

RHETORIC

Mastering the art of persuasion

REVISED, FIFTH EDITION



From the first steps to a perfect presentation

Rhetoric – Mastering the Art of Persuasion From the first steps to a perfect presentation

Horst Hanisch



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Idea and text: Horst Hanisch, Bonn

English editing and translation: Guido Michels, Cologne; Jennifer Taylor-Gaida,

Cologne

Layout: Guido Lokietek, Aachen; Horst Hanisch, Bonn

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Fore-words ...

in lieu of a fore-word

"Man is distinguished by his relatively high intelligence, his specialized craft skills and his differentiated language." Dtv-Atlas Philosophie, 9th edition, 2001, page 191

In the beginning was the word

Or perhaps not? Weren't our ancestors more likely word-less? Didn't the first humans communicate on an unspoken level? After all, a school of fish is able to coordinate its movements without speaking a word. And don't ants communicate non-verbally as well, through body contact? As a matter of fact, language as we know it has only been around for the last 30,000 to 100,000 years.

And even today, we still cannot express everything with words. Or are you able to explain to your neighbour how a banana tastes? Using the word 'banana-like' doesn't count, because if our neighbour had never eaten a banana, this word would still not help him to imagine what one tastes like.

Some statements still demonstrate the bodily feelings language betrays. For example: "I can't stand the smell of him", or "I can't put my finger on it". Sometimes words get stuck in our throats, so to speak.

And, to make things worse, people even tell us now and again that we shouldn't take everything so literally (but how should we take it then?)! Incidentally – some people can't even understand their own words: "I can't understand a thing I'm saying ..."

So it shouldn't come as a surprise to us that, as Albert Mehrabian discovered, only 7% of the information conveyed through interpersonal communication comes from spoken words, while 93% comes from the <u>way</u> in which the words are said as well as the body language of the speaker!

Following my standard work on the theme of body language, I will now turn my attention in this book primarily to the topic of the spoken word, exploring <u>verbal</u> communication before an audience. See also my book "Discussion - Mastering the skills of moderation".

Out of the gigantic mass of themes that could be subsumed under the concept of 'rhetoric', I have decided in this book to focus on topical aspects and practical applications. Therefore, the field of 'antique' rhetoric is only touched on briefly as an introduction to the field. I have rounded out the theme by providing excerpts from actual speeches.

The book is divided into several large sections corresponding with the fundamentals of rhetoric, from ancient times to modern usage.

I would like to ask the reader to forgive me if I go into greater detail on some points and sometimes intersperse my comments with humour. In my opinion, it can do no harm when trying to deal with the wealth of material that accompanies us, or perhaps even relentlessly pursues us, day after day, to take out some time to have a laugh.

For example, when I hear sentences like this one: "His wife didn't have time to go to the store, so he decided to run over himself." Wonder if he survived the accident?

Since language obviously does not always follow the rules of logic, situations often arise that summon a smile: Has anyone ever said they wanted to have a word with you (and was it really just one word)? Or did someone once give you their word (did she have only one? - And now she doesn't have any left? - So she is left wordless?).

Well okay, then she might as well tell you "You have my word." (And just where do you have it?). Just recently, someone took me at my word, and I especially like people who hang on my every word, although of course not those who put words in my mouth.

Once in a while, someone offers to put in a good word for me (don't you ever wonder how they decided which word to choose? - Is that why it's sometimes necessary to weigh one's words?).

Some of our peers promise to keep their word (where do they keep it? - clutched tightly in their hand?), while others ask to exchange words with us ("What will you give me for the word "carrot"?).

Others can't get a word in edgewise (why not try it head on?), while the next guy seems to think that mum's the word (Aha – we finally know which one it is!). It seems that a word can be either good or bad: "As good as one's word." (What's so good about it?).

Did you ever hear someone wish they could eat their words? While others were busy mincing their words? Or do you wonder why some folks nod approvingly when words get out of hand, remarking that "those are fighting words"?

