

Business

Presentation Superstar!

A dozen ideas to help you create compelling presentations and thrill your audience



In this book, how to:

- Create relevant content
- Design stunning slides
- Prepare for a presentation
- Deliver presentations like a superstar

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“Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Prajakta's Experience

"I usually present to clients in the United Kingdom. My audience generally comprises of individuals at a very senior level in the client organisation.

My presentations before the workshop

Before this workshop, I used to get a bit nervous & fearful before a presentation. This used to cause me to mumble & I used to lose my train of thought. My presentations used to be unstructured & would have too much detail. As a result, my presentations used to be long & would lead to confusion in the mind of the Client. My voice modulation wasn't very great, either.

My presentations after the workshop

I had a few presentations last week. They went really well. There were no hiccups as I had structured the presentation using the 5 step process that I had learnt in the workshop. Unlike in the past, this time, I was not mumbling at all. The presentation was focused & to the point. There was no loss of relevant points. This was very different from earlier, when I used to find that the presentation used to often go haywire.

This time around, I felt more confident. This was different from earlier when I used to get a bit nervous & used to mumble sometimes."

**Prajakta B.,
Mumbai**

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Preface

Stuck in a mire; Prashant's story



"Can you help him out? He is my biggest worry, right now."

In his conversation with me, Mitul¹, Project Head of one of India's top five IT firms, and a client of our firm, was referring to Prashant², one of his most tenured employees."

The reason:

Prashant, though technically brilliant and vastly experienced had been stuck at the level of a Senior Development Engineer for almost his entire ten year tenure with this Organisation.

The next logical career move for Prashant would have been to move into a client management role. However, owing to his severely constrained communication and presentation ability, this was not an option that the organisation considered for Prashant. He would be a terrible liability in that role, considering that the bulk of their clients were global biggies based in the United Kingdom and in Northern America, and managing such high profile clients required highly evolved communication and presentation ability.

¹ Names changed to maintain privacy.

² Names changed to maintain privacy

His lack of communication skills led to younger and less experienced individuals surpassing him in the career stakes.

Now, his manager was left with a dilemma: what do you do with someone like Prashant? Do you simply let him be, but let his morale weaken further as he sees people far less experienced outshine him? Or, do you shift him out of the system and allow him find his niche elsewhere?

When I met with Prashant, and observed him addressing his own team mates, Mitul's cause for worry became amply clear. Prashant's inability to effectively communicate in critical one-to-many situations –in this case, even those whom he knew on an intimate level – spelt doom for him. There was no way in which this man was going to be placed in a role that required evolved communication or presentation ability.

Hay McBer, you paying attention?

Tom Peters, thinker, writer and management uber guru, says that in today's world, skills such as communication and presentation ability rank higher than technical skills, even as important as these technical skills might be.

Numerous studies have also proven as much. In one such study³ conducted by Hay/ McBer Group, which looked at top performers in forty different organisations, it was found that an individual's emotional quotient or EQ (soft skills and people skills, simply put) was **twice as important** for success in one's career, as compared to IQ or technical expertise and among the many competencies that these top performers possessed, you guessed it, was evolved communication ability.

³ Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, Daniel Goleman, Bloomsbury Publishing

We should've listened to Dylan

The times they are a-changin'!

Poet, philosopher and singer-songwriter Bob Dylan's prophetic words had rung the warning. Blessed are those that paid heed to his words.

This is not our father's world. The nature of skills that are needed to succeed today has drastically changed.

In the Industrial Age of old, it was the hard, technical skills that held sway. People who could use their bodies to generate output (viz., factory workers) were in demand. In the Information Age, people who could use their minds to generate output (viz., computer programmers) were the dominant force. Think the Google Guys, Bill Gates, the guys hammering out code in the thousands of 'Software Development Centres' across the world and their ilk.

The Information Age rewarded those with high IQ and technical ability. However, it also laid a great deal of emphasis on soft skills, communication skills being one among these. And, the importance placed upon these soft skills has increased steadily over the years.

As Tom Peters is often quoted as saying, "Soft is the new hard".

Keep up with the programme or get left behind...

In a world where everyone has an MBA, engineering degrees, a string of postgraduate qualification... relevant business degrees or years of industry experience, mastery over these critical soft skills can tip the scales in your favour when you are angling for a new job, a promotion or maybe personal and professional growth.

And neglecting to develop your presentation and communication skills can cost you, as we've seen with our friend Prashant.

The future belongs to those who possess evolved soft skills

Of course, wealth, prestige and honour are what usually follow for those endowed with the virtues and competencies required to thrive in the age one lives in!

Are you ready for it?



Are you the type that can influence others? Are you the type who can stand up in front of an audience—even a tough one – and win them over to your way of thinking? Are you the type who can gauge as to what the recipient of your communication is there to hear from you? Can you go out there and blow their minds with the lucidity of your thoughts and the power of your eloquence?

It is such as these that will experience significant professional success. Wealth, prestige and honour are what usually follow for those endowed with the virtues and competencies required to thrive in the age one lives in.

And if you are not among those blessed with these? Then waste no further time, my friend. Go out and learn what you can to thrive in this new Age.

This book will help you along some of the way

I sense that you have picked up this manuscript because you seek to inspire, motivate and lead; because you desire to influence thought and action; because you crave to be the agent of change in the workplace and outside.

You know that you want to be a presentation superstar. You know that it is the tool that one requires to sway the universe

And it is to you, Dear Kindred Soul, that this book is dedicated.

And I promise that putting into practice the lessons contained in this book, will greatly help you along your way.

How this book is structured

This book is divided into three broad parts:

1. Presentation content design & structuring
2. Slide design and preparation
3. Presentation delivery

The book pretty much follows the steps that you will follow when you are required to deliver a presentation, no?

Use this book, then, as a guide to help you at every step of your journey to designing and delivering your presentation.

My story: twenty three years of study. Some of it is in this book

Aged sixteen, I had my first formal lesson in public speaking and communication. While I had a good deal of stage experience by then, having taken parts in elocution, debates, theatre, et al since aged five, sixteen was when I had my first formal lesson in public speaking and communication. And since then, I have studied this science diligently.

I have studied, written and taught about communication, especially business presentations, over the last twenty three years, twelve of which I have done so as a professional trainer and consultant.

This book contains some of the lessons I have learned. I say some, because there is a lot more I have to share, but that will be the contents of another – larger – book.

Suffice to say, if you follow the lessons contained in the pages of this manuscript, you will see a remarkable change in your presentations.

You will turn into a presentation superstar!

So, go on, it is time to shine like the star that you are.

I wish you success!

Client Speak:

Stories of Client Successes & Praise for our Business Presentation Skills Insights & Services

Ashok Prabhu,
Bangalore

I thought I was doing everything correct

As I had given several presentations to the internal and external customers in the companies I worked, I thought that I was doing everything correct; until I went through the 'Business Presentation Training' conducted by Jerson James.

Jerson brought out new perspectives on presentations

Earlier I used to put whole lot of data into the slides and the slides used to take centre stage in my entire presentation.

What I learnt

I learnt about the importance of profiling the audience; how to choose the right data and common mistakes that we make during presentations. After the training I learnt that slides are just a tool that helps in presentation and I should be the centre of the whole presentation.

I'm receiving kudos from all

Now my approach to presentation has totally changed and presentations have become whole lot of fun. My seniors and colleagues have appreciated the change in approach and my newly acquired skills.

My American Clients loved my presentation

Recently I presented on 'Enterprise Application Data Archival Solution', a technical topic to my Clients from America. The feedback that I received from them was excellent. They loved my presentation.

A word of thanks for Jerson

I wish to say a special word of thanks for Jerson James who was with full of energy and made us enjoy the 2 days training session

Ashok Prabhu,
Bangalore

Selvarajan Shanmugam,
Bangalore

Initially I was skeptical

"When I entered the training room first day, I was wondering what I could learn from your session. I learnt the best things about business presentations

But, you taught me all the best things about "Business Presentation Skills" in those couple of days of training.

I am very satisfied and happy that I attended your training session. Thanks once again for such a best in class training session by you.

Appreciation

You are one of the very few highly capable and talented best trainers I have ever seen."

Selvarajan Shanmugam,
Bangalore

Derrick D'Souza
CTO, uAchieveIt, Inc, Pune

We needed scientific but real world applications

"We had a team of content developers who were a mix of experienced and inexperienced individuals. Our need was to take the skills we had in content creation and enhance it with new practices and techniques that would help us produce world class content products. We needed to come up with a model that was scientific but very real world in its application.

Initially, we were sceptical

My early interaction with Jerson James was that of guarded scepticism; having dealt with "training industry leaders" in the past, I had little reason to think differently about them. What moved me towards an engagement with Jerson eventually was his ability to articulate as to how he could help us assimilate our skills with leading edge training methods.

The team retained learning

The entire experience at the content creation workshop was one that revealed Jerson's commitment to excellence. The sessions were energetic, engaging and very hands on. His

reinforcement of key concepts ensured that the team retained what was most important for their skills. The quality of presentations and the hand outs were certainly amongst the best that we have seen.

The post workshop support helped iron out gaps & in implementation

On returning to our workplace we could apply the new skills we had learnt almost immediately, the gaps were ironed out over the following weeks with able support from Jerson.

I would recommend Jerson

We are able to justify the premium training workshop through the value we have received since then. I am very impressed with Jerson James and I recommend him to any organisation with a need for a high quality - high efficacy training experience."

Derrick D'Souza
CTO, uAchieveIt, Inc, Pune

Harish Gopal,
Bangalore

My Presentations before the workshop

"Before attending the workshop, my view of the presentation was creating few slides and reading out from them during the presentation.

My Presentations, now

After attending the Business Presentation Skills workshop, I understood that a presentation is much more than this

What I learned

The techniques thought in the workshop to define the objective and profiling the audience will be useful to ensure that all the time during the presentation is utilized for the appropriate things. All the 'hooks' which I learned during the workshop will help me to keep the audience engaged throughout the duration of the presentation.

How the workshop methodology helped me

The play back of the video recording of my presentation gave a better understanding of the mistakes I make and take back action items from the workshop to improve the way I make my presentation”

Harish Gopal,
Bangalore

S Arora,
Director, Mumbai

‘I know a lot about this subject (sales & sales presentations). So, I was wondering if this would be worth my time”.

Jerson’s inputs are practical & implementable

“However, my reservations soon fell apart, as I found Jerson’s inputs practical & implementable.

The examples and discussion were mostly on actual instances from the corporate world and Jerson keeps you hooked on to the subject right from the word go!

Importantly, I have implemented most concepts shared by Jerson”.

How implementing the learning has helped me

“I have seen significant benefits from implementing the workshop learning.

- **An increase of 42% in sales** for the Quarter following the workshop as compared to the same the previous year
- The **sales cycle** that used to take 2 months on an average **came down to** 1.5 months
- The **ticket size also catapulted** by 25-30%”

Recommended

“Highly recommended for anyone looking at moving his/her sales & sales presentations from the 2nd gear to the 5th gear!”

