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DON'T MAKE THEM THINK!

Creating the Best Flow for the Elements of any Great Presentation

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The best way to express the critical importance of flow to your audience is to start with the simple example of written text. One distinctive aspect of written text is that the reader, who is the audience to the writer, has random access to the writer's content. If the reader, while browsing through a book, report, or magazine, encounters a word or reference that is unclear but looks familiar, the reader can simply place a finger in the current page and then riffle back through the prior pages to find the original definition or reference. The reader can navigate through the writer's ideas independently.

Your presentation audience does not have that capability. They have only linear access to your content, one slide at a time. It's like looking at a forest at the level of the trees, only one tree at a time.

You may be doing an excellent job of presenting one tree. Your audience may be suitably impressed, thinking, "That's a superb tree: deep roots, thick bark, rich foliage!" But if, when you move on to the next tree, you don't make it crystal clear how it relates to the first tree, your audience is forced to try to divine the relationship on their own. They no longer have access to the first tree, which forces them to work harder to remember it and draw the necessary connections.

At that point, your audience has three choices:

- They can fall prey to the MEGO (Mine Eyes Glaze Over) syndrome.

- They can interrupt you to ask for an explanation.

- They can start thinking in an effort to understand the missing link, and stop listening.

None of these options is acceptable. Don't make them think!

Your job is to become the navigator for your audience, to make the relationships among all the parts of your story clear for them. Make it easy for them to follow, to bring them up from the level of the trees and give them a view of the entire forest.

Doing this requires a road map, a plan, a formula. There are proven techniques for organizing ideas in a logical sequence to create a lucid and persuasive presentation. These techniques are called Flow Structures, and there are 16 different options for various types of presentations.

The 16 Flow Structures

1. **Modular.** Think of the Modular Flow Structure as a plug-and-play approach: The presenter makes an arbitrary decision about the sequence of units and then presents them to the audience, one by one. This is the most loosely organized of the 16 Flow Structures, which can make it challenging for your audience to follow.

   The Modular Flow Structure provides a couple of advantages. If need be, you can easily rearrange the items at will. Or, if you're faced with time constraints, you can even omit one or two items. Convenient, yes, but challenging for your audience to follow and for you to deliver. Because there's no compelling logic to the clusters, everyone (that includes you and your audience) is under great pressure to try to track them. Therefore, use the Modular option sparingly and briefly.