Turning Technical Experts into Great Communicators
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Focus on Your Audience, Not Yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Discuss What Your Data Means, Not What Your Data ‘is’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Step 1. Categorise your ideas to be confident they belong together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Step 2. Order your ideas to be sure you have a complete set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Step 3. Summarise your ideas to articulate what the data says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Step 4. Synthesise your ideas to make the data relevant to your audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Allow Enough Time to Synthesise Your Ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Prepare a high level storyline - early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Socialise your outline - even before your analysis is complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use the rules of structure and logic to test that your draft storyline is logically robust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Prepare your actual piece of communication last - to avoid rewrites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Useful Links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>About Us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**eBook Navigation**

- To jump to any section, please click on its line of text in the Table of Contents.
- To navigate back to the Table of Contents from any page, please click on the page header text next to the page number.
Introduction

Have you ever thought that, because you are a technical expert, communicating will be a struggle? Perhaps you think communicating is for other people: people who are extraverted, charismatic and find it easy to say the right thing?

Somehow, there are people who seem to have others ‘eating out of their hands’ with little effort, and you wonder how they do it. They seem to be natural born communicators.

What if we told you that your logical abilities can work to your advantage when you prepare to communicate complex ideas for business?

- Logic drives thinking
- Logic drives synthesis
- Logic drives clarity
Successful business communication often relies on a deep understanding of facts, and the ability to explain how these facts are logically relevant to a particular update or decision.

Decision makers are impressed by the ability to communicate complex material with clarity, which requires a rigorous understanding and clear explanation of the logical connections between ideas.

In short: charisma can be engaging, but doesn’t drive clarity.

Your abilities with logic and synthesis combined with your technical expertise can work to your advantage when generating powerful and relevant insights from complex material.

To achieve this, however, there are three things you must do:

1. Focus on your audience, not yourself
2. Discuss what your data means, not what your data ‘is’
3. Allow enough time to synthesise your ideas

Let’s talk about each of these points in more detail.
Focus on Your Audience, Not Yourself
Audiences want us to cut to the chase fast

We want to go on a journey through our analysis

When we prepare a piece of communication, we usually begin by wondering what we want to say to our audience. We typically start by brainstorming ideas, writing straight away, or sketching an outline.

In other words, instead of starting by thinking about our audience and what they need from us, we start thinking about ourselves and the information we want to get across, often in one of these three ways.
Clarity is not about taking an audience on a journey

It is very tempting – and we see people do this a lot – to take your audience on the same journey you took through your analysis, by giving a blow-by-blow description of every twist and turn in your problem-solving journey. This would be appropriate if you were recounting a holiday, but less so if your intention is to convey the significance of your work.
Clarity is not about a stream of consciousness either

It is also tempting to take your audience on a stream of consciousness journey, explaining one part of the story and then leaping to another the way author Gabriel Garcia Marquez does so eloquently in his landmark novel '100 Years of Solitude'. Unfortunately, your audience did not sign up to go on a magical journey through your analysis, while you jump from one idea to the next until the 'aha' moment emerges right at the end.
Clarity is not a nervous parade of knowledge

Or, you may be inclined to put everything you know about a topic onto paper to make sure you don’t leave anything out, which often comes across as a nervous parade of knowledge without being clear about the reasons why you want to say what you say.
However, it is safe to assume that all (certainly most!) of the people receiving your communication are intelligent people who are in a hurry.

They want you to have a point of view and get to it quickly: they are not there to read for pleasure and do not want to work too hard to find your key ideas.

**Audiences want us to cut to the chase**

- A point of view
- Necessary data only
- Confidence in the content
- Ability to skim

So, give your audience what they want, and fast. Share your point of view. Provide only data that is necessary. Provide robust content. Make it easy for them to skim written material for what is most relevant (and interesting) to them.

It is essential to state your points succinctly as you are likely to be communicating with a large number of people with differing levels and areas of interest in your material.

Let’s show you a Before and After example: an email that takes you through the writer’s thinking journey, compared to one that empowers the reader to find what they need quickly.
Hi Emperor Palpatine,

To make testing easier, I am planning on running the complete history of the weapon launch scripts on Monday so they can be tested in their entirety. Testing will involve testing Outrider weapon metrics, Rogue Shadow weapon metrics and Ebon Hawk weapon metrics. We will be moving ahead with the analysing of the Death Star tomorrow (Saturday) and will share the scripts along with the results as we go, to minimise the impact to our schedule. This will push our timeline for the signoff out by one day, but will make the testing a lot clearer because we will not have to consider historical metadata changes reflected in one ship but not the other. While it pushes our overall timeline out for the Death Star by a day, I believe it will reduce the amount of work required overall and simplify the testing process.

