

Writing Effective Talking Points

Talking points are a set of clear, easily remembered phrases that outline a proposal, project, or idea. In most cases, talking points are used to keep a speaker on track when they are giving a presentation at a conference, to a reporter, in a meeting, or even in an elevator. While different talking points may vary greatly depending on the subject matter, length of the presentation, and audience, here are some “best practice principles” to consider:

1. **Keep it short and simple.** Because their purpose is to ease verbal presentation, talking points should be short and contain only the most relevant information.
 - Using bullets can help condense and organize information.
 - Points don’t have to be complete sentences.
2. **Capture the main point or points.** People won’t remember every word they hear in a presentation. So make sure that you clearly articulate and emphasize the main points.
 - Once you’ve written your talking points, ask yourself if you’ve missed any important points.
 - Try your talking points out on a friend and see what main points your friend takes away from them.
3. **Think about your audience.** Who is the audience for the presentation? How much do they know about the subject matter? How much background and/or context will you need to give? How do they feel about the argument/ideas/opinions that the presentation will express?
 - *Worst Case Scenario.* What is the best argument that you can think of against the claims or arguments in your presentation? Try to consider some worst-case scenarios for how your talking points might be received, and then consider including responses to this potential opposition.

The “Rule of Three”

Many speechwriters have found the so-called “rule of three,” whereby talking points are structured around the three most important points, to be a useful framework. If you were limited to three sentences to describe a paper, idea, or project, what are the main ideas that you would highlight?

Of course, the “rule of three” is merely a framework that some have found useful, not a dogma. Depending on the information you’re trying to express, you may need two or five or twelve or any number of points.

What to Avoid in Developing Talking Points:

Avoid	Why
Too much information	You don’t want to bog down your audience (or your thoughts) with unnecessary detail/background. They’ll just stop listening.
Many lines of text in a single bullet point	Talking points are made to be memorized before a presentation or quickly glanced at while a presentation is being given. Make them easy to read.
Hiding the main point	Your audience may only remember one or two key things from the presentation. Make sure what they remember are the most important points.

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