



Paul Golding
Guest Author

What ‘Ma’ would say about having great impact

Pauses, white space and an understanding of our differences are valuable tools in communications

Grant Pearson
Brown
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The Communication &
Business Development
Specialists

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What ‘Ma’ would say about having great impact

By Paul Golding
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Have you ever finished a conversation and been left with a nagging thought ‘Something didn’t feel right about that?’ If the dynamics don’t feel right maybe its time to see if ‘Ma’ can shed some light on the relationship.

As much as it would be lovely to say that you can go sit by a fire in a comfy chair where a wise old ‘Ma’ would offer a warm cup of cocoa and some timely words of advice, in this case ‘Ma’ has a different meaning.

‘Ma’ is a concept used in the art world, particularly Japanese art¹. It refers to an interpretation of an empty space, which often holds as much importance as the rest of the artwork. It can help focus the viewer on either the intention of negative space, or the objects in the art piece. ‘Ma’ has also been used in music, where the silence in between musical notes can help emphasise particular notes, or phrases of music.

“Ma” refers to an interpretation of an empty space

‘Ma’ represents space that holds potential. Lao Tzu said “clay is shaped into a pot, but it is the space in the clay which is the essence of the pot.” This concept can be applied to design, production, music and also business relationships.

If the dynamic of a conversation doesn’t feel right, it can help to look at the space you’ve created between you – the ‘Ma’ in your conversation.

A great conversation is more than 2 people talking *at* each other. It is when people talk *with* each other. A great conversation creates more than either person could on their own. In a way, the conversation is more than the sum of the two people talking.



The conversation is more than the sum of two people talking
Source: [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)²

Aristotle is credited with first coining the phrase “*the sum is greater than the parts*”³. This is a different way of interpreting the essence of ‘Ma’. The space between, or around, the individual parts can add to our experience of it. It can change its meaning or its impact.

Aristotle’s wisdom pops up in a number of GPB’s “Speak up” articles. He founded The Lyceum, a school where students were encouraged to follow him while he walked the campus sharing his ideas as they came to him. Most of us know someone who would like to work in that way.

What 'Ma' would say about having great impact (cont.)

He was so revered that after his death scholars collected his teachings and put them together in a book, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*⁴.

In the case of this quote, Aristotle was suggesting that by looking at the whole of a system, including how the parts relate to each other, it gives a greater level of understanding than if we look at the parts individually. The relationships (spaces and connections) between the parts is the 'Ma'.

A 20th century update to this is 'Systemic thinking'. It helps provide an in-depth understanding of complex and dynamic situations. The 'Ma' may be less obvious to us in complex and dynamic situations but is just as important. Seeing the 'Ma' in Rubin's Vase (see picture on page 3) can be obvious, whereas seeing the 'Ma' in a fast moving business relationship may take more time to see. The term 'Systemic Thinking' was first introduced by Barry Richmond⁵ in 1987. Would he be pleased or frustrated that since then there has been an almost constantly shifting/evolving definition (depending on the industry, author or date)?

Never underestimate the power of a pause, silence between notes, and white space on a page

Picking out the more common themes in most definitions, to best understand a complex system:

- Consider the whole of the system rather than just the parts
- Examine and understand interconnections and interrelationships, and
- Revisit your analysis as behaviours are dynamic (i.e. change over time).

Ma in presentations and documents

If there were a real 'Ma' who could gently give some comforting words of wisdom in applying this to making an impact in a pitch, building a relationship or winning work, what would she say?

Firstly, and perhaps most simply, is the power of a pause in a presentation or pitch. In the same way that the silences between notes can help emphasise the music, you can create a sense of importance with the appropriate use of a pause. For example: Deliberately pausing before a phrase (Thinking Pause), before a key word (Dramatic Pause) or after a phrase (Digestion Pause) are skills of many great speakers.

You can do the same thing with the written word. Create space on the page around the main aspect you would like the reader to notice. For example:

"This could be nonsense about a flame grilled trumpet – but you will notice it."



