Using Monroe's Motivated Sequence to Organize Genealogy Methodology Presentations

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Alan Monroe (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monroe's_motivated_sequence) developed a system whereby those wishing to persuade people could most effectively accomplish that goal. In use since the 1930s (and probably before that, but without the identifying labels and clearly outlined components), Monroe's Motivated Sequence (MMS) has been used to convince people to do everything from keeping the environment clean to quitting smoking to voting for a particular candidate. It has proven effective because it follows carefully orchestrated steps that outline a logical progression for the reader/listener. We can see these steps subtly employed in commercials, political campaigns, and other persuasive arenas.

What does this have to do with genealogy speaking? In many (though not all) of our presentations, our aim is to convince the audience that the methodology we are promoting is effective—the steps we use to present our "argument" enforce this. My suggestion is that, by consciously applying the MMS, we can reach the audience in an organized manner, assisting in their logical processing of our points. And, in some cases, we need all the help we can get to reach the audience.

The five steps are as follows:

Attention
Need
Satisfaction
Visualization
Action

We can easily see how these are employed in a commercial or political campaign: **Attention** getters are often visual (sad faces of puppies bred in a puppy mill) or rhetorical questions ("How long are you going to live with the sorry excuse for a governor?") or a quotation ("The surgeon general has stated *Smoking has been shown to be hazardous to your health*."). Then the **need** is identified (though it is often incorporated in the attention step). Puppies need to be rescued, the governor needs to be replaced, or the health of America—and you, in particular—is dependent upon the cessation of smoking. But how to accomplish these?

The **satisfaction** step explains how the need can be fulfilled (often this is a lengthy process). With your donation, the puppies can all be rescued (and for just pennies a day); with your vote, the recommended governor can unseat the incumbent; and with you ceasing smoking (by using XYZ product), you will not only save yourself, but those around you who might otherwise succumb to second-hand smoke. Can't you **visualize** the end result? Puppies in loving homes and puppy mills closed down for good; a profitable and democratic government for your state; and a no cancer plus happy family for you! Often the use of actual visuals accomplishes this fourth step: puppies jumping and playing (quite a contrast to those sad-faced animals from the first step); people enjoying the benefits of a better government (perhaps scenes of clean parks, working traffic signals, or smooth-running community meetings); and you breathing freely (maybe a visual of a healthy lung x-ray or a doctor nodding and smiling).

Finally, the **action** step: the address where you can send your puppy-mill-eradication donation, the large check mark in the box next to the name of the recommended candidate, or the name (in huge letters) of the End Smoking device. You can see people grabbing pencils and paper to scribble down the needed information, reaching for telephones, blogging to their followers, etc. Tada! Another cause has been furthered by our friend Alan Monroe.

Now, for the genealogy lecturer: let's apply the same steps.

Attention:

When we begin our lectures, this is the first thing we do or say. I remember an APG Roundtable on organization that began with the moderator running in, slightly late, to begin the program. Did she get our attention? You bet! But it doesn't have to be that

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extreme. It could be simply a smile, a nod, and a statement of your topic. Or maybe one of those provocative, rhetorical questions: "Have you ever wondered where your ancestor went between Census records?" You have my attention! I have absolutely pondered about that. Are you going to help me find the answer to that mystery? I'm ready! Go for it!

Need:

"Most of us have ancestors with *empty years*: periods of time when we know he/she was alive, but we don't know where. If this is one of your genealogy stumbling blocks, tonight's information just might help reveal those hidden years and activities." If I have not already been interested by the initial attention-getter, this clarification of why I need the information in this program is sure to convince me to grab my note paper and get ready to learn where great-grandfather Frank really was during the Civil War. And the speaker is using some examples of documents to further illustrate the need (possibly some case study data that shows those *forgotten years* were spent doing something pertinent—parenting, working on a government project, serving prison time, or fighting in a war, perhaps).

Satisfaction:

As already noted, this might be a lengthy step for the presenter (possibly the bulk of the presentation, though that role might have been shared with the previous step—there is no set formula). Here is where the examples of how to locate the documents are revealed: how to do an Ancestry.com search, how to find historical society websites, what NARA documents might be helpful, etc. If this step is short-changed, then the result will be a batch of useless notes for the audience member. **Satisfaction** is what the attendee is there for. Your examples are interesting, maybe humorous, but useless if they appear irrelevant to my research. It is better to more clearly explain the Satisfaction step than to overdo the examples in the Need step. I promise, the attendees are going to be able to see the application of your points to their own circumstances if a correlation can be drawn and you are clear in your reasoning and explanation.

Visualization:

Often this is a review of the salient points, but now making application to the attendees' ancestors and the answers to their riddles that your information is now going to provide.

Action:

This step involves a couple of things: any helpful hints that might have been missed, an urging to not let a lot of time lapse between the presentation you just gave and the follow-through of the audience members. But it also includes the request for questions (note: to use the sequence as outlined here, attendees should have been asked to hold their questions until the end—this helps you keep your timing in check and allows the logical progression to proceed uninterrupted). The question/answer period gives you the opportunity to clarify anything that might have been confusing to your audience. Try not to let this period take away from the impact of your carefully outlined lecture.

Does Monroe's Motivated Sequence work? Well, try it for yourself. Keeping these steps in mind will help create an automatic outline for your presentation, allowing you to stay on track and keeping your audience from getting lost. It is fine for you to even clarify the steps with strategically positioned PowerPoint slides that show you are now moving to the next part of the process. Sometimes slides that state "Why should you care about this" (to precede the Need step); "Let's look at how this can be accomplished" (to precede the Satisfaction step); "What can happen when you use this methodology" or "Let's review" (to precede the Visualization step); and "Remember to ____" or "Allow me to answer your questions" (to precede the Action step) can allow the note-taking audience member to stay with your train of thought.

Don't lose your audience in a mish-mash of examples, explanations, rhetorical devices, etc. Help them and you stay focused on the aim of the presentation: to make better genealogists.

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