We will then build the new Death Star tables on Monday to be tested Monday evening our time, afternoon Empire Standard Time, so sign off and final productionisation can be done on Tuesday.

How does that sound?

Regards,

Darth

This is taken from a real piece of business communication, disguised to hide the source and the context. In the original version, Emperor Palpatine has to work hard to understand what Darth really wants from him.
In the suggested version, the information is reworked to:

- Minimise background details
- Highlight Darth’s point of view and support it logically
- Use lots of white space and simple formatting so that it is easy to skim.

Even though this is ‘just an email’, it is much easier to follow and increases the chances that Darth will get the Emperor’s OK to change the process for weapon launch system testing.
Hi Emperor Palpatine,

I am concerned about the complexity of our current weapon launch system testing process, and suggest a way to simplify it and also reduce the team’s workload.

If we run my new testing process on Monday and Tuesday, that will shorten testing time while making sure we are ready to destroy the Rebel planet.

This would involve:

1. Analysing Death Star tomorrow (Saturday) and sharing the scripts along with the results as we go, to minimise the delay

2. Running a complete history of weapon launch system scripts on Monday, to reduce historical metadata variances reflected in one ship but not another. To achieve this, test weapon metrics for the following ships:
   - Outrider
   - Rogue Shadow
   - Ebon Hawk

3. Pushing out our sign off timeline by one day so that we
   - Test the new Death Star tables on Monday (evening our time; afternoon Empire Standard Time)
   - Sign off and undertake final productionisation on Tuesday

Please confirm by COB today that you agree with this approach so we can proceed.

Regards,

Darth
If it were Yoda, he might simply say, “Fix our testing, we should.”
He, too, gets to the point . . . even if missing sufficient supporting detail.

Hopefully, these examples give you some ideas that help your audience grasp your ideas quickly. It is possible to do this within 30 seconds—even for quite large business documents.

This leads to our next point: make sure you have one. Don’t just deliver the data. Even if your audience is interested in the data, most of the time they will be more interested in what it means to them.
Discuss What Your Data Means, Not What Your Data ‘Is’
Discuss What Your Data Means, Not What Your Data ‘Is’

Audiences want us to tell them what our analysis means

We want to tell them what it ‘is’

In our consulting work, another common trap that we see technical experts falling into is the desire to describe data in infinite detail, rather than stepping back to explain what it means to their audience.

While it is critical to maintain the integrity of your analysis, and at times to communicate significant details in your findings, your audiences will thank you if you organise your ideas into chunks and tell them what your findings mean.

Let me illustrate with another Before and After scenario.
Discuss What Your Data Means, Not What Your Data 'Is'

The Before version is a page out of a report to Board members that provides the financials for ToyCo, an imaginary toy company.

On the right hand side of the slide below, the commentary describes the numbers in the table on the left. They do not add any extra value for the Board: no explanations about trends, no discussion about the reasons why the numbers are as they are.

And (horrors!) Board members are asked to read the same thing twice, in two different forms.

An example of what the data ‘is’, which adds less value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>(A$m)</th>
<th>LY</th>
<th>TY</th>
<th>Var LY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>2,551.3</td>
<td>2,677.8</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp Sales</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
<td>3.48%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
<td>3.59%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Growth</td>
<td>2.07%</td>
<td>-0.11%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP $</td>
<td>698.9</td>
<td>688.3</td>
<td>(-1.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP % Sales</td>
<td>27.39%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>(-169 bps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODB $</td>
<td>504.5</td>
<td>490.6</td>
<td>(-2.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODB % Sales</td>
<td>19.77%</td>
<td>18.32%</td>
<td>(-145 bps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBIT $</td>
<td>194.4</td>
<td>197.7</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBIT % Sales</td>
<td>7.62%</td>
<td>7.38%</td>
<td>-24bps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital $</td>
<td>158.8</td>
<td>111.3</td>
<td>(29.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- June Sales came in at +3.48%, up from 1.0% in May. Refer to next slide for further detail
- GP was fell by 1.5%
- CODB reduced by 2.8% on LY and rate was 145 bps below LY (-126 bps on LY before year end adjustments). Direct wages were in line with LY at 7.58%
- EBIT was up by 1.7% and down by 24bps as a percentage of sales.
Discuss What Your Data Means, Not What Your Data 'Is'

In the After version, however, there are insights into the numbers that help the Board understand what these numbers mean to the business.

