

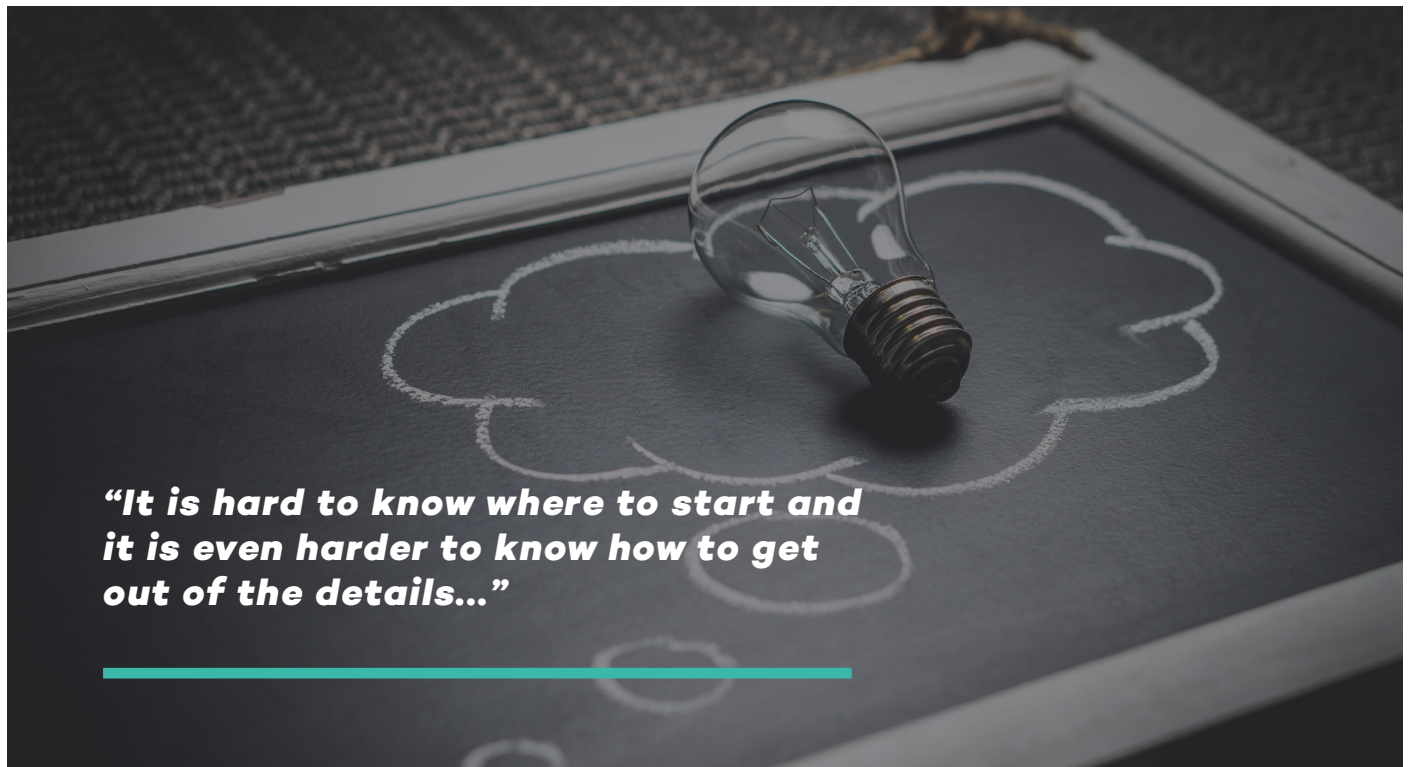
A background image showing a pair of hands holding a pair of glasses. The image is dark and moody, with a teal border on the left and right sides. The hands are positioned in the center, with the fingers gripping the temples of the glasses. The glasses are dark-framed. The overall tone is professional and focused.

