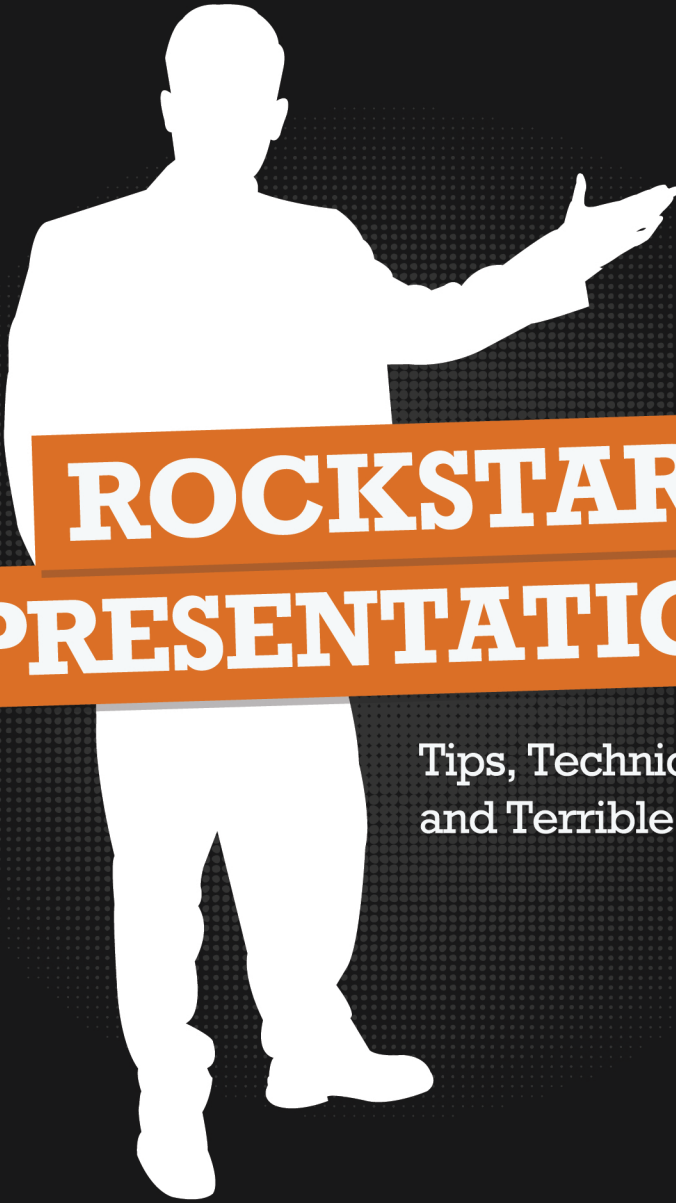


ROCKABLE ✨ presents



Tips, Techniques
and Terrible Truths

Joseph Lewis

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Introduction: *Why Are We Here?* 7

History, part 1: *Stunning Speeches* 10

<i>Abraham Lincoln: The Gettysburg Address (1863)</i>	10
<i>Winston Churchill: "We Shall Fight..." (1940)</i>	13
<i>Summary</i>	16

Public Speaking, in General 18

<i>Every Speaker is Different</i>	19
<i>Skill #1: The Art of Standing Up</i>	19
<i>Skill #2: The Art of Speaking Well</i>	23
<i>Skill #3: The Art of Organizing a Presentation</i>	26
<i>How to Organize:</i>	28
<i>Know Thy Audience</i>	30
<i>Story Time: Joe's First Presentation</i>	33
<i>The Catch</i>	35

Team Meetings, of the Garden Variety 37

<i>Prep Meetings: Let's All Form a Committee!</i>	39
<i>The Big Meeting: Time to Present to the Boss!</i>	41
<i>The Hot Wash: Return of the Committee!</i>	44
<i>Disaster Response: When Things Go Wrong</i>	45
<i>Story Time: Joe Sells Himself to His Coworkers</i>	48
<i>Summary</i>	50

History, part 2: *Killer Keynotes* 52

<i>Steve Jobs: MacWorld (2007)</i>	52
<i>Randy Pausch: The Last Lecture (2007)</i>	56
<i>Summary</i>	58

Keynote Addresses 60

<i>Plan Ahead: Find Out What You're Getting Into</i>	61
<i>Prepare: Building Your Slide Deck</i>	63
<i>Keynote Time: Delivering the Talk</i>	64
<i>Q&A: Speaker On Trial</i>	66
<i>What Is Success? Popularity Contests and Heroin Content</i>	67

<i>Presenting On a Panel</i>	68
<i>Summary</i>	69

The Pitch **72**

<i>How is a Pitch Different from Other Presentations?</i>	72
<i>How is a Pitch the Same as Other Presentations?</i>	73
<i>The Trick to a Good Pitch</i>	74
<i>A Good Pitch Stands on Three Legs</i>	74
<i>Summary</i>	79

History, part 3: Death by PowerPoint **81**

<i>Space Shuttle Challenger (1986)</i>	81
<i>Space Shuttle Columbia (2003)</i>	83
<i>Learning from Failure</i>	84

Head of the Class **87**

<i>Respect Your Students</i>	87
<i>Your Subject, from A to Z</i>	88
<i>Your Lesson Plan</i>	89
<i>How Classes Are Unique</i>	91
<i>Teaching is More than Just Talking</i>	92
<i>Handouts, and Other “things”</i>	94
<i>Summary</i>	96

Conclusion: The Big Goodbye **98**

Bonus Chapter – PowerPoint Pointers **102**

<i>PowerPoint Designs that Executives Love (but shouldn't)</i>	102
<i>1. Huge Headers</i>	103
<i>2. Large Logos</i>	104
<i>3. Fancy Footers</i>	105
<i>4. Washed Out Watermarks</i>	106
<i>5. Too Much Text</i>	107
<i>6. Annoying Art and Animations</i>	108
<i>The Final Product</i>	110
<i>Summary</i>	110

<i>PowerPoint Revolution: Aiming Higher</i>	111
<i>Design Rule #1: Less is More</i>	112
<i>Design Rule #2: Even Less is Even More</i>	113
<i>Design Rule #3: Black is the New Black</i>	114
<i>Design Rule #4: Microsoft Word is Your Friend</i>	115
<i>Design Rule #5: More is More</i>	116
<i>The Little Things</i>	120
<i>Conclusion</i>	128

Appendix – More Presentation Resources **130**

<i>Slidecasts</i>	130
<i>Templates</i>	131
<i>Two Awesome Articles</i>	135
<i>TED talks</i>	135

About the Author **138**

Your Free PowerPoint Templates **139**

AN INTRODUCTION

Introduction: *Why Are We Here?*

Once upon a time in a far away land, there lived a group of people. And one day, a man (because this was not an equal-opportunity age) decided he wanted to tell everyone something that he thought was important. So he gathered the people together, stepped up onto a rock, and started talking.

This has been the basic model for every presentation held for the last several thousand years, with minor stylistic variations in the design of the rock, of course. The forum of Plato's Academy, the Sermon on the Mount, the plays of William Shakespeare, and the radio addresses of World War II all hold to this fundamental format. And it does not matter whether you call it a speech, lecture, address, briefing, or keynote, nor whether your intent is to educate, entertain, persuade, or inspire. A presentation is still just a person standing up and talking to a group.

One might hope that after all this time, we humans would have become quite good at giving presentations. After all, we have progressed from bare feet to space ships, from animal hides to stain-resistant, wrinkle-free trousers. Surely, our capacity for public speaking would similarly evolve! But as you may have noticed, this is not the case. It would seem that we were not all born to stand and talk effectively before a group of our peers and our digital tools have failed to transform us into presentation wizards.

But we carry on. We all know that life is unfair, and presentations are a part of life. We cannot escape them, regardless of who we are or what we do. Sooner or later, *everyone* is asked to say a few words in front of a group.

For most people (known as “the audience”), the average presentation ranges anywhere from mildly useful to maddeningly useless. We despair at presentations because they are so inefficient at communicating, because the speakers are dreary and lifeless, because we have more important things we need to be doing. It is rare that a presentation captivates us, engages us, and motivates us not only to *care* about what the speaker’s message is, but to then *take action* in response to it.

But wouldn’t it be wonderful to be one of *those* speakers? To stand confidently at the front of the room, to deliver your talk with a calm voice and charismatic swagger, to point at some extremely impressive graphics projected on the wall, to hear the audience chuckle at all the right moments, and to get a heartfelt round of applause at the end? Well, you probably can.

I myself am naturally prone to both mumbling and talking too fast, and I don’t really enjoy standing in front a room full of people. And yet, through grim necessity, I’ve learned to deliver speeches, teach classes, and hold business meetings complete with genuinely useful content and appropriately-timed laughter and applause.

This is not a self-help book about public speaking, nor is it a New Age book about building self-confidence, or a business book about sales and slideshows, although you will find all of those things here. This book is about a fundamental human skill and how to exercise it in our modern working lives. It’s about talking to people, explaining your ideas, selling your proposals, countering your critics, and earning the respect of your peers as someone worth listening to.

For some people, this skill comes very easily and naturally (lucky them). But for the rest of us, delivering a presentation is a *learned* skill. So if you’re interested (and I’m guessing you are), and you’re reading this book (and I’m guessing you are), then you’re ready to start learning.



History, part 1: *Stunning Speeches*

Why learn from your own experience (and mistakes) when you can learn from someone else's? Thus, we turn to our history books to learn about some of the most important and successful presentations from the recent past.

Of course, historically these were not called presentations, they were called speeches. But just because our forebears didn't use PowerPoint doesn't mean they weren't explaining their ideas, selling their proposals, and trying to motivate their audiences to support them. They were doing all of those things, and often with much higher stakes than anything that takes place in most modern companies.

We could reach all the way back to Moses, Julius Caesar, or the Diet of Worms for historically significant speeches, but if we did that, we would also need to explore the cultural and political environments for each one to understand them, and that might take us pretty far off topic. So we will look at two "recent" speeches: US President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address of 1863, and UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill's "We Shall Fight" speech of 1940.

Abraham Lincoln: The Gettysburg Address (1863)

In July 1863, the United States Civil War climaxed in the Battle of Gettysburg, which claimed the lives of 50,000 American soldiers. On October 23rd of that year, the National Soldiers' Cemetery was to be established at a dedication ceremony at Gettysburg. This ceremony would feature a speech by renowned orator Edward Everett, a former Senator, Governor, and president of Harvard University. But Everett insisted that it would take much longer to write the dedication speech, and so the event was moved to November 19th.

Everett spoke for two hours and his speech was highly praised, yet it has been all but forgotten by history.

Then, President Abraham Lincoln stood and delivered what would become known as the Gettysburg Address, arguably the most famous and most quoted speech in American history. It has echoed through the American consciousness, through politics, literature, and popular culture, for the last one hundred and fifty years.

It consisted of ten sentences, and was completed in two minutes.

Why Was This Speech a Success?

Was it the speaker himself? At this moment in history, Lincoln was an unpopular president fighting an unpopular war (an unfortunate pattern in American politics!). He was also generally described by his contemporaries as an unattractive man with a high-pitched voice and heavy Kentucky accent. Yet he wrote and delivered this most powerful address.

So if President Lincoln was both unpopular and unattractive, and he still delivered an epic speech, then without question, the success of this speech lies in the words themselves. They are honest, humble, and reverent words. Lincoln spoke to history, to values and beliefs, to the sacrifices of the men who died at Gettysburg. Yet he spoke plainly. He did not employ the classical rhetorical flourishes of Everett. He simply said what needed to be said.

And here is what he said, as inscribed upon the Lincoln Memorial:

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great

civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.

We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

SPEECH * **SPECS**

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address received a Flesch-Kincaid readability score¹ of 63, making it a somewhat challenging read. The word usage is at the 11th grade level.

¹ The Flesch/Flesch-Kincaid readability tests are designed to indicate comprehension difficulty when reading a passage of contemporary academic English.

The Bottom Line

Quality trumps quantity, plain language is timeless, and a flawed speaker can succeed with flawless content. The lesson here for modern presenters is to avoid being clever, to avoid self-indulgence. Be specific, clear, and honest. Respect your audience, as well as your subject matter. Take only as much time as you need, and not a second more.

ROCK* TIP

Always respect your audience and your subject.



Winston Churchill: “We Shall Fight...” (1940)

During the Battle of France in 1940, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered three historic speeches to Parliament to inform and to rally the British leadership about the course of the war. The second of these speeches, “We shall fight on the beaches,” is particularly instructive because it uses rhetorical techniques that are rarely found in today’s corporate meeting rooms.

This particular speech, delivered on June 4, followed a retreat of British forces before a massive German invasion into France. After weeks of German victories and Allied losses, the British navy was able to safely extract hundreds of thousands of soldiers from Dunkirk, an achievement that was deemed miraculous under the circumstances.

Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Britain at a moment of crisis, not only in the middle of a war, but on the very day that Germany invaded Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Belgium en route to Paris. He was handed a daunting task: to lead a small

island nation to victory over one of the largest, wealthiest, and most advanced militaries in the world. Perhaps most daunting of all, his strongest allies were not yet his allies (the Soviet Union was working with the Germans, and the United States had not yet entered the war).

And so on June 4, Churchill addressed the House of Commons to explain what had recently transpired at Dunkirk, and to bolster support for what would undoubtedly be a difficult struggle in the months and years to come. (Indeed, the Battle of Britain would begin the following month.)

Why Was This Speech a Success?

The first nine-tenths of the “We Shall Fight” speech is a narrative of the retreat from Dunkirk. Churchill described the specific conditions under which the army was evacuated, the enemy forces array against them on land, sea, and air. He described failures and losses, as well as successes.

ROCK* **TIP**

Never underestimate the power of a story told well.



But the critical part of the speech came at the end. Churchill began to repeat the same phrases over and over for emphasis, to highlight the deadly seriousness of his words.

He said that Britain would fight “if necessary for years, if necessary alone.” This bleak future of unending, unaided war stunned his audience.

He continued,

...we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...

Again, his audience was stunned before erupting with applause.

You can listen online to this speech, recorded by Churchill at a later date. His delivery style is not bombastic or dramatic. In fact, he tends to end sentences on a low note, draining the sentence of some of its impact. And yet, the intensity and composure of his voice and the deep resonance of those repeating words “we shall fight...” powerfully convey the terrible purpose of his message.

SPEECH * SPECS

Churchill's “We Shall Fight” speech received a Flesch-Kincaid readability score of 58, making it a somewhat challenging read. The word usage is well above the 11th grade level.

By listing all of the venues for combat, by describing how extensive and devastating the war could be, Churchill is able to both sober his audience to grim reality while inspiring them to perseverance, sacrifice, and eventual victory.

The Bottom Line

Even in the worst of circumstances, a speaker can stir listeners to great action while fully acknowledging (not dismissing) those circumstances. The lesson here for modern presenters, similar to the lesson from Lincoln, is that honesty and a respect for the audience are tremendously powerful. Churchill did not sugarcoat the state of the war, nor did he paint an unrealistic or even optimistic view of the future. He acknowledged reality, conveyed it plainly to his audience, and went on to lead his people to survive and eventually triumph over their enemies.

Summary

It hardly needs to be said again, but we will: Be honest and direct. If your news is good, then your job is simple. If your news is bad, your job is still simple, though unpleasant. Stop *selling* and start *talking*. Respect the people you are talking to. They are intelligent and capable human beings, not “consumers” or “potential clients” or “sales targets.” Don’t waste time. Say what needs to be said, and then stop talking.

It worked for Lincoln and Churchill, who weren’t very popular and who were facing the absolute worst circumstances imaginable. So, assuming you are at least somewhat popular and the world is not on the brink of annihilation, public speaking shouldn’t be all that difficult for you, should it?

2

Public Speaking, in General

There was a time, not so long ago, when most Western school children were called upon regularly to stand before their classmates to recite a poem or speech from memory, or to read lengthy prose passages, or to participate in debates. By encouraging students to memorize texts, practice their diction, and become accustomed to interacting with (or performing for) their peers, teachers were not only instructing them in reading and writing, but in basic human communication. Of course, not all of these students grew up to become great orators, politicians, and business leaders, but they certainly had a better start down those paths.

Over time, however, these types of classroom activities have been replaced by narrower lessons aimed at meeting educational targets or passing standardized tests. Teachers have been forced to sacrifice interpersonal skills for technical skills, and the rote memorization of facts for tests. And this change has probably not helped students to become better writers, better speakers, or better leaders.

But our society is evolving in other ways, beyond education. The art of writing a proper letter crumbled upon the advent of the telephone, but technology did not stop there. As communications have become faster and richer, they have also become narrower. It is no longer necessary to develop the skills to describe anything when it is possible to photograph or record everything. And it is no longer necessary or even desirable to discuss anything in total, when all you really want to focus on is one detail at a time.

The sum of these influences is that many working professionals have developed a set of very specific skills for accomplishing very specific tasks. Individuals can lead remarkable careers in medicine, science, law, engineering, and countless other fields without ever developing the broader skills of writing papers, negotiating with

partners, delivering speeches, or teaching classes. Then, one day, because they have succeeded in their field, they are asked to give a presentation. And it does not always go terribly well.

Every Speaker is Different

The first thing to recognize is that public speaking is just like any other skill, from roller skating to whistling. Some people are naturally talented, and some people can become skilled through practice.

There are two separate abilities needed to deliver a strong presentation.

1. There is the ability to stand and speak comfortably, even charismatically, before a crowd without being nervous or tongue-tied, and to inspire confidence and trust in your audience.
2. There is the ability to structure a discussion, prepare materials, and clearly explain ideas—in short, to tell a story.

The first ability is personal, and the second is technical. It would be good to master both, but you can probably survive without the first if you excel at the second. For the sake of this discussion, we will further break down the first ability into two separate skills: standing and speaking.

Skill #1: The Art of Standing Up

The first thing you need to master to give a strong presentation is *comfort* and *confidence* when put on the spot. Speaking before your peers or superiors can be stressful, and different people respond differently to stress.

You may start bouncing your knee, drumming your fingers, shuffling papers, dropping pens, sweating, feeling overheated, feeling a rising heart rate, and many other behavioral and physical responses. You've probably heard all sorts of suggestions for how

to overcome stage-fright, and the basic problem with all of them is that they tell you *to do something*, like counting to ten, repeating the question before you answer, or that old classic: Picture the audience naked.

