**Tips on Concise Cogent Communication – Reading Material**

**Overview:**

To understand and to be understood we need clarity in communication. This reading material is designed to help you present your ideas and points in a well sequenced, short and structured manner.

**Objectives:**

This reading material is designed to help you:

1. Write/Speak short sentences
2. Identify and apply speech transitions
3. Understand a simple pattern for effective communication

1. **Write/Speak short sentences**

**Introduction**

A sentence is a collection of words that convey sense or meaning and is formed according to the logic of grammar. Clear, short sentences are preferable, and more effective, than long, complex ones.

Short Sentences express a complete thought

Writing/Speaking Clear, Concise Sentences

**Learning Objectives:**

* Recognize and eliminate repetitive ideas.
* Recognize and remove unneeded repeated words.
* Recognize unneeded words and revise sentences to be more concise.

Follow the principles below to write/speak sentences that are clear, to the point, and easier to understand or read.

1. Put wordy phrases on a diet
2. Use the active voice
3. Put the action in the verb
4. Reduce wordy verbs
5. Reduce prepositional phrases
6. Reduce expletive constructions
7. Avoid using vague nouns
8. Avoid unnecessarily inflated words
9. Avoid noun strings

**Put wordy phrases on a diet**

Here are a few examples:

Wordy: In a situation in which a class is over enrolled, you may request that the instructor force-add you.

Concise: When a class is overenrolled, you may ask the instructor to force-add you.

Words to use

Here are some words you can use to trim the fat off of wordy phrases:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Instead of . . . | Use . . . |
| the reason for  for the reason that  due to the fact that  owing to the fact that  in light of the fact that  considering the fact that  on the grounds that  this is why | because, since, why |
| despite the fact that  regardless of the fact that  notwithstanding the fact that | although, even, though |
| in the event that  if it should transpire/happen that  under circumstances in which | If |
| on the occasion of  in a situation in which  under circumstances in which | When |
| as regards  in reference to  with regard to  concerning the matter of  where . . . is concerned | About |
| it is crucial that  it is necessary that  there is a need/necessity for  it is important that  it is incumbent upon  cannot be avoided | must, should |
| is able to  has the opportunity to  is in a position to  has the capacity for  has the ability to | Can |
| it is possible that  there is a chance that  it could happen that  the possibility exists for | may, might, can, could |
| prior to  in anticipation of  subsequent to  following on  at the same time as  simultaneously with | before, after, as |

**Use the active voice**

At the heart of every good sentence is a strong, precise verb; the converse is true as well--at the core of most confusing, awkward, or wordy sentences lies a weak verb.

Try to use the active voice whenever possible.

Active vs. passive voice

In a sentence written in the active voice, the subject of sentence performs the action.

In a sentence written in the passive voice the subject receives the action.

The wedding planner is making all the reservations. (Active)

All the reservations will be made by the wedding planner. (Passive)

**Put the action in the verb**

Put all the action of a sentence into the verb. Don't bury the action in a noun or blur it across the entire sentence.

Good: The management team has to approach it differently.

Bad: The establishment of a different approach on the part of the management team has become a necessity.

**Beware of nominalizations**

Watch out especially for nominalizations (verbs that have been made into nouns by the addition of the suffix tion).

Nominalization: An evaluation of the procedures needs to be done.

How to fix it: We need to evaluate the procedures.

**Reduce wordy verbs**

Try to keep the action of a sentence clear by using concise, direct verbs.

Words to use

Here's how to revise some common wordy verb phrases:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Instead of . . .** | **Use . . .** |
| is aware of  has knowledge of | knows |
| is taking | takes |
| are indications of | indicates |
| are suggestive of | suggest |

**Reduce unnecessary prepositional phrases**

Sometimes prepositional phrases aren't really necessary, especially when you use them (instead of an apostrophe + s) to denote possession of an object. Also, try to avoid using too many prepositional phrases in a single sentence, since they can obscure the main subject and action of a sentence.

Examples

Unnecessary phrase: The opinion of the manager

Correction: The manager's opinion

**Reduce expletive constructions**

Expletive constructions are phrases such as:

* it is
* there is
* there are

Try to avoid using them, since these constructions merely obscure the main subject and action of a sentence.

Examples

Expletive: It was her last argument that finally persuaded me.

Correction: Her last argument finally persuaded me.

Expletive: There are likely to be many researchers raising questions about this methodological approach.

Correction: Many researchers are likely to raise questions about this methodological approach.

