Communication Handbook

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Contents

This Communication Handbook offers you guidelines, which will help you in writing your project report and in preparing and delivering your case presentations.

I recommend you read this booklet immediately as it will give you an idea of the communication tasks ahead of you on the project. The main purpose of the booklet, however, is to provide practical guidance on communication tasks whenever you need it during the project.

The material in the handbook is based on extensive experience of supervising students on multidisciplinary team projects on MSc and MBA programmes in Europe and Asia.

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1.   Writing the final project report

A formal report consists of 3 major sections: preliminary elements, body, and supplementary parts.

Elements of a formal written report

Front elements	Body	Supp. parts
Cover / Title page Executive summary Table of contents List of illustrations List of appendices	Introduction Situation analysis Recommendations Conclusions	Appendices References

1.1   Front elements

In a formal report, there are a number of preliminary sections which come before the actual body of the report.

Cover / Title page

The title page includes 3 items:

1. title of report
2. author's / team's names
3. date

A good title should clearly describe what the report is about. 'HR analysis' is vague and doesn't tell the reader what the main message of the report is, whereas a title such as 'An analysis of HR Training needs' clearly informs the reader what the topic of the report is.

When writing a message aimed at an action-oriented audience a title which emphasises recommendations is more effective. E.g. 'The case for expanding PrimeTech's production facilities in Latin America'.

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Executive summary

The executive summary puts the bottom line first. Busy readers may only read this section. After reading it, they should know the essentials of the situation and be in a position to make a decision. If they require more detailed information or want to check facts they can read specific sections of the report.

This summary is organised the same way as the report. It includes an introduction, findings, conclusions, recommendations, and implementation plans. You need to keep it brief, but at the same time make sure you provide a comprehensive account of the main issues dealt with in your report.

The executive summary differs from the introduction to the report in that an introduction just introduces the ideas to the reader, while the executive summary summarises the entire document briefly.

Table of contents

The table of contents outlines the major sections of the report. Headings and sub-headings are numbered, with page numbers for easy reference. The preliminary information should be numbered with small romans (i,ii), the rest with arabics (1,2 ..), and use capital letters (A,B,C) for the appendices. Usually only two or three levels of headings are used in the contents even if there are more levels in the actual report.

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List of figures

Charts, graphs and other visual aids should be numbered in the body of the report and listed in the preliminary materials. Title and page numbers for each figure should be included.

List of Appendices

Appendices should be labelled with letters (Appendix A, Appendix B) and are labelled according to their occurrence in the text. Thus the first appendix is A, the second B, etc. They should then be listed, including page numbers, in the list of appendices.

1.2 The body of the report

Since reports vary in content and purpose, there is no set format for the structure of the body of the report. The way in which you organise information will always depend upon your readership and your objective. However, most reports contain 4 main sections: an introduction which previews what is in the rest of the report; situational analysis; recommendations; and a conclusion which pulls all the parts of the main body together. The middle sections are often further divided into sections such as 'methodology', and 'findings'.

Typical report structures

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Introduction Situation - Description and analysis Recommendations - Recommendation 1 - Recommendation 2 - Recommendation 3 Implementation Conclusion	Introduction Recommendation 1 - Problem - Solution - Analysis - Implementation Recommendation 2 (P-S-A-I) Recommendation 3 (P-S-A-I) Conclusion	Introduction Opportunity - Description and analysis Recommendation - Description - Rationale - Implementation Implications Conclusion

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Introduction

In the introduction:

A. Explain the reason for the report

Explain who commissioned the report or who is responsible for the issues under discussion.

This report was commissioned by ABC Bank senior managers to gather comprehensive data about the present market situation in the Arkadia banking sector and to provide recommendations of how to consolidate and further develop ABC's position as the first Internet-only bank in Arkadia.

In July 20XX our project team received a request from TPS to investigate how their new Investor Relations (IR) website in Latvia should be designed. The assignment included a request to analyse the IR websites of some of their Latvian and foreign competitors, to identify opportunities for improvement and give clear and practical recommendations on how they should design their site.

B. Give background information

What chain of events or factors have led up to the report? What is the story so far?

Sample 1*: The banking market in Poland is going through a period of rapid growth. ABC is facing intense competition both from traditional bricks-and-mortar banks as well as new online banks. The bank's strategic goal is to acquire half a million new accounts by 20XX. In order to achieve this target, ABC must maintain and strengthen its competitive position.*

Sample 2*: At present Tesmo operates one of the world's most technologically advanced fine paper-manufacturing processes and it is now looking for ways in which it can further improve its cost-effectiveness.*

Sample 3*: The importance of creating an effective and user-friendly website has grown considerably in the last few years for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a rapidly growing group of consumers who want to book their flights and hotel accommodation online. Secondly, these customers have become much more demanding: they want information and services quickly and accurately.*

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C. Indicate the scope

Indicate the size and complexity of the report: what it covers / doesn't cover.