Sometimes we are simply at a loss for words. Which makes it seem only logical to me when one spouse says to the other: "The final word has not yet been spoken." Even today, though, I still haven't found out which is actually the final word.

But, wait a minute, I just remembered another neighbour telling me that his wife always has the last word (still don't know which one it is though). "That's my final word!" Aha.

Supposedly, the 50 most-used words in a language account for some 45 percent of any written text. So are we instead impoverished when it comes to words?

In the face of this illogical nature of language, my own views will necessarily dictate the emphasis placed here on certain issues. And it's easy to understand why others may not necessarily always share my priorities.

In addition, some chapters could certainly bear to be fleshed out a bit more. This is why I am always open to constructive criticism and productive suggestions.

Since actions speak louder than words (even good ones?) I don't want to miss the opportunity here to thank all the people who offered me mental and physical support in realizing this project.

Here's to harnessing the power of language to make the most of your personal and professional future!

Horst Hanisch

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Chapter 1 – From Rhetoric to Presentation

Rhetoric from Antiquity to the Present

"Know thyself." Inscription at the Oracle of Delphi

Protagoras and the Sophists

With the end of the Persian Wars, Greece attained great prosperity. People turned their attention to attaining a higher level of education.

In a democratic state, citizens are expected to be able to speak articulately and extemporaneously. Thus was born the 'occupation' of speech trainer.

These peripatetic trainers, who taught elocution and other subjects for money, were collectively termed Sophists, a name derived from the Greek word sophos.

People appearing before court in Athens from about 450 BC could not simply hire a lawyer; they had to defend themselves, which is why elocution and rhetoric skills were in such high demand.

The Rhetor

Originally, the word "rhetor" was used to refer to an eloquent orator who spoke before an audience. Later, the rhetor became a 'teacher of eloquence'.

Previously (see above), the rhetoric teacher was known as a 'sophist', someone who taught rhetoric and related themes for a fee.

There are two disciplines (forms) that are important for rhetoric:

- o the tone and rhythm of speech
- the linguistic forms
- semantics (the science of meaning in language)
- syntax (sentence structure)

the logical forms

- for example, persuasive argumentation techniques (structures that reveal or conceal the truth). Important here is syllogism, the doctrine of deductive reasoning. A syllogism involves combining two premises to form a third, the conclusion. Example:
- Major premise: Humans are mortal.
- Minor premise: Mr. Mertens is human.
- Conclusion: Thus, Mr. Mertens is mortal.

According to Aristotle, 'human' is the 'middle term' here.

Is Rhetoric an Art?

"There are two sides to every question."

Protagoras, a leading Sophist
(around 480 - 410 BC)

The School of Athens

Raffaello Santi (1483 - 1520), commonly known as "Raphael", was commissioned by Pope Julius II at the age of 25 to paint four walls in the Vatican (the Stanza della Segnatura). One of the frescoes depicted 'The School of Athens', showing great thinkers of antiquity.

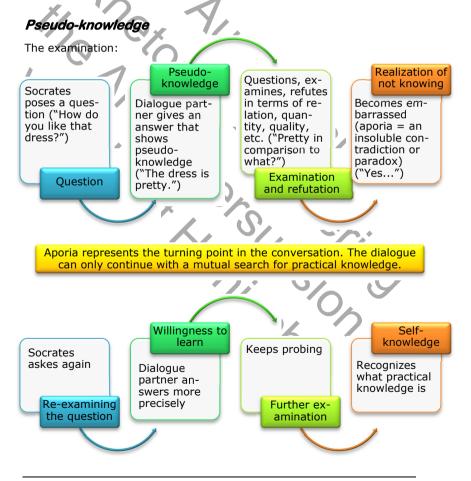
At the centre of the picture stand Plato, his finger pointing upward (standing for speculative philosophy), and Aristotle (representing empirical philosophy). Also identifiable in the picture are:

