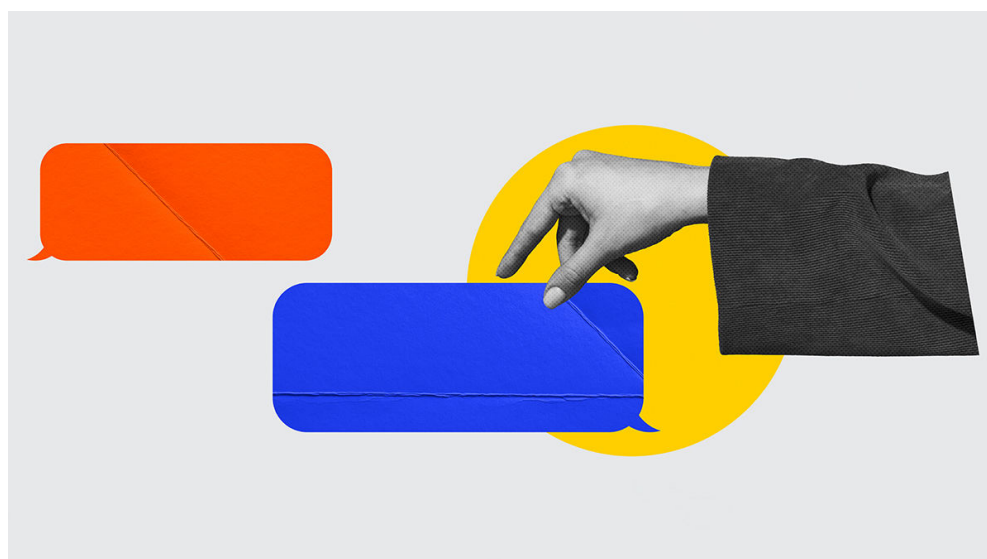




Business Communication



A Simple Hack to Help You Communicate More Effectively

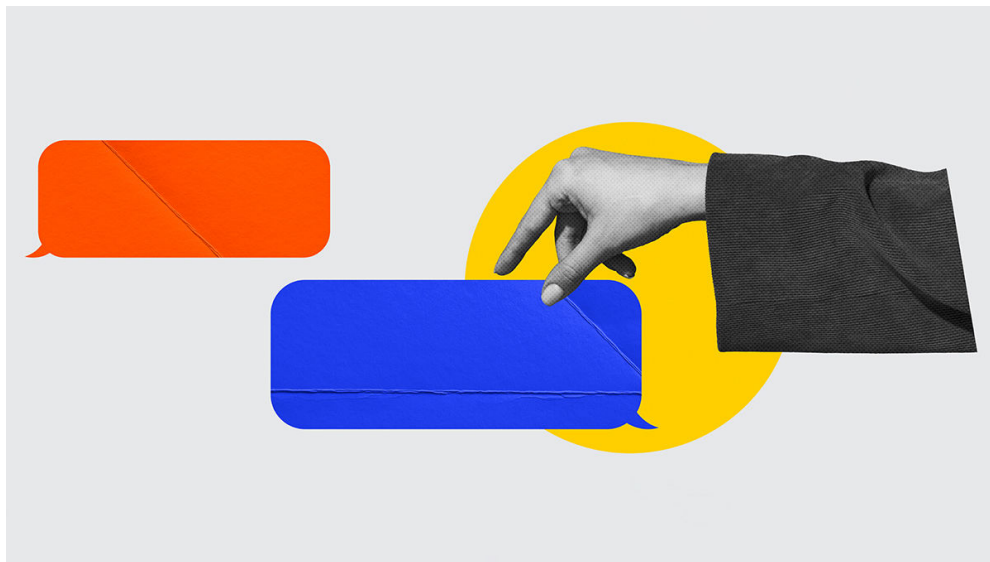
Break down your message into three parts: What? So what? Now what?
by **Matt Abrahams**

A Simple Hack to Help You Communicate More Effectively

Break down your message into three parts: What? So what? Now what?

by **Matt Abrahams**

Published on HBR.org / January 04, 2024 / Reprint [H07VJW](#)



master1305/Getty Images

Effective communication has never been more critical in our rapidly evolving world, where every conversation, negotiation, meeting, or pitch could impact our personal and professional success. We are much more likely to achieve our communication goals if we package our messages in a clear, concise, logical manner.

