

Two approaches

[1]First, let me thank you all for taking the time to listen to my presentation this morning. We are all busy folks and could be in several different places this morning – and you chose to be here. I certainly appreciate it.

By way of background, your presenter did not always know how to write a research paper. In fact, an eighth grade “F” in English went a long way toward improving my skills. My former school teacher father did not see any humor in his eldest son failing a class in his native tongue.

This experience resulted in days, weeks and months of diagramming sentences and writing complete, comprehensible sentences. Thereafter expanding sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into pages.

Since that time, I spent a large portion of my working career writing; writing letters, writing reports and writing handbooks. Each area required a slightly different skill set, and reflecting on my experience there are two approaches to writing reports or presentations.

[2] An entertaining presentation must capture the attention of the listener and must hold it. So for this style I choose a stream of consciousness approach. I sit down and type out the story I wish to tell.

In this initial draft I include every thought that comes to mind, every joke, every trick or method that will

capture and retain the listener's interest. Since I am not a touch typist, this stage involves both the typing effort and the thinking effort as you are correcting the spelling and grammar.

Once the first draft is completed, I revisit the assignment.

[3] How much time is the presentation intended to take? Are there specific points to be included? Is there any part of the intended audience that has not been included? These elements are added into the initial draft.

And then I let it sit for a few days.

The second draft effort blocks the presentation into coherent sections, and ensures each section flows to the next. Each paragraph stands on its own. The thought and supporting narrative must flow and end with the desired message.

The paragraphs must tie together and the sections must similarly connect and stream from start to finish. Those odd, stream of consciousness thoughts that seemed so witty a few days ago may now be deleted in favor of a more coherent conversational flow. The good taste that results from careful consideration is returned to the draft.

This second draft is the point at which I add the foot notes, quotes and comments which distinguish one man's opinion from a more scholarly effort. Secondary research to document weak areas is undertaken and added to the draft. The bibliography is constructed

and efforts to make sure the statements and sources are consistent are initiated.

[4] This is a good place to introduce Copyrights. The use of other folks intellectual material is prohibited without permission. The legalities are discussed in detail at <http://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ1.pdf>. I have a little more to say but will hold that for later.

If the piece is to be a presentation accompanied by a PowerPoint or overhead visuals – this is the time to start the construction of the graphics. Copyrighted materials must be added to the bibliography so proper credit is given.

I try very hard to use visuals to augment the verbal presentation – not as a replacement for good research and creative writing. The visuals are to retain the audience interest, not the outline from which to present your material. In addition, my LEO presentations are generally posted on the Lodge website, and the written word must stand alone.

[5] When these efforts are complete – another “set it aside” period of recess takes place. Each draft seems exquisite at the time, but a few days rest and reflection discloses potential weakness to be addressed in the final draft.

I try to complete the final draft at least two weeks before it is to be presented. The final review-final draft makes one last attempt to make sure the flow and

consistency is established. The humor and creativity must still be funny or creative, and the linkage to the graphics must be clear and understandable. Footnotes must be double checked and the bibliography should be reviewed to confirm it can be a resource to the reader.

The two weeks is the time to attempt to memorize your material if it is to be delivered. The linkages with graphics must be confirmed to avoid stumbling. The goal is to ensure proper preparation in order to avoid poor performance.

The Second Approach

I have served as my lodge's education officer for 6 years. As each Master has asked me to continue my service, I negotiate with him several topics during his term. I believe the Master of the Lodge should hear what he wants to know about, not just my frequently historical perspective of the world. I ask for three or four topics upon which I will prepare a paper.

[6] Since these topics may well be in areas over which I have no knowledge, fresh research is required before even a first draft can be prepared. Many, many years ago in a ninth grade speech class, Mr. Deering taught us how to use 3x5 index cards for many things. As a research tool and organizational implement index cards will never fail you.

There are however, 21st century tools which will make your task easier. Now I enter the single paragraphs that would have gone onto an index card into a word

document. I may use an outline format, or I may just enter a series of lines. I also start building the footnote file or bibliography at the very beginning in the first draft.

Research may be undertaken in the old way – books and periodicals in a library, or the new way – Google or other search engines, or a combination effort like Google books.

[7] In each case the notes and material you choose to use from published sources should be footnotes and rostered in the bibliography. I do this for all my papers because more than once a brother has come to me after a presentation and asked where they can learn more, or what was the source of my facts. A paper delivered in lodge doesn't really need footnotes, but you will appreciate the front end effort if one of these questions is asked.

Once the outline is created from the index cards, a first draft is created. At this point, the two approaches merge and the process is the same. Once the first draft is completed, I revisit the assignment. How much time is the presentation intended to take? Are there specific points to be included? Is there any part of the intended audience that has not been included? **[8]** Have I answered the question that the Worshipful Master wanted addressed? These elements are added into the initial draft.

And now we return to the first approach – let it sit for a few days.

I will not bore you with a second recitation of the second and final draft process. But I will reiterate my position that your effort should be well documented. Copyrighted material should be acknowledged including photographs, written materials and websites. Once you have put forth the effort a few times, you appreciate the effort that others have put forth to assist you.

I will close my part here today with a word of encouragement to those of you who are just starting out. When I started writing Masonic materials, I did so because I enjoyed passing on the knowledge that I had acquired from others. I did not start writing by any formula and – aside from the ninth grade speech class and a trip thorough the chairs of Richfield Lodge– I had never taken any formal training in public speaking.

Over a period of years, I have developed a method that works for me. Most of the comment I receive following a presentation is positive to neutral and I have never heard criticism from my brethren of what I have delivered. The only criticism has been from old school Masons who do not believe the lodge room should be used for anything other than ritual and business meetings.

Based upon that experience, I would offer that my approaches work for delivering interesting reports, research, history and education in lodge. Personally – I favor history, so I find truckloads of material available in Google Books and the Internet Archive. When jammed for a topic – I will visit these sites and search

on a single word. Invariably – a topic will present itself and the initial research is right there in front of me.

As we say in the internet community SURF'S UP!**[9]** –
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