When you're giving a presentation, you already have enough to do. You need to manage your displays and props, you need to remember your talking points, you need to pay attention to your audience, and other practical things. So instead of adding some "confidence building" technique to your To-Do list, just focus on the job at hand. In short, just *do* your presentation!

Most people find presentations stressful precisely because they are unusual. We don't give keynote addresses every day, so we don't have the opportunity to become comfortable with them. So the number one thing you can do to build up your comfort level is to practice.

You can practice a presentation that you're going to give, or you can find an older presentation to practice with long before anyone asks you to speak. (We're focusing on slide-based presentations here, but this applies exactly the same to a speech without visual aids.)

How to practice:

1. **Find an empty room.** If you can actually project the presentation on the wall, that's even better. The point here is to get away from the comfort and familiarity of your desk or work area.
2. **Stand up.** Even if you're just working off your laptop, stand up at the table. Get used to being on your feet,

ROCK* TIP

Don't add an anti-stress technique to your presentation. It's just one more thing to remember!



with nothing in your hands, and no way to hide those nervous tics. Get used to putting your hands at your sides *and leaving them there*.

3. **Talk your way through each slide.** Some slides will only take a few seconds (like the title and introductions) while other slides may take a full minute or two. Say as much as you can, or need, and then move on. Don't just think to yourself, "And here I'll say something about the new features." Actually say out loud what you plan to say. This is your opportunity to *actually* practice, not to *pretend* to practice.
4. **Pay attention to your body.** Are you swaying side to side? Constantly looking for something to do with your hands? Staring at the screen? Glancing at the floor or ceiling? Take note of what you tend to do when you're uncomfortable (and if possible, stop doing them).
5. **Relax.** Stand still. Put your hands in your pockets if you absolutely need to (although you shouldn't make a habit of this). Only glance at the slides to remember what comes next, and then keep your eyes on your "audience."
6. **When finished, repeat.** Repeat the entire exercise again and again until it gets *boring*. Because when giving a talk feels boring, then it's actually the *opposite of stressful*. And that's how you want to feel when talking: calm, relaxed, and untroubled. (Just try not to look or sound bored!)

ROCK* TIP

*Practice, practice, practice
until your anxiety and
discomfort turn to ease, or
even boredom!*



What is Your Body Saying?

Item number 4 on the previous page advises that you to pay attention to your own body language. Let's discuss this for a moment. You're standing in front of a conference room, probably near a screen, with a number of sleepy, grumpy, or bored professionals staring at you. What should you be doing with your limbs?

Rule 1: No flailing like an octopus.

Rule 2: Act like a human being. (This usually makes Rule 1 unnecessary.)

Just as you should strive to speak naturally, like a human being (more on that later), you should move naturally as well. When standing still, *stand still*. Pace around the room casually. Only put one hand in your pockets at a time; try to keep your hands in front of you, poised to gesture slowly and intentionally to support your words. Point at items of interest. Make eye contact with the people you are speaking to, or the people speaking to you.

Conversely, you should not fidget, gyrate, chew gum or your nails, tap your foot, twirl your hair, lean against the wall, wring your hands like Mr. Burns or Dr. Doofenshmirtz, sit on the conference table, pick at your clothes, or touch your face at all. These are all signs of anxiety (or even dishonesty!) that will signal your audience that you aren't comfortable or confident, and will undermine your presentation.

What Not to Wear

While you're standing up, take a quick look at yourself. Let's evaluate your ensemble. Can we set a hard and fast rule for how you should dress when giving a presentation? Of course we can, and here it is: Always dress half a notch* more formally than you

audience. (*Don't ask me to define how much a "notch" is. Just be grateful I didn't say "pinch" or "scoch.")

Here's the logic behind the rule. If you are presenting in a formal business environment (i.e., your office) then you want to make a professional, but not excessive, impression on your boss or coworkers. Presenting is similar to acting, and you want to look the part. Suits come in pieces for a reason – so you can rearrange them. Slacks, jacket, shirt, tie. Wear as much as everyone else, and maybe one thing more. Remember, they're in that room to stare at you, to judge you and your presentation.

By that same token, if you are a cutting edge 18-year-old graphic designer from a youth-focused company pitching your new product design to a 18-year-old buyer from a youth-focused store, then you don't want to look like a corporate drone. Do your research and dress appropriately for the venue.

Skill #2: The Art of Speaking Well

The "speaking" aspect of public speaking is critical. If your audience can't understand you, or keep up with you, then you'll lose them.

Your ability to speak, like your ability to stand, can be affected by stress, resulting in stuttering, speaking too fast, mumbling, falling silent or freezing up, and saying "um" every other word. Again, this stress is caused by how rarely we have to speak in public, and the solution is more practice.

I should pause here to point out that you may not be aware of how well or how poorly you speak. You can't actually hear yourself as well as you think, due to the close proximity of your mouth, ear, and brain. So just to be sure, try recording the sound of your voice during a practice presentation and then listen to the recording.

Really listen. Count the pauses and the “um”s and listen to the volume and speed of your words. It pays to be critical of yourself now, because your audience will be later.

It's good to practice giving the actual presentation, but if you feel you need extra work on the words coming out of your mouth, then you should practice reciting something else, something challenging. Two authors who have produced excellent works for this are William Shakespeare and Dr. Seuss. (Seriously, I highly recommend *The Lorax*.)

How to practice:

1. Find a text with challenging (but not bizarre or technical) language.
2. Stand up.
3. Read the text out loud.
 - a. **Breathe normally.** Remember to pause at the end of sentences to breathe. If you notice your words getting faint or higher in pitch at the end of a long sentence or paragraph, it's because you're running out of air.
 - b. **Keep your volume constant.** Some speakers launch into a paragraph, or even each sentence, with a great deal of energy and then fade the longer they speak until it becomes hard to hear them. You need to be loud enough for everyone in the room to hear you, but no louder than that.

- c. **Keep your speed constant.** This is not a race. Imagine you are reading the text to a child (just don't use the condescending "sing-songy" voice we tend to use with children!). If you rush, you are more likely to get ahead of yourself, get lost, get flustered, and well, make a mess of things.
 - d. **Speak clearly.** If you feel you might be mumbling or slurring words, make an extra effort to open your mouth wider. It's a little uncomfortable at first, but it helps. Pay extra attention to the letters at the end of words, like the G in "having" or the T in "judgment." (This will also help you to slow down.)
4. When finished, repeat. This is a physical skill, and the only way to perfect it is through continuous practice. By practicing, you will actually be exercising the muscles around your mouth, which in turn will improve your diction. (Actors and politicians really do practice "talking" so don't feel foolish for exercising your mouth, too!)

To Memorize or Not to Memorize

Should you memorize your talk, word-for-word? Should you plan to read from cue-cards? Or should you just wing it? This is a matter of personal style and ability. Personally, after practicing my talk a few times, I like to just wing it. I'm comfortable doing that, and I've been successful with it in the past. Most importantly, this allows me to be flexible and act naturally during the talk, responding to questions and changes of topic as necessary.

However, if you don't believe you'll be able to remember all your points as needed, then you may want to actually memorize your talk. However, this can create two problems. First, you need to

actually write down your talk and then spend time memorizing it, time that you may not have, depending on the circumstances. Second, if you are mentally locked into a script, then it may make it difficult for you to respond to questions, or change the course of the presentation when the Big Boss changes the subject right in the middle.

Reading from cards should be your last resort if you are truly unable to perform off-the-cuff or from memory. Reading from cards makes you look as though you don't know what you're talking about. People come to a meeting expecting to hear ideas or proposals from capable experts, even junior experts with only one thing worth saying. If you cannot talk about your own work without a cheat-sheet, then you could undermine your audience's confidence in your work, and their respect for you personally.

Skill #3: The Art of Organizing a Presentation

It isn't enough to stand and speak with confidence. You also have to tell a story. It might be the story of why your company needs to invest in a new technology, or how you solved a technical problem, or why a client should upgrade to a different product. Whatever your story, it needs to have a beginning, middle, and end.

You can organize your presentation in many different ways, including:

1. **Chronologically.** Present the history of events that led to the current situation. For example, the development of Software A resulted in Lawsuit B, which created Commission C, and now you need to follow Guidelines D to create Software E.
2. **Technically.** Describe each component of the system according to the sequence in which they interact. For

example, Fuel A enters Chamber B where Spark C creates an explosion that pushes Piston D, which turns Shaft E.

3. **Hierarchically.** Discuss the departments of the organization either from the bottom up or the top down. For example, begin with the CEO and board of directors, or with the technicians.
4. **Conceptually.** Introduce a new idea by explaining the concrete facts first and then the abstract theory second. You could also reverse this and proceed from the abstract to the concrete.

This may seem rather intuitive, and many people begin putting together their presentations using an outline following one of these styles of organization. The challenge, however, is *sticking* to that outline or plan. As you develop your presentation, be careful not to let it grow out of control. You may find one section more interesting than others and be inclined to spend more time on it, to the detriment of other sections.

You also might find that you “want to talk about Product A” so you find some pre-existing slides about it and just plug them in, not realizing that they aren’t designed to support your story about Product A. Slides really aren’t as interchangeable as many people believe. So invest some time in editing your materials, especially materials you didn’t create yourself for *this* presentation.

Don’t trust your own judgment when it comes to organizing your presentation; ask for others’ opinions from time to time. As an expert, your presentation

ROCK* TIP

Don't be afraid to run your presentation by others. Getting a fresh opinion may help with clarifying certain points, or identify what's missing.



probably makes perfect sense to you. But it might be missing a crucial piece that's not so obvious to your audience. And the more you play with your presentation, adding and deleting and editing slides, the more likely it becomes that you might leave something out without noticing.

How to Organize:

1. **Outline.** Decide what your story is and how you will deliver it. Avoid design-by-committee! If you are working with a team, figure out your story together but have one person responsible for the final execution to ensure a coherent presentation.
2. **Draft.** Even if you have to leave some empty placeholders for the moment, create a full draft of the entire presentation. This will help to identify gaps or overlaps in your materials.
3. **Rehearse.** When you think you have a complete draft, give a rehearsal presentation to a friend or coworker who is not familiar with the subject matter. Ask whether the story makes sense to them. If they have questions, work the answers into the presentation to make it stronger.
4. **Polish.** When you are confident that you have the right materials in the right order to tell your story, take the time to make them perfect. This includes applying templates, copyediting for grammar and consistency, and inserting compelling (and relevant!) graphics.
5. **Practice, practice, practice!**

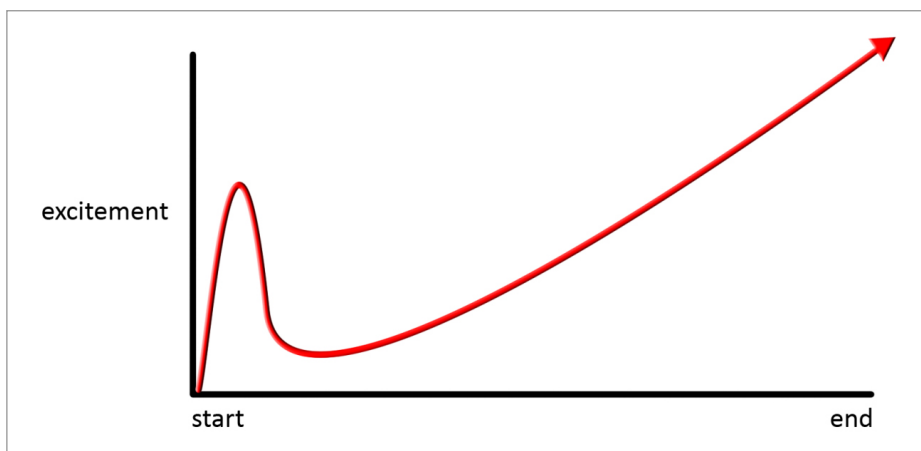
Shakespearean Climaxes

As you organize your talk, take a moment to consider what types of material you will be discussing and where you have placed it in the presentation. For example, if your presentation contains some exciting research results or product designs, or other “Aha!” moments, where have you put them? Where should you put them?

Romeo and Juliet starts with a sword fight, and *Hamlet* starts with a spooky ghost. Why? To get people to settle down, be quiet, and pay attention. By starting with something exciting, you are proving to your audience up front that your presentation is worth their time. Then, you can proceed with the less exciting details and processes.

But you can't just coast on a single bit of excitement. After the initial teaser, your presentation needs to build gradually to a second, more significant climax. Let's pretend you began your presentation with the bold declaration that your research team has cured cancer. That should get the audience's attention, shouldn't it? Then you proceed to explain your hypothesis, course of research, data, analysis, and finally you arrive at the conclusion: All cancer will be cured by next Thursday, at a cost of only \$19.95 plus shipping and handling, *and* you're feeling optimistic about solving that whole “aging” problem before Christmas.

Your “excitement level” should look something like this, over time:



Know Thy Audience

There are two general types of audiences that you will have to speak in front of:

- 1) The **“need-to-know”** people who don’t know anything about your topic and need lots of information.
- 2) The **“know-it-all”** experts who think they know everything about your topic and need answers to their specific questions.

The Need-to-know Folks

For those audience members who need to learn the facts from your presentation, make certain that your materials and your speech remain focused and detailed. If you are discussing an event or a product, there are many things you can do to make sure they get what they need.

1. Use visuals (e.g., photographs) to illustrate WHAT you are talking about.
2. Use diagrams to show HOW it works.
3. Use a table or bullet list to describe WHAT features it has.
4. Use a time line to indicate WHEN various events take place.

Try to keep all of the facts about one item together, preferably on one slide. If you spread related information across multiple slides, your audience is more likely to forget what was on the last slide as they try to make sense of the next slide.

It can also help, when explaining new material to an audience, to use comparisons. For example, you might say, “Product F is exactly like Product B, except it’s five times faster at half the price.” Take advantage of what people already understand instead of starting from scratch.

The Know-it-all Folks

Some people in your audience are already familiar with what you have to say (or at least they think they are). So they won’t be looking to absorb information as much as they want to find out something specific, as it affects them. The person from Reporting wants to know how your project impacts reports, and the person from Marketing wants to know why it’s that shade of red. And they might want to interrupt your presentation to ask.

The best defense is a good offense. Find out who your audience is and try to imagine what concerns and questions they might have. Then, simply plug the answers into your presentation.

But what if you don't know how the product impacts reports? Then you add a bullet point somewhere that says, "Impact on reports under study." This conveys that although you don't have an answer, you have thought about the problem and you are working on it, and now your friend from Reporting won't interrupt with a question, which definitely helps!

Other Focuses

Fact Focus: Some people are fact-focused. But they don't just prefer facts, they want the bottom line, and they want it now. You need to tell them **What It Is**. To satisfy these types of people, consider adding an Executive Summary at the beginning of your presentation to deliver the critical information right up front.

Process Focus: Other people are process-focused. They want to see every step in the process, all the little details about how things work, how they were developed, and why certain decisions were made. You need to tell them **How It Works**. For these folks, be sure to state up front that you will be providing a walkthrough of the product, process, or concept.

Emotional Focus: Lastly, there are the emotionally-focused people. They don't particularly care what it is or how it works. You need to tell them **Why They Should Care**. What is the value of the product? What is the benefit of the process? For these members of your audience, add some marketing-style language about the impact or meaning of your presentation.

What does this look like in real life? Well, for example, in a presentation about Product Foxtrot:

1. Include an Executive Summary with the bullet “Foxtrot works three times faster than the competition’s product.”
2. At some point state that “Over the next few slides, we’ll review exactly how Foxtrot works and why it is so much faster.”
3. Conclude with “Because it is so fast, Foxtrot will save our customers at least 10 hours of work per week and allow them to accomplish more in less time with less effort.”

ROCK*
TIP*Always communicate:*

- *What It Is.*
- *How It Works.*
- *Why They Should Care.*

Story Time: Joe’s First Presentation

The first significant presentation I ever gave was an oral report in 10th grade history class. Everyone had been assigned a different country, and I had to cover the complete history of the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1989. No pressure.

This was in the early 1990s, when the Internet only had four websites and PowerPoint had not yet taken the world (much less the classroom) by storm. I did my research using primitive paper books at the library, wrote up my report, and practiced the things I would say.

At this particular moment in my life, age 15-ish, I was fairly insecure in general, fairly nervous in front of a crowd, and prone to both mumbling and talking so fast it sounded like a foreign language. And I knew it. Things looked grim for young Joe.

The day arrived for my presentation. The two students who presented first that day were awkward and boring, which is typical in high school. But they were also slow, so the teacher pointed out that we only had ten minutes left, which was not really enough time for anyone else to give their talk...unless there was a volunteer?

Being the bundle of nerves that I was, I wanted the whole thing behind me as soon as possible, so I volunteered.

The next ten minutes were a blur of Russian names, dates, geography lessons, military anecdotes, crash courses in economics, and a lot of wiping sweaty hands on dirty jeans. I was presenting at the speed of sound, though in my defense, I did have to cover seventy years of near-global history in ten minutes.

And something wonderful happened. I forgot about my nerves, I forgot about mumbling, I forgot about the girls I had crushes on who were watching me. I forgot about all of those things because I was too busy giving my presentation. I was completely focused on my talk, remembering my research, pointing at maps, all while keeping one eye on the clock.

In fact, I slipped so deeply into my comfort zone that I started cracking jokes. And frankly, it isn't that easy to make the history of the USSR particularly funny to a bunch of teenagers.

Suddenly the ten minutes were over, I had covered everything in my report, and the class actually cheered and applauded. No, they really did. Success!

I only got a B+ on this wonderful presentation, but the teacher admitted that it was because I lapsed into some mild swearing at one point, but that's to be expected. I was only 15. A very nervous 15.

But the point of the story is simply that I was not and am not a naturally talented speaker, and yet I discovered that I could become comfortable and confident in front of an audience if I really focused on the content of the talk. Somewhere between practice and knowledge, I found all the confidence I needed to do the job well, and to have a good time doing it - so you probably can too.

The Catch

This is the part where I explain the catch, in case you missed it.

During your presentation, if you spend your limited energies worrying about making mistakes and embarrassing yourself in front of your peers or superiors, then you won't have any room in your head to think about your presentation. And if you're not thinking about your presentation, then you *will* make mistakes, which will *make* you flustered and anxious, and you won't be able to think *even more*, and then you'll find yourself in the mental Spiral of Doom!

On the other hand, if you spend your energies thinking about your presentation, remembering your story and your facts (and your jokes), then you won't have any room left upstairs to worry about making mistakes, and so you won't (probably). In fact, you'll find your rhythm, grow more comfortable, and succeed better than you thought you could.

