from

Planning Your Next Presentation

This outline works well for any presentation, no matter the topic or length.

Tell them what you're going to tell them.
The main purpose of the opener is to build a relationship with your listeners. You should provide them with a map or outline of the presentation about to unfold. Once this relationship exists, they'll listen and accept your message more readily. Your opener should take no more than 25 percent of your total presenting time.

Tell them.
Decide on one to four main ideas and divide your presentation so that each of these main ideas gets a block of time. Allocate no more than 60 percent of your total time to the main message. Leave the rest for the opening and closing. In your plan, be sure to include some time every five to six minutes to tell the audience what you've told them so far and where you're going next. This helps the audience stay focused and interested.

Tell them what you've told them.
An effective closing should highlight and summarize the information you'd like your audience to remember most. It should plant a hook that will connect your listener to the inner truth of your message on an emotional, spiritual or imaginative level. For example, conclude with a story, an image or a provocative question that they can take with them.

1. *No More Dull Deliveries* by David Fine, Profit Magazine, Dec-Jan 1996

The Three P's of Presenting

Presenting is a reality that most of us must face. Although presenting is nerve-wracking and stressful, keeping the three P's in mind will help you get through those difficult presentations with relative comfort and ease.

Preparation
Behind virtually every memorable presentation is a good deal of planning, preparation and attention to detail.

- Once you've pulled your program together, check it for flow. Confirm that the logical sequence is clear in the program and handouts – not just in your mind.
- Make sure there are no spelling errors. It always helps to have another pair of eyes read through every slide.
- Play back the show in a setting similar to the one in which it will be delivered. If you have included multimedia content, run the show on equipment that's identical to what you'll use during the actual presentation.

Practice
In addition to a great slide show, an effective presentation demands good delivery.

- Rehearse your presentation several times. If you're presenting to a large audience, it's important to practice aloud, standing up and in the way you plan to deliver it.

- Try to perform at least one run-through in the room where you'll be presenting.

- Timing is critical to delivery, so practice your pace using a stop watch.

- Don't read directly off your slides or try to memorize your whole speech. Instead, use the key points in your slides to guide you through your discussion. This way, your presentation will be more natural and interesting for the audience.

Performance

Think of your delivery as an actual on-stage performance. Ask yourself, "If I were an audience member, what would I like to see in a presentation? What would I consider a good presentation?"

- Like an actor, your movements should be deliberate; don't amble around. Your movements between the podium and your audience should be smooth and confident.

- If you want to use technology during a presentation, be sure you're comfortable with it before your presentation begins. There's nothing more stressful than fumbling with a piece of equipment during an important presentation.

- Stay aware of what your hands are doing during your presentation. Keep your hands out of your pockets! It's good to use your hands to emphasize what you're saying, but try not to over-gesture since it will distract your audience.

- In between thoughts, avoid saying "Um…". This is a bad habit from which many people suffer. Instead, remain quiet, gather your thoughts and continue speaking when you're ready.

- Try to convey an overall spirit of confidence and, most importantly, try to enjoy your performance!

1. From *CyberMeetings* by James L. Creighton and James W. R. Adams © 1998 by AMACOM, INC

10 Presentation Do's and Taboos

Do's

1. **Smile!** When audience members see a genuine and sincere smile, it makes them want to smile too. What could be better than looking out on an audience of happy, smiling people?

2. **Move.** Don't hide behind your podium. Presentations can be scary, but the audience won't eat you alive. This doesn't mean you should pace furiously from one end of the stage to the other, but a little movement will help keep your audience awake.

3. **Test your setup before the presentation.** Can you see your visual aids, slides or overheads clearly from the back of the room? Is everything working as you had expected?

4. **Present to the crowd.** Consider your audience before your presentation. If your audience is a group of university students, leave your suit at home and make your presentation less formal. If your audience requires more formality, perhaps it's best if you forget the animation. It's unlikely that swirling text and funny noises will impress this crowd.

