# Guidelines for Effective Briefings

Can you get up on your feet with only a week's notice and speak on a topic you just learned something about?  We want to know.  Can you digest the history, the context, the social engineering and mis-engineering, successes and failures and report on these to an audience?  We want to know.  And, can you coordinate with a group, can you create a set of effective written and visual materials, can you be enthusiastic, fun and entertaining?  We want to know.

So, we designed these oral briefings to challenge you in many ways that we believe you will be challenged when you get out of MIT.  The real world doesn't provide endless time to research, prepare and present.  Many times you will be asked to speak on an issue when there is very limited data, no time and scant resources.

But, public briefings should be brief and too the point (read:  you won't have to be up there forever). We recommend that you focus on the key elements (discussed below) of a briefing:

- Pick a format – linear or hub/spoke.
- Provide brief background/context on the issue.
- Provide a clear structure for the briefing.
- Provide analysis.
- Provide a conclusion.

As with informational memos, your ability to covey complex information simply is key.  Also important is your forethought about the concerns of the audience.  Challenge yourself to carefully lay out each critical issue, idea or plan and analyze these using a carefully chosen structure (e.g., pros/cons, long term/short term, then/now).  Think of your briefing as way to frame issues and analyze those specific issues so that you can feed into a larger decision.

When you know what your decision maker expects (audience) and you give her what she needs clearly and concisely (meeting expectations), you become part of the decision making team.

Here's one strategy:

**Task 1.  Work as a Team –** You will need to decide a few things as a group before you get underway.  The format is critical.  Remember that there are two approaches – the linear model and the hub and spoke model.  Both models share a priority:  Get the audience informed and back up what you say with well-designed visuals. The difference between the two models is high vs. low control over the flow and sequence of information.

It is likely that your team will have a variety of skill sets.  Some of you will be better at:  creating slides, presenting, coordinating, or ordering take out.  Whatever these strengths are, play to them and decide:
- Who talks when?
- Who is the techie?
- Who changes whose slides when different members present?
- Who is the best speaker (put first or last or use as the moderator (hub/spoke)?
- Who has the most fear (needs the most encouragement and practice with team)?

**Task 2. Focus on the parts of the briefing – Introduction, Analysis, Conclusion**

- **Craft the Introduction** – Here you introduce the issue(s) and tell a portion of the story. This means that you get to present the first piece of the whole picture, so present it well.
    - o Introduce team members -- Say who you are (a consulting group, a task force, etc.)
    - o Say who the audience is (homeowners, residents, academics, etc.)
    - o State the purpose of the briefing – Describe the issue for the audience
    - o Outline the entire briefing for the audience

- **Focus the Content/Analysis -** The body of the briefing, like a memo, is where the analysis goes. Here you want to show the decision maker the analysis that she will need to make her decision.
    - o Break down analysis into chunks and assign each chunk to a team member (most important piece goes first)
    - o For each chunk, highlight its main points
    - o Show data, charts, graphs, photos as part of the analysis
    - o Decide -- does this individual piece have its own conclusion? Action steps?
    - o Make sure that one chunk doesn't out pace other chunks in terms of depth, analysis and visual effectiveness – remember you're a team.

- **Nail down your Conclusion – Synthesize, synthesize, synthesize --** Briefings have conclusions that synthesize the information for the listener and outline the next steps. It can be about recommending a specific action or providing a variety of well-analyzed options. As the wrap-up presenter, can you:
    - o Pull the strings of the analysis together for the listener?
    - o Show how the chunks of analysis work together (even though they were presented by different team members)?
    - o Tell your audience/decision makers what the next steps/next area of analysis, next study should be?

**Task 3. Get Ready for Questions and Answers --** Everyone in the team must be ready for Q&A. So, everyone needs to focus.

1. Predict three most likely questions you will be asked and prepare answers
2. Create back up slides with further analysis and put them at the end of the slide show
3. Listen carefully to questioners
4. Be brief, be concise and be understanding
5. If you don't know, don't pretend to know
6. Don't meet a rude question with a rude answer – be polite and diplomatic and move on
7. Respond with brief examples
8. Pause briefly before you answer – this shows that you have considered the question
9. Decide who will field which types of questions