S Arora,
Director, Mumbai

***Abhishek Ram,
Mumbai***

I usually make presentations that deal with documenting the result of some research work that I have conducted along with status updates of projects. The typical audience profile is a mix of senior management across various verticals along with a few peer staff and my line manager.

The biggest learning has been the fact that I review the audience profile first and try to ascertain what are the key points that will impact them the most in order to either make a decision or provide them with the latest updates since most of them are key stakeholders

The workshop was a high energy workshop and constantly kept me clued in. Jerson was keen to listen to the views of the audience and appreciate each person's position and view point. Constant and consistent feedback was provided during the workshop to every member and thereby increased the learning for everyone.

*Abhishek Ram,
Mumbai*

Section I:

Presentation Content Design & Structuring

1. How to get your audience to care about you & what you have to say



“If your presentation is not about what your audience cares about, then they have no reason to care about your presentation”

- Yours Truly

He was the worst of the lot!

The banker speaking at the forum for Small and Medium Businesses, the sixth speaker to address the audience, was bragging about all what his bank had done for small business owners. Well, the preceding speakers had bragged similarly, but at least they possessed a modicum of public speaking skills.

This presentation was the kind you would want on a night when your sleep decided to desert you. A complete bore, there was hardly anyone in the audience who was paying attention – a fact that mattered little to him.

There was one saving grace, though: lunch was scheduled immediately after his presentation.

Oh, I doubt that an audience has ever craved lunch more!

I noticed one interesting fact thought

Sitting there, the critic in me, forged by the action of studying and teaching communication and presentation skills for almost two decades, could not help but notice one undeniable fact: everything that he was saying could have been of immense help and interest to the audience.

Just that in the manner in which he had formulated his presentation, he had failed to illustrate clearly how his points were, in essence, addressing the queries and concerns that the audience had. Instead, his presentation made him sound self-absorbed and show-offish.

If only he had cared about what they cared about, he could have made his bank appear so much more customer focussed. He could have won the hearts and minds of the audience. It could have won his bank at least a handful of new customers.

Alas!

It's Not about You!

If there is one lesson that every presenter needs to bear in mind, one lesson that will ensure that your presentation will be successful, it is this:

**If your presentation is not about what your audience cares about,
then they have no reason to care about your presentation.**

Underline that line. Print it out. Commit it to memory, and never ever forget it.

Nobody else cares about you, your organisation, your chequered history or your cutting edge product offerings.

Sorry, but that is the truth.

We are all selfish beings, and all we care about is us.

Your presentation is really not about you; as much as you might want it to be.

How to deliver a presentation that your audience will gush over



As important as presentation delivery is, there is something that takes priority over that.

That is the relevance of your content to your audience. Your presentation content must really be all about what your audience cares about. And, it must be made absolutely clear that it is.

So, place every point that you are making in the context of what your audience cares about. The following example is intended to illustrate this lesson.

An illustration

Say you are part of the HR Department presenting at colleges as part of your campus recruitment drive.

Now, it is tempting to wax eloquent about the greatness, heritage, vintage, global office spread and what not, about your organisation. The hope is that this might sway your audience.

It does not.

Everybody and their mother is bragging similarly. But, then again, if these points do not sway them, then what will? Well, these points themselves will. However, not the way they are normally delivered.

You need to place these points *in the context of questions that your audience has for you*.

In this case, your audience wants to know as to what global opportunities your organisation provides. Mention this question as one of the points in your agenda. Doing so tells them that you are going to be speaking about things that they actually want to hear. Then, in your presentation, tell them that your organisation does provide for global work opportunities - assuming it does – as it has offices in various locations worldwide. You may then mention the spread of your offices, and also an anecdote of an employee of yours who has moved across locations.

The details, placed in the context of a question that they might have, now begins to make sense. Of itself it has little meaning. It is simply a random piece of boring, meaningless information to your audience.

What our banker friend had missed out on

What the banker, whom I have mentioned at the start of this Chapter, had missed out on was connecting his points to matters that the audience cared about.

For example, in his presentation he had spoken about the size of his bank's loan book. This included loans that the bank provided to its large corporate clients, small and medium businesses, as well as, to retail customers. I guess that the figure that he had bandied was intended to wow the audience. Unfortunately, I observed that hardly anyone seem to take note of that fact. After all, why would small and medium business owners care about what the bank had done for large businesses or for retail customers?

What the banker could have spoken about instead was how his bank had created products aimed at benefiting small and medium businesses to help them deal with cash flow issues in the recessionary environment prevailing at that time; about how his bank has tried to respond to the squeeze that such businesses were faced with at that time; about other initiatives taken by the bank to help others like those in the audience. These details would have gotten the attention of the audience, since it addressed the challenges that they were faced with at that time. It would have gotten them to care about what the bank had to say, since the bank seemed to care about people like them.

The banker could have then mentioned the total amount of money that his bank had lent out, as a proof of concept of the bank's commitment to small and medium businesses. Phrased thus, the detail about the bank's loan book would have made sense to the audience. Presented as a random fact, the audience had found that figure meaningless.

So,

As you prepare your content for your presentation, ask yourself this question: what does my audience care about? What questions do they want me to answer? What are the things that concern them?

Then identify as to how you can address these in the context of your own presentation.

In your presentation delivery, verbalise their questions at the start of your narrative. Respond to these questions one-by-one. Place all your points in the context of these questions.

Your audience will find your presentation relevant. They will now care about you and about what you are speaking.

Now, if only our banker friend above had learned this lesson.

2. Gathering talking points: How to satisfy your audience's needs



When I get ready to talk to people, I spend two-thirds of the time thinking what they want to hear and one third thinking about what I want to say”

- Abraham Lincoln

“If only, all presenters would think likewise”

- Yours Truly

Was that Wikipedia?

Having sat through hundreds of presentations, there is one feature that I have found common in a great many of them.

They mostly end up sounding or reading like Wikipedia entries on the subject. By that, I mean that the presenter seemed to have dumped everything there is to possibly know about the subject on the poor audience.

Perhaps they felt compelled to tell the audience everything there was to be told. Perhaps they believe that this is how one does justice to one's presentation.

Unfortunately, the audience thinks otherwise.

Dumping a ton of (unstructured) information on the audience at once overwhelms and confuses your audience. Consequently, you will lose their attention.

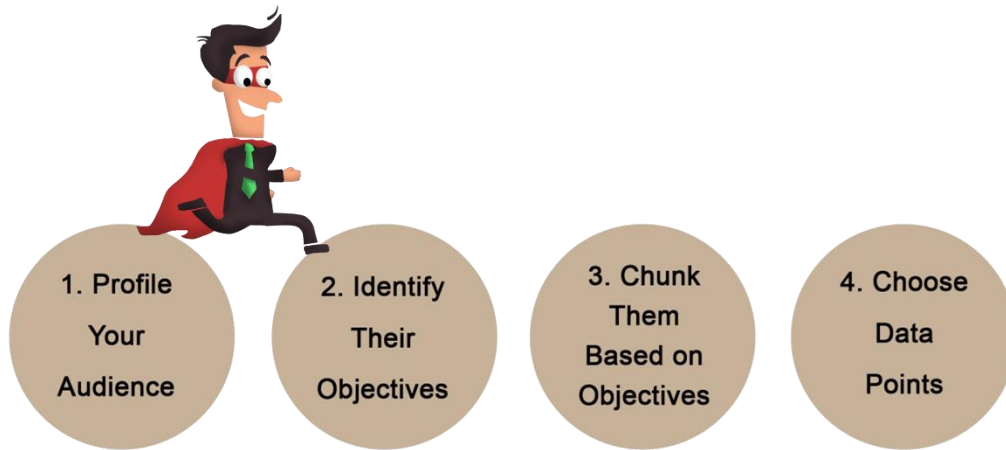
The audience fails to grasp the essence of the presentation

Your audience would have come to the presentation expecting answers to some specific questions. And, maybe the presentation did answer those.

But because the answers were hidden beneath layers and layers of – Wikipedia styled - content, the audience failed to grasp these.

So, how does one create presentation content that is designed to give the audience what they exactly want?

Gathering talking points: How to design presentations that satisfy your audience's needs



Use the following steps to help you structure focused and highly effective presentations.

Step 1: Profile your audience:

Identify who will be in your audience. Profile them based on their:

- Demography (age, gender, education, etc.)
- Firmography (industry, profession, department, designation, etc.) and
- Psychography (interests, lifestyle, outlook towards life, etc.)

For most 'corporate' presentations, the most important part of the exercise is doing a firmography based profiling exercise.

Step 2: Identify audience objectives:

Identify what your audience would want to hear from you in your presentation.

Here is where the firmography based profiling helps in business presentations. A firmography based audience profiling exercise allows you to determine what exactly people in the particular industry, or at the particular level in the hierarchy in the organisation where you are presenting, are interested in. It helps you determine as to what someone of this profile would be seeking from your presentation.

For example, say you are a consultant, making a presentation on the Power Sector in India. Your audience members are Credit Officers (these are the individuals who disburse loans to customers) of a bank.

Knowing this will help you determine as to what they are seeking from you.

In this case, being Credit Officers, they are there to understand from you what their lending policies should be to companies in the Power Sector. Your content should now be focused on providing your audience with this information.

Important: You will leave out other content related to the Power Sector that is not directly connected to this.

Sometimes though, you might not know beforehand who might be in your audience. Hence it is always a good idea to ascertain the composition of the audience at the start of your presentation. To do this, you could simply ask people to introduce themselves by stating their name and the department they work in. This works as a quick firmography based profiling exercise.

Step 3: 'Chunk' them based on objectives:



Often, you need to chunk your audience into groups of people with similar objectives. Each of the audience members might have different questions that they want answered. A group of hundred might have as many needs. Obviously, you cannot address each of their needs.

So, you would need to chunk them into broad segments. Next, identify broadly as to what the needs of the various segments are.

Continuing with the example from above, imagine that you are making a presentation at an industry forum. In your audience are Credit Officers from different banks. There are also Investors, who want to know if the Power Sector in India is a worthy investment avenue.

The needs of the two segments of the audience now become the two primary objectives of your presentation.

Step 4: Choose data points based on the above exercise

Now that you have identified what your audience seeks from you, choose the points that will help you provide the audience with what they are seeking from you.

Knock off all the points that are not absolutely essential for you to meet your presentation objective, even if these are great points by themselves, to include.

This is Abraham Lincoln's philosophy, in action. Taking the time to perform a detailed profiling and content determination exercise allows you, as Lincoln would, to think about what your audience seeks to hear from you.

One Last Thing

Somewhere towards the start of your presentation indicate to audience members as to what you have identified to be the composition of the audience. Next, inform them as to what each section of the audience is seeking from you. Then mention that you plan to address the needs of each section.

Bereft of this little exercise, you addressing the needs of a certain section of the audience will make others feel like you are digressing from the subject, even though you are not.

