

Chapter Six

Supporting Material: Backing for the Bridge
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W. Clifton Adams
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General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:

1. think of supporting material from a speech perspective.
2. accept the need for redundancy in your speech.
3. understand the purposes and types of supporting materials.

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. differentiate, from a speech perspective, resource materials and supporting materials.
2. list and explain the purposes of supporting materials.
3. list, define, recognize and provide examples of types of supporting materials.

“In Language use, utterances are more basic than sentences.”
Herbert H. Clark

Consider this principle: **Supporting materials are the building blocks of speech.** This principle reflects a way of thinking, not a literal truth. Supporting materials are composed of spoken words, well, utterances. However, you don't want to focus on “what am I going to say?” but on **“how am I going to support/get across my idea?”** You want always to focus on the ideas you want to communicate to your audience. Supporting materials are essential to effectively communicating these ideas.

Recognizing supporting materials as building blocks will help you to distinguish where order is important and where it isn't because, as with building blocks, supporting materials are usually modular: within sections, you can present them in any order or not at all. You will find this a true advantage in at least two ways. First, you won't freeze when considering what comes next and, second, you can more easily manage your time. By having more material than you think you need and the ability to use or not use it, you will always have the comfort that you'll be within the time expectations.

Making an oral distinction between supporting materials and research materials may help. In terms of speech, research materials are sources of information for your speech (see Chapter 5); this information only becomes supporting material when you present it to help illustrate an idea in your speech.

This may seem too petty a distinction to help, but it will help change your focus from a print orientation to that of speaking. Your task isn't to report on information that you find elsewhere, but to make the information your tool in communicating your ideas to the audience.

Another distinction that may be helpful is between an idea and the support for that idea. Chapter two helps in this distinction because ideas or points are more abstract; supporting materials are more specific and provide substance to the idea without subdividing the idea into sub-points. Supporting material gives concreteness to the idea. An idea may be expressed in one sentence; supporting material generally takes time to present.

Inset 6-1

SELF INSTRUCTION BLOCK ON NATURE OF SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Question one: Identify from the following events the one or ones including supporting material for a speech.

- a. The magazine in the library reports on the destruction of a rain forest in Chile.
- b. Jim decides to give a speech on the destruction of rain forests.
- c. Jim reads the magazine article on rain forests in Chile.
- d. Jim decides to use the Chilean rain forest as an example.
- e. Jim describes the destruction of the Chilean rain forest to show how they are being destroyed.

Answer: e

Question two: Which of the following is NOT supporting material for the idea? "China is a good place to live."

- a. China has livable cities.
- b. Beijing's mayor has said, "we want to make China a friendly place in which to live and work. Our government will do all it can to make the city and its living conditions first class."
- c. China's basketball teams provide sports excitement and China National Ballet is a good illustration of the development of culture in China.
- d. The average income of Chinese is above other developing countries, unemployment rate is lower, cost of living is lower and markets are full of wonderful food and consumer merchandise.

Answer a.

Yes, supporting material simply repeats in detail what the point has already said. It is a means of providing the redundancy that is needed to help the listeners be sure they have a clear and full understanding of what you're saying. Speech is structured redundancy. The redundancy helps your listeners; it also helps prevent you from overburdening yourself in having more to remember than is humanly possible while managing the speech.

Research is fairly clear. Communication is a fault-filled process. Listening is a demanding part of this process. We need to hear information more than once. The more listeners, the greater the chances that most of the listeners will not process something the first time it is presented. Those who do may be uncertain about some aspect. Repeating key ideas as many as five times isn't too much! It's nice if it is presented in different forms each time. The **I:sm₃** model provides a short hand to reinforce this principle: For each idea (**I**) in the speech, we repeat the idea through supporting material three times. The "sm₃" is a double reminder: We need to present the idea in at least three ways and we need three times the amount of supporting material as we expect to use.

By considering the many functions that supporting materials serve, you will get a fuller understanding of their nature and why the redundancy is needed.

