

10 TIPS

FOR YOUR NEXT PRESENTATION



BY BRENT MANKE

So you're getting ready for your next presentation! Awesome! I hope you're excited to get up there and share your talk.

Whenever you have the chance to give a presentation, you have a unique opportunity to connect with and win your audience over. Whether you're a rookie presenter or a seasoned veteran, it's always a great idea to think about how to improve your skills to make a bigger impact on your audience.

I'd like to share a few insights that have helped me as I've learned the art of the presentation. I hope these will help you become a more effective presenter and make a bigger impact on your audience.

Thanks for bringing me along for the ride.

LET'S BEGIN!

ONE

TURN YOUR COMPUTER OFF



What's the first thing you do when you start preparing for a presentation?

For many of us, the first thing we do is open up PowerPoint, Keynote, or Prezi and start assembling our imagery. While these programs can be helpful in laying out and organizing our content, they're not good place to start.

The first thing to do is define the message we want to communicate.

The problem with using visuals as our starting point is that when start with the *how* of our presentation we lack the clarity of thought to remember the *what* that we're communicating. Our tunnel vision will lead us astray later down the road.

By looking at your talk objectively you can determine the best course to take before getting into the details of delivering your message.

What if slides aren't even the best way to communicate your message? If you're speaking to a small group, it might be best to scrap the slides and share in a more informal, personal way. Or you might rather bring in a prop to underline a key metaphor in your talk.

Before jumping into the *look* of your presentation, spend some time "off the grid" to focus on your message. Garr Reynolds, author of *Presentation Zen*, suggests that presenters start prepping by shutting down their computer, turning off the iPhone, and grabbing a blank notepad or whiteboard.

Here's what to do once you've hit the OFF button:

1. Spend some focused time thinking about your audience and the main point you want them to understand. Your presentation isn't about you, it's about your audience and the action you want them to take. Consider your audience's possible objections and formulate an action plan for them.
2. Get input from other people who are familiar with your audience's situation.
3. Write down as many ideas as you can. Fill your empty page or whiteboard with stories, images and examples that will support your main point. By writing down your ideas in a non-linear way, new connections will begin to emerge, helping you develop the progression of your talk.
4. Begin organizing your talk, sketching out various visuals that you want to include.
5. Turn ON your presentation software and begin arranging your slides and notes.

While imagery may play a huge part in your presentation, when we start with *how* we're going to present, we can overlook the most important questions of *what* we're going to present.

TWO

FOCUS ON THE HERO



When you step up to give your presentation, you'll be tempted to think that your presentation is all about you. Don't be fooled, it's not. Even though you have the mic, and the spotlight is on you while you're sharing your thoughts, you're not not the hero of your talk.

Your audience is the hero.

Your audience is the good guy in this story. But just like any good story, our hero needs a mentor, a voice of wisdom, to guide and encourage them on their journey. Your audience is Batman, you're Alfred. They are Frodo, you're Gandalf (without the magical powers, of course). You get the idea. You're a coach, a guide, a voice of wisdom helping the hero, your audience along their journey.

With every point you make, ask the question: why is this important to my audience? What's in it for them? If you're only making this presentation for your own benefit, your audience will smell it on you.

What would your talk sound like if, instead of focusing on *your* great ideas and points, your talk was centered around your audience's needs for their success and growth?

When your talk is focused on helping your audience, they will immediately be more engaged in what you have to say, and more willing to buy in.

THREE

CAPTURE INSIGHTS



Have you ever had those those little Gobstopper candies? The fun of Gobstoppers is that as you suck on them (don't chew!), the colour layer slowly dissolves to reveal another colour below. In the same way, as you give the ideas for your upcoming presentation and your audience's unique situation time to soak, new layers and angles will come to the surface.

When you're getting ready for a presentation, you'll often find that the perfect metaphor or sell line will come to you when you least expect it. Your mind doesn't stop working at 5:00. It will continue to process ideas as you talk to other people and go about your day.

Make a habit of recording your ideas in a central place where you can review them later. Some people carry a small notebook or index cards. If you want to record your notes digitally, Evernote is a great way to sync notes between all your devices and tag them for easy reference down the road. The important thing is that your notes are within reach and in a place where you won't forget about them later.