Make use of the space (Ma) in negotiations
Source: [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)⁶

Ma in Negotiations

Secondly, in any persuasive argument, debate or negotiation, you will be less effective if you **only** examine your position, or, if you **only** examine the position of the other person. Once you have analysed both positions then consider the gap in-between (Ma). What similarities exist? How can you use those to build a bridge between you? What differences exist? What options do you have to close the gap?

Ma in Relationship Building

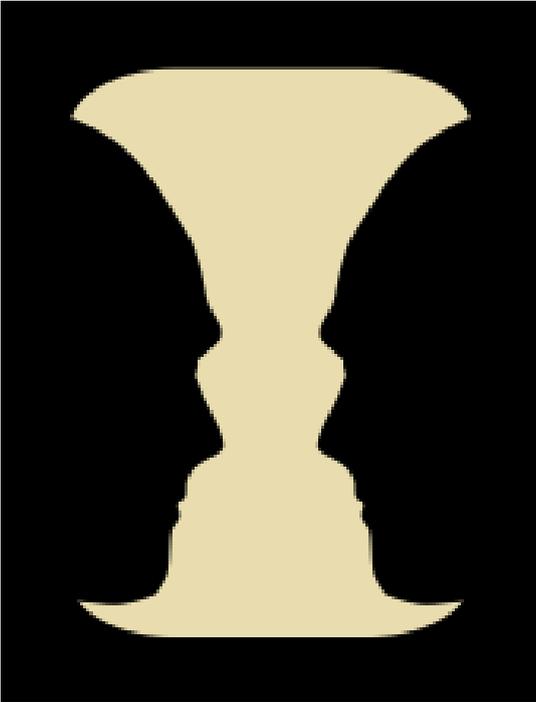
Thirdly, you can use Ma to help build long-standing, successful business relationships. These develop and grow

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What 'Ma' would say about having great impact (cont.)

when both parties achieve something that neither could achieve on their own. They make use of the space in-between (Ma) to create something that is more than the sum of the parts. This concept can transform relationships within organisations as well as between organisations and their clients.



What do you see? The psychologist Rubin created this in 1915. There are two faces and the space between creates a vase. Or is it a vase and the space around creates the faces? In either case the whole image gives us more than each section individually.

Source: *Wikipedia.com*

Finally, relationship dynamics often change over time. When our priorities, project timelines or market dynamics change our mindsets and behaviours shift. That is the same for those around us. If we assume that the dynamics of our relationships will remain constant, then we risk missing important shifts. Reviewing relationship dynamics regularly and responding to those changes quickly and appropriately helps us maintain our strong relationships.

By Paul Golding

Our guest author, Paul, is an Executive Coach at Baransu Limited.

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How the hell did this happen?



Ewan Pearson

Antagonistic negotiations are usually very uncomfortable, but should be based on good faith.

What have Prince Andrew, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin got in common? You'd probably say 'not much', and at one level that's right. But in one aspect, they are very similar as they have been negotiating hard this past year, using the 'Antagonistic' method.

We recognise two main approaches to negotiation: Antagonistic is one, and Synergistic is the other. In the former, the idea is to get the best result for yourselves, and the worst result for your counterparty. In the latter, the approach is to solve the problems for both parties, often by helping each other out.

Let's look at each of my cases, Prince Andrew first. Oh dear. He seems to have thought he was good at media interviews despite the pleading of his advisers not to do so (see BBC's Newsnight on 16 Nov 2019¹) and negotiating, viz trying for a settlement over the Virginia Roberts Giuffre case.

Analysing the negotiation, he does not seem to have had much power to negotiate with, a poor strategy, no tactics, and the Newsnight interview didn't help. He kept on blustering but did at least keep his options open to the end. The 'Power of Publicity' and 'that photo' was used against him (from the very start).



'That photo': Prince Andrew, Virginia Giuffre and Ghislaine Maxwell photo.

