Communicating Technical Forestry Information to a General Audience

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Outline

- What is technical information?

- Guidelines for PowerPoint

- Four strategies for technical communications

- Resources

- Q&A

Technical information depends on the audience and the communicator.

- **Technical versus non-technical audiences.**

  ❑ My statistical analysis may be your comic book.

- **Appropriate versus overly complex talks.**

  ❑ Properly prepare and simplify our remarks.

Guidelines for PowerPoint slides

- Basic principles

- Text and font

- Colors

- What's wrong with this slide?

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Retain outline formats to organize slides.

- Use taglines.

- Focus on one key idea per slide.

- Remain consistent across slides.

- PowerPoint supports your presentation.
  - It is not the presentation itself.

Use "sans serif" fonts such as Arial or Helvetica (32pt).

- Left justify all bulleted text.

- DON'T USE ALL CAPS.

- Consider the 6 x 6 rule as a guide.
  - 6 lines per slide, 6 words per line

- Font size matters (30pt)
  - Font size matters (24pt)
    - Font size matters (20pt)
      - Font size matters (16pt)
        - Font size matters (12pt)

Color schemes

- Use contrasting color schemes.
    - Dark on light   **Or light on dark**
- Consider PowerPoint defaults.
- Use solid colors instead of fill patterns on graphs and charts.
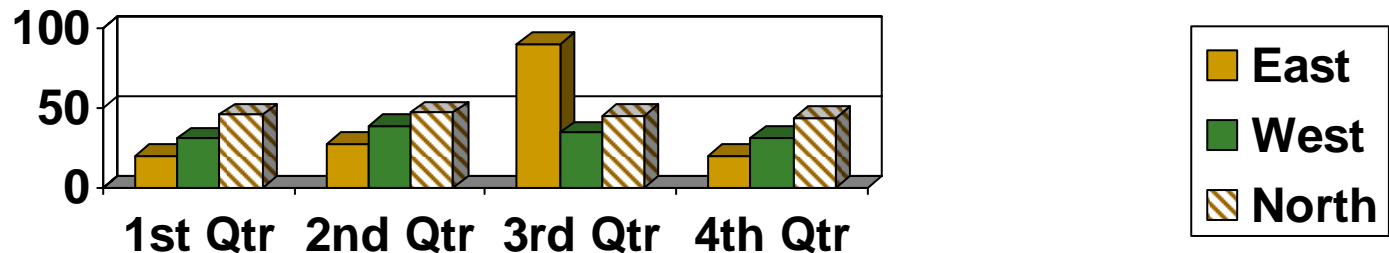
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS SLIDE?

- Studies indicate that college graduates lack necessary communication skills.

- *Morgan (1997) studied communication skills training for accounting graduates in the United Kingdom, finding that opportunities exist for more explicit training and practice for students during their academic programs.*

- Peterson (1997) surveyed personnel interviewers a businesses in the Midwest and found that, while 90 the respondents emphasized the importance of communication skills for success, only 60% agreed current job applicants demonstrated adequate skil Interviewees identified common communication s inadequacies as:

  - (1) eye contact,
  - (2) topic relevance,
  - (3) response organization,
  - (4) listening skills, and
  - (5) response clarity.

Strategies for technical communications

- Structure your message.

- Choose key words carefully.

- Display ideas visually.

- Create figures live.

Structure your overall message with a series of specific points.

- **Preview the specific point.**
    - Establish how it fits in the overall message.

- **Present with a relevant example.**

- **Review the key point.**
    - Reaffirm its place in the message.

- **Repeat with the next point.**

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Timberland investment performance has differed regionally in the US.