3. How to prevent content bloat?



“No one ever complains about a speech being too small”

- Ira Hayes

You have been there, too.

You know, sitting in through presentations with content more ponderous than a detailed explanation of the terms and conditions included in an insurance policy.

Presentations where you wondered, “How does this point connect to what he was saying earlier?” Or, “could not he have simplified that content?” Or, “he could have cut that presentation in half, and it would have still made sense”.

Ah, you remember!

In communication, as in life

The temptation to add all those points that we believe will make us appear smart, funny or whatever else, is often too hard to resist.

However, what kills presentations is often too much, not too little. What compromises an otherwise persuasive argument is presenting that extra point to bolster one's position, but which turns out to be a weaker point that the audience rips apart. Also, what causes the audience's attention to drift is too much of something, even if it is of a good thing.

In communication, as in life, what is good is often the biggest enemy of the best.

This is good advice to pay heed to, considering our audience lives in a world besieged with data and information.

So, be ruthless



The key to presentation effectiveness then lies in ruthless editing of one's content and slides.

Ask yourself a simple question: in the context of the communication objectives, which I have set – assuming that you have clearly identified these - is this point/ this slide strictly necessary?

It might be a great point, you might even be able to justify its inclusion in your content, but if it is not strictly required to meet your communication objective, then edit it out.

Your presentation will be the stronger for it.

Is this your strongest argument?

Bear this lesson in mind especially if you are making a persuasive argument through your presentation (say, if you are presenting a business case for change, a sales pitch or are justifying an inference that you have arrived at).

Ask yourself this question: is this my strongest, or among my two or three strongest arguments? If not, then you can almost certainly guarantee that it will weaken your position. If your audience can argue your weak point – whether they verbalise this argument or not – then they will.

In the bargain, your stronger points will lose their potency and your argument will fall flat.

In conclusion

To paraphrase pioneer aviator, writer and poet Antoine de Saint Exupery,

“Perfection is attained not when there is nothing more left to add, but when there is nothing left to take out”.

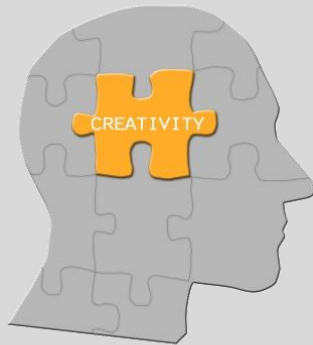
Good advice for every presenter.

It will strengthen your presentation and prevent content bloat.

Failure to do this will result in your presentation content getting compared to a detailed explanation of the terms and conditions in an insurance policy.

Ouch!

4. How to avoid losing your audience's attention



“Creativity is connecting things”

Steve Jobs

“It is also the key to holding your audience’s attention”

Yours Truly

What might they think?

Intimidated by the prospect of delivering a presentation to a high profile audience, our key customers, or our Senior Management, many of us are confronted with a dilemma: would it be okay to use tools such as humour, anecdotes, provocative questions, videos, etc. in our presentation?

It’s really a catch-22 situation.

Should we use such tools to keep our audience engaged, we wonder? But, we also wonder if our audience would disapprove of these. Maybe we should stick to presenting dry information and data, we contend. But then, we fear that we will lose their attention during our presentation.

Mostly, we choose to err on the side of caution, and so we omit these from our presentation.

And that impacts our presentation...

The fallout of this decision is that mid-way through our presentation delivery our audience begins to drift. We soldier on bravely, but we find that our audience had tuned out.

And then we regret our earlier decision. We should have included that anecdote, or maybe even that joke that we thought would have been a nice touch. These would have made our presentation truly engaging.

But now it is too late. We have lost our audience. They have missed half of our persuasive argument and consequently do not seem convinced about the point that we were making.

False teachers

Many of us have been told that business presentations should only concern hard facts, data, and relevant information. We have been told that stories, humour, provocative questions and such things are out-of-place in business presentations. We have been told things like: 'the audience has not come here to be entertained', or, 'don't deviate from the point'.

These half-truths have been peddled by teachers possessed with a rather limited understanding of the subject.

Common sense will tell you that for the audience to receive the message that our presentation is trying to deliver, they have to first listen to our presentation in its entirety. And, if we want them to listen to us, then we have to engage them for the length of our presentation.

What my experience has taught me – as yours would have taught you too – is that dry data and content will rarely, if ever, engage an audience for long.

You and me, friend, are nothing but humans, so....

Ask yourself a few questions:

- How long would you be able to sit through a presentation that is not engaging?
- How much of dry data or information will you be able to take in, before you lose interest?

At best, say fifteen minutes? Twenty maybe, if you try hard; or, if you really love the subject. But then you would lose interest. Not because you want to. But because that's the way our brains function.

What we learnt about presentations namely: 'the audience has not come here to be entertained'; or, 'don't deviate from the point', are only half-truths. We have got to keep the audience engaged. We need to do this for the entire duration of the presentation.

How then do we engage the audience?

Here are a dozen tools that you can use to engage your audience. You are limited only by your openness to using these, or by your inexperience in using these effectively.

a. A 'big bang' opening:



Nothing screams 'boring' louder than "Hi, I'm Sam and today I am going to speak about the economic outlook for the coming financial year."

Instead, grab your audience by the collar straight out of the gate. Say something that will get people to sit up and take notice. Reel them in right at the start.

And do not lose up on the chokehold for the duration of your presentation!

b. Testimonials and endorsements (especially in video format):

You need to build your credibility right at the start of your presentation. Your audience needs to know that you are worth their time. However, in an age where everybody likes to tom-tom about their greatness, it pays to avoid being seen as a show-off. That is off-putting for most people. Instead, get someone else to do the job of 'praising you'.

Testimonials from clients or colleagues, endorsements from prominent personalities, or a brief mention of a past related success should be proudly displayed in your presentation.

You might wonder how this is not 'showing-off'. Well, really speaking, it is. The only difference is that in this case it is not you talking about your own greatness, or that of your product, or idea. You are simply presenting to your audience what others have had to say.

If you can get this in video format, then there is nothing like it. Your audience will get to see that it is a living, flesh-and-blood human behind the testimonial or endorsement, and not some fake lines that you have manufactured.

Placing this at the start of your presentation gives the audience the impression that you/ your idea/ your product are worth their time. It will get them to sit up and pay closer attention to what you have to say.

You want that.

c. Analogies & Metaphors:

Metaphors are a figure of speech which allows one to declare that one subject is, on the point of comparison, the same as another.

Here is an example: The undiligent salesperson is an old car devoid of fuel; creaking and sputtering as they stall.

Analogies work in pretty much the same way.

Metaphors and analogies make complex points easier to understand. They also serve to drive home a point rather emphatically, like in the illustration provided above.

d. Visually striking slides:

Assaulted by an onslaught of poorly constructed slides since time immemorial, and overloaded with other visual stimuli, we often underestimate the power of the visual medium to engage the audience, and to drive home a point powerfully.

While we will talk at length about this in Chapter 08 (Not all Visuals are Created Equal), a list of presentation tools would be incomplete without a mention of effective slides. Designed bearing in mind the basics of visual design – which, in turn, is no rocket science - and used effectively, slides can greatly serve to engage the audience.

However, the slides that we are speaking of here are not the usual, text heavy, bullet point ridden monstrosities that we are familiar with. But, as mentioned above, we will discuss this at length later. Suffice to say here that it does help to use well designed slides in our presentation.

e. Video Clips

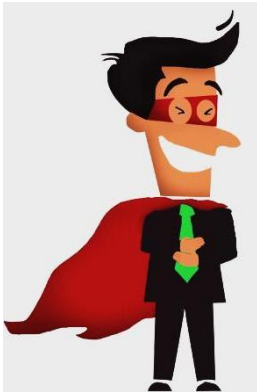
The popularity of video sharing sites like YouTube and Vimeo should be an indicator of how much people enjoy videos. Videos can be a powerful tool to grab people's attention, and also to drive home a point emphatically.

So, if you can, then do use videos in your presentation at the appropriate moment.

However, not all videos are made equal. Crisp, to the point and creative videos are the kind that you need to use.

Point to note: thirty second videos are best. On the outside, use a three minute video. Any longer, and it is an exercise in inducing boredom.

f. Humour



Never underestimate the power of humour. Nothing can reel in your audience as much as well-placed humour.

It also displays confidence. Hey, you do not laugh when you are under duress, right? You laugh only when you are in a comfortable situation; when you are in a situation of which you are in complete control. Now, is that not the impression that you want to create of yourself?

Only, be careful to ensure that your humour is non-offensive, and not in poor taste.

g. Provocative questions

You could use questions that can get people thinking, or to stir them into action.

Here is an example of a question used in a presentation on women's health: "Heart disease, says the World Health Organisation, kills one in three women worldwide, every year. Question is: is your lifestyle putting you at risk of being that one?"

Questions such as this can get your audience thinking. They engage them at a deep, personal level. They also tend to stir them into action.

h. Some activity that they can perform

Try and incorporate some activity into your presentation.

Presenting on the subject of why your organisation needs to automate some task and about a specific tool that you have identified? Give them a relevant task to perform. Time them. Then, get one of them, or you yourself, to perform the task using the automation tool that you are proposing. Next, show the time or effort saved. It is far more engaging than you speaking about the matter.

Activities draw the audience into the presentation. Get people to use their kinaesthetic sense in a presentation. It is far more engaging and effective, than merely catering to their auditory and visual senses. Even handing them a sheet of paper midway to refer to, would do. Get them to read it. It breaks the monotony of the presenter's monologue.

i. Demos



Many presenters simply talk about their topic, and include some slides which might have an image or two about the subject of their presentation. Few – and these are the smart ones – will use demos and prototypes to help their audience get a concrete, hands-on feel of what they are talking about.

For example, say that you are proposing that stationery for your company should be procured centrally and not individually by each location. Your proposal is based on the fact that in different locations the same item is charged differently. Now, you could have a slide that shows the price of pieces of stationery at various locations. Or, you could have a table set up in the middle of the room with

multiple physical pieces of the same stationery item. You could have a little tag on each piece stating location and price for that item at that location.

The demo is visceral. It is in your face. You cannot escape it. It stays there for the entire duration of the presentation, not only when that slide is on display.

Seeing the display drives home the point far more effectively, as compared to seeing slides.

If you cannot cart the real thing into the room, then use a scaled down version of the thing. Or, use a prototype, or perhaps a sampling of something.

Get your audience to touch, feel or taste it, as might be the case. No, we do not mean that they need to taste every prototype that you will use, only when it is required. It often works like magic.

Now, quite frankly, not every presentation will allow for a demo to be used. All that I am trying to say is that when you can, opt for a live demo instead of simply showing numbers or images.

j. Using Props

Sometimes, using a prop to make a point can be dramatic and also really hard hitting.