Purposes of Supporting Materials

Supporting material serves to accomplish important purposes. To some extent, each of the types of supporting material contributes somewhat to all the functions; however, often a particular type of supporting material will be most effective in fulfilling one of the purposes than any of the other types. Knowing that one type of support may provide one type of help and another type might assist in a different way, the wise speaker varies the types of supporting material when illustrating each of his or her points. It's best to have two or three different types of supporting material to develop each idea!

Consider the following purposes of supporting material:

1. To clarify concepts and ideas:

Often audience members listen to speakers to better understand how a system operates and/or to learn to do something. People in these audiences generally want examples and visual aids as well as explanations to help them make sure that they understand the idea being presented. They appreciate the redundancy that these supporting materials provide.

In addition, sometimes individuals have something of the concept, but the concept is vague in their minds. Take the concept of "quality time." Working parents want the limited hours that they can spend with their children to be the most beneficial for the children. These parents, then, come to workshops with the concept and, often, some ways to accomplish the goal of maximizing the value of time spent with their kids; but, their understanding is insufficient for their needs. So, they are seeking more examples to help them clarify and expand the idea of "quality time" in their own mind.

Certainly, audiences who want (or are even required) to learn new concepts and methods vary greatly in how much they know and how clear the

ideas are which they think they know. A variety of supporting material helps with the diversity. In speaking to all these various types of groups which come to “classrooms,” we generally think of ourselves as instructors, or teachers, and of the speech itself as informative. Still, we should recognize that such instruction builds and strengthens attitudes that give directions to actions in the public arena, thus serving an indirect persuasive function.

2. To extend the memory of the points

Beginning speakers, and even instructors, too often want to minimize development of an idea with the intent of helping the audience remember the idea. Sometimes they assert that they are using the KISS (keep it simple, stupid) principle. This approach typically has the opposite effect from the one intended. By minimizing the development of each idea, the speaker is likely to have too many ideas, making memory more difficult for both speaker and listeners.

More importantly, our minds store information in organized clusters. The larger the cluster, the more likely it will remain “visible” in a scan. Furthermore, the more support in the cluster, the more ways it may be accessed. A quote, in the mind’s organization, may be cross-linked to the author; an example may be indexed by its time of occurrence. Either association might prompt the person to recall the point. Two means of retrieval are better than one. Three are geometrically better than two.

3. To help to maintain interest

Listeners are going to vary in their concern for the topic. Even if only a few are interested in it, most are going to find a story worthy of their attention. An example, involving people similar to the audience or people they know, will give them something to ignite their interest. Interest is something you want to gain, maintain and regain in the speech. Stories, examples and visual aids are means of accomplishing this goal. Surprisingly, perhaps, interest comes from knowledge more than knowledge comes from interest; so, to some degree, redundancy unto itself contributes to interest. Variety in this support is most important toward maintaining interest.

4. To increase credibility

In providing substance to develop the ideas of your speech, you demonstrate that you are informed on the topic. By quoting experts in an area, you gain something of that person’s prestige. By discussing the latest relevant statistics, you show the audience that you care enough about the topic and about them to find those numbers. Generally, improving your image will be a secondary goal, but it will always be an important one.

5. To increase believability

Many times, the audience will accept what you say as true simply because you say it is true. Even then, it’s better to justify that trust by providing specifics. Visual aids, quotations, statistics, and even analogies can help accomplish this

goal. Then, such support becomes essential when you need to persuade the audience that your ideas are correct.

6. *To motivate the audience to act*

In those persuasive speeches where you need the audience to do what you are advocating, you will give special attention to providing examples with which the audience can identify. In these examples, you will help the listeners to see someone like them gaining something that they, the listeners, desire. However, you should not limit these examples to persuasive situations. By helping an audience understand how information might be used, you make it more relevant to them, making the informative speech more effective,

7. *To meet time requirements*

You may say, "But, I don't want to just fill time." Of course, you want to do more than fill time; you have six other very excellent reasons to develop the ideas in your speech. However, there are some good real-world reasons to work within the time allotments of your speech. While some listeners may appreciate being "done early," the likelihood is that, even with those people, there is going to be some feeling of disrespect because you didn't do what you were supposed to do, you were slacking.

