

Tips for Effective Presentations: Lecture Notes

PART ONE: CREATIVE PROCESS

1. Four Fundamentals

- **STORY:** Why do we need it?
 - The human mind is wired to understand and remember stories.
 - People engage better with stories and are more likely to be inspired by them.
 - Persuasive presentations must tell a story that **compels the audience to act**:
 1. “My product can change your life for the better.” → **Buy the product.**
 2. “My company is building the first/best/most efficient product in this market.” → **Invest in the company.**
 3. “My project creates a feature that saves our company x dollars and adds y marketable value.” → **Greenlight the project.**
 - **The FOUR FUNDAMENTALS are the tools you need to build your persuasive story.**
- **GOAL:** What is your goal?
 - Persuade the audience to *do something*.
 - Every slide needs to clearly support your goal.
 1. If the slide does not move your audience towards the goal, remove it.
- **AUDIENCE:** Who is your audience, and what’s in it for them?
 - Know your audience. If you don’t know, then research your audience.
 - There is no such thing as a generic presentation: the same content will change depending on who the audience is.
 - Every slide needs to clearly answer the question: what is in it for the audience?
 1. Ask this question of every slide.
 2. If the slide serves no advantage to the audience, remove it.
- **KEY IDEAS:** What key ideas do you need to convey?
 - Before you start, BRAINSTORM.
 1. Start with a clean slate (paper/whiteboard/post-it notes/whatever you find comfortable to work with).
 2. **Remember:** there are no bad ideas in brainstorming.
 3. Write down every idea you (and your team, if applicable) can muster. Go beyond the obvious. Surprise yourself!
 4. Organize your ideas:
 - a. Group smaller ideas into broad concepts wherever you can.
 - b. Highlight concepts that absolutely **MUST** be in the presentation for that particular audience.
 - c. Discard everything else.

- **STRUCTURE:** How will you convey these key ideas?
 - Don't start with the structure; critical ideas will inevitably be left behind if you do.
 - It doesn't matter what structure you pick. The important thing is to **choose** one and stick with it.
 - Different structures can have varying levels of impact:
 1. *Weak*: Numerical
 2. *Positive Focus*: Chronological, Features/Benefits, Opportunity/Leverage
 3. *Visual*: Case Study, Physical, Spatial, Form/Function, Matrix
 4. *Negative Focus*: Compare/Contrast, Problem/Solution, Issues/Actions, Rhetorical
 - If your project/product/company/subject has issues:
 1. Address these issues upfront.
 2. Tell the audience what steps you're taking to fix or mitigate them.
 3. The rhetorical structure can answer the questions you know your audience will have directly, but you can use other structures as well and address issues along the way.
 4. Do not hide issues. People *will* find out, and your credibility will disintegrate when they do.

2. Guidelines: How to Keep Your Audience Engaged

- **AUDIENCE MANAGEMENT**
 - **Don't make the audience think unnecessarily!** Lead them to your goal. **Spell everything out.** You may think something is obvious, but the more you force your audience connect dots for themselves, the less likely they will remain on your side.
 - What makes your audience think unnecessarily?
 1. NO REASON TO CARE: "Why should I care about this slide?"
 2. LACK OF CLARITY: "What does this slide mean?"
 3. OBSCURE RELEVANCE: "How is this slide is relevant to your point?"
 4. UNCLEAR LOGIC: "How did you get to this slide?"
 5. HIGH DENSITY: "Let me read all the stuff on this slide."
- **SIMPLE**
 - Use bullet points.
 - Focus on core ideas.
 - Select clear visuals.
 - Refrain from writing full sentences and paragraphs. An exception would be an inspiring quote. Use these sparingly.
 - Don't read your slides. You will lose your credibility and your audience's attention. Why should they listen to you if you're just reading what they're seeing and have nothing new to offer?

- **VISUAL**
 - Use images and charts that emphasize your ideas.
 - Create charts that require no more than a few seconds to decipher.
 - Label axes of all charts.
 - State the meaning (i.e. what's the bottom line?) of each chart.
- **EXPLICIT**
 - Define terms/acronyms. Figure out what the audience should reasonably know, but don't assume.
 - State the meaning and relevance of all data presented.
 - State why the audience should care about any data presented.

