

Clarify Your Objective

The keys to a successful presentation? Knowing what outcome you want. Understanding your audience. And considering the setting in which

you'll give your talk.

Define your objective



The objective of your presentation is the outcome that you want. In other words, what do you want your audience to know, believe, or do after listening to your presentation?

Examples of presentation objectives include:

- **Selling a product or service**—to boost revenues for your organization
- **Persuading senior management to support a new approach**—because you believe the approach will generate important advantages such as cost savings or process efficiencies
- **Updating other business units on the progress of a new initiative**—so you can continue to get funding for the project
- **Demonstrating how a product or service works**—so the marketing team can develop an effective advertising campaign for the offering
- **Explaining a business strategy to your employees**—so they can see how their everyday work supports the strategy
- **Showing how a new business process works**—so employees can correctly perform the process

Your objective will drive the development of your presentation, including:

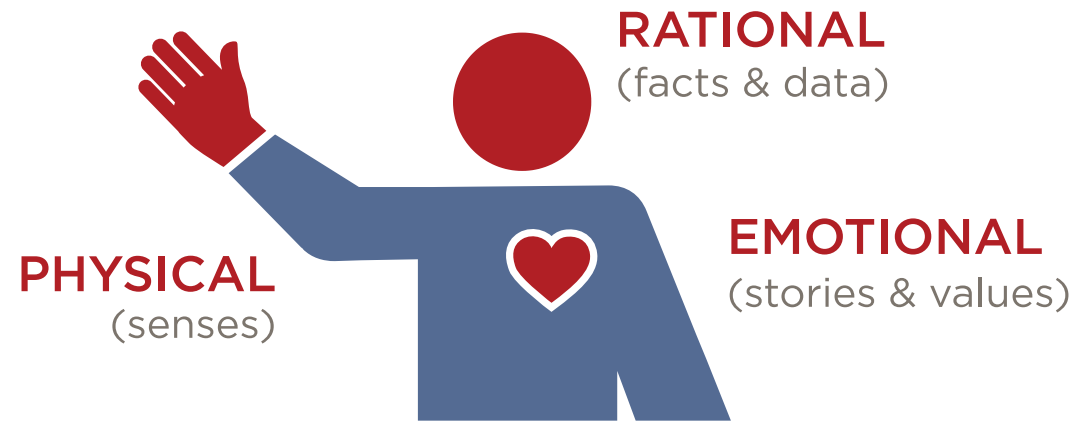
- **Whether to give the presentation at all.** There may be too much detail or vital but hard-to-absorb data that would be better presented in a report.
- **What to say.** As you pull together content for your presentation, you'll want to include only those examples and details that help you achieve your objective.
- **How to say it.** You'll need to figure out how to structure your presentation—how best to sequence your ideas so you'll achieve your objective.

EXAMPLE

Suppose your objective is to sell a product to a prospective customer. You'll probably want to outline the features of the product, explain how those features create benefits that the customer values, show how the product differs from others currently available, and explain how the customer can purchase the product or service.

Regardless of your objective, a presentation of any kind is a sell: You're trying to get your audience to do or think something in particular. To sell successfully, no matter what your objective is, you'll need to connect with your audience on all levels:

Connect to Your Audience



- **Rational**—through the facts and information you provide
- **Emotional**—through the stories you share and values you evoke
- **Physical**—through sight and sound, and possibly touch, taste, or smell

Know your audience

To achieve your objective, you need to know your audience. This is critical for determining how to frame your key message and shape your presentation. Consider:

- Who are your listeners, and what's their relationship to your topic?
- Are your listeners likely to be enthusiastic about the ideas you'll be presenting? Polite? Apathetic? Hostile?
- Is the subject of your talk controversial, familiar, or new—or a combination—for this audience? How well informed are your listeners about your topic? What do they need to know about it?
- What do they expect from your presentation?
- Are they accustomed to a certain type of presentation?
- What do they know about you? What more do they need to know? How do they feel about you?
- Why are they present? Are they there by choice or have they been required to attend?

When you make a presentation, it's easy to feel like you're the central figure, or "star." You're addressing people who came to hear *you*. But you're not the star—they are. It's up to *them* to embrace or reject the ideas you're presenting.

Your listeners won't necessarily welcome your ideas. After all, you're making a presentation because you have an objective: You want your audience to change their behavior or beliefs in some way. And people find it hard to change.

Connect with Any Audience

No one likes to sit through a boring presentation or—even worse—one where the speaker is clueless or offensive. Audiences lose patience with a presenter who doesn't know them well enough to deliver material that's of value to them. I've helped people prepare presentations that are delivered around the world for over 20 years. And there are five things you can do before your next speech to make sure you connect with your audience.

Prepare your speech by getting to know your audience ahead of time. Far too many presenters skip this step, but it is crucial. If you don't know them—*really know them*—you will see your audience as a homogeneous, faceless clump, and then you'll have a hard time getting them engaged. Take the time to find out who they are and what matters to them.

Second, define how you want to change your audience. What do you want them to do differently as a result of hearing you speak? Too many speakers throw out a bunch of data without thinking about what they want their audience to do with it. Instead, start with a goal, and then organize your data around that goal. Throughout your speech, switch back and forth between talking about where they are now and where they could be if they took your advice. Alternating between the present reality and the future will create a tension that keeps them listening. And an audience who knows where you want them to go is much more likely to follow your idea through to the end.

Third, find some common ground. This is easy to do if you're speaking to your friends, your family, or community, of course, but if you're talking with colleagues or even strangers, you can still find ways to connect. For instance, when I went to China on my book tour, I replaced my usual domestic examples of great communicators with examples from Chinese history. Taking the time to study their perspective made my listeners much more receptive to my message.

Next, you need to lose the jargon. Most professions have industry terminology, but if you're trying to create a human connection with a broad group of people, jargon will only get in the way. So ask someone who's outside of your field to look over your speech and highlight any unfamiliar terminology.

Finally, you need to anticipate resistance. Think about all the objections that the audience might bring up. Share your concepts with a few people and have them share their reactions and how they think that your audience might resist. That will not only make your presentation stronger, but it will prepare you for the Q&A.

And you should always do a Q&A. It will make you seem more sympathetic and give people a chance to be heard.

If you think about your audience thoroughly before you build your next presentation, you'll connect empathetically to them and your content will bring more value to them.

Understand the setting

No one makes a presentation in a vacuum. The setting in which you'll be giving your talk plays a major role in how your audience will receive it. It will also drive other aspects of your talk, such as your tone of voice, the words you choose, and even how you dress.

Consider these issues:

Issue	Questions to ask
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will this presentation be a one-time-only event? Or will you deliver it occasionally or on a regular basis? • How much time will you have? Can your message be delivered in that time? If not, what changes do you need to make to accommodate the set time frame? • When you present, will the audience have just finished eating, drinking, working, or doing something active? Will they be tired or alert? When will they have had their last break? • Will you be speaking first thing in the morning? In the middle of the day? Late afternoon? Evening?
Degree of formality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the situation formal or informal?
Other speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will speak before you? Who comes after you? How might this affect the audience's response to your talk? • Will you be the first or last speaker of the program?
Physical versus remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have a choice, what's the ideal setting for your presentation—in person or remote?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If it's in person, what control will you have over the environment? For instance, can you use sophisticated lighting or interactive tools, such as a device to survey your audience's responses? • Will this be a virtual presentation? If so, how will you keep your audience engaged despite the lack of eye contact and physical presence? • Will some audience members be in the room with you while others are taking part remotely? If so, how should you address both groups?
Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will you be able to take questions at the end of your presentation? Or will questions be held for a panel of speakers after all presentations have been completed? • Will you need to provide audience members with copies of your presentation or other background materials?



A Selection of Editor's Choice Articles

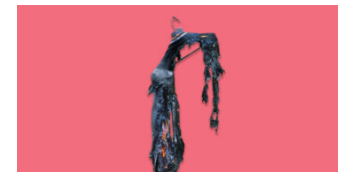
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ARTICLE
How to Moderate a Panel Discussion
⌚ 5 MINUTES



ARTICLE
To Give a Great Presentation, Distill Your Message to Just 15 Words



ARTICLE
How to Blow a Presentation to the C-Suite

PUBLISHED 19 DEC 2018

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PUBLISHED 07 NOV 2018

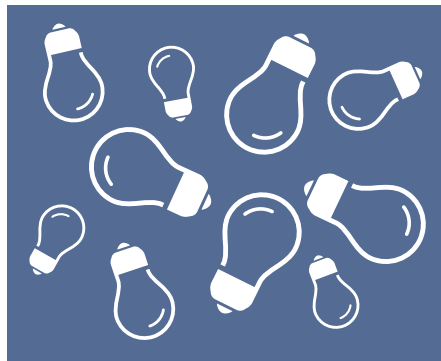
⌚ 5 MINUTES
PUBLISHED 17 OCT 2018

Crystallize Your Message

The best presentations convey one big idea that matters to the audience. Learn three tips for making your message crystal-clear in your own mind, so you can convey it clearly to your listeners.

Outline your “big idea” *

When you’re thinking about making a presentation, you will probably have lots of ideas you want to convey. These ideas may be fascinating or clever, but you can’t squeeze them all into one presentation. If you try, your listeners will have to work too hard to figure out what they should focus on—or why they should care. And they’ll resent you for making them do all that work.



To make a compelling case, you need to clarify your **one big idea**: the single most important point you want to communicate that will change your audience’s thinking or behavior. When your listeners understand your one big idea, they’ll be more likely to change their thinking or behavior in the ways you want.

So express your big idea in a complete sentence that speaks to the audience's concerns—what matters most to them—and that answers the question, “What’s my presentation about?”

EXAMPLE

Suppose you'll be giving a presentation on how software updates can help your organization. Instead of saying your presentation “is about software updates,” explain that it's “about why the production department will keep missing key deadlines unless we keep our workflow management software absolutely up to date.”

Organize your thoughts

Maybe your big idea involves a new product development plan that could help your unit capture valuable opportunities in new markets. Or perhaps it's about a new service your group has created that could help prospective customers significantly decrease their costs and boost their revenues.

If you're like most people, you might be unsure which combination of arguments, data, and examples will best make the case for your big idea. You're wondering how, exactly, you should organize your thoughts so that everything you say will support it.

To start organizing your thoughts:

- **Figure out how to support your case with evidence.** What facts and information should you use? Where in your presentation should you provide each piece of evidence? *Remember:* Opinions will have far less impact on your audience than hard evidence.
- **Identify the emotional underpinnings of your message.** Explain to yourself why your audience should care about your message. What might you say in different sections of your presentation to appeal to your listeners' emotions?
- **Identify pivotal moments in your presentation.** At what points will it be important to get your audience members' participation, reactions, agreement, or buy-in?

Research supporting materials

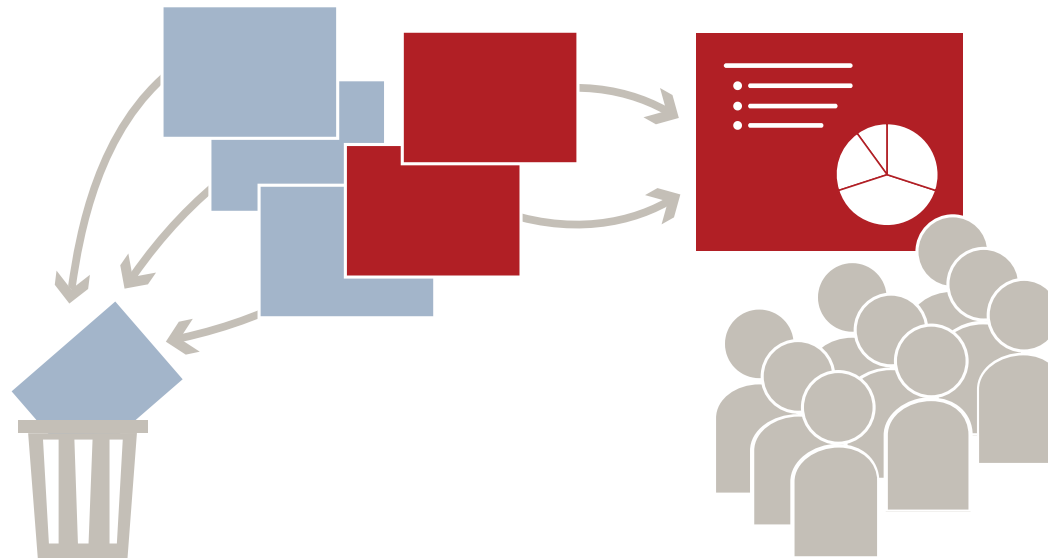
Once you clarify what your presentation is about—your big idea—and organize your thoughts about what you'll say, you'll know what supporting materials you'll need to find.

Supporting materials include the arguments, information, facts, examples, statistics, and other content you'll provide to back up your big idea. They also include compelling anecdotes, illustrations, and other details that will help you shape your presentation later.

Supporting materials can come from a number of different sources, including:

- Other presentations
- Industry studies
- News and journal articles
- Research reports
- Surveys
- Books
- Blog posts
- Podcasts

As you prepare your presentation, you'll want to research and gather lots of supporting materials. That way, you'll have plenty to choose from when it's time to pick the best pieces. At that point, you'll filter and sort the materials you've gathered, identifying the pieces that will *most* rally your audience behind your big idea.



When you reach this stage, imagine yourself using a sharp hatchet to cut out the least relevant materials and trim the content down to the most powerful. For instance, maybe you'll include compelling new findings that your intended audience might not know about, counterintuitive statistics, unconventional but potent applications of your idea, or competitors' success stories.

As you whittle down your pile of supporting materials, remember: Everything you end up saying in your presentation should tie back to your one big idea.

EXAMPLE

Let's say you're preparing a presentation on why your organization should develop a new product. Your objective is to persuade decision makers to invest in your idea. So you keep supporting materials that include the new product's profit and revenue potential. You include data about changing demographics that show a big wave of potential new buyers hitting in the next five years. You reject information you found about general trends related to product development, such as agility. But you also gather information that will help you counter arguments your audience might make against your idea.



A Selection of Editor's Choice Articles

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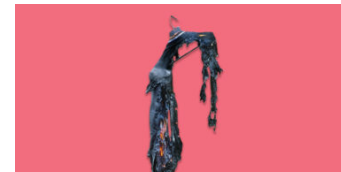
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Craft the Content

How you organize the content of your presentation makes a huge difference. Find out how to structure the contents of your talk strategically—to grab and keep your audience's attention and inspire them to take action by the time you've finished.

