# *Presentation Skills for Fire & EMS Leaders*


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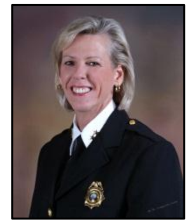
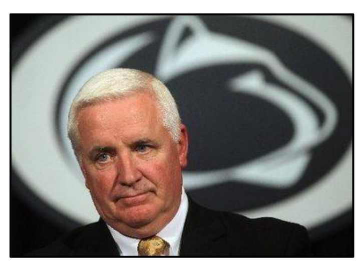
## Introduction



In our society today, information is power and those organizations in both the private and public sector that communicate well both internally and externally enjoy many benefits, not the least of which are more satisfied employees and a more loyal and supportive customer base. These organizations experience those successes because they can "put a face" on the organization, whether it's to keep their employees informed about the impact of an economic downturn, launch a new product line, or respond to an incident that has generated negative publicity.


Do you remember how Johnson & Johnson, the makers of Tylenol®, responded to the cyanide contamination of Tylenol® in 1986. Johnson & Johnson's communication response—quickly getting in front of the public and getting the bad news out up front along with their action plan—set a new standard for corporate communications in those types of events.

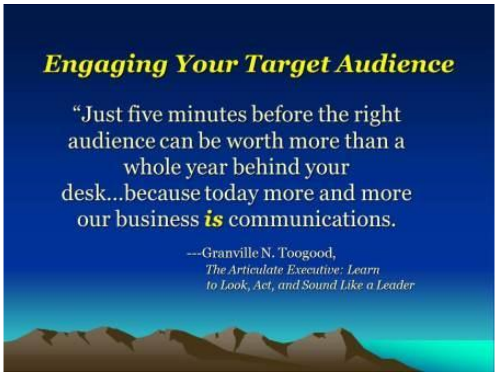

Contrast that with the initial management of the Jerry Sandusky scandal by Penn State University officials when that scandal was first unveiled in 2011. Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky was charged and later convicted of repeated counts of child molestation while at Penn State.



Part of the PR disaster was due to Penn State's initial difficulty addressing the problem. Pulitzer-winning stories in The Patriot-News of Harrisburg initially uncovered the scandal in March 2011. But Penn State remained tightlipped. PR firm Ketchum was hired in November of 2011, and the school hired Edelman and La Torre for crisis management in April 2012.

The university felt the full fallout in 2012 when the Freeh report stated that Joe Paterno and the administration covered up Sandusky's abuses. Major companies pulled sponsorships of the program. And though the school pledged to spend $208,000 a month for 12 months on PR support, the damage was done.




For organizations to be successful in the current information age, they must have managers who are skilled and practiced in the art of delivering the right type of oral presentation in the best possible manner to effectively reach their target audience. Let's start taking a look at what it takes to become just such a communicator for your organization.

Fire and EMS organizations, large and small, are in the communication business. Leaders and managers within those organizations have the opportunity to deliver oral, media-supported presentations to a wide variety of audiences for an equally wide variety of situations. Some examples include:

- Speaking before a meeting of the local governing body to obtain support for operational resources;
- Speaking before a group of civic leaders to respond to allegations that the department's response to a recent fire where several children died was inadequate;
- Speaking to a group of journalists to announce the "kick off" of an injury prevention program to reduce juvenile head injuries;
- Speaking before a group of employees to announce how the department will respond to reductions to the department's operating budget; and
- Speaking before a group of senior departmental managers to gain support for a new program.

We've learned over the years that pre-planning, preparation, and practice are the keys to optimal performance on the scene of an emergency. Those factors are the key to successful oral presentations as well for the following reasons.

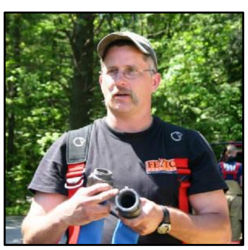
Let's take a look at the critical areas that such pre-planning, preparation and practice should address.

Identify the necessity for the leaders and managers to deliver presentations. A good place to start is to go back and examine the situations that have presented themselves in the past. Find out the answers to these questions:

- What presentations have been delivered and who delivered them on behalf of the organization?
- Why were those presentations delivered?
- Who were the target audiences for those presentations?
- What types of presentations were delivered? How was it received?
- How effectively were those presentations planned, organized, and delivered?
-

## Reasons for Learning Good Presentation Skills


Successful Public Safety organizations must have skilled communicators to both function effectively internally and to build productive working relationships with the public that they serve. Chief Officers serve their organizations in a variety of staff and line functions. In most organizations they manage divisions or units within their department that have a direct impact on internal and external customer service delivery.



When it comes to getting up in front of a group of people to communicate information orally, many of us "cut their teeth", so to speak, as instructors.

For many managers that type of presentation, the "one-way-communication" lecture, teaching knowledge and skills to entry-level employees or incumbent staff is the only type of presentation that they know how to deliver.

As Fire & EMS leaders we are increasingly placed in situations where face-to-face communication with groups of people is critical, yet an instructional style of presentation is inappropriate. Managers who can effectively use a variety of presentations that are appropriate for their target audience are an asset to the organization and they enhance their own professionalism and value.

You can become that type of communicator by stocking your "communication toolbox" with a variety of presentation tools which will give you the ability and confidence to match the best type of presentation to your target audience. The average American is subjected to between 3,000 and 20,000 messages per day, depending upon how the number of messages is measured.

> "It's not the Information Economy…It's the Attention Economy. There's too much information, creating a noise that approaches a din. It's the attention that people pay to your information or message that's in short supply" (Dourado and Blackburn).

During my first career with the Chesterfield (VA) Fire & EMS Department, from which I retired as a Battalion Chief after a wonderful 26-year career, I had the opportunity to deliver literally hundreds of oral presentations. As fire officers go, my career was somewhat unique in that I spent a combined 9+ years in staff officer positions that included EMS Director, Manager of the Emergency Communications Center, and Director of Training and Safety.

Since my retirement, my "2nd career" has included stints as: a Staff Instructor and Course Developer at the Georgia Fire Academy; a planning and operations consultant for a private sector EMS agency; and a Fire and Emergency Services consultant for the U.S. Army. In my eclectic "post-retirement" journey I've continued to develop and deliver oral presentations to a wide variety of groups. The material that I've included in this eBook comes from those experiences as well as an instructional program that I first developed for the **Officer Development Program** at Chesterfield entitled, *"Graphic Presentations"*. The target audience for that program was those firefighters who were preparing themselves for their first promotion to the rank of Company Officer in the organization.

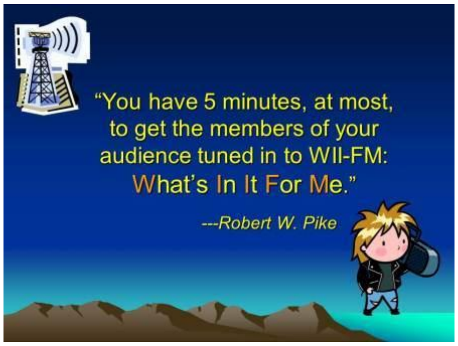
This eBook is not a manual on how to use presentation software, e.g., Microsoft® PowerPoint™, per se; many other authors have done a much better job of that with books like *PowerPoint for Dummies™*. Rather, my purpose with this eBook is to equip you with the ability to communicate using oral presentations in a way that captures the attention of your audience so that you fulfill your role as a communicator for your organization.

To that end, my focus is on helping you to develop and deliver oral presentations using methodology similar to that which we've all used to deliver emergency services to our customers: planning, preparation, and practice.

So what's say we get started?

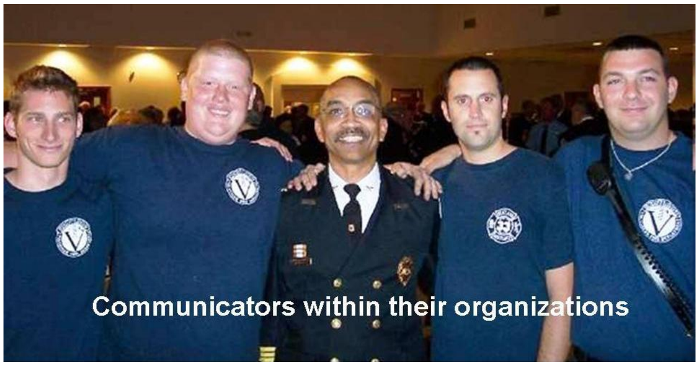
 

## Engaging Your Target Audience




In his book, *Creative Training Techniques Handbook*, the renowned trainer and expert in adult education, Robert Pike, states that when speaking to a group of adult learners, you have just five minutes to give them a reason to continue listening. Pike likens this to getting everyone "tuned in" to the same radio station, **WII-FM, (W**hat's **I**n **I**t **F**or **M**e**)**. This concept is equally applicable for the wide variety of presentations that Chief Officers are called upon to deliver on behalf of their organizations. Everyone's time is valuable and when we honor that as presenters the audience "rewards" us by paying attention to what we have to say.

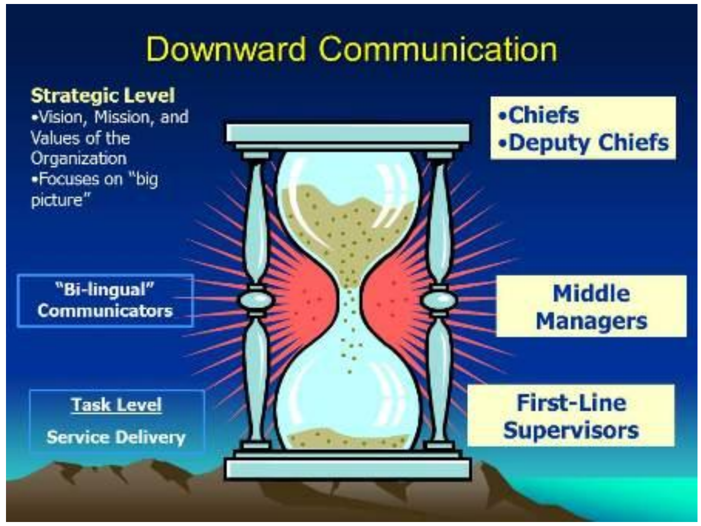
## Why Do Leaders Need to Deliver Presentations?




I was having an informal discussion one day in the apparatus bay of my battalion headquarters station with one of my firefighters, Roger Warden. Roger and I graduated from the same recruit class, Recruit School #12, back in 1982 and while I rose through the ranks of the department, Roger chose to remain a Firefighter/Paramedic—and a darn fine one!—for his entire career. The "theme" of our conversation this day centered on the role that communications plays in the organization.

Roger offered a drawing of an hourglass (Figure, "Downward Communication", next page) to give a good analogy of how we can use our organizational structure, or chain-of-command, to keep the flow of information moving. It also illustrates the key communicator role of the Chief Officer, particularly those officers who are in middle management, e.g., battalion chiefs.

