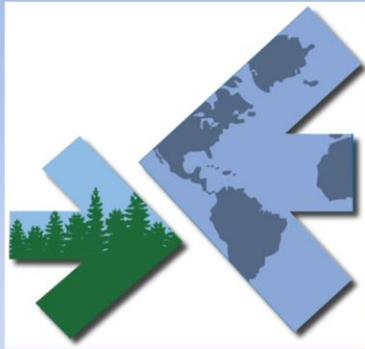


# Becoming a Compelling Communicator



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Hi. I'm Bill Dunn, owner of Big Picture Conservation LLC, an environmental consulting firm in Albuquerque, NM. Prior to pursuing my PhD at UNM, I was a biologist for New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Our department served a wide array of publics and informing them of important issues as well as obtaining their input was an important part of our mission. Here, I present techniques I learned that helped me excel in interactions with those interested publics. Master these lessons and what you communicate will command attention and respect. Most of all, you will give the knowledge you have the best chance of bringing to reality the actions you want!

## What's In a Word?

- **Communication:** Exchange Information
- **Compelling:** Earns Attention and Respect



### Key Definitions

**Communication:** "Exchange" implies a two-way flow of information: You to Them and Them to You. Always leave adequate time for the latter step.

**Compelling:** A baseline goal should be to gain attention for your viewpoint. That doesn't necessarily mean agreement, but your audience should at least give your message serious consideration.



Your college education gives you a solid foundation of knowledge. More importantly, you gain the skills to obtain more knowledge. Your job as a professional is to transform knowledge to actions that contribute to fulfilling the mission of your employer. That transformation requires communication. Specifically, you need to be able to convince decision makers that the actions you recommend are needed and should be funded.

In addition, actions that are taken will communicate back to you through results. You should take the positives and negatives from those results and add that to your knowledge base so that you can do an even better job the next time.

# Today's Topics!

- I. What You Say
- II. How You Show It
- III. How You Say It



In this presentation, I will address 3 components of communication: What you say, how you show it, and how you say it. My emphasis is on oral presentations, but the underlying lessons are applicable for any form of communication – from talking to your boss to writing a professional journal article.

I. What You Say


**The 3 C's**

Clear....

Concise...

Complete.

Key Concept!



This is the core lesson: Everything you write and everything you say should be clear, concise, and complete. Prepare well, say your piece, and move on!

## Before You Begin... Find Your Boundaries

Purpose?

Time?

Environment/Format?

Audience?

**MANAGE YOUR MESSAGE!**



Answer 4 questions when setting the foundation of your message.

- 1. What is the purpose?** This question isn't trivial. I have been to many presentations in which the presenter droned on enough that I have wondered if they even thought about why they were giving a talk. If you can't come up with a good answer (e.g., "I need to get funding from them for research", "I want to share my results with peers and get their feedback"), then don't proceed.
- 2. How much time?** Ask your host and NEVER, EVER go over that amount. In fact, you should use only **75%** of your allotted time, thereby leaving plenty of time for feedback (which may be the most valuable part of your presentation).
- 3. What is the environment of the venue and the format of the meeting?** Will there be a computer and projector provided? Will there be a sound system? How big is the room and how many people will be attending? Will questions be allowed during the presentation or will the audience wait until your presentation is completed? Get this information. If the answers are not what you want, don't be afraid to ask for changes. After all, it's *your* message!
- 4. Who is the audience?** This is mission critical! You need to shape your message to the level of understanding of those who will receive it. You are most responsible for the audience being able to grasp what you present.

Together, these four components are the foundation for managing your message. I want to reemphasize: *YOU* manage *YOUR* message. In other words, take ownership. Doing so is critical to success.

