

Thinking and Speaking in the EPIC Format

The Impact of Powerful Speaking

Learning how to speak powerfully about our issues is one of the most important tools we possess. ACTION has created an easy format for our advocates to use to create powerful "laser talks" — short and compelling talks, less than 2 minutes long, that are the backbone of our advocacy work. We use them when we meet with our members of Congress/Parliament and their aides, when we call our editorial boards, when we invite people to an event. We also use them when an unexpected opportunity arises — like running into a member of Congress/Parliament, decision maker, health leaders, or future champions at the airport, conferences, hotels, or even on the street.

We've created a simple acronym, **EPIC**, to help you remember the basics of creating your talk. The letters in **EPIC** stand for **Engage**, State the **Problem**, **Inform** about the solution, and give the **Call** to action.

Creating Your EPIC Laser Talk

E for Engage Your Audience

Here, you want to get your listener's attention with a dramatic fact or short statement. Keep this opening statement to one sentence if possible. For instance, you could say:

The two leading killers of children in the world are both treatable and preventable, yet over 2 million kids under the age of five die of pneumonia and diarrheal diseases each year.

P for State the Problem

Here you present causes of the problem you introduced in the first section. How widespread or serious is the problem?

90 percent of these kids are dying in sub-Saharan Africa and southeast Asia, many most at risk living in rural and hard to reach places that lack access to proper sanitation, quality health services, and the cost effective treatments like antibiotics for pneumonia and oral rehydration salts and zinc for diarrhea.

I for Inform about Solutions

Here you inform the listener about a solution to the problem you just presented. Develop your solution with examples of how and where it has worked, how it is proven and cost-effective and how it has benefited the poorest. Or, you could cite a recent study, or report or tell a first-person account of how the solution has impacted you or others you know.

Excitingly though, the GAVI Alliance is expanding access to the new pneumococcal and rotavirus vaccines that prevent many of the most severe cases of pneumonia and diarrhea. Combined with other interventions, we can tackle these diseases together if resources are made available and political will is built.

C for the Call to Action

Now that you've engaged your listener, presented the problem and informed him or her of a solution, what do you want the listener to do? Make the action something specific so that you will be able to follow up on whether or not the action has been taken. Present the action in the form of a yes or no question and in one sentence.

Will you work with me to advocate for our country officials to ensure equitable access to these lifesaving new vaccines for all children?

Delivering Your Laser Talk

Any good musician, actor, or speaker knows never to go on stage without rehearsing first, and it's no different with public speaking. Being an advocate requires that we get out of our comfort zones and commit ourselves to practicing powerfully speaking about our issues to others. After your first experience of using an effective laser talk with a member of Congress/Parliament or the media, you'll never go back to winging it again.

It's important to speak naturally rather than to read your talk word for word. As you get familiar with your talk, you'll discover where you need more practice or where you may want to make changes. These talks will develop and change as you learn new information over time, so be flexible and always keep on the lookout for interesting facts and powerful stories so you can make updates.

Tips for Delivering Your EPIC Laser Talk:

1. Practice your laser talk out loud several times before practicing in front of another person.
2. Memorize as many of the details as possible.
3. Practice your laser talk with another member of your organization.
4. Identify the audience you imagine you are addressing — for example, a member of Congress/Parliament, a health minister, or NTP Manager.
5. Deliver your talk without stopping, even if you make a few stumbles along the way. The more you practice, the better you will get.
6. Once finished, critique yourself. Pick two things that you liked about the talk and one thing you would like to improve upon. Ask your partner to critique your talk next and listen with an open mind.

Tips for Listening to and Providing Feedback on an EPIC Laser Talk:

1. Ask your partner who the target audience is.
2. Listen intently to the talk and gauge how natural it seems.
3. Identify which elements of the EPIC format were present and which were missing.
4. Prompt your partner to critique his or her talk.
5. Tell your partner two things you really liked about the laser talk and one thing you think he or she could improve upon.

Prepared to be Powerful

Remember that conversations vary, so you may not always deliver your laser talk exactly as you learned it. But if you learn it well, you will be able to use all sections of the talk as you need them. Learning a good repertoire of laser talks that you can pull out at any time will help make you a primed and powerful speaker for the end of poverty!

