How to get a message across

Handout 1/10 from Article A54 https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index
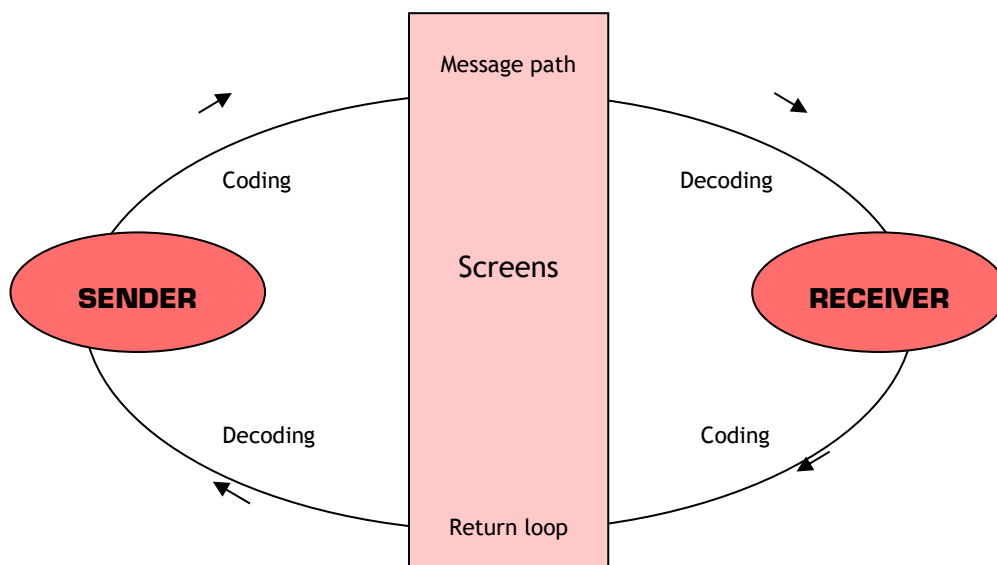Photo by Szabo Viktor on Unsplash
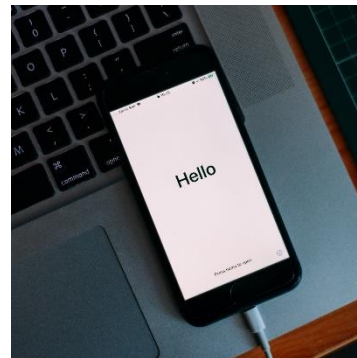
Three means of using 'words'

There are in essence three ways in which messages can be sent from one person or group to another. The 'written word' is anything in print or on screen, the 'spoken word' for speech in some form, and the 'demonstrated word' is for actions that communicate. They will often all be included in the sending of one message.

THE WRITTEN WORD

THE SPOKEN WORD

THE DEMONSTRATED WORD
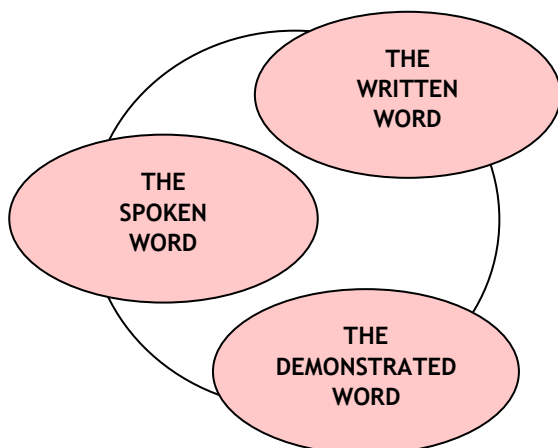
So someone giving out a notice in a church service may encourage people to come to a special event (spoken word). The details of date, time and what to bring can then be included in a notice sheet (written word). Finally the notice-giver may explain they are going themselves to this event and would love others to come with them (demonstrated word).

A simple diagram to explain the communications process

Message path

Coding

Decoding

Screens

SENDER

RECEIVER

Decoding

Coding

Return loop

Things go wrong in the coding process, the decoding process, and when screens get in the way.