Why crafting content matters

While preparing a presentation, you gather lots of supporting materials—facts, statistics, example, arguments, and stories related to the one big idea you plan to communicate to your audience. You need to organize all those materials. That means figuring out which ones you'll use in which parts of your presentation.

You also want to hook your audience in a very brief opening, effectively structure the main part of your presentation, and anticipate likely opposition. And you'll want to end with a call to action if your purpose is to get your audience to think, believe, or act on something.

A well-organized presentation makes it easy for your audience members to follow your thinking and absorb your ideas. And when you make things easy for them, they'll be more likely to adopt the new behaviors or beliefs you want them to.

But deciding how to craft the content of your talk is about more than just thinking through the logical flow of your ideas. You also need to:

- **Organize your content in a way that taps into your listeners' emotions.** That way, you can win their hearts as well as their minds.
- **Avoid trying to cover too much ground in your presentation.** When you attempt to include too much, you dilute your points. Your presentation will seem abstract and thus dry to your audience. It's better to go deep rather than broad. But take care not to overwhelm listeners with *too* much detail. Remember: Your audience members are intelligent. It's okay to let them figure some things out for themselves during your talk. *

The opening

An effective opening hooks the audience in the first few sentences. You can also use the opening to set the stage for the main part of your talk, such as briefly previewing your key messages or establishing your credibility.

Hook your audience

Open your presentation with a hook to grab your audience's attention in the first few moments of your talk. A hook can be a comment, question, relevant story, statement, or example.

Here are some tips for crafting a great hook: *

- **Tell a personal story.**

EXAMPLE

A forensics expert plans to begin his talk about DNA testing by telling about how he used the technology to identify civilian war casualties buried in mass graves.

- **Throw out a quirky fact.**

EXAMPLE

The author of a trend-defying, streamlined cookbook decides to pitch his idea to a publisher by pointing out that the average family spends just 15 minutes preparing dinner.

- **Make them curious about what's coming.**

EXAMPLE

The head of a scientific institution plans to deliver an update of the institution's progress and map out challenges that lie ahead. He elects to start his presentation by asking his audience, "What do the years 1866, 1953, and 2040 have in common?"

- **Use a pertinent quote.**

EXAMPLE

A manager planning to give a talk about the importance of innovation in high-tech fields like telecommunications and computing decides to start by sharing something said in 1977 by Digital Equipment Corporation's president, chairman, and founder Ken Olson: "There's no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

- **Draw a hypothetical scenario.**

EXAMPLE

A product manager for a new line of smart sensors that monitor oil wells creates excitement in a presentation to prospective customers by saying, "Imagine a world in which all the wells in your oilfield wirelessly report their own status to a website anyone in your group can access from anywhere. Well, you needn't imagine. This world is already here."

Energize Your Meeting with A Story

Let me tell you about a meeting that I had that I was very apprehensive about early on, and it actually turned out quite well. It was a meeting about a risky decision that we were about to recommend, and the CFO was in the room, and the head of sales was in the room, the head of marketing was in the room.

What I decided to do was to tell a story as a way into this meeting that I was not looking forward to. And this is a story about my time growing up on Oahu, in Hawaii, as a kid. There is a large rock on the North Shore of Oahu at Waimea Bay. It's about 20 to 30 feet high—it's pretty large. And what you're supposed to do is climb up the back, and then get up to the top and jump off of it into the ocean. Now clearly, jump too late, and the water will go out, and you might hit the sand. Jump too close to the rock, and you'll hit the rock. Jump too far, you might get swept out to sea. So timing, distance—everything had to be just the right way, and then it was a lot of fun.

So after I told the story, what I found was that what I had unwittingly done was provided a mental and emotional model for the entire meeting. Each of the executives, as we talked about the analysis, which is dry numbers and a risky decision that had a lot of implications, would refer to the story about—"Well, wait a minute. You're saying we should jump at this time, and I think we should jump at that time." Or, "You're suggesting something that sounds like we're jumping too far." And that's when I knew that the story was a success.

Kicking off a meeting with a story doesn't always become the framework of the conversation, but I find that, generally speaking, it leads to a smile. And that smile changes the tenor of a meeting, it gets more engagement out of the audience, and leads to much, much better meetings than I originally started out with.

Complete your introduction

After you've hooked your audience, use the rest of your opening to *briefly*:

- **Define the purpose of your talk.** "Today, I'm going to explain how this new way of handling customer complaints works and why it's better than the old way."
- **Establish your credibility.** "At my last company, I redesigned call center processes and was able to help the team improve its efficiency."
- **Describe how the audience will benefit if they listen to your presentation.** "Once you've mastered this new approach, you'll be able to resolve customer complaints faster and more effectively."
- **Briefly preview the main points you'll cover in your talk.** "We'll start by looking at the problems with the existing process. Then we'll move to how the new process works and how you can learn to perform it correctly."

Create an Effective Presentation

I've worked with thousands of executives over the years, and presentations are a problem for almost everyone. One of my recent clients was a seasoned health care industry executive. He was a confident speaker. But every time he presented to colleagues or gave speeches at industry events, he struggled to keep the audience's attention. So what was he doing wrong? He wasn't thinking enough about shaping the content to respect the needs of the audience.

Here are five steps to creating a great audience-centered presentation.

First, find a story to tell. Start by telling one of the basic human stories. There are five that grab us every time: Stranger in a strange land, for when your company or industry is facing a new competitive landscape. Revenge, or let's beat the competition. A love story, which is good for M&A or product launches. Rags to riches, for entrepreneurs. And the quest—we're in search of something important.

Two, draw them in quickly. The classic mistake is to start with an agenda slide or a self-introduction. Don't start by talking about you; attention spans are too short for that. You have one to three minutes to pull them in and engage them. So give them a factoid that grabs them, or ask a rhetorical question, or simply start telling the story you've chosen in a personal and compelling way. Make it about the audience.

Three, explain the threat. Colleagues or conference attendees come into a presentation asking, "Why should I care? Why should I pay attention?" Their internal monologues—about their own job, their own kids—will trump yours every time. So point out a problem that only you can solve. Spend as much time describing the problem as you do explaining how to fix it. That's essential to engage the audience's emotions, as well as their intellects.

Four, outline the solution. Explain to your audience in simple terms how you can help them. Show them your expertise and your body of knowledge, but don't overwhelm them with information. No more than five steps.

Five, give them an action step. Get your audience to do something right there in the room. Now that you've identified a problem and solution, they're itching to do something about it. So have them write down a list of three to-do's or have them verbally commit to a project. That will become a talisman.

To be a truly effective public speaker, you have to have great content that you're passionate about and that takes the audience on a decision-making journey. Focus on the audience, and you'll be well on the way to achieving the other essential for a great presentation: powerful delivery.

The body

After the opening comes the body—the main part of your presentation. You need to think carefully about how you'll structure the body of your talk. There are several options, and the structure you choose will depend on your audience and the situation.

The problem/solution structure

If the goal of your presentation is to persuade your audience to buy something—whether it's a product or a new idea—you can use the **problem/solution** structure for the main part of your talk.

When you use this structure, you start by acknowledging a problem that your audience cares about. You'll want to describe this problem in enough detail to show your audience that you know what their problem looks and feels like. You may also decide to ask questions that get your listeners thinking about how bad the problem really is. *

Describe a Problem You Know Your Audience Has

**EXAMPLE**

The product manager for a new line of smart sensors that monitor oil wells decides to paint a vivid picture of a problem based on what he sees prospective customers doing: “You’re currently sending guys out in cars to drive around your oilfields and record data about each well’s temperature and flow rate manually, on clipboards, right? How much is that costing you in terms of time, fuel, vehicle maintenance, and payroll? And how often do these guys make mistakes?”

By describing a problem you know your audience has, you create a bond between them and you—and you increase their willingness to hear your ideas for change. *

That gets them ready to hear the next part of your talk, where you’ll describe your solution to the problem you identified. Here you will:

- Phrase your solution in terms of the audience's problems

- Help the audience visualize the benefits of your solution
- Involve the audience in developing a path forward

EXAMPLE

The product manager for the oil-well sensors identifies three powerful benefits that his sensors offer customers: the sensors can reduce costs by 20%, they can decrease errors in oil-well status readings by 15%, and the technology will pay for itself within two years.

By presenting a problem and then a solution in your talk, you describe “what is” and then introduce your vision of “what could be.” That contrast throws your audience a bit off balance—and jars them out of complacency. As a result, they’ll be much more likely to adopt the solution you’re proposing.

Other structures

If your presentation has purpose other than selling a product or idea, you’ll likely want to use something other than the problem/solution structure for the main part of your talk. To illustrate:

- **Informing other business units on the progress of a new initiative.** In this case, you might want to use a chronological structure—explaining step-by-step what’s been accomplished so far on the initiative.
- **Demonstrating how a product or service works.** A chronological structure might work for this purpose as well; you explain the steps that a customer would go through to use the product or service.
- **Explaining a business strategy to your employees.** You may want to use a more thematic structure in this case—such as explaining what’s happening in the business world that makes the new strategy so important, and how each person in your unit can help support the strategy.
- **Showing how errors are made in a business process.** Here you might choose a cause-effect structure, describing how bottlenecks create delays in one part of the process and how lack of sufficient training in the process lead to errors in other parts.

Mixing data and story *

Including data as you present a problem and then a solution is helpful, but telling a compelling story and presenting bold ideas can make your presentation even more persuasive. Stories and ideas fascinate people far more than organizations do.

EXAMPLE

At an energy conference, a city mayor and a former governor gave back-to-back talks about the conference theme. The mayor focused his talk on all the impressive environmentally responsible projects his city had undertaken. It gave the impression that he was boasting, and the audience grew bored. By contrast, the former governor focused her talk on how smarter use of energy could benefit everyone in her state. She backed up her idea with stories and examples that brought it to life. *

Depending on the purpose of your presentation and the way you structure it, you'll want to adjust the mix of data and storytelling that you use in the main part of your talk.

Most presentations lie somewhere on the continuum between a report, with lots of data, and a narrative, with lots of storytelling. A report is data-rich, exhaustive, and informative—but not very engaging. Stories help you connect with your audience, but listeners often want facts and information too. Great presenters layer story and information like a layer cake. And they understand that different types of talks require different blends of ingredients.

Find the perfect mix of data and story

Report Literal, Informational, Factual, Exhaustive			
Present research findings	Present financial information	Launch a product	Appeal fo
If you want to communicate information from a written report, send the full document to your audience in advance. Limit your talk to key takeaways. Avoid doing a long slide show that repeats content from the report.	Financial audiences love data and will want details. Satisfy them with facts, but add a narrative thread to appeal to their emotional side. Then present key takeaways visually; you'll help them find meaning in the numbers	Instead of covering only the product's specifications and features, focus on the value your product brings to the world and your audience. Tell stories that show how real people will use the product and why it will change their lives.	Prepare a structure. ➤ conveys y compellin Then let c answers c presentat questions concise ar

Build Trust with Storytelling

You can't be an effective leader unless people trust you. And a good way to build trust is by telling stories, because it builds credibility and relationships. You can tell stories about experiences you've had, what you've learned from them, and how those lessons apply to current business situations. When you tell a powerful story, people identify with you. They remember similar experiences they've had. And they realize they have something in common with you, which makes them more likely to trust you.

I've taught storytelling workshops for executives around the world. And I can tell you that the most compelling stories involve a conflict that must be resolved. So start a story by describing a problem or a situation you faced, and use sensory details to activate your listeners' imaginations.

Let's use my client Sam as an example. He manages a product development team. And one of his team's new offerings wasn't working out. So he called a team meeting and started telling a story about fishing with his old friend Al. The two men were sitting at the end of a rickety dock, fishing lines in the water. It's cold and damp, and the clouds were coming in. They'd been there all day and they hadn't caught a thing.

Now Sam introduces a complication to heighten his listeners' emotional involvement in the story. He tells his team how he feels a strong tug on the line. It's a big fish, and Sam starts reeling him in. But the fish is fighting hard. Then the line catches on one of the dock posts. And there's no way he's going to land that fish.

And then comes the resolution, giving listeners a sense of closure. Sam describes how Al jumps into the lake, fully clothed, to free the line so Sam can land the fish. Now, finally, Sam delivers the most important part of his story, the lesson he learned that applies to his team's current situation. Al's actions, Sam explains, taught him that sometimes you just have to jump in to solve a problem, without asking permission or waiting for everyone to agree. So Sam would do that with the problem product. He had decided the team would cut its losses and just start over.

The best stories capture your listeners' attention and end with a lesson that applies to your current business situation. They're also concise. They take less than 90 seconds to tell. And they're personal. They're about something that happened to you. Tell a powerful story, and people will identify with you and see you as someone they can trust. After that, they'll want to follow you.

Structuring for senior management *

In some cases, you may need to make a presentation to senior-level individuals such as department heads or senior executives.

EXAMPLE

You've prepared an analysis of emerging competitors in your organization's industry and presented your findings to your boss. She suggests that you share your findings with department heads in your organization.

You want to carefully structure your presentation to meet their information needs and time constraints.

The more senior someone is in the organizational hierarchy, the tougher an audience member that person may be. That's because senior leaders are busy. They have to make lots of high-stakes decisions. And they're impatient. Often, they have little time to weigh options—and they don't need all the details related to your presentation. For these reasons, many of them can't sit still for a long presentation that has a big reveal at the end. They'll just interrupt you before you finish your talk.

Your goal is to speak to what they care about right away, so they can make their decisions efficiently. Here are tips for presenting to executives:

- **Summarize early.** At the beginning of your presentation, state your high-level findings, conclusions, recommendations, and call to action. Then move on to your supporting data.
- **Set expectations.** Let your listeners know that you'll spend the first few minutes presenting your summary and the rest of the time on discussion. Even impatient executives will likely let you convey your main points uninterrupted if they know they'll soon get to ask questions.
- **Create summary slides.** If you'll be using a slide deck during your presentation, place a short overview of your key points at the front of the deck. Use the rest of your slides as an appendix. After you present your summary, let the group drive the conversation, and refer to the appendix slides only as relevant questions and comments arise.