This report focuses on the following two issues:

1. *An assessment of the potential for an internet-only model of retail banking in Taiwan*
2. *Recommendations of what alliances to develop to overcome competition from traditional and other online banks.*

This report presents observations, findings, and recommendations regarding effective website design. However, it does not provide any technical solutions for designing websites.

D. Refer to the sources and methods employed

This section tells your reader where you got your data (surveys, research, interviews, questionnaires, experiments) and the procedures that were involved.

Our major source of data was a questionnaire sent to 20 dental clinics in Pusan.

The data in this report was collected by surveying and assessing the websites of ComfyHotel Ltd's three competitors: CheapNites plc, DossHouses Ltd and SleepWell Inc.

E. Preview the organisation

Inform your reader of how you have organised the report and why you have organised it that way.

Sample 1: *The first part of the report provides an assessment of the potential for an Internet-only model of retail banking in China. Three arguments in favour of continuing to develop the present model are presented. The second …*

Sample 2: *We've divided our report into three main sections. Firstly, we discuss what a company gains from a reward system. Secondly, we present the key building-blocks of a good reward system and highlight the demands these elements place on the company's management in the implementation stage. Finally, we propose a framework which we believe ensures a smooth and effective implementation process.*

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Situation analysis

The situation analysis section contains all the necessary information to support your recommendations. This sections includes a description of the perceived problem or opportunity that your team is addressing, including a description of your methodology and findings. This discussion explains your team's research so that the company can fully understand the process that your team followed in order to formulate its recommendations. You should present, analyse and interpret the material you have gathered.

Aim to keep your discussion concise and to the point: only provide enough detail to effectively support the key points that you present. Consider putting detailed information in the report appendices. For example, if you have used a questionnaire to collect data, then the questionnaire itself should be placed in the appendices, whereas relevant information drawn from the responses would, of course, appear here in the main body of the report. All information that is directly pertinent to the subject under discussion should be included in the main text.

Recommendations

Recommendations are your opinion of what action should be taken based on the observations and findings you have presented. Build a clear link between your analysis and your recommendations. Strong evidence that your recommendation will be effective in the context of the company and the situation must be provided. The quality of this evidence will impact the overall effectiveness of your report.

Also, alternative or secondary recommendations may be presented but in less depth than your main recommendation(s). These recommendations should also be supported with data. Unless self-evident, recommendations require detailed implementation plans.

Conclusions

The conclusion should summarise the key findings of your report and give your team's interpretation of what has been presented.

Recommendations should be pulled together and restated. You should also provide suggestions for future actions, for instance, how and when should the recommendations be implemented.

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1.3   Supplementary parts

Appendices and Exhibits

Charts, tables, questionnaires, surveys, interviews, financial statements and other supplementary documents and supporting data are often placed at the end of the report rather than in the body where they will slow the reader down. This helps the reader to follow the main lines of your argument and stops them being side-tracked by clutter.

Make sure appendix material is referred to in the main body. If no reference is made to this material, it shouldn't be there.

Appendices should appear in the order they are presented in the text of the report and should always have a title and be numbered.

If you have a lot of statistical data, a computer program or similar material, you can put it on a CD and attach it to the back of the report with a plastic wallet designed for that purpose.

References

References within the body of the report are numbered and then the sources are listed at the end of each section or at the end of the whole report.

Sources should be cited when you:
1. Quote directly from an article, book, or webpage.
2. Present factual information, facts, figures, statistics taken from a specific source.
3. Present charts or diagrams taken from other sources.
4. Paraphrase a section taken from another source (in your own words).

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1.4   Reader-friendly document design: ensuring high skim value

Place your key ideas in 'stand-alone' message headings

Message headings aid comprehension and help the reader to recall ideas. They enable the reader to see at a glance how the message is organised (skim the document) or to quickly find a specific section (scan the document).

- Use message headings especially when making recommendations: *Focus marketing efforts on SE Asia clients* rather than *Marketing issues*

- Use message headings for charts and graphs too: *Sales peaked at 35 million in Q1* rather than *Sales in Q1*

- Ensure sets of headings within sections of the report are grammatically parallel: all nouns, all verbs etc:

  1.1 Analyse the audience
  1.2 Define the objective
  1.3 Select suitable content

Use bullets or numbering to enhance readability

- Use bullets when the number or the order of the items in the list doesn't matter; use numbering when the number or the sequence or number of items is relevant.