## Who Is Your Audience?

- **Culture**
  - Conservative
  - Appreciate Nature
- **KNOWLEDGE**
  - High school
  - Historic perspective
- **DESIRES AND NEEDS**
  - To Make a Buck!
  - Can't **Give**, But like to **Get**



Let's take a closer look at understanding your audience. It encompasses 3 aspects about them: their **culture** (behaviors and beliefs), their level of **knowledge**, and their **desires and needs**. As a wildlife biologist, I worked a lot with the ranching community and I use them here as an example. Culturally, ranchers are generally conservative. With frequent droughts, fluctuating cattle prices, and a host of other factors, ranching is a risky venture. Ranchers won't add any other risks if they can help it. However, they rely on nature for their well-being and are out in it a lot. So they generally have an intrinsic appreciation for the wild animals that roam on their lands. Most have a high school education; some have a college degree, usually in agriculture. The value they added to my efforts however, was that most ranches have been owned by the families for several generations. Thus they had a long-term perspective of the local environment that I couldn't possibly obtain by the few visits to the area that I would make. Finally, like everyone else, they need to make a buck. However, none of the ranchers I knew made a living solely off of their ranch; they all had second jobs. So they would be unable to contribute to my conservation efforts, such as setting aside part of their ranch as a refuge for a sensitive wildlife species. However, they would be open to accepting grant money to set aside land if I could obtain it.

# Grain and Extent

$A(\alpha x + \beta y) = \alpha Ax + \beta Ay = \alpha c + \beta d.$

$\Delta f = \frac{1}{\sqrt{|g|}} \frac{\partial}{\partial \xi^i} \left( \sqrt{|g|} g^{ij} \frac{\partial f}{\partial \xi^j} \right) = 0, \quad (g = \det\{g_{ij}\}).$

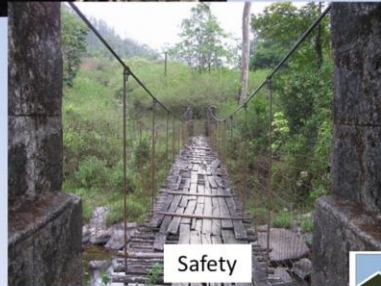


Grain (resolution) and Extent (total area encompassed by your analysis) are concepts from one of my academic disciplines, Landscape Ecology. It has applicability in planning presentations. As you plan your presentation, you need to determine how much of your subject you will cover and how detailed you will be. An example is explaining plans for a new bridge. If your audience is comprised of fellow engineers, your presentation might include the algebra, trigonometry, and calculus that went into the plans for the bridge.



What You Say

## Grain and Extent



However, if your audience is the general public and your goal is to obtain their approval for construction of the bridge, they likely will be more interested to know that it will improve traffic flow, it is safe, and it will look nice.

## Focus Statements

**Hypothesis:** a proposed explanation or prediction

**Objective:** measuring an attribute or a change.



Your presentation needs to be anchored on one to three (never more!) focus statements. They can be either hypotheses (commonly used for scientific presentations) or objectives. Pick one form or the other. Do not mix them together. And above all, they need to be clear and concise!

