Leaders must structure content in order for audiences to pay attention and remember. In general, humans struggle with attention and retention. Complex content (like financial results or medical research) and tempting distractions (like smartphones and instant messengers) make this struggle more pronounced.

By the time the average patient returns home from a physician, the doctor's instructions are:

50% forgotten

25% misremembered

accurately remembered 25%

As with patients and doctors, an audience's attention and retention are not driven by the speaker's accuracy or intelligence. Audiences pay attention and remember when they hear:

Numbering
to show the audience the structure and order of the speaker's content

Signaling
to remind the audience where they are within the structure, what has come, and what is to come

Repetition
to give the audience many chances to hear and understand the most important points

The below sequence delivers key information in a format that supports maximum recall for audience members:

1 **Open the presentation** with a procedural introduction followed by a substantive thesis.

Formally introduce, such as by thanking hosts	_____ _____
State the thesis or main idea	_____ _____

2 **Deliver the content** according to a clear structure with three main points.

Establish for the audience the presentation's structure	*There are three things I'll focus on.*
Number and summarize three main points	*First,* _____ *Second,* _____ *Third,* _____
Number, repeat, and elaborate on each point with supporting details	*First,* _____ > ____ > ____ *Second,* ____ > ____ > ____ *Third,* _____ > ____ > ____

3 **Close the presentation** by restating the thesis and ending with next steps or thanks.

Restate the thesis	_____
Restate the number and summary of each main point	*First,* _____ *Second,* _____ *Third,* _____
Conclude with a call to action, a discussion of next steps, or thanks	_____ _____

Ric Elias was a passenger on U.S. Airways Flight 1549 that made an emergency landing in the Hudson River on January 15th, 2009 after a flock of birds struck one of the plane's engines. All 155 passengers on board survived and the accident gained worldwide attention, earning the name "The Miracle on the Hudson." Mr. Elias used the content structure format to deliver an impactful TED Talk on his experience aboard Flight 1549, that earned a standing ovation and 6.4 million views on www.ted.com.

1   Open the presentation

I had a unique seat that day; I was the only one who could talk to the flight attendants . . . I could see in their eyes there was terror, life was over. **Now I want to share with you three things I learned about myself that day.**

2   Deliver the content

I learned that it all changes in an instant.
> *I thought about all the people I wanted to reach out to that I didn't, all the fences I wanted to mend, all the experiences I wanted to have and I never did. And that urgency, that purpose, has really changed my life.*

The second thing I learned that day is I allow my ego to get in.
> *I regretted the time I wasted on things that did not matter with people that matter. And I thought about my relationship with my wife, with my friends, with people. And after, as I reflected on that, I decided to eliminate negative energy from my life.*

The third thing I learned is dying is not scary. But it was very sad.
> *And that sadness really framed in one thought, which is, I only wish for one thing. I only wish I could see my kids grow up . . . Above all, above all, the only goal I have in life is to be a good dad.*

3   Close the presentation

I was given the gift of a miracle, of not dying that day. I was given another gift, which was to be able to see into the future and come back and live differently. I challenge you guys that are flying today — **What would you get done that you're waiting to get done because you think you'll be here forever? How would you change your relationships and the negative energy in them? And more than anything, are you being the best parent you can?**