- As with headings, keep lists grammatically parallel: begin each item in a similar fashion. For example:

  We recommend that HiTec:
  - Outsource component production
  - Develop the inventory system
  - Decentralise distribution

Ensure enough white space

- Leave plenty of white space at either side of your text and in between sections.

- Use single-space text with more white space (2 lines) between paragraphs.

- Use a ragged right margin: it makes it easier for the readers' eye to distinguish one line from another.

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Use suitable typography

- **Don't use bolding or underlining in mid-paragraph**

  If you feel tempted to bold or underline something in mid-paragraph, it suggests that the structure of your text needs rethinking. If you want to highlight a point, it's more effective to put that idea in a heading or topic sentence.

- **Don't overuse capital letters**

  Research clearly shows that capitalised text is extremely difficult to read and slows reading down dramatically. If you capitalise the first letter of every word it also makes it difficult to read. In general you should aim to capitalise only the first word of a sentence or phrase and use lowercase for the rest.

  THIS IS THE MOST DIFFICULT TO READ BECAUSE IT'S ALL CAPITALS.

  This Isn't Much Easier Because Your Eye Has To Stop For A Fraction Of A Second Every Time You Come Across A Capital Letter.

  This is by far the best and research clearly shows that you can read this a lot faster than the other two examples.

- **Select an appropriate font**

  Try to use *serif* fonts for continuous text. e.g. Times New Roman. Serif fonts have extenders on the end of most letters, as this text does, which means they are easier to read. The extenders give our eyes more to focus on.

  - This is a serif font and is easiest to read.

  Sans serif fonts (those without connecting strokes at the beginning and end of letters) often work well for headings (e.g. Arial, Tahoma).

  - This is sans serif font and it is more suitable for short headings

  Type should be preferably 12 point like this text.

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2.   Preparing and delivering impactful presentations

This section presents some practical ideas that will help you when planning and delivering your project presentations.

Checklist for recommendation presentations

A. Content and Structure

1. Include only content which contributes to achieving the aim of your presentation.

2. Use the introduction to arouse audience attention, to motivate, highlight the challenge / problem and present your solution. (see section 2.1).

3. Tell a coherent story: show you know the situation and the issues, define the problem or the opportunity, and show how your solutions address this problem/opportunity. Highlight audience benefits.

4. Select sufficient evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, to substantiate the ideas you present but do not present too much detail. Choose the most significant data and summarise the rest of it.

5. Discuss implementation issues if appropriate.

6. End with a powerful conclusion that reaffirms the key takeaways, tells the audience what they should do, and leaves them with something memorable (see section 2.2).

7. Decide on roles: who starts, who deals with the financials etc. Will you have somebody who will act as an MC? Who will facilitate the Q&A?

B. Slides (see section 2.3)

1. Limit the number of slides you use. There is a tendency to use too many.

2. Employ 'visual' visuals such as charts, graphs, diagrams etc

3. Begin with a title slide that includes the name of the company, the title of the project, and the names of your team members.

4. In longer presentations use a preview slide to present the body of the presentation. - Don't include *'Introduction', 'Conclusion', 'Thank you', 'Questions?*

5. Exploit descriptive headings: *Invest $6M in Italian distribution channels*

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6. Ensure that bullets convey the key messages: to help you and to guide the audience.

7. Don't put too much information on one slide. Remember the 666 rule: a maximum of 6 bullets per slide, 6 words per line, and no more than 6 consecutive text slides.

C. Nonverbal behaviour (see section 2.4)

1. Sit down when not presenting - give the presenter the stage.

2. Sit in the order in which you will present (next presenter nearest stage).

3. Consider using other team members to change slides.

4. Look interested when not presenting both through facial expression and gesture.

5. Stand up when answering questions during the Q and A session.

6. Always look at the audience, maintain good eye contact.

7. Use a laser pointer when necessary to indicate points on the screen.

8. Use supportive gestures to emphasise key points.

D. Other issues

1. Avoid reading.

2. Speak expressively (see section 2.5).

3. Create smooth transitions: use signposting to link the different sections of the presentation (see section 2.5).

4. Use professional language.

5. Rehearse the presentation together with other team members.

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2.1   Start with an impactful introduction

A strong introduction gives an immediate impression of a confident and professional presentation. Your introduction should aim to arouse interest and attention, highlight the perceived opportunity and briefly outline your solution.

Arouse interest and motivate the audience

The saying, 'You never get a second chance to make a good first impression' is often used to emphasise the importance of the first few minutes of a presentation. There are numerous ways in which we can endeavour to arouse the audience's interest and attention.

You could tell a story which highlights the challenge you've identified; use survey results to highlight a challenge or opportunity; present graphs to point out a problem that needs addressing, or simply pose a real or rhetorical question.

