

## **Boost Productivity: Prepare Your Next Speech or Report in Hollywood Style**

**By Bonnie Budzowski**  
**President, inCredible Messages, LP**

No matter what your area of expertise, be it administration, sales, service, or something else, your job includes crafting and delivering messages. Preparing these messages is time-consuming. The pressure to communicate, in the face of other pressing commitments, can also be anxiety-producing. As a result, many professionals waste time in procrastination, perfectionism, and eleventh-hour writer's block.

Addressing issues around anxiety can be complicated, but addressing issues of productivity in communication is straightforward. Following three simple rules can increase the quality of your communication while reducing the time and frustration it takes to prepare a message.

### **Rule 1: Take the Perspective of a Filmmaker**

A predictable route to writer's block is to sit yourself before a blank screen or page, expecting to start your project at the beginning and plow straight through to the end. Instead, try the filmmaker's approach: work on one scene (section) at a time, anticipating an editing process that will piece the scenes together seamlessly.

Begin a communication project by warming up your mental generator, as an actress or singer might warm up her voice before a performance. Then develop your project one segment at a time, like the filmmaker. Save the criticism for later, because premature criticism will hamper you, like a persistent tickle in your throat.

Try the following technique to warm up and identify segments for your message:

*Make a list of questions from the receivers' perspective.* For example, if you need to communicate changes to an employee benefit plan, simply list questions employees will have about the change: Who is affected? How far-reaching is the change? What will this cost me? Why was this decision made? When does the change take place? Where do I go with my questions?

By identifying the questions, you established the "scenes" of your message. Next, put those scenes in a logical order, based on the receivers' primary concerns. Write out the answers to the questions, and you've quickly produced a draft. Add examples, diagrams, or attachments as needed. Prepare an introduction and conclusion appropriate to the delivery system (memo or presentation).

Edit your material as necessary, and you've produced a communication product in the style of a filmmaker—without the frustration and anxiety that typically comes with a communications project.

When your task is to persuade receivers to approve your proposal or purchase a service, warm up by listing the receivers' priorities rather than his or her questions. You may need

to do some research or conduct informal interviews before you can make a good list. The time you spend clarifying priorities and goals is a high-yield investment.

### **Rule 2: Get a Good Night's Rest and Edit in the Morning**

Filming and editing are completely different tasks. For maximum productivity, keep the separation distinct. In other words, take a break between writing and editing. Renowned writing teacher Peter Block explains it like this:

*Writing calls on two skills that are so different that they usually conflict with each other: creating and criticizing. In other words, writing calls on the ability to create words and ideas out of yourself, but it also calls on the ability to criticize them in order to decide which ones to use.*

Even when preparing technical manuals or medical abstracts, we call upon a part of the brain that specializes in creating, generating, and making abstract connections. While the neurology is complex, we can think of these activities as functions of the right brain. The right brain is the lyrical, visual, subjective, expansive part of the brain. It is the source of color, interest, and analogy.

When generative functions are left unchecked, however, they produce messages that are sloppy and hard to understand. We need the functions of the left brain to discipline and edit the work of the right. The left brain checks for sequence, establishes transitions, and deals with pesky punctuation marks. These critical functions of the left brain make our messages readable and understandable, logical and to the point.

People who find themselves developing a presentation or report at the eleventh hour are obligated to create and criticize at the same time, to mix right brain and left brain activities like you mix salt and pepper at a meal. From a productivity standpoint, this is the least efficient way to use the resources of the brain.

For maximum productivity, write your draft or prepare your speech on one day, and critique it the next. Better yet, start the project long before it is due and go through several short rounds of creating and critiquing, with breaks in between.

### **Rule 3: Divide Your Preparation Time into Equal Segments**

When you have no choice but begin a communication project mere hours before it is due, work with your brain rather than against it. Here's how:

Divide whatever time you have into three equal parts:

- Use one third of your time to plan—to develop questions (scenes) and gather information needed to answer them.
- Use one third of your time to write and fill out the draft, adding an introduction, transitions, and a conclusion. As you write, turn off your spell check. This helps you to avoid fixing things that might get deleted from the final draft.

# inCredible Messages

*Using Influence and Credibility to Move Business Forward*

- Devote a full one third of your time to revision, a word which means *re-vision*. Step back and take a hard look at the message from the receivers' perspective. From this perspective, you may delete or rearrange large chunks of material; you may reconfigure the scenes in your message. Once you've adjusted the material, it is time to do the fine work of editing. Perform this task carefully, until the transitions between scenes are seamless and the grammar and punctuation is perfect.

Dividing the project into three equal parts will produce a well-balanced message that makes the best use of your time. Remember to take a brief break between each major task to allow your brain to shift gears.

Following the rules described in this article will not change the fact that communication is hard work. On the other hand, following these rules can help you get out of the negative productivity spiral that often surrounds communication tasks. The rules can help you invest time in a focused way—to produce high-impact messages. For higher productivity and better results, prepare your next report or speech in Hollywood Style.

Copyright 2006 by inCredible Messages, LP



Permission is granted to reprint this article when the following contact information is included: © 2006 by Bonnie Budzowski, President of InCredible Messages, LP. For more free articles, go to [www.IncredibleMessages.com](http://www.IncredibleMessages.com) or contact Bonnie at [info@IncredibleMessages.com](mailto:info@IncredibleMessages.com).