

# Suggestions for preparing an effective presentation

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## Content

1. A presentation is a means for passing information to the audience. However, the information needs to be effectively delivered to make a difference. If the audience cannot grasp, understand or absorb it, it is a waste of time for everybody – the presenter and the audience. It therefore need NOT pass on ALL the information. It is not an article in a journal (and even in an article you have to be selective).
2. After selecting only the important parts to be delivered by removing the less essential parts, one needs to start assembling the slides, combining the images and the writing. Make sure not to load too much writing in one slide – listeners will lose you in mid-way.
3. Organize your material in a coherent structure with good transitions from topic to topic and with some logical order. It is easier to absorb organized messages.

## Design

4. It is easier to absorb when people see an image and hear words about it. So don't show only images without talking about them, nor present too much writing without something visual to assist the understanding. You can, sometimes, add some pictures that contribute to the atmosphere of the subject without talking about them (especially at the beginning and the end of the presentation). But then they should be self-explanatory, or with a clear title. You don't want the listeners to stop listening to your words, trying to guess what that image is and how is it connected to the topic. The listeners have limited attention, and if they spend some of their attention on these issues, they won't be able to pay full attention to your content.
5. Minimize distractions – DON'T show moving gifs and various cartoons, just because they are cute. Do they really contribute to the understanding of the topic?



Some people would put such a cartoon just to say they want to hit the nail on its head, and then the audience spends a few seconds to try and guess what in the presentation represents the nail, and how do you hit it on the head, and they are left without

understanding the real issue – the speaker goes on, and the audience is still struggling with the unclear metaphor or an enigmatic cartoon. Along the same line - avoid using very fancy PowerPoint tools. The program provides a wide selection of templates, transitions and animations, but this does not mean you should use them all... Many of them are very distracting and do not contribute to an effective presentation.

6. Although some people like to place a faded picture in the background of slides, I feel that it is usually a distracting element, gives a feeling of a cluttered slide. Even if it is faded enough to not interfere too much with the reading, people can't really see what's in the picture, and waste time (out of the few seconds they scan the slide) and devote attention trying to see what's in the background picture, instead of paying attention to the details presented in the slide or to the words said by the speaker.

### **Speaker's behavior**

7. Use conversational style when you talk – don't read word by word the text you wrote on the slide. The writing should only represent titles, to remind you the order of sentences you want to say, and to make it easier on the audience to follow if they lost you for a brief moment. But you should be able to fill in the sentence and talk freely about the topics behind the few words that appear on the screen. Avoid long quotations, unless absolutely essential – they break the conversational style.

8. It is not a good idea to learn by heart the sentences you want to say word by word – it doesn't sound natural, and you will live with the terrible fear that you may have a black-out all of a sudden and forget what you wanted to say. Better to learn to expand the short titles that appear in your slides with free speech.

9. To fine tune the length of the talk while you are presenting, you can expand the headings on your slides in more details or expand in a minimalistic fashion. In addition, you can prepare ahead of time "Escape buttons" on the slides, and depending on the time, you can choose to use them, in order to skip a few slides, and reach the end with enough time to conclude calmly. Alternatively, you will be able to ignore them, if you see that you are OK with time. At any rate, make sure to leave time for questions. Leaving no time for questions may be considered by the audience as a result of fear of confronting questions, even if this is not the case.

10. Talk to your audience not to the screen on the wall– look the listeners in the eyes. It will give you authority, credibility, ability to monitor reactions, and it will add personal touch. Avoid as much as possible looking at the screen behind you, because this is an escape from looking at people's eyes. Try to have the computer in front of you, so you can see the slides on the screen in front, and easily raise your eyes and look at the audience eyes frequently.

11. Avoid too much use of the pointer. It is often not needed, and it causes speakers to avoid looking at the audience, which is a great mistake. If you need to point listeners' attention to a part of your text or to a part of your image or graph, try to use a bubble, or an arrow that emphasizes what you want to emphasize with a mouse-click, without the need for you to turn and look at the screen behind you.

12. If you feel nervous: Before you start, take three deep breaths, or contract all muscles then relax them. Remember: only 10% of what you feel is seen by the audience, so don't get stressed from the fear that people will notice that you are nervous. Direct the talk to friendly faces. Drink a sip of water (if you are out of air or need a few seconds to relax while you talk).

The points listed above are (briefly) my personal views. I am well aware that some people will not fully agree with all the points I listed here. I actually saw hundreds of lectures that obviously did not follow these suggestions. Some of them had different approaches, and were still effective, but unfortunately, there were many seminars or lectures that were far from delivering an effective presentation. Consider every lecture you hear or deliver as an additional experience and try to learn from it.

Good Luck!