In this article, I will present a three-question structure that I believe serves as an indispensable tool for various scenarios, from impromptu interactions to crucial business presentations, but first let's start with why having a structured approach is so useful.

The Value of Structure in Communication

A structure provides a roadmap, a logical connection of ideas that guides both the communicator and the listener. Think of it as a carefully crafted story or a well-designed recipe. And the benefits of using one are many:

- **Clarity:** A structure eliminates ambiguity, ensuring that your message is straightforward and easy to understand and follow.
- **Retention:** Ideas presented in a structured manner are more likely to be remembered, making your communication more impactful. Our brains are actually designed to encode and remember structured information.
- **Persuasion:** A logical structure builds your case point by point, facilitating persuasion by guiding your audience through a reasoned argument.
- **Efficiency:** Structure saves time and mental energy, simplifying complex ideas into digestible, actionable points.
- **Reduced anxiety:** Having a predefined structure can significantly lessen communication anxiety, as you already know how to convey what you need to say and you are less likely to forget your content.

The “What, So What, Now What” Framework

Much like the Swiss Army Knife, known for its versatility and reliability, this structure is flexible and can be used in many different communication situations. The structure is comprised of three simple questions:

- **What:** Describe and define the facts, situation, product, position, etc.
- **So What:** Discuss the implications or importance for the audience. In other words, the relevance to them.
- **Now What:** Outline the call-to-action or next steps, such as taking questions or setting up a next meeting.

This structure not only helps in organizing your thoughts but also serves as a guidepost for your audience, making the information easier to follow and act upon.

The Framework in Action

What does this structure look like in practice? Here are three examples:

1. Introductions

Introductions can often ramble and confuse. Using this structure can help you be clear and set expectations for what is to come.

When you're introducing someone:

- **What:** I am honored to introduce Dr. Clark, who is here to discuss her insights into attachment theory.
- **So What:** Her work has changed the way many people go about making daily decisions. I am certain you will think differently when you leave here tonight.
- **Now What:** Without further ado, join me in welcoming Dr. Clark.

When you're introducing something:

- **What:** I am excited to introduce the latest version of our product. In this release we've added many usability enhancements and improved our speed.
- **So What:** Now our clients can more easily complete their tasks and save time and money.
- **Now What:** When you leave this conference session, please install it today.

2. Answering a question

Questions are a great opportunity to use this structure. For example, imagine a job interview where you are asked: "Why are you qualified for this job?"

- **What:** I have over 12 years of experience in customer-facing work, addressing challenges such as migrating to new systems and implementing new processes.
- **So What:** These previous experiences will help me provide your customers with high-quality results, while also assisting you to streamline your deployment process.
- **Now What:** I'm happy to have you discuss my qualifications with some of my former clients.

3. Giving feedback

I often coach clients who need to provide constructive feedback to use this structure. For example, you have a colleague who failed to complete his report on time.

- **What:** I've noticed that your report was not submitted within our agreed-upon timeframe.
- **So What:** This puts us at a disadvantage for practicing our pitch and might jeopardize our client meeting.
- **Now What:** I need for you to complete this report by tomorrow morning. Please let me know what I can do to assist you.

In conclusion, mastering structured communication helps you craft your messages and prioritize what you intend to communicate, while helping your audience digest your information and remember it. By using “What, So What, Now What,” you can navigate various communication situations, ensuring that your message is not just heard but internalized and acted upon.

This article was originally published online on January 04, 2024.



Matt Abrahams is a lecturer in organizational behavior at Stanford Graduate School of Business. He hosts [*Think Fast, Talk Smart: The Podcast*](#) and is the author of [*Think Faster, Talk Smarter: How to Speak Successfully When You're Put on the Spot*](#).