TURNING TECHNICAL EXPERTS INTO GREAT COMMUNICATORS

SIMPLE IDEAS TO HELP YOU **GET OUT OF THE DETAILS** AND COMMUNICATE WITH IMPACT

BY DAVINA STANLEY

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"It is hard to know where to start and it is even harder to know how to get out of the details..."

Communicating complex ideas clearly to others, particularly when your audience is not expert in your field can be vexing.

It is hard to know where to start and even harder to know how to get out of the details, so you can communicate something technically accurate that engages your audience.

But, what if your first draft could shoot through all of the layers in your governance structure for fast signoff by your exec team? No rework. No questions. Just 'approved'.

Believe it or not, this is possible. Even for technical experts. I have seen it and so have my team. Often.

The first step, however, requires you to focus more on the finish line than the start line. It requires you to take your hands off your keyboard and think about

your communication strategy before you prepare any part of your communication.

Today I am offering you two ideas to help you do just that and an opportunity to learn more through my [FREE EMAIL COURSE](http://bit.ly/6CommsTips) (Go here to sign up: <http://bit.ly/6CommsTips>).

Here are today's ideas:

1. GET SPECIFIC ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE:

If you don't know exactly what you want from your communication, all you will get is questions

2. KNOW THAT YOUR AUDIENCE IS NOT YOU: Decision makers rarely want all the technical details before they get to your big idea

Read on to learn more and use the ideas in the worksheets provided.

GET SPECIFIC ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE

If you don't know exactly what you want from your communication, all you will get is questions

Sometimes the simplest fixes create the biggest difference. Clarifying the purpose of your communication does just that.

Many, if not most, of my clients dive into preparing their communication right from the minute they know they need to prepare an email, paper, or deck.

They like to think and write at the same time, which I understand completely: so do I. It can be a useful way to brainstorm, so long as we are clear on where 'thinking writing' does – and does not – lead us.

It leads us to be clear about our message at the end of our ramblings. At this point we are clear about our message, but that clarity is largely – if not totally – absent for our audience.

They will have wandered through our thinking journey and either taken a mental detour or switched off well before the end.

This problem is even more acute when we do not have a highly specific understanding of why we are communicating to them in the first place.

Lack of clarity around what we want to achieve from each piece of communication leaves us vulnerable to creating a 'nervous parade of knowledge' or a 'kitchen sink' communication that includes every conceivable detail about a topic, so we can avoid being wrong.

Unfortunately, this guarantees we will be wrong: We won't put a clear idea forward. Our audience won't know what we are saying. And if we are asking for something, all we will get is a long list of questions.

SO, HERE ARE TWO STEPS TO TAKE TO AVOID CONFUSING YOUR OWN AUDIENCES

- 1. Separate your broader strategic purpose and your specific story purpose**
- 2. Focus on audience outcomes, not your inputs, when articulating your story purpose**

Let's look at each one of these in more detail now.

1. SEPARATE YOUR BROADER STRATEGIC PURPOSE AND YOUR SPECIFIC STORY PURPOSE



In work life, we always communicate for a purpose, and yet we aren't always able to articulate what that is. Here is a story about my client 'Gus', a mid-career actuary from the Risk Division of a large bank that illustrates this point.

Gus needed agreement from a report owner and the reporting team to implement a new data collection tool for preparing a particular high-stakes report.

The tool would gather and sort the input data from many internal finance systems so the reporting team would no longer need to manually gather and manipulate the data.

Instead, they could focus on the fun stuff: analysing and drawing insights from it.

Given the benefits seemed obvious, Gus assumed implementing this tool would be straightforward and required only one story outlining steps for implementing the tool.

However, he had not realised that the business leader was concerned about any change to the report as he was concerned

about looking foolish when presenting an error to the CEO.

Not realising the differences between his audiences and the different objectives he needed to have when communicating with each brought him unstuck. And not just once: twice.

Once he understood the difference between his broader strategic purpose (getting the new system implemented broadly) and his story purposes (ensuring the reporting team knew how to do it and that the general manager would support it happening) he prepared two different pieces of communication.

