

Patricia Fripp®

# FAT & SKINNY Words

**A Great Technique to Being Understood**

*Frippicism®: Great public speakers know how  
to connect with their audience*

## Fat and Skinny Words: A Great Technique to be Understood

If your goal is to sound clear, concise, and credible, this advice is invaluable.

Nothing can turn your audience off faster than using fat words when they're hungry for skinny ones.

### Or vice versa.

I learned this exciting concept from Dr. David Palmer, who was a Silicon Valley negotiations expert. He introduced me to "levels of abstraction."

Unless you can match your message to the expectations of your audience or talk at the same level at which they are listening, you won't connect as well as you would like. This is true whether your audience is one person, ten, or one hundred.

### Suppose you write the word "automobile" on a pad.

A simple concept. Going up to the next level of abstraction, you could write above it that the car is a "wheeled passenger vehicle," then "surface transportation," then "major force in the world's economy." This is making the word "automobile" fatter and fatter, larger and larger. These big ideas and abstractions are "fat words." They are great for conveying the big picture, for inspiring ideas, for motivating.

### Now, let's make the word skinnier.

Underneath, you might write "sedan," "Ford sedan," "red, four-door Ford sedan." Eventually, you would be talking about a specific car with its VIN. Those are "skinny words." They are essential for conveying instructions and solving technical problems.

**No one holding a screwdriver, camera, or looking at a blank screen on their computer wants fat words.** You'll just frustrate them, maybe make them furious. They want to know minute details and the specific who, what, when, and how.

“ They want to know minute details and the specific who, what, when, and how. ”

## Many of my clients hire me to coach their sales teams.

After giving them the automobile illustration, they learn to be more effective at evaluating each other by saying, “Your words are too fat,” or “Those words aren’t skinny enough.” When you are presenting a sales overview to an executive or senior management, ask, “Should your words get fatter or skinnier?”

## Upper management needs fat words.

After a successful initial interview with a company, you may be lucky or skilled enough to be invited to present your offerings to their management team. For this group, your ideas need to be brought down a level of abstraction by using skinnier words and phrases.

## Let’s assume you were very effective and persuasive.

You made the sale. Now you are dealing with the individuals who make the technology or machine work. That is when the words and phrases need to get skinny. The who, what, when, how, and how do I troubleshoot problems?

At what level should you present your information so that you get your message across? It all depends on the audience.

For many years, as a professional speaker I asked my clients, “What do you want to accomplish from my program?” “What is the purpose of the meeting?”

Often, I heard very “fat” answers. “Get them to sell more,” or “Motivate them,” or “Get them excited about our new strategy.”

My reply would be, “How much are they selling now? How much more?” or “Motivate them to do what?” or “What are the reasons they would be excited about the strategy.” Over the years, I have become better at asking questions that drive the conversation to give me “skinnier” answers. Some of my favorite questions are “Can you give me a specific example?” and “How will you measure the results?” and “Can you help me understand specifically what you mean by that?”

## Can you see the challenge?

When their words and instructions are too fat, it is challenging to know how to meet and exceed their expectations. With my questioning, I need to drive their comments and expectations down the level of abstraction I can understand.

How clear are you when you communicate? Have you developed the ability to move from fat conversations to skinnier?

*Frippicism®: No one holding a screwdriver, camera, or looking at a blank screen on their computer wants fat words.*

**Patricia Fripp®**, **CSP**, **CPAE** is a Hall of Fame keynote speaker, executive speech coach, and sales presentation and online learning expert. She was elected the first woman President of the National Speakers Association.

In Patricia's career, she has delivered over 3,500 presentations as well as hundreds of virtual presentations. Companies hire Patricia to help them drive more business by polishing their sales conversations and presentations and to help leaders inspire action and build commitment through their words. Clients of her speech coaching include corporate leaders, technical and sales professionals, and seasoned professional speakers. Her online learning platform—**FrippVT® Powerful, Persuasive Presentations**—is embraced as a “must-have” by speakers and companies worldwide.

When her business was mostly keynote speaking, Meetings and Conventions magazine named her “One of the 10 most electrifying speakers in North America.”

As a presentation skills expert, Kiplinger's Personal Finance wrote, “Learning presentation skills from Patricia Fripp is one of the best ways to invest in you.”

She is the author of *Get What You Want; Make It, So You Don't Have to Fake It!*; and *How's That Presentation Coming Along?* Patricia is the co-author of *Deliver Unforgettable Presentations* and *Speaker's Edge* and a contributing author of *Speaking Secrets of the Masters and Insights into Excellence*.

Patricia has been named “One of the Top 30 Women in Sales” and “One of the Top 30 Global Gurus.”

As a speechwriter, one of her speeches for a Johnson & Johnson executive was featured in *Vital Speeches of the Day*. Patricia won the Cicero Speechwriting Award for a speech she collaborated on with her client author, and host and producer of the *New Thinking Allowed* channel Jeffrey Mishlove.



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“Patricia Fripp® is amazing. As a speech coach, you’ll never find anyone with her wisdom, experience, and ability. Once I began to work with her, she improved my speaking style immediately. Her ability to listen to what her clients want to say and instantly give them the right words to use is incredible. Patricia can take an average presentation and quickly transform it to become great.

She takes time to explain and teach her clients how to think about their speech structure and language so that they are equipped to apply the same strategy moving forward. Patricia truly cares a lot about her clients’ success. You get both a coach and a fan when you partner with Patricia.”

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**Bhavin Shah**, CEO & Founder, Moveworks

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## Patricia FRIPP®

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Patricia Fripp®, CSP, CPAE

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