

It is with deep sadness that we mourn the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 8th September 2022. Like many of you - whether in the UK or abroad - we feel the profound sense of loss, and our thoughts are with her family at this sad time. Her long life and reign are an inspiration to us all.



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Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd.
The Communication & Business Development Specialists
Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



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By Lynda Russell-Whitaker
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Quality Listening - revisited

Last month, I finished a short-term assignment for UCL's Institute of Education (IOE). I was setting up training programmes for researchers in the various faculties of the IOE. Part of the work entailed conducting an audit of what was already being offered at UCL with regard to mentoring training programmes and other forms of research leadership development.

Along the way, I found a report that particularly struck me. It had been conducted by a post-doctorate researcher (postdoc) in another institution and was published on a web site of one of UCL's training partners, Vitae, that specialises in the development of UK researchers.

What stood out for me in this research, which included interviews with postdocs across a number of institutions in the UK, was. It revealed what seemed to be a serious lack of high-quality listening across the board. Listening came out as one of the top requirements (if not the first) for postdocs and early career researchers whether from supervisors, tutors or line managers.

Clearly, having the ability to listen deeply is a key skill for any researcher. However, having reflected on this for a number of months, I honestly cannot think of a single occupation where developing our ability to listen more profoundly would not bring substantial benefits to all.

Those of you who are regular - and long-term - readers of the SpeakUp Journal know that this is not the first time I have written about the importance of active, and even deep, listening (SpeakUp #62). In my article in SpeakUp #65 on Exploratory Questioning and Modelling, I also addressed the importance of high-quality listening, along with questioning. Unfortunately, it is not something that comes naturally to many of us. We lead busy lives and are often holding several ideas and problems in our heads simultaneously.

It is a challenge for us to clear our minds of all the other thoughts, and bring that level of focus and attention to a single conversation and person.



Focus on listening; close other actions'

So why is truly active listening so important in our relationships, whether that might be in conversation with a member of our family, a friend or a colleague? Not to mention, a client or supplier? In my opinion, at the most basic and practical level, the result is that it saves time. If you had paid attention right from the start, you



Quality Listening - revisited (cont.)



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

would have taken the brief accurately. That is, you would have needed to ask fewer clarifying questions than if you were, for example, waiting for your conversation partner to finish what they were saying in order that you could say something you thought might impress them.

Imagine what it would be like if you felt that the clinician was listening profoundly to you during a GP or hospital appointment? Or if you felt that your supervisor, whether as student or employee, was not waiting to tell you what they thought you ought to be doing, but first really listened to what you had to say? The quality of the conversation, as well that of the relationship, would improve overall very significantly.

This becomes particularly important in a team situation where collaboration and cooperation are essential. To use an extreme example, going back to the hospital scenario; staff working in an operating theatre environment understand just how crucial it is to actively listen to each other. In such a situation, poor listening might literally be a matter of life and death.

For most of us, though, it is probably more about enhancing the quality of our relationships and our lives. In her book 'The Coaching Manual'², author and highly-respected coach, Julie Starr, offers this advice to help us develop our deep listening skills:-

The primary aim of the listener is to understand what the speaker is saying. By a process of listening, questioning or clarifying, you should aim to:

1. Understand what the situations or problems really are, e.g. if the speaker is not happy with their job, identify some of the causes of that. If they want a closer business relationship with their client, find out the driving factors behind that, and therefore what is currently in the way.

2. Understand how they feel about the situations and be able to tell them afterwards, e.g. 'I think this situation is

frustrating you and also perhaps upsetting you a little'.

3. Be able to fill in gaps in the conversation, i.e. what wasn't said. For example, 'I think maybe you're wondering how your step-children's mother might react'.

4. As more and more of us are called upon to use a coaching rather than a management style in the workplace, this type of advice about profound listening is very valuable.



Full concentration on listening³

As it becomes more and more important from an economical perspective to retain and develop staff, the ability for all individuals in an organisation to communicate in this way is critical.