Meeting with Decision Makers

1. Who is this person and what do they stand for? Do some research.
2. What is the goal of your meeting? What do you want to get the decision maker to do?
3. If you don't know where he/she stands on your issue, you have to find out.
 - If he/she is opposed, goal is to neutralize or soften
 - If he/she is undecided, goal is to create a supporter by:
 - Identifying what's holding them back or information they need.
 - Understand his/her interests
 - Making a compelling case.
 - If he/she is supporter, get a formal commitment and help them become a champion.
4. Schedule your meeting through their scheduler.
5. Recruit people to be at meeting with you.
6. Create a clear, concise message and request. Don't bring more than one or two.
7. Decide how to deliver your message and request. What story will you use to demonstrate?
8. What facts will you use?
9. Define roles for the meeting:
 - Meeting leader
 - Storyteller
 - Pitcher or messenger
 - Recorder
 - Supporting Actors
10. The meeting agenda:
 - Introductions and thank yous.
 - Meeting overview—what you will present during the meeting and what you are looking for.
 - Storyteller tells story to illustrate.
 - The request from the “pitcher” that requests a yes or no answer. Get a response
 - Respond to response—don't accept vague answers, find out if additional information is needed, stay on message, get clarification.

- End the meeting with thanks and follow up plans.

Planning Worksheet

1. What is the decision maker's stake or interest in the issue?	
2. How will you connect with the decision maker's interest?	
3. What objections might the decision maker have?	
4. How will you respond to the objections?	
5. Who will take responsibility for the different roles during the meeting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting Leader • Storyteller • Person making ask • Recorder

Sample Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions and thank you (2 minutes)
2. Meeting overview (1 minute)
3. Personal stories (2 – 3 minutes)
4. The “ask” (2 minutes)
5. Strategic response (2 minutes)
6. Wrap up, thank you, next steps (1 minute)

Forging Links With The Media

- Get the names, numbers and email addresses of local and international journalists you think write well on your subject and invite them to lunch or for a drink. They never say no.
- The news agencies are good ones to target – Reuters, AFP, AP as their material appears in regional press in donor nations as well as all national and international media.
- The international media tend to be based in the same building in a capital city. Find out where they all drink after work – it's always the bar within walking distance.
- Know the best times to target them for maximum coverage eg before their morning editorial meeting so they have something to offer for the next edition of their newspaper/programme. Find out when their deadlines are so you don't annoy them by ringing up at their busiest times. Find out when they get their biggest audience/readership and target those editions.
- It's a good idea to offer news and press releases on the traditional day off eg Friday in Moslem countries and Sunday in Christian nations. The following day is always very slow for news and the newsdesks will be delighted to have some thing for their editions.
- Good journalists will want to focus on the human interest angle – encourage this. Offer them a facility where they will meet real people and see real events: the TB patient, the health worker, the family, the colleagues, the living and working conditions
- Remember a picture paints a thousand words – strong images will get your message across – and that goes for your words too
- Pictures of meetings, conferences should be avoided unless there's nothing else
- Pictures of labs with pipettes and test tubes are of limited interest

News Conferences

- If you are involved in organising a press conference make sure it's easy to get to with plenty of parking. Check with a friendly journalist that there's no other big news event planned for that day.
- "Dress the set" – design the room so there's a banner or other relevant visual image behind the speakers. Put posters or photos up around the room.
- Make sure there's a printed list of the speakers' names, titles and contact details available. It's probably worth providing them with complicated facts and figures.
- If you're doing a Power Point, they'll ask for a copy
- Provide a press pack, with the key messages and ideally still photographs for the print media
- Get the journalists to sign in so you know who's come...you can send a press release to the ones who didn't show up afterwards. Provide refreshments.
- Provide a quiet room for separate one- to-one interviews with broadcasters

How to Write a Press Release

- **Make sure the copy fits onto one page. Journalists rarely read further.**
- **Each paragraph should ideally be one sentence, maximum two.**

TEMPLATE 1 – ADVANCE PRESS RELEASE (Media Advisory)

TITLE GOES HERE

Paragraph 1—Top line goes here eg

The head of (NGO X) in Senegal will discuss the challenges facing small traders there, most of them women trying to feed their families, at an open evening for micro-credit financiers in Dhaka next Tuesday (November 10)

Paragraph 2 – Background about your organization eg

It's being hosted by xx – an organization which

Paragraph 3 – more info about the event - why readers should be interested in coming along eg

Mrs xxxx xxx, who's worked in Dhaka for 15 years, was a teacher there before joining NGO X, which specializes in micro-credit. She risked her life running an illegal school for girls in Afghanistan during the Taliban years.