Source: Purchased from Pictorial Press Ltd/ Alamy Stock Photo

The case was settled out of court on 15th February 2022 for a reputed multi-million-pound (but undisclosed) sum, and no admission of guilt, but only after a lot of time, a ruined reputation, and lots of legal fees. Money finally traded for confidentiality and peace/settlement/closure/finality. The 'Power of Time Elapsed' was used by both sides. In the end, proving one's innocence is almost impossible, and the available evidence was all against him. He got taken to the cleaners.

Donald Trump has written several books about negotiating and is seemingly very good at it. Whatever you think of his Presidency (not much, in my case) and his six filings for bankruptcies³, he is very skilful at using tactics and doing deals. For example, when met with media hostility, he took to social media to speak directly to his supporters, cutting out the intermediary; both unprecedented and un-Presidential. He saw the election as a deal, and put his skills to work in winning it, just (and only by electoral college seats, not by votes), despite being a no-hoper at the outset.

PJ O'Rourke, who died on 15th Feb 2022



PJ O'Rourke 2007
Source: www.wikipedia.com⁴

(the same day that Prince Andrew settled), wrote about the 2016 Trump vs. Hillary Clinton campaign in his colourful book "*How the hell did this happen?*". He comments that the election was 'a series of

'singularities' rather than any meaningful sequence of events. That may well be what Trump intended, although I am not sure that he ever expected actually to win.

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How the hell did this happen? (cont.)

When met with defeat in 2020, Trump first denied, then sued everyone, and when that failed, he asked his supporters to storm the Capitol, which they duly did on 6th Jan 2021. He's since been cleared of the impeachment charge for causing that riot and is rumoured to want another go at playing, sorry being, President.



Donald Trump, 45th President of the USA
Source: *Unsplash.com*⁶

And so to the saddest event, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. First, I want to share our thoughts with the Ukrainians who have been the pawns in such a violet crime. It is not fair, logical, reasonable or defensible, yet Putin has done it. The invasion may have started on 24th February, but the planning and preparations seem to go way back, perhaps even past Putin giggling as a taxi driver in St Petersburg. I am no political historian, but you can see how this all built up. A man leading a country whose image was severely dented by the demise of the USSR in 1991 wants greatness and power back for his nation⁷. NATO worked over the period 2004-2022 to bring various Adriatic states into the membership, aggravating Putin who saw this as a threat.

Temperatures rose, posturing started (e.g. NATO's Black Sea manoeuvres in 2009 and Putin's Southern border manoeuvres in 2019). Putin and his team tell a series of lies, and then this invasion/war/special manoeuvre starts. In negotiating terms it seems that Ukraine is a pawn in a bigger and much

longer negotiation between the West (NATO/USA) and Putin. But's it's also one done in bad faith where there is no honour, diplomacy. Just I win, you lose. Putin seems to have underestimated the Ukrainians and the West, but is still pursuing a deal for land.

What can we all learn for our own more mundane business negotiations?

First, such negotiations will be uncomfortable. You're not there to be friends but to do a deal. Second, despite that, negotiate in 'good faith'. To us, this means with a legitimate aim, without the use of excessive force, and with integrity. Third, prepare heavily before you start, and continue to analyse and review as you advance. Fourth, pay special attention to where the Relative Powers lie, then map out your strategy and tactics to fit the power profile. For example:

You	Power	Them
8	Time	4
2	Precedent	10
7	Competition	7
1	Publicity	9
5	Authority	5

By Ewan Pearson

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“We’re Following the Science!”



Desmond Harney

Des looks at how GPB’s Scientific Analyses can help you

In recent times here in the UK, the phrase in my title (above) has frequently been heard in public pronouncements about the devastating Covid-19 pandemic. There’s also been some accompanying debate about what the phrase means exactly, and whether the claim made has been consistently true.

But that’s not what I want to discuss here. Instead, I reference this phrase because it echoes how we work at GPB. I’ll explain how we “follow the science” ourselves, what that means, and how we use that science to your advantage.

