

# Developing a message that works

## Learning objectives:

- Gain an understanding of how to define and address the unique needs of your audience
- Learn practical approaches for developing, testing, and communicating messages
- Participate in hands-on exercises to develop a key message that will advance your work

## The “Curse of Knowledge”

Source: Heath & Heath, Made to Stick

# Good vs. Great

(Let's compare and contrast.)

How educators  
communicate.

While an occasional disinclination to exercise is exhibited by all age cohorts, the likelihood of positive health outcomes makes even mildly strenuous physical activity all the more imperative.

Where we often go wrong:

- Jargon vs. Real Language
- Complexity vs. Simplicity
- Comprehensiveness vs. Brevity
- Dispassionate vs. Empowerment

— — —  
Source: Andy Goodman, *Free-Range Thinking*, Nov 2003

How the pros  
communicate.

The image shows the Nike logo with the slogan "JUST DO IT." in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The logo is centered on a solid black rectangular background.

## Messaging outcomes

### Cognitive

What do you  
want the audience  
**TO KNOW?**

### Affective

What do you  
want the audience  
**TO THINK?**

### Behavioral

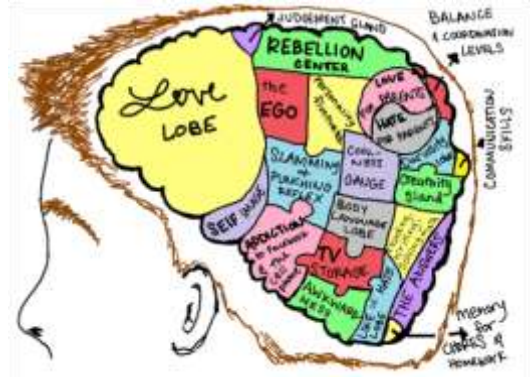
What do you  
want the audience  
**TO DO?**

Source: Philip Kotler

## Behavioral obstacles realities

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- Limited attention and bandwidth
- Planning fallacy
- Social norms
- Identity
- Status quo bias



Sources: Adapted from work by Dr. Ben Castleman and Ideas42

## Behavioral responses

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- Accepting defaults (go with the flow)
- Paralysis
- Simplifying strategies
- Questioning belonging



Sources: Adapted from work by Dr. Ben Castleman and Ideas42

## Behavioral strategies

### Simplify

- Make information easier to digest

### Shift status quo

- Change defaults
- Meet people where they are

### Nudge

- Prompt follow through
- Define and promote action

### Shift mindsets

- Address psychological and cultural barriers or concerns

Sources: Adapted from work by Dr. Ben Castleman and Ideas42

## Commander's Intent

*“If nothing else,  
they must...”*

Think singular, time-oriented actions toward the larger goal

Source: Heath & Heath, Made to Stick

- Gather your parents' tax information tonight
- Complete the online application by Feb 5
- Add the admissions workshop on Oct 1 to your calendar
- Make an appointment with your counselor



## Schemas

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A framework, analogy, or jumping off point that helps your audience apply existing knowledge or understanding to a new idea.

**Apple Pay**

Your wallet.  
Without the wallet.

Gone are the days of searching for your wallet. The wasted moments finding the right card. The swiping and waiting. Now payments happen with a single touch.

Apple Pay will change how you pay with breakthrough contactless payment technology and unique security features built right into the devices you have with you every day. So you can use your iPhone 6 or Apple Watch to pay in an easy, secure, and private way.

Coming in October

## Schemas



## Step #1 (Page 2)

### Defining your communication takeaways:

- Work individually for 10 Minutes
- Using your individual communications topic, identify the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes of your messaging goals
- Share your work with someone at your table