More importantly, in today's world, time management is important. Individuals, and organizers of events, coordinate activities to maximize efficiency. If more than one workshop is scheduled, the early completion of one may mean noise from those departing that one session will disrupt the others. With back-to-back events, many people have to find ways (sometime disruptive, seldom as productive as they would like) to fill the dead time. Most importantly perhaps, as in your classroom speeches, rewards are often keyed to using your speaking time as scheduled.

The first three of the purposes above are usually associated with "informative" speeches where the understanding of information is deemed to be important. Beginning speakers generally need to recognize that when the information seems self-explanatory is when clarity is most needed. In contrast, if the audience already understands the information, there probably is no need to present a speech about it. When there is some understanding, by providing examples, visual aids, and analogies, the idea can become more concrete and useful. Surprisingly, perhaps, the concreteness also makes the speech more interesting. Obviously, stories are high in their interest value; but, overall, interest is maintained, most reliably, through having a variety of types of supporting material.

The second group of three is usually associated with "persuasive" speeches where the overall goal is to change behavior through changing attitudes. However, these three purposes are integral to effective instruction just as having information understood is essential to being an effective persuader. Statistics and authoritative quotations are often needed to accomplish these three goals.

While the last purpose listed above should be viewed as less important than the others, in our “new information (entertainment) age,” it is increasing in importance. Many individuals today make an excellent living by occupying the minds of audiences. Thus, the purpose should not be overlooked. You do want to occupy their minds in the most meaningful ways. The easiest indication that you failed to occupy their minds in a meaningful way during any allotted period is that you have stopped before the end of that allotted time.

In the discussion above, we considered types of support as if everyone had a clear understanding of each type. However, generally, the understanding of the types tends to be more intuitive than is needed. To become a quality public speaker, you need to have clear categories of the types of supporting materials.

Types of Supporting Material

1. *Statistics* are numerical expressions that help the speaker establish a point with an audience. People generally think of statistics as adding concreteness to a speech. They see statistics as being most “reality based.” Of course, statistics are abstractions that generalize across many specific cases. A helpful way to think of numbers is as seasoning to be sprinkles gingerly throughout the speech. Remember, that statistics are used to help you illustrate ideas. You may want to make them meaningful by coupling them with other types of support such as visual aids or analogies. Precision isn’t essential generally; when it is, do use a visual to reinforce the number. Otherwise, round judiciously; even round so as to understate your point.

2. A *quotation* is the words of an important person that the speaker uses to reinforce the point. This definition is specific to making speeches and reflects the purposes of supporting material. It should be understood in speeches, that most types of supporting material come from another source, but we, here, reserve the label “quotation,” for the words of someone, who for whatever reason is deemed important. The person may have been an expert, or a poet, but may have simply been the witness to a crime. The quote may have importance because of who the person is or because of the unique quality of selection and arrangement of words. If the language is of importance, obviously, the quote needs to be exact. However, if the significance is in the source of the idea, a functionally equivalent paraphrase is sufficient. There is no need to say, “quote... end of quote” in presenting the quotation, unless you want to make it clear that you don’t agree with the quote. You should, instead, let your body and voice say it is a quote.

3. An *example* is a case which is presented to represent many cases. Reflecting back to Chapter 2, an example is a specific that represents the more abstract concept. You may simply reference the example if its existence is common knowledge as in, “Remember when Paris Hilton went to jail.” However, examples generally work better when they are extended and you supply the audience with details, even if the details are generally known. Unlike quotations and statistics that we hope are accurate, examples need not be true as long as




they help to illustrate the truth of the point being made. Some of the best examples come from personal experience or personal creativity.

