list of speeches and scroll down to find the speaker you want to hear.

Figures of Meaning

Metaphor: Two unlike things are compared for emotional, dramatic or poetic effect.

Winston Churchill, in a radio address to the British people on June 18, 1940, compared the efforts to defeat Hitler as rising to "broad sunlit uplands." Churchill likened defeat at Hitler's hand to sinking "into the abyss of a new dark age."

Listen to Owen's speech and read the text from the Library of Congress American Memory Archive.

Extended Metaphor: More than one comparison is made that is based on a metaphor already introduced into the speech.

Robert Lanham Owen compared democracy to religion in his speech "Democracy's Achievement"

Listen to the award and the humble acceptance remarks from the History Channel. To access speeches on the History Channel, click on the icon for the Speech Archive for the full list of speeches and scroll down to find the speaker you want to hear.

Hyperbole and Minimization: Word choices emphasize the significance of something - even overstating its importance, or de-emphasize through understatement.

In 1927 Charles Lindbergh was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his flight across the Atlantic in the "Spirit of St. Louis." In a speech presented in Washington on June 11, 1927, President Calvin Coolidge used hyperbole to praise Lindbergh's "splendid achievement". In receiving the award, Lindbergh minimized the effort, suggesting he had made the trans-Atlantic flight simply to see Europe.

Read a copy of the sermon by Francis from the History Place.

Personification: That which is not human is assigned human attributes.

Note how St. Francis of Assisi personifies birds in a sermon by addressing them as “little sisters.” The title “Sermon to the Birds” even presumes that birds, as an audience, possess human qualities and act by making moral choices. The sermon is dated at 1220.

Listen to Gore’s speech from the files of KWTW television station.

Sensory Imagery

Sensory Imagery: By using words that describe sensory experience a speaker can create a profound image and appeal to the sense memory of the audience.

Vice President Al Gore, speaking in Oklahoma City to mark the anniversary of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, effectively used seasonal images of winter and spring, and thermal images of cold and warmth in his speech of tribute to those who died in the bombing.

Writing Tools

Getting down to the mechanics of writing

Style Guidelines

Use reference sources on wording, sentence structure

Dictionaries, Glossaries and Thesauri

Along with regular dictionaries, you’ll find sources for literature and culture, scientific fields, legal definitions, and Internet terms.

Organizing and Citing Sources

Do an exercise for developing a bibliography

Other Guides for Speechwriting

These are online tutorials that describe how to plan and write a speech

Interactive Exercise

Finding and Citing Research Sources