That's the catch.

3

Team Meetings, of the Garden Variety

I asked Google, very nicely and in many different ways, how the concept of “teams” arrived in our modern business world. But Google was unable to give me a single, solid answer. From what I could find, the modern concept of a business team first emerged in the early twentieth century, and really broke into mainstream practices around the 1980s. Prior to the Team Age, corporate life centered around the individual: credentials and experience, expertise and accomplishments, success and failure.

This makes sense. Years ago, professional fields were broader and shallower. An individual was expected to do quite a range of things for their employer, whether they were engineers, artists, or accountants. But today, professional fields are much more specialized and more numerous. Just consider how many *types* of accountants, lawyers, doctors, engineers, artists, and teachers there are today thanks to the development of new fields of study, many of which sprang into being with the advent of modern technologies.

For example, thirty years ago a video game developer was a software programmer. Today, video game developers include conceptual artists, character animators, environment modelers, script writers, voice-over actors, directors, producers, sound effects people... and software programmers. Thus, a job that could be done almost entirely by one generalist in the past requires an entire team of specialists in the future. I mean, the present. We don't have hover cars yet, do we?

And because we are not yet psychic or telepathic here in the future, we need to meet with our teams on a frequent (sometimes too frequent) basis to make sure we are all working together and not inadvertently ruining each other's efforts, which would be bad.

Team meetings take many forms in our various work environments. Sometimes they are quick huddles in the boss's office or at lunch. Sometimes they are sessions in a conference room where everyone takes turns saying what they are currently working on. And sometimes they are small nightmares in which team members regularly discover that others are inadvertently ruining their efforts. Which is bad.

These types of status meetings tend to be fairly informal and not relevant to our discussion of presentations. But if we move up one level (or take one step back, whatever movement-based metaphor works for you), there is another type of team meeting that does demand a presentation.

Throughout the life cycle of a project, it is common for a team or individual to brief other teams or the executive leadership on the status of the project. This includes explaining what the new project will be, how the current project is proceeding, or how the last project concluded.

There are many small but troublesome pitfalls in these types of briefings. It can be nerve-wracking telling a grumpy-looking vice president about your technical work. It can be awkward giving a talk that is broken up among half a dozen team members. And it can be frustrating trying to explain something complicated that you understand as an expert but that other people just aren't going to be able to grasp in a thirty-minute meeting.

So let's discuss the best way to pull this off.

There are many flavors of team meeting, and they are often inter-related. We'll look at three of them here:

- There is the prep meeting to discuss what you will do at the Big Meeting.
- There is the Big Meeting.
- There is the “hot wash” to discuss what happened after the Big Meeting.

Prep Meetings: Let's All Form a Committee!

Prep meetings, or planning sessions, or whatever your organization calls them, are basically committees that exist solely to create a slide show for the Big Meeting. The first question you should ask yourself (or the team, for that matter) is why an entire team is needed to assemble 20 slides and then present the material at the Big Meeting.

The most likely answer is that no *one* person knows all of the information that the team needs to present, and that the various slides (and talks) need to come from different team members. This is the first source of chaos. Having two or four or ten different people creating slides and talking in the same meeting to the Very Important People is bound to make you look somewhat disorganized. So you need a plan:

1. Assign one person to create the presentation.
2. Agree upon the story your presentation will tell.
3. Assign people to develop presentation content.

Your first committee decision should be to minimize the number of speakers, and to identify one person to create the presentation. Ideally, you should select your company's writer or artist (or an administrative assistant with strong slide skills) to build the slides

based on the team's input. This will ensure that the final product is coherent and professional. It will also eliminate the potential for different versions of the presentation floating around between team members in emails, causing even more confusion as to which is the "real" presentation. (We call this "version control.")

The second thing your committee needs to agree upon is a game plan. What is the story you are telling at the Big Meeting? What are you going to emphasize? For example:

- Sales are up!
- High turnover is hurting production!
- The new product is marginally better than the old product!

The danger here is simply saying, "Archie will talk about research, Sally will talk about design, Raj will talk about data, Veronica will talk about marketing, and Kenji will talk about staffing."

If your presentation isn't focused, the Very Important People may derail your meeting and start to ask questions (that you can't instantly answer) and you'll have to have more meetings and write reports until you satisfy them that you know what you're doing, all because you didn't keep the first meeting focused and on track.

Lastly, your committee needs to assign individuals to create slide content and deliver it to your slide assembler.

ROCK* TIP

Minimize the number of speakers. Have one person create the slides. Focus the presentation.



Most prep meetings are run by a team leader, manager, or director. If you are not this leader, pay attention to whether the above questions have been answered. The worst “plan” would be to have *everyone* put together *a few slides* about *everything* they are doing, and then email them all to the team *leader* the *day before* the Big Meeting.

So you need to speak up! Even if that means volunteering to be one of the speakers (or the only speaker) and to be the one who assembles the slides.

The Big Meeting: Time to Present to the Boss!

Let’s imagine a best case scenario:

- You were selected to assemble the slides for the presentation.
- You were selected to speak for the whole team.
- You have a clear message to communicate during this meeting.

But wait, there’s even more that needs to go right:

- Each member of the team sent you the information / data / graphics needed for the presentation.
- Each member of the team reviewed and approved the draft presentation you created.
- You had time to review and rehearse the talk before the meeting (refer to Chapter 3).

So now it is time for the meeting. Remember, a Big Meeting usually involves high-level leaders within your company or even impressionable clients, so every aspect of this meeting (no matter how short or seemingly unimportant it is) needs to run smoothly.

1. Arrive early and set up your equipment: laptop, projector, slide show, hand outs, etc.
 - a. Don't rely on someone else to bring their computer.
 - b. Don't wait until the last minute to have your IT department fix the projector.
 - c. Don't plan to download the slides from your email or from the network during the meeting. (Because something *will* go wrong!) Have the file on your desktop, ready to go.
 - d. Don't give your attendees a printout of the entire presentation. This only invites them to read ahead, ask questions out of turn, and ignore the live speaker (AKA: You).
2. When it is time for you to give your talk, take control of the room.
 - a. Speak loudly and clearly.
 - b. If there is a delay while the slides load, keep talking. Introduce yourself and your team, explain what you are going to be talking about. Do not create a long silent void while you tap at your laptop; it will make you appear disorganized and unprofessional.

3. Give your presentation exactly as you practiced it.
 - a. If someone asks a question, answer it as concisely as possible *and move on*. Don't allow the interruption to derail your talk into another subject.
 - b. If someone asks a question you can't (or shouldn't) answer, ask them to please hold their questions until the end of the talk. Then, as you give the rest of the talk, figure out the most polite and helpful way of telling the person with the question that the information is not available, or that they should speak to Mr. Jones in Sales, or to their Customer Manager.

ROCK*
TIP

*Arrive and set up early.
Take control of the room,
and keep it!*

There are a few hidden dangers during these meetings. If you have never met with these executives or clients before, ask your coworkers about them:

- Are they very technical and prone to asking questions?
- Or are they more likely to be bored / confused by technical details?
- Do they tend to ask the same question no matter the subject, such as, "But how will this affect the quarterly sales figures?"

There is probably a limit to how much you can tailor your presentation to cater to everyone in the room, so be prepared to

handle these types of questions or interruptions. If the CEO is known to be impatient and to start asking questions on Slide 2, be ready to politely point out that all of his or her concerns will be addressed over the next few slides.

Also, you may not have information that will answer specific questions from Sales, or Finance, or Reports, or IT. But if you know these people will be attending the presentation, make an effort to acknowledge these individuals and their concerns. Add a slide to your presentation titled “Reports” and simply say, “This project should have no direct impact on Reports” and move on.

With any luck, this will make everyone feel involved and respected while at the same time avoiding any difficult questions that might disrupt your presentation.

The Hot Wash: Return of the Committee!

Not all organizations hold follow-up meetings to discuss what happened at the “Big Meeting,” but if yours does, then you should take advantage of the opportunity. This should be a mirror image of the prep meeting, in the sense that it will be led by your team leader or manager, who should be handing out assignments. Again, just like the prep meeting, pay careful attention to what is being said.

First, did the rest of the team feel that the presentation went as well / badly as you did? If not, why? Did they see or hear something that you missed? If you were busy giving the talk, you may have missed

ROCK* TIP

Pay careful attention to what is being said: Did everyone hear the same things at the meeting as you? Praise, problems, and assignments?



the smiles or frowns in the audience, and you definitely won't have heard any whispered conversations on the side.

Second, did the rest of the team hear the same feedback that you did? Did you all hear the same criticisms and concerns? The same requests for follow-up actions? Different people tend to focus on different words. Some people may only pay attention to positives or negatives, and thus have rather one-sided opinions about how the Big Meetings went. And different people may take different notes about how the product needs to be updated, or when the report is due, or what sales figures the executive wants to see by the end of the week.

Third, are your team members being assigned specific follow-up tasks based on the results of the Big Meeting? Just as individuals need clear assignments to prepare for such a meeting, individuals also need clear guidance on how to respond to such a meeting. If no such guidance is forthcoming, ask for it.

This is both the weakness and the strength of working in a team. You can help each other by filling in the gaps, or you can undermine the team by staying quiet.

So you need to speak up! Even if that means telling your team members (or leader) that you think they misheard or misinterpreted some feedback.

Disaster Response: When Things Go Wrong

I couldn't possibly list everything that might go wrong during a presentation. There are technical failures, such as your computer falling asleep and disconnecting from the projector, and there are human failures, such as completely forgetting what to say and just staring at the CEO for thirty seconds.

Here are a few worth looking at:

Time Problems

Being the consummate professional that you are, you have arrived on time for your thirty-minute presentation only to find that the team is running behind schedule and you have less than twenty minutes to speak. This happens quite often in the real world, so I suggest that once you've finished preparing and practicing your presentation, review it carefully and think about what parts you could either do without, or trim down if you're forced to do so. Being prepared for something like this beforehand will not only help keep fluster and panic to a minimum, but will also ensure that you stay focused on the most important content in your talk despite being forced to cut out an entire third of it.

Technical Problems

There is always a small risk of your hardware and software conspiring to ruin your meeting. If this happens, *keep going!* Naturally, you're not going to be able to make all your points or show all your visuals, but you can keep talking about your topic. Whatever you do, don't put the whole room on pause while you frantically smack your computer. Stay engaged. Keep talking. The more gracefully you handle a disaster, the more professional you appear.

Human problems

The whole point of "practice, practice, practice" is to prevent human failure. And I'm sorry to say, there is no cure for a human failure, because *you* are the human. If you breakdown, you're done. So practice, practice, practice. But if you do make a mistake or get stuck, don't draw attention to it. Don't apologize and start rambling about what a goofball you are and how this always happens to you, ever since the third grade when you were Rabbit #2 in the Easter pageant. It's important that you just keep moving through your

presentation. Highlighting your mistake will only slow you down and make those who didn't notice or care about your error, *start to notice and care*.

Audience Problems

What do you do when your boss or client completely derails your presentation with other discussions, or even attacks your data or theory?

The most dramatic example of this in my experience occurred in a military briefing. A colonel was showing his PowerPoint slides to the general about an operation that took place the previous week. The general stopped the presentation and demanded to know why the colonel's report was so incomplete, and why it took so long to deliver. (The general compared the presentation to the sports page in a newspaper, which contains hundreds of statistics about complex events that are reported within hours of the event itself.) The colonel had no answer.

When a boss attacks a presentation, it's because the presentation has failed to inspire confidence. The boss suspects that you are wasting his time, or that you're trying to hide mistakes or bad results. (Or maybe he's just having a bad day.) What do you do?

First, stay calm. You're in a bad spot and panicking won't make it any better.

Second, listen carefully to what your boss is saying. Maybe he's just impatient and his questions will be addressed later in your talk. If so, politely point this out and proceed.

Third, if your boss's concerns are valid, or his suspicions about your presentation are correct, then admit it. If your product is bad, if the customers hate it, just say so. You won't impress anyone by lying *when they know you're lying*.

The bottom line to disaster response should always be more honesty and cooperation. Don't allow the situation to make you look like the single point of failure in the room. Maintain a sense that you are part of the team, that "we" have a problem, and that you are trying to solve it for "us." If your audience gets it into their heads that "they" are the victims of "your" failure, you're in deep trouble.

Story Time: Joe Sells Himself to His Coworkers

I once worked as a Writer/Editor for a large firm where I only interacted with a few people on a regular basis. My supervisor and I agreed that I should give a presentation to other teams to explain to them what I did and how I could help them to accomplish their projects. So, this was both an informational talk and a sort of sales pitch about my editorial services.

That week, I put together about twenty slides to use during the three team meetings that I had scheduled. I had slides with bullets, numbered lists, time lines, software screenshots, charts and graphs, and even a few animations. I then sent the slides to a few of my coworkers to get their reactions before the first meeting.

Several people ignored my email, of course. Some people suggested that I mention a few more topics that they considered to be particularly helpful, and I added a few words to that effect. But there were also people who wanted me to change *everything*.

It was suggested that I add more words to every bullet, and add more bullets to every slide. They were of the opinion that slides were speaker notes, and that everything in the talk needed to be projected on the wall. I disagreed. They were skeptical.

It was also suggested that I reorder my slides. Instead of my arrangement, which made sense to me and how I intended to give

the talk, they wanted “everything at the beginning” (whatever that means). I tried to explain that I would discuss each topic in turn, in a sequence that I found logical. They were skeptical.

At the end of the day, of course, they were my slides and I delivered the talk in the way that I wanted. I showed what I wanted and I said what I wanted, and no one was confused. I made the same jokes in all three presentations, and I got the same genuine laughs. And at the end of each meeting, I even got a smattering of applause and a few people stopped me in the hallway to tell me what a great talk I gave.

And I was just telling them about my job. (Spoiler Alert: Writing and editing are usually not very exciting or funny.)

The point is that everyone is different; everyone thinks differently and has different comfort zones when it comes to giving a presentation. The people giving me feedback about my slides were not thinking about what I was including in my presentation, they were thinking about *how they would give my presentation*, which is a very different issue.

This illustrates some of the difficulties of having a team or committee create (or worse, give) a presentation. If I had tried to give my presentation the way other people would have preferred, it would have been less successful. I would have been less comfortable, less confident, and less effective. By the same token, if anyone else had tried to give my talk my way, they probably would not have been very successful either.

Summary

Team meetings are opportunities for you to impress your peers, your bosses, or your clients with the quality of your work and your ability to present it to them like a professional. But team meetings are also opportunities for chaos, confusion, group-thinking, and (unfortunately) general embarrassment. The key to success is communication and accountability.

ROCK* REMINDER

Always have a clear and simple plan for your presentation. The simplest plan will lead to the best result.



When planning, as long as everyone is contributing, then you are most likely to have all the information you need at any given time. If everyone is just nodding along, you may be in dangerous waters. And as long as it is clear who will be doing what, and when, then you are more likely to deliver the best possible presentation, to make the best possible impression, and to come away from the meeting with insightful and useful feedback.

The bottom line is that the path to success is usually the simplest one: A minimal number of speakers, a single presentation style, and a single clear goal are all you really need. Make a plan and follow it.

4

History, part 2: *Killer Keynotes*

We live in exciting times. The world is bustling with innovations, with bright people and bright ideas. And every three and a half minutes, somewhere an entrepreneur stands up in front of a group of stakeholders to talk about their great ideas. This happens at press conferences, trade shows, board meetings, investor meetings, demonstrations, and academic forums. And some of them are just brilliant.

These keynote talks cover new technologies, business mergers, movie concepts, construction projects, medical procedures, and anything else you can imagine. But the best part is, the really good keynotes tend to show up online, where you can watch them.

In this chapter, we'll review two recent and very successful keynote talks. The first is Steve Jobs' 2007 introduction of the iPhone at MacWorld (I considered using the even more recent introduction of the iPad, but the iPhone is a more proven success at this point.) The second keynote is Randy Pausch's 2007 Last Lecture.

Steve Jobs: MacWorld (2007)

The MacWorld events are, well, fan conventions. Much like Comicon and other events that cater directly to the most passionate fans of games or movies, MacWorld is a trade show with a very specific purpose: To build a community of Apple fans, and to whip those fans into a frenzy over Apple's newest offerings.

And it works.

In 1998, Apple CEO Steve Jobs began delivering the keynote speech at MacWorld, the speech that unveils Apple's newest hardware and toys to screaming fans. These speeches garner

instant media coverage as they reveal products like the iMac and the iPod. Jobs doesn't come to these events to sell his products—he comes to watch the products sell themselves.

He doesn't explain to his audience (of self-selected, pre-initiated supporters) why the product is good or how it works or why they should consider investing in one. He simply lists capabilities and performance statistics. He doesn't use the latest business-speak jargon about paradigms, process flows, architectures, or methodologies to describe a concept. He uses plain English to talk about a tool.

And it works.

In 2007, Jobs took the stage at MacWorld once again. He opened with a series of simple but powerful statistics about how quickly Apple integrated with Intel, and how many Macs were being sold to people who had never owned a Mac before. The statistics were impressive and easy to understand. And the slides projected on the wall behind him were equally impressive and easy to understand. Just numbers. No headers or footers or corporate logos. No bullet points. Just the naked numbers, bright white in a sea of darkness. That's all he needed.

He joked about the competition. He played Mac's newest TV commercial. He displayed photographs of new products (again, without headers and footers and logos; just the bright colorful products floating in a sea of darkness). He gave sales numbers, compared sales volumes with the competition, and described new partnerships. The numbers just kept coming, along with partner logos, product images, screenshots, and videos.

ROCK* TIP

If you want to impress people, don't try to impress them - show them something impressive.



And he kept his audience laughing and cheering all the way.

MacWorld 2007 reviewed Apple TV. After a few minutes of describing how to use it, Jobs began to *actually use it*. He scrolled through menus, played movies and TV shows, displayed photos, and listened to music. In his presentation.

ROCK* TIP

A presentation is an audio-visual event, so you should use sights and sounds to maximum effect.



Then, about 26 minutes into the keynote, Jobs began talking about Apple's flagship product for the coming year. He unveiled the iPhone.

Jobs began by building the case for the iPhone. What's wrong with the competition? He showed the other smart phones on the market, which looked mechanical and primitive. Seconds later, he revealed the iPhone, which looked like a prop from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. He explained the screen's features, and the phone's software, and finally the breakthrough applications (apps!) that would completely change the nature of phones forever.

