

What they say about PLAIN FIGURES courses

"Informative, insightful and fun..."
S.T. (Isle of Wight)

"Excellent course! Well thought out and explained. The workbook is an excellent resource for the future..."
J.T. (Salford)

"Can you get my manager to go on this course?"
M.H. (Manchester)

"The trainer made a dry subject very engaging."
R.L. (Maidstone)

"Course leader really knows her subject and is very good at getting people to understand her concepts..."
T.S. (Edinburgh)

Corporate governance, investor relations, risk management, business partnering, Sarbanes Oxley, etc...

Finance professionals need first rate communications skills in the 21st century.

PLAIN FIGURES has over ten years experience training professionals in numeric communication. We work to British Standard 7581:1992. Our workshops are informal, friendly and practical.

Speaking of Finance

Seven tips on how to talk about figures without losing or confusing your audience

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Content-rich, coherent financial presentations save time, shorten meetings and make a good impression. They improve governance because everyone understands the facts. They reflect well on you as an open and competent professional.

Tricks for talking about numbers

Below we list a few tricks that will help you explain financial figures to audiences small and large.

Tip One Numbers are abstract and need to be written down for easy comprehension. Show them on a PowerPoint slide. Better still, put them on a handout so everyone has a copy.

Tip Two When speaking, add the phrase “which means” after each figure. This ties abstract numbers to concrete ideas. So, for instance:

- “The overspend is averaging £12,000 each month, which means it will be more than £70,000 by year end...”
- “Option C will cost £280,000 over four years, which means it costs less than options D or A...”

Tip Three Round numbers when speaking. Listeners are better able to take in, compare and recall numbers if rounded. “Expenditure fell from around £90,000 in 2007 to just under £70,000 in 2010...” is far easier on listeners’ ears and brains than “expenditure fell from £87,783 in 2007 to £69,038 in 2010...”.

If the audience needs the precise numbers, put them in your handout.

Tip Four Simple graphs communicate with ease and look professional. Ensure your graphs tell a single, straightforward story (e.g. “chocolate imports up”) and are clear of ‘chart junk’, like 3-d.

“Financial presentations differ from most business presentations because numbers – an essential ingredient – are abstract and are particularly so when heard rather than seen.”

Tip Five Distribute your own A4 handout as well as (or instead of) copies of PowerPoint slides. Whereas copies of slides are rarely intelligible after the event, sentences and paragraphs in a written handout remain lucid forever.

Keep your handout short, less than two sides. (Longer and no one will read it.)

Tip Six Avoid illustrating your points with spreadsheets or large tables. They have too much detail to communicate with ease. It’s like expecting the audience to understand 15 things at once.

If the audience needs to see figures, include them in your handout.

Tip Seven Introduce each table or chart individually. Too frequently speakers offer no or insufficient explanation leaving the audience puzzled as to the point being made. Follow these steps:

1. State the title of the table or graph
2. Explain headings and scale
3. Briefly summarise or interpret
4. Give the audience time to read and take in the information.

With such an introduction, listeners will ‘own’ each table or graph.