



Communication skills in software engineering

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Initial thoughts

- If you want to progress in your career, you have to have great communications skills
- You need to be able to publicize and show your skills
 - If you can't do that, how will anyone know to promote or hire you?
- People with less technical skills but much better communications skills will often be more successful than you
- Stop, think, speak!

Why should you listen to me?

- It's my job to communicate successfully in a lot of different ways:
 - Writing blogs, published multiple Springer academic articles, just finished my first book
 - Writing articles for magazines
 - “Soft” managing people, customers and other managers
 - More than 50 conference lectures, coached over one hundred people in SQL Server and helped more than 50 people get PMP certification, in role of Microsoft Certified Trainer and PMI trainer
 - Successfully worked in startup and corporate environments, as internal employee and external consultant
 - Held dozens of job interviews, implemented agile methods, and lead teams of seniors that, technically, knew much more than me
- And yet, that doesn't mean I know everything, or I am right... quite the contrary – it worked for me - it is very individual, and we all develop our own style – basic rules still apply

Agenda

- Importance of communication
- Leaders and followers
- Importance of writing, verbal and interpersonal skills
- Required skills
- Job interviews
- Meetings
- Writing
- Presentations

Importance of communication

Why are you here?

Day one of your new career

- You love to write software in your favorite technology stack and you are good at it
- One day, after a couple of years, somebody comes to you and says... "I would like you to recruit, build and lead a team of 5-10 developers...and you start ASAP"
- You freeze and start thinking... but I am a developer... I write code – now I have to interview people, write requirements, hold meeting, report status, ...
- If you want to succeed in these, and many other tasks, communication is key skill

Day one of your new career

Why are you here?

- Are you afraid of leading people?
- Are you unsure if this is what you want?
- “Leader” vs. “Doer”?
- Is delivering presentations daunting?
- Is leading a meeting challenging?
- Is transition of skills difficult?
- New project manager role?

What makes leader successful?

- Ability to focus on the business fundamentals?
- Ability to master management practices (leading, planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, communicating)?
- Lead and manage business outcomes, using effective communication, by...
 - ...managing customer expectations
 - ...managing project team
 - ...communicating with upper management
- It is not just the ‘what’ you say – but ‘how’ you say it

First day in leadership role

What to do

- Establish how you want team to work
- The first few weeks are critical
- Get to know your team members
- Show what you stand for
- Set and clarify goals
- Look for an early win

Don't do any of these things

- Don't try to accomplish the work without building relationships
- Don't assume that your team members understand how you work
- Don't be afraid to communicate often and repeatedly

Leaders and followers

What is leadership

From 'geeks' to leaders

What is leadership?

- Leadership is action of leading a group of people or an organization to a common set of goals
- What is leadership to you?
 - What thoughts or images come to your mind? Which qualities do leaders display?
 - Which emotions do leaders inspire? What do you want and need from a leader?
 - It's different for everyone

Why would people follow?

- Trust
 - Delivers quality results
 - Demonstrates integrity
 - Compassion
- Stability
- Hope

How leaders build trust

- Have clear and consistent goals
- Be open, fair and listen
- Be decisive
- Admit mistakes
- Allow empowerment

How leaders build team trust

- Support all team members
- Give credit to team members
- Be sensitive to the team's needs
- Create trust between team members

From 'geeks' to leaders

- Leader - Success is all about growing others
- Your first task to become a leader is to delegate
- Never put off until tomorrow what you can get someone else to do today

- Determine the tasks/work to delegate
- Provide clear instructions
- Empower your team
- Avoid the need to micromanage
- Keep the tasks broader
- Spend more time overseeing functions
- Delegate 'up' or 'out'

Importance of writing, verbal and interpersonal skills

Why write

5 C's of business communication

Effective communication tips

Why write?

- By writing well, you can stand out from the crowd. There is too much poor writing in the business world. (PriceWaterhouseCoopers)
- What you write stays “out there” for everyone to see
- It hits three key aspects of your professional career
 - Communication – with words you come across as serious professional or junior
 - Credibility – style, wording and grammatical correctness add to your credibility
 - Success – people that write well have more chance to get what they want

5 C's of business communication

- Clear – transparent and able to see through
 - NOT CLEAR - I think last week we talked about adding some things or ideas to the agenda that we need to talk about. But then Michael brought up something that I don't remember about improving the agenda....
 - CLEAR - The purpose of this note is to define a new process for creating meeting agendas.
- Concise – using as few words as possible
 - NOT CONCISE - We think that by the time the team finishes migrating to the new version of software, and we believe it will be right, it should be December 1st
 - CONCISE - Software task target completion date: December 1st
- Courteous - show consideration of others
 - NOT COURTEOUS - Did you really delete that stuff? That is just not what you should have done at all!
 - COURTEOUS - I understand that the files were removed. Do we have any options of recovering those files? Can we meet later?

