Guide the Conversation: Bridge, Hook and Flag

These are three techniques for guiding a conversation so that you are sure to get the main point or points that you want to be remembered across to your target audiences.

Bridge. This technique will allow you to move from an area in the conversation that you don't want to discuss or that has the potential to sidetrack the issue and get the conversation back to your message. If the legislator says, for example, "Why shouldn't we be supporting a policy that will help software companies? Isn't a good economy good for libraries?" Rather than getting into a discussion about the economy and whether or not new legislation will help the economy overall, you can use this as a platform for your point by saying: "I think the real question is," and go back to your main point. For example, "I think the real question is "doesn't everyone benefit from good consumer laws?" Then, answer that question!

Hook. This is a technique that can lead your listener to follow up on your first point, allowing you to get a second point in. For example, you can say, "There are two crucial considerations that need to be taken into account before you support this proposed policy. The first is," then expand on that point. Likely, the legislator or staff person will then ask you (or allow you) to follow up with the second point. This keeps the conversational ball in your court longer and gives you the opportunity to make both (or all) points.

Flag. This technique is the easiest, and most people use it unconsciously all the time. Flagging alerts your listeners to what you consider most important. It's an excellent way to emphasize the key point or points you want the audience to remember. Flagging is simply giving your audience a verbal clue about what is essential: "The most important thing to remember is . . ." or "If you remember nothing else, please remember these two points . . ."