

# Building Better Presentations

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## DESIGN TIPS:

- **The opening act** – Start with a great intro slide to really grab the audience’s attention.
- **Wow, now I understand** – The most effective slides reinforce or highlight the presenter’s message.
- **One main point per slide** – Break complex information into multiple slides or prepare a handout that can be left behind.
- **Can you see me now** – Use a font style that is simple and large enough to be read at a distance. If you’re not sure, stand at the back of the room and click through your slides to get an idea of what the audience will see. Also, limit the number of fonts in your presentation to 1-2 max (and when in doubt – go with Helvetica).
- **Put your slide titles to work** – Titles on slides should help deliver the message not merely give a name to the slide.
- **If a slide contains more than 75 words, it’s likely a document** – Either try to reduce the amount of content on the slide, break the information into multiple slides or prepare a handout to accompany your presentation.
- **If a slide contains around 50 words, it’s likely a teleprompter** – Remember, the audience often reads ahead and thus has to wait for the presenter to catch up.
- **Remember the 3-second rule for text** – Can the message on your slide be processed effectively within three seconds? Presentations are a “glance media” – more closely related to billboards than any other media.
- **Keep it simple** – Plain white, gray or black backgrounds work best.
  - Backgrounds should never compete with content.
  - Don’t mix backgrounds from different presentations.
  - Dark backgrounds are generally considered to be more formal, dramatic and work better for large venues.
  - Light backgrounds are typically more informal, have a bright feeling and work better for small venues and conference rooms. White backgrounds are generally better when using cut-out images that are already on a white background.
  - If you must have a logo (although generally not recommended), place it in the lower right corner.
- **Consistency is king** – Use a consistent background, color palette (3-4 harmonious colors max), text and images throughout your presentation to enhance professionalism.
- **Placement of elements creates meaning** – Consider contrast, flow, hierarchy, proximity, repetition, alignment and whitespace when developing your presentation.
  - Contrast – Lettering and graphics stand out from the background.
  - Flow – The audience knows the order in which to process the information.

- Hierarchy – The audience sees the relationship between elements.
- Proximity – The audience perceives the meaning from the location of elements and senses that information belongs together.
- Repetition – The consistent use of fonts, visuals, design elements, etc. makes your presentation more professional, less distracting and easier to follow.
- Alignment – Consider alignment (left, center or right-aligned) when placing text, visuals and other elements on the screen.
- Whitespace – The audience has visual breathing room.
- **Remember the old adage** – A picture is worth a thousand words. Adding images will significantly increase audience retention of your main points. Full-screen images have the greatest impact.
- **In focus** – Make sure images are a high enough resolution so they won't appear blurry on screen.
- **Cut the clip art** – Please try to avoid using clip art in your presentation. Drawings, illustrations and other graphics are OK, but avoid the cheesy clip art.
- **Color has meaning** – When selecting colors for your presentation, do so with purpose. Also, keep in mind that members of the audience may have trouble seeing certain colors, so don't rely solely on colors to make a point.
- **Data slides are not really about the data. They are about the meaning of the data** – Ask yourself: “What would I like the audience to remember about the data that I'm presenting?” With data, the goal is to restrain (one message per data slide), reduce (remove the clutter) and emphasize (focus on the main message).
- **The wrong questions** – Instead of asking, “how many bullets should I have per slide?” or “how many words per slide?” ask, “what message do I want to convey with this slide and how can I do it as clearly as possible?”
- **Finally, SIMPLIFY your slides for increased clarity and maximum impact.**

#### PREPARATION AND DELIVERY TIPS:

- **Start with one very important question** – Do I need slides for this presentation or would a traditional speech without visual aids have more impact?
- **Check to make sure you brought your big idea** – This is the one idea you want to be sure to leave behind with your audience.
- **Know your audience** – What do they know about your topic? What are their biases? How can you persuade them that your topic matters? Your goal is to figure out where your audience is and where you want to take them.
- **Have a structure in mind** - This could be chronological, problem-solution, climatic, sequential, etc. Related, storytelling is the greatest way to make a lasting impression with your audience.
- **Relax** – To calm pre-talk nerves, arrive early, mingle with the audience, have people sit close and practice, practice, practice.