5 C's of business communication

- Consistent - able to maintain a particular standard
 - NOT CONSISTENT - Each status email is a different format
 - CONSISTENT - Each status email is consistent
- Compelling – attracting strong interest and attention
 - NOT COMPELLING - Subject: Status Report / Project: OS 125333 Upgrade Status 11/12
 - COMPELLING - Subject: Windows Update / Project: Status and Actions for 11/21

Effective communication tips

- It's the right people...
 - Getting the right information...
 - At the right time...
 - Using the right method...
-
- Delivery is critical
 - You may think that content is king
 - You are the influencer - you ARE the message

Effective communication tips

- Make the complex simple
 - Use simple, memorable terms
 - Avoid technical jargon – IT is tools of the trade, not product
 - Say what you mean in as few words as possible
- Technical message - “We will soon have the UDF and other procedures ready by the end of the week.”
- Clear approach - “The customer will have the month-end report this Thursday.”
- Find Your Tempo
 - Use language that’s your own
 - Let your values come through
 - Concentrate on being real
 - Be genuine and people will respect you for it
 - Example - Every morning you come in and say “good morning” and get a pulse of your team

Required skills

Skill one – Expressing yourself

- There's no point trying to communicate if people can't tell what you're trying to say
- Can you describe to yourself what you're trying to say?
 - Figure out the most important points
 - Put them in the 'right' order to get your points across
- What do you want the audience to take away?
- If you'll be talking, anticipate questions
- Use the simplest language to avoid ambiguity and confusion
- Be concise - applies both to written and verbal communications
- Be animated and engaging but don't do "Developers, Developers, Developers"
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vhh_GeBPOhs
- Be passionate and enthusiastic
- Be confident and honest, be authoritative if needed, but avoid arrogance – it's a fine line
- Audiences can pick up if you're fake

Skill two – Knowing your audience

- Who are you communicating with?
 - Technologists (e.g. developers, testers, DBAs, architects)
 - Management (e.g. IT Directors, Group Managers)
 - Executives (e.g. VPs, CXOs)
- Does everyone have the same ability with your language?
- Formal or conversational? Academic lecture? Conference session? Written or spoken?
- What do you think they're expecting you to say? How will your communications be re-told to others?
- Break down difficult concepts
- Beware of going off-topic and dangerous topics - politics, sex, religion, jokes, swearing, company-bashing
- Beware of inter-departmental politics
- Use analogies and anecdotes – people love hearing stories

Skill three – Precision questioning

- How do you get the answers you need?
 - What a client wants from an engagement?
 - What an architect thinks an API has to do?
 - What an employee has problems with?
- Assume other people aren't very good at expressing themselves and help them
 - Beware of holding an inquisition...
 - Beware of seeming to apportion blame...
- Use questions to plant ideas
 - E.g. How do you think your design would be affected if we did XYZ?
- Use a trail of questions to get past barriers

Skill four – Listening

- Critical skill when dealing with clients, colleagues, and friends
- ‘Active listening’ – giving undivided attention
 - Even if you can type and listen at the same time, it’s rude and suggests you’re not listening
 - Make eye contact (even just occasionally if it makes you uncomfortable)
 - Remove distractions that prevent listening
 - Ask for repetition if what’s been said is unclear
- Summarize what’s been said to ensure you heard correctly and avoid future confusion
- People don’t like to repeat themselves later (unless teaching)

Skill five – Expectation management

- ‘Under promise and over deliver’ – always and in all aspects of life
 - Be very clear when setting expectations
 - What are you going to do and by when
- Contingency plans
- Responsiveness
 - E.g. are you on call 24x7?
- Beware of setting implicit expectations
 - E.g. always answering email within an hour means people will expect it
- Notify people immediately when expectations cannot be met
- Try to be honest with reasons why (where appropriate)
- When working with clients, how should they contact you?
 - When is it appropriate for them to call your cell phone?

