

Simplifying Technical Presentations

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A. Simplifying language

1. If the word is there to impress – cut it.
2. If it needs defining, define it. Then cut it.
3. If you have to teach the jargon, introduce the concept before the term.
4. When tension is high, use less jargon.
5. Ask your audience to stop you if you use jargon they don't understand.
6. Keep your sentence structure simple.
7. Ask a nontechnical person to read through what you've written or listen to your presentation.
8. Run a readability check.
9. Warn your audience about difficult material.
10. Be especially careful about words that have different technical meanings than their common meanings.

B. Simplifying information

1. Stick to your main points.
2. Provide three different levels of complexity, organized like an onion.
3. Include only details that are needed to explain your main points or to avoid losing credibility later.
4. Don't skimp on non-technical information your audience already knows.
5. Tell stories – or at least use concrete language.
6. Personalize.
7. Check for understanding.

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- Explaining Risk to Non-Experts: a communications challenge (Oct–Dec1987) – www.psandman.com/articles/nonexpt.htm
- Quantitative Risk Communication: Explaining the Data (1994) – <http://www.vimeo.com/20676915>
- Simplification Made Simple (Sept 2008) – www.psandman.com/col/simplify.htm
- Misoversimplification: The Communicative Accuracy Standard Distinguishes Simplifying from Misleading – www.psandman.com/col/misoversimplify.htm

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