



## 4 Common Ways to Remember Material

by

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Remembering speeches can be a very intimidating experience. There are many ways one can remember material and I would like to focus on what I believe are the 4 common ways to remember material.

1. **Memorizing**
2. **Reading from complete text**
3. **Using Notes**
4. **Using Visual Aids as Notes**

Let's take a look at each of these in detail.

1. **Memorizing** -In my opinion, this is absolutely the worst way to keep track of material. People are preoccupied with trying to remember the words to say and not the ideas behind the words (or with the audience). As a result, normal voice inflection disappears. With memorizing, mental blocks become inevitable. With memorizing it is not a matter of "will" you forget; it's a matter of WHEN!

2. **Reading from complete text** - Listening to someone read a speech or presentation is hated by most people. People say, "If that's all they were going to do is read there speech, I could have read it myself." I'm sure many of us have experienced this at least once while attending a conference or two. Below are some reasons why I believe people read poorly:

- The speaker loses normal voice inflection because they lose touch with the ideas behind the words. Listen for pauses. Natural speech is filled with pauses; unnatural speech is not.
- The text isn't spoken language - too often speakers write their speeches in "business language". That is often hard to read, much less listen to.
- The speech isn't static - the potted plant will probably move more. There is little movement, little energy, little interest behind the lectern.
- There's no or little eye contact - any eye contact is with the text, not the audience. To read text while trying to maintain eye contact with the audience takes a lot of practice.
- The speaker is scared - many speakers read because they are afraid to try anything else. They know reading will fail but at least it will fail with a small "f" rather than a capital one.

NOTE: Don't get me wrong, there are times when speeches **MUST** be read. Many times it is necessary to read policy statements or company announcements. Also, some speeches must be timed right down to the second.

## WHEN YOU HAVE TO READ!

If reading is absolutely necessary, here are some suggestions:

- Pay attention to the inflection in your voice - to sound natural, rehearse often, checking yourself for pauses. Ask yourself if your words sound the way you would say them if you weren't reading. Tape yourself and listen to your own voice. Take notes where changes should be made with the inflection in your voice.
- When preparing your written speech, say the words "out loud" first in order that your written text will read closer to your speaking style. This will make it easier to read and much easier to listen to. People often **DO NOT** write the same way as they speak and this makes reading more difficult. If we use wording and phrasing we normally use in our everyday language it will be easier to add the correct voice inflection and tone. Annotate your text to

indicate which words to emphasize. Numbers are the easiest target words to say slowly with emphasis on each syllable.

- One of the biggest problems speakers face when reading text is that we often forget to use gestures. We are so busy making sure we read the text we fail to communicate effectively with our entire body. One thing we can do to help this is to "double space" your typed text to leave room to add notes or cues about gestures and other reminder type clues. We need to practice using this annotated text of our speech so we can easily and smoothly react to these cues for our gestures while at the same time correctly read the text. This does take some practice. Some people do this very effectively.

I work with ministers who do this extremely well, but they also practice a lot! Videotape yourself reading the speech and then sit and watch the speech, making notes as to the gestures which could have been used. Add notes to your written text based on this review, using notes or even pictures of the gestures to use and deliver the speech again, trying this time to add gestures. After a little practice, this will become second nature.

- When we read speeches, the amount of eye contact with our audience is usually less. In some cases, people who read speeches have NO eye contact. To avoid this, first write like you speak (see suggestion #2). When typing the text, use upper and lower case letters. This will make it easier to read. TYPING EVERYTHING IN UPPERCASE, AS I HAVE DONE HERE, MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT TO READ> Don't have long paragraphs or you will lose your place every time you look up. Start a new paragraph every sentence or two. Also, have your text double spaced. Some people even go so far as alternating the color of the text for each paragraph.

Use unstapled pages for your text. Paper clip your pages and just before you begin, remove the paper clip. As you prepare your text, keep in mind that you will have to handle these pages and you want to do this smoothly and as quietly as you can. Do not have part of a sentence begin on one page and continue onto the next page. End the page with a complete sentence and paragraph.

During your pauses, smoothly "slide" the page you just finished using to one side and continue with the text on the next page. Do not pick up the page and place it behind or turn the page over when done. This will be distracting and will bring attention to the fact that you are reading. Avoid handling the pages as much as possible while you are reading.

With a lot of practice and careful preparation, you can deliver a powerful speech, even when reading. Some of the world's greatest speeches were read, but you can be assured, they weren't reading them for the first time when delivering their speech to their audience. Practice, practice, practice.

**3. Using Notes** - This is the most common way for remembering material. Using notes is better than reading since the speaker can have normal voice inflection and make more effective eye contact. If your notes are on the lectern, you probably won't move very far from them. If notes are in your hand, you probably won't gesture very much.

Below are some suggestions to consider if you decide to use notes:

### USING NOTES

- Use note cards. Include quotes, statistics and lists you may need, NOT paragraphs of text. VERY IMPORTANT: Number your note cards! (Just in case you drop them).
- Don't put too much information on each note card or you will find yourself reading too much. Put only a few words or key phrases.
- Leave your notes on the lectern or table and move away occasionally. Don't be afraid to move away from your notes and get out of your comfort zone. Too many speakers use the lectern to hide behind and this restricts the effective use of your entire body.
- Practice using your note cards. If you find yourself reading your note cards too much, this is a sure clue you need to reduce the amount of written text on each card. Remember, all you need are short phrases or key words, enough to "jog" your memory.
- Use pictures or picture maps to guide yourself. Pictures help you to "visualize" the key points of your speech. Use mental pictures as well to tell the story in your head. This will take some creativity, but will be worth the effort.

**4. Using Visual Aids As Notes** - Simple visual aids can effectively serve as headings and subheadings. Speak to the heading. Say what you want to say and move on. If you forget something, that's okay; the audience will never know unless you tell them.

Practice creating just a few meaningful headings to use and practice using only these headings as your "cues". This will take practice, but practicing using only these few words will force you to better internalize your speech.

This has four important advantages:

- You don't have to worry about what you are going to say next. Your visual aids provide you with your "cues" of your next major idea or thought. All you need to do between ideas is to use an effective transitional statement. (See my tips on using transitions).
- Having only a few key words on your visual aid allows you to move around the room without the need or feeling you need to go back to your notes. In fact, most inexperienced speakers don't move around at all. Movement also helps you to relax and adds energy to your presentations. Movement also allows the listeners to follow you and pay closer attention to you and your message. Plan your movements during your rehearsals. Decide where in your presentation it makes sense to move. If you find yourself starting to sway from side to side, take one or two steps and stop again, standing evenly on both feet. Keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet. This will help keep you from swaying.
- You can have good eye contact with your audience. You can look at your audience all the time while speaking - except for that brief moment you look at your visual aid. But that's okay since the audience will probably follow you and also look at your visual aid. This will help the audience to "see" your message as well as "hear" your message. The more you rehearse and the more you become familiar with your visual aids, the easier it becomes.
- Your audience will feel comfortable that you are on your planned track. Well designed visual aids show the audience that you DO have a plan and have properly prepared and are following your plan.

Keep in mind, your visual aids do not have to be only word charts. They can contain diagrams, pictures or even graphs.

When you use visual aids, always introduce the visual aid **BEFORE** you show it using one of your transition statements. You can even use the "looking back / looking forward" transition: "Now that we have seen the ...let's now look at ...."

Regardless of which method you choose to use to remember your material, nothing will help you more than proper planning and preparation. Remember to *prepare, prepare, prepare!*

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