The title conveys a message instead of just stating a topic. The message takes advantage of the most important ‘real estate’ on any slide: the title.

The commentary on the right hand side is easy to skim:

- The bold highlights point to the key message for each call out, and
- The detail against each point provides useful context on the numbers and the message.

An example of what the data ‘means’, which adds real value

**June EBIT on track and above last year by 1.7% with GP and CODB variances impacted by year end adjustments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A$m)</th>
<th>LY</th>
<th>TY</th>
<th>Var LY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>2,551.3</td>
<td>2,677.8</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp Sales</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
<td>3.48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
<td>3.59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Growth</td>
<td>2.07%</td>
<td>-0.11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP $</td>
<td>698.9</td>
<td>688.3</td>
<td>-1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP % Sales</td>
<td>27.39%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>-169 bps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODB $</td>
<td>504.5</td>
<td>490.6</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODB % Sales</td>
<td>19.77%</td>
<td>18.32%</td>
<td>-145 bps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBIT $</td>
<td>194.4</td>
<td>197.7</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBIT % Sales</td>
<td>7.62%</td>
<td>7.38%</td>
<td>-24 bps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital $</td>
<td>158.8</td>
<td>111.3</td>
<td>(29.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- At 3.48% June’s comparable sales were **stronger** compared to May’s 1% thanks to successful Mothers Day promotions.
- GP margin (before year end adjustments) **increased** by 21 bps on LY thanks to improved margins in lollies and toys. This helped offset lower margins in Games caused by theft and clearance markdowns in Cartoons.
- CODB initiatives were a success, **delivering a 2.8% reduction on LY.** Direct wages were in line with LY at 7.58% with savings recognised in depreciation, supply chain and light and power.
Discuss What Your Data Means, Not What Your Data 'Is'

To achieve this in your own work, take these four steps to generate insights that help your audience understand what your data means, and how it is relevant to them.

Step 1. **Categorise** your ideas to be confident that they belong together
Step 2. **Order** your ideas to be sure you have a complete set
Step 3. **Summarise** your ideas to articulate what the data says
Step 4. **Synthesise** your ideas to make the data relevant to your audience
Step 1. Categorise your ideas to be confident that they belong together

First, categorise your information. Identify the theme that runs through your data.

For example, you may have four observations on different classes of investments:

- A large number of mid-range investments returned significantly below industry norms this quarter.
- An unusually large number of small investments delivered returns that were below industry norms this quarter.
- None of our top 20 investments delivered a return this quarter.
- Our large investments returned poorly across the board this quarter.

They are all observations and they all relate to the performance of the relevant investments.
Step 2: Order your ideas to be sure you have a complete set

Next, put the observations in order. We encourage people to choose one of three specific ways to order your ideas: by structure, time or degree.

**Structure.** Use a framework to organise your ideas. For example, you may use an analytical framework for your analysis, and want to be sure you discuss every section of that framework in your communication. A reporting template with a series of categories is also a framework.

**Time.** Put things in chronological order according to the steps they should be (or have been) done. This is particularly useful for action plans: make sure you pick a consistent unit of measurement and ensure you don’t leave any gaps in your sequence. For example, if you are organising points by the month, make sure each month within the relevant time frame is included.

**Degree.** Order things by magnitude. In our example, investments are ordered by size, from the largest to the smallest. Impact is another common frame for ordering points, typically with items delivering the most impact preceding those with less impact.

Once your ideas are put in order, it is much easier to see if any ideas are missing, and to work out what the whole picture is telling you.
Discuss What Your Data Means, Not What Your Data ‘Is’

Step 3: Summarise your ideas to articulate what the data says

Our investments performed well below industry norms this quarter

1. None of our top 20 investments delivered a return this quarter.
2. Our large investments returned poorly across the board this quarter.
3. A large number of mid range investments returned significantly below industry norms this quarter.
4. An unusually large number of small investments delivered returns that were below industry norms this quarter.