5. **Don't try to impress with jargon.** Never speak above the crowd in hopes of impressing people. When you're speaking in a language that doesn't compute, they'll tune out. The audience may also see you trying too hard to impress and you may come across as false or insincere.

6. **Use a computer and multimedia projector.** Professional presenters use a computer and projector, so why shouldn't you? Overheads projectors are a little old-fashioned and printing those overhead slides is a nuisance. Get out of the comfort zone and try using new technology. If you're worried about its reliability, bring your overheads as back-up.

7. **Be yourself!** Be honest, open and sincere. You're best at being yourself, so let your true self show. People relate to honesty and expressiveness.

8. **Update your slides for each presentation.** Don't use the same slides again and again. In the world of visual aids, fresh is good.

9. **Place your company logo in the bottom right-hand corner of your slides**. The eye looks naturally to the bottom right corner, so if you want your company's name reinforced, place it there. While you're at it, why not use corporate colors for your slides? Not only is it a double-whammy but it's also a way to stay consistent with the use of color throughout the presentation.

10. **Use light colors on a dark background and vice-versa.** This seems obvious but it's important to keep in mind. The easiest combinations to read are white or yellow bold text on a dark background.

Bonus tip! Show a visual every one to three minutes. Using this guideline can help you stay on schedule during your presentation. In the planning stage, if you allocate a maximum of three minutes for each slide, it will help you stay on time during your actual presentation.

1. **Forgetting to turn off your screen saver.** Your presentation is going smoothly, and you're taking a little extra time to explain each of your PowerPoint slides. You turn to look at the projection screen and, in horror, realize that the audience has been watching cute little tropical fish swim for the past five minutes. If you're using a laptop for your presentation, be sure to turn off your screen saver *before* you begin.

2. **Beeping laptop.** If you usually present using a laptop, you've probably experienced the low-battery warning. It screams for attention and successfully irritates any well-intentioned audience. Bring an extension cord if you're using a laptop and plug it in. This way you won't have to worry about low batteries interrupting the flow of your presentation.

3. **Speaking too quickly.** It's natural to speed up when feeling nervous. But when you speak at record speeds, not only is it difficult for the audience to understand what you're saying, but it's a dead giveaway that you're sweating bullets.

4. **Overusing animation.** Animation is great for capturing the audience's attention and adding interest to any presentation, if used in moderation. However, when things are whirling, whizzing and zooming across the screen, they direct the people's attention away from your message. They'll be too busy trying to figure out how you got your visuals to do those amazing tricks.

5. **Unexpected animation.** Be sure to rehearse your animated presentation before you give it. This ensures the animation you've used is working properly and is appropriate for the audience. Don't let any unexpected sights or sounds catch you off guard.

6. **Using too many bullets and fonts.** Keep it simple by using only a few bullets and a maximum of two fonts per slide. If you get too many fonts and bullets, the design becomes cluttered and the information more difficult to read.

7. **Forgetting to delete all guidelines.** If you're using PowerPoint, there's nothing worse than a slide that appears as "Click to add title." Of course the audience will forgive you, but it certainly won't help you look like a pro.

8. **Using a font that's too small.** The smaller the font, the more difficult it will be for the audience members at the back of the room to read your information.

9. **Placing too many words on a slide.** Keep the information in your presentation concise. The words that appear on the slide should spark the larger thought, not explain it. Follow the 7 x 7 rule, which limits the words on a visual to no more than seven words per line and a maximum of seven lines, for a total of 49 words or less per visual. Headings or titles should be kept to four words or less.

10. **Using red lettering on your slides.** Typically, red has negative connotations. It's almost always interpreted as a warning sign or danger, and in business it symbolizes failure or financial loss.

Bonus Tip! Spelling is important. Probably one of the most embarrassing blunders is overlooking spelling errors on your slides. Don't solely trust your spell-checker either. Your best bet is to review your slides and then ask someone else to look at them next.

Figuring It Out

How can you present data so that your audience gets it? Whether you're presenting a budget, analyzing inventory or projecting sales figures, working with data in meetings can be tricky. To clearly convey the meaning behind the numbers, you need to pay special attention to how you deliver the figures. Consider these helpful guidelines on how to present data more effectively.