Imagine, that you are presenting on the subject of not allowing distractions from diverting our focus from the task at hand. Perhaps you could surreptitiously place a jar of coloured chocolates, or a poster with a thought provoking image and some text, within the line of sight of your audience. Ensure that your prop is prominent. Then somewhere at the start, ask how many people were distracted by the candy jar or by the poster, even as you were speaking.

Use it to illustrate the need to remove distractions from our environment.

k. Addressing their landscape, or speaking their language:

“The presenter truly understood us, our life and our challenges. The presentation was relevant”

Very few things could help you win over your audience as well as being relevant to them and to their life situations.

So, make everything that you say about them. If you are quoting examples, make sure that they are related to their field or to the place where they are from. Presenting in Mumbai? Then talk about Mumbai and not about Delhi. Presenting to Doctors? Then, talk about medicine and not about geology. Talking to kids? Then talk about Lightning McQueen, and not the Queen of England.

The key is to make them feel that your narrative was all about them. Your audience will turn you into a veritable star!

Amitabh and Obama might not need these tools. You and I certainly do



In the absence of such tools, the only device that a presenter can fall back on is his own voice. Now, unless one has been blessed with a voice that has the timbre of an Amitabh Bachchan, or the colour of a Barack Obama, that strategy is

a sure fire recipe for disaster.

Oh yes, I almost forgot, there are those dull, text heavy, visually fatiguing slides, that one could use too!

Little wonder then that audiences often groan at the prospect of having to sit through a presentation; for in their mind, presentations equate boredom.

Bottom line: script these tools into your presentation delivery. Try to use as many of these as you need to. But use at least some of them, for sure.

Also, you do not need to use all twelve in every presentation. Feel free to pick those tools which will be most conducive to the effective communication of your message.

A few words of caution! When to use such tools

The tools are not to be used for entertainment purposes. If the tools used do not help the audience in better understanding the subject, then they exist for mere entertainment value. These merely distract the audience.

So, how then do we ensure that the tools we use will engage the audience and not distract from the presentation?

Bearing in mind the three points mentioned below will help us ensure this:

a. Presenting a complex point? Simplify it, using a tool

Is the point that you are presenting, complex or technical in nature? If yes, then try and use some tool that enables easy understanding of the point.

b. Select tools that are relevant to the subject

The story about Aladdin and his magic lamp is a bad idea when presenting about your new customer care initiatives. Not unless, it has got a real connection to the subject. An anecdote of how a customer of the company praised some new initiatives of yours is a good story to tell.

c. Select tools that are non-offensive

A joke about a politician (viz., on India's Lalu Prasad Yadav) might be in poor taste. A funny incident that occurred with you is great. It is not offensive. Especially avoid poking fun at any ethnic group.

Serious need not mean boring

A business presentation might be on a serious topic. But it does not mean that it has to be boring.

In fact, it necessarily needs to be engaging and interesting. Or, as discussed earlier, you will lose your audience's attention. That will negatively impact your presentation.

So, as you sit to design your next presentation, bear this in mind. Use tools to engage your audience. Just bear in mind the three rules mentioned above.

Then serious will also be interesting!

And, you will ensure that you will not lose your audience's attention.

5. Speak to the mind and to the heart



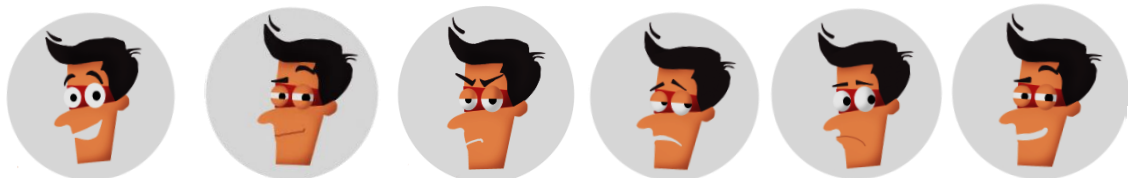
“They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

- Carl W. Buechner
(Writer)

Stories have many emotions attached to them. And, believe it or not, so does every compelling business presentation.

Do not believe me? Well, let us take the most mundane of business presentations: a weekly update presentation.

Emotions, everywhere



Even something as mundane as a weekly update presentation can take one through a roller-coaster of emotions. For example,

- Joy (at meeting some goals)
- Sorrow (at losing out on something significant like a milestone or a lost sale)
- Pride and exultation (at achieving a goal in the face of adversity)
- Resilience (that you are not giving up, even though things have not been great so far)
- Shame (at failing at something)
- Anger (at being let down)
- Gratitude (at being assisted in the goal)
- Fear (at losing one's job owing to some slippages)

Now, before I go any further, let me clarify this: I am in no way saying that all great presentations are, or need to turn into, touchy-feely dramas.

What I am saying is that business involves more than mere logic and data. It involves some very human elements, as well.

Our heart wants to join the party too



Consider this example. You have a loved one who is ill. The doctor hands over the test results (data) to you. The data says that your loved one is fine.

Yet, many of us in such a situation still want the doctor's reassurance that your loved one will in fact be fine; that there will be no further complications; that no more serious medical intervention is required.

This simple reassurance on the doctor's part, communicated verbally, speaks to your heart. This assurance puts you at ease much more than the test results do.

The head and the heart

Your audience, similarly, is looking for something specific from the presentation.

And, it is not always mere data!

Continuing with the example of the weekly update above, your audience - mostly your boss or client - is looking to *be reassured* that things are under control. Or, if they are not, that you are trying your level best to get them under control; that you have taken the right steps and *are confident* that things will change.

If, for example, in the presentation, you are presenting about a significant success that you as a team have had, then your boss wants to know that you and your team are *genuinely happy* about it; that you *take pride* in your achievement.

Or, if your team has failed, then your boss was to know that you are *genuinely as distressed* about it as he or she is; that you are focussed on making up for the failure by putting into action a new plan, and also working harder.

Look at the words marked in italics. These are human and/or emotional elements in an otherwise data driven presentation. These human elements are the story, and your presentation needs to communicate this, not just display the data.

Data speaks to the head. The human elements, we can say, speak to the heart. And it is the human elements that we often connect with, more than we do with the data.

Let us not downplay the head

Nothing I am saying is designed to insinuate that data is not important.

It is data that tells us for sure that things are on track. No manager is going to accept your reassurance if you do not have data that substantiates your story. Your story will only ever make sense in the light of concrete data congruent with your story

However, data by itself is not always enough. This is because data, as I had mentioned above, speaks more to the head. Sometimes, we all want to hear things that will speak to our heart.

Great presentations have human elements

Speaking to the mind and to the heart, then, is the key to delivering great presentations. It is what differentiates great presenters from the merely average.

So, speak to the heart, as much as you will to the head.

It is what will turn your presentation into a compelling story.

Section II:
Slide Design &
Preparing to Deliver a
Superstar Presentation

6. The power of the visual medium



“Use a picture. It’s worth a thousand words”

- From a 1911 newspaper article

Death by PowerPoint!

So badly have we been scarred by those ghastly slides that we have been subjected to since time immemorial, that we have developed an aversion to PowerPoint.

You know the kind of slides that I am talking about.

I am referring to those monstrosities with line after line of bullet point ridden text in font sizes too small for the human eye to read; those imbecilic slides adorned with silly clip arts that the presenter thought was the zenith of design sophistication; those eyesores with flying text and animation.



It has led to an anti-PowerPoint movement springing up all over the corporate world. Many presenters have begun to consider it hip not to use any kind of visual aids in their presentations. It has almost come to be seen as a badge of honour to deliver one’s presentation without using visual aids of any kind.

However, what many of us fail to realise is that visuals – effectively designed and used correctly – can speak a thousand words.

The Power of the Visual Medium

Consider the impact that a movie like the 2006 Academy Award winning documentary on climate change, *The Inconvenient Truth* has had on audiences worldwide.

Prior to this movie, every environmentalist worth his salt had been harping on climate change. All of us knew at some level that it was a big problem; at least we had heard many say that it was. We had heard some stories, but the truth never really stuck around.

Not until Al Gore released, *An Inconvenient Truth*, his arguably brilliant documentary on climate change.

Suddenly, global warming was on everybody's mind. Many more decided to join the fight to stop climate change.

So, why, the sudden change?



The documentary had stunning, often shocking, images of climate change (like the ones above).

Every bit of information presented had a visual aid that really hit home the point. Every bit of data was accompanied by a graph, or image that

somehow made the statistic data impact viewers at a much more visceral level.

The pictures spoke what words would have struggled to articulate.

Suddenly, every person was an environmentalist.

That is the power of the visual medium to impact change.

Increase the Impact of Your Presentation

The visual medium can be a powerful aid in any presentation. It can increase the potency of the narrative, manifold.

To be fair, we don't always need visuals in a presentation, but having them surely does help. It can be a very powerful tool in delivering your presentation.



So, do use well-crafted visuals in your presentation. Do not think that it is a badge of honour that you are speaking without the aid of visuals.

Visuals really do speak a thousand words.

7. Not all visuals are created equal



“I like visuals to be choice and at the same time minimalist”

Harold Prince
(Broadway Producer & Director)

Seen slides like these, before?



Figure 01

Of course, you have. Almost every corporate presentation uses slides like these.

So, when we talk about the power of visual aids, we are not exactly referring to travesties such as these.

‘Coz, not every slide is a good slide.

So, what then is a good slide?



We can answer that question if we first identify the purpose a slide serves in a presentation:

Now, obviously, you cannot expect your audience to remember every single thing that you say during the course of your presentation. However, there are key points that you want them to register. These points would be the essence, the gist, or the key take-away from the narrative that you are delivering.

The purpose of a slide in your presentation is to communicate these key points. An effective slide is one which only displays these key points, and nothing else.

We call such slides a visual representation of the message, which really is the purpose of slides in a presentation in the first place.

Now, every point that you are making can be represented using text, visuals, or using a combination of the two. Such a slide becomes a visual representation of the point being made.

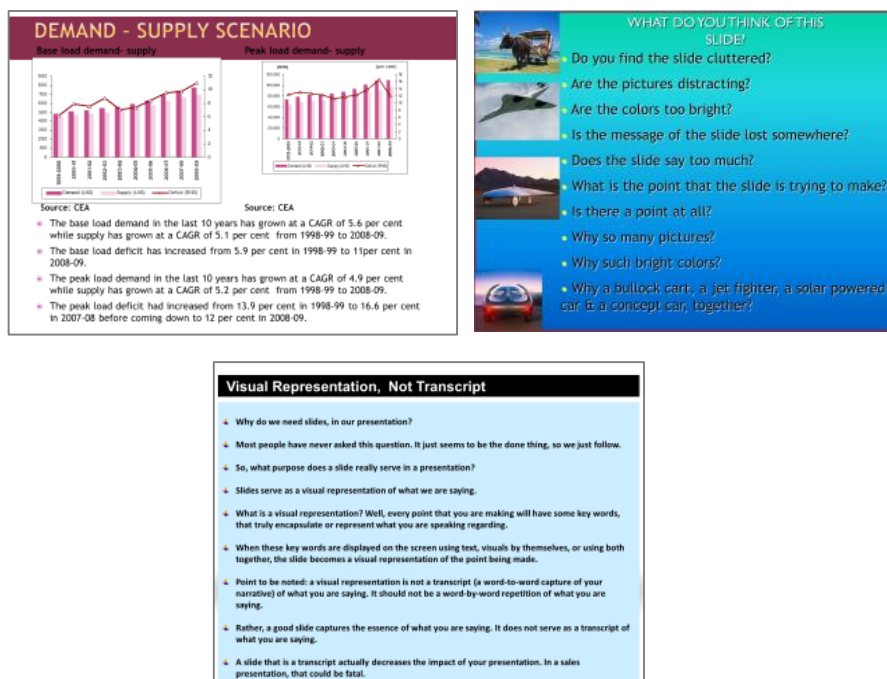
A key point to be noted here is that a visual representation is different from a transcript.

