

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

introducing students to the world of business

Planning, preparing and delivering
compelling presentations

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Planning your presentation

Where to begin

What is the purpose of my presentation?

Before you even start putting together your presentation, begin by asking yourself – what I am I trying to achieve? In public speaking, a presentation can serve two possible purposes:

- To inform an audience by enhancing their knowledge of a particular topic
- To persuade an audience – through compelling content – to believe or do something

Most presentations you undertake will either inform or persuade, or do a little of both. Finding the right blend of information and persuasion will depend upon the desired outcome and how well you understand your audience.

Knowing your audience

Just a little research into the characteristics of your audience can reap huge benefits on presentation day. If you are presenting to your peers or an audience with whom you are familiar a little humour may help to keep the audience interested whilst a strictly formal approach may be more appropriate for an audience less familiar with you or your material. Similarly, an engineering presentation to an audience of engineering experts will likely contain large amounts of technical detail and illustrations. The same presentation delivered to a non-engineering audience would contain content with much less technical detail and focus on the main summary messages. It is also important to identify an audience which might be sensitive to *over-selling*. Such an audience may respond better to fact-based content than broad ideas and theories.

To ensure that you are taking the right approach with your audience, ask yourself three questions:

- To whom am I speaking?
- What do I want them to understand or do as a result of my presentation?
- What is the most effective way of organising my presentation to accomplish that goal?

What do you want to say?

Once you've considered the general aim of your presentation and your audience you need to think about what you want your presentation to accomplish. What is the central point you want to make to your audience?

Consider what it is that you're trying to communicate in its simplest, clearest, most concise form. Write it down in just one sentence. Try and be as specific as possible as this will become the defining framework for organising your presentation.

- **An ineffective central idea:** “Talk about marketing plans for new product.”

- **A more effective central idea:** “Inform the audience about the three key elements of our marketing plan, explaining clearly how each supports the aim of launching our new product and the timescales to which we are working.”

Now ask yourself if the central idea makes sense? Does it really get to the core of what you’re trying to say – remember this may be obvious to you but to your audience it may be completely new. If you’re not happy, rewrite. Get your main point right at the beginning and the rest of the presentation will fall naturally into place. Test your central idea on friend and family before committing to it. If it doesn’t make sense to them it may not make sense to your audience!

Research your topic

It is vital that you properly research your topic. Read reports and look up important information about the subject with the specific purpose of writing a presentation outline and a script. Be prepared to support any points you may make in your presentation with reference to fact – web-based resources such as Wikipedia or search engines such as Google® can be a great help here.

When examined in this light new ideas and alternative ways of thinking often develop. The ability present a subject with confidence directly affects your audience’s impressions and helps to keep their attention.

Building your case

Move the audience to your point of view

There will be three fundamental questions any audience will be asking whilst they listen to you:

- What are you saying?
- Why should I believe you?
- Why should I care?

The purpose of your presentation is to move your audience to your point of view – you want them to agree or to empathise with what you are saying. So you will have to build a compelling case and you’ll need to carefully organise your argument. If you’ve done your research effectively you will have sufficient supporting material to use to bolster your central idea. As you further organise your thoughts you will need to decide what your main points will be.

Write down your main points

Your main points should flesh out and support your central idea. They should be phrased precisely and arranged in strategic order to achieve your aims. From the central idea below, your main points might be:

Central idea: Inform my audience about the three key elements of our marketing plan, explaining clearly how each supports the aim of launching our new product and the timescales to which we are working and to ask the audience for their support in securing the necessary financial backing to launch the product.

Main points: (examples)

- Show that in the first element of our marketing plan we have carefully researched the potential market for our product with the facts supporting our belief that there is a substantial potential opportunity available.
- In the second element of our marketing plan show how we have used the 4 Ps to carefully build a promotional plan covering the first twelve months from the launch of the product that will support our sales objectives.
- The third element of the marketing plan defines our sales objectives – how many do we need to sell! This demonstrates to the audience how much money we plan to make and how much we need to get started.
- Finally, as we're asking for the audience's support, summarise the opportunity in such a way that they see the opportunity clearly and will more readily say "yes" when asked for their backing.

Create a comprehensive outline

Under each of the main points you should delineate sub-points and the evidence or proof points you plan to share to support them. The beauty of this approach is that if you do this once, you will only need to amend it slightly for subsequent similar presentations – moving new evidence such as references or statistics in and out as needed.

It is best to state your main points and sub-points in full sentences if you can. This is time well spent as these points can become talking points – or even a full script – very quickly as you review and rehearse your presentation.