Counter resistance *

Depending on the circumstances, you can expect at least some members of your audience to be resistant to your ideas. Their resistance can be logical, emotional, or practical. By anticipating these different forms of resistance, you can structure your talk in ways that deflate the opposition.

Logical resistance

Audience members might be opposed to your views, your cause, your affiliation, or what they think your proposed solutions might be.

Anticipate their potential arguments by researching articles, blog posts, and reports that challenge your stance. Use your insights to prepare responses to skeptical questions or comments you might get from your listeners.

EXAMPLE

You'll be making a presentation to peer managers about advantages organizations can gain by letting employees use their own smartphones and tablets to get work done in the office. You research the topic and find that organizations' biggest concerns about this "consumerization of IT"

include security of company data and loss of organizational control. You anticipate that your audience will ask you questions about these concerns, so you prepare responses that you believe will address these issues. Or you may even choose to bring up the issues within your talk.

Emotional resistance

If your ideas violate values, dogmas, or moral codes that your audience holds dear, think of ways you can present your ideas from their perspective.

EXAMPLE

You work for a large retailer that wants to open a store near a relatively rural town. Your boss asks you to meet with the town planning board to gauge local acceptance of the idea. Many planning board members are worried that the new store might put long-standing local retailers out of business.

In your talk, you assert that the store will provide employment opportunities for area residents, and that your organization plans to hire local people for managerial positions. You back up your claim by presenting statistics on the number of new management jobs your company brought to 10 similar-sized communities in the region over the past five years, along with average salaries. You also play video testimonials from several of those local managers.

Practical resistance

Sometimes what you'll be asking your audience to do will be physically or geographically difficult for them or will require personal sacrifice. In such cases, acknowledge that fact—and let them know some of the ways their efforts will be supported. Tell them how you plan to shoulder some of the burden yourself.

EXAMPLE

Suppose a new initiative you're presenting to your team means you'll be asking them to work nights and weekends to meet a tight deadline. You plan to explain that you, too, will work the same hours until the project is wrapped up, and that everyone will get some paid time off afterward.

The call to action *

You'll want the closing section of your presentation to contain a strong, clear call to action to your audience. In this part of your talk, you'll tell your listeners what you want them to do or believe. Asking a provocative question can help.

EXAMPLE

You're finishing a presentation proposing a new business process. Your call to action might be: "You've heard what I've had to say about this business process. Now you have a choice. You can stick with the same process, which means no implementation pain and no interruption of normal work flow. Or you can endure six weeks of annoyance that, by the end of the quarter, will cut input time by 40%. That will give you 40% more time to help customers—or win new ones. Which would you prefer?"

► Tips for using commands in your call to action *

EXAMPLE

Let's pretend you're a passenger in someone's car and you think they're driving too fast. A "hard command" would be "Slow down!" A "medium command" would be "You know the speed limit is 45 mph and police ticket a lot of speeders here." A "soft command" would be "A speeder was in a horrible accident last week in this exact spot."

"Soft commands" are more subtle, but they can trigger a profound reaction in your audience.

In the closing portion of your speech, avoid merely summarizing your arguments. That will just leave your audience bored and vaguely irritated. Audiences tend to remember the last thing they've heard. So if you summarize in your call to action, you'll dampen any enthusiasm your presentation may have generated. You want to leave your audience inspired to agree with your idea, commit to supporting you, or take a specific action.

Determine presentation length

Once you've established your opening, structured the main body of your presentation, and developed your call to action, you need to make it all fit into the time you have available to deliver the presentation.

Sometimes, you have to fit a speech into a timetable developed by others. Other times, you can control how much time you'll have to deliver your talk. But even then, you'll want to be concise. That way, you can keep your audience interested, and you respect their attention span and time.

When others control time

If you've been allotted 30 minutes to deliver a presentation, keep these guidelines in mind:

- It's better to make fewer points and make them well. Five points, plus or minus two, is the limit of important messages most adults can recall.
- If you don't have time to make a point clear or acceptable to your audience, save it for another presentation.
- Allow time for questions and answers.
- Plan what to delete if you run out of time.

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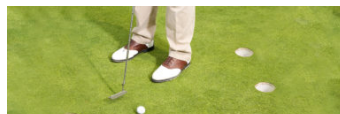
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- Make the presentation as long as it needs to be to convey your key message clearly and completely, but make sure it is concise.
- Allow time at the end for questions.



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Articles on Presentation Skills selected from Harvard Business Review. See all related articles here.





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⌚ 5 MINUTES

PUBLISHED 19 DEC 2018



ARTICLE

To Give a Great Presentation, Distill
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PUBLISHED 07 NOV 2018



ARTICLE

How to Blow a Presentation to the C-
Suite

⌚ 5 MINUTES

PUBLISHED 17 OCT 2018

Craft the Content

How you organize the content of your presentation makes a huge difference. Find out how to structure the contents of your talk strategically—to grab and keep your audience's attention and inspire them to take action by the time you've finished.

Why crafting content matters

While preparing a presentation, you gather lots of supporting materials—facts, statistics, example, arguments, and stories related to the one big idea you plan to communicate to your audience. You need to organize all those materials. That means figuring out which ones you'll use in which parts of your presentation.

You also want to hook your audience in a very brief opening, effectively structure the main part of your presentation, and anticipate likely opposition. And you'll want to end with a call to action if your purpose is to get your audience to think, believe, or act on something.

A well-organized presentation makes it easy for your audience members to follow your thinking and absorb your ideas. And when you make things easy for them, they'll be more likely to adopt the new behaviors or beliefs you want them to.

But deciding how to craft the content of your talk is about more than just thinking through the logical flow of your ideas. You also need to:

- **Organize your content in a way that taps into your listeners' emotions.** That way, you can win their hearts as well as their minds.
- **Avoid trying to cover too much ground in your presentation.** When you attempt to include too much, you dilute your points. Your presentation will seem abstract and thus dry to your audience. It's better to go deep rather than broad. But take care not to overwhelm listeners with *too* much detail. Remember: Your audience members are intelligent. It's okay to let them figure some things out for themselves during your talk. *

The opening

An effective opening hooks the audience in the first few sentences. You can also use the opening to set the stage for the main part of your talk, such as briefly previewing your key messages or establishing your credibility.

Hook your audience

Open your presentation with a hook to grab your audience's attention in the first few moments of your talk. A hook can be a comment, question, relevant story, statement, or example.

Here are some tips for crafting a great hook: *

- **Tell a personal story.**

EXAMPLE

A forensics expert plans to begin his talk about DNA testing by telling about how he used the technology to identify civilian war casualties buried in mass graves.

- **Throw out a quirky fact.**

EXAMPLE

The author of a trend-defying, streamlined cookbook decides to pitch his idea to a publisher by pointing out that the average family spends just 15 minutes preparing dinner.

- **Make them curious about what's coming.**

EXAMPLE

The head of a scientific institution plans to deliver an update of the institution's progress and map out challenges that lie ahead. He elects to start his presentation by asking his audience, "What do the years 1866, 1953, and 2040 have in common?"

- **Use a pertinent quote.**

EXAMPLE

A manager planning to give a talk about the importance of innovation in high-tech fields like telecommunications and computing decides to start by sharing something said in 1977 by Digital Equipment Corporation's president, chairman, and founder Ken Olson: "There's no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

- **Draw a hypothetical scenario.**

EXAMPLE

A product manager for a new line of smart sensors that monitor oil wells creates excitement in a presentation to prospective customers by saying, "Imagine a world in which all the wells in your oilfield wirelessly report their own status to a website anyone in your group can access from anywhere. Well, you needn't imagine. This world is already here."

Energize Your Meeting with A Story

Let me tell you about a meeting that I had that I was very apprehensive about early on, and it actually turned out quite well. It was a meeting about a risky decision that we were about to recommend, and the CFO was in the room, and the head of sales was in the room, the head of marketing was in the room.

What I decided to do was to tell a story as a way into this meeting that I was not looking forward to. And this is a story about my time growing up on Oahu, in Hawaii, as a kid. There is a large rock on the North Shore of Oahu at Waimea Bay. It's about 20 to 30 feet high—it's pretty large. And what you're supposed to do is climb up the back, and then get up to the top and jump off of it into the ocean. Now clearly, jump too late, and the water will go out, and you might hit the sand. Jump too close to the rock, and you'll hit the rock. Jump too far, you might get swept out to sea. So timing, distance—everything had to be just the right way, and then it was a lot of fun.

So after I told the story, what I found was that what I had unwittingly done was provided a mental and emotional model for the entire meeting. Each of the executives, as we talked about the analysis, which is dry numbers and a risky decision that had a lot of implications, would refer to the story about—"Well, wait a minute. You're saying we should jump at this time, and I think we should jump at that time." Or, "You're suggesting something that sounds like we're jumping too far." And that's when I knew that the story was a success.

Kicking off a meeting with a story doesn't always become the framework of the conversation, but I find that, generally speaking, it leads to a smile. And that smile changes the tenor of a meeting, it gets more engagement out of the audience, and leads to much, much better meetings than I originally started out with.

Complete your introduction

After you've hooked your audience, use the rest of your opening to *briefly*:

- **Define the purpose of your talk.** "Today, I'm going to explain how this new way of handling customer complaints works and why it's better than the old way."
- **Establish your credibility.** "At my last company, I redesigned call center processes and was able to help the team improve its efficiency."
- **Describe how the audience will benefit if they listen to your presentation.** "Once you've mastered this new approach, you'll be able to resolve customer complaints faster and more effectively."
- **Briefly preview the main points you'll cover in your talk.** "We'll start by looking at the problems with the existing process. Then we'll move to how the new process works and how you can learn to perform it correctly."

Create an Effective Presentation

I've worked with thousands of executives over the years, and presentations are a problem for almost everyone. One of my recent clients was a seasoned health care industry executive. He was a confident speaker. But every time he presented to colleagues or gave speeches at industry events, he struggled to keep the audience's attention. So what was he doing wrong? He wasn't thinking enough about shaping the content to respect the needs of the audience.

Here are five steps to creating a great audience-centered presentation.

First, find a story to tell. Start by telling one of the basic human stories. There are five that grab us every time: Stranger in a strange land, for when your company or industry is facing a new competitive landscape. Revenge, or let's beat the competition. A love story, which is good for M&A or product launches. Rags to riches, for entrepreneurs. And the quest—we're in search of something important.

Two, draw them in quickly. The classic mistake is to start with an agenda slide or a self-introduction. Don't start by talking about you; attention spans are too short for that. You have one to three minutes to pull them in and engage them. So give them a factoid that grabs them, or ask a rhetorical question, or simply start telling the story you've chosen in a personal and compelling way. Make it about the audience.

Three, explain the threat. Colleagues or conference attendees come into a presentation asking, "Why should I care? Why should I pay attention?" Their internal monologues—about their own job, their own kids—will trump yours every time. So point out a problem that only you can solve. Spend as much time describing the problem as you do explaining how to fix it. That's essential to engage the audience's emotions, as well as their intellects.

Four, outline the solution. Explain to your audience in simple terms how you can help them. Show them your expertise and your body of knowledge, but don't overwhelm them with information. No more than five steps.

Five, give them an action step. Get your audience to do something right there in the room. Now that you've identified a problem and solution, they're itching to do something about it. So have them write down a list of three to-do's or have them verbally commit to a project. That will become a talisman.

To be a truly effective public speaker, you have to have great content that you're passionate about and that takes the audience on a decision-making journey. Focus on the audience, and you'll be well on the way to achieving the other essential for a great presentation: powerful delivery.

The body

After the opening comes the body—the main part of your presentation. You need to think carefully about how you'll structure the body of your talk. There are several options, and the structure you choose will depend on your audience and the situation.

The problem/solution structure

If the goal of your presentation is to persuade your audience to buy something—whether it's a product or a new idea—you can use the **problem/solution** structure for the main part of your talk.

When you use this structure, you start by acknowledging a problem that your audience cares about. You'll want to describe this problem in enough detail to show your audience that you know what their problem looks and feels like. You may also decide to ask questions that get your listeners thinking about how bad the problem really is. *

Describe a Problem You Know Your Audience Has

**EXAMPLE**

The product manager for a new line of smart sensors that monitor oil wells decides to paint a vivid picture of a problem based on what he sees prospective customers doing: “You’re currently sending guys out in cars to drive around your oilfields and record data about each well’s temperature and flow rate manually, on clipboards, right? How much is that costing you in terms of time, fuel, vehicle maintenance, and payroll? And how often do these guys make mistakes?”

By describing a problem you know your audience has, you create a bond between them and you—and you increase their willingness to hear your ideas for change. *

That gets them ready to hear the next part of your talk, where you’ll describe your solution to the problem you identified. Here you will:

- Phrase your solution in terms of the audience's problems

- Help the audience visualize the benefits of your solution
- Involve the audience in developing a path forward

EXAMPLE

The product manager for the oil-well sensors identifies three powerful benefits that his sensors offer customers: the sensors can reduce costs by 20%, they can decrease errors in oil-well status readings by 15%, and the technology will pay for itself within two years.

By presenting a problem and then a solution in your talk, you describe “what is” and then introduce your vision of “what could be.” That contrast throws your audience a bit off balance—and jars them out of complacency. As a result, they’ll be much more likely to adopt the solution you’re proposing.

Other structures

If your presentation has purpose other than selling a product or idea, you’ll likely want to use something other than the problem/solution structure for the main part of your talk. To illustrate:

- **Informing other business units on the progress of a new initiative.** In this case, you might want to use a chronological structure—explaining step-by-step what’s been accomplished so far on the initiative.
- **Demonstrating how a product or service works.** A chronological structure might work for this purpose as well; you explain the steps that a customer would go through to use the product or service.
- **Explaining a business strategy to your employees.** You may want to use a more thematic structure in this case—such as explaining what’s happening in the business world that makes the new strategy so important, and how each person in your unit can help support the strategy.
- **Showing how errors are made in a business process.** Here you might choose a cause-effect structure, describing how bottlenecks create delays in one part of the process and how lack of sufficient training in the process lead to errors in other parts.

Mixing data and story *

Including data as you present a problem and then a solution is helpful, but telling a compelling story and presenting bold ideas can make your presentation even more persuasive. Stories and ideas fascinate people far more than organizations do.