## Step #1: Define Your Communication Takeaways

Communications Topic: <b>FAFSA Completion</b>					
Target Audience (choose ONE to focus on): <b>High School Seniors</b>					
Cognitive		Affective		Behavioral	
What do you want the audience to know?	What existing schemas or frameworks can you use to help them understand?	What do you want the audience to think?	What misconceptions or negative perceptions do you need to overcome?	What do you want the audience to do?	What risks or obstacles might dissuade or prevent them from acting?
<b>That financial aid exists and can help make college affordable.</b>	<b>Other students completed the process and qualified for thousands in aid - success stories.</b>  <b>Applying takes less time than watching an episode of your fav TV show</b>	<b>That accessing financial aid is easier than they think.</b>  <b>That financial aid is available for them.</b>	<b>Students and their families may think that accessing aid is out of reach or too difficult.</b>  <b>Students may think aid is not for them.</b>	<b>Complete the FAFSA by the state deadline!</b>	<b>Lack of hands-on support; finding time to complete the FAFSA; and general fear or feeling of being overwhelmed by the process.</b>

# Understanding your audiences

# Will they tune in or tune out?

Our success begins with  
understanding.

## Guiding Principles

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**You can't do it all.**

You need to prioritize by making smart decisions.

**Individuals and groups respond to messages differently.**

So a one-size-fits-all approach is likely to fall short.

**People don't hide their uniqueness.**

So it's our job to tailor our messaging to resonate with *them*.

## Who should you focus on?

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- Consider the return on investment: who matters most to your strategic goals?
- Consider two critical variables:
  - Impact
  - Access

## Juggling Multiple Audiences

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### Other Questions to Consider:

- What are there key commonalities among audiences that you can leverage?
- What are the insurmountable differences that require differentiated responses?

## What makes them unique?

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- What are the unique lenses that they will be examining your message through?
- Consider a few critical variables:
  - Attitudes
  - Beliefs
  - Values
  - Channels/Mediums

## Why will they care?

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- What are the specific and unique factors that will ensure interest in your message?
- Consider a few critical variables:
  - The relevance of the problem you want to solve
  - The credibility of your solution
  - The benefits of your solution

## What challenges do they present?

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- What are the specific and unique challenges or barriers that your audiences present?
- Consider a few critical variables:
  - The timing of your message
  - How your audience prefers to receive info
  - Misconceptions and counter-messages





## Step #2 (Page 3)

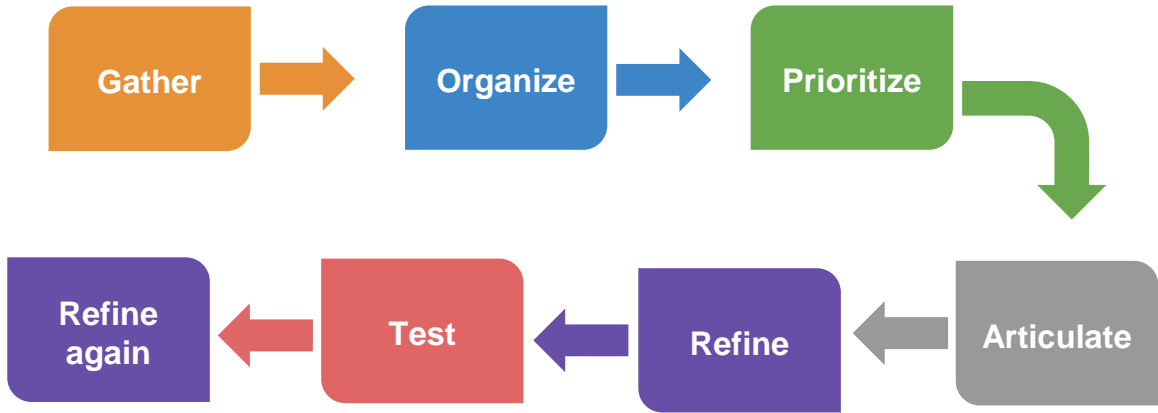
### **Understanding your audience:**

- Work individually for 10 minutes
- Continue working on your individual communication topic
- Share your work with someone at your table