- Socrates (470 399 BC) ("I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance.")
- Plato (427 347 BC, pupil of Socrates); founded the Academy (Akademos), which was closed in 529 by Emperor Justinian.
- Aristotle (384 322 BC, Plato's pupil); opened a school (Lykeion).
 He is regarded as the founder of logic. Aristotle was the teacher of
- Alexander the Great (356 323 BC) until he ascended the throne in 336 BC

Also shown are:

- Pythagoras (580 496 BC), the Greek mathematician.
- Heraclitus of Ephesus (about 500 BC), who believed that everything in the world is in flux.
- Diogenes (403 324 BC), a cynic who eschewed all worldly goods and (supposedly) lived in a barrel.
- Euclid (about 300 BC), who wrote an influential textbook on geometry.
- Ptolemy (around 90 160), who wrote a famous handbook of astronomy.

Socrates (around 470 - 399 BC) realized when talking with his peers that many believed they had a great stock of knowledge at their disposal, but that this often turned out to be only pseudo-knowledge. This superficial brand of knowledge does not stand up to the logic of further questioning. Socrates therefore developed a method, which he called the elenctic examination, to show his partner in dialogue that the latter had not yet attained genuine knowledge, but rather merely pseudo-knowledge.



Chapter 1 – From Rhetoric to Presentation

Persuasive presentation

The challenge for the teacher of rhetoric is to persuade listeners of the veracity of any kind of content.

He has to be able to logically present the facts, and even to convince listeners that a weakness is actually a strength. Of course, a sentence might be true in one situation and false in another. For example:

- Major premise: Humans have two legs.
- Minor premise: Mr. Mertens has two legs.
- Conclusion: Mr. Mertens is human.

Or:

- Major premise: Humans have two legs.
- Minor premise: A kangaroo has two legs.
- Conclusion: A kangaroo is human.

From this example we can see that there can be no such thing as objective content. The upshot is the famous 'homo-mensura thesis' of Protagoras:

"Man is the measure of all things; of what is, that it is, of what is not, that it is not."

The homo-mensura thesis is considered the heart of sophist thinking:

 "The human establishes what is, everything beyond that is rejected (scepticism), and all being is not objective, but rather subjective and changeable (relativism)."

The significance of the Sophists and the Platonic Dialogue

Although in the Greek philosophy of nature man did not play the decisive role, this view gradually evolved into a more anthropocentric one. Man moved to the centre of philosophical patterns of thought.

This is also why verbal - interpersonal - communication, i.e. language, became increasingly important. Spoken language was paramount for the Sophists.

Plato called the drive that always guides humans to the region of true being and the good 'eros'. It arouses in men the longing to devote themselves to contemplating ideas.

In the Symposium this urge is described as the philosophical striving for beauty and knowledge. It takes on a mediating role between the sensual world and the world of the spirit.

In our relationships with others, the pedagogical aspect (epiméleia) of this drive is demonstrated in the way we want others to share in our knowledge.

The Platonic Dialogue

Plato calls this process of sharing our knowledge with others a dialogue.

This dialogue, according to Plato, opens the way for us to remember our past. It works based on words and concepts that summon ideas and memories.

In a dialogue, ideas should be presented logically, i.e. without the help of illustrational tools and images. This is known as dialectics. At the same time, the interrelationships of these ideas should become clear to us.

The participants in a Platonic dialogue thus deliberately take up opposing positions (dialectic = the logic of contradiction), in order to check the cogency of theses by examining their antitheses.

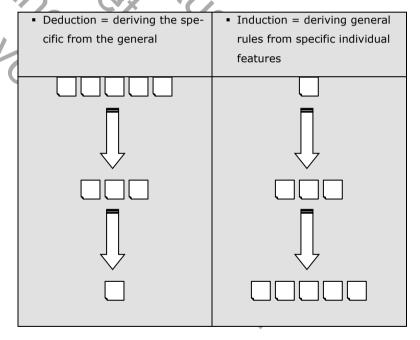
Aristotle and logic

Aristotle lived from 384 to 324 BC. He was a pupil of Plato for over 20 years. In 342 he became the teacher of Alexander the Great.