Check Audience Background

Do your meeting participants have a financial or accounting background? Are they people who work with numbers on a day-to-day basis? Presenting to number-crunching experts versus numerical novices requires a different approach and determines the speed and style of your presentation. Accounting folks know financial acronyms and jargon. They're also trained to see behind the number and think about its implications. Non-accounting folks may need data explained in simpler terms. If you're unsure of your audience's background, always break down formulas, describe how you arrived at figures, write out acronyms and include any equations you may have used.

Seeing Is Believing

Show-and-tell really works! Use graphs, tables and charts to convey information and support your spoken words. A recent study printed in Information & Management Journal revealed that using visual aids enhances audience attention, comprehension and retention of material. Additionally, the use of visual aids also influences the audience's perception of the presenter. Presenters who used visual aids were regarded as more professional and credible than those who lacked visual aids.

Preparing Slides

Create slides to support spoken words and illustrate data. Use horizontal visuals instead of vertical – the bottom half of a vertical graph can be difficult to see and verticals are often hard to project in rooms with low ceilings. Follow these quick tips when preparing slides:

Color Coding

Choose colors that contrast well as some people may be colorblind or unable to differentiate reds and oranges. Use three colors, four at most. Colors should clarify and differentiate. Too many colors may be pretty, but will detract from your message. Remember that black has positive connotations when you're dealing with data, while red signals debt – so avoid red at all costs!

Slow Down

Show step by step how you arrived at a figure. Explain the relevance of each step. For example, explain which months are included in your company's Q3. Differentiate between net and gross figures.

Less Is More

Build complex ideas gradually, one step at a time. The number-one problem with visuals is that they contain too much information. Ask yourself if all information is relevant to the point you wish to make on the slide.

Bigger Is Better

Use bold, thick lines with figures and illustrations and avoid unnecessary details in images.

Presentation Technology

You most likely use Excel or similar spreadsheet software to work with numbers. Use a multimedia projector connected to a laptop or PC to show the live spreadsheet in the meeting. If you need to take notes, you can use the whiteboard to capture notes in electronic ink. Your notes can then be printed, e-mailed or saved to a computer file for future reference. Add interactivity with an interactive whiteboard such as a SMART Board. Interactive whiteboards work with your projector and laptop to provide touch control of your projected software applications.

Practice Makes Perfect

This old adage is annoying, but true – practice is the key to a smooth presentation. If you run through your presentation even once beforehand, you will be clearer, more confident and more relaxed. That way, you can focus on the audience instead of worrying about your presentation style.

1. Dr. Judson Park

Delivery Habits to Avoid

The first step to overcoming bad delivery habits is to be aware of them. Do you have any of the following bad presentation habits? If you aren't sure, try videotaping your next presentation to find out!

Annoying Movements

These actions focus the audience's attention on what you're doing rather than what you're saying. Everyone has nervous habits, but the key is to become aware of them and try to control them.

Too Many Gestures

The only thing worse than using no gestures is using too many gestures. Again, the audience focuses on the motion of your hands and not your message.

"Um," "Ah" and "And"

These words distract from your presentation's content, diminish your authority as a speaker and can make you seem unprepared.

Loud Clothing

Clothing is a device we use to express ourselves and our individuality. Try to ensure that the clothing you choose matches the tone of your presentation and your audience. If you're trying to present yourself in a professional manner, stick to standard business attire. After all, your audience may have difficulty focusing on your message if they're staring at your leopard-print suit.

Overlooking Editing

Nothing looks less professional than misspelled words. It signifies sloppiness and can cost you your credibility. Take the time to look over your visuals – at least twice!

Turning Your Back

Don't talk to the projector screen, interactive whiteboard or flipchart. If you need to reference a visual, turn your body a maximum of 45-degrees towards it.

1. "No More Dull Deliveries" by David Fine, *Profit* Magazine, Dec. – Jan. 1996.