Communications Topic #1: <b>FAFSA Completion</b>			
A.) Who are the most essential audiences to focus on?	B.) What makes them unique?	C.) Why will they care?	D.) What are the unique challenges they present?
<i>Think Return on Investment</i>	<i>Think Attitudes, Beliefs, &amp; Values</i>	<i>Think Benefits &amp; Solutions</i>	<i>Think Barriers &amp; Obstacles</i>
Priority #1 <b>HS Seniors</b>	Want information quickly, digitally Concerned about cost of college	Money for college!	Senior year is overloaded with activities; may have senioritis
Priority #2 <b>Parents</b>	Are under a lot of stress thinking about paying for college and don't know who to turn to Lots of aid/cost misconceptions	Need a trusted, credible source of info May need to be guided in a hands-on way	Finding time in their schedules Requires a trusting relationship Tough to engage digitally
Priority #3 <b>Educators</b>	Have powerful relationships with students Information is complex & changing	Want better tools and resources they can incorporate easily into their work	Their plates are very full Need support as aid process changes
<b>E.) What are the key commonalities among the audiences?</b>		<b>F.) What are the insurmountable differences among the audiences?</b>	
Everyone has a desire to access aid, but need credible information and better guidance		They need different types of support; the communication methods and opportunities vary substantially; groups have different misconceptions that must be addressed.	

# The mechanics of messaging

# Process: turning data into information



you must register for the workshop at [www.wvgearup.org](http://www.wvgearup.org) by February 16

Can't make it? Hosting another workshop on February 25...

THE LIBRARY IS ON THE 2ND FLOOR

12th grade students and parents should attend **Waiting on tax returns? File now, edit later**

free event

try to register for FSA id in advance

STAFFED BY EXPERTS FROM MARSHALL UNIVERSITY'S FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

Native Spanish speakers will be present to assist families

# FAFSA workshop

any student considering college should complete the FAFSA --- even if you think you won't qualify for need-based aid.

FAFSA is the primary application for federal and state financial aid for college

IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

State FAFSA deadline - March 1

An FSA id is your online login account for Federal Student Aid

## February 18

financial aid is not just for "traditional" 4-year college programs. Students pursuing associate degrees or trade or certificate programs can also qualify

HOSTED BY GEAR UP

EVENT COORDINATOR CONTACT: MS. KENNEDY, COUNSELOR

Federal Student Aid is the office that receives your FAFSA and awards federal funds

SECURE & CONFIDENTIAL

to complete the FAFSA, you should bring... 2015 tax returns, driver's licenses, social security number, untaxed income records, FSA id...

(304) 555-5555

KENNEDY@MYSCHOOLEMAIL.COM

# 7 to 8 pm

FAFSA = FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID

snacks will be provided

## Step 1: gather



## Who

- 12th grade students/parents should attend
- staffed by financial aid experts from Marshall University
- hosted by GEAR UP
- native Spanish speakers available
- any student considering college - even if you think you won't qualify based on income
- Event coordinator - Jessica Kennedy, counselor, (304) 555-5555 or [kennedy@myschoolemail.com](mailto:kennedy@myschoolemail.com)
- students pursuing trade/certificate, associate degrees or bachelor degrees

## What

- FAFSA workshop
- free event
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid

## Where

- School library
- The library is on the 2nd floor

## When

- February 18
- 7-8 p.m.
- Registration deadline = Feb 16
- State FAFSA deadline = Mar 1
- Next workshop = Feb 25

## Why



- FAFSA is the primary application for federal and state financial aid for college.
- Snacks will be provided
- Secure and confidential

## How

- You must register by Feb 16 at [wvgearup.org](http://wvgearup.org)
- Register for FSA id in advance
  - The online login account for Federal Student Aid
    - The office that receives your FAFSA and awards federal funds
- Bring your 2015 tax returns, driver's licenses, social security number, untaxed income records, FSA id...
- Waiting on returns? File now, edit later

## Step 2: organize


## Who

- **12th grade students/parents should attend**
  - staffed by financial aid experts from Marshall University
  - hosted by GEAR UP 
  - native Spanish speakers available
  - any student considering college - even if you think you won't qualify based on income
  - Event coordinator - Jessica Kennedy, counselor, (304) 555-5555 or [kennedy@myschoolemail.com](mailto:kennedy@myschoolemail.com)
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- 