Perhaps you’re lucky enough to be too young but in MY head, incidentally, that phrase also recalls happy childhood memories of Holiday ‘Disney Time’ TV shows (1961-’98). And of one particular, up-beat, frequently featured film clip: ‘*Following the Leader*’ sung by The Lost Boys, from Disney’s ‘*Peter Pan*’ (1953)’.



🎵 “We’re Following the Leader!”
Image source: DisneyWiki²

Maybe you’ve already experienced parts of GPB’s unique suite of three Scientific Analyses first-hand? After all, they’re key components in the powerful armoury of Science and Art that helps us to develop our clients’ communication skills.

Scientific analyses

People are intrigued when they first hear about our Scientific Analyses, and are then keen to experience them. GPB offers three areas of Scientific Analyses: Vocal, Visual and Content.

In each of these, we use objective measures to get a baseline reading which informs our advice.

We share these reports in confidence with each individual and recommend development areas. We explain what’s been measured and how that was done. The reports are balanced, since they identify both strengths and development areas for discussion.

People are generally happier to discuss their development and engage more completely when they know they’ve been objectively assessed. This results in quicker, greater and longer-lasting improvements, saving time, money and effort. A win for everyone!

I won’t cover our Vocal and Visual analyses further here, as they’ve been well covered in prior articles. Instead, we’ll focus on our Scientific Analysis of Content. That’s a crucial area because, even if your vocal and visual delivery are second to none, if your content isn’t optimal then that great delivery may largely go to waste.

Content Analysis

For Content Analysis, we use specially developed GPB digital software, in combination with analogue analysis. This assesses sample documents and narratives against a number of key persuasiveness measures. I will return to those later.

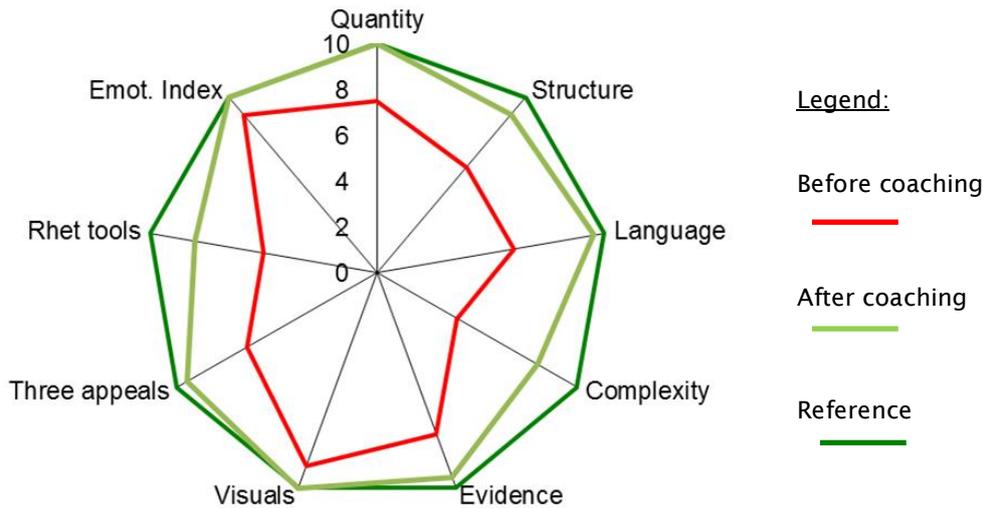
We analyse documents and speech narratives using up to 12 parameters. An example input radiograph is shown on the next page. We compare each of the scores obtained against those from reference samples of the most effective content.

The results are put into an algorithm that gives us output measurements of parameters such as efficiency, clarity, brevity, credibility and, ultimately, the persuasiveness of the content.

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“We’re Following the Science!” (cont.)



Above: an example of a GPB Content Analysis input parameter graph. *Source: GPB*

Our analysis offers recommendations at the macro and micro levels. Our aim is to help you craft more persuasive communication for your readers or listeners. Each piece of advice shared below benefits from a large body of thought and scientific research. Their cumulative impact can be huge.

