

Preparing your messages

Key Steps

There are four key steps to communicating with confidence, cohesion and clarity:

- PLAN
- PREPARE
- PRACTICE
- PRESENT

These are known as the 'Four Ps'. Good communicators and media spokespeople put most of their effort into the first three – planning, preparing and practicing.

Planning

Without detailed and structured planning your messages will fall flat, your audience will miss the point or you will get the criticisms you are keen to avoid.

There are three key steps to planning:

- RESEARCHING YOUR AUDIENCE
- DEFINING YOUR KEY MESSAGE
- STRUCTURING YOUR MESSAGE

Researching your audience

This is the most important part; without knowing who your audience is you will not succeed.

If the audience is made up of peers you can afford to use more jargon and refer to common ground. But if the audience is made up of people who have limited knowledge of your work, you will need to simplify your language accordingly.

Defining your message

Once you know who you are talking to, you can decide what it is you want or need to tell them. But to do this you must establish your one key message.

Few people will remember more than one major point you make so you should work out what it is that you want your audience to go away remembering.

This will depend largely on your purpose. Do you want people to be persuaded of a point? Or do you want them to be motivated into action? Perhaps you are simply teaching them some new facts or skills.

Your key message should be capable of being spelt out in a single sentence of less than 20 words, otherwise it is likely to be too complex for people to remember.

Use the following page of this handout to help you hone your messaging.

Message development preparation sheet

Who is my **a**udience?

What are my objectives?

What is my one key **m**essage? Do I have other supporting messages?

What **e**xamples can I use that help explain or support my messages?

Use human examples to illustrate your points (people not process)

What difficult or **n**egative questions may be asked?

What else is 'moving' on this topic that may be raised?