## What

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## Why

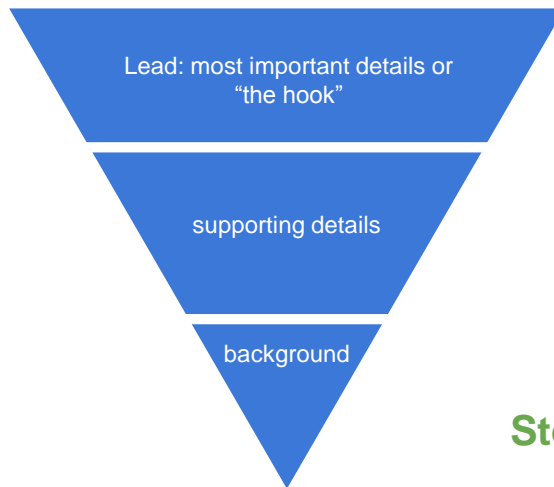
- **FAFSA is the primary application for federal and state financial aid for college.**
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- 

## How

- You must register by Feb 16 at [wvgearup.org](http://wvgearup.org)
  - Register for FSA id in advance
    - The online login account for Federal Student Aid
      - The office that receives your FAFSA and awards federal funds
  - Bring your 2015 tax returns, driver's licenses, social security number, untaxed income records, FSA id...
  - Waiting on returns? File now, edit later
- 

## Step 3: prioritize

## The inverted pyramid



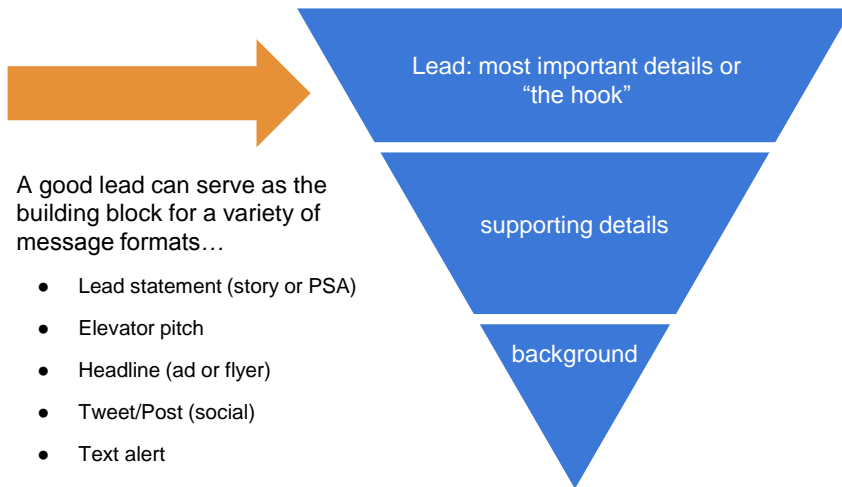
**Step 3: prioritize**

## Step 4: articulate

Messaging building  
blocks

- Leads
- Talking points
- Narrative

## Leads and stories



### Summary lead

Valley High School will host a free financial aid workshop on February 18 from 7 to 8 p.m. for senior students and parents. Financial aid experts will be on hand to help families complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

### Anecdotal leads

Last year, Valley High seniors claimed more than \$1.5 million in financial aid for college. Find out how much money you qualify for during our free financial aid workshop on February 18 from 7 to 8 p.m.

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Need money for college? We can help with that!

## Talking points

*A list of key points, fully articulated — but succinct.*

### Example:

- Valley High School will host a free FAFSA completion workshop on February 18 from 7 to 8 p.m. in the school library.
- Financial aid experts from Marshall University will assist senior students and their families in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- Completing the FAFSA is one of the most important steps in preparing for college.
- Information students put on the FAFSA is used to determine their eligibility for a wide variety of state, federal and college-level financial aid programs.
- Any student planning to enroll in a certificate or trade, two-year degree, or four-year degree program should complete the FAFSA.