**Avoid using vague nouns**

Try to avoid using the following vague, all-purpose nouns, which sometimes lead to wordiness, especially when used in prepositional phrases.

* factor
* aspect
* area
* situation
* consideration
* degree
* case

**Examples**

Vague: Strong reading skills are an important factor in students' success in college.

Precise: Students' success in college depends on their reading skills.

**Avoid unnecessarily inflated words**

While a large vocabulary is useful, you should try to avoid using inflated diction if a simpler phrase works equally well.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Inflated | Simple |
| cognizant of | aware of, knows |
| facilitate | help |
| impact on | affect |
| implement | start, create, carry out, begin |
| subsequent to | After |
| utilize | use |

**Avoid noun strings**

Unless readers are familiar with your terminology (or jargon), avoid using phrases with many consecutive nouns (noun strings).

**Examples**

The city could certainly use a fleet of public operation transportation vehicles.

The city could certainly use a fleet for public transport.

1. **Identify and apply speech transitions**

Transitional Words and Phrases

**Introduction**

**Transitions connect your ideas and make it easier for your readers to follow your thought process.**

Transitional words and phrases can create powerful links between ideas and can help your reader/listener understand the logic of your conversation/presentation.

However, these words all have different meanings, nuances, and connotations.

Before using a particular transitional word in your written document or spoken communication, be sure you understand its meaning and usage completely and be sure that it's the right match for the logic in your conversation/presentation.

**Learning Objectives:**

* List transition words and phrases
* Identify situations where transition words are needed

Read this article on speech transition and learn to use transition words in your presentations

Speech Transitions:

Magical Words and Phrases

By Andrew Dlugan

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Speech transitions guide your audience

When listening to a speech, have you ever wondered “how does this relate to that? “felt the speaker jumped randomly from one point to the next?gotten totally lost?

If you’ve experienced this, there’s a very good chance that the speaker failed to use appropriate speech transitions.

In this article, we define speech transitions and learn why they are so critical. In addition, we provide dozens of speech transition examples that you can incorporate into your speech.

What are speech transitions?

Speech transitions are magical words and phrases that help your argument flow smoothly. They often consist of a single transition word or a short transition phrase, but occasionally form an entire sentence. In a written speech, speech transitions are generally found at the start of paragraphs.

Speech transitions smooth over the boundary between two ideas, and reveal the relationship between the words just spoken and those about to be spoken. In this way, speech transitions help your audience understand your message.

**Types of Speech Transitions**

There are many types of speech transitions. Each type highlights a different verbal relationship. For example, one type of transition highlights the contrast between two different ideas.

Each of these types is cataloged below. For each type, we list just a few of the possible words and phrases. Can you think of others?

1. Transition between Similar Ideas or Points

* Likewise …
* Similarly …
* This is just like …
* In a similar way …
* We see the same thing if we consider …

“Speech transitions smooth over the boundary between two ideas, and reveal the relationship between the words just spoken and those about to be spoken.”

2. Transition between Contrasting Ideas or Points

* However …
* Conversely …
* On the contrary …
* On the other side …
* On the other hand …
* If we flip that around …
* Yet, we cannot ignore …
* The opposing argument …
* If we examine the opposite side, we see …

3. Transition to elaborate upon an idea

* Also …
* Moreover …
* In addition …
* Furthermore …
* In other words …
* Not only that, but …

4. Transition to Numbered Ideas or Points (or Process Steps)

* First … (The first step is …)
* Second … (The second step is …)
* Third … (The third step is …)
* Last … (The last step is …)

5. Transition to show Cause-Effect Relationship

* Therefore …
* As a result …
* Consequently …
* For that reason …
* This is important because …

6. Transition to a Supporting Example

* For instance …
* For example …
* As an example …
* To illustrate this …
* What’s an example of this? …
* But does this happen in real life? Yes …

7. Transition to a Supporting Demonstration

* Now that we’ve covered the theory, let’s see it in action …
* To reinforce what we’ve learned, let’s see a demonstration …
* I’ve prepared a demonstration to show how this works.
* Let’s see a demonstration which applies what we’ve learned.
* “When executed well, speech transitions help make a speech understandable.
* When executed poorly, speech transitions can obscure meaning and frustrate audiences.”

8. Transition to a Supporting Quotation

* X said: …
* In 1968, X said: …
* This idea was expressed clearly by X who said …

9. Transition from Introduction into Speech Body

* Let’s begin …
* To get started, let’s examine …
* Let’s get started talking about …
* Now that we’ve given an overview, let’s start with …

10. Transition from Speech Body into Conclusion

For a short speech, you might conclude with a single statement:

* In short …
* In summary …
* In conclusion …

In a longer presentation, your conclusion might include a review of the key points:

* Let’s summarize the key lessons …
* Let’s recap what we’ve covered today …

11. Transition to another Speaker

In a team presentation, it is necessary to transfer control between speakers.

