

27/9/3 Message Map Guidelines

- 27 words
- 9 seconds
- 3 messages

Total of 27 words for all three key messages, with each key message averaging 9 words in length

Message map

Question or Concern:

Key Message 1
(9 words on average)

Supporting Information
1.1

Supporting Information
1.2

Supporting Information
1.3

Key Message 2
(9 words on average)

Supporting Information
2.1

Supporting Information
2.2

Supporting Information
2.3

Key Message 3
(9 words on average)

Supporting Information
3.1

Supporting Information
3.2

Supporting Information
3.3

9 Principles of Message Mapping

1. Limiting the number of key messages to a maximum of 3-5 using as few words as possible
 - Ideally no more than 9 seconds or 27 words to express the necessary information.
2. Constructing messages that can be easily understood by an adult with a 6th to 8th grade education
 - This can be tested using the “readability” utility contained in a number of word-processing programs.
3. Adhering to the “primacy/recency” or “first/last” principle
 - This principle states that the most important messages should occupy the first and last position in a list.
4. Citing third parties or sources that would be perceived as credible by the receiving audience.
5. Providing a preamble to the message map that indicates genuine empathy, listening, caring and compassion
 - Crucial factors in establishing trust in high-concern, high-stress situations.
6. Using graphics, visual aids, analogies and narratives (such as personal stories) can increase an individual’s ability to hear, understand and recall a message by more than 50%.
7. Constructing messages while recognizing the dominant role of negative thinking in high-concern situations.
 - Examples include: avoiding unnecessary, indefensible or non-productive uses of absolutes, and of the words “no”, “not”, “never”, “nothing” and “none”; balancing or countering a negative key message with positive, constructive or solution-oriented key messages; and providing three or more positive points to counter a single negative point or bad news.
8. Presenting the full message map using the repetitive structure found in the “Tell me, Tell me more, Tell me again model” (the “Triple T Model”):
 1. Tell people the information in summary form (i.e., the three key messages)
 2. Tell them more (i.e., the supporting information)
 3. Tell people again what was told in summary form (i.e., repeat the three key messages).
9. Developing key messages and supporting information that address important risk perception, outrage and fear factors such as trust, benefits, control, voluntariness, dread, fairness, reversibility, catastrophic potential, effects on children, morality, origin and familiarity.

Message map

Example*

How contagious is Ebola?

Key Message 1

“Ebola is hard to catch”

1.1

Direct contact with infected body fluids needs to happen in order to get Ebola.

1.2

An Ebola patient is only contagious— when they are showing symptoms.

1.3

It takes between 2 and 21 days from infection for someone to start showing symptoms.

Key Message 2

“The amount of Ebola needed to cause infection is not known”

2.1

Experts believe that Ebola is difficult to catch outside of the healthcare setting.

2.2

The greater the contact with body fluids and the more Ebola virus in the body, the greater the risk of infection.

2.3

The Texas patient who died from Ebola developed symptoms and was thus contagious for days before being isolated and no-one he interacted with outside of the hospital have gotten sick.

Key Message 3

“All viruses are different”

3.1

The flu virus is easily caught and is passed between people by an airborne route.

3.2

Ebola is not spread through the air or water or, in general, by food.

3.3

In Africa, Ebola may be spread as the result of handling or eating bush meat (wild animals hunted for food) or contact with infected bats.

*Taken from: <http://www.astho.org/Infectious-Disease/Top-Questions-On-Ebola-Simple-Answers-Developed-by-ASTHO/>