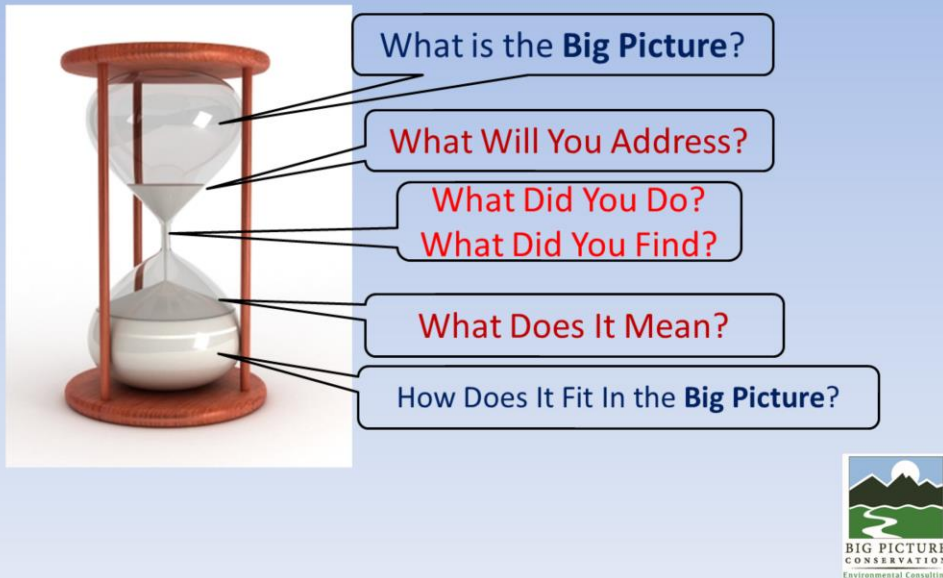
What You Say

# Brainstorm!



Next brainstorm about your subject. This process may extend over several days. Initially, all ideas are valid. During the course of this exercise, ideas are added and subtracted. Slowly, you become increasingly organized.

# The Hourglass Model



The Hourglass Model is an excellent format to use for organizing your presentation. You begin by providing the broad context. What is the overall sphere in which your subject falls? For example, I studied the imperiled Lesser Prairie-Chicken, a grouse found in the southern Great Plains. There are a lot of reasons why it is imperiled and an overview of those were provided here. Then, I introduced my subject – how weather affects the rates of births and deaths, thereby governing the trajectory of the population. Then, it was time for specifics. What data did I collect and how did I analyze it to determine the effect of weather on Prairie-Chicken populations. Next, I shared what I found in my analyses and what it might mean. In other words, does weather really affect Prairie-Chicken populations? How and why? Finally, I bring the presentation full circle by returning to the Big Picture, explaining how my results will contribute to the conservation and recovery of this species.

What You Say

## A Perfect Fit with IMRAD

What is the **Big Picture**?  
What Will You Address? } = **Introduction**

What Did You Do? = **Methods**

What Did You Find? = **Results**

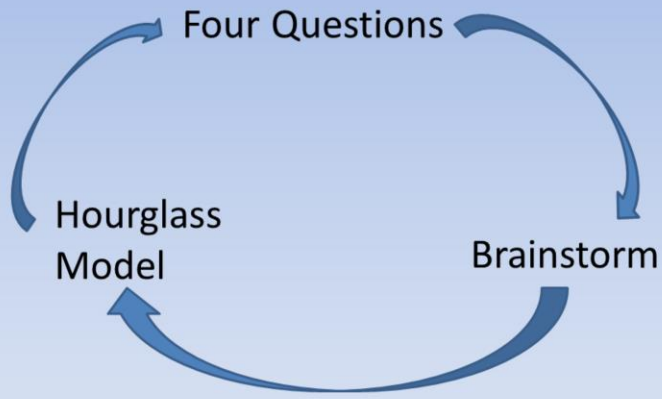
What Does It Mean?  
How Does It Fit  
In the **Big Picture**? } = **Discussion**



The Hourglass model fits “hand-in-glove” with IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion), the standard format for most scientific papers.

What You Say

## It's a Recursive Process



Preparing the foundation of a presentation is a recursive process. As you work on each step, new ideas may come to mind that will help you sharpen your focus and frame the message so your audience will understand it and appreciate your efforts.

How You Show It

## II. How You Show It



Visual Aids should  
complement, *not* compete

Your new **CAREER GOAL**  
**NEVER, EVER** have to say,  
“I know you can’t see what is on this slide but...”



Powerpoint is used in almost all professional presentations these days. Its advent has been both a blessing and curse. On one hand, Powerpoint provides an excellent means to visually bring your message to your audience. On the other hand, poorly constructed, cluttered slides can detract from your message. So the Three C's are critical. First, your slides should complement what you say, not compete against it. In other words, you do not want the slides diverting attention from the message. Secondly, they should be easily viewed. I can't begin to tell you how many times I have heard "I know you can't see what is on this slide, but...". The slides are the **visual** component. If the audience can't **see** them, why show them?

