

Skills 360 - Organizing your Ideas (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. What are the different situations in your work in which you have to persuade people?
2. How much time would you normally spend preparing for a one-hour presentation?
3. What techniques do you use to develop and organize your ideas?

Vocabulary

To figure out: to find a solution or understand something; "Greg is trying to figure out how to arrange the new office furniture."

To deserve: if you deserve something, you should receive it because you have worked hard; "You did such a great job on the project that you deserve some time off."

"No matter what": if you say "no matter what" plus a thing, it means it doesn't matter what that thing is, something else will always be true; "No matter what your level of fitness is, you can benefit from this training course."

To rattle off: to say something quickly, especially a list of things; "When Neil asked when we could meet, I rattled off three or four different times."

To revisit: to consider something again; "I want the IT department to revisit the possibility of online sales."

To cross out: to remove something from a list, often by drawing a line through it; "Mr. McNeil crossed out seven of the eight models on his list when he saw their prices."

To switch: to change from one thing to another; "Please ask Rachel to switch the brochures at the front desk to our new ones."

To nix: to remove something or stop using it; "Sales were cut in half when the pizza restaurant nixed discounts for university students."

To whittle down: to make something smaller bit by bit; "Over the last five years, management has whittled down our commission to 2%!"

To jump out at someone: to occur or be obvious to someone; "I've looked over all the suggestions for Employee of the Month, and Eleanor's name jumped out."

To be linked: to be connected in some way; "Our salary raises are linked to the amount of hours we work."

To come up with: to think of or create; "It was actually Val in Accounting who came up with the name for our newest product."

To peruse: to read something, somewhat casually; "After you finish perusing the agenda, let me know if there's something that should be added."

To aim for: to try to do something; to have something as your goal; "We are aiming to hire six new assistant managers this year."

Manageable: can be done without too much difficulty; "I'm sorry, but dealing with sixty-three client accounts on my own isn't manageable."

Memorable: easy to remember; "Our first TV ad was so memorable that people still talk about it fifteen years later."

To strive for: to work hard to do something; to have something as your goal; "It won't be easy, but let's strive to bring in four new contracts by the end of the month."

Roughly: approximately; "Thomas says there are roughly ten laptops that need to be replaced."

To throw in: to add or include; "The Rolston rep ordered 2500 extra packs, so we threw in a case of the new UBSs for free."

To gel with: to match, get along with, or combine well with; "The bright pink package just doesn't gel with our corporate image."

Parallel: if two things are parallel, they happen in the same way; if sentences or phrases are parallel, they are made with the same pattern; "Tad's Fitness has a nicely parallel tag line: 'Get up, Get out, Get fit.'"

To have a nice ring to it: to sound nice or impressive when said aloud; "Harry Mueller, Vice President of Sales... that does have a nice ring to it, doesn't it?"

To shoot for: to try for, attempt to accomplish, or have as a goal; "Can we shoot for Friday to have those banners printed?"

To pare down: to make something smaller by removing parts; "You need to pare down the product description to only 55 words."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I'd like to help you organize your ideas.

Before we get into that, a quick reminder that our Business English App for the iPhone and iPad is now available in the App Store. The app comes packed with over 100 great lessons from Business English Pod – including *all* our Skills 360 lessons. And the best news of all? It's free to download. Just head over to www.BusinessEnglishPod.com for the App Store link.

Okay, now here's a situation we all find ourselves in: we've got a purpose and we have a bunch of ideas. And we have to **figure out** how to make those ideas serve our purpose. Maybe the purpose is to convince your manager that you **deserve** a promotion. Or maybe you want to develop a personal goal plan. Or maybe you have to give a presentation to the Board about recent technological trends.

No matter what your purpose, you can't just **rattle off** a bunch of ideas one after another. They need organization. And this is why we take time to prepare.

Last week we looked at several ways to generate ideas. But once you have a big list of ideas, what are you going to do with them? That's what I'll talk about today.

