



Creating Effective Presentations to Increase Comprehension and Retention

“If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time – a tremendous whack.”

~ Winston Churchill

Making presentations is a part of business life. Whether it is a presentation to staff or a sales meeting with a significant client or prospect, there is nothing that helps bring the point home more than a well-produced and rehearsed professional quality presentation. An effective presentation allows the audience to experience the power of words and pictures simultaneously, which increases comprehension and retention of the material.

There are some tools and tips for enhancing the power of presentations. This issue provides some information on preparing slides or overheads, on speaking, and on providing supporting material to your audience.

Presentation Software

The introduction of presentation software provided one of the major advances in preparing presentations. These programs significantly changed the level of effort and cost of preparing slides or overheads. What in the past might have required the production services of a public relations firm or advertising agency can now be produced using a program such as Microsoft PowerPoint.

Presentation software offers a variety of useful features, from creating output for high-resolution slides or overheads, to helping with presentation format, graphics, and even animation. But even though production has been dramatically simplified, the tips for authoring a good presentation remain the same.

Scripting

Regardless of how comprehensive or simple your presentation, a detailed outline – a script – is essential to its success. Not only will a script help you develop your presentation logically, it will also help you flesh out ideas, add images, and invent language to enliven your presentation. Use the script to present the problem,



demonstrate your understanding, offer your solution, and define the next step.

Having a script does not imply that you must memorize the presentation or read to your audience. Instead, it is a foundation from which to speak. Your audience will be following along as you move through your slides or overheads, so use your narrative to expand on the concepts, provide additional information, or use examples or anecdotes to reinforce your points. This is also your opportunity to enliven the presentation with humor or drama.

Test the strength of your script by reviewing it as if you were in the audience. Have you stated your points in words and concepts that are meaningful and understood by the audience? Have you presented a clear solution? Can your presentation be easily condensed to a few memorable ideas?

Graphics

As we stated earlier, the power of a presentation is the combination of words and pictures. Presentation software such as PowerPoint provides a selection of master pages and guides that establish and maintain the position of basic elements on the slide or overhead. This is important, as a shift in position of the title or margins from slide to slide can be very distracting to your audience.

The most pleasing proportion for slides or overheads is a 2:3 ratio. This means that if you use a standard 11-inch page in landscape orientation, the overall page depth should not exceed 7.33 inches.

Limit text on each slide to 5 or 6 lines and 5 or 6 words per line. Select a point size that will be readable from the farthest point away from the screen, and leave plenty of white space between individual lines. Unless you have a good reason not to, use only two fonts throughout the presentation – one for headlines and one for text. Keep type sizes consistent for main points and subpoints, and don't overuse attributes such as bold, italics, underline, and all caps.

Establish a simple color scheme and use it throughout the presentation. White or light colored text on a dark background provides good contrast and readability. Use contrasting color sparingly and only to add emphasis.

Charts, graphs, clip art, and background textures can add visual interest, but be careful not to create a distraction to the point you are making. If you use animation (such as moving headlines or fades), vary it from slide to slide to avoid being too predictable to the audience. Photographs, carefully chosen and used sparingly, can break the monotony of text-only slides and add real interest and focus to your presentation.

Preparing to Speak

You have carefully prepared your presentation slides or overheads; now it is time to prepare yourself to speak. Every effective presentation is the result of a well-prepared speaker who knows the topic and is comfortable defending his perspective. This includes both technical knowledge – the details of how the project or job will be accomplished – as well as applications knowledge or what effect the project or job will have.

Every presentation deserves a practice session. Using a printout of your slides or overheads, annotate in the margins as a reminder of where and what you want to insert (such as anecdotes, examples, or additional information). Using these notes, speak your presentation out loud. If you are new at giving presentations, consider practicing your delivery in front of a mirror. This trick has been known to improve a new speaker's delivery by 50%.

Plan to spend no more than four or five minutes per slide or overhead. If you find you cannot make your points adequately in this amount of time, then consider breaking the information into two or more additional slides.

As the speaker you will need to pay close attention to your physical appearance, hand gestures, eye contact, and posture. Plan to dress more formally than your audience (usually one step above in formality). Keep your voice deep, pitched low, and speak deliberately without rushing. If you

are speaking from a podium, do not grip its edges or lean forward. Stand straight and move your speaker's notes by sliding them sideways rather than turning them. Maintain eye contact with your audience and exhibit relaxed body language. Nervous gestures, inappropriate language or clothing, and jewelry that distract the audience moves the focus from your presentation to you – an undesirable outcome.

