



SIX SPEECH STRUCTURES

A guide for everyday business presentations





The Six Speech Structures

Anyone who has a story to tell follows the same natural structure to tell it. Whether a story is being told as a play, film, novel, article, speech or song, this simple structure is the writer's framework for telling a clear, concise and gripping tale.

As a presenter or speaker, whether you stand up once a year or every day, the more you embrace your role as a storyteller, the better you will be at communicating memorably. That's why we've taken the structure below, and applied it to the six most common speeches made in business.

This will help you to develop a clear idea of how to apply this simple story structure to any presentation you make. If you get it right, you will develop presentations which demand attention, and have a clear and unmissable message.

Although the three act structure forms the basis of most well told stories, the way you use it will depend on the type of story you're telling:



The Progress Report



The Strategy Recommendation



The Product Sales Presentation



The Justification of a Decision



The Training Presentation



The Bad News Presentation

INTRODUCTION / PROLOGUE TO SILENCE THE CROWD AND GET PERMISSION TO TELL YOUR STORY

Grabs the audience's attention and gives them a reason to keep reading, listening or watching. You introduce the one sentence message or call to action which your speech is based around, and attach it to a hook which makes everybody want to know more.

ACT 1 CONTEXT, CHARACTERS AND CHALLENGES

Sets the scene and defines the questions that the story will answer. Makes the audience care about the characters in the story. In fiction, this is where you get to know the characters we'll be following throughout the story, but in business this might be a brief look at the state of the industry, recent financial figures, or achievements to date. Your purpose here is to set the scene for you to explain the actions you're taking or justify your suggestions. Focus tends to be on the past.

ACT 2 CHOICES, TWISTS AND DETAIL

Introduces a dilemma, danger or mystery. The audience is led to consider the possible repercussions of this upon the characters who they are, by now, deeply invested in. This is the set up - we know where we are, so what's going on? Focus shifts to the present and we introduce problems, questions or dilemmas.

ACT 3 THE ANSWER AND ACTION - THE CLIMAX OF THE STORY

The problem is resolved or mystery unravelled, its effects are explored and all loose ends tied up. You won't always be able to finish with a fairy-tale solution - but think of the third act as shifting our perspective from the past and present to the future. It's time to discuss possible outcomes, repercussions and opportunities arising from what you've been examining. Act 3 must end by bringing together everything you've said so far into a simple and coherent message, question or call to action.

CONCLUSION / EPILOGUE TO SEND THE AUDIENCE AWAY WITH THE MESSAGE RINGING IN THEIR EARS

The story is summarised, its lessons considered, and the audience is sent away to reflect on the well told story, moral message, or emotional finale they have just witnessed.



The Progress Report

INTRODUCTION DESCRIBE THE ISSUE OR ASSIGNMENT, AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

If a Progress Report is a simple update about whatever you're working on, your introduction provides a quick recap of what that is. Your hook (what gets everyone interested) should be one or two ideas about the effects your work will have. Introduce your call to action if you have one.

ACT 1 DESCRIBE WHERE YOU STARTED, WHERE YOU ARE NOW AND WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

Your purpose here is to set the scene. First, explain why what you're doing is important. Next, introduce the context you've been working in and the problems you're trying to address. Most importantly, outline the critical remaining steps that will get you to where you want to be.

ACT 2 PRIORITISE PROBLEMS AND EXPLAIN HOW THEY'RE BEING ADDRESSED

Now that you've set the scene, this is where things start happening. Explain the problems you're addressing and prioritise them. Talk about action - what you've been doing and what else you plan to do.

ACT 3 DESCRIBE SUCCESSES TO DATE - POSITIVE PROGRESS MADE - REMIND THEM OF THE 'BIG PICTURE'

Why are you giving a Progress Report? Usually it's to make sure everyone understands what you're doing, why, and has confidence in your strategy. You've already explored the what and why, so instil confidence in your audience by explaining your progress so far. First, talk about how far you are through implementing each strategy or action you outlined earlier. Then discuss the outcomes you've seen so far and the results you're expecting to see (backed up by evidence).