All four statements paint a disappointing picture about the company’s performance for the past quarter, which could be summarised as ‘Our investments performed well below industry norms this quarter’.

The key thing here is to articulate the point in just one crisp sentence (ideally 25 words or less).

We call this working ‘bottom-up’ as we draw out a higher order insight from the data.
**Step 4: Synthesise your ideas to make the data relevant to your audience**

Once you know what the data says, the next step is to present this information to your audience in a way that is relevant to them.

**Our investments performed well below industry norms this quarter.**

"We are working to understand why our results are so low."

"We need to work out why our results continue to be so low."

"Find another job before this place goes bust!"

In this example, three different potential audiences are likely to have distinctively different interests in the same information.

- The CEO will want to know not just that the numbers are poor, but that you are going to look into why that’s so.
- The Division Head will need to approve any extra time you invest in working out what happened.
- And your colleagues may have a completely different set of interests!

So, even though the data is the same, the needs of each audience are different and your need to convey a message they care about will take different forms.

In synthesising your thoughts in this way, you can cater to both both your needs and theirs to explain what your data means.
Public servants who understand that while logic and rigour are vital, advice is only good if ‘above all else’ it is compelling.

Ken Henry, Secretary of the Department of the Treasury,
Headed up the Henry Tax Review
Allow Enough Time to Synthesise Your Ideas
Allow Enough Time to Synthesise Your Ideas

Audiences want to understand us

We want to continue analysing rather than synthesising our findings so we can be understood

If you enjoy—and value—the analytical parts of your work, it is very tempting to keep on analysing to the last minute, to make sure the thinking is right.

However, this means you often do little justice to that very same analysis, as you don’t allow time to explain what it means to decision makers and others you want to influence.
27 Allow Enough Time to Synthesise Your Ideas

Ken Henry, previously the Secretary of the Department of the Treasury in Australia, stresses the importance of taking the time to think through your communication as well as your analysis.

He observed that when public servants advise a minister, they are seeking to have influence. Just as people in business are competing for their leader’s ear, public servants have many competitors for the Minister’s ear.

Henry says, “While logic and rigour are vital, your advice is only good if ‘above all else’ it is compelling.”

You must put in as much effort to construct and present your argument as you do to perfect your analysis.

Time and time again, we see this among our clients. People work late to perfect their analysis rather than spend time on preparing their communication. This results in tedious presentations, baffled audiences, and delayed decisions.

And you, the expert who put so much effort into the analysis, do not get the credit you deserve for the work you have done.

So, here is what we recommend that you do:

1. **Prepare a high level storyline** – early
2. **Socialise your outline** – before your analysis is complete
3. **Prepare your actual communication** last – to avoid rewrites
Prepare a high level storyline - early

When preparing a piece of communication about something complex, it is rare for there to be no thinking – or analysis – up front. Whether the analytical journey involves crunching numbers, working through a series of facts with colleagues, or thinking things through, it typically involves moving through four steps: getting the data, analysing it, synthesising it (extracting insights from it), and then getting to an ‘aha’ moment when the message becomes clear.

1. Crunch your analysis

2. Clarify your thinking

3. Communicate with your audience

The diagram visualises this 4-stage process in the 'Crunch your analysis' phase. This explains why so many pieces of communication are presented in this order and arrive at the main point toward the end.
However, if you challenge yourself to ‘Clarify your thinking’ and draft a skeletal storyline early, it will help you step back from the details to remember the high-level perspective you will need to ‘Communicate with your audience’—simply by ordering the ‘Crunch your analysis’ process in reverse.

At this stage of preparation, it is all right to have assumptions and gaps in your data.

Having a high-level perspective also gives you a hypothesis to test, identifies potential gaps in your analysis before it is too late, and gives you something to talk about with senior leaders if you bump into them in the corridor.
Socialise your outline – even before your analysis is complete

While you must be careful about how you frame your conversations before your analysis is complete, it is (nearly always) beneficial to start talking about your story outline with key stakeholders in advance.

This enables you to test responses, get feedback on what stakeholders are looking for, and ensure your thinking is robust before you prepare your final piece of communication.

Make sure you tell them this is your early view, and that your findings may change after the final stages of analysis.