EXAMPLE

At an energy conference, a city mayor and a former governor gave back-to-back talks about the conference theme. The mayor focused his talk on all the impressive environmentally responsible projects his city had undertaken. It gave the impression that he was boasting, and the audience grew bored. By contrast, the former governor focused her talk on how smarter use of energy could benefit everyone in her state. She backed up her idea with stories and examples that brought it to life. *

Depending on the purpose of your presentation and the way you structure it, you'll want to adjust the mix of data and storytelling that you use in the main part of your talk.

Most presentations lie somewhere on the continuum between a report, with lots of data, and a narrative, with lots of storytelling. A report is data-rich, exhaustive, and informative—but not very engaging. Stories help you connect with your audience, but listeners often want facts and information too. Great presenters layer story and information like a layer cake. And they understand that different types of talks require different blends of ingredients.

Find the perfect mix of data and story

			Story Dramatic, Expressive Evocative Persuasive
Financial information	Launch a product	Appeal for funding	Present to higher-ups
audiences love data want details. Satisfy facts, but add a thread to appeal to emotional side. Then key takeaways you'll help them find in the numbers	Instead of covering only the product's specifications and features, focus on the value your product brings to the world and your audience. Tell stories that show how real people will use the product and why it will change their lives.	Prepare a crisp, well- structured story arc that conveys your idea compellingly and concisely. Then let questions and answers drive the rest of your presentation. Anticipate questions and rehearse clear, concise answers.	Presenting formally to higher-ups in your organization is high-stakes, high-impact opportunity to take your listeners on a transformational journey. Use a clear story framework and aim to move them emotionally.

Build Trust with Storytelling

You can't be an effective leader unless people trust you. And a good way to build trust is by telling stories, because it builds credibility and relationships. You can tell stories about experiences you've had, what you've learned from them, and how those lessons apply to current business situations. When you tell a powerful story, people identify with you. They remember similar experiences they've had. And they realize they have something in common with you, which makes them more likely to trust you.

I've taught storytelling workshops for executives around the world. And I can tell you that the most compelling stories involve a conflict that must be resolved. So start a story by describing a problem or a situation you faced, and use sensory details to activate your listeners' imaginations.

Let's use my client Sam as an example. He manages a product development team. And one of his team's new offerings wasn't working out. So he called a team meeting and started telling a story about fishing with his old friend Al. The two men were sitting at the end of a rickety dock, fishing lines in the water. It's cold and damp, and the clouds were coming in. They'd been there all day and they hadn't caught a thing.

Now Sam introduces a complication to heighten his listeners' emotional involvement in the story. He tells his team how he feels a strong tug on the line. It's a big fish, and Sam starts reeling him in. But the fish is fighting hard. Then the line catches on one of the dock posts. And there's no way he's going to land that fish.

And then comes the resolution, giving listeners a sense of closure. Sam describes how Al jumps into the lake, fully clothed, to free the line so Sam can land the fish. Now, finally, Sam delivers the most important part of his story, the lesson he learned that applies to his team's current situation. Al's actions, Sam explains, taught him that sometimes you just have to jump in to solve a problem, without asking permission or waiting for everyone to agree. So Sam would do that with the problem product. He had decided the team would cut its losses and just start over.

The best stories capture your listeners' attention and end with a lesson that applies to your current business situation. They're also concise. They take less than 90 seconds to tell. And they're personal. They're about something that happened to you. Tell a powerful story, and people will identify with you and see you as someone they can trust. After that, they'll want to follow you.

Structuring for senior management *

In some cases, you may need to make a presentation to senior-level individuals such as department heads or senior executives.

EXAMPLE

You've prepared an analysis of emerging competitors in your organization's industry and presented your findings to your boss. She suggests that you share your findings with department heads in your organization.

You want to carefully structure your presentation to meet their information needs and time constraints.

The more senior someone is in the organizational hierarchy, the tougher an audience member that person may be. That's because senior leaders are busy. They have to make lots of high-stakes decisions. And they're impatient. Often, they have little time to weigh options—and they don't need all the details related to your presentation. For these reasons, many of them can't sit still for a long presentation that has a big reveal at the end. They'll just interrupt you before you finish your talk.

Your goal is to speak to what they care about right away, so they can make their decisions efficiently. Here are tips for presenting to executives:

- **Summarize early.** At the beginning of your presentation, state your high-level findings, conclusions, recommendations, and call to action. Then move on to your supporting data.
- **Set expectations.** Let your listeners know that you'll spend the first few minutes presenting your summary and the rest of the time on discussion. Even impatient executives will likely let you convey your main points uninterrupted if they know they'll soon get to ask questions.
- **Create summary slides.** If you'll be using a slide deck during your presentation, place a short overview of your key points at the front of the deck. Use the rest of your slides as an appendix. After you present your summary, let the group drive the conversation, and refer to the appendix slides only as relevant questions and comments arise.

Counter resistance *

Depending on the circumstances, you can expect at least some members of your audience to be resistant to your ideas. Their resistance can be logical, emotional, or practical. By anticipating these different forms of resistance, you can structure your talk in ways that deflate the opposition.

Logical resistance

Audience members might be opposed to your views, your cause, your affiliation, or what they think your proposed solutions might be.

Anticipate their potential arguments by researching articles, blog posts, and reports that challenge your stance. Use your insights to prepare responses to skeptical questions or comments you might get from your listeners.

EXAMPLE

You'll be making a presentation to peer managers about advantages organizations can gain by letting employees use their own smartphones and tablets to get work done in the office. You research the topic and find that organizations' biggest concerns about this "consumerization of IT"

include security of company data and loss of organizational control. You anticipate that your audience will ask you questions about these concerns, so you prepare responses that you believe will address these issues. Or you may even choose to bring up the issues within your talk.

Emotional resistance

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EXAMPLE

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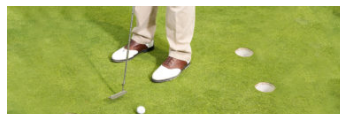
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Create High-Impact Media

Visuals and other media can make or break your presentation. Find out how to use a diverse array of media to liven up your talk and help your audience grasp and remember your ideas.

The power of media

Most presentations can benefit hugely from media. These may include visuals such as video clips, slides, charts, props, prototypes, flip charts, photographs, and handouts. Media may also include audio clips, music, simulations, games, and demonstrations.

People tend to respond better to visuals and other media than to the spoken word alone. When you make effective use of media, you help your audience:

- **Maintain attention.**

EXAMPLE

You show several photographs and play a sound clip to keep your audience interested as you share statistics on your industry.

- **Remember facts.**

EXAMPLE

You play a short video that depicts someone correctly carrying out a process you've described in your talk.

- **Understand ideas, relationships, or physical layouts.**

EXAMPLE

You present a series of before-and-after diagrams illustrating how reporting structures will change once your unit is reorganized.

- **Follow your talk's structure.**

EXAMPLE

You project a brief agenda or outline at the beginning of your talk. At the end of each section, you repeat the agenda, highlighting the next section.

Using different media can also help you be sure you're appealing to individuals' different styles of learning—which can be visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.

Learner type	They learn best by...	Help them by...
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absorbing information from simple images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using visuals that connect key concepts to triangles, circles, squares, and so forth
Auditory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to others talk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using storytelling, debates, and Q&A sessions
Kinesthetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grasping new ideas through physical activity, such as using their hands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving them opportunities to play games, work with models, and create charts and physical representations of what you want them to learn

Create Slides People Will Remember

We have all suffered through presentations that are really PowerPoint read-alongs, where the audience completely tunes out. But used the right way, slides can actually make your ideas stand out and be remembered. My firm helps companies create persuasive presentations, and we've created over a quarter of a million of them. And here's how we approach slide development.

First, we use slides selectively. If you're in a small, informal setting, we encourage clients to ditch the slides. Instead, spend time shaping a conversation. Use the whiteboard or prepare a few graphics to collaborate around. It's easier to make a personal connection without slides in the mix.

Second, we write the slides after we've prepared the speech. When you're creating a presentation, it's going to be really tempting to dive right into the slide software. But that software forces you to think about your content linearly and in small chunks. Instead, hammer out what you want to say and then think about the visuals that you need to support it. That way, you're going to craft your whole message instead of little bitty slide parts.

Next, we create slides that people can understand in three seconds. People can only process one stream of information at a time. If your slide is too complicated, they're going to be reading it instead of listening to you. So you need to simplify the visual content by only putting elements on the slide that are there for the audience to help remember what you said.

To keep slides simple, we storyboard one concept per slide. If you absolutely need to have more than one concept on a slide, use a build so that people won't be distracted by too much information at once. Before you open up your slide software, sketch out your slides on Post-it notes. The tiny size constraint will force you to simplify them, and then it lets you rearrange them really easily.

And finally, remember that slides are a visual medium. Use an informative diagram, an interesting chart, or a photograph that helps make your point. Don't just project the words that you're saying aloud onto a giant screen. If you really want people to have an outline of what you're saying, then just give them a handout.

With a little bit of thoughtful preparation of your visuals, we can stop boring presentations and make your next speech more persuasive.

Appropriate media

You can choose from among many different types of visuals and other media. A good rule of thumb is to use a mix of media in order to appeal to all types of learners—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Each media type has pros and cons. When selecting, consider flexibility, complexity, cost, and appropriateness for your presentation and your audience. Also, note that electronic media—such as PowerPoint slides and digital flip charts or whiteboards—have special advantages: You can e-mail them to your audience in advance, make them available for download, and archive them for future reference or access by others. You can also easily revise and update them.

Media types: Pros and cons

Type	Pros	Cons
Slides	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy to create, update, and transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not always project clearly

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible—you can show text, graphics, and some animation • Can show to remote audiences through conferencing technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology can break down, so you need a backup set of overhead slides • Can be tempting to create too many slides or to put too much content on slides
Video clips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for capturing audience's attention, especially in a large venue • Can be presented to remote audiences • Flexible—can be live-action, animated, augmented with text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential problems with video quality, such as pixilation or freezing
Physical flip charts, whiteboards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible—you can write down key phrases and draw pictures as you talk • Easy to use and inexpensive • Encourage interaction—people can come up and add to what's on the flip chart or whiteboard • With whiteboards, you can erase anything you've written or drawn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not effective for large groups; hard to read from the back of the room • Not useful for presenting to remote audiences • Difficult to transport—flip-chart stands are bulky • Content cannot be stored • Wear out over time
Digital flip charts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible—you can write down key phrases and draw pictures as you talk • Can be shared with remote audience members through technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Potential problems with technology • Can be hard to write neatly and clearly on the chart
Software simulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide real-time demonstration to help audience follow the logic of a key point, calculation, or other result • Encourage interaction between audience members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential problems with technology

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be shared with remote audience members 	
Handouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful for informal, short presentations • Inexpensive • Provide a place for audience members to take notes and refer to after the talk • Can contain supplemental background information of interest to audience • Can be presented to audience members in the room and to remote listeners as e-mailed or shared documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can distract audience from listening • Can be disruptive if distributed during your presentation • If printed and bound, can be bulky and unwieldy for audience members to carry around
Audio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for livening up a presentation • Can be presented to remote audiences • Useful as a complement to other media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential problems with sound quality, such as static or inadequate volume
Props	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer an element of surprise, thus a good tactic for grabbing audience's attention • Can encourage interaction from audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to transport if they're large or awkwardly shaped • Remote audience members can only view physical props and cannot handle or interact with them • Less effective for large audiences; hard to see in back of room
Prototypes and models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective for demonstrating a new product or service • Encourage interaction among audience members • Good for kinesthetic learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective only for smaller audiences • If physical, can't be shared with remote audience members • Can be difficult to transport if they're large or awkwardly shaped

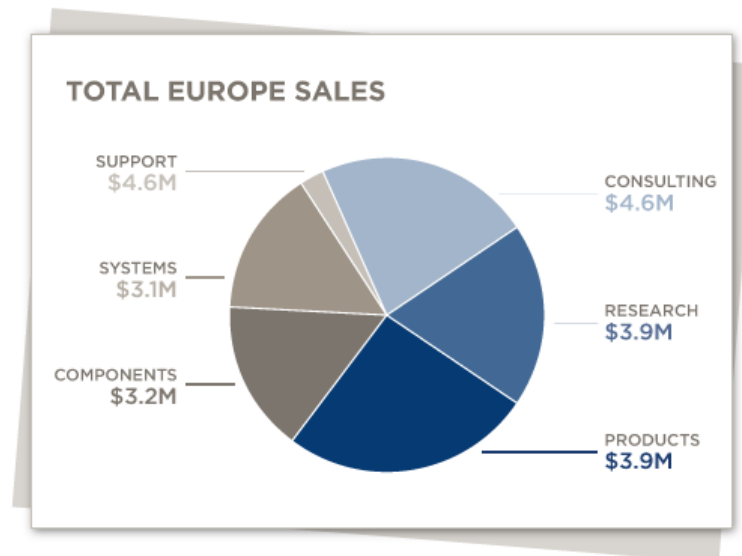
Use media effectively

To get the most impact from your visuals and other media:

- **Keep them simple.** Avoid trying to spell out everything on each slide or sheet, bullet by bullet. Resist any temptation to use lots of different typefaces and colors.
- **Use media to reinforce**—not substitute for—concepts. First develop the concepts you want to convey in your talk. Then create visuals and other media that will reinforce those concepts. You want your media choices to flow from your concepts, not vice versa.
- **Strive for variety.** Mix up your visuals and other media to appeal to various types of listeners and learners.
- **Make sure media are visible to all.** When showing a prototype, make sure everyone can see it—including members of your audience who are watching from a remote location. If some people can attend your talk only through phone conferencing, describe what you're doing with a prototype or model, so they can follow along.
- **Use media to make data meaningful.** Configure complex data into simple visual forms that make the key point of the data accessible and clear to your audience members. You want to easily draw their eyes to the data that you want them to see.*

EXAMPLE

Show your listeners this:



Nancy Duarte. "When Presenting Your Data, Get to the Point Fast." HBR Blog Network
<<http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/03/when-presenting-your-data-get/>>.

