

The Art of Explanation

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General Ideas

- Know who you are talking to
- What do they already know?
- What do they want to know?
- How would they like to receive the information?
- Directly speak to them or their specific group
- Show credibility and authority regarding the topic
- If you are telling a story people want to hear the end of or want to be part of, they are likely to be engaged in it

10 Principles for good explanations	7 Steps of creating an Explanation	Dynamic Explanations
<div><div>1. <b>Simplicity</b></div><div>• Use short words and sentences</div><div>• NO: complex words, unnecessary detail</div><div>• Is this the simplest way I can say this?</div></div> <div><div>2. <b>Essential Detail</b></div><div>• Use only information that helps the point you try to explain</div><div>• What is essential to the explanation?</div></div> <div><div>3. <b>Complexity</b></div><div>• Understand the topic yourself before explaining</div><div>• Are there aspects of this you don't understand?</div></div> <div><div>4. <b>Efficiency</b></div><div>• Make it as short as possible</div><div>• Try multiple ways of how to explain it</div><div>• Is this the best way to say this?</div></div> <div><div>5. <b>Precision</b></div><div>1. Define what you want to say</div><div>2. Choose the right words to say it</div><div>• Am I saying exactly what I want to communicate?</div></div> <div><div>6. <b>Context</b></div><div>• Explain why it matters</div><div>• Use sentences like:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The reason this matters is...</li><li>• All of this connects back to...</li><li>• This does not happen in isolation.</li><li>• This is important, because...</li></ul></div><div>• Why does this matter to the people you are addressing?</div></div> <div><div>7. <b>No Distractions</b></div><div>• People loose interest when they don't understand a word or reference</div><div>• Either explain it or cut it</div><div>• Only use images and graphs when you reference them directly</div><div>• Are there verbal, written or visual distractions?</div></div> <div><div>8. <b>Engaging</b></div><div>• If one part is not interesting you might loose the attention</div><div>• Look for parts that might be weaker than others</div><div>• Where could the attention get lost?</div></div> <div><div>9. <b>Useful</b></div><div>• Look for questions someone might have</div><div>• Do you answer the questions people have?</div></div> <div><div>10. <b>Clarity of Purpose</b></div><div>• Make sure you know exactly what you want to say</div><div>• What are you trying to explain?</div></div>	<div><div>1. <b>Set-Up</b></div><div>• Summarize in one sentence what you want to say</div><div>• How long does it have to be?</div><div>• Go through the 10 principles of a good explanation and try to answer the questions</div></div> <div><div>2. <b>Find Information</b></div><div>• Collect everything relevant to the explanation</div><div>• Be conscious of the validity of your sources</div><div>Double check the information</div><div>• Have a list of questions to answer</div><div>• Have a list of what you don't understand</div></div> <div><div>3. <b>Distil Information</b></div><div>• Divide the information to smaller parts</div><div>• Cut everything that is not necessary</div><div>• Look for gaps in the information</div><div>• Go through the information several times and cut everything unnecessary</div></div> <div><div>4. <b>Organize Information</b></div><div>• Identify the strands of the explanation</div><div>• <b>Strand</b> = logical sections, chunks or themes of information</div><div>• Make a list of the strands in your explanation</div><div>• Define a purpose for each strand</div><div>• Experiment with putting the strands together in different orders</div><div>• Think of visual elements to support what you say</div><div>Avoid generic visual elements.</div></div> <div><div>5. <b>Link Information</b></div><div>• Start Writing</div><div>• If you get stuck you are either unsure what to say or how to say it</div><div>• Write only how you would speak. If it sounds weird spoken, change it</div><div>• <b>Back-Annos</b> = Back announcements</div><div>Recaps or summaries of what just has been said.</div><div>Use a part of the information and reframe it with some new. e.g.</div><div><b>Main point:</b> "Global temperatures have risen by 1.1 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times."</div><div><b>Back-anno:</b> "That means the planet is already significantly warmer than it used to be."</div><div>• Writing Techniques:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look for hard stops in the reading flow</li><li>• Use connecting sentences between parts</li><li>• Show the structure and how things connect</li><li>• <b>Joining phrases</b> and <b>"hooks"</b></li><li>• Split longer sentences into small ones</li><li>• Use Back-Annos</li></ul></div></div> <div><div>6. <b>Tighten</b></div><div>• Go through it and delete everything unnecessary</div><div>• Delete also elements you worked hard on, if needed</div><div>• Look for complicated words and sentences</div><div>• Delete them or make them easier</div><div>• Go through the 10 Principles of a good explanation</div><div>• Get a second opinion</div></div> <div><div>7. <b>Delivery</b></div><div>• Package the explanation to be engaging</div><div>• Place the visual elements aligned with the explanation</div><div>• Use the right formatting<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Font size big enough to be seen at a glance</li><li>• 1.5 line spacing</li></ul></div><div>• When verbally presenting<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make Bullet points</li><li>• Reduce the information as much as possible, while being able to remember the information</li><li>• Practice the explanation for flow (Make notes for pauses, what to emphasize and where to just go ahead)</li><li>• Practice each strand separately and the whole explanation</li></ul></div></div>	<p>Follow the same 7 steps</p> <p>Steps 1-3 are the same</p> <p>The other steps differ</p> <div><div>4. <b>Organize Information</b></div><div>• Create the strands of your explanation</div><div>• Limit yourself to 5 pieces of information per strand (Main Point, 3 Facts &amp; Context)</div></div> <div><div>5. <b>Verbalize</b></div><div>• Read the explanation out loud</div><div>• See what works and where you struggle</div><div>• Verbalize the strands individually</div><div>• Use Bridging Phrases:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ... another thing is...</li><li>• ... while ... X is also important</li><li>• One aspect is X, another is Y</li></ul></div></div> <div><div>6. <b>Memorize</b></div><div>• <b>Chunking</b> = a memory technique where you put information together and label it as a single thing in your mind</div><div>1. Identify the key information</div><div>2. Group related items to chunks</div><div>3. Label each chunk</div><div>connect them with something you can remember</div><div>4. Put the chunks together</div><div>• Put the strands together in chunks</div><div>• Memorize the chunks</div><div>• Combine them to coherent arguments</div><div><b>Memory Methods</b></div><div>All these methods link different kind of information to things you know and remember.</div><div><div>Link Method:</div><div>Craft a story of the information</div><div>Connect the information with elements and words from the story</div></div><div><div>Journey Method:</div><div>Connect the information to landmarks on a route you are familiar with</div></div><div><div>Memory Palace:</div><div>Connect the information to different places in an environment you are very familiar with</div></div></div> <div><div>7. <b>Questions</b></div><div>• Look for questions, likely to be asked.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What would you like to know?</li><li>• What would you rather not be asked?</li><li>• Is part of peripheral topics?</li></ul><div>• Look up information about the interests of your audience</div><div>• Prepare answers to all questions you can find</div><div>• Link the answers to trigger words</div></div></div>