- **Make a connection** – Start with a story, impressive fact or something to engage the audience right away at the start of your talk. Presenters typically have only 30-60 seconds to grab the audience's attention, so make use of this time.
- **Slides are not a Teleprompters** – Avoid reading your slides or overheads to your audience.
- **Get a remote** – A remote will allow you to move away from the podium and build a connection with the audience.
- **Use a clip-on microphone** – Being heard clearly is important, and you don't want people straining to hear or understand you during the course of your presentation or they'll tune out. If possible, a wrap-around microphone that you wear on your head is even better than a clip on.
- **Don't hide** – Get out from behind the podium and connect with the audience.
- **Leave the lights on** – Both the presenter and the slides should be visible.
- **Don't go long** – Stay within your allotted time. Related to this, never skip or apologize for slides.
- **Whenever possible, keep it short** – Twenty to twenty-five minutes, that's generally all you need. Spending the rest of the time answering questions and creating discussion is typically more effective than a longer presentation.
- **Break it up** – Studies have show that attention span drops after the first ten minutes of a talk, so plan on doing something (ask questions, short group exercises, video clips, etc.) to regain the audience's attention.
- **Be inspiring** – Both you and your slides should be provocative enough that people pay full attention to you.
- **Have a S.T.A.R. moment** – Something They'll Always Remember.
- **Re-claim the spotlight** – After the Q&A, briefly restate your main point one more time to leave a lasting impression with the audience.
- **Finally, great presentations take time and practice to create.**

## RESOURCES:

### Books and Articles:

- *Presentation Zen, Presentation Zen: Design and The Naked Presenter* by Garr Reynolds: <http://www.presentationzen.com/>
- *Slide:ology and Resonate* by Nancy Duarte: <http://www.duarte.com/books/>
- *Really Bad PowerPoint (and how to avoid it)* by Seth Godin: [http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog/2007/01/really\\_bad\\_powe.html](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2007/01/really_bad_powe.html)
- *Beautiful Evidence* by Edward Tufte: [http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/books\\_be](http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/books_be)

### Inspiring Presenters:

- Majora Carter: [http://www.ted.com/talks/majora\\_carter\\_s\\_tale\\_of\\_urban\\_renewal.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/majora_carter_s_tale_of_urban_renewal.html) or [http://environment.umn.edu/momentum/eventseries/speakers/majora\\_carter.html](http://environment.umn.edu/momentum/eventseries/speakers/majora_carter.html)

- Johan Rockstrom: [http://www.ted.com/talks/johan\\_rockstrom\\_let\\_the\\_environment\\_guide\\_our\\_development.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/johan_rockstrom_let_the_environment_guide_our_development.html)
- Hans Rosling: [http://www.ted.com/speakers/hans\\_rosling.html](http://www.ted.com/speakers/hans_rosling.html) or [http://www.environment.umn.edu/momentum/eventseries/speakers/hans\\_rosling.html](http://www.environment.umn.edu/momentum/eventseries/speakers/hans_rosling.html)
- Present like Steve Jobs: Visit <http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/> and search for “present like Steve Jobs”
- TED Conference Series: <http://www.ted.com/>

#### **Photo Resources:**

- Kuler.adobe.com – select color palettes from your photos
- iStockphoto.com – stock photography
- Shutterstock.com – stock photography
- BigStockPhoto.com – stock photography (less expensive than iStockPhoto and Shutterstock)
- Flickr.com – search “Creative Commons” photos under the “Advanced Search” button
- Your own high-quality photos
- Wikimedia
- Avoid using photos from Google Images or from PDFs due to copyright issues and generally lower resolutions

#### **Presentation Design:**

- NoteandPoint.com - <http://noteandpoint.com/>
- Duarte Design - <http://www.duarte.com/work/>
- University of Minnesota Professor Scott St. George’s presentations - [http://web.mac.com/scottstgeorge/Scott\\_St.\\_George/Presentations.html](http://web.mac.com/scottstgeorge/Scott_St._George/Presentations.html)
- The Science Presentation Commandments by Professor Scott St. George - <http://www.slideshare.net/scottstgeorge/geog82608-the-power-of-simplicity>

#### **Presentation Humor:**

- PPT humor: <http://www.technicallyfunny.com/videos.htm>