Not this:



GEO & DESC	CONSULTING	RESEARCH	PRODUCTS	COMPONENTS	SYSTEMS	SUPPORT	TOTAL
Grand Total	4,634,068.91	3,883,621.28	5,843,307.44	2,890,064.81	2,531,168.87	831,178.79	20,395,527.67
UK	1,812,064.34	1,659,130.10	1,677,340.18	1,734,038.89	1,593,727.52	287,646.49	8,763,747.52
Germany	385,195.50	145,927.68	737,681.62	520,211.67	129.00	70,969.04	1,860,114.51
France	53,743.00	360,629.35	296,676.27	57,801.30	261,631.24	41,861.04	1,072,342.20
Italy	9,730.00	62,204.26	287,966.62	28,900.65	0.00	37,208.19	426,009.72
Spain	30,246.48	935,909.79	160,940.14	86,701.94	0.00	29,158.87	1,242,857.22
Portugal	0.00	124,531.50	115,279.71	31,790.71	0.00	11,678.77	283,280.69
Switzerland	1,194,630.10	209,724.09	302,498.78	31,790.71	278,337.21	53,392.28	2,070,333.17
Netherlands	317,484.50	85,999.93	320,678.71	34,680.78	0.00	44,457.28	803,301.20
Western Europe Other	119,394.74	284,601.35	1,281,434.33	28,900.65	397,065.90	199,308.40	2,310,725.37
Russia	94,053.01	6,532.05	211,934.38	14,450.32	0.00	8,548.41	335,517.97
Poland	325,791.36	8,431.18	237,751.17	21,675.49	0.00	7,490.30	600,539.50
Eastern Europe Other	292,335.88	62,453.86	213,365.73	18,785.42	258.00	39,459.72	626,658.61

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<<http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/03/when-presenting-your-data-get/>>.


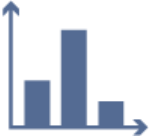


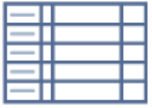
Great slides

Slides should be easy on the eyes, but they needn't be boring. To create great slides, follow these tips:

- **Text.** Put no more than one concept on each slide. Use just one or two typefaces. Show key phrases, not full sentences. And round off complex statistics and numbers: "Over 3 million," not "3,168,201."
- **Graphics.** Augment or replace text with simple graphics—charts, tables, graphs, illustrations—that highlight the facts you want your audience to focus on. Avoid showing trite or clichéd images—those that your audience members have already seen frequently in many other places. Avoid cluttering slides with logos and other graphical content that doesn't add meaning. And ensure unity of appearance: Make sure all illustrations are done in the same style and that photographs are taken by the same photographer.

- **Color.** Use color only when the information in a graphic requires color to clarify a point or to focus viewers' eyes on key information. Use the same color palette through your slide deck. And limit yourself to three complementary colors, plus a couple of neutral shades, like gray and pale blue.

How to use charts, graphs, and tables

Graphic type	Example	Use when you want to show . . .
Line graph		How something has changed over time. Depict time along the bottom and quantities up the side.
Bar chart		The relationship between different items at one point in time.
Pie chart		The relationship between different items at one point in time. Especially useful if “slices” of the pie are noticeably different in size.
Scattergram		A statistical linear regression (a straight line that best fits scattered data points), exponential smoothing, or a moving average and you have many data for one specific variable.
Table		Numbers that differ by orders of magnitude such that no scale is big enough to plot them.

Slide alternatives

Many slide presentations confuse or bore audiences, because presenters fill the slides with too much detail or read directly from them while giving their talk. Remember, you don't *have* to use slides. In fact, they're often overused. Surprise your audience by doing something other than a slide presentation—such as using other media and getting your audience involved in your presentation.

Use other media

You can use media other than slides in your presentation. Consider these ideas:

- **Physical or digital flip chart.** Use a flip chart to create visuals yourself as you talk. This helps you draw your audience in where a static slide doesn't.
- **Props and prototypes.** Instead of describing a new product on a slide, show your audience a prototype. Pass it around. Let audience members get physical with it. If possible, show remote audience members an image of the prototype that can be rotated so they can see what it looks like and how it works.
- **Music.** Add a soundtrack to your presentation. Music can help you evoke an emotional response from your listeners and signal transitions to new themes in your talk.
- **Video clips.** Show video clips to enchant, move, and thrill your audience. Videos can also help you create the right emotional atmosphere to start or end your speech—or add energy to it in the middle.

Involve your audience

In addition to using media other than slide presentations, you can use creative tactics to engage your audience during a presentation. For instance:

- Ask audience members to tell you their stories related to the topic at hand.
- Break your listeners up into small groups and have them respond to a challenge—a question you ask or a problem you pose. Have a representative from the small groups report back to the whole group.
- Play a game with your audience that's relevant to your presentation topic, then award prizes.
- Get your listeners to design something—a new product, a plan. Give them tools to do it with—paper, sticky notes, iPads.
- Have your listeners use portable video cameras that you hand out, or use their mobiles, to create video responses to what you're talking about. Then show some of the video to the whole group.

A Selection of Editor's Choice Articles

Articles on Presentation Skills selected from Harvard Business Review. See all related articles [here](#).



ARTICLE

How to Moderate a Panel Discussion

⌚ 5 MINUTES

PUBLISHED 19 DEC 2018



ARTICLE

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ARTICLE

How to Blow a Presentation to the C-Suite

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Engage a Remote Audience

Giving a remote presentation? You'll need to work harder to capture—and keep—your audience's attention. Discover five tactics that can help.

Pros and cons

According to a leading design firm, 80% of corporate presentations are now delivered remotely. Remote presentations offer both advantages and disadvantages. The decision about whether to present remotely may or may not be yours. Either way, it's good to know the advantages and disadvantages, so you can prepare to be as effective as possible.

Remote presentations give you important advantages as a speaker, such as:

- Enabling you to reach a wider audience via internal networks, the internet, and social media sites
- Letting you interact with your listeners in new ways—including taking and answering their questions, following their comments online during the talk, and conducting contests. Thanks to chat-room capability, you can adjust your presentation on the spot.

On the downside, there's always the possibility of technical difficulties in giving a remote presentation, such as poor audio or video quality. Or listeners may have trouble joining the presentation.

But most important, if you're delivering your talk through audio only and not through Skype or other visual conferencing media, you can't make eye contact with all your audience members. Even with visual conferencing, you can't see their body language, and they can't see yours.

Without that all-important nonverbal communication, your listeners may feel disconnected from you. As a result, they may have difficulty trusting you or lose interest in your talk.

These disadvantages make it harder to win—and keep—your audience's attention during a remote presentation. In fact, a survey examining what people do while they're attending webinars revealed that they spend more time checking e-mail than actually watching the presentations.

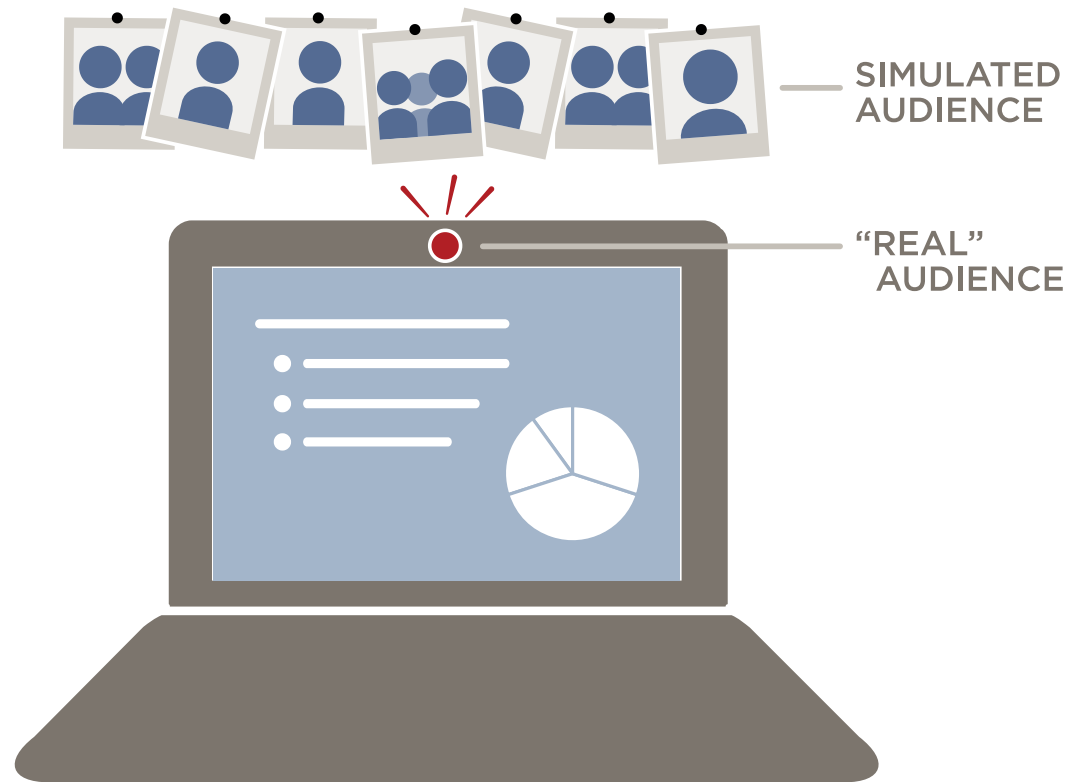
Captivate your audience

To make your remote presentation more interesting to your listeners than their inboxes are, you need to:

- **Simulate physical connection.** Use props to make believe you are seeing your audience before you.
- **Excel at audio.** Use your voice creatively.
- **Remove distractions.** Anticipate and remove visual or auditory annoyances that could distract you or your audience from your talk.
- **Lure and re-lure your listeners.** Regularly create a sense of contrast and offer intriguing bites of content in your talk.
- **Delight your audience.** Show that you're having fun, and display your individuality.

Simulate physical connection

Seeing your audience helps you feel more connected to them. And when you feel connected, you adopt a warmer, more intimate, conversational speaking style that will hold your listeners' attention. If you're looking into a Webcam during your talk, your audience can see you—but you won't see them.



Use a photo to remind you of your audience: Just under the camera on your computer, tape a photo of your actual audience members. If you're speaking to a huge audience, use a photo representing your audience. As you talk, look steadily into the camera and include the audience photo in your gaze.

If your audience will only be able to see your slides, make sure each one is uncluttered and shows only one idea. That way, the slides will be less distracting. They will also give listeners the sense that you, as a person, are organized and clear-thinking. That makes listeners trust you—which inspires them to keep listening.

Excel at audio

In remote presentations, audio trumps visuals for holding an audience's attention. So use your voice creatively. For instance:

- **Stand up while delivering your talk.** When you stand, your chest cavity fills with more air, making your voice richer and more rounded. You can also gesture more freely, which helps you speak in a more natural way.

- **Vary your voice.** Vary the pitch and volume of your voice to reflect your message—such as using a higher pitch to convey excitement about an idea you're discussing. Use pauses to convey a sense of drama and to make listeners curious about what you'll say next.
- **Bring in other voices.** If appropriate, invite other people to deliver parts of your talk or to engage in some casual conversation with you as you deliver your presentation. Hearing more than one voice is more interesting than hearing just one voice, especially during a lengthy presentation.

Remove distractions

By removing visual, auditory, and technology-related distractions, you can stay focused on your talk and avoid annoying or distracting your audience:

- **Remove visual distractions.** If you'll be delivering your talk from an office with windows, cover them so you don't notice people walking by. Put a sign on your door that says, "Recording in progress" or "Do not enter." If you're having trouble completing a thought and you're running a chat session, cover the chat box with a piece of paper so you don't feel compelled to look at listeners' comments.
- **Remove auditory distractions.** Turn off anything around you that will beep, buzz, or chirp, such as your mobile phone, reminders, or incoming e-mails. Avoid wearing chunky jewelry or accessories that could jangle or clank against your desk or other objects while you're talking. If you tend to click your pen when you're nervous, keep pens out of reach. Lay your notes out flat so you don't have to rustle through your papers.
- **Have a techie nearby.** Make sure you've got a tech-savvy aide—a colleague or IT person—standing by to resolve any technical difficulties that arise during your talk.
- **Have a moderator.** If you've got a chat session going on during your talk or if you're taking questions or asking listeners to complete polls, a moderator can process the incoming responses and prioritize them for you.
- **Distribute backups of your slides.** Have copies of your slides on your desk, and also send your slide deck to audience members in advance of your presentation. That way, if your technology fails, you and your audience won't get distracted by the fact that you have nothing to look at.

Lure and re-lure

In a remote presentation, your "hook"—your compelling opening factoid, story, or statistic—won't be enough to hold your audience's attention throughout your talk. You need to keep *re-luring* your audience—drawing them back to you and the ideas you're conveying.

To re-lure them, regularly create a sense of contrast and provide enticing content bites:

- **Mix voice and media.** Punctuate your talk with short videos, graphics, demonstrations, and other visual media.
- **Tell stories.** Relate personal stories that help illuminate the ideas you're conveying in your talk. Stories draw people in, create a sense of suspense, and make listeners want to know more.

- **Create tension.** Periodically acknowledge your audience's "what is"—the problem they're struggling with—and then describe "what could be" if they adopt the ideas you're proposing. The tension created by the gap between what is and what could be will pique your listeners' interest.

Delight and surprise

Delighting your audience can help you further forge a human connection with them and keep them interested during a virtual presentation. Try these approaches:

- **Convey your passion.** Draw on the excitement and passion you feel for the ideas you're communicating in your talk. Let that energy come through in your voice. Smile. The tone of your voice changes when you smile—listeners will be able to tell that you're smiling, even if they can't see your face.
- **Sneak in a game or contest.** Use games and contests to keep your audience guessing about what else you have to offer. You could write a message on a slide or whiteboard that says, "The first one who tweets about this gets a free mug." You'll get your audience looking for additional opportunities to win fun prizes.