Being trained in this type of communication is not just for those of us in the coaching and training professions, but for anyone involved in supervising and managing people, whether as individuals or teams.

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

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Reference:

1. Source: <https://www.pexels.com/>
2. The Coaching Manual, The Definitive Guide to the Process, Principles and Skills of Personal Coaching, by Julie Starr. Published by Pearson Education Limited (Third Edition). First published in 2002.
3. Source: <https://www.pexels.com/>

“To Infinity and Beyond!” – via the elevator (pitch)

And, “to fail to prepare is to prepare to fail”

Try to imagine that you’ve been obsessed by outer space since childhood. And that deep down you’ve always wanted to join NASA but just never found time to fill in the application form.



Left: Extravehicular activity (‘EVA’) by NASA’s Bruce McCandless II, 1984. Right: NASA’s Stephanie D. Wilson [Photo Credit: NASA]

Then, one day, as you’re waiting for an elevator (pretending it’s a space capsule, of course) you notice somebody beside you, also waiting. And then you realise that person is Bill Nelson, Administrator of NASA. What a coincidence! This must be Fate, right? It’s your big chance. Time to give Bill your best shot.

You open your mouth to speak... but then pause, catching flies. Where on earth should you start? You want your words to be relevant, compelling and memorable. You want to seem interesting, credible and competent. To exude gravitas and enthusiasm. And suddenly you wish you had rehearsed more for just this moment.

As you try to think what to say, someone walks up to Bill, takes him by the arm and walks him away towards the coffee lounge. You’ve missed your chance! If only you’d been better prepared, you’re sure Bill would have been fascinated by your story and would have stayed to hear you out. Perhaps enough even to schedule a follow-up meeting.

This is an imagined situation. But there are plenty in the real world where we can benefit from having a strong pre-prepared “elevator pitch”. A short speech that explains what you or your organisation does, the value you add,

how you’re different, or some other narrative. It should tell your story clearly and succinctly. It needn’t be for Bill - nor for any specific individual. It could be for use with a senior colleague or other stakeholder. For potential new clients, perhaps. Possibly even for former clients you haven’t seen in some time.

Your *elevator pitch* should be brief and persuasive, spark interest and influence its recipient. You might need several different versions: to engage people around a specific project, initiative, idea or product – or just in yourself.



NASA’s idea of an elevator. Is somewhat longer than most! [Photo Credit: NASA]

Wikipedia defines an *elevator pitch*, speech or statement as ‘a short description of an idea, product, or company that explains the concept in a way such that any listener can understand it in a short period of time... [and] when explaining to an individual... why they would be a productive and beneficial person to have on a team or... project.’¹

An *elevator pitch* should last no longer than a short elevator ride. Hence the name. There are no absolute rules about duration. But it should be short enough to finish before the elevator doors ping open and your target disappears. Perhaps for good. Short enough to gain and maintain their interest. Strong



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“To Infinity and Beyond!” – via the elevator (pitch) (cont.)

enough for them to want to hear more. Either now or in future. Remember, there are good reasons why a lot of TV commercials run for just 30 seconds or less (other than the cost of air time!)

I’ve recently started some client work in the green manufacturing space, around improving The Elevator Pitches. It’s an unusual request but completely logical as it benefits from some of the same techniques and preparation that can be applied to longer forms of persuasive communication. That client sees the value in being prepared for unexpected opportunities.

For instance, take GPB’s ‘**7 Rhetorical Canons**’ methodology (see image) developed from Classical thinking. We routinely apply this to major presentations. But it’s equally helpful in preparing an elevator pitch. You needn’t worry about the Latin names of the 7 steps outlined. Focus on the action each step suggests.

You should think about::

- (1) what your audience should hear;
- (2) what the optimal content would be (a few key messages);
- (3) how you should sequence it;
- (4) what words make your narrative most compelling;
- (5) what prompts work best to deliver your pitch; and
- (6) how best to handle questions

that might arise, when (6) you’ve delivered it. Once you HAVE delivered it, reflect ...