The presentation soldiered on with more screenshots, product photos, features, and statistics. He never explained how anything worked, and rarely explained why anything was added (or not added). For the most part, he simply listed features and then showed them in action.

The on-screen demo was huge, colorful, and dynamic. Music played. Video played. Phone calls were made. The presentation was a show.

And the audience cheered.

Why Was this Presentation A Success?

Steve Jobs proved himself a capable and charismatic speaker again and again, yet I don't think it is unreasonable to suppose that almost anyone could have given the iPhone keynote to thunderous applause. The reason is simple: The product was outstanding.

The product was revolutionary. It was loaded with hardware and software capabilities that no one had seen before. It was a game-changer; it heralded a new age in communications technologies, and other exuberant clichés.

The lesson for presenters is equally simple. Steve Jobs can pitch Apple products on the world stage just by listing features and giving demonstrations. If you can't sell your products (or ideas, proposals, etc.) just by describing them, then your presentation isn't to blame; your product is. (You need a better product!)

But from a presentation standpoint, you don't just need excellent content. You also need to understand your content in detail, and recognize the difference between selling a product and allowing a product to sell itself.

One way to evaluate who is doing the selling (you versus your product) is to look at your slides. How many of them are explicitly explaining or displaying the product itself? Because every slide that features the product is about *reality*: This is the product, which is excellent and speaks for itself.

SPEECH * SPECS

Jobs' language during his keynote never employs any sort of technical jargon, and would be comprehensible to most children. (I lost count of how many times he described things as "cool.")



Every slide about anything else (your company, your team, the competition, the market) is about *fantasy*: “This is my story about the product, to manipulate your opinion of it, because the product isn’t good enough to sway your opinion on its own.”

I advise you to be in the business of Reality.

The Bottom Line

Outstanding content sells itself. Get outstanding content, and then don’t ruin it with incomprehensible jargon.

Randy Pausch: The Last Lecture (2007)

University professor Randy Pausch was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer in 2006. One year later, on September 18, 2007, he delivered a presentation titled *The Last Lecture*, in which he described how he achieved his childhood dreams, including experiencing weightlessness, being Captain Kirk, and working as a Disney Imagineer. This presentation became an online video phenomenon, led to a series of media appearances, and became a best-selling book.

The visual component of *The Last Lecture* was a series of home photographs and a few bright words on black backgrounds. At one point, a brief video of one of Pausch’s students’ work was shown. For the most part, Pausch spoke from behind a lectern, occasionally crossing the stage to display a prop.

The stories that Pausch told are not technical, nor scientific, nor business in nature. They were personal stories, primarily about the personal relationships in Pausch’s life that contributed to his various successes. He talked about his mentors and his students, his colleagues and his family. He discussed no breakthroughs, he unveiled no exotic products. *The Last Lecture* was seventy-six

minutes of advice about how to live one's life, delivered by a charismatic and successful individual.

Why Was This Presentation a Success?

Although there are many factors which lead to presentation success, I believe that *content*, *charisma*, and *circumstance* are probably the top three.

In a sense, the *content* of Pausch's Last Lecture was both too general and too specific. He advised his audience to follow their dreams, to cherish life, to seize opportunities. He also described the specific people he had worked with, the specific technical projects he took part in, and the specific achievements he had realized in his career. A person listening to this talk can try to emulate Pausch in a broad sense, but there is no definitive roadmap for replicating Pausch's successes.

So if the content was fairly engaging but not terrifically special, was it the *man* himself? Randy Pausch was a handsome, young, and charismatic speaker. But this alone cannot be enough or else every word spoken by a Hollywood actor would capture the world's imagination.

The remaining component then is the *circumstance* of the presentation. Randy Pausch was an accomplished young man facing an untimely death, which placed his life and his words in a rather unique context. He was able to embody a graceful, even joyful attitude toward life and work under the most adverse of conditions.

Pausch offered the same sort of insights that one expects to hear from a much older man, and yet here we are hearing them from a man in his prime, someone a working professional can more easily identify with. Instead of receiving a lifetime of wisdom from someone of an older generation, we are receiving this wisdom from our peer, someone just like us.

So when Pausch described how thoroughly he has succeeded in his work, in his relationships, and more specifically in accomplishing his childhood dreams at the age of 47, we hear it far more keenly.

The bottom Line

Good content carries greater weight when delivered by the *right person* at the *right time* for the *right reason*.

Summary

A successful modern keynote address relies even more on the power of *reality* than our classic speeches did. Where Lincoln and Churchill succeeded with high-minded concepts delivered with powerful honesty, Jobs and Pausch succeeded with rare and valuable content that spoke for itself. Again, the lesson here is to focus on the facts, to respect your content and your audience, and to remove yourself from the equation as much as possible. Your audience hasn't gathered together to watch your jaw move, they've come to learn something new.

SPEECH * SPECS

Pausch's "Last Lecture" speech received a Flesch-Kincaid readability score of 81, making it a fairly easy read. The word usage is at the 5th grade level.



5

Keynote Addresses

Once upon a time—No, we already started a chapter that way.

As we discussed earlier, the whole concept of meetings and presentations is both very old and very modern. And while the team meeting presentation is the most modern, the keynote address is the most traditional. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Churchill's speeches before Parliament were essentially keynote addresses.

A keynote address is simply one person standing before a large audience and speaking at length about a subject within their professional expertise or personal experience. It is the least interactive type of presentation, with information flowing in one direction: from the speaker to the audience. It is also a presentation that comes with several built-in assumptions:

1. The speaker was chosen (usually by the conference hosts) to give the presentation because of their proven reputation and generally acknowledged expertise.
2. This means that the speaker rarely has to spend any time or effort explaining who they are or why they were selected to speak.
3. The audience usually comprises people who are already familiar with the speaker, and who are eager to hear what the speaker has to say. (The audience might also comprise professional rivals or critics, but again, they will be *informed* audience members.)

Today, we most frequently encounter keynote addresses at conferences, and they tend to be structured very similarly, regardless of the speaker or the subject matter. After a brief introduction by an associate or event coordinator, the keynote

speaker takes the stage, projects their slides, and talks for an hour or two without interruption.

Most professionals will not be invited to give a keynote address until the middle or later stages of their careers, when they have developed significant reputations and accomplishments in their fields. However, younger professionals may be asked to speak if they have achieved some notable success at an earlier age.

Those who are asked to deliver a keynote address later in their careers most likely have developed their speaking skills over the years in smaller forums, and so the transition to giving a longer talk is easier. But those who achieve success early may be thrust on stage with much less experience in public speaking, so those lucky few should pay special attention!

Plan Ahead: Find Out What You're Getting Into

When you are first contacted to speak at an event, it is critical to learn as much as possible about the conference, the coordinators, the audience, and the venue. Most conferences are annual events with well-established communities of professionals who attend year after year, and these audiences will arrive with certain expectations and assumptions about the speakers at these events.

Ideally, you will have already attended at least one of these conferences in the past as an attendee (after all, you are a professional in their field) and so you should have some sense of what types of talks are given at the conference. But even if you have attended one before, you should still do some research:

1. Study past presentations at the conference.
2. Review the content and style of past presentations.
3. Ask for guidance from the event coordinators.
4. Learn about your audience.

Look up the keynote addresses from past conferences. Many are now available on conference websites, either as online slideshows or even streaming videos. If the presentations are accompanied by technical papers, read those as well.

Take note of how long the papers and presentations are. Do they favor text and bullets? Do they include many tables and charts of data? Do they contain entertaining photographs or clip art? It's important to get a sense of the tone set at the event. Some cater to engineers who expect to see data, while others are more informal where presenters are expected to have a more personal or entertaining style.

The person who invites you to speak at this event may give you specific guidance about the type of talk they would like you to give at their conference, but they might simply say, "We'd like to hear about your latest research" or "Could you tell us your thoughts on the future of the industry?" If this is the case, then you should also review the conference theme, paper tracks, discussion forums, panels, and other scheduled events. Try to shape your presentation to match the other content at the event.

You should also try to determine what, if anything, your audience may be hostile to. For example, some professionals and academics prefer to discuss research and development outside of commercial applications and will react negatively to anything that resembles a sales pitch. Similarly, if the same people (or people from the same organization) have been speaking at this conference year after year,

the regular attendees may be tired, or even hostile, to hearing the same pet theories or results of related experiments.

This creates the need for a difficult balancing act: Not too different from what the attendees are used to hearing, but not too similar to what they have already heard. Plan carefully!

Prepare: Building Your Slide Deck

Once you have decided what you will be talking about for your keynote address, you may be inclined to pilfer your own older presentations for familiar slides. And while many of your existing slides undoubtedly contain charts, tables, graphics, and photos that you will need in your new presentation, you should avoid recycling too many slides.

First, estimate how many slides you will need in total. To do this, divide your allotted speaking time (e.g., thirty, sixty, ninety minutes) by how long you tend to speak to a slide, on average. Everyone is different, so this may be thirty seconds per slide, or two minutes per slide. It will be important to get this estimate correct.

Now, as discussed in the “Team Meeting” chapter, you need to craft your presentation as a coherent story about your chosen topic. (This is why you should avoid recycling too many slides; it will turn your keynote address into a kluge of other, smaller presentations.)

There are a few logistical concerns you should keep in mind as well. For instance, your keynote address may be held in a large conference room or assembly hall in which some attendees will be sitting some distance back from the screen. And while that screen may be very large, you should still make an effort to accommodate your venue. Remember, in most cases your audience isn’t sitting a few feet from the screen; they are sitting dozens of yards away.

To make your presentation easier to see, make all of your text larger. This may mean splitting a text-heavy slide across two or even three slides so that each one is as legible as possible. You should also revise your imported photographs and diagrams, particularly those you know to be “just a little bit fuzzy.” You can get away with lower quality images on smaller screens, but when your presentation is fifteen feet high, it needs to start out as crisp and clear as possible.

ROCK*
TIP

*Optimize your presentation
to be visible from a
distance.*



It may also be helpful to make your colors darker, and to make the lines and arrows in your diagrams thicker and bolder.

Keynote Time: Delivering the Talk

A keynote presentation is just a longer briefing with a larger audience. The challenge is to maintain your momentum and level of engagement with your audience. You'll need to be coherent, informative, and even entertaining for an hour or longer. Which is about as hard as it sounds.

Find your tone and your pace and stick to them. Punctuate your talk with regular highlights, such as props, video clips, and other audio-visual tools. After all, every minute of uninterrupted talking on your part is a minute of uninterrupted listening for your audience. Give them and yourself frequent pauses to consider a diagram or photograph, to watch a short film, or just to laugh at a joke.

Keep an eye on the audience in general. This can be difficult in a large dark room, but you should be able to hear how restless they are, or whether they are quietly filtering out to stretch their legs, or whether private conversations are popping up all around you.

If the audience doesn't seem engaged, pause for a moment to consider why that is. Are you in the middle of a lengthy section reviewing data? Or are you explaining the background material before presenting the Big Idea? Can you skip ahead to the next section, or at least to the end of the current section? Maybe a quick anecdote will get things moving again.

ROCK*
TIP

Monitor your audience. Keynotes can be long, and you may want to adapt to their mood.



You should also double-check your performance. After talking for an hour you may be feeling some fatigue. Your mouth or throat may be dry, your back may be sore from standing still, or any number of other factors may be dragging you down, muffling your voice, or otherwise dampening your presentation. So take a drink, start moving around, and remember to project your voice.

And while you shouldn't arbitrarily change your presentation plan right in the middle of the talk, you should assess the situation if you honestly feel things aren't going well. But should you really speed up your presentation or skip over a "boring" part? After all, this will only bring you to the end sooner than you planned. Your conference hosts may be concerned about a change in their schedule, but there are benefits to ending early. You can use the free time to take questions from the audience, to encourage participation and involvement, which will undoubtedly make at least a handful of people very happy.

Or you could simply break for lunch a few minutes early, which usually makes everyone happy.

Q&A: Speaker On Trial

You may choose to close your presentation with a “Question and Answer” session. You also may be required to close with a Q&A session per the conference coordinator’s directions. Either way, it is a good opportunity to take a break from speaking, interact with your audience, and make certain that everyone really understood what you said.

Most questions at a keynote are not difficult or awkward, unless your presentation was particularly shocking or bizarre, in which case you’re probably prepared for a flood of hard questions. Usually, most people just want you to clarify one point, or to give them your opinion of *their* research, or talk about your next project or the future of the industry. I suggest giving accurate but brief answers and moving on to the next person. (An audience is always happier when ten people get to speak than when only two people get to speak.)

However, not all questions are easy.

One troublesome question after a long address is a request for further detail or clarification of an idea. Sometimes this is reasonable, and all you need to do is provide a name or date. But sometimes a detail-oriented engineer or accountant wants to interrogate your data, and methods, and results, and interpretation, and the school you went to, and the company that paid for your study... You see where I’m going with this. In the event that someone asks an inappropriately specific question, I suggest you simply ask them to find you after the talk and you can answer them later (if they can find you!).

When a troublesome person asks a troublesome question, many people in the audience will instantly roll their eyes because they think the difficult person is going to waste all of the Q&A time

on argumentative minutiae. You will make many friends in your audience by artfully moving past the difficult person and engaging with as many other people as possible before your time is up.

You can also manage questions and answers simply by providing your audience with your contact information. Display your name, email address, or other means of reaching you on your last slide and leave it displayed during the Q&A session. If people really want to speak with you, they can, and this should alleviate some of their anxiety about getting your attention during the group session.

What Is Success? Popularity Contests and Heroin Content

A short talk, or a *technical* talk, is just an opportunity for the audience to hear some important or unique information, and perhaps have a few questions answered. In these instances, it is less important to be clever, charming, or even memorable. Your work will speak for itself.

But for a long talk, a keynote address, you are doing more than conveying a few facts. You are giving a performance. Conference attendees usually pay a fee to enter, and they often make that decision based upon whether they think the keynote speakers (and other content) are worth the money. And while your performance won't impact your honorarium, it may impact whether you are invited to speak at that conference again, or whether any of the attendees invite you to speak at other events.

The more experience you have as a speaker, the better sense you should have of how comfortable you are speaking, and how successful your talks are. If you suspect that you may not be the most entertaining presenter, especially beyond the half-hour mark, then you should re-double your efforts to make your content as compelling as possible.

Web design critic Vincent Flanders (referencing author William Burroughs) has coined the term “heroin content” to describe material that is so good that people will crawl through a sewer to beg for it. If your website has heroin content, then it doesn’t matter how poorly designed the site is. Similarly, if your presentation has heroin content, then it doesn’t matter how well you deliver the talk. People will love it anyway.

ROCK* **TIP**

The best presentations have what’s called “heroin content”: unique, valuable, and in demand.



What exactly is heroin content? A Harry Potter novel. A Star Wars movie. An iPhone. More relevantly, heroin content is a revolutionary new theory, or the results of a ground-breaking study, or pearls of wisdom from someone who has lived an extraordinarily unique life. You may want to review your presentation and ask yourself, “How special is this? How unique? How much demand is there in the community to hear what I have to say?”

If the answer is, “Not much,” then you need better content. It may be as simple as adding more visuals instead of bullet points, but it also may mean a little extra research and some new ideas.

At the end of the day, you’ll simply have to test your presentation with peers or coworkers and gauge their reaction. Are they bored, interested, engaged, or impressed?

Presenting On a Panel

Keynote addresses aren’t the only way to participate at a conference. You may also be invited to be a member of a panel, a group of experts discussing a specific topic and answering audience questions, typically with a moderator to guide the ongoing discussion.

You can prepare for this in the same way as preparing for a keynote address, simply on a smaller and less formal scale. The panel session may begin with opening statements from each member, either on the same topic or different aspects of the topic. You'll be notified beforehand what they'd like the panel to discuss, so you can plan appropriately. You'll give your opening remarks, usually seated without slides, and then the discussions will begin.

As a panel member, you're there to play a role, or to represent a point of view or organization. Remain focused on your role. If you were asked to represent the video game industry, or young professionals, or soldiers returning from Iraq, then do exactly that. Panels have great potential for generating lively debate, developing original ideas, and even launching new projects; however, they are also prone to falling apart into side arguments and being derailed by personal agendas. Keep your contributions grounded in your expertise.

To contribute to a positive panel experience, try to support the moderator in keeping the discussion focused. Come prepared with useful information, like industry sales figures, or release schedules for upcoming products, or new ideas you're currently working on. You'll be disappointing a lot of people if you only come prepared with a company statement and a vague personal opinion.

Lastly, have fun. Panels are supposed to be dynamic, interactive events. Your audience came not only to learn from experts, but to hear how experts interact and share ideas and debate important subjects in their field. So get involved and set a good example!

Summary

A keynote address, like any other presentation, is an opportunity to be more than yourself for a few minutes (or hours). Instead of merely being a brilliant thinker, creator, or entrepreneur, you become

a performer, a center of attention for your peers. You have the opportunity to make a name for yourself as not only an admirable professional but an admirable individual, not only insightful and successful, but charming and commanding, or whatever else you wish to project.

But if you do not exploit this opportunity to its fullest, it is no catastrophe. At worst, you may only convey your ideas without making a strong personal impression, which is not disastrous. For inspiration as to how you can make the most of your keynote address, I recommend that you watch as many other people's presentations as possible. One excellent resource is TED.

TED, the annual Technology Entertainment Design conference, is a forum for all manners of professionals to speak about their work, from engineers and scientists to politicians and businessmen, artists, musicians, and film makers. Each TED presentation is only 18 minutes long, so while they do not demonstrate how you can deliver a much longer talk, they do demonstrate how you can deliver a particularly engaging presentation to a large and diverse audience. I personally recommend the talks given by Hans Rosling and J.J. Abrams.

For examples of much longer presentations, you could watch something such as Randy Pausch's Last Lecture, or you could attend a half-day or full-day seminar, such as those given by design guru Edward Tufte. Pay close attention to the types of devices these presenters use, from simple slides to workbooks, handouts, music, video, and other props. Note their pacing, use of humor, anecdotes, breaks, and anything else that you find yourself enjoying.

And try to have fun. Because if you don't, then your audience definitely won't, and that's bad.

6

The Pitch

My wife and I once went to a dealership to buy a used car. We found a mid-90s Camry that we liked, somewhat, but it had seen some rough roads, and it hadn't even passed the dealer's inspection yet. We had reservations. The price was also much too high—too high for a pristine car, much less for this one. So I was ready to haggle.