“Big picture”, macro level advice prompted by our analysis may include:

- Think more deeply and fully about your readers or audience. Who are they? What do they know and want? What is the true purpose (*Telos*) of this communication, and thus what do you want from them? Be clear on such questions from the outset
- Create a storyboard with a clear sequence that’s easy to follow – so nobody gets distracted or lost in a complex mental maze
- Restrict yourself to only a few Key Messages, perhaps even just one. That provides focus for you, and makes things simpler for them to follow
- Provide compelling evidence in support of your points – e.g. data, statistics, examples, case studies, quotations and visual aids. There’s a “Leap of Faith” required from them about anything forward-looking. They will make that leap far more happily if your “proof” is convincing, relevant and of several types.

- Tap into the power of story-telling, to engage them more fully. Humans find stories rewarding. Because they trigger reactions in more areas of our brains than merely hearing a recital of facts and figures. This can result in a more directly experiential personal engagement.

Here’s some advice we offer at a more detailed, micro level. It includes key aspects of language choice and use:

- Be concise – if you don’t need a word, cut it out. Every extra word is more effort for the reader or listener. Don’t waste their time or effort — or yours. Make every single word count
- Use short words rather than long ones - they’re much easier to follow!
- Write/speak to express, not to impress. Be understood first time. If the audience is distracted or confused, your message/s may become diluted, or lost entirely.
- Avoid “typos”, poor punctuation and grammar. This helps your credibility. If you don’t care enough to pay attention to the detail, then why should they? It’s surprising how often even the use of Spellcheck is forgotten. It usually spots about half of the errors, so do a manual check
- Content should be in the active not passive tense where possible, and be personal rather than impersonal.

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“We’re Following the Science!” (cont.)

- Anglo-Saxon words typically have fewer syllables, so are shorter than *polysyllabic vocabulary* (see what I did, there?). The latter are commonly words of Latin or Greek origin
- Use shorter sentences, whether speaking or writing. This helps your audience to follow you. Aim for an average of less than 20 words per sentence when writing, and about 12 words per sentence when speaking
- Write creatively for their enjoyment, stimulation, and provocation. This helps keep them engaged and actively considering your ideas
- Use Rhetorical Tools to make your content more powerful. A full list with definitions and examples are shared on our dedicated webpage: <https://www.gpb.eu/2020/03/rhetorical-tools-list.html>³.
- Write and speak with originality – well-worn, tired old phrases will make your ideas seem less novel and stimulating.

Just for fun, I’ve run this article through our content analysis software. The table of results is shown below.

As I hope you’ve seen, we genuinely do “follow the science”. Doing so ensures we have the most solid base on which to give the best possible advice.

Helped on our way by GPB’s objective Scientific Analysis data, none of us need fear looking like Lost Boys or Girls, on the twisty-turny road to more effective and persuasive communication. Feel free to join in and sing along with me, now:

🎵 “We’re following the Science... The words are easy to say.”¹

By Des Harney

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3. Rhetorical Tools – GPB website (see link in text)

NUMERICAL ANALYSIS		
Number of characters:	5172	
Number of sentences:	60	Number of words:
		1064
Number of Syllables:	1710	Number of Unique Words (Per character):
		520 (48.9%)
		Number of Repeated Words (Per character):
		544 (51.1%)
Average number of characters per word:	4.86	Average number of syllables per word:
		1.61
		Average number of words per sentence:
		17.73
		Number of Polysyllabic words:
		161

READABILITY ANALYSIS		
Gunning fog index	13.15	IDEAL 15
Coleman-Liau index	9.81	IDEAL 8
Flesch-Kincaid grade level	10.3	IDEAL 12
Automated Readability index	10.63	IDEAL 13
SMOG (Simple Measure Of Gobbledygook)	12.19	IDEAL 12
Flesch reading ease	52.83	BEST 100

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS	
All Rhetorical Questions:	No quotations found in the document.
1. and?	
2. Who are they?	
3. What do they know and want?	
4. of this communication, and thus what do you want from them?	
5. care enough to pay attention to the detail, then why should they?	
6. ee what I did, these?	