Pacific Northwest Timberland Returns (Data source: NCREIF)

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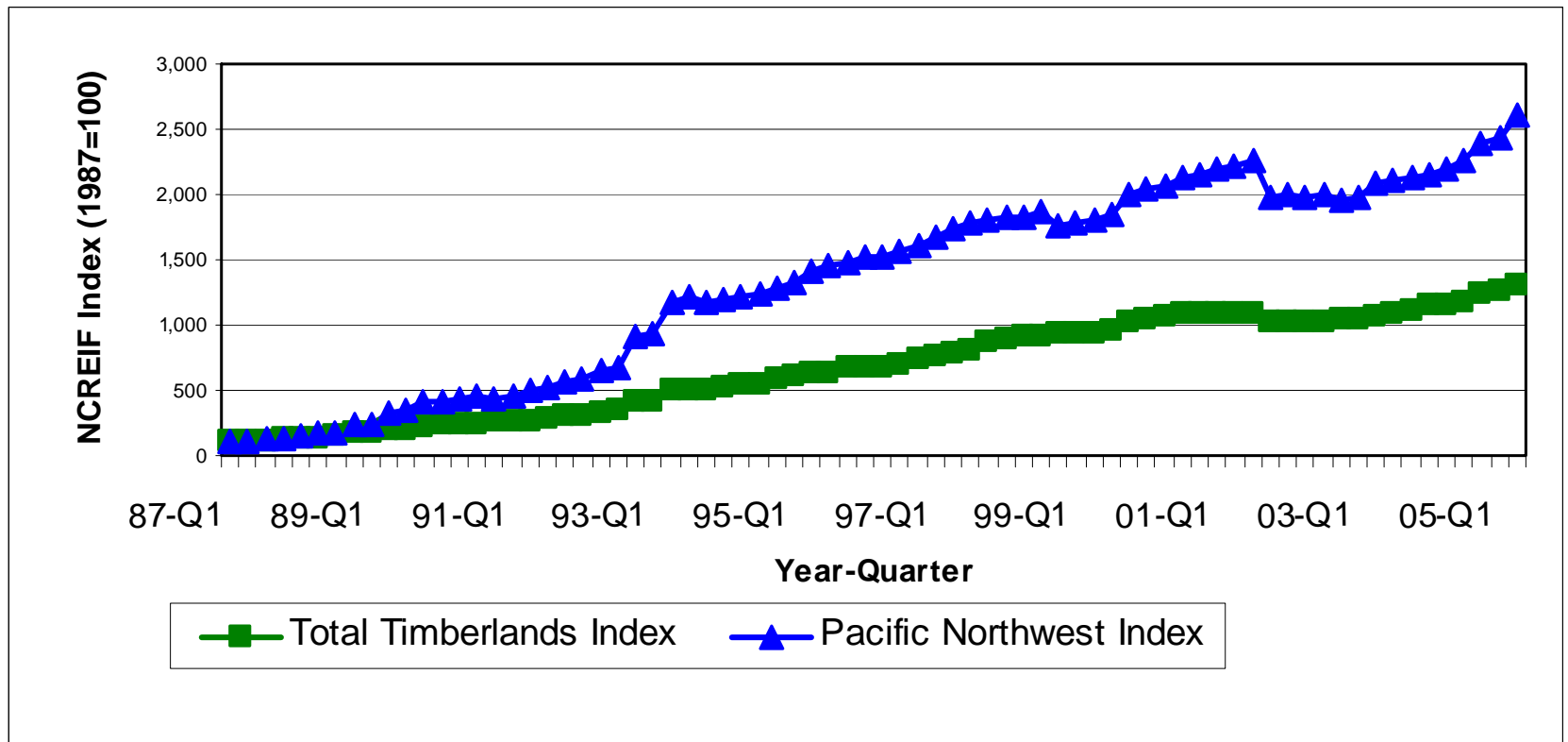
Choose key words carefully.

- Avoid jargon.
- Avoid complexity.
- Avoid thinking out loud.
- Avoid the word "but."
  - Use "and."
- Avoid saying:
  - "You don't understand."
  - "That's the dumbest idea I ever heard. Who let you in here?"

Display ideas visually.