The Right Vocabulary Can Make All the Difference

One of the most common mistakes that presenters make is failing to modify written work for spoken presentations. Obviously we don't write and speak in the same way – and the language used in your presentation should reflect these differences.

Keep It Simple

Remember that your audience doesn't have the luxury of rereading a particular sentence or paragraph. If they don't grasp your point immediately, you've lost them. Don't use your presentation to showcase your extensive vocabulary (or to utilize a great thesaurus). Instead, use short, familiar words. "It's rare to see a purchase like this in the garment industry" is much clearer than "A procurement of this

type is unprecedented in the garment industry."

Keep It Short
In the same vein, use short sentences. For example, "Please let me know if there's any further information you need" versus "Please feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail if you have any questions or require any further assistance in the near future." Not only are short sentences clearer to the audience, they're easier for you to deliver without pausing mid-sentence.

Make It Clear
Avoid vagueness at all costs. Your audience will start tuning out, and once their interest wanes, it's difficult to get it back. For example, "Profitability is estimated to decline in the next fiscal year" is nowhere near as memorable as "Sales are estimated to fall by 33% in the next 12 months. That's a $2.3 million loss."

Make It Visual
Use visual references that your audience can relate to. "Our upcoming ad campaign will feature three 24' x 30' billboards" will be instantly forgotten. While "Our upcoming ad campaign will feature three 24' x 30' billboards – each billboard being the size of a double-decker bus" provides a visual reference that will reinforce your message.

Make It Personal
Use personal rather than impersonal language. "I'm sure you all realize the implications of this policy" will resonate more with your audience than, "This group is bound to realize the implications of this policy."

Make It Relevant
Tailor your presentation to your audience. If you're speaking to a group of colleagues, use colloquialisms and jargon where appropriate. If you're pitching an account to a new client, use formal language. The key to effective communication is using language that will help you relate to your audience.

The First 90 Seconds Mean So Much

It's vital that the first moments of your presentation grab your audience's attention. Not only does a great introduction provide an overview of what will be discussed, but it should also convince the audience that your presentation will be relevant. So how can you prepare an introduction that's exciting and intriguing? Read on!

1. Ask a Question
Ask either a rhetorical question or one that seeks a response from the audience. If you want the audience to respond, make it easy for them to do so. Ask a question that can be answered with a yes or no, or call for a show of hands. For example, "How many of you are tired of unproductive and inefficient meetings?"

2. State a Fact
Begin with a fact or statistic that supports the topic of your presentation. For example, if your topic is the importance of meeting efficiency you could use a statistic such as, "Most professionals attend a total of 61.8 meetings per month and research indicates that over 50 percent of this meeting time is wasted."

3. Tell a Joke

However, be sure that the joke is appropriate! If you have any doubts, select another joke or a different method. Also be sure that the joke is relevant to your topic and the speaking situation.

4. Tell a Relevant Story

Everyone loves a well-told story, especially a personal story that relates an experience you had with some aspect of the topic being discussed. People are drawn to hearing about the experiences of others, and stories provide an opportunity for the audience to get to know you.

5. Use a Quotation

With the help of the Internet, it's easy to find a quote for just about any topic.

6. Make an Emphatic Statement

A powerful statement captures the attention of your audience and sets a dynamic tone for your presentation. For example, "It's time to take control of your unproductive meetings. Refuse to let them eat away at your bottom line any longer!"

No matter which type of introduction you select, make it enthusiastic! If you're interested in what you're saying, the audience will have a reason to be. And remember to practice your introduction several times before presentation day because, as they say, you won't get a second chance to make a great first impression.

Other links to check out:
http://www.proedgeskills.com/Presentation_Skills_Articles/mind_tickle.htm
http://www.managementhelp.org/commskls/presntng/basics.htm
http://www.see.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/Management/art1.html?http://www.ee.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/Management/art1.html
http://www.strategiccomm.com/usecharts.html
http://www.proedgeskills.com/Presentation_Skills_Articles/visual_aids_undermine.htm