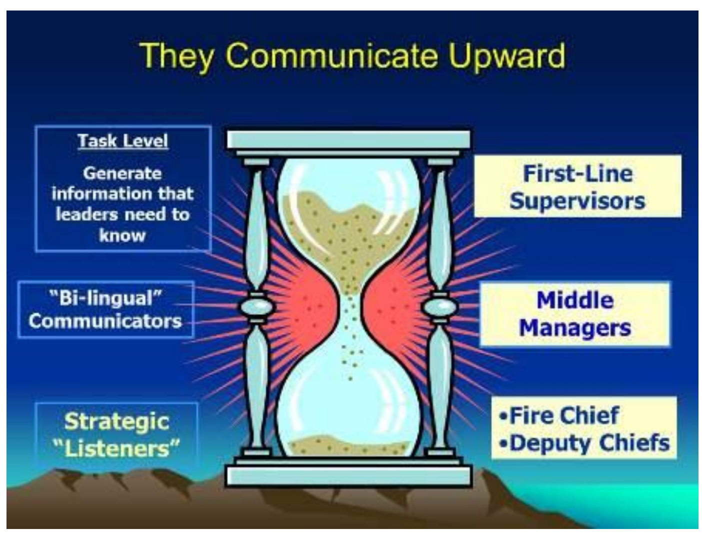
The Strategic "Communicators" are the executive leaders of the organization, i.e., the fire chief and their deputies or assistants. These leaders are responsible for "big picture" communication that is consistent with the organization's strategic plan. When the Strategic Leaders of the department set policy and direction for the organization, it's the leaders in middle management who are tasked with going forth to inform and educate the work force with that information by communicating downward effectively.




In downward communications, the Middle Managers "hear strategic" messages from their bosses, process them, and then communicate the messages to their direct reports using "task level" language.

To do this effectively those officers must in essence be "bi-lingual": they need to be able to "hear and understand" the strategic information and then communicate it to their first-line supervisors, e.g., company officers, in language and context that is understood at the task level. Increasingly, this involves delivering an oral presentation that's applicable to the target audience.

Putting the process in reverse, those middle managers communicate upward by listening to their direct reports and then conveying that information to the Strategic Leaders. They also communicate upward with their bosses regarding progress on projects and work performance by their work units. Once again, this is usually in some type of oral presentation.




When communicating upward, the Middle Manager hears the message from their direct report in "task level" language, processes the message, then communicates the message to their boss using "strategic language."


Teachers within their organizations

Fire & EMS leaders are expected to teach their people and prepare them for delivery of service to internal and external customers.

Leaders communicate with officials of local government on behalf of their organizations. Frequently, those in middle management function as an "ambassador" of their bosses in this realm of communication because the boss can only be in one place at one time.


Communicating with government officials on behalf of their bosses


Communicating with external customers and stakeholders

Leaders are frequently called upon to make presentations to the organization's external customers and stakeholders. Frequently, especially in proactive departments, those officers get out in the community to deliver presentations to: (1) inform and educate stakeholders about changes in how the department will operate; (2) gain public support for a fiscal issue, e.g., an upcoming bond referendum for the construction of a fire station; or (3) provide leadership communication for an upcoming fire safety program. Not infrequently, officers have to make presentations in response to the public's perception that services were not delivered appropriately or in a timely manner.

**Quick Review**

**Question:** Why do Fire & EMS leaders need to make presentations?

**Answer:** (1) They communicate upward and downward within their organizations, (2) they teach for their organizations, (3) they communicate with government officials on behalf of their leaders, and (4) they communicate with external customers and stakeholders.

## Target Audience Groups

The planning for your power presentation starts with determining what type of group you're going to address. Each group will have different needs and expectations and your presentation should acknowledge those qualities; people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.


Examples of different audiences include, but are not limited to:

- Groups within your organization such as employees or volunteer members.
- Superior officers. Because you belong to their "tribe" you probably have a degree of credibility starting out. You'll build upon that credibility and goodwill by getting them "tuned in" to WII-FM within the 5-minute window.

**Tip:** Respect the time of your bosses when communicating upward. Granville Toogood recommends that any upward communication last no longer than 18 minutes.

Because of your position in Public Safety you probably have a degree of credibility starting out with the following types of groups (table on next page). Build upon that credibility and good will by being prepared when you present. You'll also build credibility for your organization when you present good presentations to groups outside the organization.

| | |
|---|---|
| • Groups within your jurisdiction bodies, e.g., City Council or County Commissioners.<br>• Presentations to Allied Public Safety departments, e.g., local Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement, or Health Departments.<br>• Presentations to other departments of local government, e.g., Utilities, Social Services, or Budget Management departments.<br>• Presentations to members of state and federal governing bodies, e.g., legislators or their staffs. | • Presentations to members of state and federal agencies. These can include: regulatory agencies, e.g., OSHA or EPA; allied public safety agencies, e.g., State Police, U.S. Fire Administration, Department of Justice, or Department of Homeland Security.<br>• Presentations to external customers and stakeholders that can include: citizen groups, e.g., homeowner associations or PTA; business groups, e.g., Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau; or non-profit groups, e.g., the Red Cross or Salvation Army.<br>• Presentations to the media, e.g., television, radio, or newspapers, e.g., informational briefings at the scene of an emergency; informational briefings regarding proposed programs or projects affecting the community. |

**Examples of groups outside the organization to which Fire & EMS leaders would be called upon to deliver presentations.**

## Presentation Types and their Applicability

Now that we have a grasp of the different target audiences that you may be called upon to address as a middle manager, let's move on to the different types of presentations that we can use to best meet the needs of your audience.

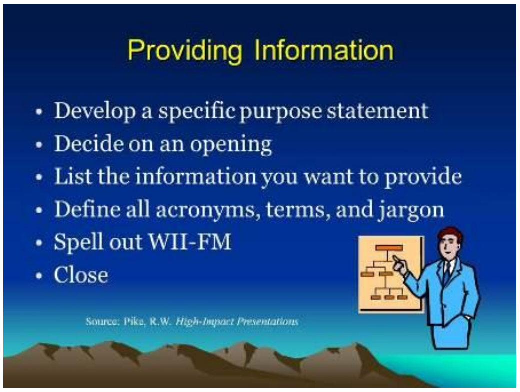
Robert Pike categorizes presentations into six distinctive types. Those categories are predicated upon the presenter's purpose and goal for delivering the presentation.

- Providing Information
- Teaching a Skill
- Reporting Progress
- Selling a Product, Service or Strategy
- Obtaining a Decision
- Solving a Problem

Let's take a closer look at each of the presentation types and the intended purpose for the use of each.

## Providing Information



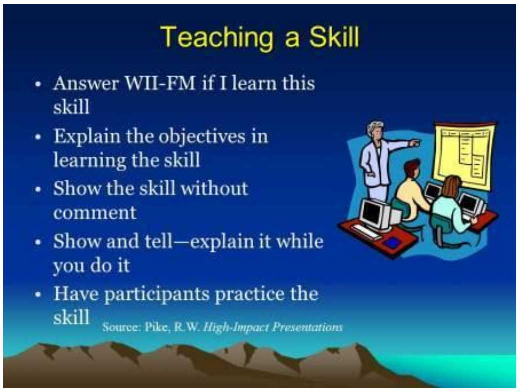

Your organization is hosting a regional training class and you need to brief the members of your organization who are working as staff for the event. You would use this type of presentation because you're looking to provide them with schedules, task assignments, communications strategy, how to handle logistical issues, etc.

The tasks necessary to develop this type of presentation include:

- ✓ Develop a specific purpose statement so that everyone understands the purpose of the presentation.
- ✓ Decide on an opening that appeals to their need to know. Example: You're going to address a senior citizens group on cooking safety, so your opening might be, "Today four senior citizens will die in a fire and another eight will suffer burn injuries from a fire. The vast majority of these deaths and injuries can be prevented. I'm here and you're here today because we don't want you to be one of those 12 people tomorrow."
- ✓ List the information you want to provide. Make sure to provide handout information to reinforce your points and to provide them with a "take away" from the presentation.
- ✓ Define all acronyms, terms, and jargon, especially when addressing groups outside your organization because they may not have the requisite knowledge to understand the context of your message.
- ✓ Spell out WII-FM
- ✓ Close with any follow up action they can take to learn more about the information. Thank them for their attendance.

## Teaching a Skill



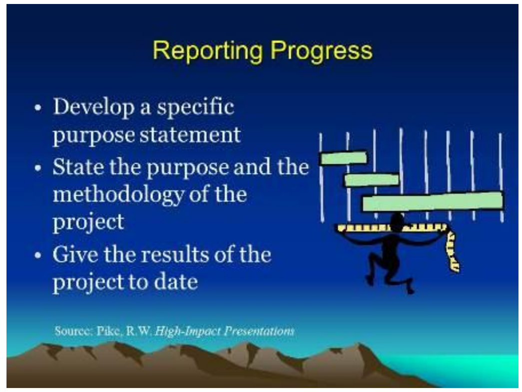

This is the type of presentation that most of us are very familiar with: teaching people. Many times it involves hands-on demonstration with equipment pertinent to their job.

Develop this type of presentation by:

- ✓ Answering WII-FM: How will my learning this skill enable me to do my job more safely, effectively or efficiently?
- ✓ Explain the objectives in learning the skill so that they begin seeing the linkage back to WII-FM.
- ✓ Show the skill without comment so that they observe what good performance looks like.
- ✓ Show and Tell—Explain the skill while you do it so that they understand the background. Adult learners, in particular, learn faster when they understand why something is done a particular way.
- ✓ Have participants practice the skill in a non-testing environment that gives them plenty of opportunity to develop mastery of the newly acquired skill.
- ✓ Provide feedback to the student on how well they are learning the new skill. Praise good performance and encourage improvement on identified areas for improvement.
- ✓ Review all the pertinent steps for the skill and reinforce the necessity for developing mastery of the skill, e.g., it improves safety or effectiveness when done correctly.
- ✓ Connect the skill to its use on the job. This reinforces the WII-FM concept that you started the instruction with earlier.
- ✓ Adult learners in particular formulate questions in their own mind when they are learning. Answering those questions is crucial to them truly understanding the new skill and its applicability.
- ✓ Have participants plan how they will use the skill on the job. Ask them, "What will you do differently back in the workplace now that you've been exposed to this learning?"

## Reporting Progress




This type may appear to be similar to the **Providing Information** type of presentation, yet it is different. This type of presentation is best used when you're goal is to have a positive influence on the attitude of your audience towards an existing or in-progress project or program, e.g., procurement of a new piece of fire apparatus or the implementation of a problem-oriented fire prevention strategy.

Your goal is that you want them to feel good about the progress to date or to better understand the lack of progress and what's being done to get things "back on track."

- ✓ Develop a specific purpose statement for this presentation today.
- ✓ State the purpose and the methodology of the project. Who assigned you the project and how are you going about working on your objectives?
- ✓ Give the results of the project to date. Which objectives have been accomplished? What's your progress on remaining objectives?
- ✓ List any concerns than have arisen that may have a negative influence on the achievement of your objectives.
- ✓ Suggest or elicit action ideas to resolve the concerns from members of the audience.
- ✓ Define who is responsible for action steps and set deadlines.

## Selling a Product, Service or Strategy


This type of presentation is most applicable when you're goal is to have a positive influence on the attitude of your audience towards a proposed project or program, e.g., gaining public support for the replacement of a fire station or gaining officer support for a problem-oriented policing strategy.

Your goal is to leave the presentation with their support for the object of your presentation.

- ✓ Get the listener's attention—address the WII-FM question for your audience.
- ✓ Maintain the listener's interest by focusing on information that they need to become informed and educated enough about your subject so that they will support the subject.
- ✓ Create desire in the listener to become involved in the success of the program or project. Let them know how they can participate and get others involved.
- ✓ Action Step: We ask the listener to make a "buying decision". Don't say you hope that they'll support the bond referendum for the replacement station. Instead, say, "With your support and the support of others in the community we can make this new station a reality and continue to provide prompt emergency response to the Branchwood community."