- **Especially helpful for showing:**
  - Comparisons;
  - Percentages;
  - Rankings of alternatives;
  - Correlations between variables;
  - Chronology or a time series of events; and
  - Conceptual models or relationships.
- **Visuals should clarify, simplify and reinforce.**
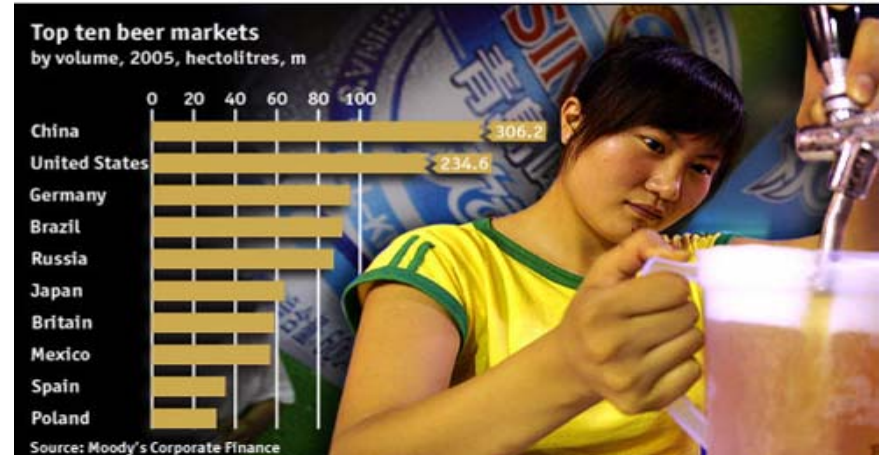 - They should aid in understanding.

USA Today versus The Economist
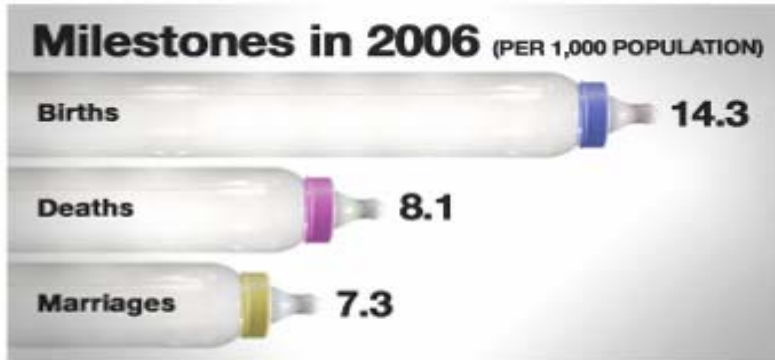
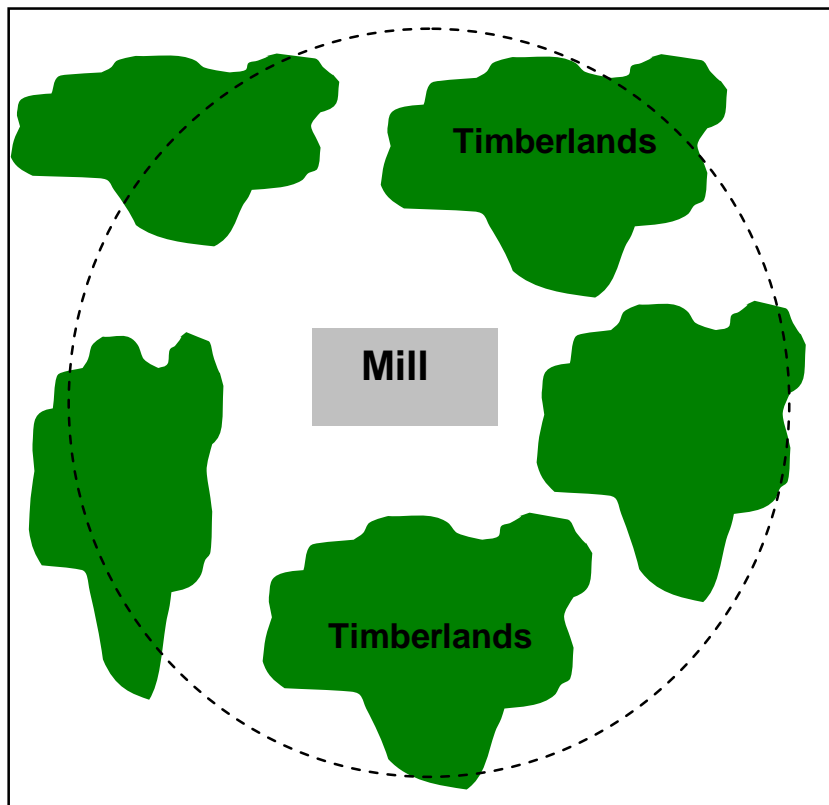By David Stuckey and Keith Carter, USA TODAY
Source: cdc.gov