Three types of slides are dominant in professional presentations: bullet statements, graphs, and tables. Following is a section I entitled "Bad Slide, Good Slide" in which I provide examples of how to properly present each type of slide.

## Bullet Statements

### Not this...

#### Population Dynamics of Mule Deer

- Population densities may range from 0.5 to 5 deer per square kilometer.
- Mule Deer live 8-10 years but that depends on birth and death rates.
- Females are sexually mature at 1 ½ years. They breed in November and December and 1-2 young are born in June or July. The number of young that are born varies with condition of females as well as predation and disease.
- Overall, about 33% of a population dies each year.
  - ✓ Most deaths occur during fall from hunting and winter from the effects of weather.
  - ✓ Predators may be a significant source of mortality, but their effect varies depending on the condition of cover and forage.
  - ✓ Chronic wasting disease may also be a significant source of mortality especially when deer are crowded together.



The purpose of bullet statements is to summarize. So why do so many presenters try to include every thought they have?? Note the small font and the complete sentences.



How You Show It

## Bullet Statements

...but this!

### Population Dynamics of Mule Deer

1. Density: 0.5-5/km<sup>2</sup>
2. Life Span: 8-10 years
3. Births: 1-2
4. Mortality: 33%



**4-25 Rule: 4 Points, 25 Words**



A good slide of bullet statements should be limited to 4 points and 25 words. Reduce your points to key phrases. If you really have to share more than 4 points, use multiple slides.

# Graphs

Not this...

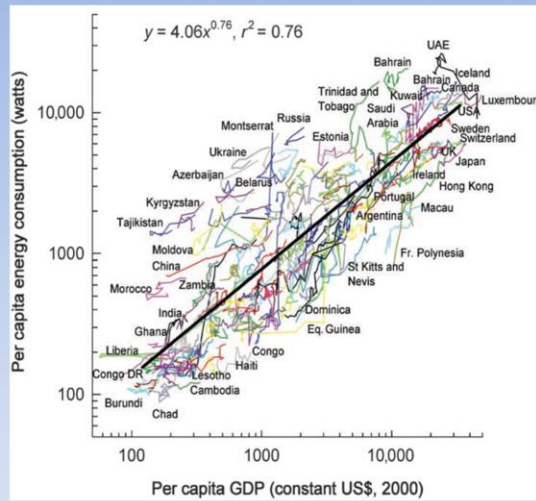


Figure 1. The relationship between per capita energy use and per capita gross domestic product (GDP; in US dollars) of countries, plotted on logarithmic axes, from 1980 to 2003. Note that the slope or exponent, 0.76 (95% confidence interval, 0.69–0.82), is close to three-quarters, which is the canonical value of the exponent for the scaling of metabolic rate with body mass in animals.

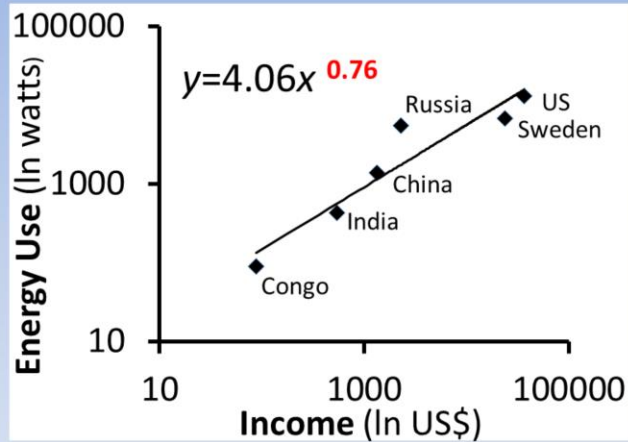


Another bad habit is to include graphs from published papers. Worse yet, often legends are included for explanatory purposes. Who can see it and who has time to absorb what it says while listening to the speaker? It is fine to include detailed graphics in journal articles. The reader can take the time to absorb the finer points. A typical powerpoint slide will be on the screen for less than a minute. So keep it simple.