Detail what else you plan to do, and what effects that will have.

CONCLUSION ACTION STEPS

Here you can give a round up of all three acts by showing how your actions and plans relate to the problems you outlined in Act 1. Follow this with a message about the positive impacts you've seen so far. Make sure you close with a clear statement about the steps which still need to be taken to achieve your goals.



The Strategy Recommendation

INTRODUCTION DEFINE THE OBJECTIVE

This is a quick-fire journey through the three acts to follow. Concentrate on two or three benefits; ones that you know your audience care about. This is your hook.

- 1: Explain why you're looking at new strategies.
- 2: Summarise the strategy you're recommending.
- 3: Explain what you hope to achieve with this strategy.

ACT 1 DESCRIBE THE CURRENT CONDITIONS

Your audience might not agree that you even need a strategy, let alone that yours is the right one to follow, so use your first act to point out the challenges, opportunities and issues that led you to develop your strategy. Identify the problems you intend to solve and the success that this will bring.

The bridge into Act 2 - describe the consequences of doing nothing.

ACT 2 DESCRIBE THE DESIRED STATE

Now that you've painted your 'Big Picture', point out how much better things could be. Describe how these problems could be resolved and what implications that would have across the business. Your aim here is to get the audience excited, desperate to know exactly what you're going to do to create all of these fantastic outcomes.

ACT 3 LIST THE POSSIBLE STRATEGIES, WITH PROS AND CONS OF EACH

Give the audience the options, with a focus on the effects and repercussions of each. Be clear about listing the pros and cons of each, by using signposts - *"This option has two pros..."*.

CONCLUSION IDENTIFY BEST ONE, DESCRIBE NEXT STEPS

Refer back to the pros and cons you described to draw conclusions about which is the best option. Then talk about how that option would improve the current conditions mentioned in Act 1, to reach the desired state in Act 2. If you do this well, you can really sell your idea.

Finish your presentation talking about actions. What needs to happen for this strategy to be implemented? What do you want your audience to do now?



The Product Sales Presentation

INTRODUCTION **FRAME THE CUSTOMER'S 'NEED' THAT THE PRODUCT, SERVICE, OR IDEA ADDRESSES**

If you've been charged with giving a sales presentation, chances are you already know what to do here. Your introduction needs to create a gap for your product to fill. Show your audience that they need the product - that's your hook. Then promise to solve the problem you've described with your product, idea or service.

ACT 1 **DESCRIBE THE NEED IN MORE DETAIL**

Set the scene by talking in more detail about the need you're addressing. How is the problem you're solving affecting people or business now? Identify the problems your audience cares about, highlight those - then promise (if you can!) that your product solves that problem.

ACT 2 **DESCRIBE HOW YOUR SOLUTION ADDRESSES THE NEED**

Introduce your product and talk about it in terms of the issues you've set out. Link each feature (and only choose those features that are most relevant to today's audience) to a problem you have identified, and a benefit, like so:

"The wheelmax 2000 wheels are four times thicker than industry average [feature], so punctures are reduced by 45% [problem]. Now off-road mountain bikers can have more of the fun, and none of the hassle [benefit] of punctures in the middle of their best-ever journey."

ACT 3 **PROVE THE BENEFITS OF BUYING IN TO YOUR SOLUTION**

It's time for evidence. Use facts, stats and case studies your audience can relate to, and that support the points you made in Act 1.

CONCLUSION **GET AGREEMENT ON A NEXT STEP**

Summarise your argument, and spell out exactly what you want to happen next. Open up for conversation, so that you can come to an agreement.



The Justification of a Decision

INTRODUCTION **FRAME THE SITUATION**

Summarise the dilemma and significance of the decision. Hook your audience by explaining why the decision matters - ie. explore some of the potential repercussions.