The abrupt way to do this is to simply have one person stop talking, and then have the other person start talking. It is much smoother, however, to pass the verbal baton to the next speaker (X):

* To talk about our next topic, we have X …
* I’ll pass the microphone to X who will describe …
* To guide us through a demonstration of this, we have X …

Want to learn more?

For more on mastering team presentations, read How to Deliver Group Presentations: The Unified Team Approach.

12. Transition Back to an Earlier Point

There are many occasions when you need to jump back to an earlier idea to add additional information.e.g. after a break, following an exercise, or returning from an unplanned interruption

* Let’s return …
* Let’s revisit …
* Let’s go back to …
* We introduced X earlier; let’s explore that further now.
* Avoid Faulty Transitions
* When executed well, speech transitions help make a speech understandable.

When executed poorly, speech transitions can obscure meaning and frustrate audiences.

Beware these three types of faulty transitions:

**Miscount Transition**

This faulty transition occurs when a speaker begins counting main points, but does not do so consistently. (e.g. First, Second, Next, Next, Third, Third, …) Faulty counting can also occur when a speaker tries to number both the main points and the sub-points and gets mixed up.

**Incompatible Transition**

This faulty transition occurs when a speaker uses a transition word or phrase which doesn’t match the relationship. (e.g. they start with the word “however”, but they follow it with an example)

**Tangential Transition**

Transitional phrases like “That reminds me…”, “Ironically…”, or “As an aside…” are dangerous because they often lead to an off-topic diversion which blurs the focus of the speech and wastes time for you and your audience. Just. Don’t. Do. It.

1. **Understand a simple pattern for effective communication**

**Introduction:**

The Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, at the India Economic Convention 2014, outlined his vision for India that he referred to as the three Ds: democracy, demography and demand .The Rule of Three is a classic writing principle that may also be slightly imbued with magic. It states that ideas or stories presented in threes are more memorable to the listener. A classic example of the rule of three was Winston Churchill’s famous Blood, Sweat and Tears speech. He is widely attributed as saying I can promise you nothing but blood sweat and tears. What he actually said was “I can promise you Blood, Sweat, Toil and Tears”. Because of the rule of three we simply remember it as Blood sweat and tears.

**Learning Objectives:**

* Identify, prepare and present 3 key points

This is one of the oldest of all the presentation techniques – known about since the time of Aristotle.

People tend to remember lists of three things. Structure your presentation around threes and it will become more memorable.

The Rule of Three – We remember three things.

1. Takeaway

Divide your message into three chunks. What are the benefits of your service? What are the main things you want the audience to walk away remembering? Most people don’t have the memory (or attention) to remember five or six main points; however, three is a number we are uniquely attuned to recall.

Steve Jobs was famous for using the Rule of Three in his presentations. In 2011, he described the iPad 2 as “thinner, lighter, and faster” than the first. These three adjectives were massively effective; they said everything the audience needed to know. It was much more successful than if he had announced “20 ways the iPad 2 is different from its predecessor.”

2. Instruction

If you aim to instruct, divide your teaching into three main steps. The TSA, for example, has a three-step process for security: “show ID and boarding pass, take out liquids, and take off shoes and jackets.” This sequential set is extremely easy to remember, and the technique can (and should) be used in an instructional presentation.

Another instructional technique that uses the Rule of Three is as follows: tell your audience what you are going to say. Say it. Then, tell them what you just said.

Presentation Tips

3. Narrative

Many great stories and even some not-so-great jokes have been structured in the classic Rule of Three. Think of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” “The Three Little Pigs,” and “Three Blind Mice.” This also includes the sequential order of a beginning, middle, and end. You can use this structure in a presentation to introduce your subject, describe an obstacle, and then reveal what is required to overcome it.

But why use a narrative? “Neurologists say that our brains are programmed much more for stories than for abstract ideas. Tales with a little drama are remembered far longer than any slide crammed with analytics.” – John Kotter, author of “A Sense of Urgency.”

**Conclusion:**

Consider the Latin phrase “Omne trium perfectum,” which means “everything that comes in threes is perfect, or, every set of three is complete.” No matter the content, the Rule of Three should be used in your presentation. It will boost the memory of your audience, and can even help you remember your main points while you speak.