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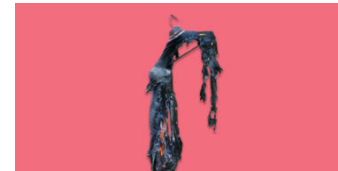
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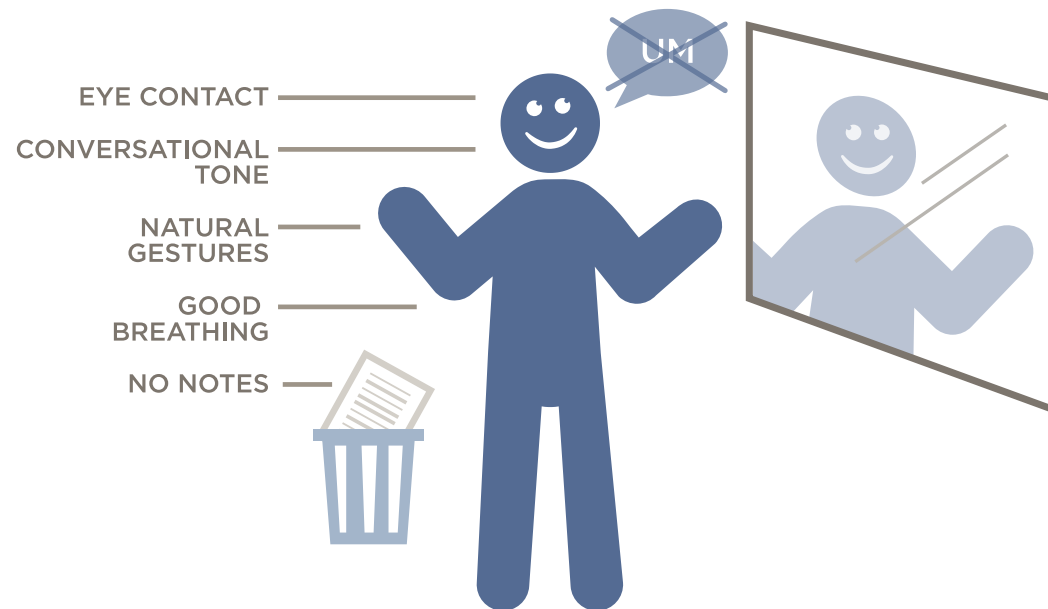
How to Blow a Presentation to the C-Suite

⌚ 5 MINUTES
PUBLISHED 17 OCT 2018

Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse

When would you prefer to discover the problems with your presentation—before or during your talk? By rehearsing thoroughly, you can identify and fix problems *before* “show time.”

Practice your delivery



Your goal in making a presentation is to move your audience: You want them to learn, think about, or act on the ideas you present. To do this, you need to polish your delivery. That means rehearsing—a lot.

Practice delivering your talk in front of a mirror at home. Then, using a video recorder or a trusted friend or colleague, practice some more. While you're practicing, be sure to do the following.

Watch your language:

- Adopt a conversational speaking style.
- Use notes only if you have to.
- Avoid jargon and terms that may be unfamiliar to your intended audience.
- Be careful to not use filler language such as "um" and "er."

Act natural:

- **Face your audience and make eye contact.** Focus on a few friendly-looking individuals, rather than looking at the whole audience.
- **Join your audience.** Avoid standing behind a podium or lectern. Walk around in the audience or use movement to control the pace of your talk and involve your listeners.
- **Gesture in a relaxed, natural way.** Avoid nervous gestures such as jingling keys or coins in your pockets or fiddling with your hair.
- **Breathe normally.** It will help you avoid filler language.

Use feedback from your friend or colleague to polish your delivery. If you've videotaped your practice session, review the video and identify ways to improve. Keep rehearsing until you feel thoroughly prepared to give your talk.

To get the most value from your rehearsing:

- Practice with the equipment and visuals you will actually use at the event.
- Deliver your entire presentation each time you practice.
- Rehearse until the presentation doesn't sound memorized.

▼ Body language tips *

- **Peel yourself away from your slides.** Avoid turning your back to your audience to look at your slides. This puts a physical and psychological barrier between you and your listeners. As much as you can, keep your eyes on the audience. Let people see your face.
- **Open up your posture.** Avoid a closed stance, such as folding your arms, standing with your legs crossed, putting your hands in your pockets, or clasping your hands behind or in front of you. It signals discomfort.
- **Use body language that's natural to you.** People judge your authenticity from your body language. Contrived gestures will make you look inauthentic. So whether you're boisterous or quiet by nature, be yourself in your use of body language. If you really love what you do and you're excited to the

point of giddiness about it, show your enthusiasm through big, dramatic gestures and energetic movement. If your personal style tends to be subdued, use more restrained gestures and a more reserved posture.

Boost Power Through Body Language

When you think of effective leaders, what's the first thing that comes to mind? For many people, it's the idea that it's all about charisma, and that you either have it or you don't. But studies have shown that powerful people may have another factor in common, and it's something we can actually exert some control over: hormones.

More specifically, powerful men and women tend to have relatively high testosterone, the dominance hormone, and lower cortisol, the stress hormone. And this particular hormone profile is related to a greater willingness to take risks, to seek out challenges, and to thrive in stressful situations—all key elements of effective leadership.

Although there are person-to-person differences in these hormone levels, they're not set in stone. In fact, they fluctuate from day to day, hour to hour, and even from minute to minute. Which means you can alter your own hormone levels using something as simple as movement: putting your body into a bigger, more open postures, or what we call "power poses." Here are a few rules and examples.

One, understand the science. When you're nervous and insecure, your cortisol can shoot up and your testosterone can even go down. When you're feeling powerful and confident, the opposite happens. So, by putting yourself into a power pose, you signal confidence and power not just to the people around you, but also to your own brain. In effect, you are configuring your brain to deal with, and even thrive in, any leadership challenge you face.

Two, warm up in private. The most effective power poses are the big ones. So before that big team meeting or board presentation, you should close the door to your office or find a quiet corner and really stretch yourself out. Make yourself as big as you can. Stand with your legs spread, with your hands on your hips, or lean back in your chair and put your feet on your desk. Testosterone rises, cortisol drops.

Three, tone it down a bit in public. Once you're leading that group, you don't want to look like you're trying to dominate it. So just be as squared off and big as seems natural. Lift your chin, stand tall, rest your hand on the back of a chair or another prop, use open gestures. Testosterone stays up, cortisol stays low.

Four, make it a habit. People in leadership roles must feel and display confidence as often as possible if they expect their teams to follow them. So think more about your body. Stop hunching over your laptop or huddling over your BlackBerry. Open up. Take up more space, and your hormone levels will start to look like a leader's.

▼ To memorize—or not?

There are pros and cons to memorizing your speech word for word. To decide whether to memorize, examine your own comfort level, familiarity with your subject matter, and other important considerations.

If you're new at making presentations, it might be smart to memorize your talk ahead of time, then adopt a conversational delivery style during the actual presentation. But some experts advocate *not* trying to memorize word for word, because it could cause you to appear overly rehearsed and thus unnaturally polished. Also, when you present a talk verbatim from memory, an audience question that comes at you in the middle of your talk can throw you off completely.

If you know your subject matter, you shouldn't have to memorize.

Project a positive image

Audiences never rely solely on a presenter's words to assess their message. They also consider the presenter's demeanor and body language. The image you project while you're talking can make or break your presentation. If your image doesn't inspire confidence and commitment, the audience will discount your words.

To practice projecting a positive image, do the following while you're rehearsing your speech: *

- **Make sure your facial expressions convey interest in the audience.** Smile at appropriate moments in your speech and look attentively at your listeners.
- **Rise up to your full posture.** Standing up straight will boost your confidence and give your voice greater volume.
- **Avoid "defensive" body language.** Resist any urge to fold your arms in front of you, cross your legs, or hunch your shoulders.

Modulate your voice

To use your voice to its best advantage, you'll need to modulate it while giving your talk. As you rehearse your presentation:

- Keep the tone of your voice natural and conversational.
- Use a microphone when speaking to a large group or in a large space. If you don't have a microphone, speak loudly enough for everyone in your audience to hear.
- Avoid rapid-fire or drawn-out speech.
- Avoid speaking in a monotone. Raise and lower your voice to emphasize different points and indicate your feelings about what you're saying.
- Pronounce words clearly.
- Use pauses to create suspense and to allow listeners to absorb particularly important points.

The PowerPoint Mistake Almost Everyone Makes

I got a call from an old colleague, a good friend of mine who's now a senior marketing executive for a big global tech company. He was getting their new CTO ready for a big user conference they had coming up. It would be his debut in front of several thousand users. There'd be industry analysts there, as well as his company's leadership team and most of the sales force. So it was a big deal.

The problem was, the dry runs weren't going very well—people were finding the presentation hard to follow. And my friend was confused, because they thought they had a really compelling story. They had awesome slides. And the CTO himself was a brilliant guy and a pretty good speaker. So they really didn't know where the problem was.

Well, two days and a long plane flight later, I'm watching one of the dry runs myself. And to me, the problem was obvious. It was the slide transitions. He was doing what everybody else does when they use PowerPoint slides. He'd advance the next slide, and then he'd immediately start talking about it. And what this does for the audience is they disconnect for a moment. They're trying to visually process the information on the slide and try to make sense out of that. At the same time, they're multitasking, trying to listen to what the speaker has to say about it. And when you repeat that pattern, slide after slide after slide, they quickly get fatigued and they start checking out.

So what we worked on together was his transitions. And what I had him do, instead of being reactive, I had him be proactive with his slides and position each slide—say a sentence or two about the slide before he brought it up. Then, once he brought the slide up, I'd have him pause. And I told him, "Wait until you start seeing the audience eye contact start to come back to you. Then you can start talking." And at first, those pauses felt really awkward to him. But then he realized the audience needs that moment to process the information on the slide. And then, when the eye contact comes back, they've got their undivided attention on him.

His presentation—big success. Everything they wanted it to be. And I guess the lesson on that is, don't forget to plan and practice your slide transitions. They can make it easy and effortless for your audience to follow along.

Rehearse with a test audience

Bring together a test audience: people who are similar to your audience profile or who might have expertise in the topic of your presentation. Practice your presentation with them, recording the rehearsal on video if possible. Afterward, ask them for their feedback on the following:

- **Structure.** Is the flow of ideas in your presentation logical? Are your points clear and concise? Is the level of detail you're providing appropriate—that is, compelling and not overwhelming?
- **Visuals and other media.** Do the media you plan to use in your talk—visuals, audio, slides, props, models, simulations—support your points well? Are they easy to view, hear, read, or use? Do you have a good number of visuals—enough to clarify your ideas and hold your audience's interest, but not so many that you distract or overwhelm listeners?
- **Your style.** Does your voice sound conversational? Are your gestures natural? Is your demeanor professional?

Use your test audience's input to identify and address any problems before giving your talk.



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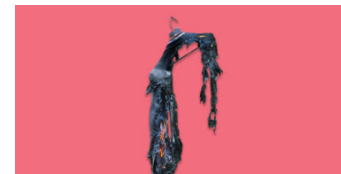
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⌚ 5 MINUTES
PUBLISHED 17 OCT 2018

Present with Impact

Discover powerful techniques for leaving a lasting impression with your talk—including preparing yourself mentally and emotionally, battling stage fright, keeping your audience engaged, and handling questions confidently and competently.

Prepare mentally and emotionally

To deliver an effective presentation, you need to prepare mentally and emotionally just before you take the stage:

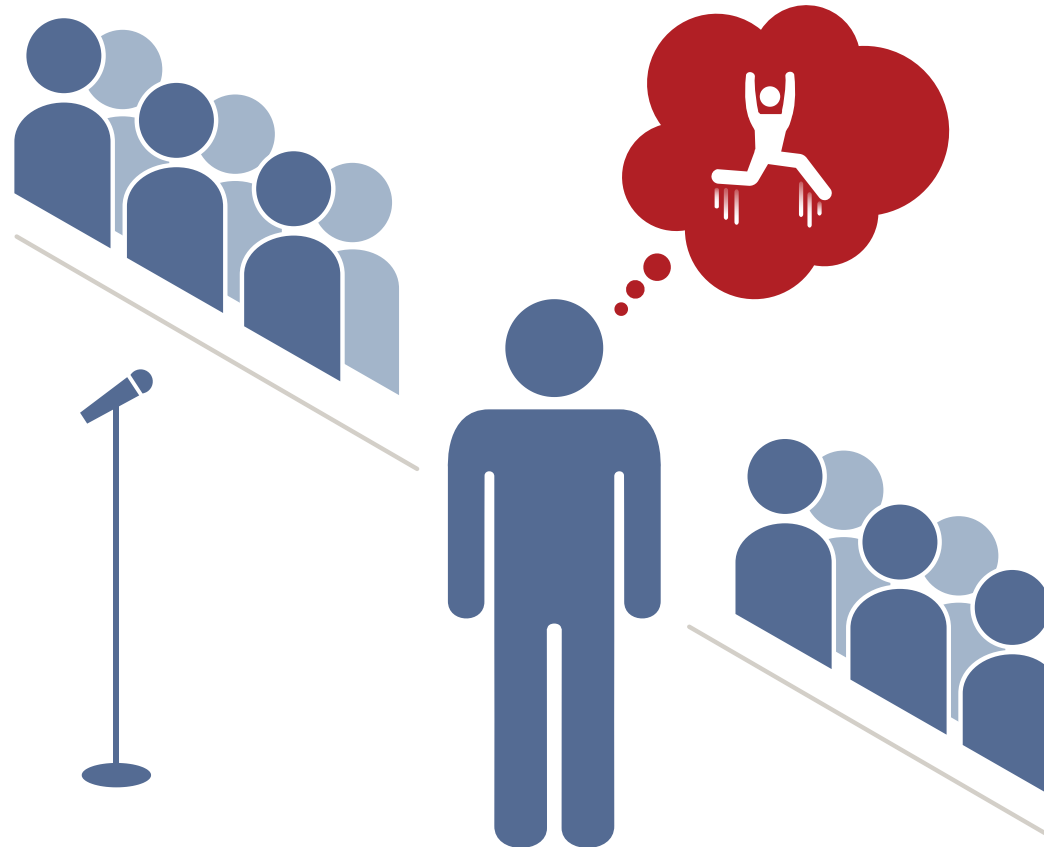
- **Reflect on why the messages you'll be delivering really matter to your audience.** Clarifying your purpose will help you infuse your presentation with energy and enthusiasm, which your audience will notice and respond to. *
- **Tap into your own passion for your ideas.** Articulate in your own mind why you believe in the ideas you'll be presenting. Your passion will come across to your audience when you deliver your speech.

