COMPASS

The Message Box

The Message Box is a tool to help you organize your thoughts and identify key points. It is designed to be flexible—it can be used to help structure a presentation, organize a lecture, outline a proposal, or prepare for an interview.

Your audience—a journalist, policymaker, colleagues at a professional meeting, or a group of second graders—can only absorb a limited amount of information. Your goal as an effective communicator is to identify the information that is critical to your audience—what *really* matters to them, what do they *really* need to know. Start by listing the central issue, then "frame" the issue with the most relevant information.

Streamline your information into concise messages by answering the following questions:

▶ What are the problems/conflicts/issues involved (Problems?)
▶ Why does this information matter to my listener (So What?)
▶ What are some of the possible solutions to the problem (Solutions?)
▶ What are the potential benefits of resolving this problem (Benefits?)

Consider these questions as your "starting point." If the questions don't exactly apply, rework them to get at the "meat" of your information—keep asking yourself *So What? Why?*

Pare down your ideas so that each message is one or two concise sentences—if you still have a paragraph, keep working. Once you have honed in on your key points, list anecdotes, sound-bites, and facts that reinforce your messages.

The principle is easy, but it takes time to develop message that work for you and your audience. Keep working to refine your messages—they will evolve and get better over time.

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Audience: _____

Problems?

ISSUE

Benefits?

So What?

Solutions?

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