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Brown  
Consulting Ltd.

The Communication &  
Business Development  
Specialists

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*Happy Christmas, Hogmanay and  
New Year from everyone at  
Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd*



Richard Keith<sup>1</sup>

## Christmas creativity in communication

Richard has come up with a humorous GPB twist on a couple of well-known Christmas carols

**W**e regularly advise clients to be brave and inventive. Those of you who have attended one of our workshops will remember, we hope, being told to do some metaphorical white coats and to experiment with your communication with the aim of discovering new and possibly better ways to convey your messages and authentic personality.



Merry Christmas (Source: Unsplash.com)

Similarly, many of you will have been on the receiving end of a pitch or presentation that stood out for its creative initiative and has thus stuck with you. In short, creativity born of experimentation in rehearsals can often yield great returns.

One obvious area where this can be done is in your content. In that spirit, I thought it would be fun to try a little festive experiment with a couple of well-known Christmas carols by rewriting the lyrics to fit some core areas of GPB advice. After discarding a few classics-in-waiting ('O, answer the question' to the tune of 'O, come all ye faithful', and 'O little voice constrained by phlegm' to the tune of 'O little town of Bethlehem') I decided on the following two carols:

### The Twelve Days of Coaching...

*(Sung to the tune of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas...')*

*On the first day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:  
"It's Content and Delivery!"*

*On the second day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:  
"Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"*

*On the third day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:  
"Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"*

*On the fourth day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:  
"More rhetoric,*

#### In this edition:

*See the Christmas prize quiz on pages 9&10*

#### **Christmas creativity in communication**

By Richard Keith

Richard re-writes the lyrics to two well-known Christmas carols fitting in some core GPB advice.

#### **Persuasive communication: Examples from Famous Authors**

By Desmond Harney

Des looks at effective persuasion skills, making reference to the work of some famous authors... and Spiderman!

#### **Let me tell you a story... the persuasiveness of ancient orators**

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

Lynda looks at 'truth default' and bias in some ancient stories.

#### **Prize quiz: What's the question?**

By Ewan Pearson

Have a go at coming up with some humorous questions, there's a prize for the best questions!



## Christmas creativity in communication (cont.)

Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

*On the fifth day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"WORK - ON YOUR - VOICE,  
More rhetoric,  
Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

*On the sixth day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"Set out the structure,  
WORK - ON YOUR - VOICE,  
More rhetoric,  
Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

*On the seventh day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"Eye contact is crucial,  
Set out the structure,  
WORK - ON YOUR - VOICE,  
More rhetoric,  
Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

*On the eighth day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"Yes, gestures help you!  
Eye contact is crucial,  
Set out the structure,  
WORK - ON YOUR - VOICE,  
More rhetoric,  
Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

*On the ninth day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"Now practise questions,  
Yes, gestures help you,  
Eye contact is crucial,  
Set out the structure  
WORK - ON YOUR - VOICE,  
More rhetoric,  
Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

*On the tenth day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"PLEASE do tough questions,  
Now practise questions,

Yes, gestures help you,  
Eye contact is crucial,  
Set out the structure,  
WORK - ON YOUR - VOICE,  
More rhetoric,  
Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

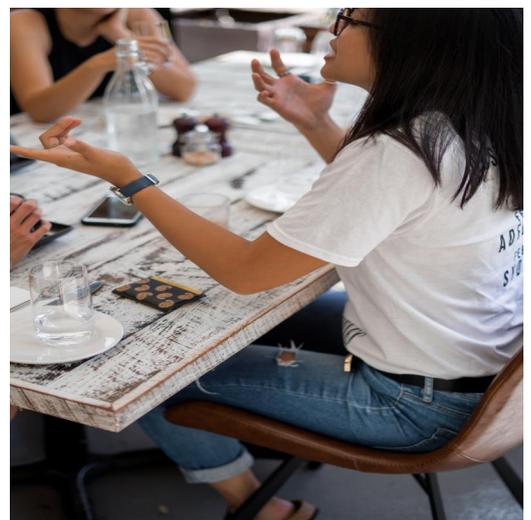
*On the eleventh day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"Rehearsing makes a difference,  
PLEASE do tough questions,  
Now practise questions,  
Yes, gestures help you,  
Eye contact is crucial,  
Set out the structure,  
WORK - ON YOUR - VOICE,  
More rhetoric,  
Use evidence,  
Key messages,  
And it's Content and Delivery!"