Paragraph 4 — Quote

"NGO X feels passionately that micro loans for girls and women represent the route to economic independence of individuals and the enrichment of nations," said Mrs xxxxxx.

Paragraph 5 — Details of event time, place, non-members welcome etc

Paragraph 6

For more information, please contact: XXXXX tel:

ENDS

TEMPLATE 2 – POST-EVENT PRESS RELEASE**TITLE GOES HERE****Paragraph 1 — Top line goes here**

It should be the most interesting, and/or NEWEST bit of information about the event.

Paragraph 2 – Background about the organization and the event**Paragraph 3 — More info about the event, including a quote if relevant**

One of the audience, Judith Naef, studying business management, said it was particularly useful to see how women could make it in the workplace. “I’ve really appreciated the diversity of the panel,” she said.

Paragraph 4 — If you haven’t included a quote in par 3, you should do it here.**Paragraph 5 — Summary**

Something else about the organisation and what it does

Paragraph 6

For more information, please contact: XXXXX tel:

Attach photos of the event here with captions eg:

DSC02540jpeg shows left to right: xxx .

ENDS

How to Write an Op-Ed

What is an op-ed?

Op-eds are opinion pieces that are usually published opposite the editorial page in a newspaper. They are written by columnists, leaders of organizations, advocates, public officials, and community members. At most papers, anyone can submit an op-ed to convey a clear point of view about a topic of public interest. Advocates can use up-to-date and accurate information about their issue to write a powerful personal op-ed or one to be signed by a key decision maker or influential community member.

Tips for writing your op-ed

1. Check your local newspaper for Opinion Editorial guidelines as they differ based on your newspaper. It usually ranges 500-800 words.
2. Browse previously written op-eds in the newspaper to understand what people are and are not writing about. A newspaper will usually accept an op-ed that has not been written about yet.
3. Get in touch with how you personally feel about the issue and feel free to use personal examples, relating your message to your own experiences. *TIP: It's often helpful to open with a story or anecdote and then circle back around to it by referencing it at the end.*
4. Because an op-ed is longer than a letter to the editor, resist the temptation to cover more issues or ideas and instead go deeper on the issue you want to cover. Tell an illustrative story, give a detailed example, include a bit more data, or highlight other people's points of view. Keep it simple.
5. Make sure there is a call to action for decision makers. An op-ed is a prominent piece that will be read by many people; use this opportunity to be bold in what you want.
6. Make your piece current and relevant. Have it relate to something that is going on now.
7. Once you have drafted your piece, send it to your colleagues and allies for feedback. This is a critical step. Feedback from others helps ensure that you have a piece of publishable quality.

Tips for pitching your op-ed

- Find out who makes decisions about op-eds for your paper. Sometimes this is different from the editorial page editor.
- Submit your piece and then call him/her to confirm that it was received within 24 hours of submission.
- Once you've confirmed it was received, call the editor or writer back again within 48 hours to see if they are willing to print your piece. Feel free to tell them who you are and a bit about your work and why you are submitting the piece at this time.

- If you learn the editor does not plan to run it, find out why and determine if a revision would improve its chances of being published. In some cases, the paper may give you the opportunity to shorten it and have it printed as a letter to the editor. Alternatively, you call another paper and ask if they would be interested in your op-ed. If they will not run it, consider submitting it to another publication.
- When your op-ed is published, follow up with a thank you to the editorial page editor.

Sharing the news!

- A main goal in getting media published is to influence decision makers to take bold and effective action on issues. Share the op-ed with your local decision makers and other high-level officials you are targeting.
- In addition to contacting decision makers, send copies of your piece to other influential members of the community with ties to your issue.
- Make sure to let your partner, friends, and family know that you've been published so they can respond with a letter to the editor and keep the issue in the news
- We want to hear about your success! Send a copy of your op-ed to ACTION staff and other ACTION trainees.

