

Now just because I've spent some time discussing the mechanics of journalism, it doesn't mean these kinds of messages are to be used only when you come into contact with reporters. I use the newspaper example because we're all familiar with newspapers.

Even people who don't read newspapers have seen them displayed in vending machines and can see the way the front page is constructed. That's the way your speech, presentation or testimony should be constructed too.

Newspaper owners spend a lot of time and money studying how to capture people's attention, and keep it. I like to capitalize on other people's research!

You are now on your way to writing and speaking in the language the ear understands. Your message is more immediate, it's more interesting and it has more impact. But we still have a way to go. So hold on to your newspaper tear sheets, your headlines, stories and SOCKOs™ — we're going for a ride.

Freight Trains and Boxcars

If you've been thinking about a specific topic, chances are the salient points and aspects will already be in your mind.

If you've been thinking about that topic in terms of iceberg tips, headlines and so on, you should also be able to recognize the most important 10 percent or so of your information.

If you have already been writing and speaking those headlines and iceberg tips, you are getting to be a pretty safe and powerful communicator on that topic.

But please don't rush off and try out your new-found skills in an annual general meeting or courtroom just yet!

You already know the value of thinking and preparing your message before you speak. Now it's time to improve the message — to give it clarity and power — and we can do that by looking at it from different points of view.

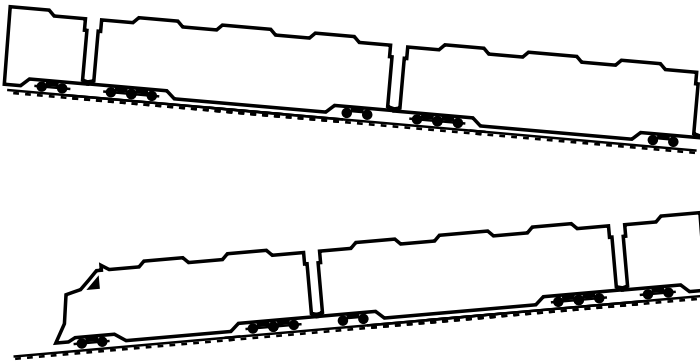
Studies of how geniuses become geniuses show that they don't think any differently from the rest of us, but they *keep thinking about the same thing over and over again*. It takes about 10 years on one topic to get to the genius level, so don't expect to be there by the end of this book. We can, however, accelerate the process by revisiting your message from several different points of view. That's where the freight train comes in.

So return to your SOCKOs™ and pick your best short, sharp, memorable, honed, true and polished statement that you want the world to know about and write it in as brief a space as possible. Look at the drawing of a freight train and try to squeeze your SOCKO™ into the first boxcar.

If you think there isn't enough space, just remember that elevator in Hollywood and trying to explain your movie idea to a famous producer! A Broadway producer had his own way of testing people's clarity of thought. When stopped on the street by people wanting to pitch a deal, he'd hand them his business card and tell them to write on the back of it. Those who complained were told, "If you can't write your idea on the back of my card, you don't have a very clear idea."

So if you can't squeeze your SOCKO™ into the boxcar (or business card), it's not a SOCKO™. It may be a memo, a letter, an analysis or something else, but it's not a SOCKO™.

A FREIGHT TRAIN



OF RESOURCES

Figure 9: Freight Train

Lack of brevity and clarity is one of the major problems we see in our clients.

In business and government these days many senior executives communicate mainly through written memos and reports transmitted by courier, fax machines and e-mail. They don't speak. When they do, they *sound* like written material that should have been sent by courier, fax machines and e-mail.

What we are often doing in our training courses is helping people relearn their verbal communication skills that have been allowed to deteriorate. We also see some of the same problems cropping up in our writing course. Computers and e-mail are changing traditionally accepted norms of writing and, more importantly, *how* we write.