Skill six – Inbox management

- The #1 key to productivity
- People strive for ‘inbox zero’ – have your own goal
- Turn off all ‘new mail’ notifications
- Design a folder hierarchy
 - Avoids having to perform searches each time you need something
- Don’t read an unread email unless you’re going to process it right then
 - Otherwise you’ll need to read it again
 - Scan the preview and decide when to process
 - Use rules to auto-file emails from distribution lists
- Use color-coding/flags to prioritize
- Concise emails help reduce time going back/forth with people
 - Or just go talk to them in person or on the phone

Skill six – Ignorance != Stupidity

- We are ignorant of most knowledge in the world
- Does that mean we're stupid?
 - No, it means we have a lack of knowledge
- Do not equate ignorance with stupidity
- We all have huge amounts of knowledge for those areas in which we're experts
- But we all start with zero knowledge about anything
- Allow for the fact that others do not have as much expertise as you in specific areas
- Educate, don't berate or belittle because of lack of knowledge

Skill seven – Knowing “It Depends”

- The answer to many technical questions is “It Depends”
- However, when answering a question you should never just say “It Depends” and then stop
- Answers to questions can start with “It Depends”
 - Then explain why “It Depends”
 - And how “It Depends”
 - And what “It Depends” on
 - And even who “It Depends” on
- Don’t use “It Depends” as a crutch to avoid “I don’t know”
 - “I don’t know” is perfectly acceptable as honesty is usually always best and appreciated
- Any time you’re told by someone that “It Depends” and they don’t offer any more information, ask them to explain
 - In a nice way... don’t be aggressive

Skill eight – Be Cool, Calm, and Collected

- There will be times when you're under pressure
 - E.g. an important presentation to management several levels above you
 - E.g. your first large public presentation at a user group
 - E.g. you're instructing a team about recovering from data loss
- Stay calm, be confident about it
- Take your time so you don't make mistakes
- Remember to breath steadily and don't panic
- There will be times when you're angry
 - E.g. your project just got cancelled
 - E.g. you didn't get the promotion you were expecting
- Stay as calm, don't blow up but express your anger in professional way – it is important to communicate that you understand that something unfair was done to you
 - Take some time away from the issue to calm down and compose yourself

Job interviews

Why interviews

Benefits

- Build a better team
- Be part of the process
- Meets your requirements
- Build your interviewing skills
- Learn how to look better when you interview for your next position

Process

- Prep: Follow company HR standards
- Step 1 – Document & post
- Step 2 – Screen & phone
- Step 3 – Interview & test
- Step 4 – Follow on interview(s)
- Step 5 – Selection
- Step 6 – Paperwork

Why interviews

Questions

- For each requirement, write 2 or 3 questions
- You may not ask all questions
- Document your rating
- Try not to be clinical
- Prefer one on one, then team
- Team member vs. full team

Selection criteria

- Review requirements
- All questions are “scored”
- Rank the candidates
- Select the top person
- Discuss, agree, select
- Document the reason selected or not selected
- Complete any HR paperwork

Interview process

Step 1 – Why are you hiring?

- Why are you hiring?
 - Business
 - Technical
- Communication & Leadership skills
- Team input
- Document and post

Step 2 – Phone interview

- Screen ad responses
- Goal of phone interview
- Deal breaker questions
- Interview and take notes
- Review results with team
- Keep all documentation and notes

Interview process

Step 3 – In-Person Interview

- Goal
- Prepared list of questions
- Involve your team
- Review results with team
- Keep all documentation and notes

“Get them talking”

- “Can you tell me about yourself?”
- Confidence, enthusiasm and passion
- Speed of response
- Open ended questions
- Specific and detailed questions

Interview process

Step 4 – Follow On Interviews

- Goal
- Reflect, review & discuss
- Down select
- Invite and schedule
- Deep dive
- Keep all documentation and notes

Step 5 - Selection

- Goal
- Team review
- Discuss pros and cons
- Pretend ‘hire’
- Informal vote
- As the leader, you have final say

Interview process

Step 6 – Paperwork

- Follow your company's process
- Offer letter
- Acceptance
- Rejection and who's on deck
- Final acceptance