## Obtaining a Decision


Your boss tasked you with leading a project to develop next year's training schedule for the department. You're meeting with your colleagues to gain their support for the results of your group's work.
This type of presentation would contain the information the group needs to render such a decision, e.g., the required training topics; the non-required, but good to know topics; available resources; and time constraints.

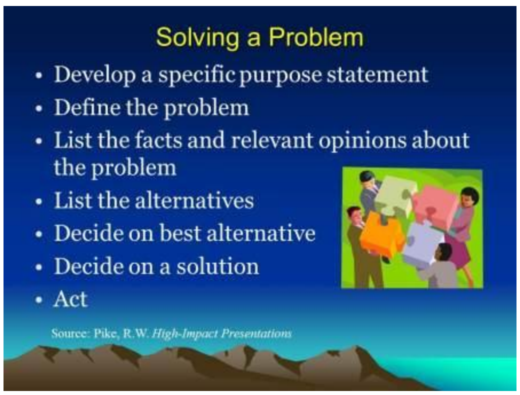
You would conclude with a proposed training schedule and ask for their approval. When creating this type of presentation, make sure to:

- ✓ Develop a specific purpose statement for this presentation.
- ✓ List the decision-making criterion by describing for the attendees how you conducted your work so that they are informed and educated on the process.

- ✓ List the alternatives that were considered during the process, especially those that were considered, but ultimately dismissed. Get them out there up front because members of the audience have them in their mind.
- ✓ Present a comparison of the alternatives. A great strategy here is to use a matrix to list the alternatives with the pros and cons for each alternative. Use this to help "lead" them down the same path of understanding that you or your team followed to reach your conclusions.
- ✓ Finish up your presentation by presenting your recommendation and the action steps necessary to make that recommendation a reality. If you've addressed the previous steps adequately, you'll have persuaded your audience to support the recommendation just like you persuaded yourself.

## Solving a Problem




An analysis of fire call data indicates a dramatic increase in the number of suspicious fires in a particular section of the community and the Fire Chief has tasked you with leading an inter-agency task force to address the problem. You're going to need a presentation that essentially helps you get the group's work off to a good start.

Your presentation would need to have a problem statement and supporting data—the information you've already got a grasp of, but which the other group members will be ignorant of at this point—and possible solutions for consideration.

Your goal would be to have everyone on the task force as informed and educated as you are about the problem so that the task force can effectively and efficiently meet its challenge.

At the same time, you're going to be planning a presentation that focuses on obtaining solution for a problem and for that you need to engage your audience as quickly as possible. Therefore, it is useful to keep the informative portion of the presentation—your opening section—brief, yet informative.

For this type of presentation it is important to have easel pads and markers, or a whiteboard with markers, so that as members of the task force start working you can capture that work. Otherwise, this presentation can easily deteriorate into an endless discussion where nothing gets accomplished. This is the type of presentation, that when done poorly, gives meetings a bad name.

> **Tip #1:** Recruit a member of your audience to function as a recorder so that you stay focused on keeping the presentation on schedule and on target.
>
> **Tip #2:** If you're using a white board to collect information, take a photograph of all work before erasing so that you have a permanent record of the group's efforts.

Action Steps for planning a presentation to find a solution to a problem include:

- ✓ Develop a specific purpose statement of why this group has been formed so that you start with everyone on the "same page" and heading in the right direction. Use the purpose statement to set the goal for the meeting.
- ✓ Define the problem so that everyone has a common understanding of what the group has been tasked with accomplishing.
- ✓ List the facts and relevant opinions about the problem so that from the start all team members are working from the same body of background information.
- ✓ Facilitate a "brain-storming session" with the meeting participants to compile a list all the alternative solutions for the problem. Have a scribe capture the group's ideas on easel paper or a whiteboard.
- ✓ Facilitate group decision-making to decide on the best alternative solution. Consider using a technique such as Nominal Group Technique for this part of the process.
- ✓ Decide on how to implement the agreed upon solution. List the action steps, responsibilities, and deadlines for all to see.
- ✓ Close with a strong group statement on how the group will go forth to take action on the solution.

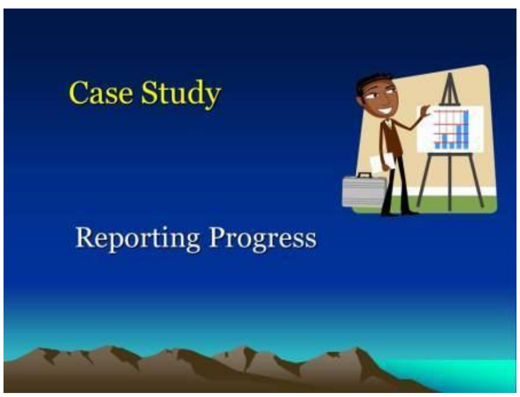
**Quick Review**

**Question:** What would be the most appropriate type of presentation when meeting with a group of developers who are concerned about the financial impact of a residential sprinkler ordinance before city council?

**Answer: Selling a Product, Service or Strategy**. They already have a position—they believe that sprinklers are costly and they don't want to pass that cost on to their buyers—so your goal is to influence their position to support the ordinance.

You want to really focus on the WII-FM for your presentation because residential sprinkler systems are a life-safety measure that can have a dramatic positive impact on residential fires, fires that account for 70-80 percent of structure fires nation-wide each year.

## Case Study—Creating a Presentation to Report Progress



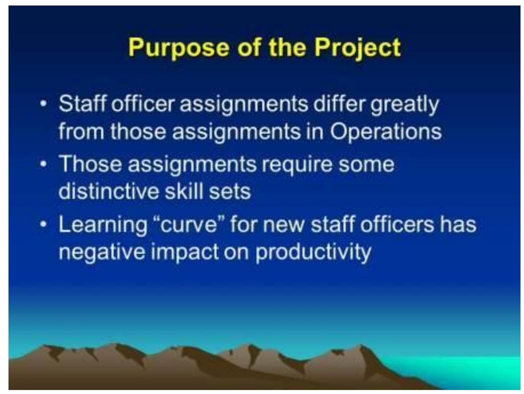

You are the leader for a group that was tasked by the Chief with designing a professional development program for staff officers. The group has an appointment to deliver their first progress report to the Chief and their deputies next week. For this meeting the group has chosen to create a presentation using the **Report Progress** outline.


**Your Group's Purpose Statement.** The target audience for your presentation will be the Chief, Deputy Chief, and the Division Heads for the Training, Communications, Planning, and Logistical Divisions. Your presentation starts with your Purpose Statement to ensure that everyone attending understands "Why" they are at this meeting.

A good purpose statement also helps establish the scope of the presentation, i.e., it's a meeting to inform and educate the attendee about how a project is proceeding. It's not a decision-making or problem solving meeting. The Chief will appreciate this function because it can help minimize attempts by others to pursue their own agendas during the presentation without the Chief necessarily having to make such a statement.

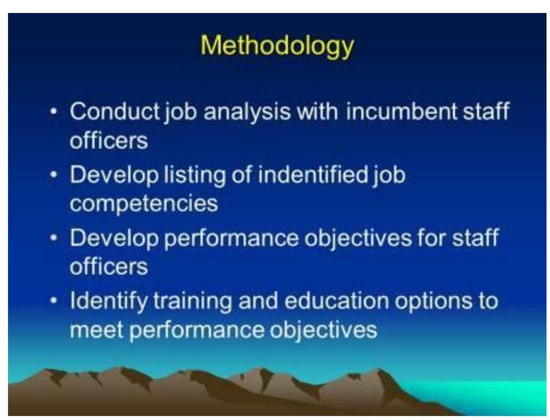
**The Purpose of the Project.** This section provides information to the attendees to help them understand the "Why?" regarding the project: Why has the Chief put this group together and tasked them with this work? Keep in mind, this is the first progress report and some of the attendees may not be familiar with this information yet.




Points that you should include in this section would include:

- Staff officer assignments differ greatly from those assignments in Operations.
- Those assignments require some distinctive skill sets that many new staff officers do not possess until they are assigned to a staff role and begin on-the-job training.
- The "learning curve" for a new staff officer is currently too "steep" and results in a loss of productivity for the department until the new staff officer acquires those new skills and learns how to do their job.

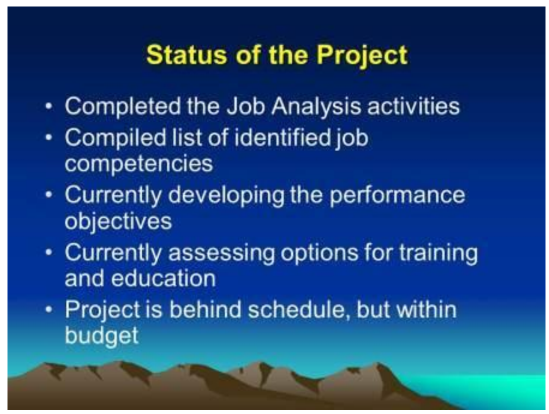
**Your Group's Methodology.** Here you would inform and educate the attendees regarding the course that the group has plotted to accomplish their mission. The information presented should help them understand the major tasks that the group has agreed to work on.



In essence, these are the group's enabling objectives.

- We decided to conduct a job analysis using interviews and focus groups with incumbent staff officers to learn what they do and how they do it.
- We will use that feedback to develop a listing of job competencies identified by the incumbents.
- We're going to use that listing of job competencies to develop performance objectives for staff officer professional development.
- We're going to identify training and education options available to develop the competencies required to meet the performance objectives.




**The Status of the Project.** Now you start getting to the "meat" of your group's presentation. This segment helps the presentation audience understand the progress that the group has made regarding their stated objectives.

**Completed Objectives**

- ✓ We've completed the Job Analysis activities with incumbent staff officers
- ✓ We've completed compiling a list of job competencies as identified by incumbent officers through our interviews and focus groups.

**Work in Progress**

- ❒ We're now working on developing the performance objectives that address the job competencies and that will ultimately be incorporated into the performance appraisal process.
- ❒ We're currently assessing training and education options that currently exist to minimize the amount of course development we may need to do and to avoid redundancy with existing programs that will meet our needs.

The project is currently behind schedule, but within budget.

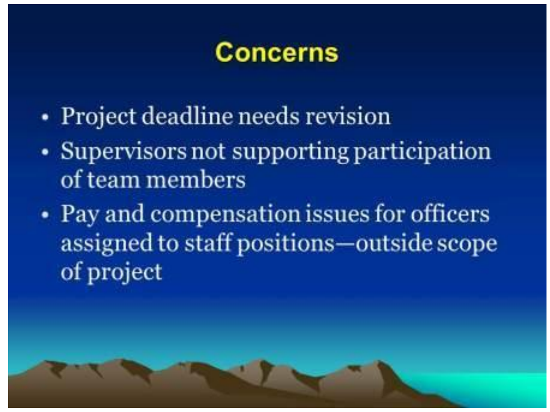
 

**The Results of the Project to Date.**
We interviewed all staff officers currently serving as work unit managers. We also conducted a total of five focus groups that involved a total of 24 junior officers serving in staff positions.