*On the twelfth day of coaching, my tips from G.P.B:*

"Great! Now you're ready,  
Rehearsing has worked wonders,  
Don't over-answer,  
Bridge if you can do,  
Gestures are potent,  
Eye contact's now working,  
Your structure's sturdy!  
-NICE VO-CAL WORK-  
Good rhetoric,  
Strong evidence,  
Key messages,  
So great Content and De-li-ver-y!"

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You should incorporate natural but purposeful and structured gestures (Source: [Unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com))

# Christmas creativity in communication (cont.)



## We wish you success when pitching

*(Sung to the tune of ‘We wish you a Merry Christmas...’)*

We wish you success when pitching,  
We wish you success when pitching,  
We wish you success when pitching,  
with a fab Q&A.  
("Yourself at your best",  
despite being stressed.)  
We wish you success when pitching,  
with a fab Q&A!

Now bring us a shorter slide deck,  
Now bring us a shorter slide deck,  
Now bring us a shorter slide deck, with  
far fewer slides.  
(We know this one irks,  
But trust us it works!)  
Now bring us a shorter slide deck, with  
far fewer slides!

For we all like engaging speakers,  
For we all like engaging speakers,  
For we all like engaging speakers, and  
that can be you.  
(Some stronger pa-thos  
helps you come ac-ross.)  
For we all like engaging speakers, and  
that can be you.

We won't make your voice sound silly,  
We won't make your voice sound silly,  
We won't make your voice sound silly,  
it still sounds like you.  
(Pitch mod-u-la-tion  
in your o-ra-tion!)  
We won't make your voice sound silly,  
it still sounds like you!



Season's greetings (Source: Unsplash.com)



We wish you a Happy New Year! (Source: Unsplash.com)

Here's my seasonal advice: be brave  
and try to be creative: take risks in  
rehearsals and, who knows, you may  
have some fun, and it may even pay off  
when you are giving your next  
presentation or pitch.

Merry Christmas everyone, and a  
Happy Healthy Hogmanay and 2022.

By Richard Keith

### References:

1. Photograph of Richard Keith—by Ori Jones Photography
2. Merry Christmas image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/K6qH4pYiKvs>
3. Gesture image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/wXJVixHP44>
4. Christmas tree image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/ocq7NBmpOYU>
5. Happy New Year image: [https://unsplash.com/photos/PXI\\_S152jNM](https://unsplash.com/photos/PXI_S152jNM)

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# Persuasive Communication: Examples from famous authors



Desmond Harney

Des takes persuasion lessons from Austen and Dickens. The latter offers us a famously topical festive example.

A recent re-reading of Jane Austen's 'Persuasion' has prompted discussions with my GPB colleagues on its title and subject matter. I'll briefly share relevant reflections on that with you here before turning to a more festive parallel.



Ciarán Hinds and Amanda Root in BBC TV's 1995 adaptation (source: wikipedia.com)

Austen's original and anodyne working title was 'The Elliots'. It was only when published, six months after Austen's death, that the novel gained the title her brother Henry provided, by which we now know it. Despite this, one of her preoccupations specifically concerned one's influence over others, as Henry's title suggests. She explores how status and standing affect an individual's power of persuasion. Austen depicts the potential dangers of exerting influence (sometimes unintentionally) on others – and the life-changing consequences and responsibilities arising from such coercion, however well-intentioned.

The introduction to my Penguin edition<sup>2</sup> suggests that misgivings about her own unintended, real-life influence over her niece's life choices provided the artistic motivation. Austen warns us to wield our persuasive power warily, and to consider the potentially damaging effects on others of doing so. Her theme predates and paraphrases the adage since popularised by Spiderman in Marvel Comics and in their recent film adaptations: the "Peter Parker principle" - 'With great (persuasive) power comes great responsibility'<sup>3</sup>.

