



Tutorial Proposal: Whiteboarding 101

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Summary

- Whiteboard talks are one of the key ways that engineers can communicate structured information with colleagues
- A combination of teaching, storytelling, and improvisation
- An attendee will learn how to...
 - Structure a whiteboard talk
 - Narrow down the topic scope
 - Adapt to different audiences
 - Control the conversation

Framework

- **Very** interactive session
- Need several flip charts/whiteboards to be used by breakout groups during the session.
- Pattern of “Teach a unit, do an exercise.”
- Time required: 2 hours. 3 hours preferably.

A Few Assertions

- Whiteboards allow for real-time visual organization of data
- People absorb information through narrative
- Giving people a reason to listen to you is just as important
- Whiteboards = Narrative + Visual organization

Unit: Setting Boundaries

- A whiteboard is a lecture with interactive elements. You have to set boundaries on what you're discussing, or you'll lose your audience.
- **Horizontal Boundaries:** What is the scope of your presentation, and how does it relate to the time you have and the audience?
- **Vertical Boundaries:** What is the level/range of abstraction of your talk, based on the audience? Tech people want data, Managers want strategy, Executives want ideas.

Exercises: Setting Boundaries

- TBD

Unit: Building Your Model

- A whiteboard is a way to create a thought construct that can be implanted wholesale in an audience, by way of narrative.
- **“Know ten to teach three”**: You need more depth to teach a subject in order to dynamically adapt to different learning styles in the middle of a discussion.
- **“Choose your metaphors”**: The more ways you can describe a topic, the more audiences you can reach.

Exercises: Building Your Model

- How many metaphors can you use to describe the TCP 3-Way Handshake?
- Describe a technical concept
 - In two minutes.
 - In one minute.
 - In 30 seconds.
 - In 10 seconds.
 - To your colleague
 - To your non-technical friend

Unit: Defining Your Terms

- You're attempting to create a thought construct in people's heads. Vocabulary is important.
- The words you use are the words your audience will use to manipulate what you're talking about.
 - When your audience says "So you're saying it's like X, but for Y", they're trying to impose their own vocabulary on the construct to make it more tractable, which might not be welcome if you're introducing a new concept.
- So... what words do you want them to leave with?

Exercises: Defining Your Terms

- TBD

Unit: Controlling the Conversation

Agendas are Magic: Have an agenda, drive the agenda, stick to the agenda.

Agendas can be Blamed: There's no shame in moving along a talk by saying that "there's a lot to cover."

Invocation: Set the tone at the beginning, and give closure at the end, even if it's just "Thank you all for coming" and then "Have a good afternoon."

Exercises: Controlling the Conversation

- TBD

Unit: Letting The Audience In

- **Listen to the words of the question:** How technical are they? What's their vocabulary? Are they actually convinced by your last answer? Do they feel you're wasting their time?
- **Choose three proxies:** You're not going to be able to read every face in the room. Choose three people; left, center, and right. These people become your proxies for the audience.

Exercises: Letting the Audience In

- TBD