This is the list of Job Competencies that we've compiled thus far:

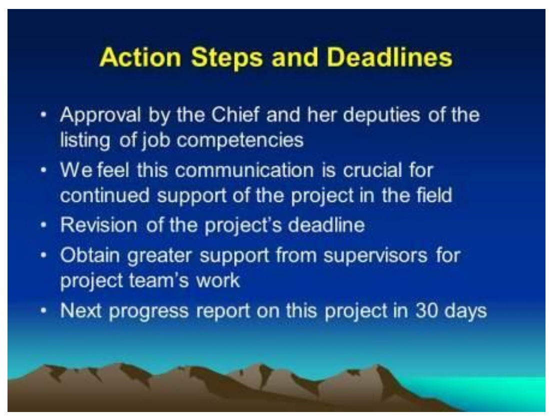
- Staff officers have to develop patience. Project work and program management take time and job satisfaction is many times delayed, unlike the more immediate satisfaction that occurs in line functions, e.g., when an emergency incident is well managed.
- Staff officers must know how to establish project goals and objectives and how to manage timelines and resources.
- Staff officers need to communicate using oral and written communication skills on a daily basis.
- Staff officers organize and conduct meetings that require creation of agendas, managing meetings, disseminating meeting information, and providing status reports upward and downward in the organization.
- They must understand how to collect and analyze data, how to use process management and flowcharting skills, and have the ability to use quality improvement tools and techniques.
- Using a computer. Staff officers must have the ability to effectively use Word, Excel, PowerPoint and the Internet, especially the latter for research work.
- Incident Command System Skills. They must have a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the ICS positions within the General Staff and Command Staff and be able to perform those jobs on emergency scenes in support of line officers in tactical ICS positions.




**Concerns of the Project Group.** Here your team communicates to its audience—particularly the decision-makers present, e.g., the Chief—about any issues or problems that have arisen that will hinder their ability to complete the assigned project.

- The team is concerned that the assigned deadline is not attainable now that they are into their work.
- Team members are not receiving adequate support from their supervisors to work on the project, i.e., the time to meet and time to work on assigned tasks back in their workplace.
- Another issue has arisen that, while related to the group's work, is outside the scope of the project, i.e., the pay and compensation for officers assigned to staff positions.

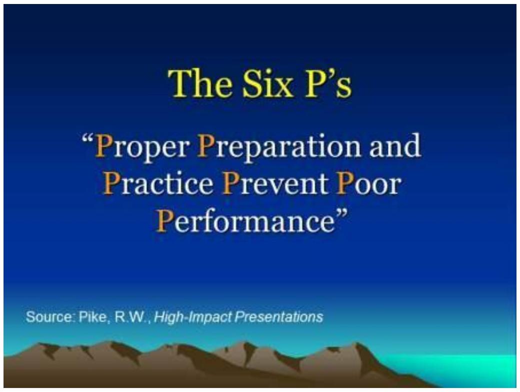



**Action Steps and Deadlines.** In conclusion, the team points out key actions and behaviors for both team members and the target audience as work on the project continues.

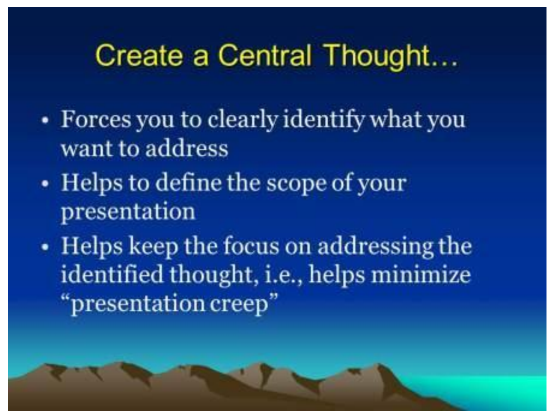
- ❒ The Chief and their deputies need to approve the listing of job competencies within the next two weeks so that we can communicate this information to the organization.
- ❒ We feel this communication is crucial in our efforts to continue obtaining feedback and keeping our people informed about the progress of this project.
- ❒ Revision of the project's deadline is required for success.
- ❒ Supervisors must provide a higher level of support to their direct reports who are team members if the project is to succeed.
- ❒ We will deliver our next progress report on this project in 30 days.

## Planning Your Presentation




If you don't have a destination, any road will get you there. You're leading your audience on a "journey", e.g., to learn something, make a decision, or work on a project, so they are looking to you as the presenter to be their "leader".




Once you've determined your target audience and the appropriate type of presentation to best serve their needs, you need to determine what needs to be included in the presentation. A good presentation has a strong central theme and so should your research in preparing your presentation.

This initial phase of your planning process is important because it will help get you focused on the "Why" and the "What" of your presentation, both of which are keys for you to be successful in getting your audience tuned into WII-FM within that first five minutes.

"Brain-storming", either individually or in a group, is a great strategy for identifying what you need to include in your presentation.

Brain-storming is a creative activity that uses the right side of the human brain, i.e., the creative side. Each of us has a dominant side of our brain: right-brain-dominant people tend to be creative by nature, e.g., artists, musicians, or philosophers, while left-brain-dominant individuals are more linear in their thinking, e.g., mathematicians, engineers, or planners.

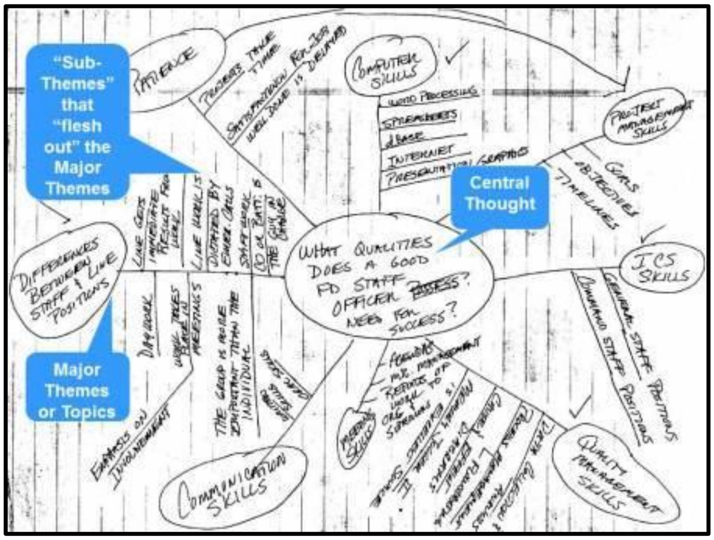
Each of us has the capacity to use our right-brain; it's just that those who are left-brain-dominant can only do "right brain" for a short period of time, typically only for four to five minutes, before the more logical left brain "kicks in" stopping the creative process. "Mind-Mapping" is a brain-storming technique that can help keep this from happening resulting in more ideas coming forth.


Steps to "Mind-Mapping". "Mind-Mapping" can work well either individually or in groups to accomplish your goal which is to ensure you're including everything you need in your presentation. (If you are facilitating a group's use of "Mind-Mapping", recruit one of the group members to be the session recorder, i.e., the person capturing the group's ideas on easel paper or a white board).

- ❒ Begin by identifying a central theme and putting it in the middle of the paper or easel paper. What is the subject or issue that your presentation needs to address? What will help "tune" your audience to "radio station" WII-FM?
- ❒ When using with a group, have the scribe jot down one or two words that capture the person's thought. Later, you can go back and have the person elaborate more on their idea so that everyone else fully understands their thought.
- ❒ When capturing the main themes off the Central Thought, if someone can say it, jot it down on the paper or board. Don't let participants try to explain or elaborate on their idea: there will be plenty of time for that later. The right brain "likes" speed!
- ❒ Avoid going around the central theme in either a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction. Any "appearance" of organization or process gives the "left brain" the "idea" that it's time for it to take over: when that happens the right brain disengages and creativity comes to a halt. "Mind-Mapping" helps keep everyone in their "right-brain", i.e., their creative mode, as long as possible.
- ❒ When participants "throw out" items related to something already listed, post it on the "stem" of the appropriate main theme.
- ❒ Keep the session "short and sweet". Most "left-brainers" can only stay in their "right brain" for about four to five minutes. After that their "left brain" wants to start organizing what's already been listed.

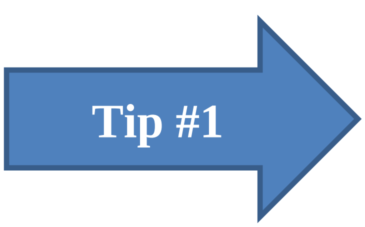
**Sample "Mind-Map"**

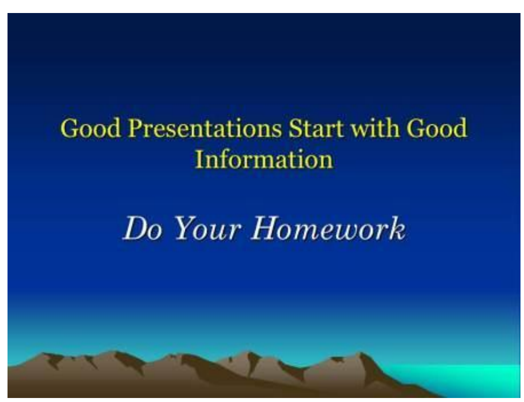



In our example, a team was assigned a project by the Chief to develop professional development standards for staff officers, i.e., those officers working in Training, Communications, Logistics and Planning Divisions of the organization.

- ✓ They started their "Mind-Map" with the **Central Thought**, "What qualities does a good staff officer need for success?"
- ✓ Next they conducted the "brain-storming" to identify the **Major Themes** that had connection to their Central Thought: those are the "spokes" off the "hub".
- ✓ The final step involved taking each Major Theme and conducting a "mini-brain-storming" segment to identify **Sub-Themes**.

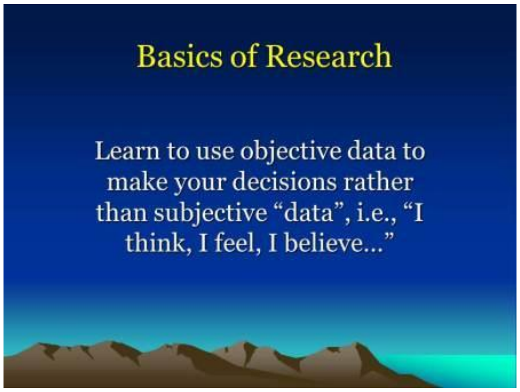
This also helps you develop a scope for your presentation. Have you ever been at a presentation where the presenter tried to cover too many topics in too little time? I know that I have. Inevitably, they've spent too much time on the first couple of topics only to find themselves rushing through the remainder of their material. Creating your central thought will help keep your efforts focused on collecting information that will be relevant to your presentation.

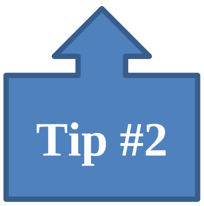


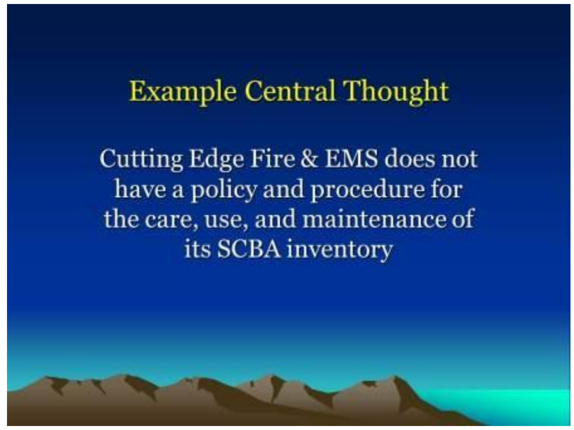
After you have your central thought clearly identified, develop three to five research questions to assist you in defining your information needs.