I encourage you to think carefully about what you can realistically achieve from each specific piece of communication and be willing to take several steps to achieve your overall purpose, rather than just one. It is counter intuitive, but it may well save you time.

In the next point I share a simple way to get to the heart of the purpose for a specific piece of communication.

2. FOCUS ON YOUR AUDIENCE OUTCOME, NOT YOUR INPUTS, WHEN ARTICULATING YOUR STORY PURPOSE

One of my favourite clients, an accountant called Tracey, explained the difference that thinking carefully about her purpose made for her.

Tracey wrote tons of short emails. They would typically be simple: asking for information so she could move a line item from one client account to another, or similar.

However, she found that she spent an awful lot of her time chasing the partners in her firm to get answers to what she thought were super simple questions.

This all changed when she focused on her purpose. Here's what she did:

Before she began preparing her email she asked herself a quick question: What do I want this particular audience to know, think or do as a result of this communication?

Once she was clear on that she was able to get to the point much more quickly in her emails, and she found that some people would reply, almost instantly.

The amount of time she spent chasing them radically shifted and she enjoyed her job inordinately more.

The difference here is in the twist: She wasn't asking 'what do I want from this communication?' but rather, 'what do I want my audience to know think or do as a result of this specific piece of communication?'

This sentence seems simple – and on the surface it is. But I encourage you to dig deeply to get it right.

I find it often takes a few 'goes' at getting clarity around the purpose, and that the first thing my clients suggest they want to achieve really isn't it what they need at all.

In today's coaching session with a team of property experts, for example, it took four of us four goes to get it right. Our first 'go' was this:

As a result of this email I want the landlord to allow us to proceed with our site renovation.

After several attempts, with me continuing to ask 'why' (I use the simple and powerful **FIVE WHY'S TECHNIQUE**) it ended up being quite different:

As a result of this email I want the landlord to be ready to detail their timing and scope for their upgrades to the Mall so we can synchronise our own store renewal program when we meet next week.

The communication for the first attempt would have looked very different than the revised version.

Once you are clear about your purpose, I encourage you to think about your audience. The two are linked and you may need to iterate between the two, particularly where complex and high-stakes communication is concerned.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

PURPOSE

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF ABOUT USING THESE IDEAS IN YOUR OWN SITUATION.

1. Think about a situation when you have needed to communicate to multiple audiences. Was one story effective? If so, can you identify what worked and why?

2. If not, what was the cost? How much time did you take to repair the damage and how much did it cost you reputation ally?

3. Can you imagine a situation where it would be more useful to have multiple stories? If so, where?

4. How would this be beneficial?

KNOW THAT YOUR AUDIENCE IS NOT YOU

Decision makers rarely want to know all the technical details before they get to your big idea

I was talking with a late career engineer with two Masters' Degrees this morning, who is part of my current Clarity First online program.

The first takeaway Shane described was the surprise that his audience has different needs than he does.

He loves detail and has traditionally provided lots of background and supporting details before he gets to his main point.


He has traditionally done this because he understands the importance of the details, and assumes his audience needs it if they are to understand his recommendation.

Having tried some different approaches to suit his audience's needs and styles his audiences are reacting more quickly and positively to his communication.

So, let's get practical and think through three deceptively simple ways to do that.

- 1. CHECK: YOUR AUDIENCE MAY NOT BE WHO YOU THINK IT IS**
- 2. UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR REAL AUDIENCE NEEDS TO KNOW**
- 3. MASTER HOW TO ENGAGE THEM**

Let's now look into each of these elements.