ACT 1 **DESCRIBE THE CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS AND PRIORITISE THEM**

This is where you set the scene, by discussing what outcomes would be best for the business and why. Prioritise outcomes you discuss so that everyone knows what to look for in Act 2. The most persuasive presentations are those where the audience is helped to make the decision for themselves.

ACT 2 **DESCRIBE ALTERNATIVES AND OPTIONS**

Explore the different options and how they would work. Highlight their pros and cons and possible repercussions.

ACT 3 **COMPARE OPTIONS TO CRITERIA AND ELIMINATE THOSE THAT DON'T MEET CRITERIA**

Use logic to bring the room to a common agreement upon the choice you've made by using the success criteria as the tool for ruling out options. Identify those which don't meet the criteria and eliminate them, then show which options are left.

If there are a few alternatives remaining, it may be worth recapping their pros and cons to set up your selection.

CONCLUSION **RECOMMEND BEST REMAINING ALTERNATIVE**

Endorse the choice using the success criteria you outlined in Act 1. Finish your presentation with a strong message about the suitability of this choice (because it's going to achieve the things you prioritised in the beginning), and any call-to-action you need to ensure the decision is implemented.



The Training Presentation

INTRODUCTION	FRAME THE SKILL IN TERMS OF ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE AUDIENCE	Summarise the main skill you're going to help them develop, and add a hook by identifying the value that skill will provide. Take time to find two or three benefits that your audience values.
ACT 1	EXPLAIN THE SKILL OR PROCEDURAL STEPS INVOLVED	Briefly provide context. Explain how the skill works and provide some evidence and justification for learning it, then do the actual teaching.
ACT 2	GET THE AUDIENCE TO TRY SOME ASPECT OF THE SKILL OR PROCEDURE	Most people find it easier to learn by doing. Getting the audience involved is good practice for interesting and engaging presentations or workshops. Tell your participants what you want them to do, recap exactly how they should do it, and how long they have.
ACT 3	REVIEW AND SUMMARISE, INCLUDING THINGS THE AUDIENCE DID NOT TRY	First give some feedback. Reinforce the value of the skill they've just learned (a fact, anecdote or case study), then recap how the whole skill or process works. Repetition is a vital part of committing something to memory. Discuss other uses or variations of the skill, and any practical, logistical or contextual issues.
CONCLUSION	DESCRIBE WHAT THEY CAN DO TO CONTINUE LEARNING THE SKILL	Sum up in one or two sentences why the skill is important by discussing how it can be used and the benefits the audience can expect, and close with options for building on your presentation.



The Bad News Presentation

INTRODUCTION SHOW WHAT HAPPENED AND CLARIFY THE DAMAGE/COSTS

People probably already know the bad news. That shouldn't be the focus of your whole presentation. Summarise it in the introduction and make sure everyone understands both why and how it's bad. Concentrate on the facts of the case - evidence, costs, casualties and corollary damage.

ACT 1 EXPLAIN HOW AND WHY IT HAPPENED - LEGAL ADVICE NEEDED

Provide context and explanations, rather than excuses. Take legal advice to avoid making any silly mistakes, but in general don't apportion blame or make any unsound claims. Answer the questions from your audience. Find out what the questions are before you stand up to speak, or ask for them here.

ACT 2 SHOW INTERIM STEPS PUT IN PLACE TO LIMIT/CONTAIN DAMAGE

Explain what you've done so far, and what you'll be doing in the short term. Address these points in order of importance.

ACT 3 EXPLAIN THE PATH TO A PERMANENT 'FIX'

Deal with the issues and actions, again, in order of importance. Be clear - which issue will this rectify, and how?

CONCLUSION WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THE FIX?

Your audience needs a clear statement from you. Make sure they understand your commitment, and the actions you/the business have taken to deal with the situation, so far, and what will happen next. Finish with a clear call to action for all parties involved in the 'clear up'.



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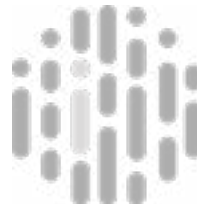
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