How to get a message across

Handout 2/10 from Article A54 https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index
Photo by Szabo Viktor on Unsplash
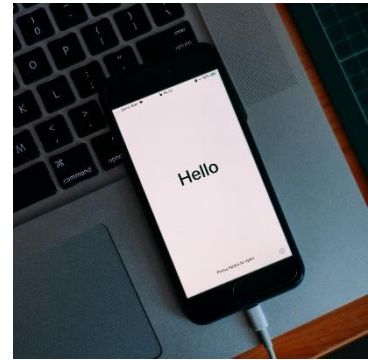
The media codes you can use

Personal letter or card

Public print – notice-sheet or newsletter
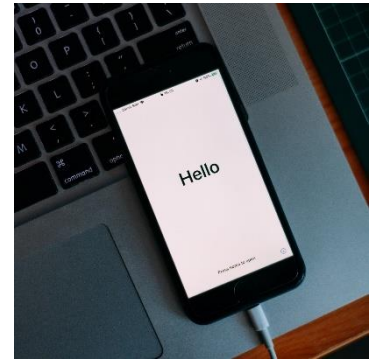
Digital – email, web or text

Digital – social media or WhatsApp

Telephone – spoken

Face-to-face – your place or theirs

Public announcement – celebration or cell

How to get a message across

Structuring the written word

Groups:

Breaks:

Structuring the spoken word

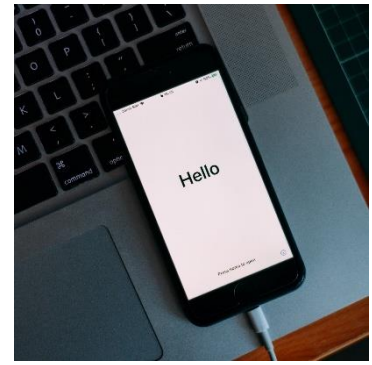Announce the structure at the start

Add structure reminders as 'breaks' between 'groups'

Change the dynamic for your 'breaks'

Be aware of marker words that introduce a new 'group'

How to get a message across

Handout 4/10 from Article A54 https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index
Photo by Szabo Viktor on Unsplash

Colouring the written word

Remember that 'colour' does not necessarily mean a colour tone. The word is used more generally here.

- **Bold**
- *Italics*
- CAPITALS
- A serif font
- A sans-serif font
- Different sizes
- Colour (literally!)

- Photographs or other pictures (clip art is now regarded as dated)
- Corporate image with logo, fixed font, colour and style
- Layout templates
- Professional print design
- In all the above the use of actual colour

Colouring the spoken word

Be human, rather than a CD player

Stay close to your audience
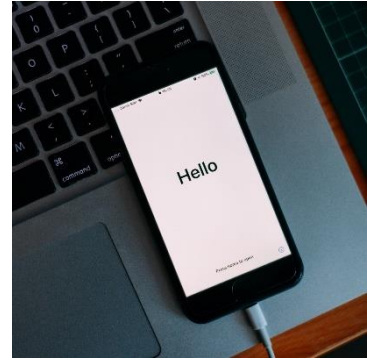
Use all the buttons on your voice control

Beware 'precious' stories

Do not force humour

Use background visuals if appropriate

Colour your news

People-centred

Local

Topical

Visual

Unusual

Straightforward

Structure your news

Tell the story in the first sentence

Include reported speech

Keep paragraphs very short

Make headings large

How to get a message across
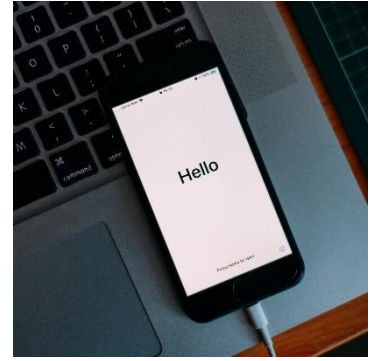
To get your message across

Clear

Correct

Concise

Credible

Captivating

How to get a message across
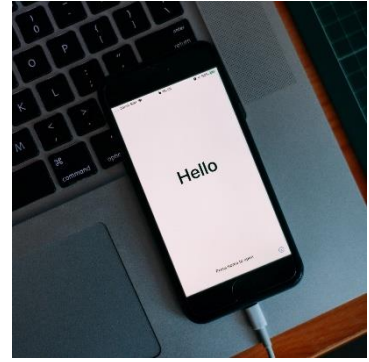
Exercises (1 of 4)

Exercise 1

What examples would you use from Scripture to demonstrate that God is a God of innovative communication as he puts across messages to his people?