- (7) on how well it went. How it was received. What parts seemed to work best? What went less well? You can then refine it accordingly/as necessary, for future use.

We should never ignore practice, as Lao Tzu’s quote below makes clear. Ask a buddy for feedback. Is the content right? How do you sound and look when you’re delivering it? Use your mobile phone’s camera to film yourself rehearsing. Review it to see for yourself what’s working and what’s not.

That way you can continue improving your pitch. Making it ever more engaging and persuasive. Whether it’s about you, a latest initiative or your business. Or perhaps about how neatly you would fit into NASA’s Artemis Moon Mission programme. Maybe they could use your help. If only Bill knew...

By Des Harney

References/Image sources:

- 1) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elevator_pitch
- 2) Image sources: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Astronaut-EVA_edit_\(1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Astronaut-EVA_edit_(1).jpg)
- 3) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Artemis_1_SLS_Rollout_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Artemis_1_SLS_Rollout_(cropped).jpg)

The 7 Rhetorical Canons



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Metaphoric gestures



We add some 'reality' to this 'abstract' area of non-verbal communication

We have written before about the strong impact of an effective metaphor in a presentation or pitch. The skilful inclusion of a comparison that helps your audience understand one thing by understanding something else can add clarity, memorability and, ultimately, persuasion. Some of the best metaphorical expressions we have heard from our clients or from public speakers stay with us for years afterwards.

However, along with being able to use metaphors in speech, a truly accomplished communicator will also understand how to use metaphoric gestures for maximum impact.

Before exploring the idea of gestures in more detail, let's remind ourselves of an important point about metaphor: that is, rather than merely being elements of language, we actually *think* in metaphor and, consequently, metaphorical expressions are generated by these conceptual frameworks¹. A conceptual metaphor is a comparison that uses a (often more concrete) *Source Domain* to help us understand an (often more abstract) *Target Domain*.

Our brains 'map' the necessary elements from the *Source Domain* onto the *Target Domain* to add clarity and comprehension. We find this in business discourse. For instance, the conceptual metaphor SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS ARE PLANTS gives us metaphorical expressions such as 'He works for the local *branch* of the bank', 'Our company is *growing*' or even 'Employers *reaped* enormous benefits'².

The common conceptual metaphor MORE IS UP gives us metaphorical expressions such as 'share prices are

falling', 'house prices are *on the up*' or 'inflation continues *to soar*', all of which, of course, are simply comparisons.

The fact that we think in metaphor is key to appreciating why metaphoric gesture can also be impactful. We at GPB are adamant that gestures are essential to effective communication. (Indeed, some academics believe that gestures are so integral to communication that they should be classed as a part of speech rather than thought of as a separate category of non-verbal communication)³. There is plenty of debate about how best to categorise gestures, but we classify them into 4 types: **Iconic**, **Prosodic**, **Deictic**, and **Metaphoric**.

Iconic gestures are those that represent literally (or, as literally as possible) what a speaker is saying; **Prosodic** gestures are the beats on the stresses of the verbal utterance, used often for emphasis; **Deictic** are pointing gestures, for example at ourselves or a screen.

Metaphoric gestures are '*voluntary movements of the body which use a cross-domain mapping to express certain thoughts or feelings*'⁴. Metaphoric gestures, therefore, operate in a similar way to metaphors in language, relying on mapping across the source and target domains to aid understanding.

The potential for metaphoric gestures becomes obvious once you realise how much of a presentation or pitch (probably a significant majority) deals with abstract ideas, especially those related to the future which is, by its nature, unclear.

For instance, a phrase like 'My team have the experience to take your business to the next level' may well be



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Metaphoric gestures (cont.)

accompanied by a speaker raising their hand or hands to near eye level, with the palm/s down, to demonstrate this. ‘

‘We would then move to the next stage of implementation’ may be accompanied by a speaker moving both their hands, with palms towards their own chest, away from their body into the space in front of them, before pausing and holding them there, to show movement from one point to another on a timeline. This is metaphorical: the future is not ‘in front’ of us literally.

