Make Your Next Pitch Instantly More Compelling By Using This One Philosopher's Framework



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Want to know with confidence that your elevator pitch will land? Would clarity and persuasion help you attract more clients, investors, mentors and sales? To maximize success in conversation, ensure you are following Grice's maxims.

Twentieth-century British philosopher Paul Grice shifted the way we think about semantics and language. His maxims for conversation are part of his work on the cooperative principle, which states that when people engage with one

another there are unspoken assumptions around how the conversation will unfold. Research tells us that we grasp the nuances of Grice's maxims from an early age; a 2015 study found that children as young as six years old could distinguish the presence or absence of all of the maxims when listening to someone speak.

Translation: When decision-makers listen to you, they are already filtering your words through these four maxims, and if you step out-of-bounds on one or more of them, you'll have a hard time winning over your listener. Clarity is critical, particularly in high-stakes conversations like an investor pitch, and you don't want all your hard work to go down the drain because your vision is too difficult to follow when you talk about it.

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As a ghostwriter and copywriter who teaches entrepreneurs to write faster, I've seen firsthand how following a framework can multiply an entrepreneur's financial results. Let's dig into each of Grice's four maxims in more detail and learn how you can use them to capture anyone's attention on command.

1. Say what is needed and nothing more

The *maxim of quantity* states that excess information will ultimately clutter your story or position. Ever check out of a conversation because the person talking keeps going off on tangents? Gatekeepers will do the same to you if you overstuff them with detail; give me whatever context I need to really understand the situation and nothing more.

This is why you should be sharpening your elevator pitch all the time. A pitch forces you to blend storytelling with value

and land your point in a succinct way. In my work assisting entrepreneurs with messaging, the elevator pitch is often the most challenging type of communication for a professional because it requires restraint and precision.

A good rule of thumb for editing is to ask yourself “So what?” at the end of each sentence or story detail. If your language doesn’t actually propel your message forward, leave it out.

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2. Back up what you say

If your listener has to spend precious moments wondering whether the words you speak are true, their attention is being diverted from your message. Grice’s *maxim of quality* has two components: Tell the truth, and back up what you say with evidence, preferably scientific in nature.

In a world of misinformation and content overload, science, statistics and other proven examples can help you reinforce a position. But as data editor Mona Chalabi mentioned in a 2018 NPR interview, listeners can actually feel alienated by statistics if they don’t have sufficient context.

According to this maxim, the natural disposition of a listener is to corroborate your argument in some way; anticipate this skepticism and you’ll do a better job holding someone’s rapt attention.

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3. Keep it relevant

Gary Vaynerchuk points out that while “content is king,” context is God. It’s true; you can barrage your listener with anecdotes or tangents, but will sleek

catchphrases and one-liners really add to your conversation or argument in the long run?

Grice's maxim of relevance states that the most potent pitches, speeches and arguments are those whose subject matter is highly relevant. Companies have already picked up on these consumer semantics and adjusted accordingly, which is why customization was the No. 1 marketing trend for the second year in a row this year. (And what could be more relevant to someone than having a product with their own name on it? This is what made Coca-Cola's recent customization campaign wildly successful.)

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4. Stay organized as you speak

Grice's final maxim asks us to "be perspicuous," which means to be clear and easy to understand. This maxim refers more to your actual word choices; the more muddled your language, the harder it becomes to follow you.

Run your next personal anecdote through these four sub-maxims to ensure you'll be memorable:

- Avoid obscure expressions. A fancy vocabulary might make you more descriptive and feel smarter, but flowery language actually sets you back when it comes to keeping someone's attention. Also keep industry jargon to a minimum.

- Keep it brief. Grice refers to this sub-maxim as prolixity, which is a fancy way to remind you to keep it short and to the point. Details create vividness, but if there's a way to deliver all the information needed in fewer total words, err on the side of brevity.

- Stay orderly. When I help entrepreneurs write faster, we spend a lot of time focusing on outlines in order to work out logic and flow. The same applies for speaking. As soon as your listener’s brain has to overthink or work harder, their emotional brain gets overtaken by other parts of the brain responsible for information processing. We want to keep listeners in their emotional brain for as long as possible, because people act and buy on emotion. Flow and order actually create more emotion for your listeners, not less.

The good news is that most people are wired to listen and filter for these maxims automatically. Stay in bounds, keep your message clear and to the point, and you’ll have everything you need to captivate listeners the next time you have an important audience.

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