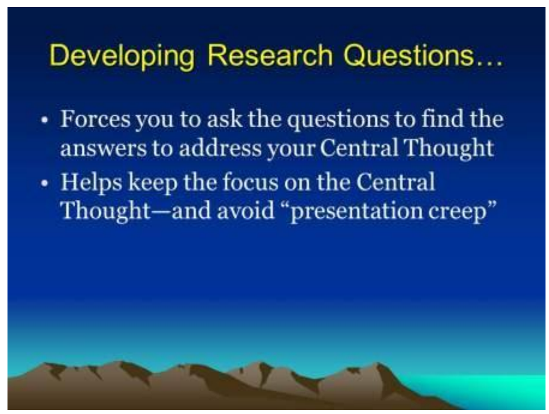



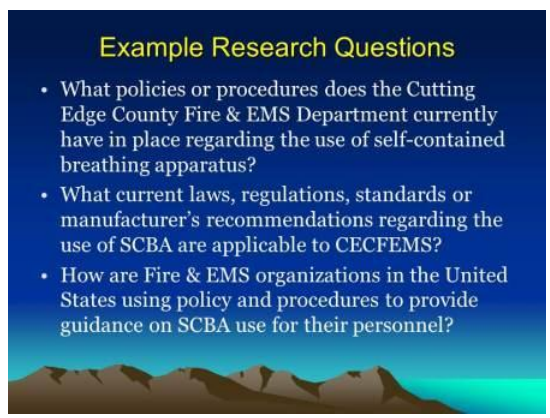

Research questions should help guide the researcher to obtain the information they'll need for their presentation. They will help him or her to answer the questions that most people would have regarding the central theme:

- What's our current state?
- What are the statutory or regulatory requirements?
- What best practices exist elsewhere?



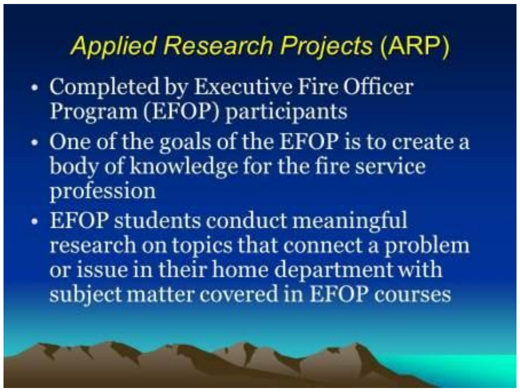

**Example of a central thought for a presentation to solve a problem. Here the presenter is focusing specifically on the lack of a policy for the care, use, and maintenance of SCBA. Though there are many other aspects regarding SCBA, e.g., training or purchasing, they will not be included in this presentation.**



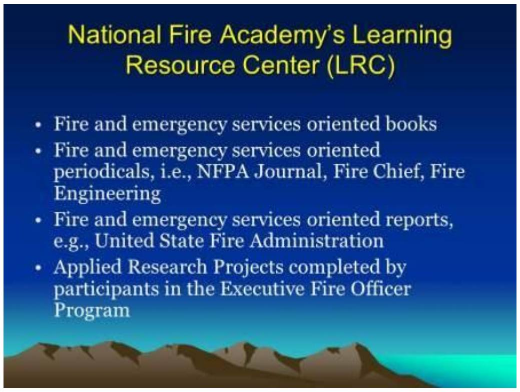

 

## Sources of Information




The compilation of Applied Research Projects (ARP) that have been completed by students in the NFA's *Executive Fire Officer Program* truly have become the "body of knowledge" for the fire service that was envisioned by the program's creators, Charles "Chuck" Burkell and Dr. Burt Clark, PhD. The completed ARPs included in the collection address virtually every aspect of administration and operation of today's fire and rescue department.


**The Learning Resource Center (LRC) on the campus of the National Emergency Training Center's National Fire Academy provides a wealth of informational sources for the fire officer who's conducting research. (http://www.lrc.fema.gov/index.htm)**

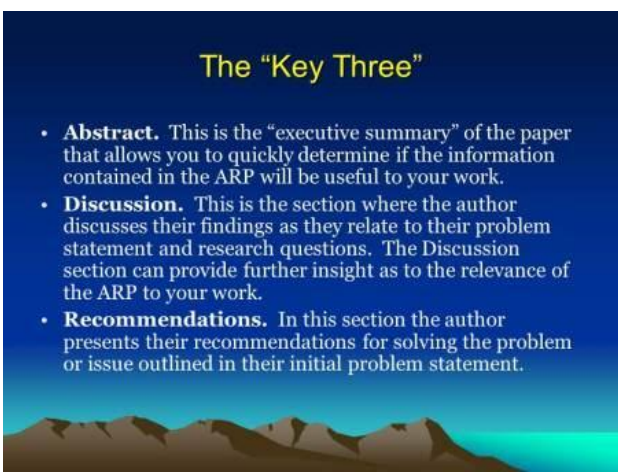




**Featured topics**

- Emergency Management - Library Resources Guide : FEMA doctrine, ebooks, journal articles and more
- Fire and EMS - Library Resources Guide: browse fire and emergency services topic guides and studies, fire histories, fire prevention news digest and public education exchange and more.
- Fire service history hub: wide range of materials of historical interest to the fire service community
- Guides to finding fire and all-hazards information : all-hazards pathfinders, major disaster bibliographies and more
- Resources on the web : eBooks, directories, RSS feeds, journal article databases, codes and more
- USFA History Station : growing collection of finding aides and links to USFA historical materials and reports

You can search for ARPs using the LRC's On-line Card Catalog; once you've located the ARP for the topic that you're looking for, you can view the ARP's abstract and can in many cases download a copy of the ARP in PDF file format.




You can accelerate you research of an individual ARP by focusing on the "Key Three" sections of the document:

- The Abstract
- The Discussion
- The Recommendations


The ability to search the vast amount of information on the Internet using search engines has revolutionized the way that researchers can conduct their work (I'd have finished my four ARPs in half the time if I'd had the Internet available to me!).

A word of caution: Don't believe everything you find on the Internet (I know, you're shocked!).

When you search for information you're going to find lots of it . . . but is it accurate and reliable? You will have to determine that for yourself, and the **CRAAP** (Currency Relevance Authority Accuracy and Purpose) Test can help.

The CRAAP Test (table on next page) is a list of questions you can ask in order to determine if the information you have is reliable. Please keep in mind that the following list of questions is not static or complete. Different criteria will be more or less important depending on your situation or need. So, what are you waiting for? Is your web site credible and useful, or is it a bunch of . . . ?!

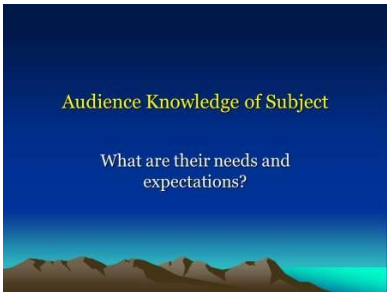
## CRAAP Evaluation Criteria

| | |
|---|---|
| **Currency:** ***The timeliness of the information.*** | • When was the information published or posted?<br>• Has the information been revised or updated?<br>• Is the information current or out-of-date for your topic?<br> Are the links functional? |
| **Relevance:** ***The importance of the information for your needs.*** | • Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?<br>• Who is the intended audience?<br>• Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e. not too elementary or advanced for your needs)?<br>• Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use?<br>• Would you be comfortable using this source for a research paper? |
| **Authority:** ***The source of the information.*** | • Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?<br>• Are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given?<br>• What are the author's qualifications to write on the topic?<br>• Is there contact information, such as a publisher or email address?<br> Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? examples: **.com** (commercial) **.edu** (educational**)** **.gov** (government) **.org** (non-governmental organizations) **.net** (commercial) |
| **Accuracy:** ***The reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the informational content.*** | • Where does the information come from?<br>• Is the information supported by evidence?<br>• Has the information been reviewed or refereed?<br>• Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?<br>• Does the language or tone seem biased and free of emotion?<br>• Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors? |
| **Purpose:** ***The reason the information exists.***<br><br>Key:  indicates criteria is for Web only | • What is the purpose of the information? to inform? teach? sell? entertain? persuade?<br>• Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?<br>• Is the information fact? opinion? propaganda?<br>• Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?<br>• Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases? |

**Source: Evaluating Information—Applying the CRAAP Test, Meriam Library, California State University, Chico, California.**

## Meeting the Needs of Your Audience

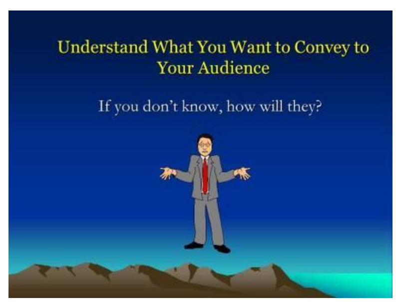



What are the needs and expectations of your audience? The more you know and understand them during your planning for your presentation, the better your chances of meeting them early in your presentation—the key to helping them tune in to WII-FM.

Meet with the host or organizer of the event to gather background information on your target audience. Ask them what their expectations are and those of others who will be attending the presentation.

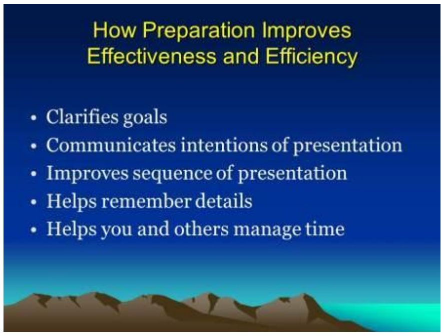
Do some research on your target audience when preparing your presentation. Visit their website, Facebook® page, or get a copy of their newsletter to gather background on the group. This type of background work can also help you gain perspective on some of the previously discussed areas, i.e., similarities you both have, their attitude towards the subject, etc.

Make sure that you have a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish so that you make efficient and effective use of their time and yours. If you don't know, how will they? Nobody likes going on a trip that has no destination, direction, or leadership. Most people spend too much time sitting through unproductive meetings and presentations.




**P**lanning, **P**reparation, and **P**ractice will make your presentation the exception and they'll appreciate it.




By clarifying your goals up front, you will make the most efficient use of your time and you'll have a greater opportunity to reach your goal. Preparation helps you to:

- Communicate the intentions of your presentation. It helps you communicate the "Why" and the "What" for your audience. (Helps get them tuned into WII-FM)
- Improves the sequence of your presentation. Your planning helps you develop the "map" to ensure that your presentation has an effective beginning, middle, and ending.
- Remember the details. This is critical if your presentation contains technical information or if the group needs to make decisions.
- Manage your time and that of your audience. Time is a valuable commodity for your audience, especially when communicating upward to your bosses. Your delivery of a well-planned presentation demonstrates your respect for the time your audience has dedicated to you and your presentation.

## Presentation Time Management

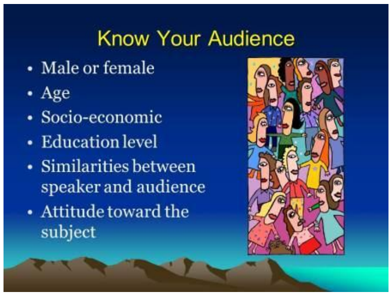
How important is good time management when making a presentation? Research on presentations has shown that audiences can only "stay connected" for 18 minutes, so plan on keeping your presentation within that 18-minute "window". (That window is likely only getting smaller in our electronically connected world where people can't go more that four or five minutes without checking their smartphone).