A transcript vs. a visual representation

A transcript is a word-to-word capture of your narrative. A visual representation only displays the essence, the gist, or the key take-away that you want people to remember, on the screen.

A slide that is a transcript actually decreases the impact of your presentation, because your audience will focus more on reading the contents of your slide rather than listening to you. In a presentation, that could be fatal.

The slides that I have depicted at the start of this lesson (Figure 01) are examples of transcripts. Here they are, again.



Horrendous slides, no?

Visual representations help your cause

Here is an illustration of the contrast between a 'transcript' slide and the visual representation of the same slide.

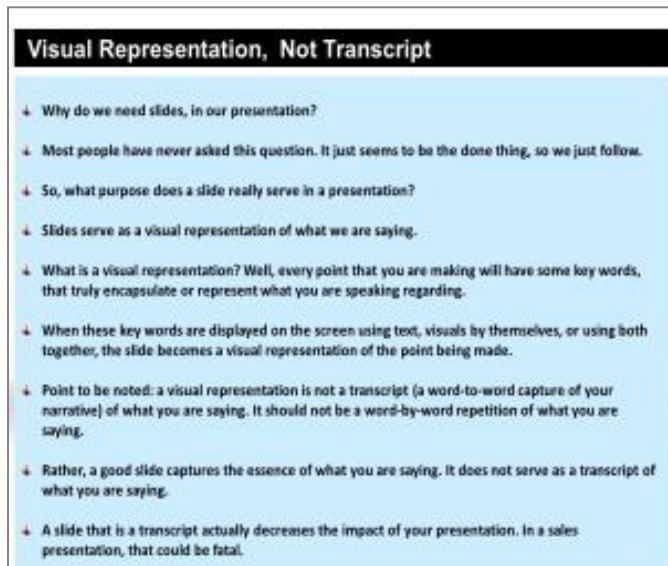


Figure 02, is a transcript, i.e. a word-by-word capture of this Chapter on a slide, though in bullet point format.

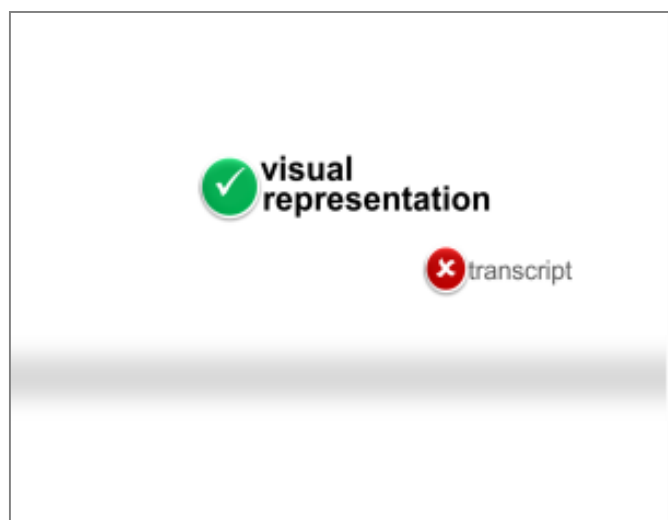


Figure 03, is a visual representation of this Chapter on a slide.

Here is another example of a visually representative slide:

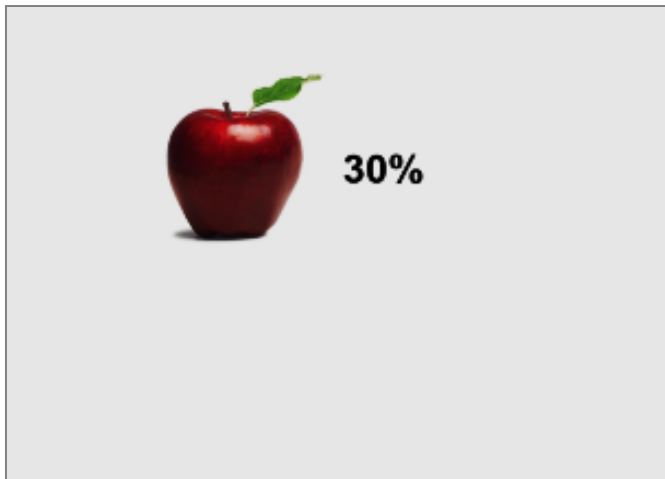


Figure 04, is a slide, which visually represents the percentage of people in a particular place that prefer apples. (In this case, 30 percent)

Slides that resemble those in Figures 3 and 4 act as strategic aids to our presentation. These can act as really powerful aid & greatly enhance the impact of our narrative.

Slides that resemble the depiction in Figures 1 and 2 are a terrible apology for a slide. They add no value whatsoever to the presentation, except act as a visual teleprompter for the presenter. And, that is a terrible use of slides because they do nothing for the audience.

Bottom line: ensure that your slides are a visual representation and not a transcript of your narrative.

A clarification

Of course, visually representative slides will not work minus the presenter's narration. They cannot be stand-alone tools, which you can simply convert into PDF and email to your audience. Visually representative slides work in tandem with your narrative, and thus work to increase the potency of your presentation.

I also realise that many presenters are required to send out their slides to the audience for reference. One might argue that such visually representative slides would be useless to the audience in such a case.

What it pays to remember is this: your slide is intended to help increase the potency of your presentation and not to serve as notes detailing your presentation. If you want to send out notes to your audience, then add them to the 'Notes' section of PowerPoint (this is below your slide), then PDF or print your slides out before you send it out to the audience.

Do not reduce the effectiveness of your presentation by turning your slides into notes.

8. Preparing to deliver a presentation? Will it be a slide tour or a compelling story?



“If you are afraid of being forgotten, then do something memorable”

- Anonymous

The tour guide at the museum

Consider a tour guide taking guests on a tour of various exhibits in a museum.

In the tour of the museum, the exhibit is always the focus. The guide's narrative is the audio track running in the background. And rightly so! The audience has paid money to see the exhibit, not to admire the guide.

The guide's inputs – if they are insightful or awe inspiring - will add to the 'wow factor' of the exhibit. However, the guide is always merely the aide. The focus is always the exhibit.

Job done, the guide will usually be forgotten.

This is a good analogy for many a presentation.

Slide tour guide

It is an extremely rare presentation in which I have observed that is not the slide that is leading the presentation. Usually, I have observed that the star billing in the presentation is accorded to the slide displayed on the screen. The presenter relegates himself to the position of the 'aide';

Presenters, whose presentations typify the kind described above, will first bring on a slide and then read from it. Or, at best, the presenter – who is mostly standing at the side of the screen - will bring on the slide, read out the point, and then elaborate upon, or explain the point.

The focus is always the slide. The slide, in this case, is also leading the presentation, as it always precedes the narrative. The presenter is the aide standing to the side of the slide, providing the background commentary.

This is what I call a slide tour.

It results in a terribly mediocre, boring and unmemorable presentation. And yet, it is the modus operandi of most business presenters!

To be fair, if your presentation is well crafted and engaging, then the message that you want to convey might still get through. What you will compromise on though, is the impact that *you* can have on your audience.

What great presenters do



Great presenters realize that the audience has come to hear them – not the slide - speak. Importantly, they recognize a crucial point: the audience wants to be persuaded/ moved/ uplifted/ wowed, as might be the case.

So, they take centre stage, both literally and figuratively, while delivering the presentation. They dialogue with the audience as though the audience were a person seated in a chair across them,

seeking information or advice. They interact with the audience; they encourage and respond to questions as they come up. It is a give and take of information.

Their narrative is the star of the show here. It is almost like they are telling a compelling story to the audience.

Only, they use a variety of 'tools' – viz., slides - to complement, or aid their delivery. For example: they deliver the narrative and bring on the right slide to visually represent the point being made at that time.

In such a case, the narrative comes first, and the slide follows. Or, better still, the presenter 'brings on' the slide at just the right time in his or her narrative to visually represent a point that is being made. When the point that they are making has concluded, they will blank the slide out and continue their dialogue with the audience. They avoid keeping the slide on when there is no need for it to be displayed. When the next point that requires to be visually represented is being made, they will bring on the subsequent slide.

The presenter is always the star of the show. The slide is merely the aid that is used when needed.

What they studiously avoid is bringing on the slide, reading aloud the points displayed and then elaborating upon them. That style of presentation is best left for the tour guide at the museum.

Great presenters deliver that; yes, even in the context of a serious business presentation.

Presenter View

Knowing what they have to say next, and leading the narrative to the following point, requires three] things:

1. Well-crafted and structured presentation content
2. Notes, created in the 'Presenter View' function of PowerPoint
3. 'Using Presenter View' to guide one's presentation delivery

I talk about the 'Presenter View' functionality that PowerPoint offers, in the next lesson in this manuscript.

Bottom line

Take charge and centre stage when delivering your presentation. Deliver it like you were telling your audience a compelling and interesting story. Only, use the 'tools' of presentations at the opportune time and in the right manner.

Do not let the slide be the star of the show, while relegating you to the position of an 'aide'.

This will allow you to deliver a truly memorable presentation.

9. One PowerPoint feature to overcome three presentation challenges

One

In J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy, there was the One Ring to rule them all.

In PowerPoint, there is this one feature which can help you overcome, well, not all your problems, but three big challenges that you face as a presenter.

The only difference between the One Ring in Tolkien's epic and the feature in question is that the ring failed in its endeavour, while the feature in PowerPoint- it is called Presenter View if you are itching to know - always works.

The One Ring was also pure evil. The feature in PowerPoint is a blessing from on high.

But, first, let us look at the three challenges that presenters face.