## Narrative

*A polished and complete message*

### Example 1: Announcement script

Need money for college? We can help with that! Our school is hosting a free financial aid workshop on February 18 from 7 to 8 p.m. Financial aid experts will be on hand to help you complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Completing the FAFSA is one of the most important steps in preparing for college or career and technical programs, because it allows you to be considered for thousands of dollars from state, federal and private scholarship and grant programs.

Any senior student thinking about education after high school should attend. Since the FAFSA asks for tax and income information, you should also try to bring a parent or guardian.

You must register by February 16. To learn more and sign up, visit [wvgearup.org](http://wvgearup.org).

## Narrative

### *A polished and complete message*

#### Example 2: News Release

##### Valley High School to host financial aid workshop

Valley High School will host a free financial aid workshop on February 18 from 7 to 8 p.m. for senior students and parents. Financial aid experts from Marshall University will be on hand to help families complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Completing the FAFSA is one of the most important steps in preparing for college or career and technical programs, because it allows students to be considered for thousands of dollars from state, federal and private scholarship and grant programs.

Any senior student thinking about pursuing education after high school should attend. Spanish language translators will be available to assist families. To participate, students must register by February 16. To learn more and sign up, visit [wvgearup.org](http://wvgearup.org).

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## Step #3 (Pages 4-5)

### Getting to the core of your message:

- Work individually for 5 minutes
- Draft either a summary or anecdotal lead for the school newsletter
- Choose 1 example for your table to share with the group

# Step #4 (Page 6)

## Getting to the core of your message:

- Work individually for 10 minutes
- Identify the who, what, where, when, why and how of your message
- Draft either an anecdotal or summary lead for your message

### Step #4: Individual Exercise—Getting to the Core of Your Message

Using your communications takeaways and audience worksheets, begin developing talking points for your unique Communication Topic.

Who:	Any 12 <sup>th</sup> grade student considering postsecondary education and their parent/guardian
What:	FAFSA completion workshop
Where:	Valley High School, library
When:	February 18 from 7 to 8 p.m.
Why:	Completing the FAFSA is the most important step in finding financial aid to help pay for college.
How:	Register at <a href="http://wvgearup.org">wvgearup.org</a> by February 16
Any additional essential details?	Spanish language speakers available; will need tax/income information
<p><b>Instructions:</b> Using your talking points, draft either a <b>summary</b> or <b>anecdotal</b> lead for a story on your topic. <i>If you have extra time, begin using your talking points to build out a story or ad copy, following the inverted pyramid structure.</i></p> <p><b>Valley High School will host a free financial aid workshop on February 18 from 7 to 8 p.m. for senior students and parents. Financial aid experts will be on hand to help families complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).</b></p>	

# Making Your Message Stick!

## 6 Steps for Message Stickiness

Adapted from "Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die" By: Chip Heath & Dan Heath

### Simple

Creating a message that is simple sounds easy but often times we get too caught up in the excitement of our message and go from simple to in-depth. The challenge is keeping the message simple yet profound enough that it is easy to remember.

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BE A PAIN IN THE BEHIND



KnowHow2Go.org

**Be a pain.** Tell everyone you know that you want to go to college. Tell your parents, teachers, counselors, coaches and clergy members. Don't stop until you find an adult who will help you.

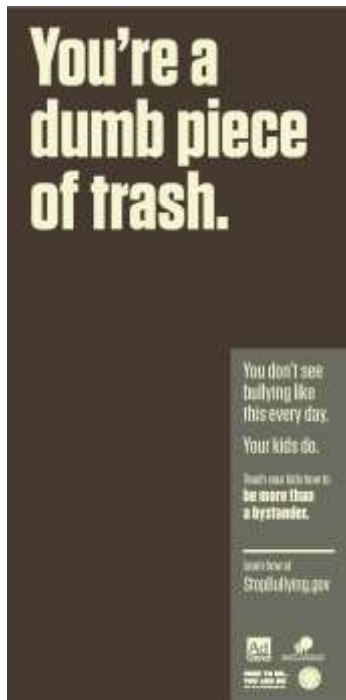
This step is essential. The next three steps become easier with a supportive adult, so get yours!