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Verbatim or extempore - or somewhere in between?

gpb

Do situations affect when best to use a scripted or spontaneous speech?

Among the celebrations during March is International Women's Day, so I thought it fitting to cite examples of two speeches by two women for this article; both successful politicians. One hails from the UK, the other from the US. Both women trained in and practised law before embarking on a political career. One speech that I've chosen is from the deliberative (symbouleutic) genre (where the speaker tries to get action from the audience by describing a possible future) or rhetoric (with elements of display throughout). The other is from the display (epideictic—also known as ceremonial) genre.

"And that gives me a problem [this morning]. After all, I'm here to talk about Brexit - and any politician who talks about Brexit without a significant level of anxiety, clearly doesn't have any wisdom!"

The other speech is one I came across recently, delivered almost 40 years earlier, in 1969, by a young Hillary Rodham³ (now Clinton) at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, United States. She and her fellow graduates that year requested that a member of their class deliver the commencement address⁴; the clear candidate being Hillary Rodham.



Lynda Russell-Whitaker



Nicola Sturgeon
Source: www.wikipedia.com¹



Hillary Rodham Clinton
Source: www.wikipedia.com⁵

One speech I know well, having written about it some years ago in this journal, and analysed it for an academic essay last year; Nicola Sturgeon's Keynote 'Brexit speech'² delivered to an audience of RSA Fellows in 2018 and broadcast live by the BBC. She disarmed the audience early on with humour, referring to an article "Can politics ever be a source of wisdom rather than anxiety?" written the previous week by the RSA's then Chief Executive, Matthew Taylor, stating:

There are two unusual aspects to this speech; one is that it was the first of its kind at Wellesley in its 91 year history: the other is that her opening lines were impromptu.

Apparently, Ms Rodham was so infuriated by an implicit reference from the previous speaker, Senator Brooke, to women knowing their place, as homemakers, that she felt compelled to veer from her script and respond. One memorable line is ..*"the challenge now*

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Verbatim or extempore - or somewhere in between? (cont.)



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

is to practice politics as the art of making what appears to be impossible possible."

While Nicola Sturgeon is obviously reading from a script, Hillary Rodham seems not to be, at least not from the short extract I've been able to watch. She comes across as passionate and spontaneous. Some might say that there is more display rhetoric than content, but I felt that her conveyed emotion shone through.

Does a spontaneous speech resonate more with an audience?

So which is better, a speech delivered from a detailed script or one composed and delivered on the spot?

I think it depends on the occasion and the topic. For example, a funeral oration (epitaphios), especially a public one, would usually be more formal, whereas a quick word of thanks might be informal. However, one doesn't want to forget to thank key people or important points, so you may well have prepared something like some prompts or notes. If you are responding to someone else's remarks, this may be more spontaneous and ad-lib.

One of the earliest recorded writers on this topic would probably disagree. Alcidamas, a star pupil of the renowned rhetorician, Gorgias (along with rival Isocrates), wrote a pamphlet c.390 BC entitled 'On those who write written speeches' or 'On the Sophists'⁶⁷ This was an attack on those who thoroughly scripted their speeches rather than delivering them extempore.

He suggests that anyone can write a speech, having the luxury to indulge in days, or even weeks, of preparation in their production, '*since writing is*

more readily available to us than speaking'. I doubt we would agree that it is far easier to acquire the skill of writing than speaking extempore. His viewpoint is that of a privileged man with the advantage of an excellent rhetorical education.

Whilst I take issue with 'practising writing results in very great helplessness when it comes to speaking', I agree with his assertion that 'no-one would believe that those practised in writing will also be able to make a speech as a result of this same ability.'

Nowadays, we are less disdainful of a well-delivered, fully scripted speech, such as Nicola Sturgeon's at the RSA. However, I think most of us find it admirable, even exciting, to experience an obviously improvised speech. Even a small degree of spontaneity seems to energise an audience, as it clearly did with Hillary Rodham's opening remarks.