General tips

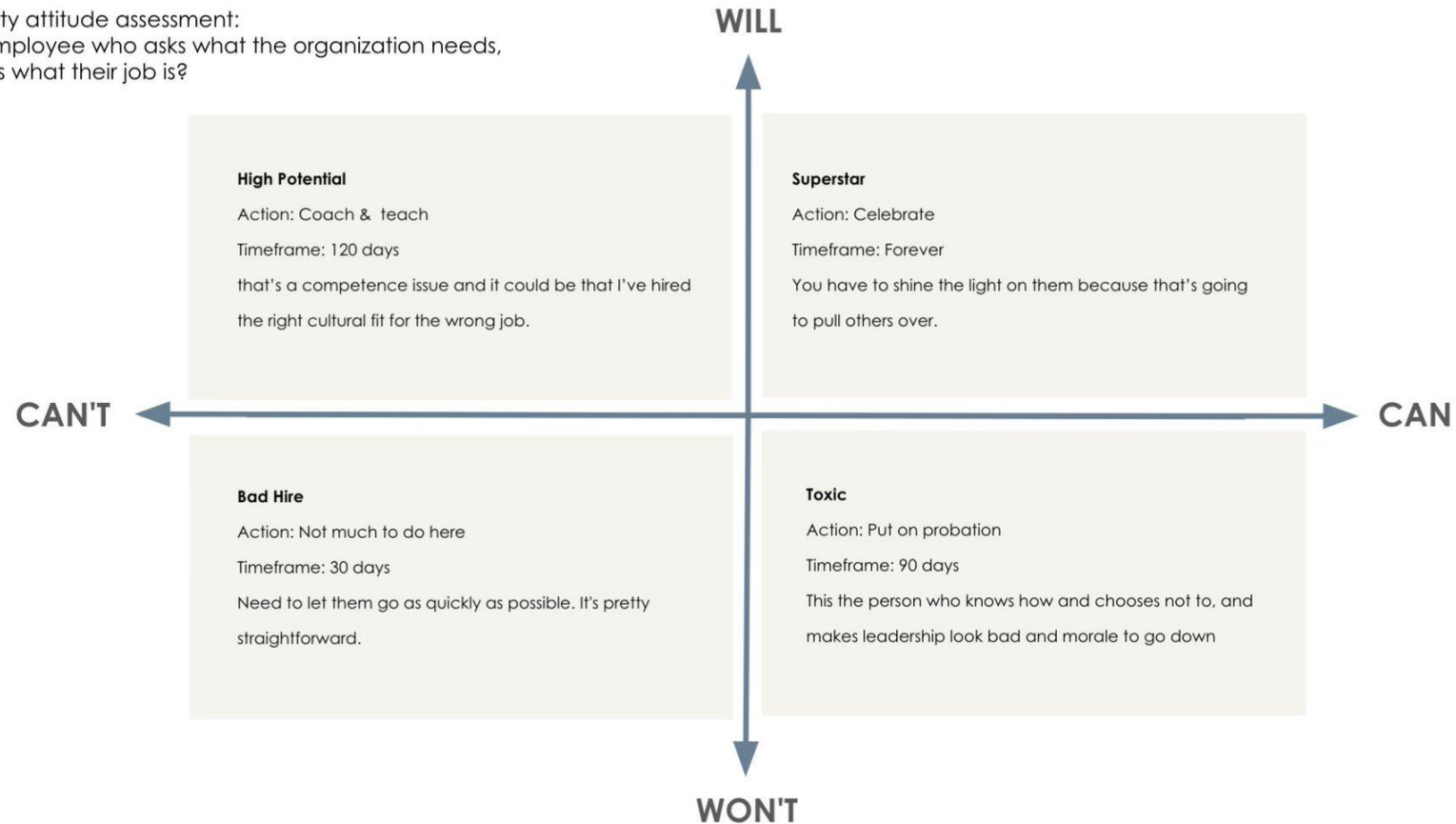
- Be considerate, friendly and understanding
- Restrain to the time allotted
- Be thoroughly prepared
- Focus attention on the interviewee
- Encourage questions
- Avoid distractions

Interview process

EMPLOYEE ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Assign an action step and a tenure timeframe

Quick & dirty attitude assessment:
Is this an employee who asks what the organization needs,
or who asks what their job is?



Meetings

Introduction

- Running a successful meeting is a skill just like anything else
- Signs of a poorly-run meeting:
 - No agenda or goals
 - Nobody in control
 - People not paying attention
 - Participants frustrated and thinking “this is a waste of my time”

In-Person Meetings

- If meeting with another team/client/group, don't have all your people on the opposite side from all their people
- Mix people together so it doesn't feel like 'us vs. them'
- Introduce people you're with and ask for introductions from others
- Very important to know who's in the room: know your audience!
- Pay attention to your body language
 - Don't sit with your arms crossed – it's a defensive posture
 - Pay attention to other people's body language
 - Make eye contact with everyone
- If you're not presenting or the note-taker, close your laptop lid