Putting it all together

Plan your beginning and ending

You have about 60 seconds to make a good impression on your audience! What you say during that first minute will often determine how open your audience is to the messages you are trying to convey. How you leave them at the end is their final impression of the validity of your case. So plan both your opening and your closing carefully – very carefully!

Introduction:

- Gain the audience's attention
- Establish your credibility (what gives you the right to talk to the audience on this subject?)
- Tell them what you're going to talk about – and ask for their agreement

Conclusion:

- Signal the ending (let them know you will stop talking)
- Summarise/restate your points
- Deliver a call to action – what do you want the audience to do now?

Secrets of power presentations

In her book *Secrets of Power Presentations*, Micki Holliday suggests answering these questions as you start to organise your presentation:

- What does the audience need to know?
- What does the audience want to know?
- What is in it for the audience?
- What questions might the audience have?

The old adage for delivering an effective presentation still stands: Tell them what you're going to tell them; tell them; and, then tell them what you told them.

Tell the story for maximum impact

So why put all this effort into planning what you are simply going to say? Because if you do you will better understand your audience; craft your central idea and main points clearly; and, embed your supporting reference points so seamlessly that you will be free to do what all great speakers do – connect with their audience. With the planning done you are free to be confident, maintain eye contact with your audience and to make a real impact.

Preparing your presentation

When to use visuals

Now that you have a central idea, main points and presentation outline you'll need to assess whether or not you need to develop any visuals to accompany your presentation.

Visual elements such as graphs, charts and text can enhance your ability to communicate, helping your audience to follow your message and quickly understand various types of information.

Used thoughtfully they can be valuable tools. Used indiscriminately or when poorly constructed they can actually detract from your message. They can clutter your presentation and confuse your audience.

There are three main reasons to use visual aids:

- To clarify your message
- To make your material more visually interesting
- To help your audience to retain your message

Visual “do’s”

A few guidelines for using visuals will ensure that you use them to the greatest effect. Remember that the ideas you share and how you connect with your audience is the most important element of your presentation – visuals merely support these aims. Your charts are NOT your presentation.

Use a standard template: If you are representing a school or company, whether fictitious or not, it may help to portray a professional image by using a standard template that reflects the colours and logo of your school or business.

Plan and design your visuals in advance: Don't ever hastily throw some charts together at the last minute. Your audience will know that you haven't invested enough time and such charts will, at best, draw attention away from your message or may even offend your audience if it is obvious you haven't prepared properly.

Keep it simple: Your objective is to develop a single, well constructed graphic to support your point. Don't create something that the audience will need to decipher.

Ensure that visuals are large enough and easy to read: Don't give the audience eyestrain. What is on your charts must be easy to read and not overly complex – otherwise you may distract your audience from the points you are making.

Using bullet points

Your audience doesn't want to read long passages of text on a screen. The most effective way to use text is with short phrases that can be read at a glance and support the message you are trying to give. Presented this way text can remind people of your key points or help them follow the progress of your presentation.

Don't make the *classic* mistake of a bad presentation by simply reading your bullet points to the audience. The chances are your audience can read and don't need you to do it for them! Bullet points should only highlight the broader points you wish to make and discuss.

Here is an example of poorly used bullets:



Marketing Plan

- We have carefully researched our potential market
 - The facts support our belief that there is a substantial potential opportunity available
- The 4 Ps were used to develop a comprehensive promotional plan
 - Covers the first twelve months from the launch of the product
 - Comprehensively supports our sales objectives
- Comprehensive research identified how many units we need to sell
 - Identifies target sales and revenues
 - Identifies corresponding investments and lending
- We need your support to exploit this exciting opportunity
 - Clearly defined scope of investment opportunity clarifies potential risks and rewards available to investors

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It's not that these bullets don't support the main idea, but there are simply too many words on the chart and it can be improved. The chart below would be better:



Marketing Plan

- The potential market has been thoroughly researched
- Comprehensive promotional plan developed using accepted marketing standards
- Research tells how many units we need to sell to achieve our goals
- This is a great opportunity from which can all benefit!

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Using charts and graphs

Graphs and charts can be very effective tools. They can also obscure the very information they are intended to communicate. Like other tools they must be used when the task requires them and with care.

Remember that the audience has come along to listen to you speak not to behold the beauty of your charts! Use charts sparingly and remember that some of the world's best public speakers never use charts at all.

As you begin creating graphs and charts there are a couple of points to keep in mind.

Choose data that supports your main points. Too many charts are chosen because they happen to be attractive or because they have already been created and they save the speaker preparation time. Do not fall into this trap. Choose charts carefully and use them only if they inform the audience on the topic in hand or help move them to your point of view.

