

# Delivery rules

by Gianni Anchois

**Delivery of a speech is much more important than the content.**

Marcus Tullius Cicero, Roman philosopher, statesman, lawyer, political theorist, constitutionalist and one of Rome's greatest orators, famously asserted that the "delivery of a speech is much more important than the content".

*"If you don't have much to say, no matter how you say it, you will bore your audience"*

It's an interesting consideration.

Common sense tells us that if you don't have much to say, no matter how you say it, you will bore your audience. In the business world, unfortunately, the same effect on your listeners is obtained when you actually have too much to say too.

We've all been there. The speaker stuffs the presentation with data points and detailed information, uses a weak storyline and ends up losing the room ten minutes into his speech.

Projecting Cicero's approach into modern public speaking, we could say that to be engaging and interesting (and possibly, sometimes, even entertaining) you need to apply a three pronged approach.

*“The three ingredients of a great speech:  
content, structure, you”*

### **Rule #1: content.**

First, build your talk on material that sits just at the right level: not too detailed, not too generic. A good rule of thumb, as suggested by Guy Kawasaki, is to use a maximum of 10 slides, for a maximum duration of 20 minutes and using the smallest font size of 30.

Wherever possible, use powerful imagery or streamlined wording to impress the point you are making into the listener's mind. Always try to remember that less is more.

### **Rule #2: structure.**

Second, make sure you have a storyline to articulate your material effectively. Two sources of best practices can help here.

You can use some of the classical rhetorical devices as taught by Aristotle in his “Rhetoric”, and in modern times put to very good use and effect by, among others, Sir Winston Churchill.

Start by establishing your ethos, your credibility as a speaker. People respect and relate to someone who's been there before, who's learned from mistakes and that in general has had skin in the game.

Then read the pathos, the emotions, of your audience. As an example, in most audiences you will likely find well disposed people: gain their

attention first (even a simple eye contact will do). Identify those that are ill disposed: usually they keep their arms crossed on their chest and shift their weight on the chair often. Make the effort of looking at them more often than others, and try to engage them in your presentation.

Finally focus on the logos, the whole reasoning behind your presentation. It might be a business proposition, an innovative piece of technology or any other product or service that you may think is relevant and resounding to them. If there's no commonly agreed reasoning behind it, you will not be able to make your points stick.

What also works quite well for me is to use the screenwriter's methodology to build a storyboard. If you break down your account into the five stages of setup, raising action, climax, falling action and resolution, you'll hopefully be able to build the momentum in your speech and take your audience on a journey, instead of forcing them to a passive experience.

### **Rule #3: speaker.**

The third and most important element in the build up of a great speech or presentation delivery is you.

Make sure you work on your delivery techniques, your voice, your posture and the way you move your arms and your body. If you are a walker on stage (as I am), try not to walk too much whilst presenting, so to avoid the tennis match effect. Practice slowing down your speech and pausing often for effect.

When nervous or anxious, we tend to increase the pitch of our voices. As any singer or performer knows, that can have a disastrous effect so make sure it doesn't happen. Practice talking from your chest, not your throat, so that you will limit the fatigue and be fresher for the Q&A session at the end of the speech.

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The final recommendation is obvious, but it's incredibly consistently overlooked in the business world -- the general excuse being lack of time.

Before you take your new speech on the road, remember the basic rule of any successful speaker: practice, practice and practice some more.

Natural born speakers, as Cicero would certainly confirm, are not born: they are made.

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