A successful storylining process comes from focusing on the rules of logic that tie ideas together in your storyline, which means that you will:

• Use the rules of structure and logic to test that your draft storyline is logically robust, and

• Ground any changes that stem from your conversations in these rules.
Use the rules of structure and logic to test that your draft storyline is logically robust.

Here is where your abilities to think logically and follow a process become your strengths.

- Use a logical and structured approach that includes a short introduction which provides just enough time for your audience to switch on to your topic and lead them to the one – and only one! – high level question you want to address.
- You will then answer that high level question (controversially!) in just one sentence and support your answer using either inductive or deductive logic.
- Make sure every idea has a logical place within your storyline and that the insights you are deriving from your data are accurate.

If you do this, your story be logically sound and accurately reflect your analysis, while creating great clarity for your audience.

At Clarity College, we like to map our ideas out visually using sticky notes or our storylining software (www.neosi.co) neosi, which makes it easy to visualise the relationships between our ideas and step back from the details.
Some simple rules underpin the approach*

The rules

- Every communication must provide some background (context, trigger, question)
- Every communication has one clear overarching governing idea
- Ideas at each level synthesise the ideas grouped below
- All ideas must be logically ordered

*For more detail see Barbara Minto, ‘The Pyramid Principle’, or for a quick introduction - Oxford University Introduction to Logic for Beginners iTunes U
To reuse our first example, here is what the revised email from Darth Vader looks like as a one-page storyline:

**CONTEXT**
I am concerned about the complexity of our current weapon launch system testing ...

**TRIGGER**
and would like to suggest a way to reduce the workload by simplifying it.

**QUESTION**
How could we improve the system testing?

---

I suggest we run a new testing process on Monday and Tuesday that will shorten test time while making sure we are ready to destroy the Rebel planet ahead of schedule.

**Testing Death Star tomorrow (Saturday) and sharing the script along with the results as we go, which would minimise the delay.**

**Running a complete history of weapon launch system scripts on Monday, which would reduce the need to consider historical metadata changes reflected in one ship but not another.**

**Pushing out our sign off timeline by one day which would be manageable.**

- Test Outrider metrics
- Test Rogue Shadow metrics
- Test Ebon Hawk metrics

- Build the new Death Star tables on Monday
- Test them Monday evening our time (pm Empire Standard Time)
- Sign off and undertake final productionisation on Tuesday
Use the same structure to ground your revisions after receiving feedback.

Tempting as it may be, don’t be swayed by other people’s views when receiving feedback on your story, and don’t try to accommodate everybody’s point of view.

While all stakeholders can add value to your story, it is critical that you use their input primarily to test the rigour of your thinking, and not allow disparate opinions to toss you around like a ship in a storm.

If your stakeholders identify something that doesn’t work in your storyline, then it probably doesn’t. The trick is to work out what needs fixing: the logic of the argument, the logic of the analysis, or the way you have articulated your points.

And . . . ensure whatever changes you make fit within the logical rules.
Allow Enough Time to Synthesise Your Ideas

Trust the rules of storylining to flush out the logic of your argument

We have learned from ample experience – almost 50 years between us now, using these techniques – that it is essential to trust in the logical rules of storylining.

For example, if your stakeholder thinks your answer is wrong, be thorough in exploring whether you are addressing the wrong question, or if your ‘answer’ doesn’t answer your question. Very often, for example, a slight shift in the context will alter the question and then lead to a magical new insight being expressed in the answer.

Ensure that your analytical logic is robust

A magical aspect of storylining is that it helps you test whether your analysis is robust or has gaps in it.

You get more out of the process when you build your storyline early, and ground your communication in a storyline.

Articulate your argument carefully

Socialising your storyline, or sharing it to garner feedback, is a powerful way to eradicate assumptions from both your structure and your language.

This is why we encourage people to articulate their ideas in their storyline as a full sentence at each stage.

If you use just a couple of words or a phrase, the idea will not be complete and you will leave room for ambiguity and confusion.

Once you are clear about what it is you need to say—by mapping it out as a storyline and socialising it with your stakeholders—it is time to prepare your final piece of communication.

And we encourage you to leave it as close to the last minute as you can to allow for the thinking to be as robust as possible before you prepare your document.
Allow Enough Time to Synthesise Your Ideas

Prepare your actual piece of communication last – to avoid rewrites

This is where some trust comes in: leaving the document preparation until quite late can feel uncomfortable until you have seen and learned to trust the storyline process.

