EFFECTIVE TALKING POINTS

Talking points are a set of clear, easily remembered phrases that outline a proposal, project, or idea. In most cases, talking points are used to keep a speaker on track when they are giving a presentation at a conference, to a reporter, in a meeting, or even in an elevator. While different talking points may vary greatly depending on the subject matter, length of the presentation, and audience, here are some "best practice principles" to consider:

1. **Keep it short and simple.** Because their purpose is to ease verbal presentation, talking points should be short and contain only the most relevant information.
    o Using bullets can help condense and organize information.
    o Points don't have to be complete sentences.
2. **Capture the main point or points.** People won't remember every word they hear in a presentation. So make sure that you clearly articulate and emphasize the main points.
    o Once you've written your talking points, ask yourself if you've missed any important points.
    o Try your talking points out on a friend and see what main points your friend takes away from them.
3. **Think about your audience.** Who is the audience for the presentation? How much do they know about the subject matter? How much background and/or context will you need to give? How do they feel about the argument/ideas/opinions that the presentation will express
    o **Worst Case Scenario.** What is the best argument that you can think of against the claims or arguments in your presentation? Try to consider some worst-case scenarios for how your talking points might be received, and then consider including responses to this potential opposition.

**The "Rule of Three"**

Many speechwriters have found the so-called "rule of three," whereby talking points are structured around the three most important points, to be a useful framework. If you were limited to three sentences to describe a paper, idea, or project, what are the main ideas that you would highlight?

Of course, the "rule of three" is merely a framework that some have found useful, not a dogma. Depending on the information you're trying to express, you may need two or five or twelve or any number of points.

**What to Avoid in Developing Talking Points:**

| Avoid | Why |
|---|---|
| Too much information | You don't want to bog down your audience (or your thoughts) with unnecessary detail/background. They'll just stop listening. |
| Many lines of text in a single bullet point | Talking points are made to be memorized before a presentation or quickly glanced at while a presentation is being given. Make them easy to read. |
| Hiding the main point | Your audience may only remember one or two key things from the presentation. Make sure what they remember are the most important points. |