‘The market opportunities are endless’ may be accompanied by a speaker extending a hand and index finger in front of them and moving the finger in a circular motion three or four times, to show an endless cycle. ‘Let’s unpack this in more detail’ may be accompanied by a speaker ‘holding’ an invisible container between their hands out in front of them, and then moving their hands apart, turning palms upwards, as if opening and revealing what is being held inside the container (this is a well-known variation of the Conduit metaphor).⁵

We can’t easily show pictures of metaphorical gestures, as they all require movement, but spelt out with the descriptions above, you can see how these metaphoric gestures work:

The first example compares the complex and uncertain idea of growing the revenue, staff, geographic coverage and market share of entire organisation with the simple and embodied gesture of raising a hand from one position to a higher position; the final example compares the world of ideas being discussed at that moment with a physical, hand-held container being opened and its contents shared out physically with those in the room.

By incorporating strategic metaphoric gestures such as these, you can help to solidify the images you are verbalising, thereby adding clarity and greater understanding to the vision you are projecting to your audience in your presentation or pitch.

David McNeill tells us that, ‘An implication of the phenomenon of metaphoric gestures (of any kind) is that the abstractness of an idea is no barrier to its receiving reality in gesture form’⁶.

With all the uncertainty in the world today, adding a bit of ‘reality’ to the ‘abstract’ sounds like a positive thing to incorporate in all of our spoken communication, whether that be in a business setting, or indeed anywhere.

By Dr. Richard Keith

References:

1. George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
2. Zoltán Kövescses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 10.
3. David McNeill, ‘So You Think Gestures are Nonverbal?’, *Psychological Review*, 92:3 (1985) 350–371.
4. Alan Cienki and Cornelia Müller, ‘Metaphor, Gesture and Thought’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Metaphor and Thought* ed. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 483–501, p. 487.
5. David McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal About Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 147
6. Ibid., pp. 162–63.

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Writing rules, there to be broken

Rules, principles and guidance in writing

I have been working with a few clients recently on their writing skills in English. I realise that writing this article is thus a hostage to fortune, but needs must as there is stuff to share.

It's been fascinating to see how clients react to some writing by someone else: reactions vary from strong applause to derision. And when the tables are turned on their own craft, they can see the flaws and their eyes open to the possibilities. Firstly, they can all write, so this is improvement to a higher level.

English as a written language is made all the harder by a lack of ownership and authority, it's a global language with many ways it can be written. Once the basics are in place we cannot say 'that's wrong', and we don't hold with many of the 'rules' of writing. But we can try alternatives and see then some are better than others.

Here are a few good principles though to follow:

First, we support the philosophy of 'write for the readers not the writer, so write to *express* not to *impress*'. That alone triggers vigorous debate, disagreement and it has many consequences. Writers like to show they know a lot, and to some extent that's important. But much more so is being understood.

So our **second** principle is to 'make it *easy* for the reader on *first pass* to understand and remember what you have written'.

Third, that the reader should *enjoy* what they have read (within reason). That one requires a creative brain that is willing to deploy some Rhetorical Tools. Remember that if it's not literal, it must be metaphorical, and that stories are still the brain's best friend.

Fourth, as Des also said in his article, '*to fail to prepare is to prepare to fail*'. So, before writing anything down, lay it out in draft and summary form to establish a structure and a path for the reader to

follow.

Fifth, if you are going to make a claim or argument, you must provide sufficient evidence in support. The best evidence is independent, quick and easy to verify

Sixth, the design of each page matters, including white space and visuals.

Seventh, it should contain no errors, such as typos, errant apostrophes, or incorrect punctuation. So please check, check and check again. Then get someone else to check it as they are sure to find more mistakes. MS Word will spot about half of all typing errors, so please don't rely solely on it.

Finally, that the writer does not detain the reader any longer than needed. This will be longer where there is a story to tell, but that's OK so long as the writing is *efficient*, and not *verbose*.