Her concerns may feel less relevant to a modern audience, however. Given that

the power afforded automatically to an influencer, simply by their status (see also part 1 of Aristotle's 'Ethos'), appears to have reduced dramatically since Austen's time. That could be one reason why so many senior figures and organisations seek advice on Persuasive Communication from GPB.

But who DOES successfully persuade us nowadays—and how? We've learned no longer to believe much that's said by briefed politicians or other formal spokespersons, for instance. Systematic deference for the elderly has been eroded, at least in the West. The medical world has lost its relatively unchallengeable status – as anti-vaxxers have demonstrated. Whereas one perhaps rather unlikely person who wields strong persuasive influence



Greta Thunberg, in 2020 (Source: Wikipedia.com)

globally is a diminutive Swedish teenager with Asperger's Syndrome. Jane Austen might well have been astonished at Greta Thunberg's persuasive appeal and effectiveness. Since it fails to follow the model of influence she depicted and felt she understood so well. At GPB, we're less surprised. If you want to persuade others nowadays, typically you must earn that right. And Thunberg earns it through several powerful means, in a non-native language. Her approach has

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## Persuasive Communication: Examples from famous authors (cont.)

helped gain her three nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize, so far. Why is she so effective? Perhaps because:

- 1) Greta Thunberg seems well-informed and passionate about her climate activism for one so young.
- 2) She focuses on a small number of Key Messages (arguably just one!) using carefully selected powerful evidence and rhetoric in support.
- 3) She's not afraid to communicate honestly about her beliefs and experiences, and she relates positively to a broad spectrum of her audience.

The success of this approach is so very difficult to compete against that Thunberg's detractors often resort to '*ugly personal attacks*'<sup>4</sup>, rather than directly addressing the subject of her activism. She shows us a powerful example of persuasion in action today.

Since Austen's novel is hardly an iconic Christmas tale, let's now turn our attention to a more topical take on persuasion. One that's more redolent of the season of good will, cooked goose, holly wreaths, Christmas spirits (plural) and much more, besides. It's another story depicting the power of persuading others. I'm referring to Charles Dickens's '*A Christmas Carol*'<sup>5</sup>, in which Ebenezer Scrooge is famously visited by four philanthropic ghosts one Christmas Eve, intent on saving his soul. Each hopes to influence the misanthropic miser to open his heart, and his purse, to those less fortunate.

As though in keeping with GPB's guidance, each spirit provides Scrooge with powerful evidence (i.e. of the negative impacts of his lifestyle and choices). Using just a few Key Messages, each one selectively focuses Scrooge's attention towards the top of what GPB terms the '*Iceberg of Information*' (where only their most relevant and compelling evidence is shared, see image on next page). And while Scrooge remains impervious to their warnings at first ("*Bah! Humbug!*"), as the accumulated force of their evidence becomes ever more affecting, he eventually sees the error of his miserable ways.

It's worth remembering, however, that Scrooge's epiphany famously requires supernatural terror for a successful intervention. Ebenezer's misanthropy has remained impenetrable, over several years, to the persistent human persuasive efforts of his nephew, Fred. Rather than echoing Austen's concerns about the dangers of persuasion, Dickens's key message is about the fallibility of human intervention and influence, when not specifically tailored to the audience, particularly so in the absence of compelling supporting evidence.



Ebenezer Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present (Source: Wikipedia.com)

That's a key message which GPB fully endorses. Dickens's Christmas spirits must bring powerful, opinion-changing evidence, to stir stubbornly stony Scrooge, until - and only at the very end - '*his own heart laughed*'<sup>6</sup>.