Unfortunately, the salesman was not ready to haggle. Nor was he ready to speak to another human being with a working cerebellum. He pointed out the price. I pointed out what was wrong with the car. He pointed out the price. I pointed out that it hadn't passed his own inspection yet. He pointed out the price. I pointed out the market value. He pointed out the price.

As you can see, there was a problem in his sales technique.

The problem was that he didn't know the product, the competition, or his audience. And to make matters worse, he had no personal talent for dealing with people. Which is why we bought a different car somewhere else.

How is a Pitch Different from Other Presentations?

There are many different sorts of pitches, from sales to customers and proposals to colleagues. The common factor is that a pitch is an attempt to motivate your audience to make a decision, to take action, or more specifically, to give you something.

To convince another person to give you their money, their time, their trust, or even just an opportunity, you need to do more than convey the facts. A pitch is far more challenging than a team meeting or

keynote address because the stakes are higher. A poor pitch means no sale, no profit, no income, no promotion, no raise, or worse. If there is a *worse*.

For this reason, a pitch needs to be charismatic and engaging and compelling. It requires more effort, more confidence, and more presentation skill. Your audience isn't just collecting information or appreciating your hard work. Your audience is actively judging you, trying to decide whether to entrust you with their money, time, and reputation.

ROCK* **REMINDER**

A pitch is a high-stakes presentation. Keep in mind the risks of failure and the rewards of success.



How is a Pitch the Same as Other Presentations?

A pitch is just another presentation. You plan and prepare, and then you stand up and talk. Like any other presentation, the key is to take your time at any given moment:

- State your goals.
- Assess your audience.
- Decide on a story.
- Build a coherent presentation.
- Employ any and all tools that will help tell your story well.
- Practice, practice, practice.

The Trick to a Good Pitch

Naturally, there is no trick, at least nothing that we have not already discussed in the earlier chapters. Like the keynote address, you can compensate for any shortcomings in your presentation style by providing richer and more compelling content. But a pitch is far more demanding than a simple address, and so you really do need “heroin” content to carry the day.

On the other hand, if your content is running a bit thin, meaning that your product isn’t terribly original or your proposal isn’t terribly profitable, then you can compensate with enormous quantities of personality. This assumes, of course, that your audience is willing to swallow what you’re dishing up.

A Good Pitch Stands on Three Legs

Let’s return to my used car salesman. Aside from his depressing inability to communicate like an adult, he didn’t know that a good pitch stands on three legs:

1. Audience
2. Competition
3. Product

ROCK* REMINDER

*Know your audience, your
competition, and your
product.*



Audience

There are two sorts of audiences for a pitch. You have *semi*-hostile people who may have invited you to present your product, yet they are somewhat skeptical and entirely capable of walking out if they

don't like what they hear. Then there are the very hostile people who allowed you barge in on their lives to sell them something they suspect they don't need, and are very likely to toss you out if they don't like what they hear.

Very rarely will you pitch a product or idea to an audience as eager, friendly, supportive, inviting, and forgiving as the audiences you will encounter when leading a typical business meeting or delivering a keynote address. This means you need to be even more attentive to your audience's attitude and body language:

- Are they paying attention to you, or having side conversations?
- Are they checking their phones or laptops?
- Are they drumming fingers, glaring, or igniting their torches and sharpening their pitchforks?

An angry mob is a bad thing, so before things spiral out of control, you need to stop and re-engage. The key is to eliminate the idea of “buyer” and “seller,” which is adversarial. Instead, you need to stand down from “pitch” mode and start talking like a human being again. For example,

- “I can see you have some reservations about this product, so let me just pause here for a moment. I realize that this is a very new idea, and we don't have as much research here as you probably want to see. But what we do have are these testimonials and these case studies.

ROCK* TIP

*A happy audience is good.
But an impressed audience
is much, much better.*



But let's set that aside for now. You've seen the basic idea. Maybe I can answer some of your questions and address some of your concerns now?"

But there is more to dealing with your audience than managing their emotions or interests. Your audience consists of people and organizations, and you need to know about them:

- Is their organization thriving or struggling? If possible, get some numbers. Revenue, staff, offices, clients.
- What tools are they using now? Hardware, software, appliances, service providers, vendors.
- What is their biggest problem now? High costs, low sales figures, competition, failure to adapt to a rapidly changing market space?

If you can demonstrate to them that you understand their specific problems, they may be more impressed with you and more inclined to believe that you and your product are of value to them.

At any rate, a pitch is overwhelmingly subjective. You might do a great job, in your opinion and in the opinion of most of the people in the room, but if the chief decision maker isn't impressed, then you're done.

Competition

You could have a great product. You could have a great presentation, and you could be a great salesperson with a friendly and receptive audience, but the wider world could be conspiring against you. It's not enough to present from a position of strength. You also need to prove that no one else is stronger.

A smart audience will see you coming a mile away. They know you want to talk about software, or hardware, or leg warmers. They'll have done some research of their own, and they will probably have their resident expert in technology (or 1980s fashion) sitting in the room, ready to ask some painfully specific questions.

ROCK*
TIP

*Know your competition.
Knowledge is both a
shield and a sword in
negotiations.*

They'll name other companies, other products, and not all of them will be relevant. It will be your job to anticipate those names and questions, and be ready to demonstrate not only that you are well aware of the competition, but also aware of how your product is superior to theirs. Because if they believe, even for a moment, that they know more than you do about your business, then you're done.

Product

Just like the competition and the audience, the product is also a tightrope between a pit full of spikes and a pit full of bears... with guns. On the one hand, if you don't know enough about your product to answer your audience's questions, then they won't want to invest in you. And if, somehow, your audience actually demonstrates that they know more about your product than you do, then they definitely won't want to invest in you. No matter how great the product is.

So study. Study the manual, talk to the engineers, play with the product, try to break it, talk to people who like it, talk to people who hate it. And if you're pitching an idea instead of a product, then you need to treat it like a complete product. It has features, it has time lines, it has a team of professionals working on it, and so on.

Admittedly, developing a commanding knowledge of your product is less fun than trash-talking your competition or subtly manipulating your potential investors by playing off their emotional cues. But, on the other hand, learning a lot of facts about something is technically easier than skillfully controlling a room full of strangers.

ROCK*
TIP

When it comes to product, know your facts, names, and statistics. Details are critical.



But even if you aren't particularly keen on memorizing serial numbers and performance statistics, you should appreciate the fact that a superior product (and your knowledge about it) is a silver bullet. Maybe the competition is strong. Maybe your audience is not just skeptical, but hostile. Maybe you aren't great at persuading. None of that matters if you can say, clearly and without reservation:

- My product will save you money.
- My product will accomplish your goals.
- My product will adapt to meet your changing needs over the long term.
- My product is supported by a team of reputable and experienced experts.

As long as your audience has a scrap of business sense, and you haven't done anything to make them distrust you, then a superior product really will sell itself. When delivering your presentation, it can be helpful to know when to pitch your product, and when to step aside and let the product pitch itself.

Summary

Selling a product or an idea, either to well-known coworkers or fresh-faced strangers, comes down to two things: *reality* and *fantasy*. When your competition is weak, your product is strong, and your audience is receptive, then *reality* is on your side and all you need to do is point it out.

But if the competition really is competition, your product is only different and not clearly better, and your audience is getting restless, then you need to create a *fantasy*. Tell a story, paint a picture, and convince your buyers or investors that they want or need what you have. (You might have noticed that I haven't devoted any space here to exploring how to create a *fantasy*, which should tell you how much I support that particular tactic.) The caveat here is that if you regularly find yourself in the business of selling lots of *fantasy* and very little *reality*, you may want to rethink your line of business.

7

History, part 3: *Death by PowerPoint*

“Death by PowerPoint.” You may have heard this phrase before. It’s a simple business joke about how boring slides can put your audience to sleep, permanently. But we’ll get to PowerPoint in a later chapter. For now, let’s talk about death.

What are the consequences of a bad presentation (besides the risk of causing the audience to fall asleep)?

We could discuss poor staff morale, or a failure to persuade investors, or other mundane consequences of a bad presentation, but it might be more instructive to consider much higher stakes. What if a presentation led to a wrong decision that destroyed irreplaceable assets *and cost people their lives*?

It happened at one particular organization. Twice.

But before we proceed, a caveat: It would be disingenuous to claim that the sole cause of these disasters was a bad presentation. The decisions that led to these tragic results were made by many people, over the course of many hours or days, with many sources of information. Many factors such as conflicting information, poor communication, and bureaucratic politics played significant roles in these events.

But the presentations did fail. And people did die.

Space Shuttle Challenger (1986)

On January 28, 1986, the space shuttle Challenger launched from the Kennedy Space Center. Seventy-three seconds after lift-off, the vehicle began to break up, shattered by forces twenty times

stronger than Earth's gravity. The crew is believed to have survived the disintegration of the vehicle, and even remained conscious as the orbiter fell, and then died upon impact in the ocean with two hundred times the force of Earth's gravity.

The evening before these events, NASA managers were discussing the impending launch with the engineers at Morton Thiokol who built the shuttle's rocket engines. They were collectively concerned that the low temperatures expected on the day of the launch might compromise the rubber O-rings that sealed the rocket fuel inside the rocket boosters. If the O-rings failed to seal, the fuel could leak out, ignite, and destroy the shuttle.

In the midst of this discussion, the rocket scientists faxed NASA a nine-page slide deck (this was before PowerPoint, so these slides were essentially sheets of paper turned sideways with hand-written bullet points on them). These slides displayed numerous statistics describing previous rocket launches, attempting to explain the relationship between low temperatures and O-ring damage. On the final page "Recommendations," the engineers stated that "O-ring temp must be $\geq 53^{\circ}\text{F}$ at launch."

In addition to these slides (which can be found online, with a little effort), the NASA managers received other conflicting data and recommendations from the engineers during the night's discussions. Their final decision was to launch as planned. It was 30°F . The space shuttle was coated in ice, the O-rings were severely compromised, and the Challenger was destroyed.

The Set-up

The people involved knew what the problem was and what the stakes were. To avert disaster, all they needed to do was wait for a warmer day.

The Bottom Line

The experts failed to clearly articulate critical information, they failed to send a single consistent message, and a bad decision was made. And people died.

Space Shuttle Columbia (2003)

On January 16, 2003, the space shuttle Columbia launched from the Kennedy Space Center. Eighty-two seconds after lift-off, a chunk of foam insulation broke off the main tank and hit the orbiter's left wing. On February 1, as the shuttle passed back through Earth's atmosphere, the damaged wing failed to protect the vehicle from the extreme temperatures of re-entry and the shuttle disintegrated, killing the crew.

The problem with Columbia was noticed immediately; a video camera captured images of the foam striking the wing. The NASA managers and their engineers then had two weeks (while the shuttle was in orbit) to determine whether the shuttle was in fact damaged, and whether it could survive re-entry when it returned from the International Space Station.

To facilitate the investigation, engineers at Boeing attempted to determine whether it was possible for a piece of foam to damage a heat shield tile. The results of their study were not published in a report, nor were they described in a letter of findings and recommendations—they were summarized in a PowerPoint presentation. Lost in a sea of bullet points, this presentation did in fact state (in somewhat convoluted scientific language and acronyms) that it was not only possible for foam to damage tiles, but that the large chunk of foam in question traveling at shuttle-launch speeds had probably caused very significant damage to the shuttle.

NASA was not convinced. No military satellites were tasked to photograph the shuttle wing to see whether it was damaged. No astronauts were authorized to exit the vehicle and inspect the wing. And so of course, no repairs were attempted. For two weeks, the shuttle Columbia orbited the Earth with a hole in its wing the size of a basketball, and it was shredded to pieces as it returned home.

The Set-up

The people involved knew what the problem was and what the stakes were. To avert disaster, they might have attempted repairs, or launched the next shuttle a few weeks early to retrieve the Columbia crew. (The Atlantis was already scheduled to go up on March 1, and it could have launched on February 10 without missing a single safety check.)

The Bottom Line

The experts failed to convey their findings and recommendations clearly. The Boeing presentation contained only incomplete phrases and carefully couched findings, vaguely worded, absent of any definitive conclusions. And people died.

Learning from Failure

Most of us do not deal in life-or-death fields of business. Most of us do not even deal in particularly costly fields of business. But these two examples, taken from the same organization, demonstrate two distinct presentation failures.

First, there was the failure to communicate *clearly*. In both cases, the experts failed to clearly explain the results of their research and their recommendations. Their findings were written in shorthand, in technical jargon, in acronyms, and in rather inconspicuous places.

Second, there was the failure to communicate *appropriately*. In both cases, the experts treated a high-stakes scenario with the same seriousness as a bi-weekly status meeting. They jotted down some notes, in no particular order, in incomplete sentences. Most critical of all, *these were not situations that called for presentations*. The experts involved should have authored proper technical papers, written in clear and complete sentences, fully explaining their findings and clearly stating their recommendations.

In fact, the team investigating the Columbia disaster stated:

“...many of the engineering packages brought before formal control boards were documented only in PowerPoint presentations... It appears that many young engineers do not understand the need for, or know how to prepare, formal engineering documents such as reports, white papers or analyses.”

So while this book you are reading discusses how to deliver successful presentations, it is absolutely crucial that you develop the skills and insights needed to determine whether a presentation is truly called for. Because sometimes, you need to write a business letter or a technical paper.

But that’s another book.

8

Head of the Class

Personally, I like teaching, although it's not for everyone, what with the repetition and the general need for boundless patience. But it also has its highlights, like genuinely helping someone to learn to do something new for the first time.

Unlike team meetings (which everyone has to do), and unlike keynote addresses (which most successful people have to do), and unlike pitches (which everyone in sales has to do), relatively few people find themselves thrown into a teaching position. Corporate training tends to be conducted by professional trainers who teach full-time.

However, on rare occasion, companies that don't have regular trainers or training programs may ask employees with particular expertise to hold a class for other members of the staff.

Let's pretend they asked you.

Respect Your Students

When you are asked by your boss to hold a class or run a seminar on some area of your expertise, it is for the benefit of your coworkers. These are your students. Some of them will be peers and teammates who you work with on a daily basis, some of them will be strangers from other departments with names you can't remember, and some of them might even be your superiors (hierarchically speaking, of course).

ROCK* REMINDER

Your students are your coworkers. Don't be condescending or impatient.



You should keep in mind, throughout the process of planning and teaching your class, that the consequences of your class will range very close to home. Which means, if you are nice, you will make friends with the people around you. If you are short-tempered and condescending, then you will annoy the people around you. If you teach well, your coworkers will go away slightly wiser and more capable. If you teach poorly, your coworkers will go away confused or misled, and your business may suffer for it.

So this is something worth doing right.

Your Subject, from A to Z

The good news about being asked to teach a class is that it will almost certainly be a class about something you know everything about (otherwise they wouldn't have asked you to teach it). This means you won't need to invest any time researching the facts or the process, or finding diagrams or samples. These should already be floating around your computer (or your head) because they are parts of your working life.

The only trick in designing a lesson about your expertise is making sure that you explain it thoroughly. For example, you may decide to save time by starting on step 3 because steps 1 and 2 are so incredibly obvious, *to you*, but they won't be obvious to the new hire or the people from the other department.

Aside from starting at the *actual* beginning and closing at the *actual* end of the topic, you'll also need to be sure that you cover all the side-topics, or sub-topics, such as where the files are stored or why the product template looks that way or how the documents are transferred from person to person.

ROCK* TIP

Be careful to explain your subject from a novice's perspective from beginning to end.



These may seem like administrative details, again, *things that are perfectly obvious to you*, but they are wholly new and mysterious to others.

So be thorough.

On the off-chance that you have been asked to hold a class about a topic that is not strictly within your areas of expertise (because you're so very capable, a natural leader, and gosh darn it, people like you!), then you will need to research and prepare. This is an inconvenience, as you need to take precious time out of your day to learn something just to turn around and *try* to teach the material to others. And you know perfectly well that you're not the most qualified person to be doing this. Which is annoying.

Sorry, but that's the job. Your best bet is to research as thoroughly as possible and develop your presentation, and then find a few people with related expertise to review what you are going to teach. Hopefully, they will make sure that you don't make any glaring mistakes.

Your Lesson Plan

The first steps in preparing a class are administrative.

- **How many people are you teaching?**

Try to get an accurate count of the number of people attending the class. This will affect many minor details, such as which conference room you will be using, how hard it will be to find a meeting time when everyone is available, how many copies of handouts you need, and so on.

The number of attendees will also impact how formal versus personal your class will be. When you only have five students, you can take the time to answer more questions and indulge in tangent

discussions. When you have twenty or more students, you'll need to stay more focused just to cover everything in the allotted time.

- **How long will the class be?**

There is a huge difference between a thirty-minute meeting, a sixty-minute meeting, and anything longer than an hour. If your topic is rather narrow or focused and your class is small, you might be able to do it in only half an hour. More often, a full hour will be needed to set up, run the whole class, answer questions, and review key points. On rare occasions, you will need more than an hour, and this will require planning breaks, food, and other resources.

Be certain to schedule enough time because if your class is cut short, the incomplete knowledge you'll have passed on may be almost useless.

- **Is it a single class, a class repeated for different groups, or a series of classes?**

The best type of class to hold is a single session. You're basically planning one meeting. And if asked to teach a second group of people, you can simply repeat the same session. Holding a series of classes is much more challenging because you have to plan more content, hold frequent reviews of earlier classes, and ensure continuity across the series.

- **What topics do you need to cover?**

It's very important to determine the scope of your class. Do your students need to know every aspect of the work process, or just the parts they will be involved in? Do they need to know about all of the product's features, or just the new ones? Do they need to know everything about market research, or just the activities your team is currently pursuing? Determining the scope will also help you determine how long the class will be, and how many classes you'll need to hold.

- **What materials will you need?**

It is likely that you will need to put together some slides for your class. But you may also need to demonstrate live software, or a piece of hardware, or other types of samples. It can be tempting to simply print out your slides for your students both to prepare for the class and to refer to after the class. But you can do better (more on this later!).

How Classes Are Unique

A class is similar but not identical to a regular meeting. In a meeting, your job is to explain some information to a group of people, for some business reason. In a class, your job is to explain some information to a group of people, for the express purpose of making them understand the information. This is a critical difference.

At a typical meeting, people are only trying to learn as much as they think they need, they only ask questions they think matter to themselves, and they will leave knowing that if they have more questions they can come ask you about it later.