Trouble getting started? Try using the EPIC format

Although an op-ed is considerably longer, the EPIC format can be a powerful and effective formula for organizing and presenting your thoughts and ideas in an op-ed:

E	<i>ENGAGE Your Audience</i> – You want to grab the reader's attention with a short, but dramatic statement.
P	<i>STATE the Problem</i> – Present the causes of the problem presented in the first line to represent how widespread and serious the problem is.
I	<i>INFORM about solutions</i> – Use first person accounts to inform your reader on possible solutions and why they are effective and beneficial.
C	<i>CALL to Action</i> – Now that the reader is engaged and informed on the issue, what would you want the reader to do? Make the action something specific and direct it in a form of a question.

How To Prepare For An Interview

Discuss With Your Colleagues:

- Why am I doing this interview?
- What is the aim? Where do I want to go?
- What is the top line/news angle?
- What is the message I want to get across?
- How shall I make those points?
- What have you or your colleagues said before on this subject?
- Guess 10 questions and prepare 10 answers
- Make sure you have the facts and can back them up

Do Proper Research — Ask The Journalist:

- What is the programme outlet/publication/website?
- Who are the audience/readers?
- Live or pre-recorded?
- How long will the final report be? And therefore how long will your final interview clip be?
- What angle is the journalist taking?
- Question areas?
- Where will the interview take place?
- If it's for broadcast: what type of interview -
 - Stand alone interview?
 - Discussion?
 - Is it the last interview in a sequence?
 - Will another interviewee follow you? Or appear with you? Who? An opposing view?
 - Is it the only clip or interview in a packaged report?
 - Is your contribution to be used to explain a point or to give perspective?
 - Will it go up on the net?

Rules For Messages And Clips:

- Be aware of your audience - who they are, their current level of knowledge and what you need them to know. Devise your message so that it takes them from their starting point to the current situation or threat.
- Be aware of the journalist. S/he has their own news agenda and will be looking at the story from a different perspective.
- The soundbite may well be different from your message, as it will usually be a bit shorter, summed up in about 20 seconds. That's 60 words maximum.
- For your message to get through, it has to be simple as well as short.
- Don't be afraid to repeat it. Use different forms of words if you like.

When You Are On Air:

- Turn off your mobile phone.
- Make sure you are in a quiet environment.
- If the interviewer challenges you, don't take it personally. Keep going and keep calm.
- Make sure you are comfortable

Interview Content:

- Get your facts right
- Give yourself time to think about your answer
- Be careful not to interrupt. They'll have to edit or ask you the same thing again
- Listen to the question - refer to it and use it to enable you to move on to your message
- Speak in complete sentences in order to provide the best clip. The journalist will tell you if you are talking for too long, or if it's too complicated. Be prepared for them to ask the same question several times. Just keep answering.
- If it's a pre-recorded interview and you want to re-phrase an answer, stop and request you do it again. That's quite acceptable.
- Keep it simple
- Be prepared to be able to cite genuine reports, dates, people to back up your answers.
- A good reporter should cite genuine reports, dates and people. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification if they make a sweeping statement. Ask for evidence.
- Think ahead if you can - where am I being taken here?
- Don't answer from notes or a script
- Keep to the point
- If you don't want something to appear in the report or the headline *don't say it!*

If It's TV:

- Check your appearance
- No distracting jewellery, hair, patterned clothes.
- Lights will make you shiny so take along some powder.
- No stripes, checks, sunglasses, bright blue or green tops (if you are in a studio, their backdrop will be one of those colours and you will disappear). A red jacket for women, a red tie for men, is good.
- Keep eye contact
- Body language is vital
- Don't look away at the end until the cameraman gives you the all-clear
- Be prepared for it to take about 45 minutes, even if it's just for a short clip.
- Don't sit in a chair that moves - you don't want to be swinging about!
- If you're standing, don't rock
- Be careful about what you do with your hands
- If you're in a remote studio, look straight into the camera
- If you are with the interviewer, look at them and ignore the camera