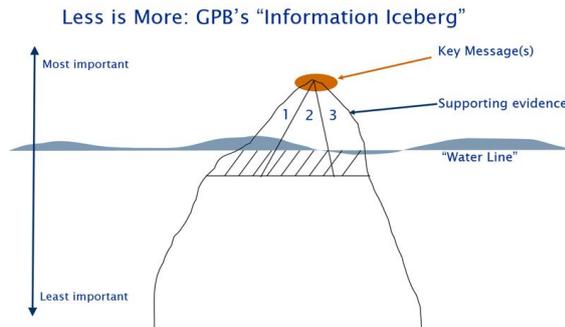
So, when you find yourself in similar shoes to those of Jacob Marley's ghost, needing to persuade an awkward audience, GPB's "spirited" advice might include the following:

- Consider your audience
- Focus on your primary objective

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# Persuasive Communication: Examples from famous authors (cont.)



GPB's "Information Iceberg" – best to focus on your Key Message and most compelling evidence. Leave everything else in reserve, below "the water-line".  
Source: GPB

- Prepare just a few Key Messages, appropriate to both the audience and your aim
- Research and employ the most independent, free and quick-to-access evidence in support of case
- Use just a few striking, memorable visual aids – e.g. perhaps some helpful ghosts, if you've any to hand.

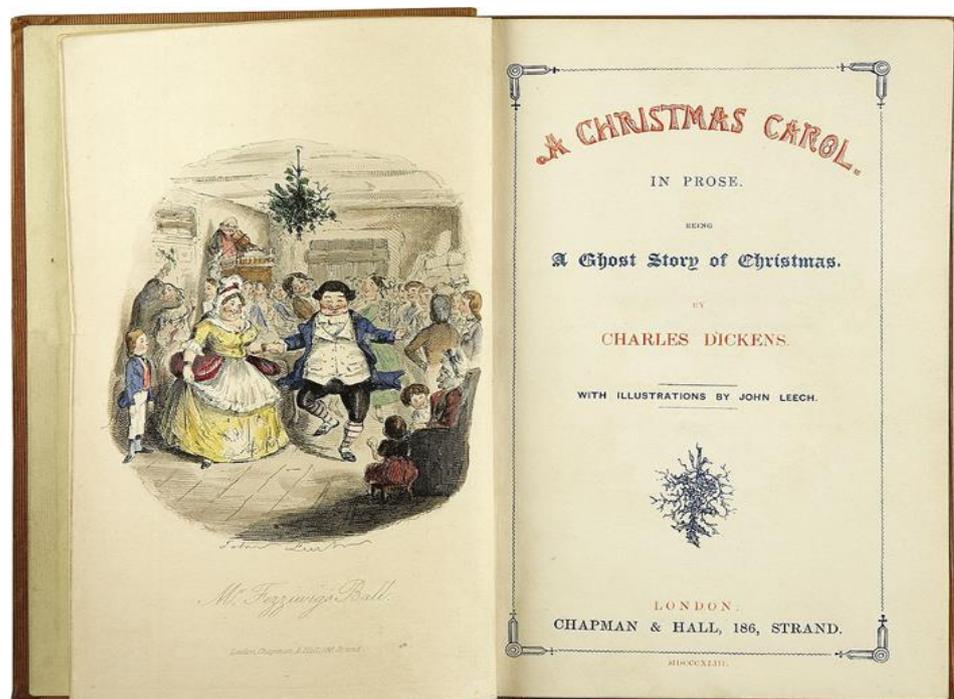
If we can learn from these pointers, and from Austen and Dickens, then 'God Bless Us, Every One!'<sup>7</sup> Implementing them should result in a more persuasive and prosperous New Year.