EXAMPLE

A utilities executive had to talk with her company's union members about safety rules, a seemingly dull subject. She found an angle that aroused her passion: Her own father had been a union member, so she had a genuine affinity for the union members' well-being on the job. She prepared an uplifting acknowledgment of them and their contributions to the company. During her talk, her ideas came across as a personal expression, delivered with authenticity. *

- **Establish your personal energy "trigger."** Think about activities you take part in that make you feel energized, such as running, solving a difficult puzzle, motorcycling, or skiing. Focus on those energized feelings and select a visual or auditory image—a trigger—that you associate with the feeling of heightened energy. An example might be a rising thermometer or the sound of fireworks. When it's time to deliver your speech, you can conjure that energized state by envisioning or hearing your trigger.
- **Visualize success.** Picture yourself giving a successful presentation. Repeat positive statements to yourself, such as "I'm relaxed and ready." Imagine yourself at the lectern, speaking with confidence and panache.

Overcome stage fright



Even professional speakers and acclaimed actors and performers get nervous before and during their talks. The key to successful presenting is how you *manage* the fear.

Accept nervousness as natural. Don't try to counteract it with food, drugs, or alcohol before your presentation. Instead, use breathing techniques and tension-relieving exercises to reduce stress, such as focusing on relaxing each group of muscles or picturing yourself in tranquil and confidence-boosting scenes.

To control nervousness during your presentation, try these tactics: *

- Stop thinking about yourself and how you appear to the audience. Switch your thoughts to the audience and how your presentation can help them.
- Occasionally, pick out a friendly face in the audience and talk to that person. Think of these individuals as being on your side.
- Take some deep, quiet breaths.
- Lose yourself in your material—concentrate on the ideas you want to convey, rather than the fact that you're up there "performing."

Keep the audience engaged

How to Deliver an Engaging Presentation

When people give presentations, they typically make one of two mistakes: Either they're so nervous they think about their delivery too much, or they're so accustomed to speaking they don't think about it enough. But both types of people have the same problem. They're not engaging with their audience, and no one tells them what they're doing wrong.

CEOs, especially, tend to live in a bubble and not to get real feedback. I taped one executive we were working with, and when he saw the video, he was shocked. He said, "I'm terrible. I'm really boring." So I coached him to follow these four steps.

One, be open. Most people are nervous at the start of a presentation, so they make protective gestures, closing their body in. That sends a negative signal to your audience at the very time you want to draw them in. Most people have a hard time forcing themselves to be very open physically when they're walking up on stage. So what I recommend instead is, imagine you're having a conversation with a good friend. Be as open to your audience as you would be to that person.

Two, establish a connection. An effective speech is all about getting on the same wavelength, finding common ground. That has to do partly with the content. But it also has to do with the delivery. You have to close the distance between you and your audience. Lean in. Make eye contact. If you're doing a PowerPoint presentation, stop focusing on the computer and the screen. Move toward your audience, and only step back at natural breaking points.

Three, be passionate. Most businesspeople have this idea that when you go to work, you check your emotions at the door. Speeches thrive on emotion. So even if it's a boring topic, figure out your connection to it. What's at stake for you? And then show your passion to the audience. Don't try to manage your gestures or think consciously about your tone of voice. Instead, spend five minutes before the talk thinking about the emotion you want to convey—excitement about presenting a new idea, anger at the competition—and let it seep in.

Four, focus on the audience. Stay connected. And adjust your delivery depending on what you see; speed up or slow down, ask questions if people look confused. In the long run, your impact depends not on how you deliver the presentation, but on how your audience receives it.

If you're like most speakers, you can expect to encounter one or several difficult audience members while you're giving a talk. These are people who are tuned out, overloaded, checking their e-mail, or texting.. They won't hear what you have to say unless you can grab—and hold—their attention.

If you are physically with your audience, it's pretty easy to detect whether you're losing their attention. You'll see people doing things like fidgeting, checking their cellphones, looking around the room a lot, glancing at their watches, or—the worst-case scenario—dozing off.

If you're delivering a remote presentation, it's harder to know if people are losing interest. That's because often you can't see your audience, make eye contact, and observe their body language to get cues about how they're responding to your talk. So you'll have to work harder to make sure they stay engaged.

To keep your audience's interest level high throughout your talk:

- Change what you're doing, such as pausing for a moment or changing the volume or pitch of your voice
- Ask for a show of hands or a response to an online poll, to get your listeners doing something physical
- Sprinkle humor into your talk
- Ask your listeners a question, then provide more detail in areas that matter most to your audience, as suggested by their responses

Powerful group presentations

At times, you might want other people to be part of your presentation. You may be presenting the results of a group effort. Or perhaps their presence and experience will help you achieve your objective.

EXAMPLE

Suppose you're leading a new product development team and you plan to make a presentation to senior management about the team's progress on a new line of heart-healthy frozen food entrees. You decide that a group presentation would be better because it will enable team members with recognized technical expertise to explain the details of their work. With that in mind, you organize the presentation to include the following people:

- **The team's nutrition expert**—to address the nutritional and medical issues facing the team
- **The marketing department's representative on the team**—to explain what the team has learned about competing products and customer responses
- **A team member with a background in financial management**—to present slides showing the pro forma sales costs associated with the new product line

You can boost your chances of giving a great group presentation if you effectively assign presenters, structure the flow of the presentation, and coordinate visuals.

Assign presenters

Allocate speakers by their areas of expertise with the topic or by their presentation strengths and weaknesses. For example, people with strong presentation skills are the best candidates for opening and closing the talk, where persuasiveness counts most. They can also be most effective during difficult time slots such as before or after lunch and at the end of the day.

If possible, arrange for a group rehearsal prior to the presentation. That way, each person is aware of what others are presenting and can practice leading in to the next speaker and handing over equipment or materials.

Structure the flow

Adopt this flow for your group presentation:

- Have the first speaker introduce the topic and briefly introduce the other speakers.
- Have each subsequent speaker provide a transition to the next one with a sentence: "Now June will cover..."
- Summarize the whole presentation after the last speaker has finished.
- Handle all transitions, or arrange for a facilitator to do so.

Also plan how the group will handle questions. Ensure that each speaker is prepared to answer questions in a particular subject area and to follow up if another speaker needs help. Avoid having every speaker comment on every question.

Coordinate visuals

Visuals can present logistical challenges for a group presentation. Extra planning can ensure that your visuals enhance your message rather than distract your audience. To make the most seamless presentation possible:

- Appoint someone to handle the visuals during the presentation, unless speakers prefer to do so themselves.
- Make sure that all slides or overheads use the same format and design elements (such as fonts) to ensure visual consistency.
- If speakers are using different media, coordinate how you will make the transition between media smoothly.

Handling questions

To the novice presenter, the thought of dealing with questions can be nerve-racking. But questions are as important as your formal remarks. So you'll want to be sure you're prepared to respond with confidence and competence.

Benefits

Some people think that if no one asks questions during or after their presentation, the talk is a success. But this isn't necessarily true.

If your listeners are engaged during your presentation, they will likely have questions for you. They might need you to clarify a point. Perhaps they disagree and want to challenge your argument. Or maybe they have other legitimate concerns—for instance, they see the merit of your ideas but believe the ideas might be hard to put into practice.

Getting questions from your audience is a good thing for several reasons:

- Asking questions is how your listeners interact with you and have a say in the presentation.
- By taking questions, you can better understand your audience members' concerns and address them, instead of just pushing ideas at them.
- When you invite and respond effectively to questions, you further strengthen your bond with your audience.

To get these benefits, you need to anticipate the kinds of questions your audience members might ask and develop responses to them. This calls for careful preparation before your talk, as well as rehearsing thoroughly.

All this hard work will pay off: If a question from your audience suggests that you need to change your approach midway through your talk or to go into more detail on something at the end of your talk, you'll be able to do so if you're thoroughly familiar with your material.

Challenges

Taking questions from your audience can present difficulties. For one thing, some people by their very nature like to ask questions just to undermine a presenter and his or her ideas or to simply make the speaker nervous. Others may actively oppose the ideas you're presenting and try to pick them apart by asking challenging questions.

In either case, you'll need to find ways to prevent these audience members from deflating your argument or harming your credibility.

In addition, if you're new at making presentations, you may be nervous at the thought of taking questions and then not knowing how to answer them.

For these reasons, it's important to anticipate questions your audience may ask. That calls for careful preparation and practice. The more familiar you are with your material, the greater your ability to remain composed while taking questions. You'll be more likely to know the answers to most, if not all, of the questions thrown at you. You'll also make sure that your arguments can stand up to challenges.

Anticipate questions

Audience questions give you an opportunity to provide more detail on areas that matter to your listeners. Depending on your audience, you can determine how much of your allotted time to allow for questions.

EXAMPLE

Suppose you're giving a presentation to senior executives on the potential of a new market. You decide to allot half of your presentation time to questions because you anticipate that they will have many. They'll want to know more about the size of the new market, the nature of customer preferences, the availability of local suppliers, local regulations, and the soundness of local infrastructure.

To anticipate the kinds of questions your listeners might ask, focus on their concerns and how your presentation might strike them. Rehearse your talk with several trusted colleagues, and ask them to pose questions. If you can't find someone to listen to your talk, show a few people a detailed outline of your presentation and ask them to comment. Draft answers to the questions you've anticipated.

Prepare for tough questions

Suppose you're presenting your unit's new strategic plan to a group of employees anxious about its implications for them. Or you're making a presentation to a group of executives and engineers from another company, with the goal of becoming a preferred supplier. Or maybe your boss has asked you to visit each

regional office to explain upcoming layoffs and related separation packages.

Any one of these kinds of presentations is bound to evoke tough, even contentious, questions from the audience. In such situations, you'll want to prepare yourself for the challenging questions that people will likely ask. Often, you can anticipate these questions by putting yourself in your listeners' shoes. Ask yourself, "What would I want to know if I were sitting here?"

List every tough question or objection you can anticipate. Then develop a coherent response to each. Get help if you need it.

Solicit questions

Whether you take questions from your audience during or after your presentation, or both, there are several ways you can solicit questions:

- **Prepare a few questions before your talk.** You can use these to start a Q&A session at the end of your presentation.

EXAMPLE

Early in a presentation to senior executives on the potential of a new market, you assess the size of the market. At the end of your talk, you say, "You might be wondering how I gauged the size of this market. I used the following techniques . . ."

- **Plant a question in the audience.** Before your presentation, ask one or two audience members to prepare a question and pose it during or after your talk. This can prompt other listeners to articulate questions they may have.
- **Use your experience with other audiences.** If you've given the same presentation to other audiences, identify points in the talk that stimulated a lot of questions from those audiences. During your current presentation, go back to those same points and invite questions from the current audience. Or raise those questions yourself.

Decide when to take questions

There are several points in a presentation when you might want to take questions:

- **At the end of your presentation.** This allows you to finish your talk within a specified time and make sure the audience has the whole picture. If you choose this approach, make the transition to your Q&A session clear. Also, maintain control of the Q&A session by repeating each question asked and giving the answer to the whole group, not only to the questioner.

- **Anytime during your presentation.** Taking questions during your presentation can help keep people engaged. It also gives you immediate feedback about how well your listeners understand your message. But this approach could cause you to lose control of your talk. So use it with caution. For instance, at the beginning of your talk, you might propose to take just one question at a time during different parts of your presentation.
- **At specific points in your presentation.** If your goal is to get people's reactions as you go, you might want to take questions at set points during the presentation, such as after each major section. If you choose this approach, identify these points ahead of time for your audience. Also, flag them in your notes so you don't forget to stop for questions.

Responding to questions

Often the success of an entire presentation is judged on how well the speaker responds to questions. To handle questions skillfully, you need to establish specific procedures for responding. You also need to know how to deal with tough, challenging, and even contentious questions.

Consider these tips for responding to questions effectively and efficiently.

During the presentation:

- Don't reject or gloss over questions. If a quick answer is possible, provide it. Then offer to go into more detail later, during the formal Q&A session.
- If questions start disrupting the flow of your presentation, record them on a white board or flip chart so you can address them at the end of your talk. Then leave time to do so.

During the Q&A session, and in general:

- Repeat each question asked, to make sure that you and your audience understand it and to give yourself a moment to organize your response.
- When you know the answer, keep it clear and brief.
- If you don't know the answer, ask if someone in the audience can answer the question, offer to get the answer to the person later, or direct the person to another source.
- Maintain a positive and helpful tone. Avoid appearing defensive.
- Try to take questions from people in all sections of the audience. Avoid letting one person dominate the Q&A session.
- When you're ready to end the Q&A session, say something like, "I'll take two more questions, and then we'll wrap up our time together."

How to React Non-Defensively

Consider this situation — You're presenting an idea at a meeting, and you think it's going well. Everyone seems open to your recommendations. The questions are relatively easy. Then it happens. Someone raises an objection that questions the credibility of your idea, and by extension, your own professional credibility. You can't help but feel defensive. Your body language transforms, becoming closed and withdrawn. Your voice starts to rise. Your speech becomes more stiff. You begin to sound argumentative. The other attendees, sensing weakness, pounce and ask more tough questions. As a result, your recommendation, while smart and necessary, isn't adopted.

So what could you have done differently? In my company's communication skills workshops, we teach students to avoid looking defensive by remembering a few simple rules.

First, pause and prepare. When faced with an unexpected or confrontational question, stop for a second. Take a breath. And think about what was just asked. Don't rush to respond. As you pause, take that time to short-circuit your body's desire to close up and assume a defensive posture. Keep your body language open and your posture relaxed. This not only makes you look credible, it will actually help you regain control of your emotions. If you're unclear about any part of the question, calmly ask for clarification.

Next, align with the question. You do this by acknowledging the truth of what was both asked and implied. You can align with the facts by saying something like, "You're correct. This project is 10 days behind schedule." Or you can align with emotion you heard. For instance, "You sound skeptical about our ability to deliver on time." Or you can align with both. The goal is to quickly and conversationally make the questioner feel heard and understood, which helps defuse the tension in the room.

Once you've aligned with the facts or emotions, don't transition to your explanation by using the words "but" or "however." These words negate the positive connection you just created with your listener. Instead, once you're done aligning, simply pause before offering your explanation. Then, keep it brief and on point. Be aware of your voice and body language. Keep the mood conversational. Having successfully and unemotionally addressed a challenging question, you can bridge back to your planned presentation without bringing the negative energy along with you.

It's hard not to react defensively when you're questioned or criticized, but these few rules should help you stay cool, calm, and credible under fire.



A Selection of Editor's Choice Articles

Articles on Presentation Skills selected from Harvard Business Review. See all related articles here.