Cover both Old and New Testaments and let each person in the group select something that communicates powerfully to them.

Exercise 2

So this event thinks in terms of 'message' and 'news' rather than 'communication'. What other terms might you use to relate to people's lives when trying to express what you mean by 'communication'?

It is worth noting that it is not just people who communicate; consider 'ideas' and 'buildings' to give two examples of other communicators.

Use a flipchart to build up a range of ideas from members of the group.

Exercise 3

Take the very simple message 'I love you'. How might the following each go about putting this across?

1   A young girl to her pet puppy.

2   A parent to a teenage son.

3   An older couple to their young grandchildren 200 miles away.

4   The Church Council / Elders / Trustees to each other.

Now, together, consider how God says "I love you" to us. What does that say to you?

Exercise 4

What kind of messages might be given to a newcomer arriving at your main Sunday service as they come through the door?

In each case, how would this message be given: spoken, print or demonstrated?

Now consider the messages that your congregation might give to people living near your church building by what happens on a Sunday. To think more about this read Training Notes TN137, *The message of your people,* in the Resources section of the website.

Exercise 5

What screens might get in the way of:

1   A long sermon on a July morning.

2   Someone trying to talk to a stranger over coffee after the service.

3   A large poster board with a Bible verse from the book of Romans on it outside the church building.

Ask if one or two of your group would be happy to take a case study of something they have recently tried to communicate, for all to work out the message, the coding and decoding, the return loop and possible screens.

john truscott
church consultant and trainer

How to get a message across
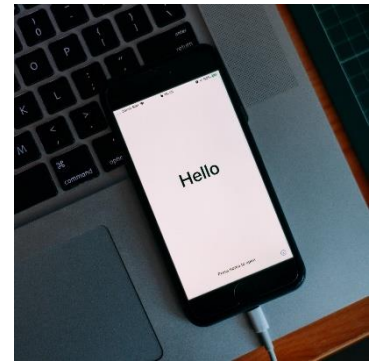
Exercises (2 of 4)

Exercise 6

Get everyone to consider the groups and breaks in other forms of communication such as a classical symphony, a traditional hymn, a children's story, a church website, a church's weekly email or notice-sheet.

Consider sermons or wedding speeches. Some will be highly structured with groups and breaks (what might these look like?) but others may ignore such means and yet still get their message across (how might they manage this?).

Exercise 7

Most people will listen to TV News, read the BBC website or equivalent, or (for younger people in particular) take in news from social media platforms.

Consider what has been said about structuring print (eg. a news website) and speech (eg. a TV News broadcast). How is a typical news bulletin structured? Why is it done like that?

How many seconds do you think the camera will stay on one presenter or video clip before changing angle or moving to something different?

What can you learn from this?

Exercise 8

Having considered the structuring and colouring of spoken messages, how might you advise a new preacher to help them get their message across in your church?

In groups aim to come up with about five key lessons to help their sermons be memorable

Exercise 9

From what you read in the Gospels, what can you learn about how Jesus structured and coloured his messages? Crowds of ordinary people flocked to him so there should be much you can learn from how he did it.

1   What means did Jesus use in his teaching? Story-telling is clearly one. What else?

2   What were the characteristics of his teaching, both to the crowds and to his disciples?

3   What reactions did he receive and from whom?

4   So how was he structuring his messages and how was he colouring them?
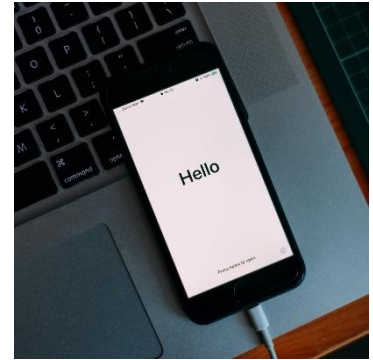
What lessons might you learn from all this for your messages today?

Exercise 10

Make a list of events of any kind in your church over the past year that, thinking about it now, could have been turned into a news story for the local community or a press release to the local media. There may be more of these than you realised.

