Extract from: The Three Key Structures of Effective Communication.
By Ian Brownlee

https://ianbrownlee.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/the-three-key-structures-of-effective-communication/

"A genius is capable of making the complex simple. An idiot is capable of making the simple complex!" Having been involved in communication skills training for many years, I am constantly amazed at the general lack of knowledge about how to logically structure communication, whether it be in a presentation, meeting, negotiation, tele- or video-conferences, emails, etc. Many people these days still think that it enough to string a collection of ideas together and then discharge them towards the audience and hope that some of them will stay in the audience's mind at the end of the activity.

There are three basic structures that we (should) use when communicating **EFFECTIVELY** with others and which help determine the success or failure of our communicative endeavour:

1.   Known to unknown

The first, and most vital element, is the concept of: Known to Unknown. All of our communication should be based on explicitly linking information that our audience consciously or subconsciously "know" and accept, to lead them to a clear understanding of the new, or unknown, information that we are going to communicate to them.

In a presentation context, this would involve the presenter clearly and rapidly demonstrating to the audience, from the very beginning, that they understand the audience's actual real-world situation and are going to present possible solutions to handle the current situation or problems.

Using the structure of "known to unknown" also helps in the creation of a "Yes Set" in the subconscious mind of the audience which helps in forming a tendency to accept that the presenter's ideas and proposals are correct!

In a more general context, I am sure that when we phone the office or family members, the first thing we do when they answer the phone is identify ourselves (providing known information) and then asking for unknown information (Has anyone called? Any emergencies? Any news?, etc). This is something that we do instinctively so why not doing in other contexts?

"Never overestimate your audience's knowledge and never underestimate their intelligence." (Glenn Frank, 1887-1940)

2.   The general to the specific
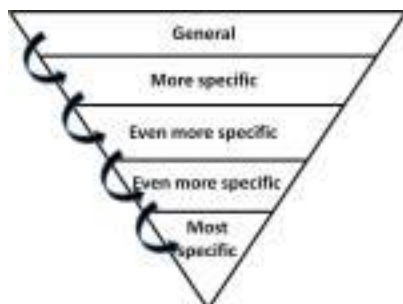
The second concept is that of going from "The General to the Specific". This could be represented visually as a funnel which serves to limit & constrain the amount of information given at each level from the wide open top to the tip of the funnel.

There appears to be a tendency for certain types of communicators or presenters to jump straight into really specific and detailed information without having considered, or used, the first concept indicated above: "Known to unknown" which places the communication within a known context. In addition, they apparently assume that (in no special order):

- The audience members have the same basic interest in this detailed data that they have.
- The audience are capable of, or interested in, understanding / analysing the detailed data and its implications.
- The audience need to know that the presenter has the data thereby proving that they are professional, valid, conscientious and trustworthy interlocutors.
- The audience want to (waste?) invest extra time in detailed analysis of the data.

We always ask one simple question: Why not just give the key points during the presentation and put the details in support documents and hand them out at the end of the presentation?

In a marketing presentation, the presenter could start briefly with the global or general overview, move on down to the national situation and then focus down even more to a more specific geographic location such as a state or county followed by an even more reduced context such as a city. In medical presentations, presenters can take the data down to the level of a specific hospital.

3.   The simple to the complex

The third and final concept is that of going from **"The Simple to the Complex".** Many people seem to believe that their own ideas are as easily accessible and understandable by others as they are to themselves! Unfortunately, this is often not the case. I am reminded of a case of a friend's new born baby… to him, it was obviously the most beautiful creature even to be born on this planet. However, to friends and family, it was actually quite ugly; small, purple, wrinkled, with gigantic hands and feet and looked like a new-born frog! However, once our friend started pointing out each of the individual "beautiful" bits of his son and linked them to family members that we knew, our perceptions changed – because he went from the simple to the complex to show the overall beauty of his son.

This process involves starting with the most basic or simple elements of any idea or product and gradually adding and linking elements, step-by-step, to build up a complete pictures of what is being discussed.

PowerPoint has proven to be a very useful tool in structuring elegant & effective communication by allowing communicators (presenters, trainers, negotiators, etc) to apply the structures mentioned above in a user-controlled step-by-step sequence which takes the audience's needs, wants and lacks into account while achieving the speakers communicative objectives.

These concepts are applicable to all of our communication as mentioned above. While it may take extra effort to prepare the material for the communication, the investment in time & effort will pay off in improved results because you are applying psychology to the structure of the communicative event.

Many people seem to feel that fast communication = effective communication. However, this is an error that frequently leads to unclear communication which, in turn, may lead to a failure to reach the desired communicative objectives.

We usually have ONLY one opportunity to deliver our message to our audience so it is of paramount importance that the message arrives EXACTLY as we intend it to. There are NO second opportunities! So a clear, logical and precisely-structured communication is one of the key factors in ensuring that we meet our communicative (business or training) objectives.