



Presentation Skills



To Make Your Pitches More Engaging, Appeal to Multiple Learning Styles

How successful pitches at Disney spoke to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. **by Duncan Wardle**

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Imagine you're in a meeting, pitching a killer idea you've been working on, but it's like tossing a sparkler into a pool: it fizzles out; no fireworks. The issue isn't merely a matter of your idea, presentation style, or charisma. It often stems from a deeper problem of disengagement within the organization. In an age where only 33% of workers are engaged, how can you ensure your idea pitches land successfully?

To make your pitches more appealing, consider the three main types of learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. No matter who you're pitching an idea to, your audience will include a patchwork of learners. You might not know each person's learning preference, so to resonate with as many team members as possible, you can develop and exhibit presentation skills that appeal to each learning style.

For example, I like to begin pitch meetings by drawing a picture of a birthday present and placing it on the wall. When people arrive, I'll point to it and ask, "What's this?" They'll respond, "It's a present." I'll agree and clarify that it's also a reminder to remain mentally present at all times. Then, I'll propose that everyone put away their devices to avoid distractions. It's a gentle signaling approach that all learners understand because it includes an image (the drawing), a conversation (the question-answer element), and an action (silencing phones).

What else can you do to prepare an engaging pitch session that connects simultaneously with those who prefer to see, those who prefer to listen, and those who prefer to do? Even if you don't know the learning styles of your audience members, you can apply the following strategies to appeal to a variety of learners.

1. For auditory learners: Harmonize your words with their imaginations.

In the late '80s, my colleague Joe Rohde pitched his idea for Disneyland Paris. He had a unique ability to convey what a Disney park would look like in France through his words. During his pitch, he brought us to the field where the park would be and described the soundscape of the park in vivid detail. He would say, "Imagine the cheerful piano melodies playing outside the Carnation Café by pianists dressed in red and white uniforms, or the distant laughter of families enjoying their day."

Even if you can't immerse your audience in the literal landscape of your idea, you can similarly engage auditory learners by beginning your pitch with a compelling narrative that resonates with your idea. Research has found that listeners are more likely to remember a fact when it's wrapped in a story. Plus, auditory learners are captivated by the rhythm and flow of words. Use varied tonalities, paces, and pauses to create a sonic experience that paints your concept in their minds.

Remember: The right word or set of words can change everything, including team members' attitudes toward and receptiveness to ideas. How can you harness the magic of words in pitch meetings to better engage auditory learners? For starters, rephrase what you usually say. Simply switching from asking "What do you think?" to "Can you help me think about this differently?" invites expansive, open-minded responses to new concepts and ideas.

You could also incorporate relevant sounds or music that align with your pitch theme. A well-chosen soundbite can enhance emotional connection and reinforce memory retention for auditory learners. Brothers Richard and Robert Sherman had arguably the best use of sound in a pitch when they performed 13 songs, including "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" and "Let's Go Fly a Kite," in a meeting with Walt Disney and other executives in 1961. It wasn't just a pitch; it was an experience, showcasing the joys of the world of a magical nanny. And it led Walt to write the screenplay for *Mary Poppins* — all because of those 13 unforgettable songs. Walt loved the songs so much that he invited Richard to his office every Friday afternoon to play his favorite — "Feed the Birds" — on the piano.

2. For visual learners: Paint a picture worth a thousand words.

Visual learners process information best when they can see it laid out in an appealing and organized manner, so integrate colorful charts,

graphs, and images that illustrate your points and ideas. You can also show a prototype, demo video, or animations in your presentation, or lay out your pitch as a visual journey akin to a storyboard. This helps visual learners follow your concept's narrative path, ensuring they grasp the flow and key milestones.

Steve Jobs did this exceptionally well using visual aids during product launch presentations to enhance storytelling and audience engagement. His presentations were minimalistic yet powerful, focusing on high-quality images and simple charts. Jobs' approach has been widely studied and emulated by professionals across industries. His keynote addresses, such as the 2007 iPhone launch, are frequently cited as masterclasses in the power of visual storytelling.

You can also use visualization to great effect. After explaining the sounds of the proposed Disneyland Paris park, Joe asked us to close our eyes while he explained his ideas for the park, helping us visualize it ourselves. The way Joe used our imaginations to bring his idea to life reminded me of playing as a child — visualizing the rooms in my imaginary house or the city I was flying over in my airplane. Joe's tactic made the park look and feel real, even though we were only standing in a field.

3. For kinesthetic learners: Let them touch the stars.

For the last part of his pitch, Joe physically walked us through the proposed Disneyland Paris site, using a string he laid out on the field as a guide. As we moved through the space, Joe described the park's layout: City Hall was on our left, and the Mickey Mouse ears shop was ahead to the right. This physical traversal of the park's footprint allowed us to experience the scale and spatial dynamics of the layout, making the idea tangible and memorable.

Whenever possible, include a tangible element like Joe's string that kinesthetic learners can interact with — be it a product prototype, interactive model, or even relevant materials or textures. This hands-on approach solidifies your concept in their reality.

Try creating an activity or simulation that kinesthetic learners can physically engage with, mirroring the experience your idea intends to deliver. This not only keeps their attention, but also makes the concept personally relatable.

For example, when Disney's Hawaiian resort was experiencing low occupancy during the school year, my team was tasked with targeting a new audience: parents with toddlers who weren't beholden to traditional school schedules. Two of my team members used a PowerPoint presentation to pitch their idea for appealing to this audience, which was to provide new products to vacationers, such as strollers, car seats, and baby bags. I couldn't feel the vision, and I had older kids, so I passed on the idea.

They asked to come back and present the idea again. When I went into that second pitch meeting, there was no slide deck. In the room there were five car seats, strollers, and diaper bags, and hundreds of baby bottles, baby powder, and diapers. I approved the idea almost immediately because I could concretely visualize the idea they were trying to convey: that parents of toddlers would need to bring tons of baby items on vacation — unless we provided them.

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Why settle for one-size-fits-all pitches when you can engage every learner in the room? By weaving visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements into your presentations, you ensure that no idea falls flat, but rather, each one resonates deeply, sparking a vivid understanding and

memorable experience for team members. Let's not just communicate ideas; let's make them unforgettable by engaging every sense and learning style.

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Duncan Wardle, formerly vice president of innovation and creativity at The Walt Disney Company, launched his [creative consulting company](#) iD8 & innov8 to help companies embed a culture of innovation and creativity across their entire organization. Duncan spent his 25-year career at Disney developing some of its most [innovative ideas and strategies](#) — ideas that would forever change the way the company expands its impact, trains its employees, and solves problems creatively. He has a new book releasing in December 2024 titled *The Imagination Emporium*, a tool kit that makes innovation accessible, creativity tangible, and the process fun.