Remote meetings

- Much harder than in-person meetings because:
 - You don't get body language cues
 - Audience doesn't get body language cues from you
 - You can't tell if people are paying attention, and you can't make eye contact
 - Conference-call software can make conversation flow hard
- Using webcams on both sides can help with body language issues
- Easier than in person because:
 - You don't need to dress up - just beware of webcams that switch on automatically...
 - You can make notes and pay attention, if you're able
- Make sure people can hear you
- Tone of voice needs to help replace body language
 - Be a lot more careful about what you say and how you phrase things

Running a meeting

- Think - Is an in-person meeting really necessary? Would an email suffice?
- Send the agenda in advance
 - Expectation management
 - Plan the take-aways and goals
- Invite only those people who need to be there
 - Know your audience
- Ask people to close laptops to encourage active listening
- Start within a few minutes of start time
- Stick to the agenda and control the meeting
 - Balance progress with getting people's views heard
- Make sure you, or someone you've designated, takes notes
- Send a recap of the meeting to all attendees
 - Good self-protection if someone 'forgets' what was discussed...

Meetings With Your Manager

- Your manager is likely the most important person at your company that you deal with
 - They are usually responsible for your review, and input into your regular pay rises, bonuses, promotions, and work assignments
 - You want them on your side, even if you don't like them, so be nice
- Let your manager know what communication style works for you
 - Micro-management or not; lots of feedback or not; in person, phone, or email
- One-on-one meetings with your manager are your time, not theirs
 - But the focus is on you to bring topics to discuss, the meeting benefits you!
 - Don't let them make it just about weekly status
- Having a remote manager can be tough
 - Out of sight, out of mind
 - Apply the 'remote meetings' skills
- Try to work out any management problems with your manager first
 - Going over their head can be perilous

Meetings With Your Employees

- Your employees are likely a mix of personalities
 - Different technical and communication skill levels
 - Respond to different communication and management styles
- General considerations:
 - Give feedback as soon as possible, whether positive or constructive
 - Find out how each employee likes to receive feedback
 - Employee reviews should not contain surprises – if so you’ve failed
 - Don’t expect employees to always like you, but you want to get their respect
 - Friendship relationships change if you become your friends’ manager
- Regular 1-1 meetings with your employees are key to building a rapport
 - 1-1s are not status reports, that’s what status report emails are for
 - 1-1s are the employee’s time with you, not vice-versa
 - Find out what they want to talk about - if ‘nothing’, then give them ideas about career development, skills you can help them build, talking through work problems they have

Intra-Team Relationships

- How do your team members like to be contacted?
 - Email? Phone? IM? In person?
- What are the cues that mean ‘send an email’?
 - Closed office door, headphones on, on the phone
- Being polite, respectful, and grateful usually helps when dealing with team members and people in other teams
- When asking questions, do some research first
 - Nobody wants a Let Me Google That For You answer...
- If you have a problem with a team member, try to solve it with them first
- Be helpful to your team members and they will help you in return
- Give credit to your team members when it's warranted

Inter-Team Relationships

- Inter-team relationships can be really strained
 - Test vs. development
 - Development vs. program/product management
 - DBAs vs. development
- Tricks for helping strengthen inter-team relationships:
 - When dealing with another team, don't be combative or accusatory
 - Organize regular meetings to present how your team works
 - Organize regular meetings to discuss methodologies and processes - these allow everyone to offer feedback on improvements

Meeting with clients

- Who is my audience and what am I trying to convey to them?
- Is my message appropriate for the audience?
- What politics and inter-personal/departmental relationships do I need to be aware of?
- What would the ramifications be if my presentation/call/report/email was described or forwarded to another person/part of the company?
- Is my communication in the client's overall best interests?
- Am I sure I have all the pertinent facts and details to be able to give my opinion credibly and correctly?
- Am I 100% sure of the technical content of my communication?
- Is my tone correct?

Writing

Introduction

- Writing is much harder than speaking, especially formal writing
- Language can be ambiguous without body language cues and voice inflections to imply stresses and other nuances
- Most people are not as practiced at writing as they are at speaking
 - There are different skills to master

General writing skills

- You only have the written word to convey your passion, tone, what's important, and meaning
- Many of the general communication skills apply here:
 - Expressing yourself
 - Know your audience
 - Expectation management
- Different written mediums call for different styles
 - Email – usually casual and shorter, but can be formal and/or long
 - Twitter – limited to 140 characters
 - Whitepapers/articles/reports – more formal
 - Blogs – more informal

General writing skills

- Always, always use a spell checker
 - There is no excuse for incorrect spellings
- Try to use a grammar checker
- Use proper capitalization and punctuation
- Break large paragraphs up into smaller, more easily digestible ones
 - Use bullet points for clarity
 - Long paragraphs can be unreadable, especially with technical content