The syllogism plays an essential role in his teachings. A chain of several related conclusions is one way of providing proof. This method is called deductive, because it progresses from the general to the specific.

In Aristotle's opinion, one of the goals of science should be to compellingly derive what exists from its causes.

The opposite of deduction is induction. Induction searches for common features within a type.



The system of status

Courts of law in particular worked with the system of Status constitutio, dealing with the point that was being contested.

In accordance with Hermagoras, the system is constructed as follows:

Genus rationale (area of argumentation)

- 1st status (status coniecturalis)
 - o is the suspicion (who is the perpetrator?)
 - Charge made by the accuser
 - "No" denial of charge by defendant
- 2nd status (status definitius)
 - o is the definition (what is the offence?)
 - o Charge made by the accuser
 - "Yes, but a milder category of offence." Admission by the defendant. However, from the point of view of the defendant, the charge is only justified in part.
- 3rd status (status qualitatis)
 - is the nature of the offence (what is the justification?). We distinguish here between absolute justification (constitutio juridicialis absoluta) and relative justification (constitutio juridicialis assumptiva).
 - o Absolute justification
 - Charge made by the accuser
 - "Yes, but the crime was justified." Admission by the defendant. However, from the point of view of the defendant, the offence was justified.

Chapter 1 – From Rhetoric to Presentation

- o Relative justification
 - Charge made by the accuser
 - "Yes, but ..." Admission by the defendant.
 - Confession (concessio): From the point of view of the defendant, it was a case of not knowing the law or of force majeure, which to his mind justified the crime.
 - Charges are commuted (translatio criminis): The defendant believes that he is the victim. He is convinced of having acted in self-defence, so that he believes the crime was justified.
- Charges are dismissed (remotio criminis): From the point of view of the defendant, he was just acting on orders, i.e. instructions from a third person. He was unable to and should not have acted any differently. He therefore argues that he is innocent.
 - Comparison (comparatio): From the point of view of the defendant, committing the deed was better than not committing it. He had to act as he did. He therefore believes he is innocent.
 - 4th status (translatio)
 - is the commutation (rejection of the charge)
 - Charge made by the accuser
 - "You don't have the right to accuse me!" The defendant is of the opinion that the accusing body (for example, the court) has no jurisdiction over him.

Genus legale (controlling the interpretation of legal texts)

Four categories are distinguished here:

- 1st category (scriptum sententia) wording and meaning
 - The written word does not correspond with the meaning to be conveyed.
- 2nd category (leges contrariae) contradictory laws
 - o Various laws are played off against one another.
- 3rd category (ambiguitas) ambiguity
 - Various interpretations are possible of the same legal text.
- 4th category (ratiocinatio) reasoning, conclusion by analogy
 - o There is a legal loophole.

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Chapter 3 – From Greeting to Closing Remarks

Beginning the Presentation

"Beginning is the most important part of work."

Plato(n), Greek philosopher

(427 - 348/347 BC)

Options for beginning a presentation correctly – the introduction

And now the first words are spoken. Is your heart racing? It doesn't matter: here we go! There are several correct ways to start your presentation. We will describe three of them here.

The serious beginning

Would you prefer to start off on a serious note?

- Serious beginning
 - Begin your presentation as usual with: "Hello ... I am ... and I will be speaking to you today about ... First, let's ..."
- Time to think
 - You present your listeners with a problem. After your greeting, you introduce the problem to be addressed by asking a question: "What would have happened if Cleopatra and Caesar had never met?"
 - Your listeners give this some thought and are thus drawn into your theme. Curiosity is aroused, suspense built up. You continue: "Hello ... My name is ... Our topic today is ... First, let's ..."
- Opener
 - "Hello ... my name is ... I've brought you a short film clip." Start your video or film using a beamer (for example, you show three TV commercials).