Personally, I find that my mind is most active when my body is active. After going for a jog, my mind will be a flurry of ideas and insights. I try to take a few minutes while I'm cooling down to record these ideas for future reference. Especially if an idea is "so obvious, I'd never forget it", I write it down so that I don't regret it later.

Make a habit of recording your thoughts in the days leading up to your talk to make sure your most brilliant insights become part of your presentation.

FOUR

BEWARE THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE



We've all fallen prey to it before. You're trying to setup a meeting with someone, and say, "See you at 8", but they show up at 8AM instead of 8PM.

You've just been beat by the Curse of Knowledge.

Coined by the Heath brothers in their book, *Made to Stick*, the "Curse of Knowledge" is one of the major obstacles to effective communication, and is important to take into account for your presentation. The term refers to the difficulty we all encounter when we try to communicate an idea that we understand to listeners who are not yet acquainted with the idea.

- Once we know something, we find it hard to imagine what it was like not to know it. Our knowledge has "cursed" us. And it becomes difficult for us to share our knowledge with others, because we can't readily re-create our listeners' state of mind.
– *Chip Heath & Dan Heath*

The Curse of Knowledge rears its ugly head particularly when we're the "expert" in a particular field. Even though it feels good to be the expert and rattle fancy words and acronyms, we need to consider what our message will sound like to someone who doesn't have the same knowledge we do.

Conquering the Curse is often as simple as asking ourselves questions like, "How will my audience understand this technical language?" or, "Will he understand my romance movie references?" As much as you might love your sports metaphors, if your audience doesn't follow sports, you should probably consider finding a different metaphor.

What curse-killing-question can you ask to help communicate effectively to your audience?



FIVE

SPEAK THE LEARNING LANGUAGES

When you present, your hope is always to connect with every person in the room. To do so, it's important to consider how the different people learn and process information best.

We're not all wired the same. While it would be great if everyone learned the same way you do, the fact is that you will speak to a lot of people that are very different than you. This gets more complicated when you talk to a diverse group. As we talked about earlier, it's important that the hero (that's your audience!) understands what you're trying to say in a language she will understand.

Here are four basic learning styles that you can keep in mind when you're making your presentation. While this isn't a comprehensive list, nor the only way to categorize various ways of processing information, I've found this helpful when engaging a diverse audience. By making some simple changes to your presentation you can draw everyone in the room into what you have to share.

1. **“Who”** learners are concerned about the relational side of what you're talking about. More than stats and figures, these learners care about how people are affected, the relationships involved, and about you as an individual. To engage “who” people, **tell stories and let your audience get to know you as a person.**
2. **“What”** learners are more analytical and are concerned with stats and figures. Precision is important to these learners. Saying, “Facebook has, like, billions of users,” won't fly. You'll earn “what” learners' trust if you can say, “In 2012, Facebook topped 1 billion users”. To engage your “what” listener, **make sure the stats and quotes you use are solid and precise.**

3. **“How”** learners aren’t as enthralled by abstract concepts and theories, they want to give the theories “legs” through concrete action steps and application. During your presentation, they’ll be asking the question, “What do I do with this?” To engage a “how” person, make sure you **introduce concrete action steps for responding to the ideas you’re presenting.**
4. **“What if”** learners are dreamers who get excited about the future. Their minds are the most stimulated when given the opportunity to imagine new possibilities and create the future based on the ideas you’re presenting. To engage a “what if” person, **invite them to dream** about what could happen as a result of what you’re telling them.

As you make an effort to connect with these various learning styles, it might feel a bit unnatural and clunky at first. Just like learning a new language, it will become more comfortable as you make a habit of connecting with these various kinds of people in your presentations.

Imagine (this is for you, “what if” folks) if you could really engage with each and every person that walked into your presentation! If you consider these various learning styles when you’re preparing your talk, you’ll be well on your way to winning over each of your listeners.