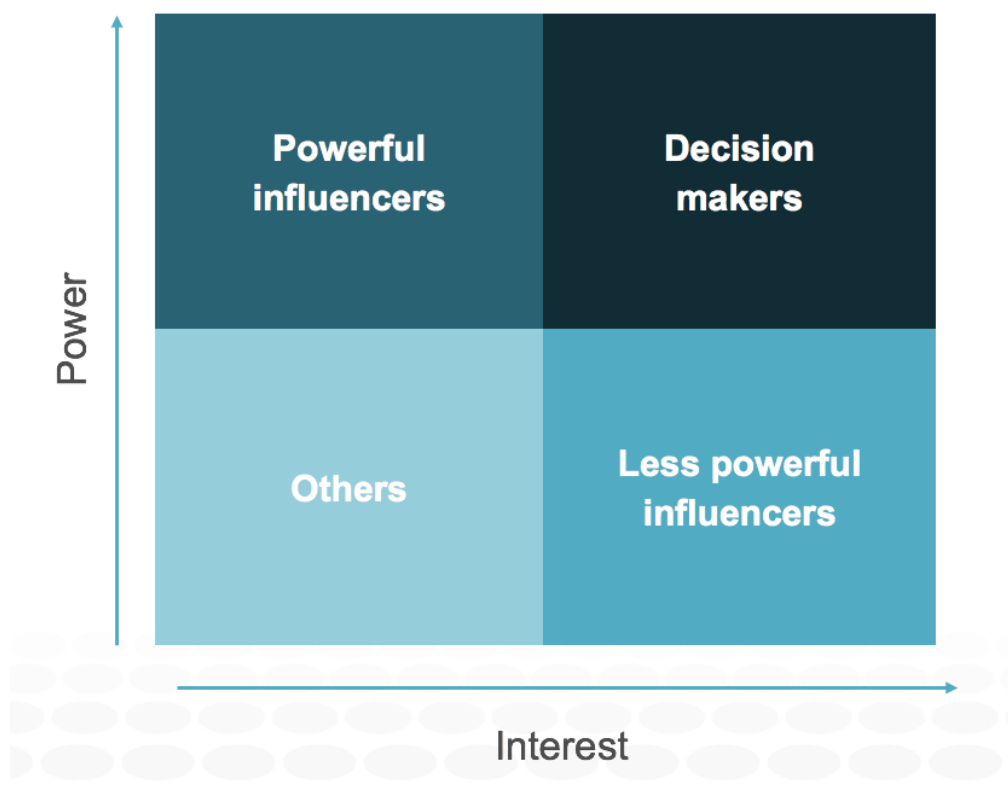
“So, let's get practical and think through three deceptively simple ways to do that.”

1.CHECK: YOUR AUDIENCE MAY NOT BE WHO YOU THINK IT IS

I am intrigued by the number of times my clients realise they have left important people out of their communication loop. Occasionally it is the actual decision maker themselves, but more often it is important others who may influence that decision.

Here are three simple steps you can take to see whether you have identified and focused appropriately on the right people:

- **Brainstorm** the list of people that you think are relevant to this piece of communication and, if it is a high-profile piece, ask a colleague to sense test that it is complete
- **Sort them into three categories:** who will decide the outcome, who will influence the outcome and who else you need to consider



- **Use the Five Why's technique I mentioned earlier to ask yourself:** Why are these people on the list? Why is this person the decision maker? Keep digging until you can describe why in highly specific terms.

Once you are confident that you have nailed down who the audience is, think about what they need to know to fulfil their role.

2. UNDERSTANDING WHAT OUR AUDIENCE NEEDS TO KNOW

There are again some questions to ask yourself to prompt you to understand the most important members of your audience more deeply. Here are some to get you started:

- **What do they want from you?**
- **Do they know much about the topic?**
- **Are they engaged in it?**
- **Do they have pre-conceived ideas?**
- **Could there be a conflict between your objectives and theirs?**

Where you find conflict between your objective and theirs, spend extra time planning how you will engage these people, ideally before your formal communication is delivered.

Speak to them one-on-one or find someone who has a good relationship with them to do it either for you or with you to understand their concerns and increase your chance of engagement.

