

Try Verbal Drafting for Your Next Speech

by Margaret Keys

Picture yourself preparing a written report. You crank out your first draft.

You don't expect to get it right the first time. You expect to "blue-pencil" draft after draft until you're satisfied that your writing is clear and concise and fits the perceptions of your reading audience.

Why, then, avoid using the same type of process for verbal presentation?

When the end result is to be a **spoken** communication, why insist on **writing** and editing and rewriting, consulting with colleagues and higher-ups, editing yet again, until you have before you a perfectly **written** piece?

With the speaking deadline only 24 hours away, the anxiety of the deadline begins to build. Suddenly it's a different matter ... now the voice and the body have to take this perfectly written presentation and deliver it. The task of making it airborne—of funneling it through your delivery system (yourself), using vocal and physical emphasis and eye contact to drive home points—is enormous. By writing the perfect pitch, often you immobilize your delivery system.

Some of us get around this by learning to scan scripts and slides with some success; some of us render each word perfectly but feel the loss of impact in the translation or under questioning.

Verbal drafting—the early translation and integration of your thoughts in sync with your delivery system—works.

Just as you would never enter a tennis tournament without swinging the racket in practice, you should never enter the speaking arena without "drafting" your material first.

Some people prefer to work "backwards" by saying several versions to find the right feel. Others choose to draft the opening and closing, tightly and "free fall" in the center.

So just what is verbal drafting, in its "purest" form? A good way to prepare is the "1-2-3" formula.

Step 1 is to list (in writing) *all* questions *this* audience should ask on this subject. Include statements and misperceptions this audience might have. Then rehearse *aloud* how you would respond to each. Stand as you would stand before the audience—gesture and speak as you would during give and take.

Step 2 is to list all of the *sensitive* questions this audience might ask, then rehearse, out loud, your responses and ways to refocus.

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Step 3 is to identify *your* goal in giving this speech, based on the questions, statements and misperceptions you now know how to answer. Are you trying to set a tone; teach people new facts or concepts; or get them to take decisive action.

Now you're ready to craft your message.

The *opening* should align with the audience quickly.

The *middle* should illuminate and magnify the message. People reason on different levels and through varying means. If you've ever taken a "personality" test, you know that people are generally categorized by

how they take in information and deal with the world around them. The middle should reach each "type" of person in a way that makes sense to them. Factor style in especially when you respond to questions.

Then you *end* your speech. This is your chance to give the audience your message. You leave the audience with *exactly* the thoughts and feelings you want them to have—not a negative or confusing note.

Verbal drafting, once you start doing it, is no more time consuming than writing, editing, and rewriting, then rehearsing. And because the message objective has become a part of your mind and body, you can adjust to the listeners' needs and perceptions as you engage in discussion.

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