 Then you can directly segue into a discussion. "And that brings us to our topic for today. Namely: 'Does advertising make people stupid?' Let's first ..."

This kind of opener already makes your listeners positively disposed toward you and what you're about to tell them. As a rule, you will succeed in a short amount of time to create a positive atmosphere.

This kind of opener can also be ingenious if you're feeling somewhat unsure of yourself or even self-conscious. Because the attention of your listeners is almost immediately directed away from your person and toward the opener. You are, so to speak, letting others (or something else) work for you.

48 The hook

A hook can be used to clearly present a situation. Only after the hook do you greet your listeners and begin the 'actual' seminar.

But first you have to find something to grab your listeners' attention, as demonstrated for example in the following.

- Rhetorical question
 - o "Today, we are going to talk about the eating habits of the Europeans. What made us choose this topic? Well, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, let me welcome you ... My name is ... And our topic today is ... First, let's ..."
- Surprise question
 - o "Is there anyone here who would like to eliminate stress from their life?" You can be sure that one or more participants will raise their hands. "You? ... You too? Well, let me first welcome you here today. I am ... and I will be speaking to you today about the topic of 'Fighting Stress'".

Chapter 3 – From Greeting to Closing Remarks

Quote

o "'We all live under the same sky, but we don't have the same horizons', Konrad Adenauer once said." Your listeners will surely find this amusing. "But first off, let me welcome you ... My name is ... And our topic today is: 'Can intelligence be measured?'"

Anecdote

o "Some say that the graduate with a Science degree asks, 'Why does it work?', the graduate with an Engineering degree asks, 'How does it work?', the graduate with an Accounting degree asks, 'How much will it cost?' and the graduate with a Liberal Arts degree asks, 'Do you want fries with that?'" Your listeners will probably be amused. "Today, ladies and gentlemen, we would like to take a more serious look at the true value of a liberal arts education today. But first allow me to introduce myself. My name is ..."

Comparison

o "One day, a stout woman came upon a drunken man. 'My God, aren't you ashamed of yourself?' the woman said to him. The drunken man turned and looked at the woman and replied: 'I may be drunk – but you're fat! And tomorrow I'll be sober again, but you'll still be fat!'" Depending on the target group, your listeners may either be amused or horrified. "But now ladies and gentlemen, let me first welcome you ... I am ... and I will be speaking with you this evening about 'Alcoholism among Youth and Adults!"

A true story

o "When Martin Luther King held his famous speech 'I Have a Dream' on 28 August 1963 before thousands of people, he couldn't have envisioned the world as it is today." Perhaps some listeners will nod their heads. "But before I begin to talk on our topic "Visions Can Come True', let me wish you a warm welcome. I am ..."

- A personal experience
 - o "While taking the train here today, I witnessed the following: in the compartment opposite I saw an older woman who was obviously annoyed at the behaviour of some young people. They were listening to loud music through their headphones and had to shout at each other to be understood. The woman shook her head and mumbled: 'Impossible, these young people today!'" Some of your listeners will nod their heads in sympathy and others will shake their heads, uncomprehending. "I ask you, ladies and gentlemen: Are young people today really less polite than senior citizens were back in their own youth? Our topic today is: 'Public Conduct in the 21st Century'. My name is ... and I would like to thank you all for coming."

Direct launch

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Or do you want to jump in 'feet first'?

- "We are facing a difficult decision." The listeners will usually be shocked, taken aback or doubtful.
 - o "I would like to thank you for coming on such short notice. Good evening ... My name is ... and I have to solve the following problem with you here today ..."

But not like this! The weak start

- "I'm not really prepared (yet)."
- "Everything has already been said."
- "I would like to agree with the previous speaker."
- "I'm not very good at public speaking."
- "I would like to ..."
- "Actually, I wanted today to ..."