ARTICLE

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ARTICLE

How to Blow a Presentation to the C-Suite

⌚ 5 MINUTES

PUBLISHED 17 OCT 2018

Evaluate Your Presentation

A great presentation excels at both style and substance. Here's how to assess these aspects of your talk—while you're delivering your presentation and once "show time" is over.

Evaluate as you go

If you're giving a face-to-face presentation or a remote talk in which you can see your audience, look for cues suggesting audience members' reactions to your talk:

- **Questions.** The questions your listeners ask will suggest areas of your presentation that need clarification.

EXAMPLE

You're updating a group of marketing professionals on your team's progress on a special project. The project involves conducting a customer survey to gauge potential market interest in a new service your organization is thinking about developing. After mentioning that the survey was just sent out, one of your colleagues raises his hand and says, "Weren't we going to conduct focus groups, too?"

You realize that there's been a misunderstanding. You clarify it by saying, "We initially considered focus groups as a complement to the survey, but decided against them because of the cost." Now you know more about what kinds of information you need to include when giving this presentation to others.

- **Body language.** Watch for nonverbal signals indicating degree of understanding, agreement, and interest among your listeners. If people are nodding their heads, leaning forward, and watching you, your talk is probably going well. If they're looking confused, sitting with their arms crossed, or checking messages, take action to deepen their understanding, win their agreement, or revive their interest.

How to get your presentation back on track

If you see this...	Your audience is likely...	Fix it by...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furrowed brows • Confused expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking, “Does this make sense so far?” • Providing some examples or a fuller, more detailed explanation of your points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arms crossed • Frustrated or annoyed expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreeing with what you’re saying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking, “What are your thoughts so far?” • Responding to objections or arguments with more evidence to back up your points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fidgeting • People checking messages • Foot-tapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking a question to reengage them • Injecting some humor into your talk with a joke • Offering an off-the-cuff anecdote related to your talk • Introducing visual or other media to liven things up

If you’re giving a remote presentation where you can’t see your audience members, you won’t be able to get cues about their reactions by watching their body language. You’ll need to be more proactive about gauging their level of understanding, agreement, and interest.

You can do that by asking questions—“How are things going? Does anyone have any questions or concerns?” Depending on the technology you’re using for your talk, they may respond by audio or through online submission of comments. Use their responses to adapt your talk as needed to clarify your points, win their agreement, or recapture their interest.

Debrief



After your presentation, assess its overall effectiveness. Ask for feedback from credible participants. Note what went well and what needs to be improved. Ask yourself:

- **“Did I achieve my objective?”** Did you make the sale? Persuade the audience to adopt your recommendation? Provide a progress report that they understood?
- **“Did my audience seem engaged and attentive?”** Did your listeners ask questions during or after your talk? Remain focused on you and interested in your ideas?
- **“Was my delivery effective?”** Did your attempts at off-the-cuff humor succeed? Did people seem excited by the opening of your speech? Inspired by your closing?

- **“Did I experience any technical difficulties?”** Could your visuals and other media be seen by people in the back of the room? Was the audio high quality and the right volume? If you gave a virtual presentation, were attendees able to join, stay connected, and see the visuals and other media you used?
- **“How can I improve this presentation?”** If you're going to give this presentation again, what changes could you make to improve it? Should you provide more evidence to back up your points? Use a broader array of visual and other media to maintain your listeners' interest and clarify your ideas?
- **“What did I learn about presenting?”** What general lessons did you learn about presenting and about yourself as a speaker? Do you tend to talk too fast or go over the allotted time when you give speeches? Do you need to work on smoothing the transitions to different parts of your presentations? Were you able to connect with your audience?

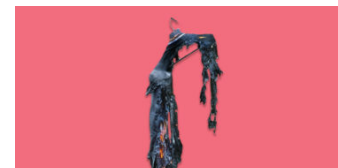
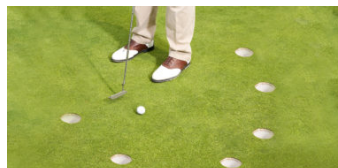
▼ Tips for evaluating your presentation

- If possible, have someone in the audience take notes for you on listeners' reactions. You can review these notes and generate ideas for improvement immediately after the presentation while it's still fresh in your mind.
- Go back and review these notes before your next presentation, even if it's on a different subject entirely.
- Record your presentation on video, including the audience, if possible. That way, you can review it afterward—including your own delivery and your listeners' responses at various points in your talk.
- The next time you attend a presentation, pay close attention to the speaker's body language, demeanor, and speaking style. Try to recognize what makes the person effective—or not.



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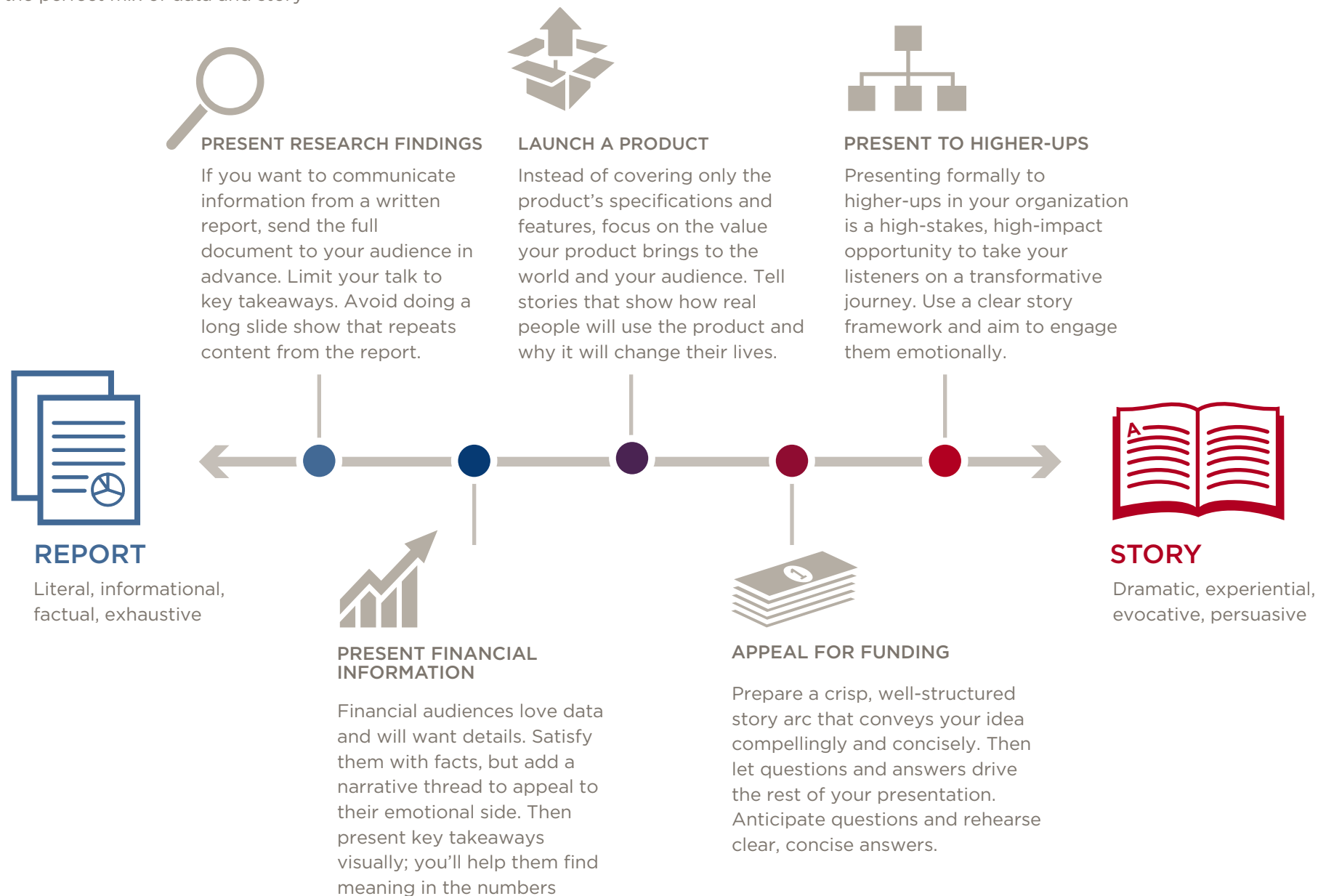
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REPORT—STORY SPECTRUM

Find the perfect mix of data and story



TYPES OF MEDIA

You can choose from among many different types of visuals and other media. A good rule of thumb is to use a mix of media so they appeal to all types of learners—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Each media type has pros and cons. When selecting, consider flexibility, complexity, cost, and appropriateness for your presentation and your audience.



SLIDES

PROS

- Easy to create, update, and transport
- Flexible—you can show text, graphics, and some animation
- Can be shown to remote audiences through conferencing technology

CONS

- Do not always project clearly
- Technology can break down, so you need a backup set of overhead slides
- Can be tempting to create too many slides or to put too much content on slides



VIDEOS

PROS

- Good for capturing audience attention, especially in a large venue
- Can be presented to remote audiences
- Flexible—can be live-action, animated, augmented with text

CONS

- Potential problems with video quality, such as pixilation or freezing



FLIP CHARTS—
PHYSICAL

PROS

- Flexible—you can write down key phrases and draw pictures as you talk
- Easy to use and inexpensive
- Encourage interaction—people can come up and add to what's on the flip chart or whiteboard
- With whiteboards, you can erase anything you've written or drawn

CONS

- Not effective for large groups; hard to read from the back of the room
- Not useful for presenting to remote audiences
- Difficult to transport; flip-chart stands are bulky
- Content cannot be stored
- Wear out over time



FLIP CHARTS—
DIGITAL

PROS

- Flexible—you can write down key phrases and draw pictures as you talk
- Can be shared with remote audience members through technology

CONS

- Expensive
- Potential problems with technology
- Can be hard to write neatly and clearly on the chart



SIMULATIONS

PROS

- Provide real-time demonstration to help audience follow the logic of a key point, calculation, or other result
- Encourage interaction among audience members
- Can be shared with remote audience members

CONS

- Potential problems with technology

TYPES OF MEDIA continued



HANDOUTS

PROS

- Useful for informal, short presentations
- Inexpensive
- Provide a place for audience members to take notes and refer to after the talk
- Can contain supplemental background information of interest to audience
- Can be presented to audience members in the room and to remote listeners as emailed or shared documents

CONS

- Can distract audience from listening
- Can be disruptive if distributed during your presentation
- If printed and bound, can be awkward for audience members to carry around



AUDIO

PROS

- Good for livening up a presentation
- Can be presented to remote audiences
- Useful as a complement to other media

CONS

- Potential problems with sound quality, such as static or inadequate volume



PROPS

PROS

- Offer an element of surprise; a good tactic for grabbing audience's attention
- Can encourage interaction from audience

CONS

- Can be difficult to transport if they're large or awkwardly shaped
- Remote audience members can only view physical props and cannot handle or interact with them
- Less effective for large audiences; hard to see in back of room



PROTOTYPES

PROS

- Effective for demonstrating a new product or service
- Encourage interaction between audience members
- Good for kinesthetic learners

CONS

- Effective only for smaller audiences
- If physical, objects can't be shared with remote audience members
- Can be difficult to transport if they're large or awkwardly shaped

Worksheet for Coordinating a Group Presentation

INSTRUCTIONS

A group presentation makes sense when you present the results of a group effort, need the experience of others to achieve your objectives, or want to add variety to a remote presentation. Effective group presentations need careful coordination. Use this worksheet to help coordinate efforts for a group presentation.

1. **Assign presenters.** Allocate speakers by their expertise or by their presenting strengths and weaknesses. Who can give an engaging opening? Whose expertise is needed to provide convincing arguments? Who can give a motivating close?
2. **Structure the flow.** Who will introduce the topic and briefly introduce the other speakers? How will transitions be handled? Will each speaker provide a transition to the next one? Or will a facilitator do so? Who will summarize the whole presentation after the last speaker has finished?

3. **Coordinate visuals.** Who will handle the visuals during the presentation? Will speakers handle their own visuals? If speakers are using different media, how will you make smooth transitions? Make sure presenters use the same format and design elements to ensure visual consistency.

4. **Plan for questions.** How will the group handle questions? After each presentation or at the end? Which speakers should be prepared to answer questions about which subject areas? Make sure presenters know to follow up if another speaker needs help, but not to comment on every question.

5. **Practice together.** Be sure to arrange for a group rehearsal before the presentation. That way, each person will be aware of what others are presenting and can help smooth out the hand-offs of speakers and materials.

Worksheet for Planning a Presentation

INSTRUCTIONS

A well-organized presentation makes it easy for your audience members to follow your thinking and absorb your ideas. When you make things easy for them, they'll be more likely to support you. Use this worksheet to plan a presentation—to think about how you want to start, what you want to include, and how to close effectively.

Opening

Your opening should be just enough to set the stage for your audience. Keep it short.

1. **Hook.** Open with a “hook” to grab your audience’s attention. Think of a personal story, a quirky fact, a pertinent quote, or a hypothetical scenario relevant to the audience—something that will make them want to hear what you have to say.
2. **Purpose.** In a single sentence, state exactly what the purpose of your presentation is. Why have you called the audience together to listen to you?
3. **Credibility.** Why should the audience trust you? What are your qualifications? Subtly let them know you have the expertise to address the subject at hand.

4. **Benefits.** In a sentence, show the audience the benefit of taking the time to listen to your presentation. What will they get out of it?

5. **Main points.** Briefly, what are the main points you plan to cover in your presentation?

Body

The structure of the body of your talk depends on your audience and the situation.

6. **Problem/solution structure.** Are you addressing a problem? If so, what is the solution you are proposing? Describe the problem in terms of the audience's everyday work, and help them visualize the benefits of the solution.

7. **Informational purpose.** Is your purpose to inform your audience; for example, to explain a new strategy or to demonstrate how something works? If so, what is it exactly that you want to convey?

Call to action

You want to close your presentation with a strong, clear call to action—to leave your audience inspired to agree with and to support you.

11. **The action.** What do you want your listeners to believe or to do? Is there a specific action you want them to take? What would make you feel the presentation was a success?

12. **A memorable closing.** Don't end by summarizing your arguments. Rather, leave your audience with something memorable. Is there a motivating or provocative question you might ask to close your presentation?