> **Tip:** When teaching a class or other extended presentation, "change up" the presentation, e.g., take a break, change speakers, or conduct an activity, so that you "reset" the 18-minute "clock" for your attendees.

It's far better—and a sign that your presentation was a success—to have your audience ask you to stay longer and answer follow-up questions than to have them checking their e-mail on their smartphone or catching up on other work during a long and drawn out presentation that's not well developed.

## Get to Know Your Target Audience




Many presenters fail because they attempt to use a "one size fits all" presentation that does not take into account the unique needs and expectations of their target audience.

The following audience characteristics are generalizations, i.e., they do not necessarily apply to every audience, but they do have application for the majority of audiences. That's why they're accepted generalizations in the presentation world.

**Men and women receive and process information differently**. Men tend to be more receptive to information in graphic form with minimal text that gets to the point. Women tend to be more receptive to presentations that provide more textual information that enables them to process the information and gain context.

**Younger audiences** tend to have shorter attention spans and process information better when accompanied by graphics and video clips. Older audience members tend to be more comfortable with textual information accompanied by strong verbal skills on the part of the presenter.

**Socio-economic Status.** This audience factor and the next, Education Level, are very much related. To ensure that your message is well received and understood, ensure that written text in your presentation and your verbal communication are in synch with your audience's ability to comprehend. The average newspaper in the United States is written on an 8th grade reading level: take such a "cue" when developing your presentation.

**Education level.** At the same time, make sure that you're presentation is not at a level that's significantly below the comprehension level of your audience. This is particularly true when communicating to governmental bodies, e.g., the County Commissioners or Town Council, and community groups, e.g., PTA or homeowner associations. Such groups tend to have significant numbers of people who have formal education beyond high school, i.e., they've attended college and/or have attained college degrees.

**Similarities between speaker and audience.** Do they look like you? Talk like you? Have the same interests as you? If you are similar, that can work to you advantage in building trust and credibility between you and your audience, but it is not a given nor is it guaranteed: you must still earn it with your presentation. Also, don't "manufacture" a similarity where none exists: people can always spot a "fake".

> If you and your audience do not share similarities, you really have your work "cut out for you" in order to help them get tuned in to WII-FM. Look for ways to show that, while you and your audience may appear different on the "surface", there are some things you share. For example, you might point out that you and they do have one thing in common: you're both here today because of an interest in a common topic, e.g., preventing kitchen fires in the home.

**What do you think their attitude will be toward the subject?** Are they there because they want to learn about ways to protect their family from fires in the home? (Probably going to have a positive mood, yes?) Or are they present because they want to know why the fire station in their neighborhood is being closed due to budget cuts? (Probably going to be in a negative mood, no?) Strive to ensure that your mood and the tone of your presentation is a match for what you perceive their mood will be.

## The Presentation Environment


Though many times the following factors may be out of your control, you need to evaluate them ahead of time to ensure that you can overcome any obstacles that will hinder your audience from getting the most out of your presentation.

You'll want a room that's large enough to accommodate the size of your anticipated audience, but not too large. People tend to fill seats starting from the back of the room; make your room small enough so that the majority of seats throughout the room are filled before you begin your presentation.

When using visual aids to enhance your presentation, you'll want the room dark enough that your presentation graphics view well from all areas of the viewing audience. You'll want enough light, however, for you to see the faces of your audience—so you can make eye contact with them—and so your audience members can take notes.

Make sure you have everything you need to make your presentation and that everything works prior to the start time for your presentation. Develop a "presentation checklist" to ensure that you have the following resources:

- ❒ Computer
- ❒ Projector
- ❒ All necessary cables to connect your devices
- ❒ Electrical extension cords
- ❒ Projector screen or appropriate wall surface for projection of your presentation
- ❒ Two copies of your presentation's computer files: one on the computer and a backup on a portable storage media, e.g., CD-ROM disk or USB drive
- ❒ Sufficient number of copies of your handouts (better to have a few too many than not enough)

You don't necessarily have to provide all of these things, but it's your responsibility to ensure that they are in place and ready to go if your sponsor has provided them for you.

## Room Setup

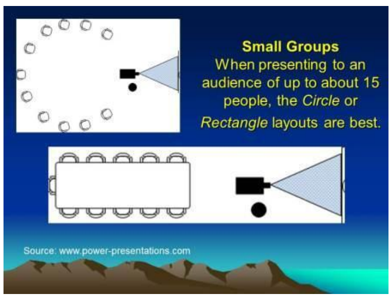
An important factor often overlooked when presenting to an audience is the seating arrangement at the place for presentation. That's because the room layout can have a high impact on the way the audience experiences and responds to your presentation, and accordingly has an influence on the way you need to plan your content and organize yourself.

> **Resource:** *Presenting to an Audience: How Choose the Best Seating Layout*. www.power-presentations.com

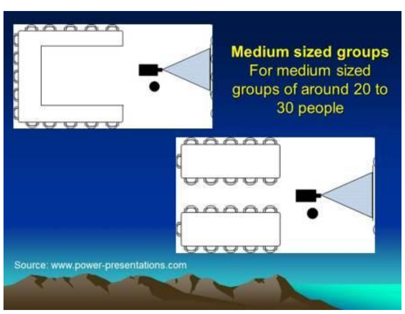
To help you decide the best seating arrangement, here are some examples with suggestions on the seating plans for different presentation events. When deciding on seating arrangement, you should consider four factors:

- ❒ Audience size;
- ❒ Anticipated level of interaction between audience members and the presenter;
- ❒ Whether audience members will be taking notes; and
- ❒ The duration of the event.




When presenting to an audience of up to about 15 people, the Circle or Rectangle layouts are best. Both layouts are good if interaction between participants is required as audience members can easily see each other from where they sit.

Typical examples are informal discussion groups (Circle layout) or business meetings (Rectangle layout). The Rectangle layout is also better if people need a flat surface to take notes or for drinks.

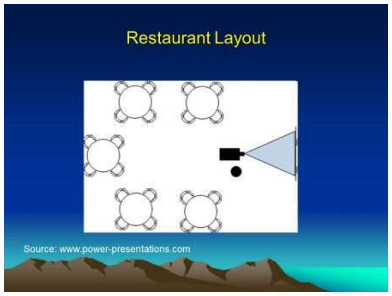


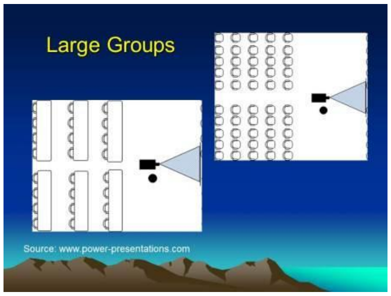

For medium sized groups of around 20 to 30 people, a better solution would either be the Open Square, aka, “horseshoe” or Block layout. Use the Open Square layout (left) when presenting to an audience of this size, especially if attendees need to interact with each other. People usually like to see each other when they talk as body language accounts for a significant portion of what we communicate.

The Block (right) arrangement has the disadvantage that people on the inside have to turn round to see the presentation, which can be irritating if the presentation is longer than an hour or so. It's okay, however, if the presentation is secondary to the proceedings, for example if people are in discussion groups, only occasionally stopping to look at the presentation.

If you intend to give a presentation where you want the audience to interact closely with each other while working on some activities, e.g. problem solving or a staff development training day, the best choice may be the Restaurant Layout.




When presenting to an audience of more than 30 people the Classroom (L) or Theater (R) layout maybe your only option. Interaction between participants is limited as audience members are all facing in the same direction. This is something you should be aware of particularly if you have a question and answer session. If you are using sound amplification equipment you should have a microphone available for attendees to use when asking questions so that everyone can hear the question. If you can't provide a microphone, you should repeat any questions to ensure everyone has heard clearly before you provide your answer.

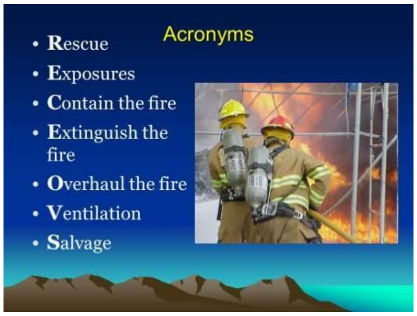
## Organizing Your Presentation's Information

Once you've identified what you want to include in your presentation, the next step in the planning process involves the organization of your information using one of the six presentation outline types. Within each outline type, however, you'll want to use different approaches to organize the material so that it [the information] appeals to the "left brain", i.e., that side of the brain that "appreciates" logic and organization of thoughts.


**Listing** items can be useful when you want to ensure (1) all items are covered, (2) you want to present information in groups by priority or (3) you want to emphasize or highlight particular items or pieces of information.

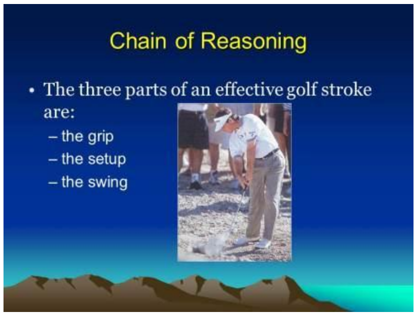
 

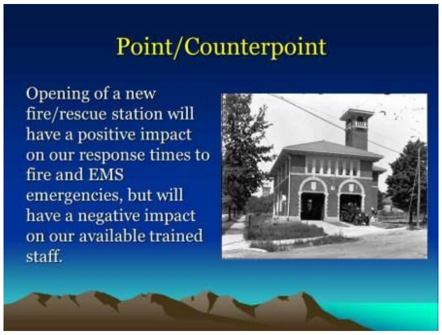
Use **Chronological Sequencing** as an organizing technique when it is important that information is covered or presented in chronological order.


**Acronyms** are a very useful tool for helping people to remember information, particularly in the teaching environment. Here we use the acronym RECEOVS to teach students to remember the 7 Fundamental Steps of Firefighting.

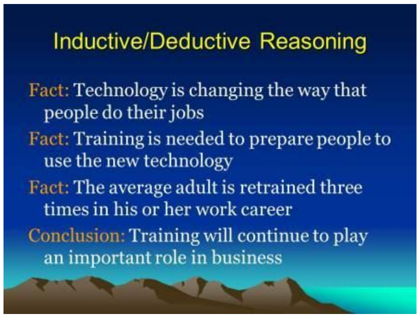
**Chain of Reasoning** is useful to illustrate how a group of tasks or actions are interrelated.




**Point/Counterpoint** is a useful organizing strategy when one of the goals of your presentation is to engage your audience is discussion or problem solving. Doing so, you help audience members see and understand all of the information related to the topic and how the information is interrelated.

The **Inductive/Deductive Reasoning** technique helps you to inform and educate your audience as to how you came to a particular conclusion on the subject. Using this technique helps you to explain your thought process and is useful when working with a group where one of your goals is to obtain their support for a concept or idea.