Three challenges presenters face

Almost everyone who has ever delivered a presentation would have faced the following challenges at some time or the other:

Challenge one: the need to turn and look at the screen to see your next point

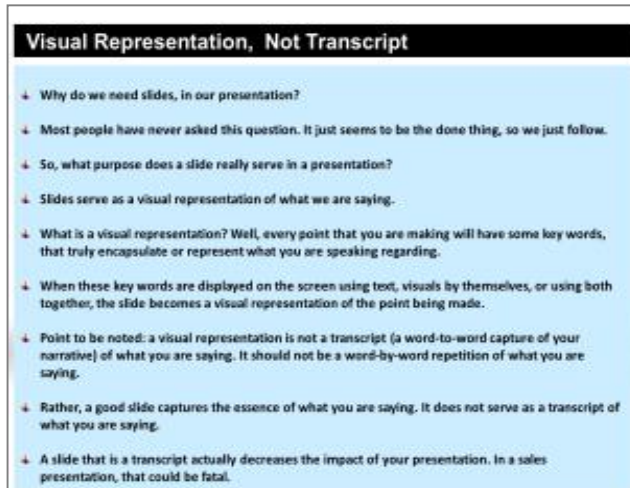
When delivering your presentation, most presenters unfamiliar with this particular feature of PowerPoint have only two ways of knowing as to what is the next point that is coming up.

- a. They either have to memorize the flow of their entire presentation, a pointless and tough, if not completely impossible endeavour, I must say.
- b. They have to first bring on the slide, then turn around to see the point that is being displayed. They will then read out the point and perhaps elaborate upon it. That is poor presentation delivery. This is the 'slide tour' scourge that we had discussed in the preceding chapter of this manuscript.

This challenge is most acutely felt when you have somebody else create your slides for you. At least when you create your own slides the flow of the presentation will be familiar to you

Challenge two: the need to create text heavy slides

When I ask people as to why they have loaded the slide with bullet-point



ridden, line after line of text, the most common answer that I get is “so that I do not forget the points that I have to deliver”.

Their fear is that unless they load their slides with content, they could miss out on certain points. So, they create the sort of slides that have led to

people detesting slides in the first place. They create the type of slides that has led to people complaining about ‘Death by PowerPoint’.

This is poor slide design. Please refer to the chapter on 'Not all Visuals are Created Equal', earlier in this manuscript.

Challenge three: the need to keep glancing at one's watch in one's presentation

Many presenters, who are unsure of how they are doing with respect to time, tend to constantly keep glancing at their watch to keep time. This is often considered rude. What, are you in a hurry to finish this and go someplace more interesting?

You might be doing this just so that you ensure that you do not overshoot the time allotted to you. However, the audience might misinterpret your actions.

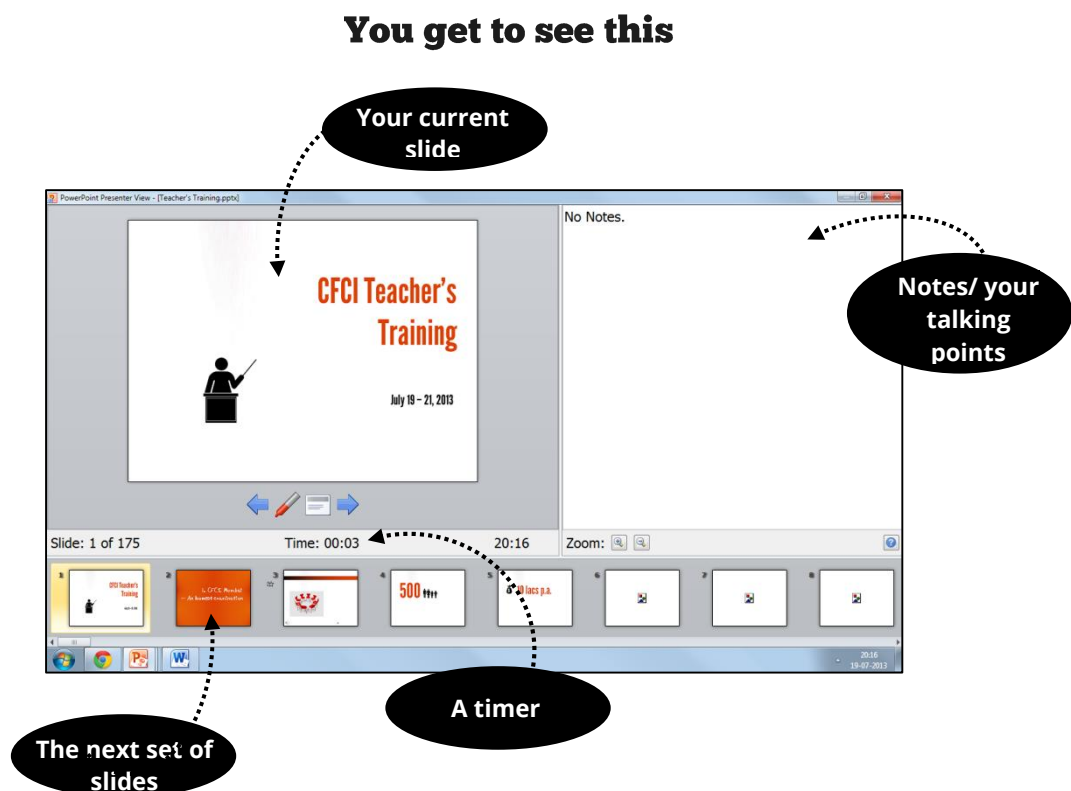
Three problems; now, one simple solution to overcome them!

Say hello to Presenter View

Presenter View is a feature in PowerPoint that allows you to overcome the three challenges enumerated above. In essence it is a feature which allows you to see on your laptop, PC or tablet something very different from what your audience is seeing on the screen. They only see the slide being displayed, while you get to see:

1. Your current slide
2. The next set of slides in your presentation
3. Your delivery notes
4. The time that has elapsed in your presentation (and so how much time you have left)

View the images below for a better understanding of this.



While your audience only sees this (your current slide)...



How using Presenter View helps you overcome the three challenges mentioned above:

One: you get to see what the next slide, and consequently the next point that you will be presenting, is. That way, you no longer have to bring on the next slide, and then turn to look at the screen to know what your next point is.

In other words, no more slide tours.

Hurray!

Two: Since you can view all the points in the notes section of Presenter View, you no longer have to load your slides with bullet point ridden lines of text.

No more 'death by PowerPoint'

Yippee!

Three: since you have a timer running in Presenter View, you no longer have to sneak surreptitious glances at your watch to see how you are doing with respect to time.

No more appearing rude.

Phew!

Three challenges, one simple solution.

Good, no?

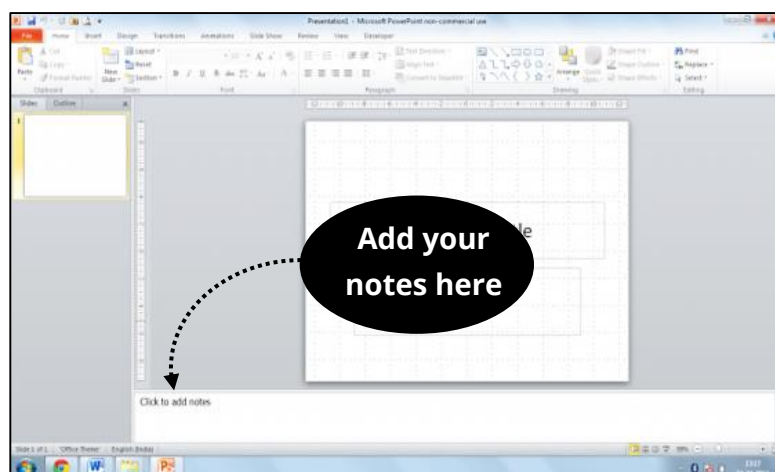
Now, let us see, how to use Presenter View



How to Use Presenter View I: Prepare Your Notes

In the Normal or Slide view, add your notes in the section below the slide. Alternatively, you could click on the View tab and select Notes Page.

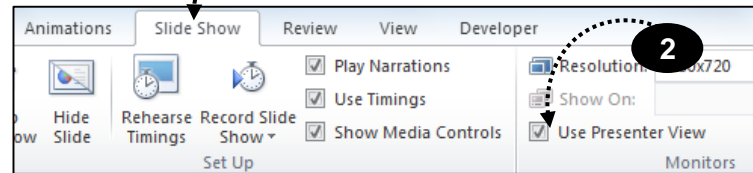
Add all the points that you want to present in the Notes section.



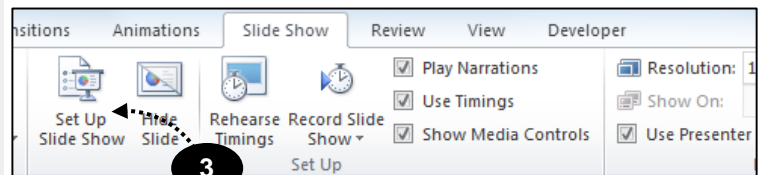
Now, add only the one key message on the slide.

How to Use Presenter View II: Accessing Presenter View

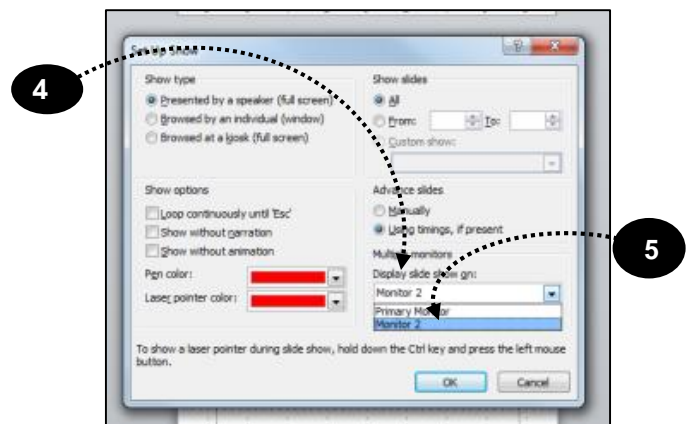
1. Go to the Slideshow tab in PowerPoint
2. Check 'Use Presenter View'



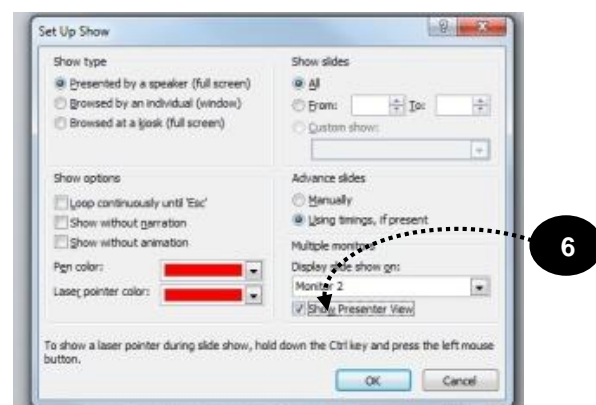
3. Next, click on 'Set Up Slide Show'



4. In the dialog box, which opens, pull the drop down under 'Display slide on'
5. Select 'Monitor 2' from the drop down. Now, Monitor 1 is your laptop/ PC/ tablet. Monitor 2 is the screen, which your audience will view the slide on



6. Check 'Show Presenter View' below the drop down menu
7. Click Ok



Show time!