General writing skills

- Ask someone to proofread your writing
 - Someone you know has better writing skills than you
- Proofreading is especially important for articles and reports
 - Can also apply to difficult emails
- Don't be afraid to use images and charts
 - 'A picture speaks a thousand words'
- Keep the language appropriate for the audience
- Consider whether your writing will be seen by a lot of people where your language is their second language

Email

- It's really easy to write a quick email and hit send without thinking through the consequences
- Once you send it, it cannot be unsent
- Consider the To: and Cc: lists carefully
 - Do not abuse Reply-All or Bcc
 - Especially not on large distribution lists where your response is '+1!'
- Be extremely careful of hitting Reply-All instead of Reply or Forward
- Most of the time you need to be polite
 - Greeting, email body, please do XYZ, thank you
 - The ease of email is not an excuse to forego common courtesy

Email

- Make it clear if you're asking for something and that you are expecting a response by a certain date/time
- Use headings to break up long emails, in general beware of really long emails
- Include a summary at the bottom of long emails
- Include an executive summary at the top of long emails, if warranted
- People may only read the first few sentences, or skim
- The most important thing is clarity
- Emails are really open to misinterpretation, especially in heated situations
 - Sometimes it can be far better to discuss something verbally

Reports

- A report usually has a clear purpose
 - E.g. a team report about the build-breaks over the last 6 months
 - E.g. an executive report on emerging technologies in XYZ area
- Report structure
 - Introduction: what the report will cover and why
 - Sections: the ‘meat’ of the report broken down into logical sections
 - Summary: conclusions that the report shows
 - Appendices: ancillary data to back up the report (e.g. detailed testing results)
- This is formal writing
 - Write in prose, broken into paragraphs, avoiding slang and colloquialisms
 - Have it peer reviewed
 - It doesn’t have to be long, but it must fulfill its purpose
- These take practice and can take a lot of time to write at first

Articles

- An article usually has a clear purpose
 - E.g. some facet of a feature in a software product
 - E.g. an opinion about the future of a technology
- Often you're being paid to write this for a website or magazine
 - This means the quality has to be high and it will be reviewed by them before it is published
- Same formality and structural constraints as reports (see previous slide)
- However, usually less formal than reports
 - More instructive and even conversational with the reader
 - More likely to ask rhetorical questions
 - More likely to include code samples and screenshots
- These also take practice and can take a lot of time to write at first

Presentations

Introduction

- There are two parts to a great presentation:
 - The presentation
 - The presenter
- There are many books, videos, websites and more about writing good presentations and slide deck formats

Type of presentation

- The presentation type is going to help you structure it
- Class/workshop/seminar – one or multiple days
 - Small audience with known backgrounds
 - Plenty of time to stretch or catch up, high quality demands
 - Multiple modules with many slides each
 - Complicated demos are ok
- Conference and user group sessions
 - Mixed audience
 - Conference: strictly limited on time, high quality demands
 - User group: not so time limited, and not so high quality demands – great place to practice
 - Must limit the number of slides
 - Demos should be flawless – beware of highly-complicated demos

Type of presentation

- Presentation within your peer group at your company
 - Much less demanding because you know the audience
 - Less strict on time, content, demos
 - Great place to practice, especially re-presenting material you've seen
- Presentation to a client or executives in your company
 - Must make a good impression
 - High quality slide deck
 - Flawless demos

Picking a topic

- Only speak about topics you know really well
 - You have to be able to explain what's on your slides
 - You have to be able to answer most questions
 - You have to be able to speak confidently and authoritatively
- You must be 100% certain of the correctness of your information
- You must be 100% certain that your demos will work
- You need to feel confident that people are there to learn from you and you have great information to give them
- Know your audience
 - Topic and level must be appropriate to the audience

Picking a complexity level

- Only write presentations at the level to which you're able
- Various ways to express presentation level
- Microsoft standards

Level	Name	Description
Level 100	Foundational	Basic understanding of the fundamental scope of technology and opportunity to integrate without practice/hands on experience
Level 200	Intermediate	Able to credibly discuss, offer perspective and integrate technology from minimal practical experience
Level 300	Advanced	Demonstrated expertise and differentiated perspective of technology built from repeated and diverse practical experience. Able to coach others
Level 400	Expert	In demand expert and thought leader with skill mastery. Delivers complex work pushing boundaries with technology built from extensive and unique practical experience. Frequently coach others in their development of this skill