Helpful Phrases

Connecting Points:

- If you're wondering how X – we did Y.
- I've talked about how X. I am going to show you – and then afterwards Y
- I want to take a few more minutes to tell you X. Once I've done that, I promise I'll show you Y

Showing Structure:

- Now we have looked at X, the next part of this issue is Y.
- We can't understand X unless we consider how it connects to Y.
- So far we have considered X and Y – but Z is also important.
- Put X and Y together, and that leads you to the next factor: Z.

Joining Phrases and hooks:

- That fact helps us understand this issue. But it's not the full picture. To get that, you also need to factor in X . . .
- My first goal had been achieved. But that immediately led me on to a second goal – which was to prove a lot harder.
- If some colleagues were telling me they were angry at what I was suggesting, listen to what else I was being told.
- Those were the numbers for last year. Now look at what has happened this year so far . . .

Bridging Phrases:

- ... another thing is...
- ... while ... X is also important
- One aspect is X, another is Y

Escape Phrases for switching topics:

- You're right, that is important. As is ...
- I think that's one important issue. Another that ties into this issue is ...
- On that, I'd agree, but if we look elsewhere...
- It's amazing the number of factors here. That is one – but also think about...
- You're quite right to raise that. I'd also highlight...
- One other thing I'd mention...
- I completely agree. Also...
- Yes. And that's just one of a number of issues . . .

Quick Explanations

Techniques to use in situations where time is rare

When you have no time, focus on:

- What topics to cover
- What you want to convey
- What you want from them

Writing Emails

- Keep in mind, the reader might just skim the mail or not read it at all
- Format the mail to emphasize the critical points
- Make the first thing they read relevant to them
- Use as few words as possible. Even bullet points.
- Target people not groups
- Highlight important information
- Only short paragraphs
- Separate requests