When a speech is truly spontaneous, there is an intangible communication between audience and speaker; the latter somehow able to improvise more effectively through the listeners' attention. This is most obvious when a speaker is passionate about their topic; they seem to be speaking from the heart. This is a challenging aspect to replicate using a script, or even detailed notes, such as a thick slide deck.

This is, after all, a spectrum (*see Prompt Risk Profile graph right*); from speeches delivered verbatim using a script through to entirely improvised, or somewhere in between. That might mean prompts on a slide in the form of images or text, or 'thin notes' written on a piece of A6 sized card. To improvise well, your priority is to know your audience and have a thorough knowledge of your subject matter. Either that, or hold

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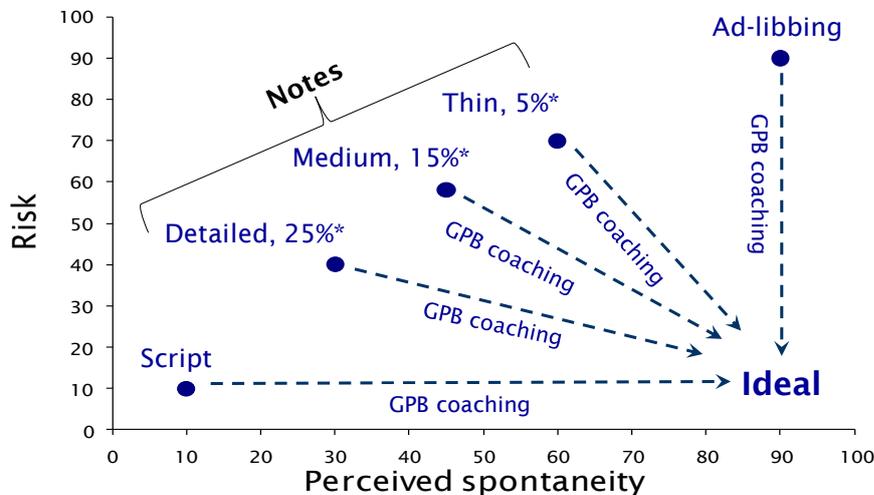


Verbatim or extempore - or somewhere in between? (cont.)



Prompts and their risk profiles

*(% = # notes words/# script words)



Above: GPB's Prompt Risk Profile Graph. Source: GPB



Woman giving speech to audience
Source: www.unsplash.com

impassioned opinions about your topic and be a very confident speaker.

For all his criticism of scripts, even Alcidamas advises being well-prepared when speaking extempore!

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

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Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd is a respected adviser based in London. We enhance the performance of businesses, helping clients to excel in the use of the spoken and written word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the long term our work improves the way a firm does business.

We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews, Telephone Calls and Document Writing.

We also produce scientific voice, visual and content analysis reports, which are unique to GPB. We then provide voice and visual coaching, and content advice.

Our clients' needs are the only focus of our work; we listen to them and closely tailor our response to deliver first class coaching and advice. In support of this we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as:

- Voice, Visual and Content Analyses,
- Prospect Relationship Management (PRM),
- the Information Iceberg,
- Client s' Rights Act,
- Feature, Benefit Impact (FBI),
- Buyers' Criteria Analysis, (BCA), and
- Our Q&A Methodology.

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



YouTube

At Grant Pearson Brown we like to provide helpful and entertaining videos about negotiation, presentation, giving speeches, and a lot more! New content is uploaded regularly, and if there is something you would like to see featured, do get in touch to let us know.

Please visit and subscribe to our YouTube Channel, where all this valuable video content is shared: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiF7nr4d3_il8j8z862uVHQ.

LinkedIn

GPB's LinkedIn page is also regularly updated with posts and content from topical areas of interest. Again, we value any comments or thoughts and encourage healthy debate. Please visit and like our page, and contribute your views at <https://www.linkedin.com/company/grant-pearson-brown-consulting-ltd/>.



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References:

1. Connect image available at Unsplash.com <https://unsplash.com/photos/yyMJNPqQ-X8>

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