PART TWO: SKILLS

1. Writing

- **INTRODUCTION**

- **Goal:** Get the audience's **ATTENTION**.
- Don't dive into your subject immediately. You have to gain the audience's attention first. The problem is you don't know their mood, mindset, and level of interest at the start of your presentation, and you have to hook everyone positively, no matter where they're coming from.
- Verbal Intro Techniques:
 1. Tell the audience why your topic is important.
 2. Ask a rhetorical question.
 3. Start with a mystery.
 4. Tell a relevant story.
 5. Use a quote.
 6. Reference the occasion.
- Dynamic Intro Techniques:
 1. Use a prop.
 2. Give a demonstration.
 3. Involve the audience.
- Tell the audience your **main point**, i.e. the story designed to persuade your audience to act. They will be able to better follow you when they know what you're ultimately trying to say.
 1. "This technology will disrupt the industry."
 2. "Our product addresses people's needs better than any other product in the market today."
- Tell the audience *how* you're going to tell them. They will be able to better follow you when they know how the ideas are organized.
 1. "I will present the three pivotal features of this technology that change the way we think about x, y, and z."
 2. "I'll compare our product's capabilities, effectiveness, and cost to the current leading brand."

- **BODY**

- **Goal:** Get the audience to **UNDERSTAND** and **BELIEVE** your message.
- Tell stories instead of giving facts and figures as much as you can. Remember: people are wired to remember and be moved by stories.
- Keep every part of your presentation relevant.
- Tell the audience why each slide is relevant.

- **CONCLUSION**

- **Goal:** Get the audience to **ACT**.
- Tie up all the loose ends from the beginning.
- **Call to action.**

2. Speaking

- **ANXIETY MANAGEMENT**

- Fear of the unknown, fear of embarrassment, and fear of failure can all be mitigated by preparation...
- ... but lack of preparation cannot be fixed. **Do NOT present if you are unprepared.** Better to risk mild annoyance over rescheduling than suffer serious damage to your reputation and shut the door to opportunity.

- **DELIVERY**

- Voice: Record and listen to yourself.
 1. Check your volume. The person sitting in the back of the room should be able to hear you.
 2. Add vocal dynamics. Check if your voice is monotonous/boring.
- Body: Record and watch yourself.
 1. Look for nervous habits. Do you stuff your hands in your pockets? Do you wave your hands excessively? Do you play with notes or pens or the clicker? Do you sway?
 2. Use gestures where appropriate, but don't go overboard into nervous habit territory.
 3. Make eye contact for approximately two seconds per person pseudo-randomly around the room to establish good connection overall.
 4. Relax. Are your movements stiff? Are you barely moving at all? Are you hopping from foot to foot?
 5. Use the stage deliberately, when the situation allows for it.
 6. Ask yourself: what is your body language communicating to the audience?
- Words: Record and listen to yourself.
 1. Listen for filler words (uh, um, so, and, you know, I mean, like, etc.).
 2. Reduce the use of jargon/idioms depending on your audience.
 3. Learn to be comfortable with silence.
 4. If you have an accent thick enough to obscure your words:
 - a. Speak more slowly.
 - b. Practice enunciating.
 - c. **Don't** feel self-conscious! Accents are OK.

3. Practice, Practice, Practice!

- **TECHNIQUES**

- Use a mirror.
- Record yourself on video. **Watch that video!**
- Present in front of trusted friends or family members. Get feedback.
- Take every opportunity to speak to get accustomed to public speaking:
 1. Look for a Toastmasters club that suits your style/personality.
 2. Volunteer for presentations at work/for your hobbies.

- **AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE**
 - Distracting habits: catch and correct problems ahead of time.
 - Effect on audience: how we think we come across tends to be different from how the audience actually perceives us--especially if we've never watched ourselves present before.
- **MEMORIZATION**
 - Writing a script is fine, but take care not to get stuck trying to remember the exact order/wording that you wrote down.
 - Your credibility is tied to your confidence and authenticity; rigidly following a script can hurt both. (Exhibit A: Marco Rubio.)
 - What you *should* know perfectly: the four fundamentals.

Final Thoughts

What makes a speaker persuasive? Subscribe to a simple equation that's deceptively difficult to achieve: **clear** and **compelling** content + **confident** and **sincere** delivery.

You achieve **clarity** by applying the four fundamentals. You **compel** others by understanding and focusing on *their* needs, desires, and interests. You exude **confidence** after preparation and practice. And when you no longer fuss over the mechanics of public speaking, fear what the audience thinks of you, or worry about the consequences of your speech, you radiate **sincerity**.

PRESENTATION TEMPLATE

1. GOAL: What is your goal?

2. AUDIENCE: Who is your audience, and what's in it for them?

Who: _____

What: _____

3. KEYS: What are the key ideas that you must convey?

Brainstorm:

4. STRUCTURE: How will you convey your key ideas?

Choose one or two structures to use.