## Using Graphics to Support Your Presentation: Principles and Guidelines

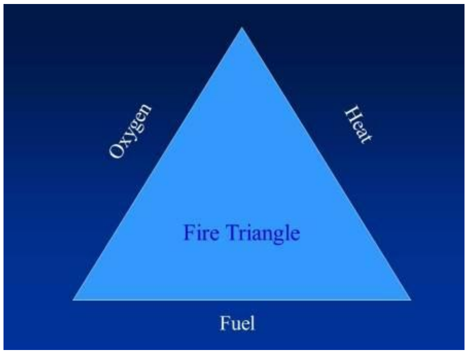
Why Use Graphics? Just take a look around you and you will see graphics being used to convey messages everywhere you look. The USA Today newspaper revolutionized the layout of newspapers. CNN and Headline News had the same affect when they introduced high tech graphics and multiple sources of information on the same television screen.


You present a more professional image when you support your presentation with visual media, e.g., slides containing text, photographs, video clips, etc., because that's how successful organizations—public and private sectors—communicate face-to-face with customers, clients and employees. When you use the same methods and techniques you cast yourself and your organization in a more professional light.

You enable your audience to reach decisions more quickly because graphics allow you to present your information in several formats; people process information in different ways. Think of a well-designed website such as CNN.com LIVE: you, the viewer, have "control" over how you're receiving the information. You can watch and listen to the "talking heads", read the "news crawler" at the bottom of the page, or watch one of the other videos playing in one of the peripheral windows.

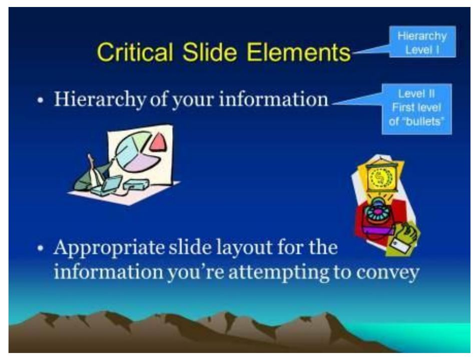
When you support your presentation with graphics, you create an environment that increases the audience's ability to retain information.

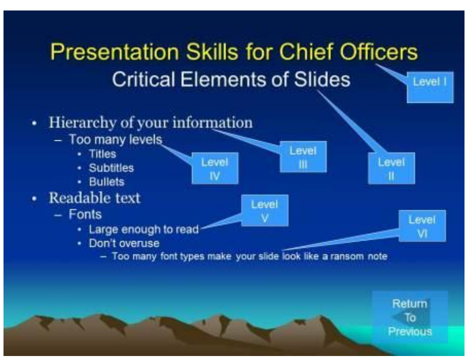



Here's a prime example of a very good graphic. The use of the geometric shape, i.e., the triangle, along with text, effectively communicates the concept of combustion by showing the critical relationship between the three required elements. (How many of us ever forgot this concept once we saw this visual display?).

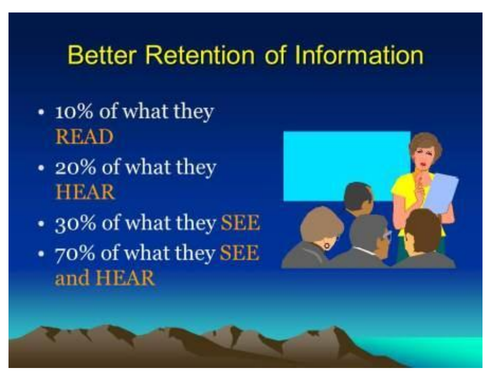
## Critical Slide Elements

**Hierarchy of your information.** The title, if you have one, constitutes Level 1, a subtitle would be Level 2, and the first level of a list of bullet items would be Level 3, and so on. You should strive to keep your "slide hierarchy" to no more than three levels; otherwise the on slide information becomes far too cumbersome and difficult for your audience to follow.




Here's an example of excessive slide hierarchy. Creating slides with this much "clutter" and information leads the members of your audience to engage the "services" of their "left brain"; instead of listening to you, they're trying to assimilate everything they are seeing and make sense of it.




Microsoft® PowerPoint™ and other presentation software packages offer a vast array of slide layouts, e.g., bullet slides, slides with title and sub-titles, slides with graphics, etc., so choose the appropriate slide layout for the information you're attempting to convey.

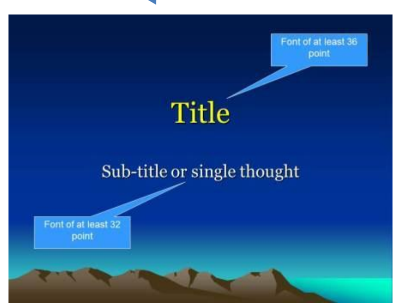
 


People tend to overuse the bullet list layout: only use that layout when you have three or more separate items or thoughts to list below the slide's title. Instead, use the Title/Sub-title layout; list your one or two points or thoughts in the Sub-title placeholder beneath the Title.

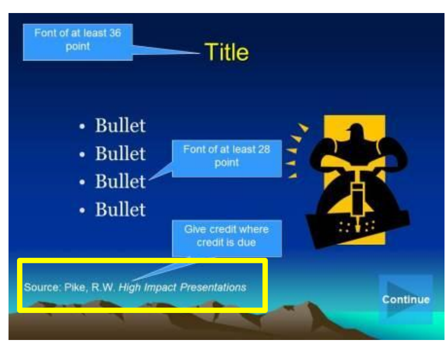
When you do use bullet points of text for your message, insert applicable clipart or photographs to the side of bulleted items to create a visual stimulus for your audience: it will help them retain the information better.



Ensure that you use font sizes and styles that your audience can read from the farthest point in the room. Generally speaking, a font of less than 28 point will be difficult to read except for the smaller venue.

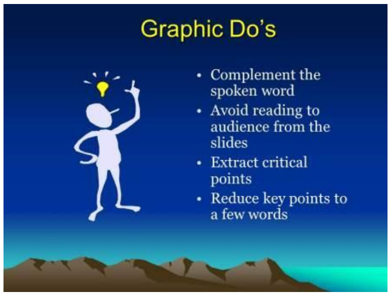

Make sure that when you are using the work of others in your presentation, e.g., text, photos, etc., that you cite the sources of your information. **Give credit where credit is due**.



## Do's and Don'ts When Using Graphics

Here are some key concepts to keep in mind as you develop the graphics to support your presentation. It is a sound practice to have a "disinterested" third party review your presentation graphics using these items as a checklist to discover errors or deficiencies in your production before your audience does it for you.




Remember: you are the leader for the presentation! Your slides should complement your spoken remarks, not display everything there is to say on the subject.

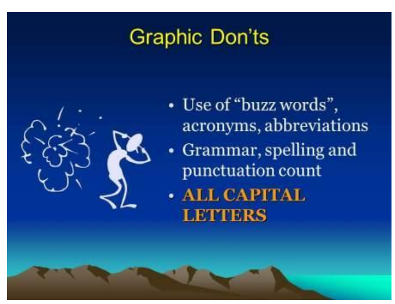
Avoid reading to your audience. Give them a few seconds to read the point you're about to cover, then "flesh out" the point for them with your remarks.

When using a bullet slide, use slide animation to only display one item at a time so that the audience stays focused on that point while you talk about it.
Make sure that the slide is capturing the critical points of the subject.

> **Tip:** When it comes to slide animations, keep things simple and consistent. Keep your target audience in mind when selecting slide transitions and sounds. (I know from experience my Fire Chief was ready to strangle after about the second slide transition that was accompanied by the sound of "breaking glass" during one of my presentations!)

Try to follow the "6 x 6" Rule for bullet slides: no more than six bulleted points, no more than six words per bullet point. Remember your font size: if PowerPoint reduces the size of the font for your bullet items below 28 point because you have too many lines, divide your bullet points equally between two slides.

> **Tip:** This should be a "red flag" that prompts you to examine whether or not you really need so many bulleted points. Remember the "6 x 6" Rule!




Avoid the use of "buzz words", acronyms, or abbreviations unless you are certain that your audience has a good understanding of their use. This is especially true when addressing groups outside of your organization.

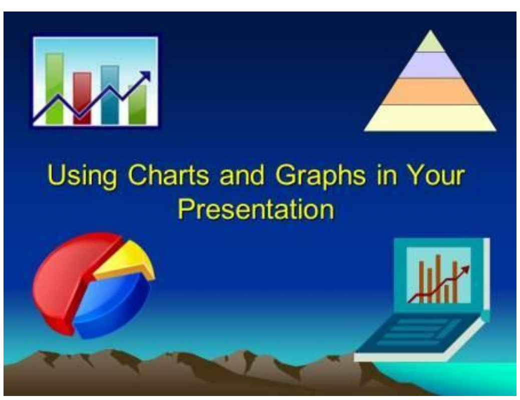
Grammar, spelling, and punctuation are very important. Make sure that all nouns and verbs agree and that you have not misspelled any words and that you're using the proper word, e.g., do you mean two, too or to? Audiences will pick up on these things, and when they do, they will start to doubt your credibility and professionalism.

> **Tip:** Don't rely on the spellchecker or grammar checker software on your computer: have someone else proof-read your material before you deliver it to your audience.

Avoid the use of **ALL CAPITAL LETTERS** (This is the written form of **SHOUTING!**) It dates back to the days of typewriters when capitalization was the only way to emphasize text. With the advent of computers we now have many other tools—different **fonts types**, font size, and **text coloring**—available to emphasis text when necessary.

Tip: When it comes to the number of slides in your presentation, less is more. Your goal should be to spend no more than 1-2 minutes on an individual slide; any longer than that means you have too much information on the slide. How will you know? Practice. Before making your presentation, you should go through it at least twice while timing yourself; that's the only way to know for sure.

## Using Charts and Graphs




Different charts, e.g., bar graphs, pie charts, or line graphs, are better for presenting specific types of information better than others. Avoid using only one type of chart, e.g., bar graphs, to present your numerical and statistical data; learning to use the most appropriate chart will help your audience to quickly grasp the "big picture" more quickly.

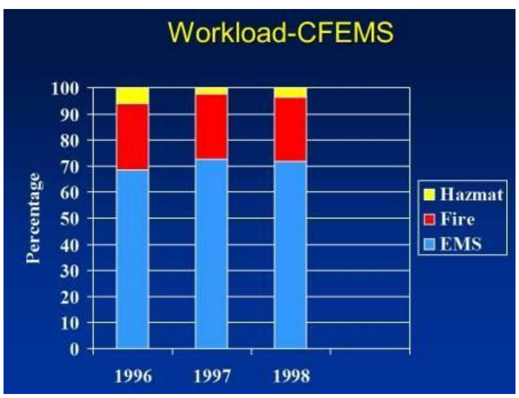
 

Your goal in using charts to present your data is that your audience "sees" that "big picture" without explanation from the presenter. If you have to "interpret" the slide for them you've not met your goal.


**Here a Pie Chart is used to show a breakdown of the total number of emergency incidents that the Seattle Fire Department responded to in 1990. The data on the individual pie slices show the percentage of the whole for each call type. The proportion of each slice provide the visual for how each call type "measures up" against the other types. This helps the presenter make their point: almost half of the calls Seattle Fire Department responded to in 1990 were False Alarms.**

If your data involves 100 percent of something, e.g., total alarms for a year broken down by call types, pie charts and stacked bar graphs help present your data well.

