6 Steps For Creating A Presentation

Everybody knows how to create a presentation, right? You just sit down at the computer, open PowerPoint and start filling in content on the slides. Mmmm...perhaps not. Perhaps there is a better way.

When we have a presentation looming, our bias for action tempts us to skip any planning phase and get right to producing the final product. We may even fool ourselves into thinking that we plan and create simultaneously. But sufficient time devoted to mapping and organizing your presentation up front allows you to deliver a more focused message that is more likely to address your audience's needs.

Let me suggest a process:

1. **Audience Needs Analysis.**Before you put pen to paper or finger to keyboard, spend some time determining what your audience already knows about your topic, what information they can use, how do they feel about the topic you're presenting. You want to answer the WIIFM question...the "what's in it for me?" question that every audience member has.

Some methods you can use to uncover information about your audience's needs: ask questions of a few representative audience members; talk to people who have presented to this audience before; do a survey; question the person who invited you to do the presentation.

2. **Outline Your Presentation.** Develop a bullet-pointed [outline](http://www.beyondbulletpoints.com/blog/?p=322) of what you want to cover and the approximate order. Don't go into a lot of detail here...this is just your road map. Make notes on areas that you need to research or on which you need to find additional resources. Once you've completed the outline, it should give you a good sense of whether or not your presentation flows logically, covers the key aspects of your topic and fits the allotted time frame. It is during this step that you want to answer the question, "What is the one key message I want my audience to take away from my presentation?"

3. **Research.** Next you want to compile the more detailed information and resources you made note of in the Outline step. This may entail reading, interviews and internet research. Make modifications to your outline based on your audience needs analysis and research.

4. **Write Out Your Presentation.** Now that you have all your material organized, write out your complete presentation. Although this seems onerous and I certainly don't recommend that you deliver your presentation from a fully scripted version, this is an interim step that allows you to get a good sense of the flow of your information and work on intentionally crafting your language.

5. **Create Delivery Notes.** Create the notes that you will use to deliver your presentation by condensing the fully scripted version to bullet points. [Note: these are bullet points for you, not for any slides you may design.] There are [a variety of note formats](http://andnowpresenting.typepad.com/professionally_speaking/2009/05/presentation-tip-use-notes.html) you can use and I recommend trying a few to see what works best. This step gives you another chance to refine your message, make it more focused and incorporate vivid examples.

6. **Design PowerPoint Slides.**Yes...it's the very last step. [And it's a good idea here to ask if you really need PowerPoint...will it enhance your audience's understanding?] Once you have created and refined your presentation, then and only then should you design your slides. Now you can really focus on what slides will add additional clarity to your spoken words, what slides will give the audience a vivid graphic example to help them get your point, what slides will help explain a particularly complex idea.

Some of these steps may indeed overlap. For example, parts of your audience needs analysis and your research may occur simultaneously. Your research and designing your slides may overlap as you find a terrific chart or illustration that you want to include. You may also decide to omit writing out your presentation and move directly from research into creating your notes; however, I do not recommend this for beginning presenters or those who present infrequently.