Bringing in emotions

Here is a small selection of ways to bring exaggerated emotions into play in your presentations or dialogues:

- Ingratiate yourself with your listeners (comprobatio).
- Predict threatening impending events (diabole).
- Express disdain for the arguments of your opponent (diasyrmus).
- Make an emotional appeal (ecphonesis).
- Mock your dialogue partner by exaggeratedly imitating his style of speaking (hypocrisis).
- Complain and moan of your own injury (mempsis).
- Exclaim in wonder (thaumasus).
- Express abhorrence.

At some point during the presentation, the title should be named. "At some point?" you might ask.

Yes, and it is common to name the title at the beginning of the presentation.

But it is not a <u>must</u>. Some people begin with a hook or teaser and then name the title. But in general it makes sense to name the title towards the beginning of the presentation so that the listeners know what to expect.

In very rare cases, not naming the title might make the audience that much more attentive and excited, forcing them to listen carefully to find out what it's all about.

For short speeches - usually of the more humorous kind - this might be an acceptable solution.

The goal of the presentation

It should go without saying that you know why you are presenting in the first place.

Which goal are you pursuing in your presentation? Possible goals can be divided into three areas:



To make sure your listeners don't go home thinking merely that 'it was nice', make sure you are very aware of the goal your presentation should achieve.

Here are some ideas

- An appeal
 - The listener should take action or buy something, for example in the case of a sales pitch or promotional event.





- Stimulate contemplation
 - The listener should do some deep thinking, take a moment to see something from another side.

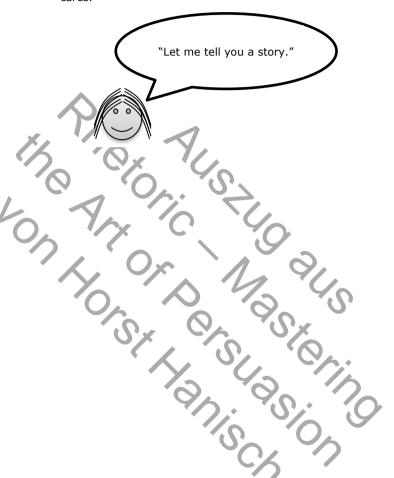


- Convey information
 - The listener should have more information at his disposal after the presentation than before.



Entertainment

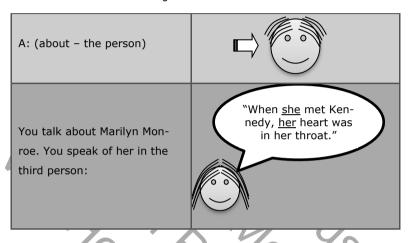
 The listener should be entertained and distracted from his daily cares

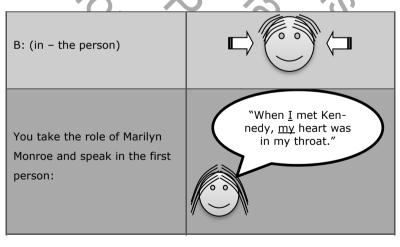


Should you put your presentation in a frame?

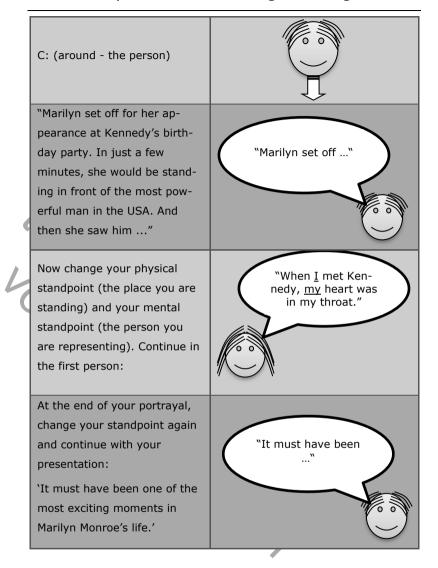
How do you like the idea of setting your presentation within a framing story? Let's say the title is: 'Marilyn Monroe'.