In the past, you may have taken a long time to prepare your communication—when it was perceived as the findings from your analysis, instead of a message for a specified audience.

If you focus on the storyline first and get that right, the final piece of communication will come together quite quickly, particularly if you allow the storyline structure to drive the structure of your piece of communication.

In the Darth Vader example, I have shown you what a storyline might look like as an email, and you can compare the two to see that the order of the ideas is exactly the same in the email as it is in the storyline.
Match story and structure exactly for PowerPoint packs too

- Explains background and purpose of pack
- No controversy
- Describes structure – sections, appendices, etc.
- Works like an Executive Summary
- States governing thought
- Provides overview of storyline
- Use a visual if appropriate

Tracker pages can be used to show audience where you are in the story

Not necessary in short packs of less than 10 pages

The same rule applies for PowerPoint packs – and any other form of business communication. The storyline's message and structure mirror the document exactly.

Ideas are ordered to match the order of the story: titles of pages are driven by messages, not topics. The title page also includes the main point, not just the topic.

Click here to watch a short video. It explains further how to make the complex clear and the clear compelling in your communication (http://bit.ly/2dHc44X).
38 Questions and Answers
The following is a record of the Q&A session from our live webinar presented by strategic communication specialist Davina Stanley, Managing Director of Clarity College. To obtain a recording of the full webinar, please refer to the Useful Links section of this eBook.

How do I use a storyline like this when I have to present information in a standard template?

Organise your ideas into your storyline first. Don’t write to the template, write to the storyline to get your thinking clear, and then work out which element of the storyline fits into the template.

In situations where you can’t edit the template (like in a finance update, or a report from a system that generates a monthly update) where you need to present the facts, have a separate one-page story.

For example, "Okay, leadership team, this is how we performed this month, and separately, here are my observations about this data. There are three things I noticed this month, here’s what they are . . . “

So, you can tell a story separately, even if it is just verbally, on top of a structured document that might be handed out.
What kind of business communication does this work best for?

Storylining works for most types of communication: anywhere you need to put across a series of observations or information, anywhere you need to put forth a proposition. In our world, we tend to think of eight categories of communication:

1. Action stories and plans
2. Alerts (trouble is coming, be ready)
3. Business cases
4. Change stories
5. Compliance stories (for example, when you need to conduct an audit to comply with certain rules and to explain what you need to do to address that)
6. Options stories
7. Proposals or pitches
8. Updates (A common form of communication to share how something is progressing; “This is how our project is going.”)

A wide range of everyday business communication benefit from this approach.

Is the use of this framework or structured communication always effective regardless of the audience? Are there any additional strategies or communication styles that you recommend, that would tailor your message based on your audience?

When you have your thinking clear, and you’ve mapped out your ideas on a page, whiteboard, or piece of paper, that helps you work out what your communication strategy would be. Using our 5-step process—to think about your purpose and your audience, your introduction, what your key question is, what the answer is, and how to support it—is enormously helpful in preparing most business communication.

You might also use it for meeting preparation, where you map it out, really keep things tight to time, and keep referring back to your points.
What other strategies can you use?

You might want to get lessons in presentation skills if you have a high-stakes presentation to make; perhaps to the Board, to get some funding for your business, for something that is really going to make a big difference. Focusing on your presentation skills can help you build engagement and an emotional connection, and perhaps ‘throw in’ some extra charisma.

I have used a fairly formal style of presenting visually here, yet there is no reason why you couldn’t get creative with storylining.

For example, one of my team presented a recommendation to an artistic community, to improve the logistics for a theatre group. They needed to engage the actors in the sorts of things they would not find exciting: where they store their costumes, equipment, etc.: the basic mechanics behind their troupe.

So what they did was get their thinking really clear, put the actors on a bus with some cheese and wine, and took them on a tour, so they could actually see the various facilities, the problems with the facilities, and why they needed to upgrade them.

They were able to organise a story, get it really clear, and get creative about how they told it.

“We know the outcome we need, the reason why we need a different way of organising the equipment, now how do we engage this audience about it?” And that was very effective. Unfortunately, cheese and wine and storytelling are not used nearly enough!

So, you can be really creative in the ways you use the method. It’s so much easier to do once you’re really clear about what you really want.
How can we use this process in such a quick-paced environment?

I think this process helps enormously with that, for example when you need to grab a senior leader, say, on the way to the lift. If you have your ideas clear in your mind in advance, it is very easy to have those very fast conversations.

