

# Messaging That's Memorable

## Your Minute Message Model™

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**“So, tell me about your school?” If these words strike fear in your heart, you're not alone.**

Many schools have a tough time explaining what makes their educational approach so unique. They're more familiar with how to launch into curricular details and statistics than with really connecting with their audience by conveying the impact their pedagogy has on the lives of real students.

In our noisy, sound-bite culture you need a way to quickly and memorably state your case. Our Minute Message Model is designed to do just that. Using this model for creating powerful messages, you'll confidently represent the school you love, helping you attract more support from more people.

**It's called the Minute Message Model to help you remember two important points:**

1. Make it brief.
2. Say the most important things first.

Whether you've got one minute to get your message across during a shared elevator ride, five minutes at a reception, or ten minutes while your prospective families take a tour, our Minute Message Model will give you confidence that you're using whatever time you have, well.

## Message Basics

### USE YOUR FULL NAME

Your name typically conveys a great deal of information about your school in a way that an acronym just doesn't.

### NEVER ASSUME

What's the educational problem you're addressing, and why should they care? Start there every time.

### REPEAT, AD NAUSEAM

It's a fact: you will be sick to death of repeating your message before it begins to sink in with your key audiences. We're bombarded with thousands of messages each day, so it takes repetition to break through.

### ADD BENEFITS, SUBTRACT FEATURES

Features are what your school does. Benefits are what happens as a result. Right-fit families need to understand why your many campus amenities contribute to something more than just the sum of their parts.



## 2. The Problem Message

Now that your audience is intrigued and knows the basics about your school, you have time to go a little deeper. Here's your chance to elaborate. What problem does your school exist to solve? What aspect of the problem is it that *only* your school is addressing?

You'll only have one Belief Message, but you can create several Problem Messages. Each one highlights a problem, and reinforces that your work solves it. Think your problem is so obvious you don't need to say it? Think again. Skipping the Problem Message means you miss the chance to set your school up as the expert in solving it. Powerful Problem Messages are visionary and help you build an emotional connection with your audience. Craft your Problem Messages by answering the question, "What's the problem out there that only my school can solve?"

### EXAMPLES: Problem Message

**Marin Academy:** False dichotomies plague American education. Subject-matter specialists work in silos, drawing false boxes around teaching and coursework. Students are labeled as creative, athletic, or academic, and the "academics" are either math/science kids or English/humanities kids. The crime in this is that labeled students rarely go on to access the parts of themselves that have not been recognized and validated. With overwhelming evidence about the human brain's multifaceted abilities, it's time to progress past an either/or way of teaching and learning.

### 3. The Impact Message

If you have a little longer with your audience—at an admissions open house, perhaps, in a formal presentation, or in a fundraising appeal—be strategic. Start the same way you would if you had one or two minutes. Begin with your Belief Message and then share a Problem Message explaining the problem you aim to solve.

Tell a story, share an anecdote, or invite your audience to imagine a “what if” scenario. Make it juicy and vivid so the story sticks with them. Don’t explain what programs you offer. Instead, demonstrate the importance of those programs by showing what happens when they work.

A great story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has a single protagonist and something unexpected. Most importantly, end your story by describing how *only* your school could have created this outcome.

#### EXAMPLE: Impact Message

Brian and Bart were members of Marin Academy’s class of 2004, and therefore in the backdrop of their senior year was the armed conflict in Iraq lead by the United States. Being very conscious of world affairs and current events, they boys discussed the conflict often, both in and out of class. The boys had both been deeply engaged in their history and English classes during their four years at MA, and so they were well informed and equipped to debate on the subject of world conflicts. But a bigger question they felt unqualified to debate was the question of why societies engage in armed conflict in the first place. They felt neither of them understood the arguments for and against armed conflict.

Brian and Bart were conflicted. They wanted to enjoy the final months of high school, maybe taste this thing called “senioritis” they knew to be a rite of passage, and celebrate all they had achieved at MA, but they still felt compelled to understand the question of “Why war?”

They sought out their English teacher’s advice, and with his help, created a proposal for a semester-long English class on the history of thought about armed conflicts from the Romans through Iraq. They decided to design a course they themselves would never take, as an expression of their desire to create a vehicle to, as our mission states, “accept the responsibility of education in a democratic society.”

Today, it is one of the more popular classes at MA, and a fitting legacy to the two young men who were encouraged to push the boundaries of their own thinking.

## 4. The Detail Message

The Detail Message leads up to the “Ask.” Tailor this message to your particular audience; you’ll be in a stronger position, when the time comes, to make them the heroes of the story: “This happens because of **you.**”

The Detail Message also links features with benefits. It’s not enough to talk about what you’re doing. You have to demonstrate why what you’re doing is important. For example: “We use technology to enhance student learning, cultivate digital citizenship, and foster digital literacy across the curriculum.” That’s much more compelling than “We have a 1-to-1 iPad program.”

### EXAMPLE: Marin Academy

**Program:** Honors Curriculum

**Program Description (with benefit):** Marin Academy has carefully considered the College Board’s advanced placement (AP) curriculum, and while there is merit to the program, we have elected to create our own college-level honors curriculum which is available to students who demonstrate an ability to work at an advanced level. We do this because we fundamentally value a depth-over-breadth approach, and prefer to offer courses that prepare our students to be reflective, analytical learners—classes geared to an externally designed test do not best achieve that objective.

## Summary

First, introduce your school (**your Belief Message**). Then, name a problem that you solve (**a Problem Message**). Next, add a story (**an Impact Message**) that shows your audience how it plays out in real life.

Then (and only then) you can get to your programmatic and academic specifics using a Detail Message, explaining in detail how your programs support getting the job done. If your audience wants to hear them, your Detail Messages describe the nuts and bolts of how you achieve impact and put your values into action.

**End each Detail Message by asking for what you need.** If you're speaking to donors, ask for money. Be concrete: how much, from how many, to accomplish exactly what? If you need volunteers, ask your audience to sign on.

Use this moment. **Ask.**

## Conclusion

No one knows your school as well as you do.

Even your most ardent supporters can quickly get lost in a list of all your curricular offerings. The thing that they care most about is that you're achieving your vision and making a difference. Every conversation, every newsletter, every annual report, video, tweet and news interview is a new chance to use your time well by reminding your audiences *why* your school matters and how they can be a part of it. **Use your time well.**

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**Mission Minded** is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofits. We believe that nonprofits, foundations, and schools only reach their highest potential if people understand the importance of their work—not just what they do, but why it matters.

Every day we partner with schools like Marin Academy, Prospect Sierra School and San Francisco Day School to help them determine the brand—or reputation—for which they want to be known. Then we help them bring that brand to life through key messages, admissions viewbooks, websites, videos, capital campaign materials, and more. As a result, our clients successfully raise more money and attract the right-fit faculty, staff and families they need to reach their goals.

Have a question? We'd love to hear from you. Write to Jennie Winton at [jennie@mission-minded.com](mailto:jennie@mission-minded.com), or give Jennie a call at 415.990.9360.