By Des Harney

## References:

1. 'Persuasion' (1817) by Jane Austen
2. *ibid*: The Penguin Classics edition (1998) - introduction, by Professor Dame Gillian Beer, University of Cambridge
3. Marvel Comics, Spiderman - from *Amazing Fantasy #15* (Aug. 1962) onwards: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spider-Man>
4. Chakraborty, Aditya in *The Guardian* (1 May 2019) "The hounding of Greta Thunberg is proof that the right has run out of ideas"
5. 'A Christmas Carol. In Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas.' (1843) by Charles Dickens
6. *ibid*: 'Stave Five' (the final chapter)
7. *ibid*: the final words of Tiny Tim ('*who did NOT die*') and which end the book.
8. Ciarán Hinds and Amanda Root in BBC TV's 1995 adaptation - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persuasion\\_\(1995\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persuasion_(1995_film))
9. Greta Thunberg, in 2020 - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta\\_Thunberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta_Thunberg)
10. Ebenezer Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present— [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Christmas\\_Carol#/media/File:Scrooges\\_third\\_visitor-John\\_Leech.1843.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol#/media/File:Scrooges_third_visitor-John_Leech.1843.jpg)
11. A Christmas Carol book— [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Christmas\\_Carol#/media/File:Charles\\_Dickens-A\\_Christmas\\_Carol-Title\\_page-First\\_edition\\_1843.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol#/media/File:Charles_Dickens-A_Christmas_Carol-Title_page-First_edition_1843.jpg)

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A Christmas Carol (Source: Wikipedia.com)

# Let me tell you a story.... The persuasiveness of the ancient orators

gpb



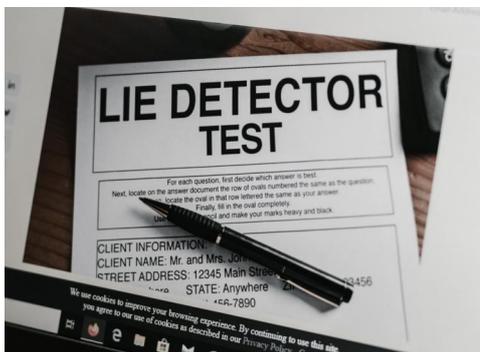
Lynda Russell-Whitaker

Stories (called 'Mythos' in ancient times) are a powerful tool, but how much should we rely on them?

This time of year is rich with stories, two of which dominate the western world, the Christian nativity and the story of Santa Claus or Father Christmas with his world travels on Christmas Eve. We even believe some tall stories as adults.

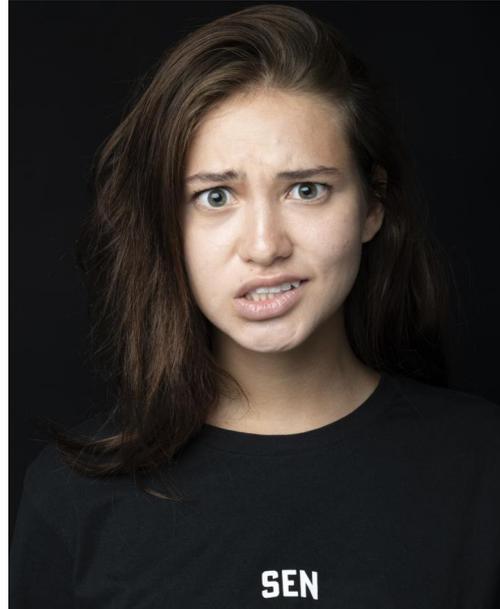
In his book *'Talking to Strangers'*, Malcolm Gladwell claims that humans are prone to believe blatant lying - and that judges are really no better at discerning who is lying than the general public.

According to Professor Timothy R. Levine, a deception-detecting expert whose research in this field was first published in 1990, his **Truth Default Theory (TDT)** differs from other techniques used to detect deception in one major way, in that it: *'rejects the idea that the best way to detect deception is pay attention to nonverbal and verbal "cues". Using cues make people poor lie detectors. My research shows that how people come off can be misleading and that there are much better ways to not getting fooled.'*



The TDT states that using cues make people poor lie detectors (Source: *Unsplash.com*)

So how can we distinguish the truth from a 'good' but untrue story? Well, the above cues are based on a set of assumptions we made much earlier in our lives. Unfortunately, these can be played upon by people who are clever at disguising the truth. For example, if what someone says is congruent with their facial expressions, we tend to believe what the person is saying.



If this person told us that she understood something that had just been explained to her, with this facial expression... We probably wouldn't believe her (Source: *Unsplash.com*).