By Anne R. Carey and Keith Carter, USA TODAY
Source: www.fossil.energy.gov

USA Today figures from 10/25 USA Today Snapshot at www.usatoday.com;
Economist figures from At a Glance chart gallery at www.economist.com

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14

Different timber market perspectives lead to different questions to answer.

Wood Procurement

Timberland Investor

Timberlands

Mill

Timberlands

Timberlands

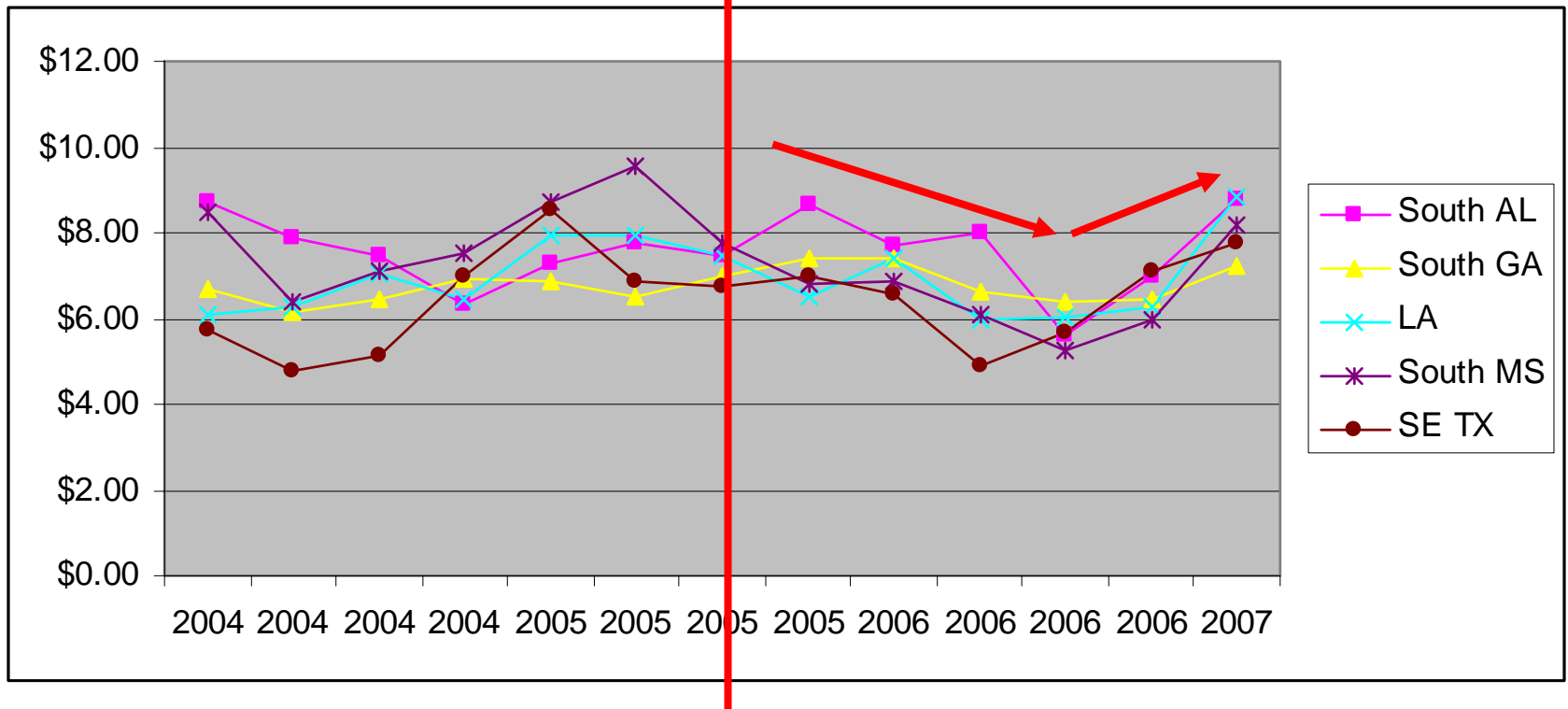Saw mill

Paper mill
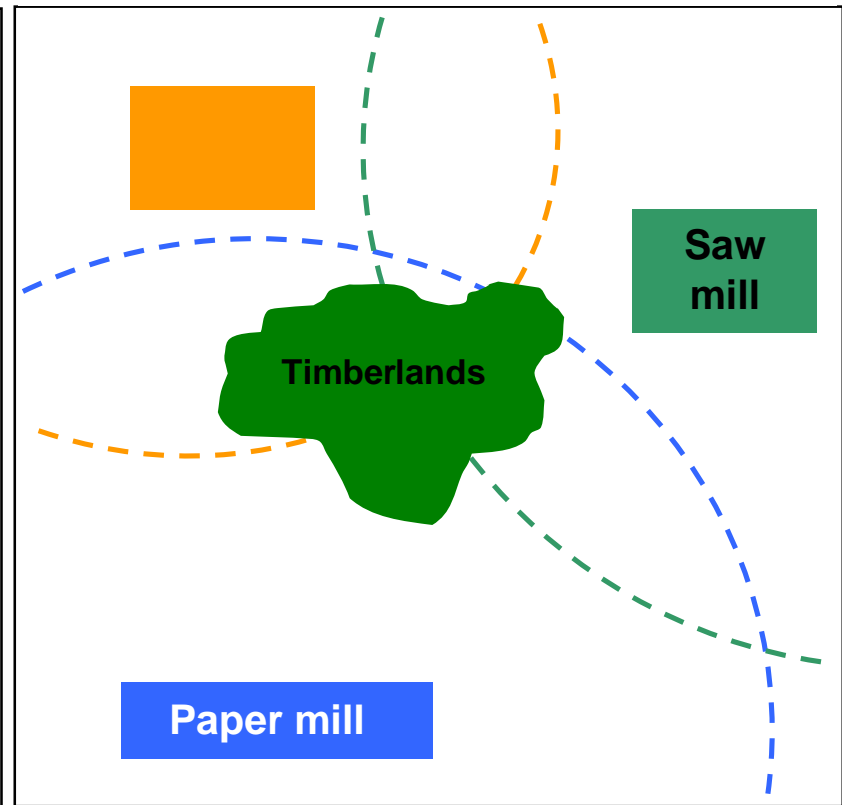
- - - - - Mill procurement areas

Create the figure live.

- Use PowerPoint or a flipchart.

- Involves the audience.

- Turns one slide into five.

- Introduces each element of the figure.

- Carries the audience; tells the story.

Timber prices are both cyclical and resilient.

Pine Pulpwood Prices, Q1 2004 – Q1 2007

Legend: South AL, South GA, LA, South MS, SE TX

Hurricane Katrina

Data: Timber Mart-South

Resources

Alley, Michael. 2003. *The Craft of Scientific Presentations.* Springer. New York, NY. 241 pages.

Chambers, Harry E. 2001. *Effective Communication Skills for Scientific and Technical Professionals*. Basic Books, Cambridge, MA. 321 pages.

Matthews, Clifford. 2000. *A Guide to Presenting Technical Information.* Professional Engineering Publishing. London. 310 pages.