This gives us a few areas of guidance for you our readers, not really of our own invention, but collected up from the musings, 'laws' and 'rules' that others such as George Orwell have handed down.

1. If you can cut out a syllable, word, sentence or paragraph, cut it out. Nothing superfluous or inefficient.
2. Try to write in the Active and Personal rather than Passive or Impersonal; '*Your cat sat on my mat*' is much better than '*the mat was sat on by your cat*'.
3. Anglo-Saxon wording is usually better than Latinate, as the former has fewer syllables. Which do you prefer: "*I attempted to initiate the internal combustion engine on my motor vehicle*, or "*I tried to start my car*". I do hope it's the latter!
4. Adjectives. Ah yes, people do love to write a whole string of these in series. Did you know there is a rule for the sequence that actually holds? There is a correct order, which everyone seems to get right even though no-one recalls



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Writing rules, there to be broken (cont.)

having a lesson on it at school. This rule is called “The rule of ablaut reduplication”, and it says this: Multiple adjectives are always ranked accordingly: **opinion, size, age, shape, colour, origin, material, purpose**. You can write these (but you shouldn’t): “*My Greek Fat Big Wedding*”, or “*leather walking brown boots*”. See?

5. Spelling, punctuation and grammar. Tomatoes are not allowed to be Tomatoe’s. It’s not correct to write its wrong. What you written is poor English. Eats shoots and leaves is missing something. Ain’t it?

6. Sub-clauses can be used, but do so sparingly. Try this one: *“I am a massive movie fan, particularly of Marvel action movies such as Spider Man, so, naturally, I wish I could confidently claim that the quote, from one of those movies, that I shared with you, above, was both factual, and – hopefully – from actor Nicholas Cage.”*

7. Try to avoid other contortions such as **Jargon, Acronyms, Corporatese, Industrese, Slang**, and other complicated words and terms. There are many acronyms that have become words, but many others that we see where we say ‘what’s that?’ We use [The Economist Style Guide](#)² to help us navigate us over these hurdles. Their advice for acronyms is to use the full version with the acronym in brackets straight afterwards, so that readers can refer back to it if needed. For example: EBITDAC, an accounting term. Most people know this as EBITDA, but with a C? I’ll spoil your guessing game by telling you it stands for Covid (or did, from the CFO who used it). The sample below was in a company Annual Report. The renowned journalist, Lucy Kellway, included it an article she wrote about Jargon some 20 years ago³:

others) has not yet produced any improvement, but we live in hope.

8. Font sizes, colours and spacing. Most of these options are tools to allow the author to emphasise selected words or phrases. Just be sensible here by being consistent, because there is too much choice. Bold, Bold and italics, Blue, Red, Green? It’s best to have your own Corporate Style Guide to ensure consistency. We can send you a template if that would help.

9. Capitalisation. I have given this a guide of its own, as there are FAR TOO many Capitals being used, especially on Slide Decks And Consulting Reports. This is a bad habit which it seems originates from North America, and Especially Those Darned Investment Banks! Here’s a suggestion based on standard and well accepted international norms: Use capital letters for the first word of each new sentence, and for proper nouns only. That has always been the generally agreed principle. Then add a few extras for EMPHASIS IF YOU MUST, BUT TRY NOT TO SHOUT WHEN YOU WRITE!

10. Images, diagrams, charts, photos. These should be either (a) helpful in explaining the words to a reader, or (b) a good way to make the document more appealing, or (c) both, or don’t use them.

By Ewan Pearson

References:

1. This is a Quote from Benjamin Franklin. It’s a good key point about writing skills and it’s also an Antimetabole, these are two of the many Rhetorical Tools at your service.
2. The 12th edition of Economist Style Guide is available from The Economist as other sources such as Amazon.
3. FT article, 11th February 2002. Copy held by GPB on file.

“Our company combines strategy with technology and insight with action, working with clients to deliver results today that endure tomorrow.”

Any ideas on what that means, or who it might be? It would seem that Lucy’s efforts to reduce Jargon (and ours, and

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