But a class is different. The point of the class is to give your students as much command over the information as possible. You need to make sure they ask all the questions they have, and that you answer them thoroughly. You don't want them to go away with the idea that they will ask you questions later. You want them to go away as experts who won't have to ask any more questions.

That's the trick.

ROCK* TIP

It's more important that your students learn than that you teach. Focus on their needs.



Teaching is More than Just Talking

Run your class just as you would run a meeting, but slightly slower, with more detail, and expect more interruptions.

There is a certain informality in teaching (usually). Assuming that you aren't teaching clients or vendors, and your students are just your coworkers, you can afford to be more personable.

Things to do:

1. At any given moment, direct your attention to one person in particular. Make eye contact. Make sure they are nodding along, taking notes, etc. If they are frowning or glancing at other people (or generally looking uncomfortable), then you should pause and ask them if they have a question. Some people will be less inclined to ask a question if they think it will make them look less clever than the other people in the room, so you will need to draw the questions out of them. When you feel comfortable, move your attention to someone else. Five seconds is plenty of time to engage with an individual without making them feel singled out.
2. At the end of any given subject, ask the room for questions. Pause and let them think about whether they really have questions. Don't rush them. Some people may take a few seconds to decide that, yes, they do need to ask a question, and then they might need another few seconds to think of *how* to ask the question. So be patient.

3. At frequent intervals throughout the class, ask your students questions about the subject. The purpose is to get them involved and also to determine how much they already know about the subject. For example,
 - a. “Who here knows why we send invoices out on Tuesday?”
 - b. “Can anyone tell me what a stored procedure is?”
 - c. “Have any of you ever used this software before?”

Things not to do:

1. Make fun of a question.
2. Make fun of a person.
3. Roll your eyes, sigh, or display your impatience or annoyance in any way.

I’m sure you would never dream of doing these things on purpose, as you walk into your class meeting. But after half an hour of piddling, derailing, repetitive, off-topic questions that keep putting you behind schedule, you’d be surprised how quickly your patience (and good demeanor) can erode. Unfortunately, there is nothing you can do about this. Your students will behave however they will behave, and it is your job to continue being professional and generally wonderful the entire time.

At the worst of times, teaching can be like traveling in the Arctic. They say the intensely cold conditions can make you hate your traveling companions in a very real and vicious manner, even if they are your best friends and have done nothing to antagonize you. Similarly, the annoying conditions in a classroom can make you

hate your students, but probably less so than when surviving at the North Pole.

So stay cool. Forewarned is forearmed!

Handouts, and Other “things”

Your slides for running the class should be the same as the slides you create for any other meeting. Research, polish, review with colleagues or experts, and practice thoroughly. But there are other, equally important things to make for a class.

As mentioned earlier, you should not plan to give your students printouts of your slides, either before or during your class. Slides are notoriously unhelpful without a speaker because the bullet points don’t make complete sense and the graphics need explanations and context. Instead, you should create a separate document to give them either during or after the class.

The quickest and easiest way to make this take-away document is to copy all of the bullet points out of your slides and paste them into a single text document. Write out each bullet point into a complete and helpful sentence, and then group them clearly by topic. Students can use this as a reference to remind them of key facts from your presentation. The complete sentences will ensure that they interpret the information correctly when they are back at their desks, trying to use the new software or process on their own.

If you’d like to make them something even better to take-away with them, review your class materials and pluck out all of the really content-rich stuff, such as schematics, maps, diagrams,

ROCK* TIP

*Create custom handouts
that your students can use
on their own.*



flow charts, tables, and photos. Then, think about what you will be saying during the class about each of these visuals. Next, copy the visuals into a text document and either modify the visuals directly or simply add text around them to fully explain them.

For example, you might just need a sentence or two to introduce the data displayed in a table. Or you might want a product name and serial number under a photograph. But a diagram or schematic might need to be beefed up with detailed legends and extra words inside the visual itself to make sure a novice will read it correctly on their own. The goal is to make everything stand on its own, without you having to be there to explain it.

You should also add a “Frequently Asked Questions” page to your take-away document. Frame the questions and answers in a very informal, user-friendly manner, such as:

- **Question:** “How do I access the new reports?”
Answer: Use this URL address: www.NewReports.com/download
- **Question:** “What happens if the forms are incomplete?”
Answer: Ask Bob Smith (bobsmith@company.com) to contact the client.

Lastly, insert a section of clickable resources, including contact information for clients or vendors, contacts with technical expertise on the topic of the class, links to recommended websites for more information, and links to Intranet sites containing company procedures and other documents.

If you give your students all of this information, then there is a very good chance that they will not come back to you with more questions. And that is a very good thing.

Summary

Teaching isn't for everyone, and not everyone will be asked to teach. But teaching is not a foreign business language either. A class is essentially just another meeting, except it is more interactive and demands a bit more effort (and sometimes patience) on your part. Besides the obvious fact that you're helping others, it definitely helps build your self-confidence and adds to the skill set you can offer your employer or your clients.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion: *The Big Goodbye*

No one likes long goodbyes unless there's a possibility of parting gifts, and since there is no ice cream or petty cash at the end of this book, I'll be quick.

If you are in the early stages of your professional life, then you have lots of exciting and terrifying things ahead of you: reimbursements, overseas conferences, your first bonus, org charts, and (most relevantly) presentations. To some extent, they are just another bit of administrative and bureaucratic nonsense to round out your day. However, at times, presentations will be critical moments to make a good impression on a superior, or an opportunity to close a deal, or a chance to establish yourself as a rockstar CEO (some day).

If you are in the later stages of your professional life, then you already know that presentations are mostly routine and occasionally critical. Hopefully, you've developed a certain level of comfort with them and appreciate the value of delivering them well.

But to return to something I said many chapters ago, some people are naturally talented, some people can become skilled, and some people will need to continuously work at it. I've seen professionals of all ages command a room with intelligence and confidence, and I've seen professionals of all ages panic and embarrass themselves in front of clients and supervisors.

Just remember to be a human being, to speak normally, to treat your audience like people, and to value *reality* over *fantasy*. As long as you plan, prepare, and practice (ooh, the three Ps of presentations! like it! I have to put it in a box in the margins), then you'll probably do fairly well.

However, you should keep in mind the very unequal relationship between content and performance.

From my experience (and from our discussion of heroin content, iPhones, and the angry general), I would say that a successful presentation is 90% strong content and 10% strong performance. The truth of the matter is that we live in cynical times. Audiences can be very suspicious of business jargon, marketing language, and obvious sales pitches. We see scam artists and identity thieves lurking in every shadow. Thus, people want to see facts, results, evidence. In short, they want to see *reality*. They don't want to hear you talk about the exciting new lifestyle you are proposing; they want to see an iPhone playing an episode of *Lost*.

I'm also basing these 90/10 percentages on having seen several charismatic salespeople shouted down by angry CEOs who were tired of mindless slides full of filler, boilerplate text, pointless clip art, and other non-content. That's right, sometimes the audience fights back!

You may be familiar with "Mehrabian's rule" that 55 percent of your presentation is your appearance, 38 percent is your voice, and 7 percent is your message, but this is misleading. These numbers (which are not necessarily reliable to begin with) describe the extent to which your audience *trusts* your message or *likes* you personally, meaning that if you claim to have a cure for cancer but you are covered in dirt and mumbling incoherently, they probably won't want an injection from you. But in reality, no matter how fantastic you look or sound, if you claim to have a cure for cancer without any evidence, you still won't get any volunteers, at least, not many confident ones.

ROCK* REMINDER

Remember the 3 Ps of presentations: Plan, Prepare, and Practice!



This may sound as though everything we've been discussing about the performance aspect of a presentation is not very important, but that's not true. You see, most presentations don't have strong content at the best of times. Most products are not paradigm-shifters, most teams are not performing perfectly, and most research does not produce a breakthrough revelation. And yet, you are going to have to give presentations about them anyway.

So, if we accept that the "90%" of your presentation that relies on content is going to be hamstrung no matter what, then it really is important that the "10%" of your presentation that relies on *you* is as perfect as possible. Hopefully, this book will help you get there.

(And if doesn't, then you should buy my next book, *Much Better Presentation Advice*.)

Thanks for reading!

BONUS CHAPTER

PowerPoint Pointers

I realize that there is one very big, very unavoidable reason why this chapter shouldn't exist: Most companies have PowerPoint templates created by artists and approved by executives, which means you might not be allowed to do any of the things in this chapter.

But, if you work at a small company, or you happen to be one of those artists or executives, then maybe you have the freedom to flex your creative muscles and try out some of these ideas. And they are only ideas. Every presentation is different, every meeting and audience and type of content is different. Sometimes you should use a light color scheme versus a dark one. Sometimes you need more administrative information, and sometimes you can get away with none.

So check with your legal people, and your marketing people, and then check your own instincts. The worst you can do is create yet another cookie-cutter business presentation, which really won't shock anyone, will it?

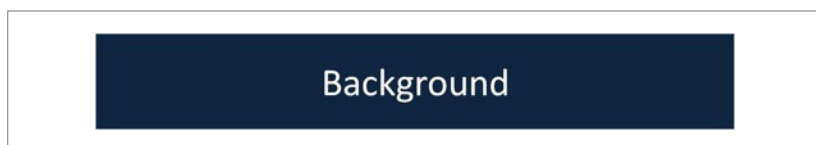
So let's start by talking about mediocrity.

PowerPoint Designs that Executives Love (but shouldn't)

It would be easy (and fun!) to discuss PowerPoint (PPT) culture in general: how it ruins meetings, wastes time, confuses audiences, and is a general haven for bad design and writing. But instead, we will use this opportunity to discuss something useful. We will review design techniques that generally meet with approval and praise. We will also review why these techniques are actually quite bad and what you can do to fix them.

1. Huge Headers

Create a header across the top of the slide that is roughly 1.5 inches tall (FYI: the slide is 7.5 inches tall). Fill the header with a company brand color, or a shade of blue (everyone defaults to blue). Set the header text to 36 points, which will just barely allow two rows of large text for those very long slide titles.



Why They Like It

Executives tend to review their draft slides on paper or on their computer, but not in a meeting room with the slides projected on the wall. Thus, they worry that no one will be able to read the title unless it is as large as physically possible, forgetting that (1) normal printed text is readable at 12 pt and (2) projected text can be up to 8 inches tall and legible from the far end of the room.

Why They Shouldn't Like It

Your 1.5 inch header is consuming 20% of your slide real estate, and all it conveys are uninformative terms like “Agenda” and “Background.” This space could be better used to convey the actual slide content.

Suggestions

Review draft slides with executives in the meeting room with a projector so they can see how big their “big” words really are.

2. Large Logos

Insert the company logo in the upper left corner of the slide, and make it as tall as the header area (1.5 inches or so). If the logo is available in full-color, use it. If the logo has a version that also includes the company's full name, use it!



Why They Like It

Marketing folks believe that repetition is the key to success. The more exposure your company name and logo gets, the better chance you have of being remembered and closing that deal. Including a large company logo (and name) on every slide is a “subtle” form of this repetition.

Why They Shouldn't Like It

First, to echo Item 1, this is a waste of slide real estate that could be better spent actually explaining your ideas or products. Second, repetition is not a solid strategy. Memorable TV commercials or print advertisements have strong, clear visuals that effectively illustrate the product in some way. And most companies are in the business of selling products, not themselves.

Suggestion

Obtain slides from a rival company (possibly from their website or from a presentation at a conference) and show your executives how your competitors use their logos. But be sure to use slides that illustrate *improvements*, not the status quo.

3. Fancy Footers

Insert a footer across the bottom of the slide that is roughly 0.5 inches tall. Employ gradients (or better yet, Photoshop) to create an artistically dynamic look with swooshes and arcs, or high-tech boxes and lines.

**Why They Like It**

A pretty footer keeps your slide from looking stale and drab, especially down at the bottom where your boring page numbers and legal disclaimers tend to hang out.

Why They Shouldn't Like It

Just like the header, this is a waste of space. While you may need those disclaimers and numbers and dates, inserting unnecessary graphics in your template will just make your file bigger and subtract from your content area.

Suggestion

Casually mention to your executives that many of your company's "boilerplate" slides and standard graphics are very large and will overlap or collide with the footer. (This suggestion also works on those big headers.)

4. Washed Out Watermarks

Insert a very large version of your company logo in the center of the slide and fade it to a subtle shade of gray to use as a watermark on all slides.

**Why They Like It**

Just like that logo in the corner, your marketing team is hoping the power of subliminal suggestion will convince your customers that you're the only game in town.

Why They Shouldn't Like It

Just like that fancy footer, this is an unnecessary graphic that will make your PPT file bigger than it needs to be. Also, it is almost guaranteed that the watermark will make some slides hard to read both on screen and on paper as it travels to different screens or printers.

Suggestion

Show the watermarked slides to the executive on different monitors, projectors, and print-outs to demonstrate how the watermark conflicts with the content.

5. Too Much Text

As you create your slides, be sure to write out your bullet points using long phrases (but not complete sentences!) and use sub-bullets liberally to list examples. Lots of them. Especially if they sound impressive, like names of experts, chemicals, hardware designations, or contract partners.

- Competitors using new resources
 - System 3.5, Database 6.0, Application 9.1
 - Dr. Tanaka, Professor Voorhees, General Sherman
- Hardware/software out of date
 - Compatibility and accessibility issues
 - Customer service, communications
- Rising costs!
 - Rate of materials, inflation, new tax laws
 - Unforeseen expenses, etc.

Why They Like It

Executives seem concerned that the people at their meetings will not understand the slide content unless it is mostly spelled out for them. This is particularly true of speakers who are not confident leading a meeting, or who have low expectations of their audience.

Why They Shouldn't Like It

Modern audiences live in a “screen” culture and will instantly start reading ahead of the speaker (because we can read faster than they can talk). Also, weak presenters tend to fall into the habit of simply reading the text on the slide, which is particularly bad when the text is not in complete sentences and the speaker starts rambling to fill in the blanks.

Suggestion

If you *have* to have text, turn awkward phrases into (very) short sentences. For example:

- Region 3 (Northeast Region) sales inc. Q3 14%

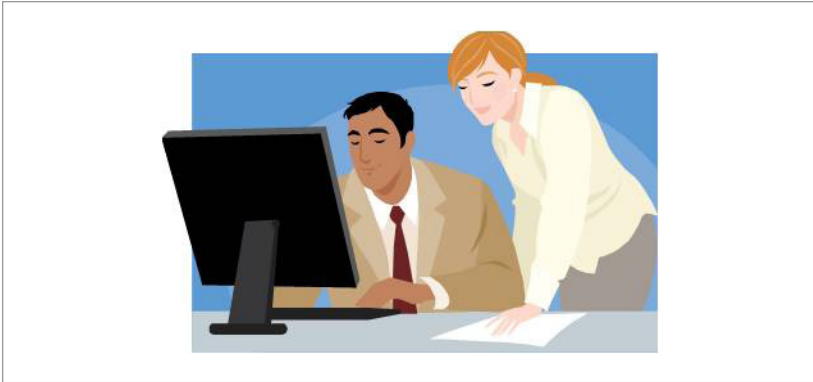
versus

- In Q3, Northeast sales increased 14%

Notice how the complete, focused sentence is actually shorter than the incomplete phrase? If asked why you did that, say that this will make the slide a better “take away” so the audience members can better read the material by themselves after the meeting (because you will probably be printing them out, or emailing them to the group).

6. Annoying Art and Animations

After you have written your slides, go back through and add a piece of clip art or animation to each slide. If possible, make the art relevant to the text (a rocket ship can symbolize zooming sales!), but if not, just insert something generic, such as pictures of “office people” who seem to be “working.”

**Why They Like It**

Similar to the fancy footer, art and animations turn a boring slide into an exciting piece of presentation “content.” They also give the presenter something to point to and make amusing remarks about.

Why They Shouldn’t Like It

Similar to the fancy footer, art and animation make your PPT file much larger (read: harder to email or print). Also, these dancing distractions do not add content to the presentation, nor are they helpful or explanatory illustrations. And sometimes, they don’t work properly as they travel to different computers.

Suggestion

Find better illustrations! Use actual photographs of your staff or product. Take screenshots of your software. Create charts and graphs to illustrate company growth over time. It will take a little more time and effort, but these “content-heavy” graphics will be used more than once because they are (surprise!) actually useful.

And if that isn't possible, point out to your executive that the file is getting too large to email to the client/partner/director on vacation in France.

The Final Product

By giving executives what they want, we end up with a final product like this:

Look familiar? Now just ask yourself: Does this slide really help the audience to understand the speaker's point?

HOUSES, INC.

Background

- **Competitors using new resources**
 - System 3.5, Database 6.0, Application 9.1
 - Dr. Tanaka, Professor Voorhees, General Sherman
- **Hardware/software out of date**
 - Compatibility and accessibility issues
 - Customer service, communications
- **Rising costs!**
 - Rate of materials, inflation, new tax laws
 - Unforeseen expenses, etc.

Proprietary documentation; Do not distribute Page 2

Summary

Poor design is a result of many small mistakes or assumptions, most of which come from underestimating the audience or discounting the speaker's ability. But remember, PowerPoint is just a tool. Whether it makes your presentation better or worse is simply a matter of how you use it.

PowerPoint Revolution: Aiming Higher

So now that we've looking at the common and the sub-par, let's aim higher. After all, we're professionals. We should look and act like them, even behind closed conference room doors. It's time we dragged our presentations into the 21st century.

Better Designs

Where should we look for inspiration for our 21st century slides? Everywhere! Study television commercials, print advertisements, and websites. What are the top companies in your industry doing? What are the top companies in the world doing?

Question: How are advertisements like slides?

Answer: Advertisements are used to explain products and services to millions of uninformed people in just a few seconds. They convey complex business messages through visual media. They strive to be focused, dynamic, and...well, **good**.

We can convince complete strangers to buy a product in 30 seconds of air time. Why do we need 70 slides and 2 hours (through lunch! every month!) at the division status meeting to explain our projects to our own coworkers?

The following design concepts and exercises demonstrate several different ways of approaching basic slide design, but we could fill an entire book with exotic suggestions for colors and contrasts, fonts and shapes, lines and art. The "rules" in the next sections are only starting points for you to begin thinking about how to redesign your slides to be unique, dynamic, and relevant to your business.

Design Rule #1: Less is More

(Clichés tend to be true!)

