

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:



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:

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|-------|
| <p>1 Open the presentation with a procedural introduction followed by a substantive thesis.</p> | Formally introduce, such as by thanking hosts | _____ | _____ |
| | State the thesis or main idea | _____ | _____ |
| <p>2 Deliver the content according to a clear structure with three main points.</p> | Establish for the audience the presentation's structure | <i>There are three things I'll focus on.</i> | |
| | Number and summarize three main points | <i>First, _____</i> | _____ |
| | | <i>Second, _____</i> | _____ |
| | | <i>Third, _____</i> | _____ |
| <p>3 Close the presentation by restating the thesis and ending with next steps or thanks.</p> | Number, repeat, and elaborate on each point with supporting details | <i>First, _____ > _____ > _____</i> | _____ |
| | | <i>Second, _____ > _____ > _____</i> | _____ |
| | | <i>Third, _____ > _____ > _____</i> | _____ |
| | Restate the thesis | _____ | |
| | Restate the number and summary of each main point | <i>First, _____</i> | _____ |
| | | <i>Second, _____</i> | _____ |
| | | <i>Third, _____</i> | _____ |
| | Conclude with a call to action, a discussion of next steps, or thanks | _____ | _____ |



Howard Schultz, CEO and Chairman of Starbucks, gave a presentation to students of the University of Denver's Daniel College of Business on his experiences as a business leader. In a portion of the presentation, Mr. Schultz utilized the content structure format to organize his key points on the challenges business leaders will face in the post-Great Recession era.

1 Open the presentation



There are three separate things going on in my view that are affecting consumer behavior and we are witness to a real change in how they're operating.

2 Deliver the content



The first is the economy and the downturn of the economy and the recession.

> So as a result of less money to spend and pressure on the consumer, every company in America has to create a value proposition along with what they stand for.

The second is the seismic change as a result of social and digital media.

> The rules of engagement, in marketing a brand or company today are dramatically different than they were in the past. So you have to create investment and capability in resources and understanding how to leverage these channels.

The third is the fact that we have parity in the marketplace.

> As a result of that parity, the consumer has lots of choices and because of the web and social media, they are highly informed. They're going to make choices on values; that is the consumer is making choices every single day based on the ethics, the values and the integrity of the organization.

3 Close the presentation



So those are the three seismic changes. We all have challenges. We all have issues. The economy is probably not going to get any better. We're going to all have to navigate through tough waters. But those tough waters I think we can get through because of the quality of the people that we surround ourselves with. And that means attracting the kind of people who have like-minded values and the skill base and experience beyond our own.