How You Show It

...but this!

## Graphs



- Axes well-defined
- Only key data shown
- Trend is clear



And this is simple. Two cogent points were illustrated in the graph on the previous slide. First, there is a positive relationship between the mean per capita income of the citizens of a country and their energy use. Secondly, the relationship matches the canonical  $\frac{3}{4}$  power law that is found for many species in nature. Note that this graphic clearly shows each.

# Tables

Not this...

Table 1. Riparian vegetation types in the Whitewater River network, Kansas, USA (from Egbert et al. 2001).

Vegetation Type	Exclusive zones			Area in confluence zones (ha)	Total area (ha)	Dominant Species
	No. of Patches	Mean Patch Size (ha ± SD)	Area (ha)			
Pecan Floodplain Forest	152	0.35±0.84	53.6	54.6	108.2	<i>Carya illinoensis</i> , <i>Celtis occidentalis</i> , <i>Acer negundo</i>
Ash-Elm-Hackberry Floodplain Forest	3471	0.52±4.7	1793.3	2161.5	3954.8	<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanicus</i> , <i>Ulmus</i> sp., <i>C. occidentalis</i> , <i>Juglan nigra</i>
Cottonwood Floodplain Forest	1463	0.39±1.3	567.2	526.2	1096.4	<i>Populus deltoides</i> , <i>Plantus occidentalis</i> , <i>A. negundo</i>
Cottonwood Floodplain Woodland	784	0.46±1.18	322.2	260.8	583.0	<i>P. deltoides</i> , <i>Salix nigra</i> , <i>A. negundo</i>
Willow Shrubland	35	0.35±0.47	10.3	1.2	11.2	<i>Salix exigua</i> , <i>Andropogon gerardii</i>
Low or Wet Prairie	385	0.32±0.83	121.5	117.9	239.4	<i>Spartina pectinata</i> , <i>Eleocharis</i> sp.
Cattail Marsh	939	0.31±1.07	287.9	248.9	536.8	<i>Typha</i> sp., <i>Eleocharis</i> sp.
Total	7229	-	3156.0	3371.0	6527.0	



So we have less than a minute to visually digest the contents of the slide *and* listen to the explanation by the speaker. Is that possible with this table? I think not!

# Tables

...but this!

## Whitewater River Riparian Vegetation

<u>Veg Type</u>	<u>Area (ha)</u>	<u>No. Patches</u>	<u>Patch Size (ha)</u>
Ash-Elm	1800	3500	0.5
Cottonwood	570	1460	0.4
Cattail	290	940	0.3

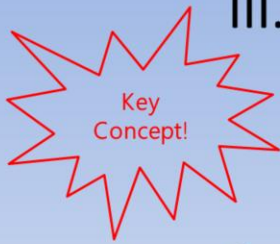
- 4x4 cells
- Round numbers
- Large to small
- Minimal decimals



Here, just the main categories are shown, the font is large, and the categories are in descending order. Much easier to grasp!

How You Say it.

### III. How You Say It



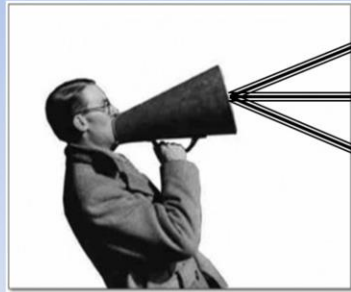
**Practice, Practice, Practice!**



Practice, Practice, Practice! Everyone says it and there is good reason why. A lot of nuances need to be mastered so that your message is clearly received and accurately interpreted. Importantly, the more you practice, the more confident you become.

How You Say it.