The Ancient Greek orators certainly knew how to exploit this 'truth bias' in their audiences. They employed a whole suite of deceptive rhetorical tools, from the manipulation of specific 'facts' of a case to outright fabrication of the truth, in order to persuade jurors of the veracity of their clients' claims, whilst casting doubt on the truthfulness of those of their opponents. Apparently, the end justified the means, especially when it came to speeches delivered in court. That's hardly surprising when the stakes could be as high as exile or the death sentence.

There are many clever and devious ways to obscure the truth through your argumentation that were used extensively by ancient rhetoricians, such as the use of *enthymemes*. These suppress the major or minor premise (or both), or even the conclusion of a syllogism and require the audience to fill in the blanks. For example: *'You can't trust [X] because s/he lied last week'*. *Enthymemes* can hide flawed logic with the additional bonus of protecting the speaker from a potential law suit!

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# Let me tell you a story.... The persuasiveness of the ancient orators

Tactics like burying weaker arguments in the middle of a speech were also very effective, especially when you consider that listeners had little time during a piece of oratory to reflect on, or analyse, a piece of logic. Nowadays, for the most part we are able to read a transcript or replay the audio or video of a speech, allowing us to analyse those elements of the story that perhaps sounded off a few alarm bells on initial hearing. This is our greatest advantage over ancient times.

In addition to the use of well-disguised logical fallacies woven together with appeals to pathos and ethos, the ancient orators used the narrative section of their speech to develop aspects of a story that could be very convincing. Certain elements make a story seem far more plausible and authentic - even truthful. Examining these masterful techniques can give us insights into how and where these are used in modern day rhetoric, whether by charismatic business people, the media or politicians.

I conducted an exercise earlier this year to scrutinise of parts of two well-known speeches by two eminent Ancient Greek rhetoricians, using the modern Criteria-Based Content Analysis (CBCA) forensic tool<sup>2</sup> which was developed to evaluate the validity of witness statements.

The aim was to determine the veracity - and plausibility - of aspects of the narrative sections of these speeches, to see how they stood up to specific criteria, as the narrative seems to be where an audience (among them, crucially, jurors) could most easily be misled. Although too involved to go into in depth here, there are two criteria that I'd like to draw your attention to with respect to analysing stories, bearing in mind that the CBCA assumes truthfulness rather than deception:

### Criteria 3: Quantity of details

*"This criterion is present if the statement is rich in detail and includes specific descriptions of place, time, persons, objects, and events".*

and

### Criteria 4: Contextual Embedding

*"...is present if the events are placed in time and location, and if the actions are connected with the other daily activities and/or customs".*

There's a lovely example of both of these criteria in this excerpt from Demosthenes' speech 'Against Conon':

*....one evening, when I was taking a walk, as my custom was, in the agora with Phanostratus of Cephisia, a man of my own age, Ctesias, the son of the defendant, passed by me in a drunken state opposite the Leocorion, near the house of Pythodorus."*



"Certain elements make a story seem far more plausible and authentic - even truthful" (Source: Unsplash.com)

This may or may not be truthful, but the quantity of details and description of daily customs provides a semblance of credibility which is very persuasive.

The lesson here is for us not to take things at face value. Closer examination can reveal clever tricks and manipulation. Perhaps, also, it can reveal the truth!

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

### References:

1. Professor Timothy R. Levine: <http://timothy-levine.squarespace.com/bio>
2. CBCA is part of SVA (Statement Validity Analysis). There are 19 criteria in this tool. For more please see research by A. Vrij: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232448555\\_Criteria-Based\\_Content\\_Analysis\\_A\\_Qualitative\\_Review\\_of\\_the\\_First\\_37\\_Studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232448555_Criteria-Based_Content_Analysis_A_Qualitative_Review_of_the_First_37_Studies)
3. Lie detector test image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/W71pf3iClmY>.
4. Congruent facial expression image: source: <https://unsplash.com/photos/GUmRXc-vOxw>
5. Pinocchio: <https://unsplash.com/photos/Q79XFGuTffM>

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# Prize Quiz: What's the question?