SIX

AVOID DEATH-BY- POWERPOINT



Since the invention of PowerPoint and other presentation software (and before that, overhead projectors), our schools and businesses have been plagued by a epidemic called “death-by-Powerpoint”. You’ve probably witnessed those talks where the presenter spends an hour with their back turned to the audience, flipping through slides packed with bullet points, reading the slides verbatim. As you were sitting there checking Facebook, you may have wondered, Why are we even here? Couldn’t he just send us his notes in an email instead of making us all sit here?

When we use PowerPoint as a teleprompter and merely try to get through a bunch of dry bullet points, we’ve missed the point of what a presentation really is.

The purpose of a presentation is to make a personal connection with you, the presenter.

You’re standing up front because we want to hear what *you* have to say. Your message is best conveyed through inflection, eye contact, stories, and natural body gestures, all of which get lost when you rely too heavily on the slides behind you.

If the projector broke 5 minutes before you were to give your next presentation, would you still be able to deliver your presentation with confidence? While visuals can be a great aid in conveying a message, your slides are NOT your presentation! YOU are the most important asset to persuading your audience.

Here are a couple things you can do to make a strong connection with your audience during your next presentation:



1. Keep the lights on. When you're setting up the room, make sure that there's enough light for you and your audience to see each other. If you have to dim the house lights for the sake of your slides, what you're inadvertently communicating is that the projector is the more important than you.

2. Create a handout. If you have a lot of detailed information that needs to be read, put it all in a handout to be passed out later. Use your precious presentation time to persuade your audience using eye contact, stories and selectively chosen stats and quotes.



3. Simplify your slides. The text and images on the screen should be able to be read and comprehended at a glance, so that your audience can glance at them, then turn their attention back to what you're saying. More on this later.

4. Turn on Presenter Notes. PowerPoint and Keynote have a "presenter mode" in which you can add presenter notes that display on your computer screen while the projector displays only the slides you want your audience to see. You can also use printed-out and handwritten notes for your own reference.

SEVEN

TAKE THE GLANCE TEST



One common problem that plagues many presentations is overcrowded imagery, bullet lists and fine print, all intended to help prove your point. Rather than clarifying what you're saying, this abundance of visual information becomes a distraction as your audience battles between listening to what you're saying and reading all the text on the screen behind you.

Your audience can't focus on two inputs simultaneously. They'll either be reading your slides or listening to that really important story you're telling, not both. Each visual should support you, the presenter, and not compete for the attention of your audience.

Billboards on the highway are effective when drivers can take in the message at just a glance, reading them while keeping their focus on other things, such as keeping their car on the road.

If your slides were billboards on the highway, would drivers be able to read the message in a quick glance while driving 100km/h, or would they be causing accidents?

Seth Godin suggests implementing the "6-word" rule: "No more than six words on a slide. EVER." If you need more, try splitting the idea into separate slides. There's no limit to the number of slides you use, and limiting the amount of information that's on the slide at any given time while help your audience capture the message on the screen quickly, then direct their attention quickly back to you, the presenter.

The glance test will help your audience stay focused during your presentation and clarify your message.

EIGHT

BREATHE



Ah.....aaaaahhhhhhhh.

If standing in front of a room full of people is intimidating to you, pay attention to your breathing before and throughout your presentation.

When I first started giving presentations, I felt the need to fill my time with talking. The sound of silence scared me more than anything. In my nervous excitement to get on with my presentation, I'd forget to breathe as I quickly moved from point to point. Learning to appreciate silence and taking time to breathe deeply helped me feel more comfortable and natural in front of my audiences.

Good musicians know that when playing music, the notes they don't play are as important as the notes they do play. It's the space in between notes that give the notes their punch and create rhythm. If music contains no silent spaces, it would just be one long noise.

Here are a few ways to incorporate silence in your next presentation:

1. Give your audience a chance to digest the things you've just said. They need to breathe too! If you ask your audience a question, they may need a few seconds of silence before answering. Giving them time to process is OK, and lets them know you care about what they have to say.
2. Try adding a "pregnant pause" before you make a key point. This creates suspense and makes your listeners lean forward in anticipation of what you're about to say.
3. Instead of saying "um" while you collect your thoughts or think of the

next point you were going to make, try simply being silent. It might feel awkward, but don't worry, your audience won't run away! Eliminating filler will also keep yourself from sounding unprofessional as you present.