## Unexpectedness

The best way to get people's attention is to break their existing thought patterns directly. People have assumptions in their mind already about your messaging so changing it up and using a different approach is more likely to surprise them and grab their attention.

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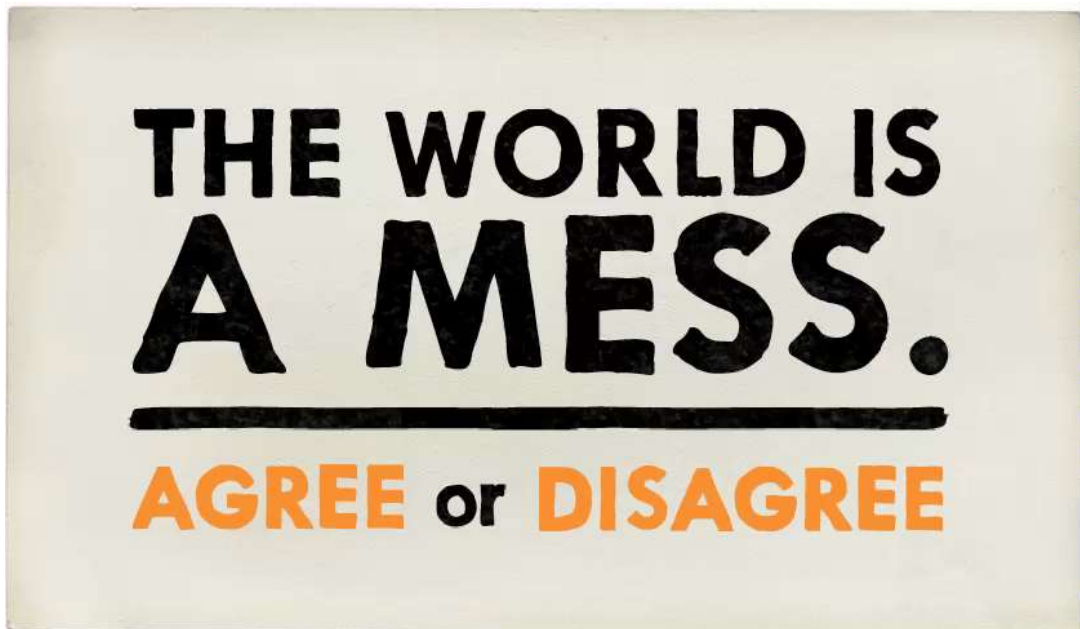
Change • Different • Surprise

Borrowed from The College Foundation of West Virginia

## Concreteness

Once you have your core message defined your next big task is making sure that it is specific and easily understood. For your message to be concrete it needs to be clear and easy to remember so that when your audience thinks back to your message they can easily recall the details and information you want them to.