You may also get some more useful ideas from my blog post: [DO FACTS CHANGE MINDS?](https://claritycollege.co/do-facts-change-minds/) (<https://claritycollege.co/do-facts-change-minds/>)

You may also find that understanding them as human beings helps increase your chance of cut through.

3. MASTERING HOW TO ENGAGE THEM

This last piece is not to be underestimated. At the highest level we can assume all audience members are intelligent and in a hurry, and that it is safe to provide pre-reading for those who are interested.

However, we can engage the most important members of our audiences, the decision makers, better when we understand their work style. We use the Bolton and Bolton Work Styles framework to help us do that.

With its foundations in the well-known Myers Briggs framework, Bolton and Bolton looks at a person's behaviour in a particular setting at a particular point in time and divides us all into four work styles.

It is useful to understand these, so we can identify our own style as well as that of our audience so we can flex to their needs. We can do this directly if we know them or through others where we do not.

We offer a simple diagnostic tool here that you [CAN DOWNLOAD \(http://bit.ly/2oRqncA\)](http://bit.ly/2oRqncA) to identify your style, but for now, here is a brief description for each.

- **AMIABLES ARE MOTIVATED FIRST AND FOREMOST BY BEING PART OF THEIR TEAM.**
When making decisions they prioritise the impact on their team and people in general. They tend to be quieter and more softly spoken than other types and enjoy anecdotes and human stories. Give the big picture first, be thorough and courteous and factor in the people priorities and you will increase your chance of engaging Amiables.
 - **ANALYTICALS ARE MOTIVATED BY UNDERSTANDING THE DETAILS AND DELIVERING ANALYSIS THAT IS CORRECT.**
Like Shane, analyticals like to be thorough and take their time when making decisions to be confident they are right. They like to provide detail first, and then offer the recommendation last. Give sufficient time to think through your analysis before any decision needs to be made to increase your chance of engaging Analyticals.
 - **DRIVERS ARE ENERGETIC PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO 'GET THINGS DONE'.**
They will prioritise progress over correctness and can often be found in senior levels of organisations. Explain in clear and simple terms how your proposition should be implemented so that it delivers maximum value to the organization to increase your chance of engaging Drivers.
 - **EXPRESSIVES ENJOY VARIETY AND CHANGE.**
These colourful people love new and different things and fast-moving environments. They love innovation and prefer to develop new programs than to manage existing ones. Talk your ideas through in person wherever possible in short, sharp bursts rather than lengthy detailed presentations to increase your chance of engaging Expressives.
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CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

AUDIENCE

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF ABOUT USING THESE IDEAS IN YOUR OWN SITUATION.

1. Which style do you belong to? Download the toolkit to help you identify where you belong [HERE](#).

2. Which style do your most important audiences belong to?

3. How could you adjust your style to engage them better when meeting them in person?

DAVINA STANLEY

Davina Stanley has had a career full of surprises that has led her to spend more than 20 years helping technical experts communicate better.

Davina began her career as a kindergarten teacher which, as an Australian farm kid who was a fourth-generation teacher, is not all that surprising.

It is surprising, though, that within six years of graduating she joined McKinsey & Company's Hong Kong office as a communication specialist.

If you knew that at teachers' college she learned to write from renowned Australian children's author Mem Fox, that might help. She also spent five years in the corporate affairs department of a multinational manufacturing company while studying communication at night.

During this time, she learned how to communicate in business, and then at McKinsey mastered a structured approach for synthesising complex ideas.

She then refined it while helping technical experts in Hong Kong, New York, Tokyo and Melbourne Australia before moving (finally!) to Sydney Australia.

Through all of that moving she found her niche, and now specialises in helping technical experts to get out of the details, so they can get heard and get ahead.

It might be no surprise then, that her adult sons are both mathematicians...

Her signature public program is the powerful and engaging 3-month [CLARITY FIRST GROUP COACHING PROGRAM](https://www.clarityfirstprogram.com), which runs twice each year. Visit www.clarityfirstprogram.com to learn more.