Now when you launch your presentation in Slide Show format/ view, your machine will display Presenter View while your audience will get to see the slide.

No more 'slide tours', no more 'death by PowerPoint', no more looking at your watch.

Go on now; mesmerise your audience!

Section III:

Presentation Delivery

10. How to project confidence and build trust



“What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say”

- (attributed to) Ralph Waldo Emerson

“I do not believe you!”

Everything that you do, every mannerism of yours tells its own story to the audience. And the story that your body language, your mannerisms tell can be in stark contradiction to what you are saying. For example, it is hard to believe someone who claims to be happy, but has on a dour expression.

Body Language ‘Mistakes’ That Can Impede Your Presentation

The following are a list of mannerisms that can erode the audience’s impression of, and trust in, a presenter. That would be catastrophic, for if they do not trust you, then you will fail to move them to accept what you have to say.

You would do well to avoid these mannerisms at all times:

a. Avoiding eye-contact with your audience:

You say that your product and you can be trusted to deliver, but lack of eye-contact with your audience will cause them to think otherwise. After all, if you were really being truthful, you would not evade their gaze. You would look them in the eye when you speak.

Well, it might be that you are only nervous. But, how is your audience to know that it is not lack of ability, or maybe that you are speaking an outright lie, that is the reason you are avoiding their gaze?

b. Slouching as you speak

Slouching as you speak makes you seem unsure about yourself and your product. For, if you truly were confident about yourself and your product, then you would stand upright, with your chest puffed up with pride.

The fact that you slouch and lack energy tells a story of its own. And it is not a story that speaks in your favour.

c. Letting your shoulders droop

Letting your shoulders droop as you speak, again, is a sign of lack of confidence in yourself, your product, the team or organisation that you represent and generally in what you have to say,

d. 'Hiding' your hands

Placing your hands out of sight of your audience - by sticking them behind your back, or in your pockets - makes it look like you are trying to hide something from them. That is not the impression that you want to give your audience, now is it?

e. Rocking back and forth or pacing about

Your audience wants to know that your assurances are 'rock solid'. They want to know that the team or organisation that you represent can be trusted to 'stay firm' when faced with rough winds; that you and organisation are 'strong' enough to withstand challenges and be around to meet their needs and not simply disappear one day.

Your body language, and not merely your words, should communicate this message. Your body language needs to communicate that you are 'rock solid'. Swaying or shifting your weight from one leg to another, or in other words, not maintaining a 'solid', sure stance makes your words and assurances less believable.

It paints you and the team or organisation that you represent, as being less than fully capable or 'solid'.

Lack of trust in you will cause your audience to reject what you are saying

If your audience feels like there is a dichotomy between what you are speaking and what your body language is communicating, then chances are that they will reject you, your idea, your product and your organisation. You cannot blame them for being wary. The cost of failure can often be too high. The hassle with righting wrongs will usually be what your audience is not willing to undergo.

Your body language would have led your audience to think that you are untrustworthy and/ or not really confident about yourself, idea or product.

Presence and body language

Non-verbal behaviours matter a lot.

Especially in a presentation, these really matter a lot. How you carry yourself, how you walk, where you look as you speak, how you hold your hands, each of these make a big difference to how you will be perceived by your audience.

These vital body language elements go a long way in creating what sociologists call 'presence'. Presence is the feeling that you get when you look at certain people, who for some inexplicable (actually, quite explicable for people who study body language) reason come across as being competent, capable, confident and trustworthy.

The best communicators and top leaders have it. Think Narendra Modi, Larry Ellison, Steve Jobs, Barack Obama and others.

The manner in which these individuals carry themselves, how they talk, each inspires confidence in people who follow them. In return they receive the respect and trust of those that follow them.

They influence thought and action, and are often successful in work and in life.

How to project confidence and build trust

Do not let your body language kill your presentation. Imbibing the following skills will help you earn the confidence of your audience:

1. Stand upright as you speak. It conveys supreme confidence. Never slouch. As the letter above said, if you are truly confident, then your posture will show it.
2. Maintain an open body language. Avoid appearing 'closed' in any manner. So, avoid crossing your arms across your chest, hiding behind a desk or any other object or piece of furniture. These are what we call 'closed' behaviours.



Also, avoid standing at an angle with respect to your audience. Adopt a 'square-on' stance. Of course it is fine to stand at an angle when referring to a slide that is being projected behind you. However, keep these instances brief. Once you are done referring to the slide, revert to your original square-on stance.

3. Hold your hands clasped lightly and at the level of your diaphragm, when you speak. This will prop your shoulders up and make you appear

confident. Holding your hands lower will make your shoulders droop and make you appear unsure and lacking in confidence.

And avoid clasping them behind your back, or sticking them in your pockets. These actions are often construed as you trying to hide something.

4. Maintain eye contact with your audience. Do not break off eye contact with them. If you have to do so, make this brief. Sweep your gaze around. Do not look only at the friendly faces in the audience, as tempting as that might be. This makes you appear trustworthy and also confident.

5. Smile!

In conclusion

Practice these elements of body language and you will greatly improve your chances of influencing your audience. It will also help you become the kind of presenter whom people will actively seek out to listen to.

11. How to have the audience hanging on to your every word



“Oratory is the power to talk people out of their sober and natural opinions.”

- Joseph Chatfield

You have been subjected to them too.

I am referring to those yawn inducing presentations where the presenter was rambling on in a dull monotone, which after some time led to the audience fighting simply to stay awake.

One of the chinks in a presenter’s armour, one which severely erodes the potency and effectiveness of the presentation, is a flat, colourless voice.

Presentations delivered in a dull monotone will rarely, if ever, have any pronounced effect on the audience. Such presentations fail because the audience fails to register the important points, and the key take-aways from the presentation. This happens because every point is delivered in the same ‘blah’ tone.

Also, people will stop paying attention to what you have to say. So no matter how hard you work on your presentation, no matter how closely you follow the rest of this book – your presentation will flop if you cannot actually present your points

How developing a good voice will help you

Power and communication ability are closely linked.

A study of notable leaders illuminates us this truth. One of the traits that most of the powerful and influential leaders – whether in the field of business, politics or elsewhere- have in common, is that they are all powerful orators.

Individuals such as Narendra Modi, Steve Jobs, Larry Ellison and John Chambers have tasted enormous amounts of success as leaders. Watch videos of them on You Tube and you will notice that they are all charismatic speakers. They seem to mesmerise their audience with their communication and public speaking ability. .

Why is this trait important? And, why should you care about developing a good voice? What if you do not really care about being among the world leaders?

Well, forget being a world leader. If you truly care about being a great presenter – and I am assuming that it is the reason that you have picked up this manuscript – then you absolutely need to develop this competence.

If the objective of a presentation is to create impact, then that objective, i.e. creating impact, is directly dependent on how you deliver your narrative. Or, put differently, the impact that your words will have on your audience is directly dependant on how effectively you deliver them.

Your speech, how well you deliver your narrative, can help you command your audience's attention. Or, your voice could simply put people to sleep.

Colour is more important than timbre

Please do not mistake what is being said here to mean a rich, husky, baritone voice.

That deep, husky voice might be a necessity for professional voice over artists. Most business presenters do not necessarily need one. The late Steve Jobs' speaking voice did not fall in the baritone range. Yet, he is considered one of the best business presenters ever.

What he had in abundance was 'colour'

His voice greatly contributed to his now legendary presentations. It helped make his presentations – especially the product launch presentations that he keynoted at Apple – among the benchmarks for corporate presentations.

Characteristics of a voice that has 'colour'

a. It displays variation in tone and pitch

Speakers whose voice possesses this characteristic:

- Speak in a slightly higher tone when saying something exciting
- Lower the tone of their voice, when delivering something serious, or when delivering a punch line



b. It displays change in pace

Those speakers who have this ability:

- Speak faster, say, when excited, when presenting a sequence of events or when enumerating a sequence of things
- Speak slower, when delivering something grave, or a punch line

c. It lays stress or emphasis on key words or phrases

Great speakers will lay stress on key words and phrases. This allows the audience to pay special attention to these.

d. It uses the power of a pause

A well-timed pause at the end of a point you want the audience to register is a powerful tool in the arsenal of a presenter. Great presenters, when they have made a point they want to ensure really sinks in to the minds of the audience, will pause, sometimes for as long as three or four beats, allowing the point delivered to really register.

They will do this when they have delivered a key take-away, a question that they want the audience to ponder over, or a punch line. The best presenters will use a prolonged pause, not a brief one, but as mentioned above, sometimes as long as three-to-four beats.

As Martin Farquhar Tupper, noted English writer and poet said “Well-timed silence hath more eloquence than speech”

That requires that presenters be absolutely comfortable with silence, which can be quite unnerving to poor or even average presenters.

e. A last tip:

Smile when you are speaking. It adds colour to your voice.

Not theatrical, but colourful

Now, no one is advocating that you be dramatic or theatrical in your presentation delivery. In fact, that would be counterproductive. You will come across as fake and put-on. Instead, speak in an easy, natural-sounding voice.

Please note that I have said ‘natural-sounding’ and not ‘your natural voice’. If your natural voice is a dull monotone, then that is not the voice that I am in favour of. You have to sound interesting for people to be interested in what you have to say.

What you need is colour, and not theatricality.

How you can develop a good speaking voice

What I suggest is that you view videos of great presenters on YouTube. View videos by Hans Rosling, Steve Jobs, Larry Ellison (Oracle), John Chambers (Cisco Systems), even our very own Narendra Modi, and pay attention to how they deliver their narrative.

This exercise is a good starting point to developing a good voice.

I have also found that reading fairy tales aloud – like I do with my kids – allows one to develop colour in one's voice. This is because these stories have a variety of emotions that they swing through. Try to make the story compelling by practicing the various characteristics of a colourful voice, mentioned above.

Lastly, get yourself a voice or presentation coach who can help you develop this competence.

Practice these and over time you will begin delivering a colourful voice.

Your narrative will have impact, and not be the drudgery that most presentations turn out to be.

12. How to deal with distracted audience members (and why they are so, in the first place)



Distracted audience members, especially those indulging in casual banter amongst themselves, can be an unnerving sight for presenters. It can throw presenters off-balance and negatively impact presentation delivery.

It can also be a source of irritation to those audience members who are genuinely interested in the proceedings.

But, why do audiences get distracted, anyways?

Given, we live in what has been termed 'The Age of Distraction'. However, even factoring for that, the reason audience members are distracted is usually because you are not being relevant to them

How to ensure that you do not lose the attention of your audience

Ensure relevance. As motivational speaker, Robert H. Schuller said, "Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation". Similarly, great public speaking is always preceded by a significant amount of private preparation.

You need to identify how the points that you are making intersect with what your audience cares about (refer to the Chapter on Gathering Talking Points). Make this connection clear right at the start of your presentation. Refer to this constantly.

This will greatly reduce the chances of your audience members losing interest in your presentation.