Writing a Title and Abstract, Choosing A Template

- The title and abstract must be compelling
 - You want people to watch your presentation
- The title and abstract must be accurate
- People get annoyed if your presentation does not match your abstract
- The best advice here is to stay as simple as possible
- Include a small logo and a subtle background
- Choose a very readable font and font size
- Choose a neutral color palette for clip art and drawings
- Try to avoid really bold, bright colors

Slide Deck Content Flow

- ‘Tell them what you’re going to say, say it all, tell them what you said’
- Title slide (with your name and email address)
- Brief introduction of yourself – 30 seconds
 - If you make this too long you risk alienating the audience
- Introduction – why is this interesting/relevant/important
- Agenda
- The content
 - Maybe broken into sections, with an agenda slide between with the next section highlighted in some way
- Summary
- Resources – not always necessary
- Thank you slide – not always necessary

Slide Content

- Use whatever works for you and the type of presentation you're doing
- Make sure that whatever you do, the audience can look back at the slides later and know what you were trying to convey
- When you use URLs, use a shortening service
- Decide whether to show the whole slide at once, or bullet by bullet
- Your choice whether to have 'demo' slides or not

How many slides

- Depends on:
 - Length of presentation – shorter means fewer slides
 - How quickly you speak – faster might mean more slides
 - Complexity of information – more complex might mean more slides
- For example, for a 75-minute presentation:
 - Aim for roughly 25 (+/-5) slides
 - Leaves time for some demos
 - Leaves time for some questions
- Specialized presentations:
 - Demo-fest may only have a few slides and all demos
 - Slide deck for a (client/executive/team) meeting may only have slides necessary for anticipated discussions

Using Images and Diagrams

- Great way to convey complex information
- Whenever you use an image, give a source reference
- Label parts of a diagram
- Make sure arrows are easily visible
- Center all images and diagrams
- Make sure annotations in the drawings are readable

Using Animations

- These can be really powerful BUT they don't print on paper or to PDF
- Don't over animate
- Weigh up the time it will take you to make a complicated animation against just explaining it with several slides with different drawings
- Don't have an animated image that continues to move while you're talking

Get a mentor (if possible)

- Find someone you trust who's a great speaker
 - Once you get good at presenting, offer to mentor your colleagues/friends
- Present in front of them and get their feedback
- Ask them to watch you present in public and give you feedback
- Your mentor can also give you good feedback on your slides
- Take their feedback in the spirit in which it is given
 - The surest way to lose your mentor is to bristle at the feedback
- If you're the one giving feedback, be nice about it
 - Think about how the person who's getting the feedback feels

Practice makes perfect

- The more you present:
 - The more comfortable and less nervous you will get
 - The more confident you will get
 - The better able to cope with problems you will get
 - The better you will get overall
- Practice to an empty room, to a mirror, to your family, or to your cat
- Practice to your mentor
- Practice not saying 'um' or 'err'

Practicing your presentation

- Most people practice a presentation before delivering it
- This allows you to:
 - Gauge the timing
 - Iron out any inconsistencies or flow problems
 - Time the demos
- Record yourself and watch how you present
 - What would you change?
- Be careful of over-practicing - your presentation may end up sounding scripted and less spontaneous

Dress code

- You need to wear what's appropriate for the venue
- You need to feel comfortable
- I usually wear jeans, sport shoes (dark), and a conference or polo shirt
 - This makes me comfortable and feels professional
- Don't over-dress
- Don't under-dress

Slide changers

- Use a hand-held clicker to advance your slides
- There is no good alternative
- It's very distracting to you and the audience if you have to keep moving to the computer to hit 'next slide'
- Carry spare batteries
- Know how to reestablish the link between the USB dongle and the clicker when it fails after you boot
- Be careful about over-use of laser pointers

Tech checks

- Nothing says ‘amateur’ like turning up to the session 5 minutes before it starts and finding your laptop is incompatible with the projector
 - Doesn’t matter if it’s a class, conference, user group, or in-house
- Make sure you’re really familiar with how your laptop displays
- Do a tech check (maybe with the A/V technician)
- Beware of over-zealous A/V technicians messing with your laptop while you’re getting ready to present
 - But be nice to them or you’ll get a bad reputation and they won’t help you
- Make sure you finish within your tech-check timeslot and vacate the presenting area for the next presenter

What could go wrong?