A frame could take three original forms:





Chapter 3 – From Greeting to Closing Remarks



A presentation in the first person conveys a course of events in a more tangible, vivid way. The listener can follow what is being related more easily and with greater attentiveness.

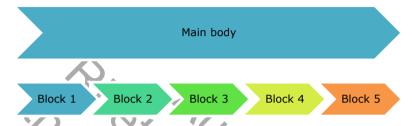
A small side effect: in the first person, there is less need to use the distancing pronoun 'one'.

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The Main Body - The Security of Structure

Just as if he were taking in a survey, the experienced presenter structures the main body of his presentation carefully.

The main body consists of several blocks set one after the other.



Each block corresponds to a logical unit. This means that the points to be treated in that block are related logically.

Block 1) General information on dinosaurs

Block 2) Carnivorous dinosaurs

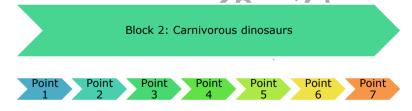
Block 3) Herbivorous dinosaurs

Block 4) Omnivorous dinosaurs

Block 5) The end of the dinosaurs

Arranging these blocks in the right, logically progressing, order is called macro planning.

Within each block the information is once again structured so that each point follows logically from the previous one.



Point 1: Carnivorous dinosaurs

Point 2: Four-legged carnivorous dinosaurs

Chapter 3 – From Greeting to Closing Remarks

Point 3: Two-legged carnivorous dinosaurs

Point 4: Flying carnivorous dinosaurs

Point 5: Swimming carnivorous dinosaurs

Point 6: Other carnivorous dinosaurs

Point 7: Summary

The order of the points within a block is called micro planning.

Paying close attention to micro- and macro-planning makes your presentation easier for listeners to follow and the structure more readily comprehensible. At the same time, suspense is built up - the listener stays curious and can keep his mind on the subject.

Incidentally: Some trainers think that the main body should account for about 80 to 90% of the presentation (with the introduction and conclusion making up 5 to 10 percent respectively).

Building suspense

The right structure helps listeners to pay attention. Curiosity and the questions each participant is asking in his head, such as: 'I wonder what's coming now', build up noticeable suspense.

Further suspense can be created when the topic is given a skilful psychological spin. We already saw in the chapter on 'Title' that a title with a question mark leaves the outcome of the talk open.

In other words: up until just before the end of the presentation, the listener doesn't necessarily know what conclusion will be reached.

Seven is the magic number

Despite the boundless enthusiasm of the lecturer to impart as much information as possible to his hapless participants, he should nonetheless keep in mind their limited capacity to take it all in at once.

Short-term memory can usually process only five to nine new bits of information on the same material. The average of five to nine is seven.

With the right sub-structure, the 'seven' points can be supplemented (see our example of a presentation on dinosaurs above).

- Block 1
 - o Point 1
 - o Point 2
 - Point 3
- Sub-point 3.1
- Sub-point 3.2
- Sub-point 3.3
- Point 4
- Point 5

- Block 2
 - o Point 1
 - o Point 2
- Sub-point 2.1
- Sub-point 2.2
- Point 3
- Point 4
- Sub-point 4.1
- Sub-point 4.2

Numbering

People who take a rational approach to their work have an easy time orienting themselves around a numbered structure (first, second, third, ...).

Be careful that you don't mention in your introduction that the "following five topics" will be addressed, and then proceed to list four or even six or more points.

The listener will probably be irritated ("Didn't he skip something?" or "I thought that was already the end!").

Horst Hanisch

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Horst Hanisch has worked as author, trainer, and coach for more than 35 years. He lectures in fields including communication, personality development, soft skills, and etiquette. He has published more than 120 books.

Horst Hanisch holds in-house company training courses, and open seminars on topics such as 'Business Etiquette', 'Table Manners', 'Self-Confident Presenting' and 'Presentation and Rhetoric'.

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