## Make Your Words Count



Volume

Inflection

Cadence



You should speak loudly enough so that everything you say is **clearly heard and understood**. **Inflection** is the emphasis you place on words. The number of words in a sentence represent the number of ways that sentence might be interpreted. Make sure you place your emphasis where it should be. Finally, **cadence** is the rhythm of your speech. What is more interesting – a river that flows slowly its entire course (think droning monotone) or one where there are rapids interspersed with more gentle currents? I submit it is the latter. Variation keeps things interesting!

Finally, use vocabulary that reaches your audience. Employing a lot of technical terms when speaking to an audience of lay people (i.e. the general public) may be impressive, but I doubt it will be informative. Being informative is the best way to impress!

How You Say it.

## Connect With Your Audience



Connecting with your audience includes three things. First, make the back of the room your target. Everything you show and everything you say should be clearly seen and heard by *everyone* in the room! Second, don't look at your audience, but across your audience. Inadvertently focusing on a person who is not paying attention to you can be distracting. Instead, look across your audience. They will perceive that you are making good eye contact with them; you will perceive them as a benign amorphous mass of humanity. Finally, mentally divide your audience into three segments and try to balance your direction among each segment during the course of your presentation.



How You Say it.

## Don't look like a Schlub!

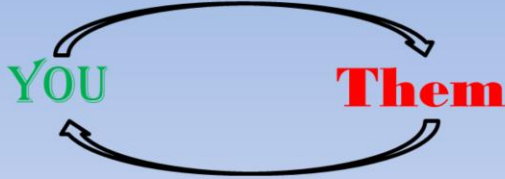
### Schlubs From U.S., China Meet In Lowest-Level Talks




You are a professional. Look the part! Stand up straight, keep your head erect, dress well. How well? As good as your audience and a little bit better. The lowest threshold should be nice jeans, a button down shirt and casual shoes (Never sneakers!!).

How You Say it.

## Gulp! Audience Feedback



- Know Your Audience, Know Your Stuff
- Good eye contact; Be direct.
- “I don’t know.” Then... *get the answer.*
- Graciously accept all ideas.



What you receive from your audience may be the most valuable part of your presentation. Leave time for it (remember the 75% rule). Four tips will help you make the most of the question and comment period.

1. **Know your audience, know your stuff.** A common refrain to calm presenters is, “Don’t worry. You know your subject better than anyone else in the room.” That’s a great statement...but only if it is true. That is why I strongly emphasize the need to get informed about your audience early in the process. That will help you anticipate how they might react to what you say and what questions they might ask. If you know them and you know your subject inside and out, you should weather any adverse reactions just fine.
2. **Direct and clear:** Be fully engaged with your questioner. Actively listen. Give a straight answer.
3. **“I don’t know”:** No matter how well you prepare, there always is the chance that you might not know the answer to a question. So just say so. Then ask the questioner to provide their contact info after your presentation, get the answer, and call him/her back. A returned response is powerful stuff. A lot of support can be gained by going the extra mile and getting the questioner an answer.
4. **Accept all ideas:** The question and comment period is a great opportunity to obtain ideas to improve your project. But you will also get some poor ideas. Whether good or bad, accept all ideas graciously, thank each respondent, and state that you will give their idea serious consideration.

# The Final Word

Your **LEGACY** begins *now*



Aldo Leopold: Father of Wildlife Conservation  
(and a *great* communicator!)



A legacy is the collection of personal and professional accomplishments for which you will be remembered. Everyone builds one over the course of their life. Your legacy started the day you were born, but the opportunities to build it really accelerate the day you enter the professional world. Few professional accomplishments will happen without at least some approval or involvement of other people. So if you want to get things done, you need to communicate well. The lessons you have just learned will head you in the right direction. Master them and there is no doubt you will be able to make a positive contribution to the world around you!

The content of this slide presentation comes from my book, "Becoming a Compelling Communicator for Conservation", a reference on how to write and speak professionally. If you would like a copy, it is available on Amazon.com or at the UNM bookstore.

**Remember: Clear, Concise, Complete!**

Best to you,  
Bill

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**Survey**



**Thank You!**

**<http://goo.gl/luGp6u>**