Make your graphs and charts easily understandable. Charts and graphs must be read. They convey information in a visual way that enhances understanding. Your audience must extract the message of a graph or a chart by simply looking at it and reading it – it should need little or no explanation. Make sure that you choose graphs and charts that are appropriate to the messages and that can be readily understood by your audience. Also ensure that they are legible, properly labelled and can be read from the back of the room. Also make sure you reference the source of your data.

Delivering your presentation

Speaking well

Now that you have planned what you are going to say and prepared your supporting materials and visuals, here are some helpful tips to ensure your presentation goes smoothly:

- **Rehearse:** Very few of us are natural speakers so we need to rehearse our presentation. Unless you are one of the few naturals, never think it will just be OK when you get there or the charts you have produced will guide you through. Giving yourself plenty of time to practice your presentation will help you get comfortable with the flow of your ideas and spot any flaws or weak spots. Be certain to time yourself – then adjust if necessary. The more you practice the better you'll feel about what you're saying and how you're saying it.
- **Come prepared:** On the day of the presentation arrive and set up early. Give yourself enough time to solve any last minute problems and have back-up copies of your slides both printed out and on a Memory Stick or CD in case of computer failure.
- **Do not read your slides:** This is a common mistake of the ill prepared or nervous presenter. The chances are your audience can read so you don't need to do it for them.
- **Describe what is taking place in your graphs and charts:** Most graphs represent "movement" or change, such as data trends. Like every picture they tell a story. During your presentation make sure you take your audience through the information being portrayed in the chart and explain why it is meaningful.
- **Transition first, then change slides:** Too often speakers will change their visuals too soon before they have had a chance to transition to the next topic. Remember to transition verbally to the next slide first.

Taking Questions

Question and answer sessions can often make or break a speech. Here are one or two things to consider when responding to questions:

- **Repeat the question:** This is a standard technique and for more than one good reason. In larger rooms people often cannot always hear what was being asked. Repeating the question to the whole audience avoids confusion and verifies that you heard the question correctly. Repeating the question can also buy you a little extra time to think about the answer!
- **Answer and move on:** It's usually the Q&A sessions that turn a 20 minute presentation into a 45 minute marathon. The Q&A session can be an extremely valuable interaction with your audience so you should be listening for questions and issues you hadn't anticipated but don't let the Q&A drift from the main topic. Answer a question, confirm that you have provided a

satisfactory answer and move on. Offer to answer any protracted questions or ones which are not related to your main topic over coffee or during a break.

- **Be ready for difficult questions beforehand:** Anticipate, prepare for and rehearse difficult questions ahead of time. You don't want to stumble on a hotly debated issue and risk losing your audience after spending so much time winning them over.

Finish early follow up

It's probably safe to assume that your audience will be pleased if you finish on time or even early. If you will be taking questions allow a realistic amount of time for that. Even if you don't plan to take questions allow a little time for them anyway.

Check with the audience that your presentation goals were met. Encourage them to call you or email any questions that may remain unanswered. Take a few notes for yourself during the presentation to remember to follow up with additional materials or to continue topics that you agreed to take "off-line."

As important as it is to deliver a good presentation it is equally important to learn from the experience and improve your skills. One way is by recording yourself and listening to it afterwards. It might also be useful to ask some of the people attending what they thought. By keeping these suggestions in mind throughout the planning and presenting process you can dramatically improve the quality of your presentation.

Remember

- **Few people are naturals:** Rehearse your presentation and don't simply read your bullet points and slides – a common mistake of the ill prepared presenter.
- **Less is more.** Visuals with bullet points, charts and graphs can enhance and support your main message but remember the audience is there to listen to you not to look at the beauty of your visuals.
- **Keep to time:** Nothing annoys an audience more than a presentation that overruns – especially if it delays a break or lunch. Be realistic about the number of visuals you use – a 20 minute presentation doesn't need 20 charts!
- **Audiences ask awkward questions:** Be prepared to answer some difficult questions or react to ones that you cannot answer. If you don't know the answer admit the fact and commit to getting back to the questioner at a later date. As part of your preparation ask a friend, parent or teacher to go through your presentation with you and ask them what “nasty” questions they might ask.
- **Don't give out handouts early:** It is common practice to give the audience a hard copy printout of the visuals you may use during a presentation. Do this at the end only. Giving these at the beginning will simply be temptation for your audience to rush ahead of your speech and read through the visuals before time and without listening to you.

Your feedback is important to us: Please send any comments or questions to either the email or postal address below:

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