4. An *analogy* is a phenomenon (usually that is already understood by the audience) that is described as similar to another phenomenon so as to increase understanding and/or acceptance of the latter phenomenon. Often the analogy isn't true. "You have to be as careful as carrying an armload of eggs," would be an analogy that we'd all understand is used to make a point, not to represent a reality. However, the analogy may be true. If true, we may refer to it as a parallel case. In discussing the Chinese school system, we could compare (and contrast) it to one we know well, the U.S. system. That would be the use of an analogy, a parallel comparison.

5. A *story* is a narrative with a plot that is used to establish a moral. A plot places a character with a goal in a situation where the goal is not easily obtained. Listeners generally want to know whether the character is successful in reaching the goal; thus, interest is generated. The interest is generated, typically, even when the audience already knows the story. Perhaps, the listeners want to see if the teller actually knows the story or if the teller might tell the story differently than usually. The story may be true, true to life or clearly fictional. What is important is that the story helps the speaker make the point. If the point isn't too serious, the story may be in the form of a joke. Serious stories may be termed parables or fables. Sometimes, both light and serious stories are called antidotes. In classroom speeches, stories need to be short; however, one technique that is often effective is to tell different parts of the story in different parts of the speech, illustrating a different idea each time.

Figure 6-1

Elementary Visual Aids

Pie Chart		Good for showing proportions
Line Graph		Ideal for showing change over time
Bar Graph		Useful to show differences in groups Care is needed in where to start the horizontal axis

6. *Audio/visual* aides are anything played or shown to an audience to help illustrate an idea. In today technological age, the possibilities are limitless and AV support can be most effective in accomplishing all the purposes of supporting material. As noted above, visual aids should be used when presenting statistics if precision is important and to enhance them at other times. See Figure 6-1 for some classical ways to present statistical information. Visual aids can be used to help imprint quotations on the minds of the audience and, though pictures, can add concreteness to analogies, examples and stories. As valuable as audio-visual aids may be, their misuse can offset their advantages. In Chapter 10, I provide some fairly standard rules for using audio-visuals. Primarily, these rules stress that an audio-visual presentation is not a substitute for a speech in the learning process. Bullet listings do not function as visual aids; in a speech, they are best used in transitions. Unless AV presentations are created by a professional with at least a proficiency in basic public communication, they tend, at best, to serve as entertainment and at worst a distraction from the speech.

7. An *explanation* is the restatement of an idea in (hopefully) more easily understood words. An explanation differs from an example in that the explanation keeps the thought process at the same level of abstraction as the idea being discussed. Restatement of complex ideas is often required to make them understandable. Often in comedy, someone will say, "In English please!" because a statement is expressed technically or even in a jargon that is understood by only an age group or segment of the population. Often by saying a point in several different ways, you help different subgroups of the audience to understand it better. Still, it is easy to overuse explanations. Your goal should be to replace most of your explanations with other types of support. An easy way to reduce the amount of explanations is to put a person in one or more of the explanations. Instead of explaining to the audience how to do something, you can tell them how someone else did it, etc. You then have an example and a more interesting segment.

Summary

In this chapter, I have listed key purposes of supporting materials with the intent of helping you both to see their importance and the need for variety in their use. A good rule of thumb is to have three different types of supporting material for each idea. The redundancy will help to fulfill various purposes and will help to make the speech manageable for you. I also defined the seven most common types of supporting material, with some emphasis on the value and rules for using visual aids. Hopefully, these definitions help you to understand both the content of each type and how they are all used toward the common aim of improving the communication of ideas toward the purposes listed in the first section.

Inset 6-2

SELF-INSTRUCTION BLOCK ON TYPES OF SUPPORTING MATERIALS

In the following items, identify the type of supporting material using the following key: (1) analogy (2) example (3) explanation (4) quotation (5) statistics:

1. The test says that one-half of all marriages end in divorce, but only in 20% of marriages where both individuals were over 27 at the time of the marriage.
2. Remember the little train that said, "I think I can, I think I can; I know I can; I know I can." We can make this system work.
3. President Truman said many memorable things like, "If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen."
4. P.T. Barnum expressed my view of the situation well, "Every cloud has a silver lining."

Answers:

1: (5); 2: (1); 3: (2); 4: (4)

Key Sources

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