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Specific • Clear • Details

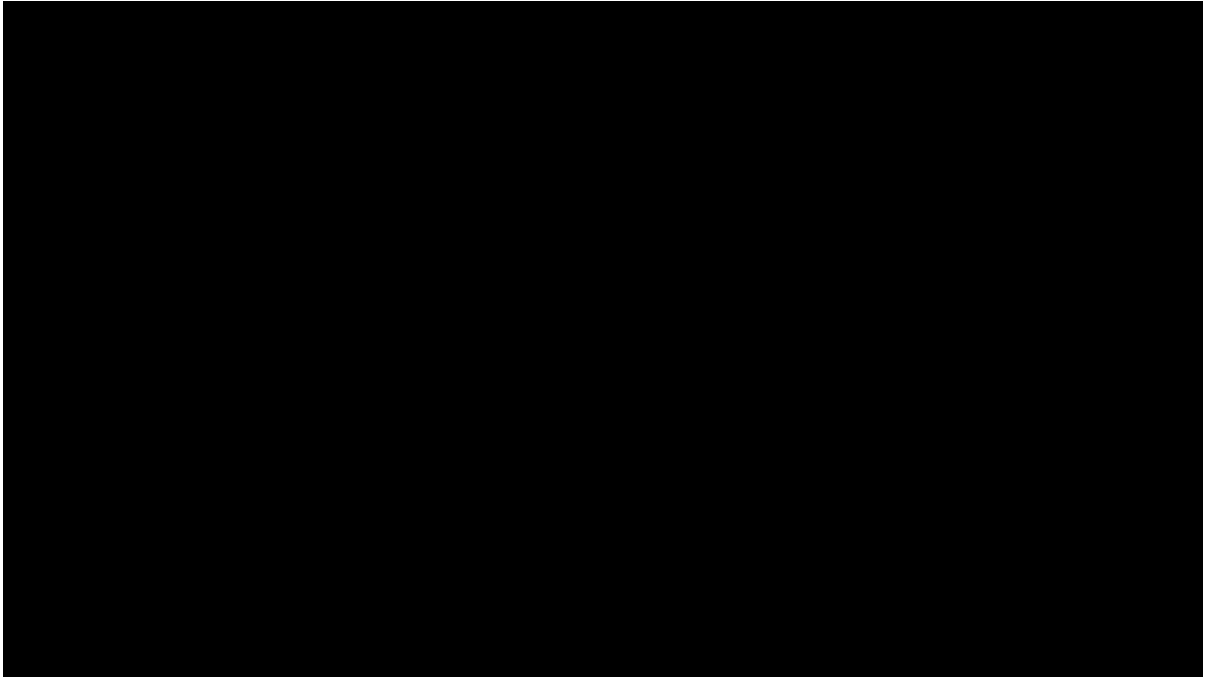


## Credibility

For your core message to have credibility in needs to provide enough evidence that the audience recognizes the authority behind the statement. Including facts or providing sources used to create your message are easy ways for the core message to vouch for itself.

Evidence • Authority • Facts

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## Emotions

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Make it have feeling! People participate and respond more when their emotions are engaged. Relating to the audience on a personal level and inspiring emotion in them leads them to believing in your message.



Feeling • Personal • Inspiring

# Stories

Sharing a story of how the program has worked and who it has worked for makes a huge difference. When your audience hears a story of how your program has made a difference for a family just like theirs they'll become inspired to buy-in and get involved.

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Who • Difference • Inspired

<http://www.texasgearup.com/story/view/how-i-got-here-maria>

Courtesy of Texas GEAR UP and AMA Productions

# Step #5 (Page 7)

## Getting to the core of your message:

- Work individually for 10 minutes
- Identify the who, what, where, when, why and how of your message
- Draft either an anecdotal or summary lead for your message

### Step #5: Refining Your Message

Restate Your Draft Message from Step #4		
Valley High School will host a free financial aid workshop on February 18 <sup>th</sup> from 7 to 8 p.m. for senior students and parents. Financial Aid experts will be on hand to help families to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).		
Use the cells below to brainstorm ways you can apply the six different aspects of "stickiness" to make your message more effective.		
<p><b>Simplicity:</b> What steps can you take to prioritize the core takeaway from the message?</p> <p>The core takeaway for this message is that the workshop is that the students get money to pay for school! Emphasizing that there is no cost to attend and that they can qualify for aid will get them through the door!</p>	<p><b>Unexpectedness:</b> What steps can you take to make the message more surprising?</p> <p>Using the crumpled up money example from the College Association of West Virginia is a great way to deliver this message in a surprising way that is unexpected.</p>	<p><b>Concreteness:</b> What steps can you take to define your message more specific and easily understood?</p> <p>Use this area to include how much aid your students qualify for! "Students can receive a Pell Grant up to \$\$\$ every year!"</p>
<p><b>Credibility:</b> What sources, facts, or details can bring authority to your message?</p> <p>This message does make a point to say that there is a "financial aid expert" that will be at the event.</p>	<p><b>Emotional:</b> How can your message better appeal to people's emotions, identity, or values?</p> <p>Talking about the different scholarships that are available based off of activities that the students are active in could get them excited about wanting to apply!</p>	<p><b>Stories:</b> How can you convey a story to help people understand and care about your message?</p> <p>Use stories of other students from the same school that have attended this program in the past! Their successful experience would inspire students to want to attend.</p>

# Thank You!

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