- Percentages
- Totals
- Sums
- Market share
- Population



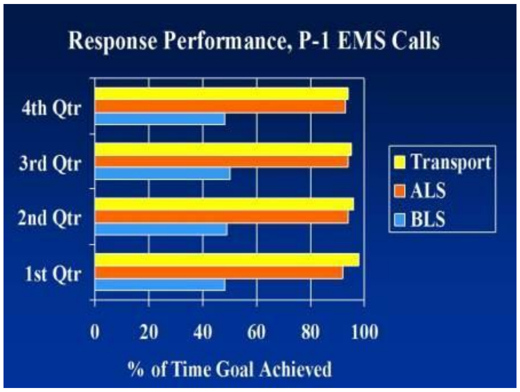

**In this example, the presenter was looking to show the audience the percentage of the whole for the three categories of calls, and show a three year trend.**

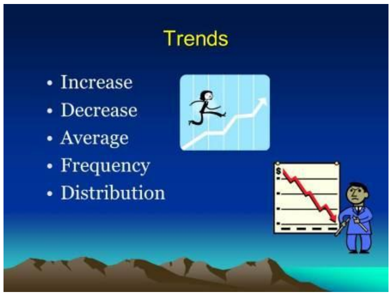
This is an example of how stacked graphs can be used to display the information relative to emergency response workload for a Fire & EMS organization, in this case Chesterfield County Fire & EMS Department outside of Richmond, Virginia.

When your want to present changes to several points of information, e.g., organizational performance goals by quarter of the calendar year, horizontal bar graphs can be very useful in communicating your data. Such a graphic would be useful when you want your audience to understand how the data changes over time.

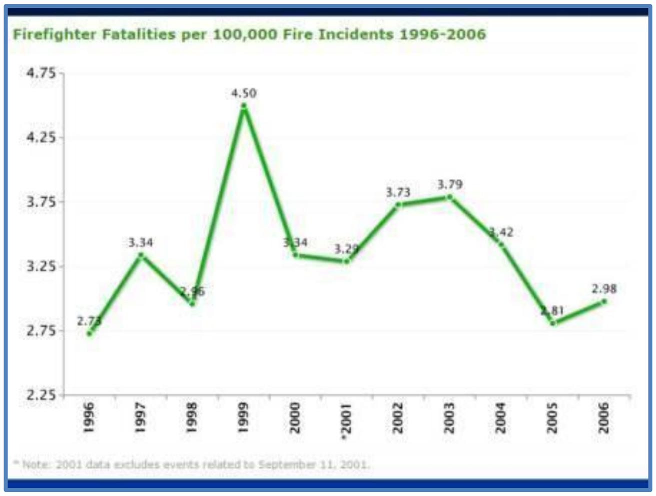
 

In this example, we use a horizontal bar graph to show how Chesterfield Fire & EMS has done at meeting EMS response time goals by quarter for the fiscal year listed for the arrival of the transport vehicle, first-response Basic Life Support, and Advanced Life Support at Priority 1 EMS Calls, e.g., multi-systems trauma, heart attacks, difficulty breathing, etc.



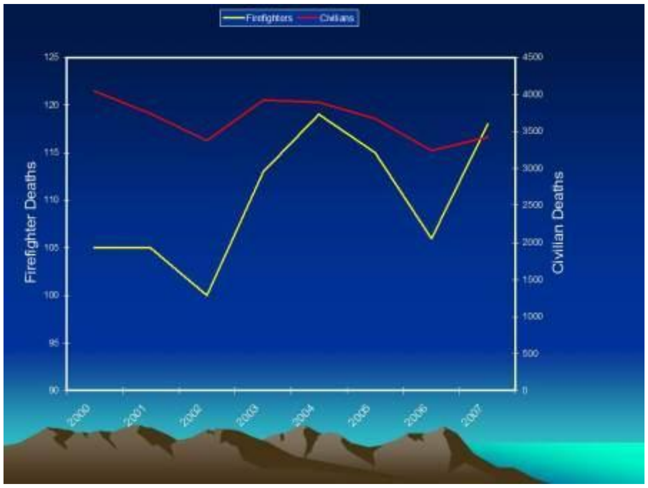

Generally, Line Graphs are the preferred chart type when presenting a single point of information over a period of time to help demonstrate a trend.


Here the presenter has plotted Firefighter Fatalities per 100,000 Fire Incidents for the ten-year period 1996-2006 using a Line Graph. We can see a "spike" in the data for 1999 which would be a clue to evaluate further data to determine the "why" and "what" behind the "spike"; also, what took place in 2000 to cause such a dramatic decrease after the "spike" in 1999.

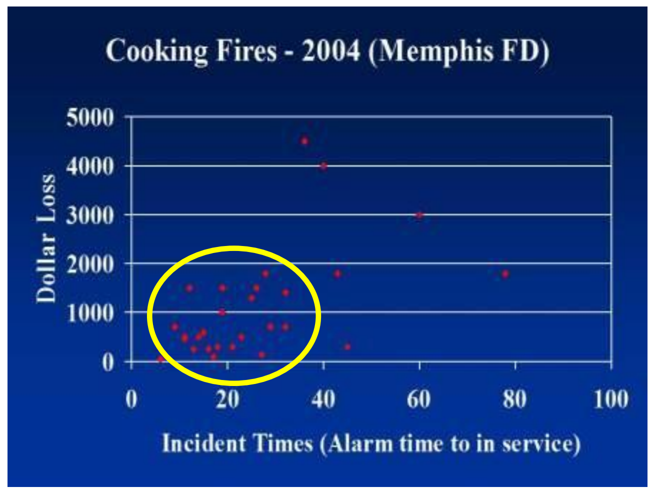
Then the data shows a "hump" from 2001 to 2004, i.e., another increase that requires further explanation. Line graphs do this very well, but be careful not to overdo the data. Display no more than three pieces of information on one line graph.




In this second example, the data compares the incidents of firefighter deaths and civilian deaths for the period 2000-2007; disturbingly the trend is clear that civilian deaths (red line) showed steady decline for the period while firefighter deaths (yellow line) have steadily shown an increase except for a decline in 2006.

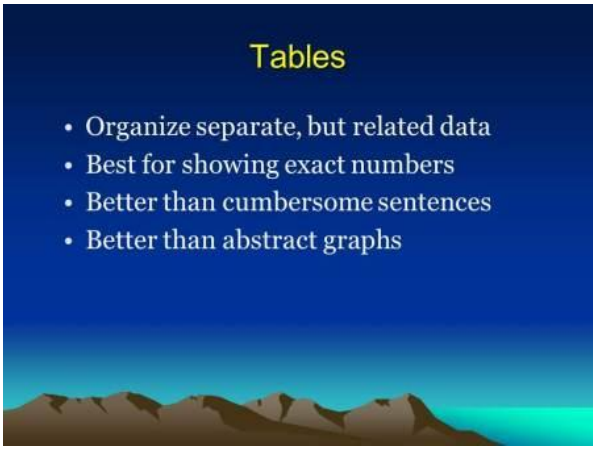
Use of Scatter Diagrams. This chart type can help your audience appreciate problem areas indicated by your data. In the example, the concentration of data points (yellow circle) indicate that for cooking fires where the Memphis Fire Department responded, property losses were kept below $2000 per incident when the department's incident times (receipt of alarm until units were back in service) were kept below 30 minutes.




**The message: early detection, prompt response, and efficient FD operations equate to effective operations, i.e., good outcomes.**


Use Lists (aka, "Bullet" Slides) to display trends or statistics. Lists satisfy the "left brain" and its need for organizing information for processing.




The use of tables to display data is a good presentation tool to use when you have the need to organize separate, but related data.

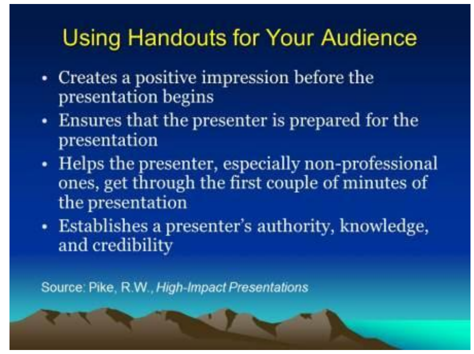
Tables are also good for showing exact numbers that the audience needs to really appreciate the point you're trying to get across, much more so than cumbersome sentences.

Tables are also better in some cases than the use of abstract graphs that may require detailed explanation.


In this example, the use of a table provides a good visual presentation of the two key pieces of data that you want to get across to your audience: what types of injuries to children are requiring hospitalizations and how many of those injuries occurred for the period.

## The Use of Handouts for Your Presentation




Providing well-developed handouts shows respect for your audience and they help enhance your presentation and your audience's ability to absorb and retain the information that you're presenting.

The benefits to using handouts for your presentation include:

- ✓ Creates a positive impression before the presentation begins;
- ✓ Ensures that the presenter is prepared for the presentation;
- ✓ Helps the presenter, especially the inexperienced presenter, get through the first couple of minutes of the presentation;
- ✓ Establishes a presenter's authority, knowledge, and credibility;
- ✓ Increases the listener's understanding and use of the information presented;
- ✓ Engages the audience at a deeper level as they interact with the handout;
- ✓ Keeps their attention focused on the subject; and
- ✓ Present more information than can be covered in the presentation

There are two "schools of thought" amongst experienced presenters as to when is the appropriate time to distribute handouts to audience members. One group of presenters wait until the end of the presentation because they feel that doing so in advance is a distraction to the audience members, that is, individual members will be reading ahead and not paying attention to the presenter.

I'm in the opposite "camp" in that I prefer to deliver my handouts prior to delivering my presentations. Why? I have several reasons for doing business this way:

- I think it shows respect for my audience; they're adults (usually) and adults should be free to decide how they want to use the handouts.
- Many attendees will want to take notes and having the handouts ahead of my remarks enables them to take pertinent individual notes, not try to scribe my remarks.
- It keeps me "on my toes". I know that they have the same "map" as I do; this keeps me from reading slides to them, omitting key points, or getting way off target.

## Summary


During the course of this eBook we have discussed the necessity for Fire & EMS leaders to deliver effective presentations.

Next we identified the types of target audiences that those leaders may be called upon to address with those presentations. Then we explained the different types of presentations and their applicability.

Finally, we used a sample set of information to create a sample presentation to Report Progress on a project.


**Why must Chief Officers be skilled and knowledgeable in the creation and delivery of media supported oral presentations? Because they are communicators of information for their organizations in a variety of roles.**

In closing, we've discussed how Fire & EMS leaders are critical communicators in for their organizations in a variety of roles. You will increase your effectiveness as such a communicator for your organization when you prepare the appropriate type of presentation for your target audience.

In doing so, you will increase both your personal value to the organization and your organization's credibility with those that it serves.

I hope that you have found the material contained in this eBook to be both informative and useful in your pursuit of professional development as a fire officer. Best wishes for your success!

## About the Author

Battalion Chief Robert Avsec (Ret.) served with the Chesterfield (Va.) Fire & EMS Department for 26 years. He was an active instructor for fire, EMS, and hazardous materials courses at the local, state, and federal levels, which included more than 10 years with the National Fire Academy.

Chief Avsec earned his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Cincinnati and his Master of Science degree in Executive Fire Service Leadership from Grand Canyon University. He is also a 2001 graduate of the National Fire Academy's *Executive Fire Officer Program*.

Since his retirement in 2007, he has continued to be a life-long learner working in both the private and public sectors to further develop his "management sciences mechanic" credentials. He makes his home in Alexandria, Virginia. Contact Robert at rpa1157@gmail.com