How to deal with distracted audience members



Remember, this is your presentation. So, you need to control the audience. You have every right – and you must exercise that right – to control the audience.

Also, the rest of your audience wants you to do that. The miscreants in the audience are an irritant to them just as much as they are to you. They expect you, as the 'authority figure' that they see you as, to be the one enforcing compliance to group norms. They will appreciate you for enforcing the rules and bringing unruly members under control.

So, politely at first, and a little more firmly, if they persist in their behaviour, ask them to stop being a distraction. This should stop them in their tracks.

What if they persist in their ways?

If the particular audience members continue being a nuisance, then you would be well within your rights to excuse yourself from your presentation and request those individuals to step outside of the room with you.

Once outside, address them politely, but firmly. Inform them that they are being a nuisance and that if they are not interested, then they should simply stay away from the room. Tell them that this will allow others, who are more interested, to gain from the presentation.

This should usually do the trick.

A word of caution, though

You don't want to be overly fussy about preventing audience banter. Sometimes, something you said could have provoked a thought or an idea that they felt urged to share with their neighbour.

Or, perhaps a joke you cracked reminded them of some incident or person, which triggered further laughter. You need this interaction between people.

However, it is incessant banter that you want to shut out.

13. (Bonus) How not to let stage fear cripple your presentation



“There are only two types of speakers in the world.

1. The nervous and 2. Liars”

Mark Twain

The panic before the moment

Are these symptoms familiar to you?

Just before you are to deliver that important presentation does your stomach feel like it is bound in knots? Does your voice seem brittle and your palms sweaty?

How many of you have found your mind drawing a blank and you were left not knowing what to say as you stood in front of your audience?

Or, you might have mumbled something at the outset of your presentation but, owing to the intense sense of nervousness that you felt, it turned out to be lame and uninspiring.

The joke that fell flat

How many of you remember that joke that you cracked that fell absolutely flat?

Remember how your audience did not seem to be very impressed with you or what you were saying?

Know what? It happens even to the most experienced

I know what stage fear feels like. I feel it every time I am to face an audience; even though I have loads of experience in addressing audiences.

I especially remember this one day when I was really scared and edgy. Terribly so!

It was a dear friend's wedding and he had asked me to be the Master of Ceremonies (the Emcee, as some would term it) for his wedding reception. I had agreed. And I was regretting that I had.

D-day morning had arrived. And I was nervous as hell.

This considering that I have loads of stage and presentation experience

Now, as I mentioned earlier, I'm no novice to public speaking. I've been on stage since I was five. Elocution, debates, theatre, vocalist in a band, being a

Master of Ceremonies, hundreds of training programmes, countless presentations, I have done it all.

I had almost three decades of stage experience the day I was having that panic attack.

And yet that morning, my stomach was in knots. I was feeling nauseous. And I was terribly scared that I would be a big flop; that I would be the laughing stock of people.

It's normal. Really!



It really is.

You see, this is a classic 'fight or flight response'. This is a physiological process that the brain created to help it in its survival.

To understand this story, we need to travel back in time to when human beings were merely cave dwellers. Our ancestors then were mainly hunters and gatherers. Meat was their staple diet.

The adventures of Mr. Red-Eye

Now, imagine one of our dear ancestors – we will call him Red-Eye – was out on a hunt to get his beloved wife some dinner.

Suddenly, Red-Eye comes face to face with a lion. Now, how much of time would our dear Red-Eye have to make a decision to either choose to take flight i.e. to run, or to choose to stay back and fight?

A split second! Anything more than that and our dear Red- Eye would be lion food.

Consider a second scenario. Red-Eye is back from the hunt and suddenly he sees a lion in the shadows about to pounce on his child. What would Red-Eye do in such a situation? Of course fight to save his child's life.

And how much of time would he have to make this decision. A split second!

You need to understand what's really happening to you

The brain needed to create a mechanism that would help it deal with these threats to life. So, it developed the 'fight or flight response'.

Here's how the mechanism works.

When faced with danger, your body redirects all oxygen to your muscles, especially that from the brain. This is to provide the muscles with extra energy to fight or take to flight.

The ability to think logically, which is a time-consuming activity, is severely curtailed.

You would feel exactly like you do before that all important presentation

The heart beats much, much faster to pump more oxygen to the muscles. High doses of Adrenaline are secreted.

The surge of oxygen / Adrenaline causes the body to experience tremors. Your mouth feels dry. You feel nervous energy enveloping your body. Your body is being primed to fight or to flee.

Are these not the exact symptoms that you encounter before that all important presentation?

Your radar perceives approaching danger

And it explains why at the start of a presentation you feel scared, nervous, and blank.

You see, your brain perceives the audience to be a threat to you. They could laugh at you. They could mock you. They could cause irreparable harm to your career. Of course, these are all exaggerations that your brain is leading you to perceive. Remember logical thinking has flown out the window.

The brain sees the audience as a source of danger to your well-being. What response do you think the brain makes to this perceived danger? You got it: fight or flight. Consequently, the symptoms manifest themselves.

I was having my ‘fight or flight’ moment

And that was exactly what was happening to me the day of my friend's wedding.

My palms were sweaty. I could feel my body quivering. My mind felt blank. I feared I was going to be a flop; a terrible flop.

It was time to tame the wild horse



I reasoned that if evolutionary or survival reasons caused my body to behave like an out-of-control wild horse, then I would be the one who tames that horse.

So I set out to bring my body and mind under control.

Here's what I did.

Take care of the first five minutes

It is usually in the first few moments of a presentation that one feels intense nervousness. Once the nerves settle down, we get more comfortable in delivering the presentation.

But, those first few moments often represent the 'make or break' period in a presentation or performance. So, I decided that I would script exactly what I would speak in the first few moments.

Scripting exactly what I would say and memorizing it would end the problem of my mind going blank.

So that's what I did. I wrote down, word-for-word, what I would say in the first thirty seconds or so of my opening.

And I committed those to memory. Only thirty seconds worth of content. Not more.

Do not rely on memory; use cue cards (or ‘Presenter Notes’)

Our memory can be notoriously unpredictable. Usually when we are nervous, it fails us. With presentations where the outcome can have large repercussions, this is all the more true.

I was not willing to rely on my memory during that important event. I was sure that I would forget what I had planned to say.

So, I made myself some cue cards. I made PowerPoint slides with a summary of what I would do during each section of the wedding reception.

I added a synopsis of jokes I would crack, things that I would say, everything. Now, no longer would I be stumped for what to say. I could just refer to my notes and deliver a winning performance.

I printed these, three slides to a page. Then I pasted them on to some nice, elegant card paper.

Next, I cut them into individual cards of a size that would fit into my jacket pocket. Importantly, I numbered them so that I would not lose the order of the slides.

My cue cards were ready.

Now, I used cue cards, since as an emcee at a wedding, I would have no access to Presenter View (Read the Chapter on One PowerPoint Feature to Overcome Three Presentation Challenges). In a business presentation, I recommend the use of Presenter View over cue cards.

Get familiar with the place and people you will address

But, in spite of all this preparation, I was nervous as hell. I was still afraid that I would fail. I was unsure how I would deal with an alien crowd in a place that I have never visited before.

So, I decided to get to the venue early. And I walked around the place familiarizing myself with the layout of the place. Now, at least the place was not alien to me.

Then I began making the acquaintance of the guests. I began going up to them and introducing myself. I enquired about them, if they were comfortable and generally made small talk. Now, at least I had some friends amidst the strangers.

But did all this calm my nerves? Well, not entirely.

Oxygen, oxygen, oxygen!



In the description of the fight or flight mechanism earlier, we had seen how oxygen is cut off from the brain and redirected to the muscles in stressful or dangerous situations. Well, I was in the throes of a major oxygen redirection exercise. I was nervous as hell.

I needed oxygen in my brain. And that's just what I decided to do.

The only way one can calm the mind, is by slow controlled breathing. Draw in a deep breath. Hold it for a while and exhale gently. Do this for a period of time.

So, I decided to follow my own advice. Instantly, I could feel my body relaxing a bit more. I felt the dark, dense fog that was obscuring my brain, slowly clear. I felt a lot more confident and at ease.

And, all this prepared me for show time.

Showtime was fun time

By the time I was half-way through the evening, I was being asked if I was a professional Emcee. People were laughing at my jokes; they loved what I was saying.

It was a nice feeling!

I got two other offers to Emcee weddings.

Of course, I politely refused bot

A few parting words:

Truth be told, there is more that I can share with you on this subject.

However, in this e-book, I have included what I believe are some critical aspects of presentation content design and delivery.

I have deliberately left out inputs on:

- How to structure various types of presentations,
- How to make even complex subjects easy for the audience to understand
- How to take a mound of data and convert it into a compelling story
- The science behind slide design
- Gestures
- Dressing right for a presentation
- Etc.

Not that these are unimportant

Now, just because I have left these out, it does not in any way imply that these are unimportant. Oh, they are extremely important. I decided to leave these out deliberately, so as to avoid making this manuscript any bulkier than it is.

However, the points which I have left out will be the subject of the premium version of this book that I plan to bring out soon.

Stay tuned!

And yes, these are all part of the workshop that we conduct for our clients

The ideas contained within this e-book are a great start

However, as I had mentioned at the start, the twelve lessons (and one bonus lesson) contained within the pages of this book will help you deliver a superstar presenter.

Provided that you put them into practice, that is.

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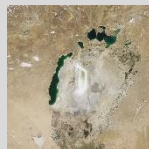
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About Jerson James, Founder Citrus Learning Systems

I'm Jerson James, that's my mug shot there.
I am the founder of Citrus Learning Systems.



Two subjects that fascinate me

There are two subjects that truly fascinate me: Sales and Communication. I have been studying these since I was sixteen. At least consciously, because I am sure that I had learned a lot about these subjects since the time I was a toddler.

Now, to a casual observer the two topics might seem to be at odds with each other. But I see them as closely linked. For what does the subject of sales concern itself with? Is it not the unearthing of the buyer's state of mind and of the current status quo through the posing of the right questions? Is it not the subsequent communication of value?

No conflict in the subjects, then, no?

I write extensively on sales at www.jersonjames.com. You can also download my free e-book on sales titled 'The Rainmaker's Roadmap' there.

All forms

All forms of communication fascinates me; business or interpersonal, whether one-to-one or one-to-many. I study the pleasant varieties of communication, and the unpleasant varieties. I study how the written word can influence thought and action, just as much as I study how the spoken word does so.

I am fascinated in seeing what works in communication, and what does not.

What I write, teach and coach people on comes from this study of mine. And, I study a lot. I also write quite a bit.

In the last three decades, thirteen of which I have been a full time trainer and consultant I have shared my insights and inputs with thousands of individuals. And, as a full time consultant, I have worked with over fifty organisations in helping them, in a nutshell, communicate or sell better.

I hope to continue studying and sharing with you the lessons that I learn. I also hope to hear from you.

Reach Me

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