Knowing the answer is one thing, but do you also know the question?!

One of the three 'modes' of spoken communication is the *question and answer* mode, or as we prefer, the *question and response* (Q&R) mode. We refer to it as this because not all questions can be answered, and if so, people either use 'blocking' (i.e. I know but I refuse to say) or the 'don't know' response.

Q&R is generally agreed to be one of the most important modes when it comes to effective and persuasive communication, so we work a lot in this area with clients, helping them to handle the toughest questions they might get, in the best way possible.

But we also help our clients to *ask* questions more effectively, as in doing so the value of the responses is maximised, the relationships between businesses improve and thus the world spins a little bit more smoothly on its axis. For example, we explore the understanding of the Open and Closed forms of questions, when to use each, how to connect Open questions to create a probing series that quickly and painlessly lead to the discovery of some important information whilst building relationships. Coaching here includes our use of the game "What's my Secret?" to develop these skills.

*We help our clients  
to ask questions  
more effectively*

Hence, for this Christmas edition, we have decided to create a quiz about questions based on (and in honour of) the BBC TV comedy programme 'Mock the Week'. In these programmes, one round of the show involves a slide going up on a screen showing a piece of information such as a number, and the panellists are asked to come up with funny questions that might produce that answer. The panellists'

suggestions are highly amusing and witty, often mocking politicians and celebrities, or even themselves.

For *our* quiz, we have supplied some answers and we ask you to send in the funniest questions that could produce each response; they don't have to be the 'correct' question. The funniest set of questions as determined by the judges, whose decision is final, will win a bottle of single cask, cask strength Scotch Whisky or a non-alcoholic equivalent (if one exists...). Have a go with your family and friends over the Christmas break!

Early in 2022 we will publish a list of the funniest questions to each answer.



It's important to ask effective questions  
(Source: [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com))

## Here's a worked example

**Answer:** 42

**Question:** What is the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything? (from Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*).

**Funnier Question:** How many runs does a typical England team score in a Ashes Test match?



Ewan Pearson

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## Prize Quiz: What's the question? (cont.)



Time for the Christmas quiz! (Source: [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com))

### Here are your answers for this quiz

- 1) 21 Seconds
- 2) 13.8 billion years
- 3) 46
- 4) 6
- 5) 1234
- 6) Quick, how much for the gourd?
- 7) 95 years
- 8) 27
- 9) 5.4 minutes
- 10) 2h 43m
- 11) 5.5
- 12) Over 18 miles
- 13) Sicily
- 14) Brummie
- 15) Sheffield

For your final one (possibly the decider), please make up an answer and its question.

Happy Christmas, or as we Scots prefer to say: Happy Hogmanay!

By Ewan Pearson

### Here are the original questions for the answers featured in the quiz

- 1) What was the duration of Boris Johnson's longest pause during his CBI speech on 22 Nov 2021?
- 2) What is the age of our Universe?
- 3) What is the number of USA Presidents, including the current one, Joe Biden?
- 4) How many wives did Henry VIII have?
- 5) When was Old St Mary's Church, Hartley Wintney completed?
- 6) What was Brian's opening line in the Monty Python 'Life of Brian' negotiation sketch?
- 7) How old is Queen Elizabeth II?
- 8) How many states are members of the EU (currently)?
- 9) What is the median average time that sex takes?
- 10) How long is the James Bond movie 'No Time to Die'?
- 11) How fast does the average person talk (syllables per second)?
- 12) How wide is the Grand Canyon at its widest point?
- 13) What is the largest island in the Mediterranean?
- 14) What is deemed to be the UK's ugliest accent?
- 15) What city is home to the UK's oldest surviving independent football team?

### References:

1. Effective questions image: [https://unsplash.com/photos/NTur2\\_QKpg0](https://unsplash.com/photos/NTur2_QKpg0)
2. Merry Christmas Image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/G6aNLWPULcY>

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Merry Christmas from all of us at GPB (Source: [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com))