or, No One Cares About Your Process

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Part of doing successful design (or any other kind of professional work) is persuading people you've done successful design (or any other kind of professional work). If you can't do that, you might as well not even bother doing the work.

If you want to persuade people you're going to have to learn what they care about. Your boss doesn't want a 30 minute lesson on typography during a design presentation that took three weeks to schedule, and for which she's skipping her lunch. Your company's leadership team doesn't want a crash course on color theory before they can the work they came to see. When you're lucky enough to get time with the people who make decisions that affect millions of people you're going to have to use that time wisely. You need to know how to get their attention immediately, make sure they understand why you need their attention, and most importantly, make sure they know what you need from them.
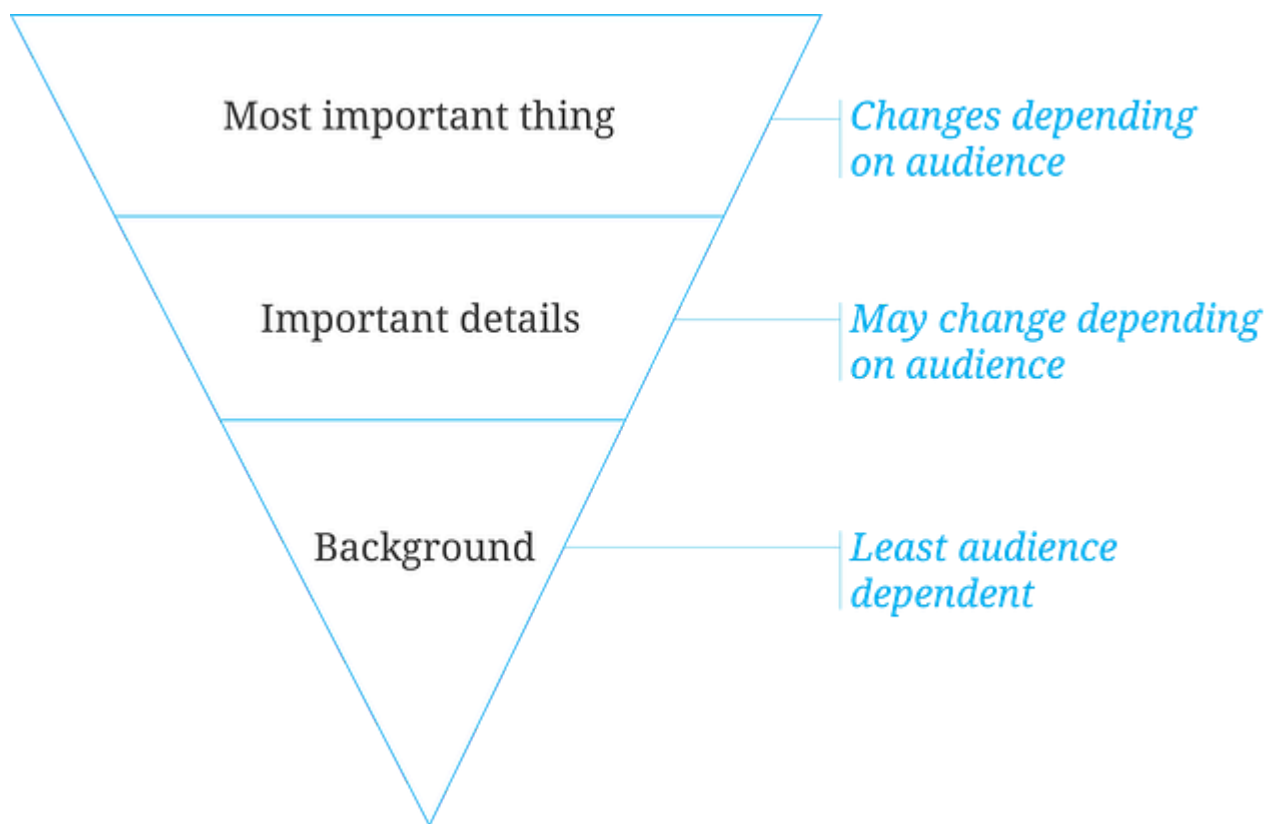
I've seen way too many designers present their arguments with incredibly long lead-ins. They're trying to justify their work, lay the groundwork, show their process, and end with a big reveal. This is exhausting. It takes forever to get to. It bores people. No one cares about your process. No one wants to sit through twenty minutes of background.

> If there's a slide in your presentation about your process, take it out. No one cares.

In my 🔝presentation workshop we talk about how to put together the right story, in the right order, for the people in the room. Then all the participants come up to the front and do a five minute presentation. Recently, I've started assigning one of the participants to get up at the one-minute mark and walk out the door. After the presentation is over, they come back in and tell us what they heard. It's usually nothing of value.

This may sound cruel, but if you've ever had a key decision maker walk out of your presentation early you know what I'm talking about. It happens all the time. Most of the workshop participants want to know what they can do to change the boss's behavior. In truth, it's much easier to change our own.

There's a metaphor used in journalism called the inverted pyramid. In short, you give the most important information at the very beginning, increase the details as, or if, the reader continues reading the article, and then finish up with relevant background. If you've ever read the headline to a story and decided you already knew everything you wanted to know, now you know why. It's by design. The inverted pyramid moves the reveal, which you've been saving up for the big finish, right to the top.

Most important thing — *Changes depending on audience*

Important details — *May change depending on audience*

Background — *Least audience dependent*

In the workshop, we learn how to build presentations using this model. What do the people most likely to leave need to know before they leave? (This often keeps them from leaving, by the way.) What are the important details that show people how you got to that solution. (This backs up the work they just saw.) And finally, the nerdy nerdy background stuff for the die-hard fans. (This is usually most interesting to the people who either need to build or extend the thing you're showing.)

So the next time you want to convince people the work you're showing them actually solves their problem, start by telling them the work you're showing them solves their problem. Show them the work. Then tell them why it solves the problem. Then tell them how you can keep that from happening.

I guarantee they'll stick around just a bit longer, and possibly even for the whole thing.