- Think about all the things that could go wrong:
 - Your mouse runs out of battery power
 - Your clicker runs out of battery power
 - Your demos all fail
 - Your laptop reboots suddenly
 - Your laptop dies
 - The projector dies
 - Multiple of the above
- You need to be able to continue presenting without a laptop or projector
- Have a spare clicker, laptop, batteries
- Maybe even a pre-recorded video of a complex demo
 - Beware though that at many conferences and in all classes, using a pre-recorded demo is unacceptable in all but the worst circumstances

Manage your nerves

- Everyone gets nervous, even seasoned presenters
 - If they say they don't, they're lying
- You'll get a lot less nervous as you get more experience
- Nerves means you're concerned about how the presentation will go
 - Even when very experienced, this shows you're not complacent
 - It's all about the audience enjoying your presentation
- Look through the slides right before the presentation
- Remind yourself that people are here to hear you speak because you're an expert
- Try memorizing your first 30 seconds
 - By the time you're done with the memorized passage, you've forgotten your nerves and you're in the swing of the presentation

Handling questions

- You need to choose how you want to handle questions
 - Leave all questions to the end or take questions throughout
 - Let the audience know your preference at the start
- Anticipate questions and put some on a slide to pre-empt them
- Repeat every question you're asked while you're presenting
 - Feel free to paraphrase
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know, I'll find out for you"
 - People like honesty, but too many "I don't knows" shows you're unprepared
- Whatever you do, don't try to make up an answer or skirt the issue
 - You'll likely get caught
- Feel free to say "It Depends", but then explain why, how, on what
- Keep track of time and don't let questions mess up your timing
- Feel free to say 'we'll need to discuss that afterwards' for questions that are going too long, you don't understand, or are not relevant

Dos and Don'ts

- Using humor
 - People like to be entertained, but they also want to learn too
 - Keep it politically-correct, see the Total No-Nos slide...
- Passion and enthusiasm
 - People will get your message if they can tell you really mean it
 - Don't speak in a monotone or end your sentences on a downward tone
- Confidence
 - You're the expert, remember that, you know what you're talking about
 - You've practiced and your demos work
 - You've thought through questions and things that could go wrong
 - Feel good about the presentation and feel confident
- Tangents
 - If time permits, and they won't put you off, take tangents
 - Make sure to get back on track though

Dos and Don'ts

- Arrogance
 - Don't be arrogant as it really puts people off
 - This can be subtle and difficult to be self-aware of until told
- Empathy
 - A great way to win over an audience is to empathize with them
 - E.g. I know you've probably all faced this problem, so I'd like to show you...
- Eye contact
 - As you're speaking, make a point of slowly sweeping your eyes around the room and even stopping for ½ second on a few random people
 - This shows that you're engaged with the audience
 - It also lets you gauge how the audience is reacting to you
 - One of the best things to see is a bunch of people taking notes or nodding their heads in agreement with you
- Use analogies and anecdotes
 - People love to hear real-world stories

Dos and Don'ts

- Thinking of a word
 - Every so often your brain will freeze and you will not be able to think of a word
 - Give it a couple of seconds and then fall back on using a few, simpler words
- Hesitation
 - Every so often your brain will pause as you marshal your thoughts for the next slide/section/demo
 - This pause should be very short and you shouldn't make any noise during it
- Movement
 - Try not to stand behind the podium or desk
 - It's a mental barrier that your psyche erects between you and the audience
 - Move about a bit so the audience can see you, but don't be distracting
 - It shows you're relaxed
- Co-presenting
 - Only do this if you're extremely comfortable with the co-presenter
 - Practice beforehand so it doesn't look clunky when you transition

Dos and Don'ts

- Self-promotion
 - At the start of the presentation it's ok to say a little bit about yourself
 - Don't go overboard – people will likely have read your bio
- Props
 - Sometimes I find it relaxing to have something in my other hand from the clicker like a water bottle, bottle-cap
 - Sometimes I just stick the other hand in my pocket
- Demos
 - Talk through your demos and go slowly
 - People need to be able to follow along
- White-boarding
 - Once you're really experienced, try presenting with just a whiteboard

Absolute No-Nos

- Don't swear when presenting – at all
 - If you can't express yourself without swearing, you shouldn't be presenting
- Don't tell jokes or make comments that involve:
 - Racism
 - Politics
 - Sex or anything dirty
 - Nationalism
 - Xenophobia
- Don't call people stupid or an idiot
- If you do any of these you're guaranteed to irritate or upset people in the room

Final thoughts

- Presenting is an art and a science, but it's not a black art
- Remember:
 - Practice
 - Be prepared
 - Calm your nerves
- Be confident, passionate, and enthusiastic
- Be honest, empathize, and don't be arrogant
 - Once you get good at it, you'll really enjoy it

Closing



**THANK
YOU**