Perhaps there are two parts to this question. One, how do we allow time for the analysis around the thinking and the communication, and two, how do we allow time for the problem solving.

From my experience, building that hypothesis as a storyline (as to what you think you are going to say, what your gut tells you, and knowing what the answer is going to be really early on) speeds up the analysis.

What you end up doing is identifying any gaps there might be in your analytical plan, before the last minute. You can identify that early.

You also quickly look at what the story might say, and, without compromising the integrity of the analysis (and it is important that you are mindful of that as you don’t want to be cutting corners), you can look at what the solution may be, and say, “Well actually, that changes our priorities in analysis”.

Some of the work may not look so necessary now, and if this is really the answer, we don’t want to exclude them but perhaps we could downplay them and emphasise some other part of the work. It can shift the balance of the work that you do, and speed up the analytical process too.

Seeing the preparation of the communication as part of the analytical work is enormously helpful.
But having said that, it is also helpful to get people together in a room (a team including some objective outsiders who understand the method) to throw ideas around, use our 10-point test, and ask, "How does the story hang together?" You will find that the story can come together quite quickly, when you focus on the logical rules that hold them together.

So, it is really helpful to focus on the analytical side and the communication side in a fast-paced environment.

Do you have examples of using the logical rules (context, trigger, question, ideas) for promoting a business to gain clients?

Aahh. I have to think carefully about that. We try to do that all the time, by the way, so have a look at our website to see if anything there resonates with you.

Where I have seen it used to great effect is in tenders. Let’s pick an example.

We worked with a law firm for quite some time where we trained lawyers to get their advice across in 30 seconds—without compromising the integrity of their analysis.

They would use this approach to prepare a covering letter to go with the tender, for example. You don’t usually have a lot of room to edit the structure of the tender, but you can use the logical rules structure within the sections in it.

They received the most phenomenal responses, like, "If you could communicate like that with us as lawyers within the legal process then, absolutely, you are hired".

They used this approach to prepare one such tender, which came back with 50 matters, which was quite extraordinary.
When you work in a technical discipline and you can communicate your value proposition very clearly (“You should hire us because . . .”), with a single sentence with support points underneath, you can often surprise your audience with the power of your proposition and be quite distinctive, not just in the law, but in other places too. That was a really great question, thank you.

**Do you do workshops?**

Yes, we do. In fact, one of my team members is running a workshop today with one of the banks. The workshop is compulsory for all new hires in the head office, so that is very exciting. We’ve run a lot of workshops; that is the mainstay of our business, as well as coaching.
Useful links

Resources
- 1-minute Video: Turning Technical Experts into Great Communicators
- Webinar Recording: Turning Technical Experts into Great Communicators
- Infographic: Why Good Communication is Great for Business

Blogs
- Communication for technical experts: #1 Put your audience first
- Communication for technical experts: #2 Explain what your data means
- Communication for technical experts: #3 Beyond analysing, communicate!
- Communication for technical experts: #4 Bonus questions and answers

Visit velpic.com
About Us

This eBook is a product of Velpic’s HR Talk initiative.

Velpic the company is passionate about empowering people through training and knowledge sharing.

While we primarily do this through Velpic, our cloud-based Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), we also collaborate with industry-leading experts on a variety of workplace education topics through our HR Talk initiative.

This eBook is one of many resources produced through HR Talk; we hope you enjoy and benefit from it as much as we enjoyed and benefitted from bringing it to you.

About Clarity College

Clarity College helps business people make the complex clear and the clear compelling. We help everyone from graduates through to the C-Suite improve the clarity of their thinking when solving problems and communicating.

Clarity College faculty are sought after by businesses, governments and universities as well as individuals who understand that thinking clearly can help both their productivity as well as the quality of their decision making. The team offers traditional workshops, blended learning and coaching as well as its proprietary neosi storylining software.

About Velpic

Velpic is an innovative cloud-based eLearning software that transforms workplace training—by providing one simple platform to do it all.

Our intuitive multimedia content creation tool, robust learning management system (LMS), Internet-responsive video streaming portal, and expert video marketplace empower organisations of any size to create, schedule, deliver and report on training activities, and promote knowledge—in less time, at less cost, and with less effort.

Users love our clean design and easy accessibility through Internet browsers and mobile devices.