

## Activity

## The Message Box

The message box is a tool to help you organize your thoughts and identify key points. It is designed to be flexible – it can be used to help structure a presentation, organize a lecture, outline a proposal or prepare for an interview.

Your audience – a journalist, colleagues at a professional meeting, or a group of elementary school students – can only absorb a limited amount of information. Your goal as an effective communicator is to identify the information that is critical to your audience - what *really* matters to them, what do they *really* need to know. Start by identifying your audience, then listing the central issue and “frame” the issue with the most relevant information.

Streamline your information into concise messages by answering the following questions:

- What are the problems/conflicts/issues involved (Problems?)
- Why does this information matter to my listener (So What?)
- What are some of the possible solutions to this problem (Solutions?)
- What are the potential benefits of resolving this problem (Benefits?)

Consider these questions as your “starting point.” If the questions don’t exactly apply, rework them to get at the “meat” of your information - keep asking yourself *So What? Why?*

Pare down your ideas so that each message is one or two concise sentences – if you have a paragraph, keep working. Once you have honed-in on your key points, list anecdotes, sound-bites, and facts that reinforce your messages.

The principle is easy but it takes time to develop tight, concise messages. Keep working to refine your messages - they will evolve and get better over time.

# Message Box

Audience: \_\_\_\_\_