You need to start by **revisiting** your purpose. What is it you're trying to do? Inform, persuade, set goals, warn, recommend? And who are you organizing your ideas for? A group of potential investors? Your boss? A customer or client? Or are the ideas just for yourself? With a clear purpose and audience, you can go through your list of ideas and **cross out** those that don't really apply. For example, maybe you're trying to convince a customer to **switch** from the competition to your company. You've brainstormed all the great things about your company and its products. Somewhere in your list is "positive workplace culture." That's wonderful. But does a potential customer care? Probably not. So **nix** it.

Great, so you've **whittled down** your ideas. Now what? Now you need to start combining and grouping what remains. Look at the ideas and see if any themes **jump out** at you. You may notice that several ideas **are linked** to one bigger idea. Or one big idea in your list seems to include a bunch of smaller ideas in your list. You can rewrite these groupings of ideas on a new piece of **paper**, or you can just draw lines connecting them. For example, maybe you are going to be introducing your company to a potential foreign partner. You've **come up with** a big list of ideas related to your business. It includes things like salespeople, products, brand image, executive, history, founder... You **peruse** this list and see that salespeople, executive, and founder are all people, so you put them in a group.

How many groups you end up with will vary. But if you're going to make your ideas work for you, it's good to **aim** for a **manageable** number of groups. Most people deal well with 2, 3, or 4. Any more than that and it becomes more complex and less **memorable**.

Once you've grouped your ideas, explore them a bit more. Remove the ideas that don't really seem to fit perfectly, and try to think of others that you've missed. **Strive for** balance. You want your groups of ideas to have **roughly** the same amount of content. In our earlier example in which you grouped different people together, you might realize you want to **throw in** others, like researchers and factory workers. And maybe you want to cross out "founder" because it doesn't seem to **gel with** your purpose.

So, you've got a few groups of ideas or things. And you've made sure that the groups are balanced. Now try giving these groups short titles. One word is best, though you can use a phrase as well. Try to make them **parallel**. That is, they should all be phrased the same way. For example, you might have "at home," "at work," and "at the cottage." You could also have them all start with the same letter. For example, we had "people" as one of the idea groups for introducing your company. Your other groups could be "products" and "places." Doesn't that **have a nice ring** to it? People, products, and places.

That's what your **shooting for**. A few groups of related ideas that can be given tight and memorable titles. You start by generating as many ideas as possible, then you start **paring down** and grouping them together, then you explore each group a bit more, and finally you label them. You're organized and ready to go!

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **myBEonline.com** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. What does Tim say about your ideas and your purpose?
 - A Your purpose should be designed to fit your ideas
 - B Your ideas should serve your purpose
 - C Your purpose and ideas might come into conflict
 - D Your ideas may each have a different purpose
2. With a clear purpose and an understanding of who your audience is, you can then...
 - A ... give names to your ideas
 - B ... create different categories
 - C ... deliver your ideas in an organized manner
 - D ... remove some of the ideas from your list
3. How many groups does Tim recommend creating for your ideas?
 - A 1 or 2
 - B 5 to 10
 - C 2 to 4
 - D exactly 3
4. Tim says that after grouping your ideas, you can add and subtract from each group. When you do this, you should strive for _____.
 - A Balance
 - B Clarity
 - C Comprehension
 - D Quantity
5. Which of the following are examples of parallel titling? [choose 2]
 - A What we do and how we do it
 - B Products, retail outlets, and the customers we serve
 - C Today's tools and tomorrow's technologies
 - D Our processes, the policies we follow, and planning for the future
 - E Long-term planning and crisis management
6. What point was NOT mentioned as a part of organizing your ideas?
 - A Grouping ideas together
 - B Giving names to idea groups
 - C Asking others for fresh ideas
 - D Removing inappropriate or irrelevant ideas
 - E Thinking clearly about your purpose

Review Answers

1. What does Tim say about your ideas and your purpose?

B Your ideas should serve your purpose

2. With a clear purpose and an understanding of who your audience is, you can then...

D ... remove some of the ideas from your list

3. How many groups does Tim recommend creating for your ideas?

C 2 to 4

4. Tim says that after grouping your ideas, you can add and subtract from each group. When you do this, you should strive for _____.

A Balance

5. Which of the following are examples of parallel titling? [choose 2]

A What we do and how we do it

C Today's tools and tomorrow's technologies

6. What is NOT mentioned as a part of organizing your ideas?

C Asking others for fresh ideas

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

