

HAYES
COLLINS / **MEDIA**

**Think
Audience**

Introduction

It might seem obvious that effective communication - whether it's for a TV or radio interview, a presentation to a group of experts or a meeting with colleagues - starts with the messages that you want to get across.

But what would be different if it was actually based on what the audience needed to hear?

For communication to truly be effective, the messages you send out need to be received and understood by the audience *in the way that you want them to be*. Without that, you'll never get the response that you're looking for, whether that be influencing their thinking or encouraging them to act.

When we put together messages based on what we want to say, we often make assumptions about the audience's level of knowledge (and interest!) in the subject and leave all sorts of gaps for them to fill in.

So your starting point for effective communication is always not 'What do I want to say?' but 'What do they need to hear?'.



Where do I start?

When you're communicating with an audience - whether that be at a presentation, at a meeting or in a broadcast interview - you'll have some outcome in mind. You might want to influence the audience's thinking - perhaps persuading them to come round to your point of view - or you might want to encourage them to take some sort of action. But whatever impact you want to have, you won't achieve it unless you get the audience to listen to you in the first place. So the real challenge when communicating is:

- Getting people's attention
- Keeping people's attention
- Making sure they remember what you've said after the interview

People will make a very quick decision as to whether you're worth their attention. So don't work up to your good stuff. Instead lead with your headline - the most important information. Once the audience has decided you're worth listening to, you can bring in the details. So if your research concludes that social media is having a massive impact on the mental health of teenagers, tell me that first, rather than describing how you went about the research and then coming to the conclusion.

Keep people's attention by peppering your talk with examples and anecdotes - they're much more memorable than a string of theories or facts and figures. If we can connect what you're saying with our work/lives/interests then we're much more likely to take in remember what you've said.

When you're interested in something, it's tempting to share everything you know about it. Resist! Stick to three strong, clear points rather than confusing the audience with too much detail.

Building your messages

For communication to truly be effective, the messages you send out need to be received and understood by the audience in the way that you want them to be.

The basic building blocks of your interview are the messages you want to get across

- Prepare three key messages about your story/issue.
- Make sure you can back them up with evidence.
- Consider how they relate to the audience - What's In It For You (WIIFY)?

Imagine that you want your key message to be:

“We are committed to ongoing improvement in the way we deliver care.”

This is all very well, but it doesn't really have much impact on the audience.

See how more powerful it looks when you add some evidence

“To give you an example, we've just started work on our brand new drop-in café in the centre of Norwich.”

Now make it hit home with the audience:

“It’s often difficult to talk about mental health problems so this café will allow people to start the conversation in a relaxed atmosphere with no pressure.”

With all of your messages you need to consider that you’ve not only covered the *features* of the project but also the *advantages* and *benefits* - in other words, don’t just tell someone what something is but tell them why it matters.

Personal presentation: 10 top tips

1. **Be yourself:** the audience is more interested in hearing someone who is passionate about their project than someone who sounds formal and corporate.
2. **Use straightforward language:** avoid jargon and slogans. Sound like a real person, not an annual report.
3. **Show your enthusiasm:** show how much this matters to you. Using adjectives such as ‘exciting’, ‘life-changing’, ‘heart-breaking’ will bring emphasis to your important points, though do make sure you avoid clichés.
4. **Stay calm:** even when faced with hostile or aggressive questions from the audience. It shows the audience you are in control and have nothing to hide. Often nerves will make you speed up your speech - listen to your breathing and try to slow the pace to give the illusion of control.
5. **Less is more:** if you try to say everything, your audience will end up remembering nothing. Focus on three strong points.
6. **Project confidence:** remember that you are the expert.
7. **Create an image:** think about the impression your clothes are going to make. Fussy jewellery or scarves, novelty ties and socks don’t shout professional.
8. **Start strong:** get the most important information out there first.
9. **Make it concrete:** examples, examples, examples.
10. **Ask for feedback:** it might surprise you.

Good luck!