Look at your presentation. How many slides are there? Twenty? Fifty? *A hundred*? And how many of them contain powerful, illustrative visuals? If the second number is less than the first number, it's time to warm up your Delete key. Why? Because having too many slides means either you need to spend less time on each slide, or your meeting needs to be far too long.

Design Exercise #1

Make a copy of your presentation to revise. Now, delete all of the slides that only contain text. **All** of them. But before you consign those slides to oblivion, copy the text to a Word document. (We'll use it later.)

Gone is the list of speakers! Gone is the agenda! Gone are the second and third comings of the agenda to remind the audience where we are in the briefing! Gone are the lists of facts and partners, lists of questions, prompts for questions!

Now, how many slides are left? Twenty percent? Five percent? **Excellent!**

And how much text have you captured in your Word document? Go ahead and fix the formatting to look like regular text (12pt Times), and take out the bullets. What's left from your dozens of slides? Three pages? **Less?**

Design Rule #2: Even Less is Even More

(The cliché that keeps on giving!)

Statistician and design guru Edward Tufte has published several books about good design, and he has coined a term for all the administrative flotsam and jetsam that clutter up a document: Chartjunk. What is chartjunk on a PowerPoint slide?

- Headers and footers
- Titles and subtitles
- Dates and page numbers
- Logos, clipart, and drop-shadows
- Anything that has ever been called “cute” or “fun”

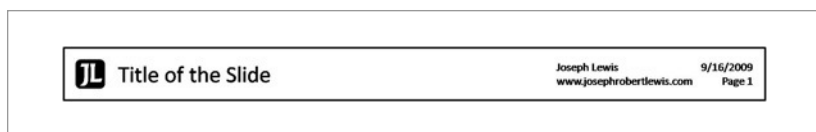
What does that leave? **Content.**

Design Exercise #2

1. Minimize all chartjunk on your remaining slides. It might help to try this while projecting the slides in a vacant meeting room (if there is such a thing).
2. Shrink your logo. If it is in color, make it a black or white silhouette.
3. Make disclaimers, dates, and page numbers tiny.
4. Make the titles small. Seriously, small. As long as you can read it from the back of the room, it's fine.

5. Delete any graphics or bits of excitement that you know are not necessary. I'm looking at you, watermark!
6. Now, add your footer content to the header. Arrange it all together in the smallest space within reason.

I ended up with this:



No footer and a header only 0.75 inches tall. Just look at all the space you have reclaimed for your content!

Design Rule #3: Black is the New Black

A presentation is a light show. You are bouncing a harsh white light off a glaring white screen straight into the eyeballs of weary cubicle dwellers, some of them sitting only a few feet away. There is no need to blind your coworkers. Make your backgrounds black, and make your content bright.

Note: This works best in rooms that are actually *dark*. If your meetings take place in fully lit rooms with open blinds, you may want to skip this one.

A wonderful thing happens when you reverse the lighting in a presentation: It becomes easier to focus on the content because there is no distracting, glaring white space. There are only the glowing words, the colorful graphics, the brilliant illustrations. The stuff you came to see! (Remember Steve Jobs' keynote presentation? He uses this technique.)

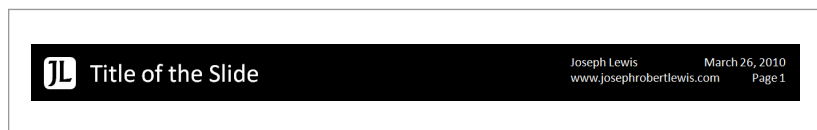
Design Exercise #3:

Make your backgrounds black and your text white.

Question: Won't we waste tons of ink when we print out black slides?

Answer: Not if you print correctly. Go to File > Print, find "Color/grayscale" in the Print window (lower left), and select "Pure Black and White." Voilà! Black ink on white paper, but white text on a black screen. **Magic.**

Here is my new header in black:

**Design Rule #4: Microsoft Word is Your Friend**

Raise your hand if you have ever attended a meeting where you were handed a print-out of the slides to be shown at that meeting. Thirty pieces of paper, **per person**, each one containing half a dozen bullet points of incomplete sentences and irrelevant clip art.

Keep your hand up if that print-out went straight into the trash after that meeting. That's a lot of wasted paper. Half a ream every time the team meets! Let's see if we can turn your Word document of deleted slide text into something more useful.

Speed Writing Exercise:

Re-write all of your bullet points as complete sentences. They don't have to be brilliant, artful sentences. Just put a subject in front of a verb. You can combine multiple bullets into a single sentence if they're related. Yes, it will take a few minutes. Indulge me.

Keyboards down. What do you have? It's almost like a little essay, isn't it? Clear declarative sentences explaining the problem, the proposed solution, how it works, who is involved. It's like a Statement of Work, or a Scope Document, or a Proposal. In fact, that's exactly what it is. And it's probably only two pages long. We're saving trees!

Now people can read your Word document before the meeting and arrive ready to have an informed conversation. It might make your meeting more productive. It might even make the meeting shorter!

Design Rule #5: More is More

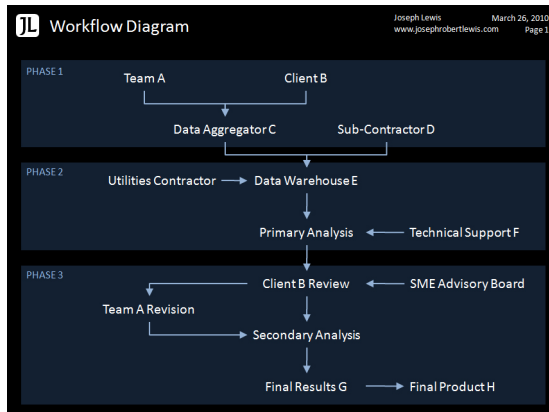
(Sometimes clichés are wrong.)

Study your slide content carefully. Do you really need a separate slide for each product/team/person? Is there a way to consolidate those timelines and schedules? The more content you have on one slide, the better it can support an informed discussion, and there's no need to flip back and forth between slides. (See example #2 below.)

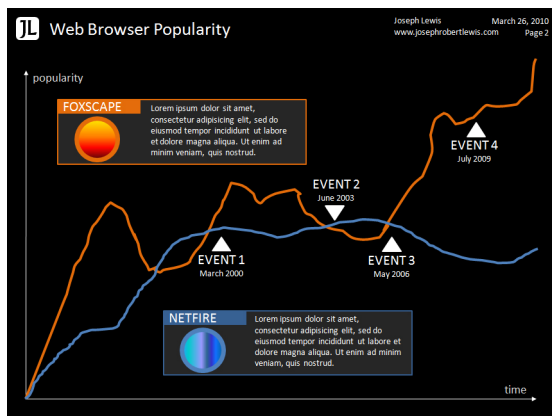
Let's See Some Slides!

PowerPoint design for the 21st century is not just about slick slides. It's about improving meetings and communications, saving time and energy, and reducing waste. But yes, it is also about slick slides.

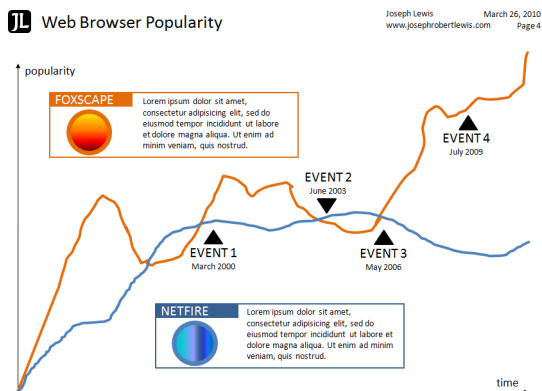
Example 1. Your standard workflow diagram. Notice how you don't need to put boxes around your words. Even those extra lines are chart junk!



Example 2. Can comparative data, timelines, multiple product statistics, graphics, and an overview of key events fit on a single slide? Of course! Instead of flipping through a dozen weak slides, your team can study a strong one.



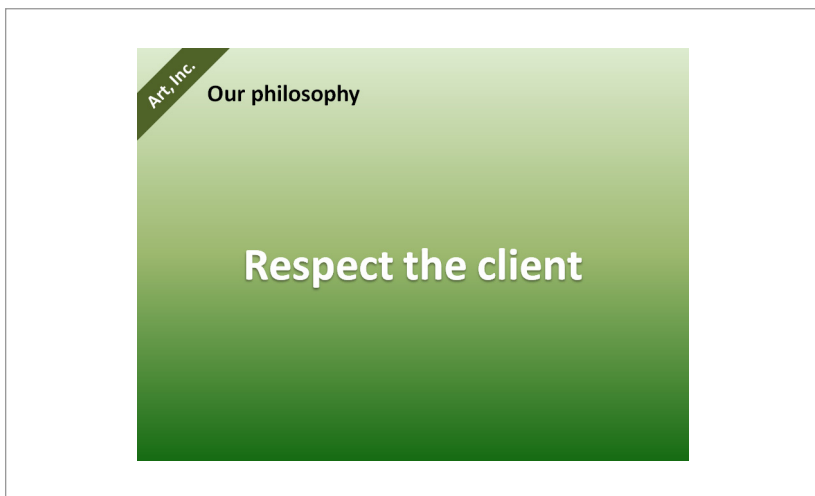
Example 3. If your boss can't get used to that black background, it looks just as clean on white:



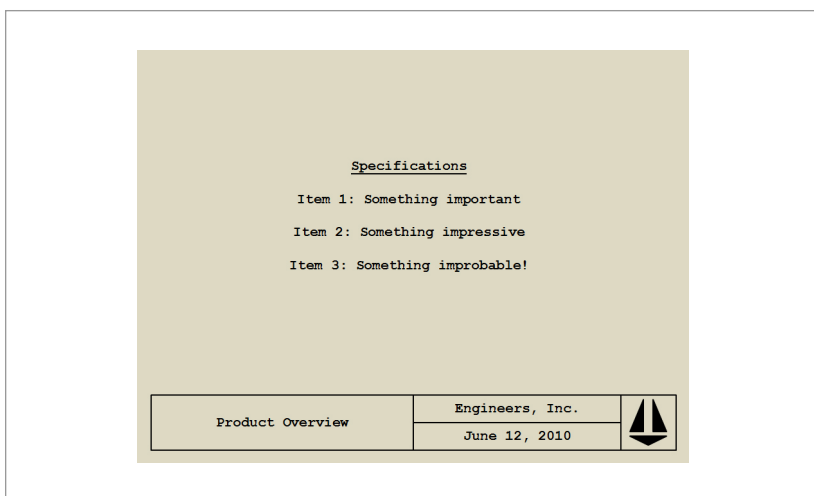
Experiment with these ideas. Rethink conventions. For example, why do slides need titles? Shouldn't the content be fairly obvious? And isn't there a speaker in the room to explain it? Steve Jobs

doesn't need headers or footers or logos, why do you? (No, Steve Jobs is not bribing me to drop his name, I just think he does this one thing right.)

And make your slides reflect your business. Are you an art / design firm? Then your slides should look artsy (or modernist or baroque, whatever it is that you do), for instance, minimalist:



Are you an engineering firm? Why not make your slides look like schematics or spec sheets?



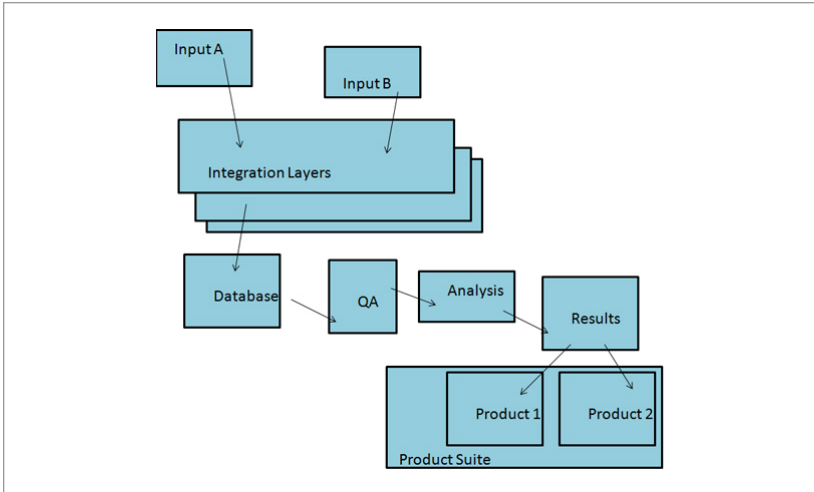
The Little Things

Sometimes you can't change your slide template, and you can't change your company colors or branding. So at the very least, you can try to make your slide content look sharp. The following tutorial will show you how to clean up a typical corporate slide in only a few minutes.

What do you think about when you hear the phrase "clean up"? Maybe you picture cleaning up food after a party, or cleaning up a small biohazard after your dog. That's the real world for you: Stinky. At least at work, **cleaning up** is a bit easier on the nostrils.

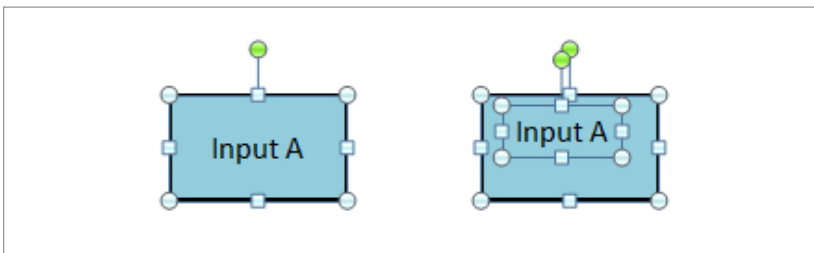
It doesn't matter who you are or what you do, sooner or later someone is going to ask you to "clean up some slides" in preparation for a meeting. This is because "someone" had time to doodle in PowerPoint but lacked the time or skill to create a proper business visual. Cleaning up slides is rarely an opportunity for fun, so let's try to make it quick. And while we're at it, let's make that slide look **sharp**.

Here's your basic mess:



Step 1: Simplify

Chances are, you've got some extra baggage hiding on this slide. Hit "Ctrl A" to select all the items on the screen, and look closely at the little circle-handles around your boxes. Do you see something like the left example or the right one?



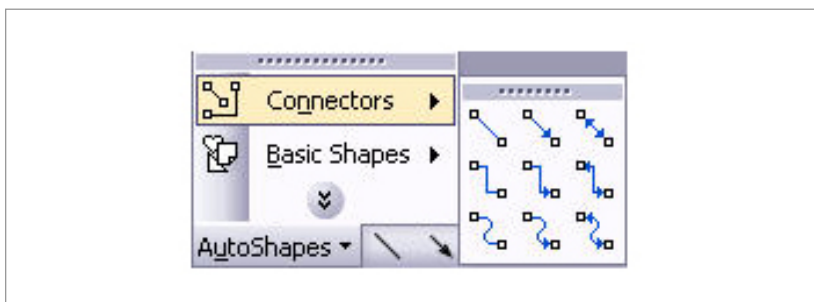
If your boxes look like the left example, great! Go to the next Step.

If your boxes look like the right example, it's because your text and your boxes are two separate objects, which will be a headache later unless we fix it now. Copy the text out of the "text box" and paste it into the regular box. (Double-click on the box, or right-click on the box and select "Edit Text.") This way, we're sure not to accidentally separate the text from the box later when we start moving things around.

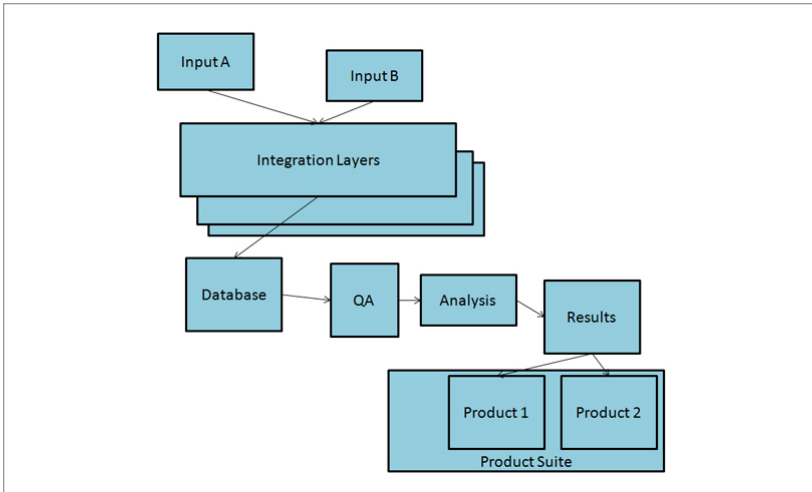
Step 2: Connect the Dots

Those crooked arrows drive me crazy. Sometimes they don't even point to anything!

One by one, delete each arrow and replace it with a "Connector" (look in your AutoShapes menu at the bottom of the screen).



If you have Office 2007, all arrows are connectors! When you draw the connector, little anchor points appear on your boxes. Place the ends of the connectors on those anchor points. Now, when you move your boxes, the connectors will move with them. (You can also switch the connectors between curvy and elbow line styles.)

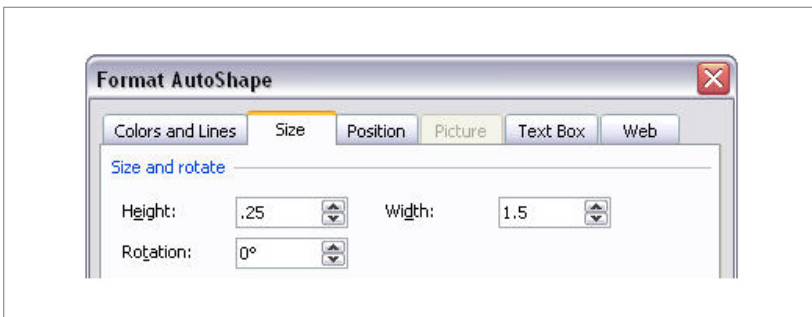


Better, sort of. Onward!