4. Focus on breathing deeply throughout your presentation to help deliver more oxygen to your brain, which will help you think clearly.

Ah.....aaaaahhhhhhh.

In your upcoming presentation, take a deep breath before you get started, and learn to be comfortable with periods of silence. You'll feel better, and so will your audience!

NINE

SAY YES



If you want to get better at giving presentations, you simply need to present. Often. Standing up in front of a variety of audiences, speaking on a variety of topics for various lengths of time will help you grow faster than anything else.

When I first decided that I wanted to become a better presenter, someone told me to speak every chance I got, and I took their advice. I decided to turn off my “do I really want to speak on that topic to those people?” filter and jump at every opportunity I had to speak. As a result, I had the opportunity speak on a large variety of subjects, in everything from small classrooms to large auditoriums, to every age and ethnic demographic. Giving regular presentations taught me a lot about preparation and helped me feel comfortable in front of a range of audiences. After each presentation I’d get feedback from a mentor or trusted peer and make mental notes for changes I would implement in my next presentation.

If you want to become a better presenter, just say YES to the next opportunity to give a presentation!

TEN

LEARN FROM THE BEST



Several years ago I visited New Orleans for a few days. During my time I had the opportunity to see parts of the French Quarter.

While we were checking out the streets, local friends told entertaining stories of the history of the city which brought the streets and buildings to life. We saw other tours being given, and as a presenter, I became fascinated with “the art of giving a tour”. These tour guides’ role was to tell a compelling story to bring buildings and history - both potentially boring topics - to life for their audiences. I was able to glean wisdom for my presentations by listening to the delivery of these stories told in these streets.

If you want to grow as a presenter, inspiration is everywhere.

There is much to be learned about presenting and telling great stories by studying films, TV shows, stand-up comedy, radio, music and theatre. If you take note of how stories are told and think about how this applies to your presentations, you will become a better presenter.

There are also many presentations available online that can teach us a lot about what works and doesn’t work when giving a talk.

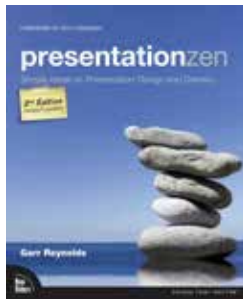
If you’re looking for some presentation-focused resources, here are a few places to start:



TED

TED is a nonprofit devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading. The two annual conferences, as well as a host of independent events around the world, feature captivating talks by leaders from a broad range of fields. Videos of the best of these talks are made available for free.

ted.com



Presentation Zen *by Garr Reynolds*

As an American living in Japan, Garr Reynolds uses the simple zen aesthetic as a metaphor for creating great presentations. Presentation Zen includes priceless insights for preparing and delivering top-notch presentations. Also find great resources at the Presentation Zen blog.

presentationzen.com



Resonate *by Nancy Duarte*

Founder of the presentation design firm Duarte, Nancy Duarte shares wisdom gained from designing thousands of presentations for some of the world's greatest presenters. In this book she analyzes the greatest speeches in history and shows how you can craft a story that moves your audiences.

duarte.com/books



Speaker Deck

Looking for some slide design inspiration? Check out this site filled with design-saavy slidedecks.

speakerdeck.com

RECAP

- 1 TURN OFF YOUR COMPUTER** First figure out what you're going to say.
- 2 FOCUS ON THE HERO** You're not the star of your presentation, your audience is.
- 3 CAPTURE INSIGHTS** Ideas come when you'd least expect it. Pay attention.
- 4 BEWARE THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE** Where is your audience coming from?
- 5 SPEAK TO FOUR LEARNING STYLES** Connect with everyone in the room.
- 6 AVOID DEATH-BY-POWERPOINT** Your visuals should merely support you.
- 7 TAKE THE GLANCE TEST** Make your slides simple, like highway billboards.
- 8 BREATHE** Relax and make good use of silence.
- 9 SAY YES** Present often.
- 10 LEARN FROM THE BEST** Inspiration is everywhere.

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Fonts used: Adobe Garamond Pro and Duke.

Find more helpup tips and resources at brentmanke.com.

THANKS!