Though external factors such as lighting, room temperature, and the audience's alertness affect how well a presentation is received, a lively speaker can overcome, or at least mitigate, the effect of these factors. Give your audience vocal clues, such as varying your tone from soft to loud or speeding up or slowing down, to emphasize a point or to break monotony. If you are comfortable moving and speaking, change your position from time to time – though avoid pacing. If appropriate, use props such as a pointer or hand gestures to draw attention to a subject.

Handouts

Handouts are an expected part of any presentation. A simple handout for a staff meeting may consist only of a written agenda, whereas a handout for a major sales presentation may be a bound book. How you prepare handouts depends in part on your audience and on what you want each person to take away from your presentation.

If you know that someone in your audience will need to take notes, then facilitate this activity by providing pads (either blank or with lines). Some speakers reproduce their slides or overheads with space for notes either below or to the side. Others reproduce their handouts with the slide or overhead on the left page and a full page for notes on the right page. Still others reproduce the slides or overheads as a group and have note space following the slides.

Pay attention to the “packaging” of your handouts. If you have invested significant resources in preparing for your presentation, you may want to finish the job by doing more than stapling your handouts in the upper corner. We can offer many suggestions for assembling and binding your handouts. For example, we can create a cover and title page to accompany what you may print from your presentation software. If you want handouts that are more elaborate or graphically designed than what can be obtained from your presentation software, we can design and produce them. If you want to include reference materials to accompany your presentation slides, we can produce tabs that will separate the sections and make the handout a useful reference tool for your audience. We offer many options for binding your handouts, from stapling to comb, coil, or wire binding, or we can drill holes, obtain ring binders, and produce covers and spines for the ring binders.

Whatever your need for presentation support, from graphic design to handout production or reproduction, we can help you look like a presentation pro!

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

worlds

Bar chart: The graphical representation of information via rectangular columns on an x,y matrix.

Line chart: The graphical representation of information via data points connected by lines on an x,y matrix.

Pie chart: The graphical representation of information via a circle divided into wedges. The width of each wedge is determined by what percentage of the circle it represents.

.PPT: Computer file extension indicating the file is Microsoft PowerPoint.

.PPS: Computer file extension indicating the file is Microsoft PowerPoint slide show.

.TIFF: Tagged image file format. A file format for exchanging big-mapped images (usually scans) between applications. This format works well for cross-platform files.

Vector: A computer graphic created in a drawing program such as Adobe Illustrator in which objects are mathematically described as vectors. Vector-based graphics generate crisp, clear lines when scaled to any size.

T H E I D E A

Rules About Using Charts

One of the best ways to communicate data is by using different kinds of charts. Charts added to presentations can convey much more than the same data presented in tabular format. However, there are few rules about using charts that are important to follow.

If you have more than two or three charts to show, separate them with other information. Too many charts are a surefire way to put a meeting to sleep. Don't overuse charts.

Use the right chart for the data you are presenting. Bar charts are used to compare data. Pie charts illustrate portions of a whole. Line charts show changes in data, either over time or against some similar fixed variable.

Make your charts interesting. Use graphic symbols (such as a stack of coins) in place of bars in a bar chart. Use different kinds of lines (solid, dashed, dotted, mixed dots, and dashes) for differentiation in a line chart. Show the sections of a pie chart in different colors.

Label your charts. Provide labels that identify the components being displayed, and when appropriate, provide the scale or measure for the chart.

Be certain that you explain clearly what the charts are showing, and always include copies of the charts in the handout materials so meeting participants can refer to them later.

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TRICKS & tips

PowerPoint Tricks & Tips

Here are some easy ways to make your Microsoft PowerPoint slide show go smoothly:

Desired Action	Keystrokes
Advance to the next slide	N (enter) <i>or</i> page down <i>or</i> right arrow <i>or</i> down arrow <i>or</i> space bar <i>or</i> click mouse
Return to the previous slide	P (enter) <i>or</i> page up <i>or</i> up arrow <i>or</i> back space
End the slide show	Escape <i>or</i> Hyphen
Stop or restart an automatic slide show	S <i>or</i> + (plus sign)
Go to slide <number>	<number> + enter
Display a black screen OR return to the slide show from a black screen	B <i>or</i> . (period)
Display a white screen OR return to the slide show from a white screen	W <i>or</i> , (comma)
Hide the pointer	Control + H
Redisplay hidden pointer <i>and/or</i> change pointer to an arrow	Control + A
Return to the first slide	Hold both mouse buttons for 2 seconds



How can I fine-tune the placement of a graphic or text box on my PowerPoint slide?



Use the arrow keys. First select the graphic, then press the UP, DOWN, LEFT, or RIGHT arrow keys to move the graphic to the desired position. To move the graphic in even smaller increments, select the graphic or text box. Then press and hold down the CONTROL key. Use the arrow keys to move the graphic or text box to the right or left, up or down. You will notice that you have even more precise control over how far the image moves.

questions and answers