Step 3: Standardize

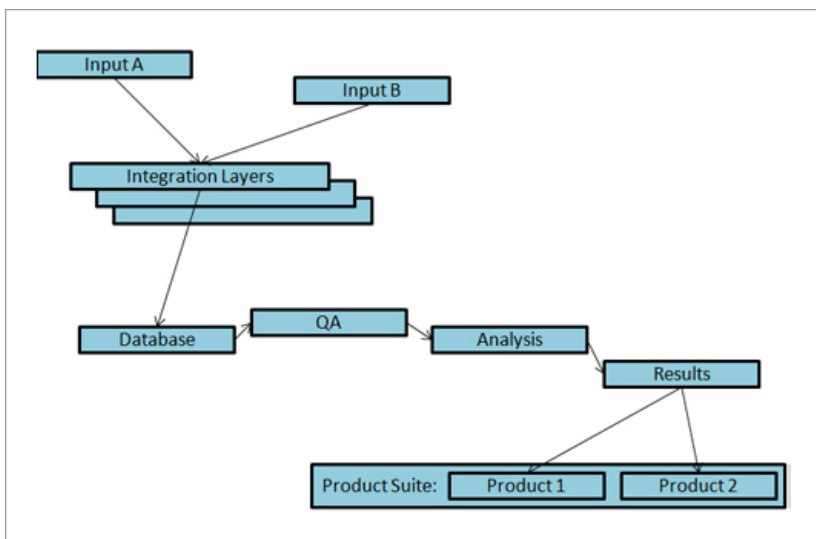
Notice how the boxes on these slides are always totally different sizes and shapes? Why do they do that?! Let's fix it.

Hold down “Ctrl” and click on each of your boxes to select them all. Right-click, select “Format AutoShape,” and select the “Size” tab (or if you have Office 2007, select “Size and Position”). Set the box height to 0.25 inches and the width to 1.5 inches.



If you have a box with a lot of text, go ahead and make that one wider. As long as one dimension of your boxes is the same (height or width), then they will look like they belong in the same diagram.

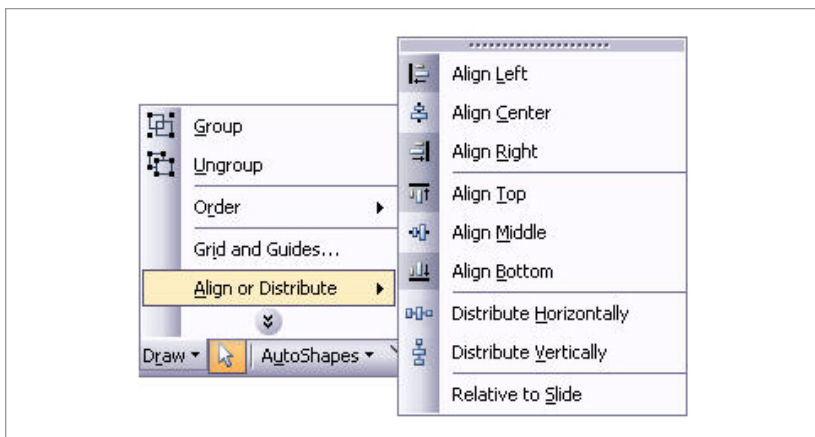
While we're at it, let's fix the text itself. With the boxes still selected, select a nice font, like Calibri, at a reasonable size, like 14pt, and get rid of any italics or bold text.



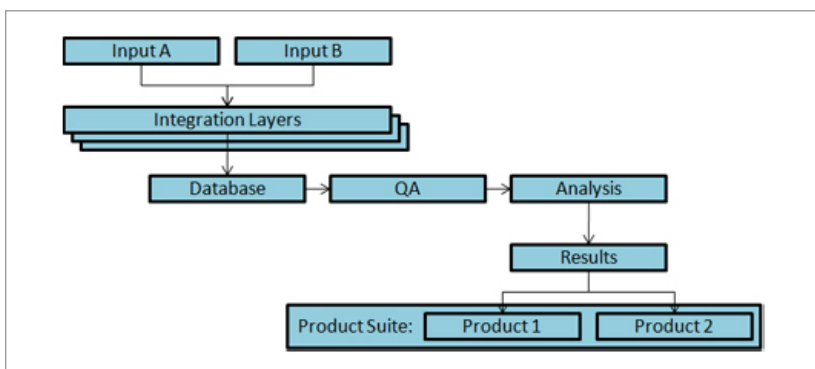
Step 4: Organize

This one's easy. Just line up those boxes. Focus on whether the arrows are flowing down or to the right, and then arrange your boxes in neat rows or columns.

You can nudge them into place one at a time with the arrow keys, or select a group to Align along the middle (horizontal) or the center (vertical) using the Draw menu at the bottom of your screen.



If nothing else, at least try to get the arrows to point straight across or straight down. If you have angled arrows, it is likely they will all be slightly askew from each other, which will look sloppy.

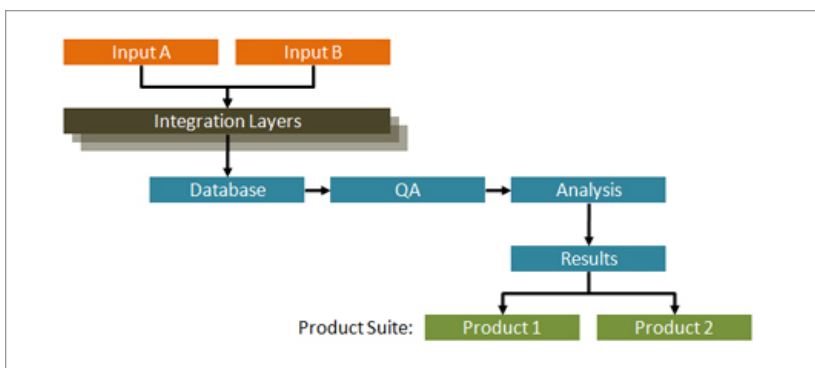


Step 5: Make it Pretty

Artistic sensibility varies from person to person, and from company to company. Choosing colors and styles can devolve into ridiculous meetings with executives arguing over how “strong” a particular shade of blue looks. No, I’m not kidding. I had to sit through that meeting. Twice. (Print and Web!)

Here's what I recommend. Select your boxes again, and do the following:

- **Outlines:** Get rid of them. They're just a bunch extra lines that tend to clash with the color of the box. Set the Line to **None** or **white**.
- **Main Boxes:** Make them bold. Set the Fill to dark blues, greens, and oranges. And use colors to mean things! Inputs, outputs, whatever. Make it easy for your audience to differentiate what they are seeing. After all, this is a **visual** medium.
- **Background Boxes:** Make them subtle. Set the Fill to the same color as the Main Boxes but set the Transparency to **50%**. When in doubt, always use variations of the same color to avoid unattractive color combinations.
- **Text:** You need contrast. Set the Text to **white**. Only use bold if absolutely necessary.
- **Arrows:** Make them highly visible. The entire purpose of a diagram like this is to illustrate **flow** or **interactions**. Set the line weights to **2pt (or more)**, set the line color to **black**, and use the **solid** triangular arrowheads.

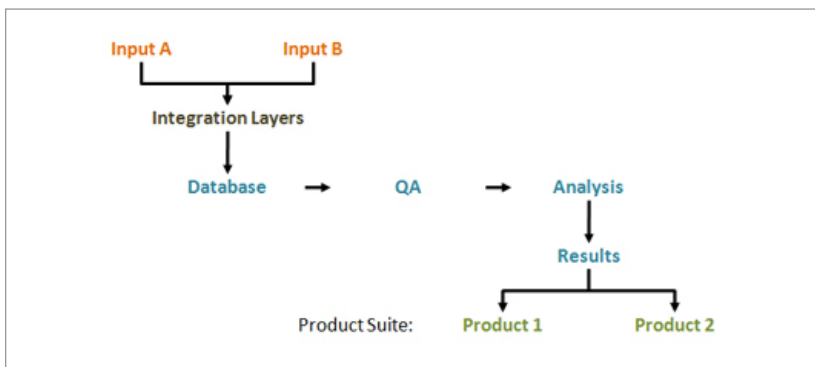


Step 6. Lose the Weight

Warning! This step may confuse and annoy your superiors! Only attempt this if your coworkers are able to literally think outside the box.

You know those boxes? They aren't really doing anything, are they? The only things on this slide that are actually important are the words (concepts) and the arrows (relationships).

So let's lose the boxes. Make the boxes white and apply those colors to the text instead. (**Bold text** may be a good idea now.)



All done!

How long did that take you? Well, if you were reading along with this tutorial, and then paused to play with colors and fonts, I wouldn't be surprised if it took up to 20 minutes. But once you have these basics down, it should take you less than 5 minutes to clean up any slide for your boss, on demand.

And if you can make the boss look good in less than 5 minutes, then you're definitely doing something right.

Conclusion

Play to your strengths in order to differentiate yourself not only from your competition but from the rest of the slide-building world. Everything you say or display makes an impression on your audience, so it is in your best interest to make every pixel, line, and color work for you.

APPENDIX

More Presentation Resources

Here are a few places where you can find articles about presentations, samples, and templates.

Slidecasts

Slidecasts are PowerPoint presentations without the presenter. They are slides specifically created to be viewed or read by total strangers without anyone speaking, and yet they still convey important business information in a compelling fashion. So, in essence, these slides are so good (in theory) that they can succeed without an expert to take you through them.

Take a look at the following seven examples from SlideShare (<http://www.slideshare.net>) to get a few design ideas that you might apply to your own slides. (You know, the ones that do have presenters!)

1. “Shift Happens” – These simple slides in bold colors use illustrative graphics and limited text to make some dramatic points about human demographic shifts. (<http://www.slideshare.net/jbrenman/shift-happens-33834>)
2. “Death by PowerPoint” – Strong graphics and simple statements are all you need to communicate effectively. (<http://www.slideshare.net/thecroaker/death-by-powerpoint>)
3. “The Brand Gap” – This business presentation in black and white presents one simple yet powerful idea at a time. (<http://www.slideshare.net/antissubliminal/the-brand-gap-presentation>)

4. “Visual Effects in PowerPoint 2003” – Design principles illustrated, plain and simple. (<http://www.slideshare.net/mjamesno/how-to-visual-effects-in-powerpoint-2003>)
5. “Thirst” – Fascinating facts about water, demonstrating the power of photographic elements in your presentation. (<http://www.slideshare.net/jbrenman/thirst>)
6. “Improving Interface Design” – A discussion of design principles featuring some sharp white-on-gray text slides. (<http://www.slideshare.net/garrettdimon/improving-interface-design>)
7. “Nokia brand & design priorities” – You know who Nokia is. Cell phones. This is a major corporation. But notice how these corporate slides don’t have titles, headers, footers, logos, or page numbers! This company has the confidence and the competence to deliver business messages without covering their slides in administrative nonsense (chartjunk!). Bravo, Nokia! (<http://www.slideshare.net/whatidiscover/nokia-brand-design-priorities>)

Templates

Templates are nice. They do some of the design work for you: find the art, space out the text boxes, pick out fonts and colors. But they’re only a first step. You’re still going to need to customize any template to fit your corporate brand and to fit your personal presentation. Here are a few sites you can visit to acquire free (and non-free) presentation templates and backgrounds, as well as animated slide designs.

All the fancy art and animation in the world will not make your presentation any “good.” But to produce superior professional presentations, you should use the best resources you can find, including art and photography. Just remember to use them because you have a **good reason** to use them, and not just because they look **cool**.

There is a world of possibility out there for making your presentations better, and the links below are just a small sampling of what is available today. Once you know what the purpose of your presentation is (to sell a product, to explain an idea, or just to entertain!), invest some time in slide design. Preferably, do this before you’re faced with the 30-minute deadline.

Art, animation, color, text, photography, and layout can either carry you to victory, or sink your battleship. So get out there and prepare your arsenal today!

1. Microsoft (free)

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/>

The PPT templates on Microsoft’s site are all free, and they feature a variety of themes and colors, but you’re not likely to find anything on the bleeding edge of design. Use these templates as a rough starting point to create something original, dynamic, and effective.

2. Templates Wise (free)

<http://www.templateswise.com/>

These templates are free, and like Microsoft they feature some nice artwork, but the designs themselves are all the same: chunky banners and text boxes. Try customizing one to better represent your organization.

3a. Powered Templates (free)

<http://www.poweredtemplates.com/free-ppt-powerpoint-templates.html>

The free templates on Powered Templates give you a great range of background art and photography, but the same headers and designs throughout. (And many of them seem to be holiday-themed. What's that about?) The free templates include three slides.

3b. Powered Templates (not free)

<http://www.poweredtemplates.com/animated-powerpoint-templates.html>

Most of the content on this site is available for a fee (around \$12), but I'd like to draw your attention to the animated slides (around \$32). These may make your files huge and not really add any "content" but, you have to admit, they look good. This is the sort of material that can make a huge impact on certain audiences (i.e., people who say "ooh" and "aah" a lot). These downloads include 3 masters and 17 slides of sharp-looking graphics.

4. Animation Factory (subscription)

http://www.animationfactory.com/en/powerpoint_templates.html?cid=E6

This site offers not only original art but animated slide backgrounds as well. You'll have to pay a yearly subscription fee (\$60-\$200) to download the templates, but if you're looking for something really exciting, hover your mouse over the animated samples to see globes and gears spin in your headers and footers.

5. Free PPT Templates (free)

<http://www.freeppttemplates.com/freeppttemplates/categories/general/>

If you have a handle on design and just want some art for your background, try this site. The art is free and available in an array of colors and designs. I recommend using something that is uniformly light or uniformly dark (like the samples below). Avoid "busy" backgrounds.

6. Template Monster (\$40 and up)

<http://www.templatemonster.com/powerpoint-templates.php>

Here is a site I really like, although I'd like it more if the templates were free. The designs here favor dark backgrounds with light text, and the headings and logos tend to be smaller than the content. Which is good. Plus, the art is very slick, and if you're looking for art, it's worth finding (and paying for) the best. (But a template is just a starting point, right? You would customize it, wouldn't you? Say, "Yes.")

7. Graphic River (\$5 and up)

<http://graphicriver.net/category/presentation-templates/powerpoint-templates>

Graphic River is best known for its high standard of quality files coupled with cheap prices. There are a bunch of PowerPoint templates, as well as vector images and illustrations that you can use to spruce up your presentations for only a few dollars.

Two Awesome Articles

In case you're beginning to think that I'm getting a little extra money under the table from the good people at Microsoft and other PowerPoint-related vendors, here are a pair of articles from Wired about the general strengths and weaknesses of the application. I appreciate PPT's capabilities while remaining aware of its pitfalls. I suggest you do the same.

"Learning to Love PowerPoint" (<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt1.html>)

"PowerPoint is Evil" (<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2.html>)

TED talks

As mentioned somewhere in this book, the Technology Entertainment Design conference is a unique and valuable forum for very clever people to share ideas in brief presentations. The presentations are all about 18 minutes long, and every one of them can be viewed online.

Here are a few worth watching. Note the tools used, the visuals, the speaking styles. And listen to the audience reactions, the applause and the laughter.

- Hans Rosling presents his research into global poverty, including powerful visuals to explain where the poorest people in the world live, over time. His dynamic statistical software supports his talk, illustrating what he is saying. In fact, it is so powerful that most of his talk is supported by this one tool, except when he uses photographs or uses his single animated PowerPoint slide. And then he swallows a sword. (When was the last time your executives did that?!) http://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_reveals_new_insights_on_poverty.html
- J.J. Abrams talks about the sources of inspiration for his television shows and films. The power of mystery! http://www.ted.com/talks/j_j_abrams_mystery_box.html
- Jeff Han demonstrates a radical new touchscreen technology (in 2006). It may not look so radical today, in fact you may have one in your pocket right now, but this is where it debuted. Notice the complete lack of slides. The visual component is just the demonstration. http://www.ted.com/talks/jeff_han_demos_his_breakthrough_touchscreen.html
- Bjorn Lomborg talks about whether it would be better to invest in solving climate change or to solve all of the other problems in the world. He uses standard corporate slides, and it is easy to see that Lomborg becomes less compelling, less natural when he speaks to his slides instead of just speaking to his audience. You can literally hear him speeding up and sounding even more breathless when he talks to his slides. http://www.ted.com/talks/bjorn_lomborg_sets_global_priorities.html

- Eric Giler demonstrates wireless electricity, and explains the technical concepts behind it. The demo speaks for itself. http://www.ted.com/talks/eric_giler_demos_wireless_electricity.html
- Carolyn Porco reveals new data that we might one day find life on one of Saturn's moons. Note that her slides are useful and unique photographs, and there isn't a single header or footer in sight. http://www.ted.com/talks/carolyn_porco_could_a_saturn_moon_harbor_life.html
- Al Gore discusses climate change (and he's pretty funny at times!). http://www.ted.com/talks/al_gore_on_averting_climate_crisis.html
- And lastly, humorist John Hodgman demonstrates how to deliver a narrative with almost no assistance from PowerPoint at all! http://www.ted.com/talks/john_hodgman_s_brief_digression.html

About the Author



Joseph Lewis is a regular contributor to WorkAwesome.com, and has over ten years of experience in publishing for government, defense, health care, and technology firms. As an editor, he has corrected typos for admirals, doctors, and scientists, and published numerous books, journals, and case studies. As a writer, Joseph has published countless classified and proprietary documents that you cannot read. Over the years, he has created and

delivered presentations to bosses, peers, clients, and students on more subjects than he cares to remember, including how to give a quality presentation. He has also written articles about business presentations, office politics, and other humorous subjects. Joseph lives in a pleasant suburb of the United States with his wife, daughter, and two cats.

Web: <http://www.josephrobertlewis.com/>

Blog: <http://josephrobertlewis.wordpress.com/>

Your Free PowerPoint Templates

This book includes:

- 7 PowerPoint template examples from the author.
- 3 PowerPoint templates provided by designer Marko Prljic.



Designer Marko Prljic (known as segan) is one of the top 20 authors on [GraphicRiver.net](https://www.graphicriver.net), where you can buy PowerPoint templates, images, icons and other cool things you may wish to use in your presentations. Marko is the co-founder and Creative Director of a web agency called Twinkle Tap, and his work has been featured in numerous blogs, design galleries and offline publications.

Check out his portfolio:

www.markoprljic.iz.hr, or follow him on twitter: twitter.com/markoprljic.

In **Rockstar Presentations**, author **Joseph Lewis** shares tips, tricks and wisdom on public speaking with no fear, no cue cards and no worries!

Whether you're giving a blockbuster keynote or teaching a handful of co-workers how to do something cool, this book was written for you.

You'll learn:

- Why everything you've heard about avoiding stage fright is wrong
- How not to fail at PowerPoint
- The secret techniques separating awesome presenters from the rest
- How you can use the same strategies employed by Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill to give great presentations

This book also comes bundled with **3 great PowerPoint templates** you can use in your own presentations!

ROCKABLE*

