

Try Verbal Drafting for Your Next Speech

by Margaret Keys

Picture yourself preparing a written report. You sit at your desk (pen, PC, or dictating machine at hand), and with an occasional glance at notes or files, you crank out a first draft.

You don't expect to get it right the first time. You expect to "blue-pencil" or "red-pencil" draft after draft, until you're satisfied that your writing is clear and concise and fits the perceptions of your reader — boss, colleague, client, or public.

Why, then, avoid using the same type of sequence in producing a *speech*?

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

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

Some of us have got around this by learning to *scan* typed scripts with some success; some of us render each word perfectly but feel the loss of impact in the translation.

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

Statistics show that in the communication of attitudes and ideas, your voice transmits 38%; your body, 55%; and your words, only 7%. Result: 93% of your spoken message is attitudinal coloring.

Just as you would never enter a tennis tournament without swinging

the racket in practice, you should never enter the speaking arena without "drafting" your material first.

Some people prefer to work "backwards" by saying several versions of a written speech into a dictating machine, to find the right feel. Others choose to draft the opening and closing and go to a written form in the center.

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

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

Step 2 is to list all of the *sensitive* questions this audience might ask, then rehearse, out loud, your responses. By rehearsing answers to verbal hardballs, you answer the things you don't want to talk about, dismiss them, and use them to bridge to what you do want to talk about.

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

Now you're ready to craft your message. Take your goal and create the message with **LME** (**L**aunch, **M**iddle, **E**nd). Create "sound bites"—memorable, quotable phrases that will stick in their minds (and in yours, if you choose to speak without notes). Use a note card, if you like, to bullet your main points, and remember to rehearse over and over as you create your message. This is the "drafting" part.

The *launch* should connect you to the audience. First, talk about them. Then talk about yourself, your role and connection to them. Finally,

identify and plant your message.

The *middle* should illuminate and magnify the message. People reason on different levels and through varying means. If you've ever taken a "personality" test, you know that people are generally categorized by how they take in information and deal with the world around them. The *Middle* should reach each "type" of person in a way that makes sense to them.

For example, an "intuitor" who deals well with the big picture should be told the global implications of your message. The "thinker" should be given all the facts and research. "Feelers" need to know how your message will affect people, and "sensors" need to know what actions to take now that they know what you know.

After you've repeated your message objective so that everyone can understand it, you're ready for the formal question-and-answer session, if you have one. Because you've rehearsed your questions well in advance and have learned to answer and bridge away from problem areas, this becomes another place to reinforce your message.

Then you *end* your speech. This is your last chance to give the audience your message. By not ending with Q&A, you leave the audience with *exactly* the thoughts and feelings you want them to have — not a negative or confusing note as is possible with Q&A.

Verbal drafting of speeches, once you start doing it, is no more time-consuming than writing, editing, and rewriting, then rehearsing. And because the message objective has become a part of your mind and body, you can give the same speech many times, adjusting it each time to the listeners' needs and perceptions.

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