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How to get a message across

Exercises (3 of 4)

Main Exercise 11

Have enough copies of today's Sun, Daily Mail and a local newspaper if you have one so that groups of three can have several news pages from all three. The Sun and Daily Mail are the highest circulation daily papers by some way in the UK if we ignore the free Metro.

The issue here is NOT the political slant of the Sun or Mail, or the fact that they may lead on stories that we are uneasy about, or that they may show pictures intended to shock or attract in some way. But these papers are written and designed by professionals whose job it is to enable the circulation to be kept as high as possible. What can you learn from them?

First, check out some of the points we have made about communicating outside the church walls. See

- The telling of the story in the first sentence or two.
- The number of sentences per paragraph
- The use of large bold headings and sub-heads
- The kind of strong words being used
- The use of reported speech
- The amount of visuals
- The focus on people.

Groups then deal with the following.

What is your initial impression of the page design, the use of print and visuals?

How are you encouraged to read the stories from the look of the page?

What positive (and perhaps negative) lessons can you learn for how your church tries to communicate with those outside its membership?

Now EITHER take a recent event in your church's life and, together, write a 200-word press release for your local paper or radio station. Try to follow all the advice given today.

OR take a forthcoming event in the life of your church that you want members to come to. Write a 200-word piece for a church newsletter or magazine.

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Handout 10/10 from Article A54 https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index
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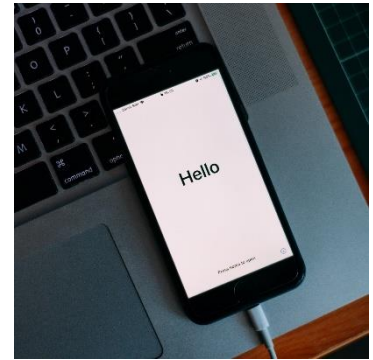
Exercises (4 of 4)

Specialised exercises 12

Here is a range of exercises for particular groups of communicators in your church, based on material on this website. Each item listed gives practical applications of the general principles that we have covered today. In each case group members will need to be given a copy of one relevant item listed (choose an appropriate one). All are freely available to download and print out in the Resources section of the website.

The exercise is to devise a series of perhaps ten specific principles for your own church for this one practical application to help you all get your messages across well.

Everyone
- Training Notes TN2: *Ten steps to help you communicate*

Groups or individuals with overall responsibility for communication
- Article A2: *Watch your image – Visual design for churches*
- Article A11: *Become a better emailer – … and make everyone happy*
- Article A39: *A plan for your communications – A template for churches*
- Training Notes TN22: *Appoint a church photographer*
- Training Notes TN82: *Print or screen?*
- Training Notes TN105: *Recording a voicemail message*

Groups or individuals responsible for outreach
- Article A21: *The use of print in outreach – Rethinking church practice*
- Training Notes TN9: *Which newspapers do people read?*
- Training Notes TN39: *We've got news for you!*
- Training Notes TN44: *The message of your buildings*
- Training Notes TN75: *Writing for the media*
- Training Notes TN89: *Hold the front page!*

Groups or individuals responsible for internal communication
- Article A9: *A church members' newsletter – Ideas for a new publication*
- Training Notes TN38: *We've got news for us!*
- Training Notes TN69: *Creative prayer diaries*
- Training Notes TN93: *And now for the notices*

Groups or individuals responsible for digital communication
- Article A14: *Create a quality website - … by asking the right questions*
- Training Notes TN99: *Social media+ guidelines*
- Training Notes TN113: *What to avoid on your website*

Speakers and preachers
- Article A19: *Speaking so that people listen – For leaders and preachers*
- Training Notes TN16: *Interviews in church services*
- Training Notes TN52: *The perils of PowerPoint*
- Training Notes TN123: *Speaking-to-camera tips*

Newsletter or magazine producers
- A29: *A basic guide to paper and print – Helping you communicate*
- Training Notes TN63: *How not to write a newsletter*

Meetings secretaries and chairs
- Training Notes TN45: *Are you sure it's minutes you need?*
- Training Notes TN61: *Mapping out a meeting*
- Training Notes TN97: *How to minute a meeting*