These techniques, known as 'grabbers', should be clearly linked to our overall objective and be fully appropriate for the audience.

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Highlight the need and present your solution

The opportunity and the suggested solution will often be presented in the introduction. It will, however, depend upon the context: the audience's knowledge of the topic, their expectations and attitude, and the amount of time you have available.

Consider using the S-C-Q-A pattern

This 4-step formula is a handy way to quickly present the opportunity you've identified and your suggested solution.

Situation	An assessment of the present situation your audience agrees with
Complication	Perceived challenge, need, opportunity
Question	The implicit question that arises from the complication
Answer	The solution, recommendation, main idea

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2.2   End with a memorable conclusion

The conclusion is usually the one part of a presentation that is often overlooked.
Presenters tend to give it little or no thought and consequently the presentation comes
to an abrupt end.
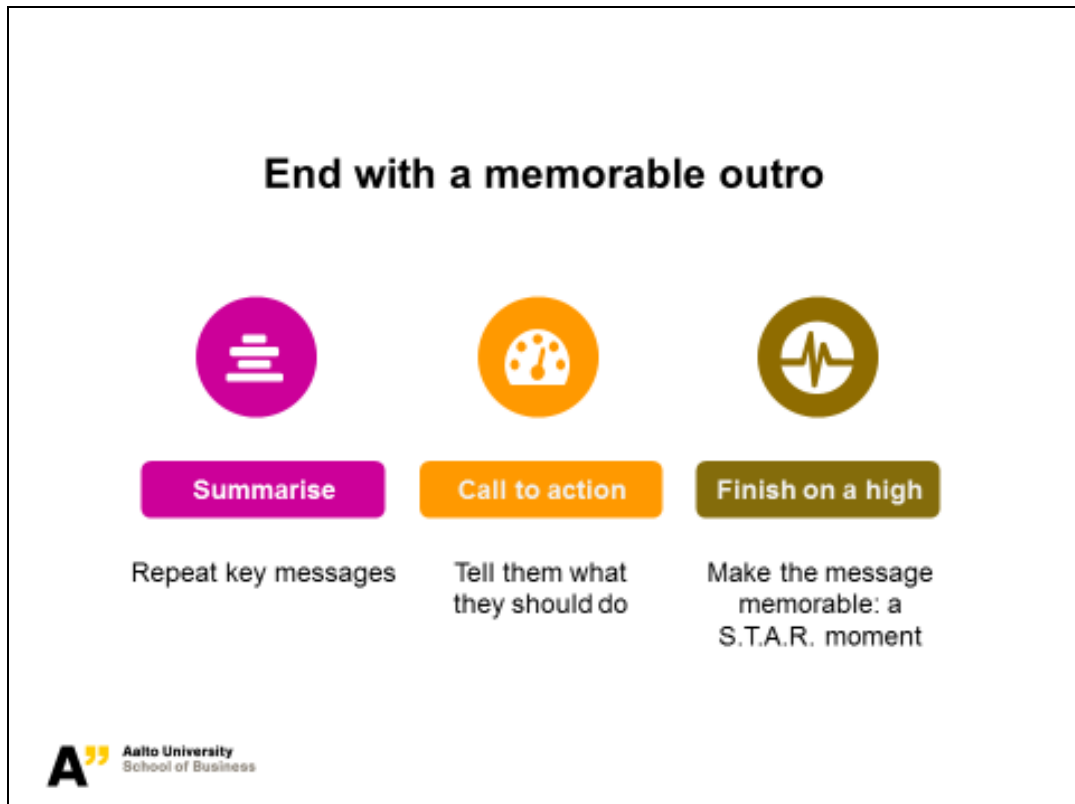
Summarise

The conclusion should aim to focus attention on the main messages that have been
dealt with. Be careful not to introduce new ideas, as this only blurs the message and
confuses the audience.

Call for action

The ultimate objective of your presentation is to convince the company to carry out
your recommendations. So, your conclusion should clearly state what you expect the
audience to know as a result of your presentation, and what action they should take.

Finish on a high-note

Create a S.T.A.R. (**S**omething that **T**hey'll **A**lways **R**emember) moment. Say or show
something which is truly memorable and highlights the core idea you're putting across.

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2.3   Create visuals that support the message and add impact

5 principles of effective slide design for stand-up presentations

Principle 1: Less is more – limit the amount of information

Principle 2: Employ visual visuals to enhance the narrative

Principle 3: Avoid chartjunk

Principle 4: Use animation sparingly

Principle 5: Ensure everything is visible and legible

Principle 1: Less is more – limit the amount of information

The audience's capacity to absorb information in a short time is limited. We need to think about what are the main points we wish to highlight on our visuals. What kind of visualization will help the audience remember our key claims? And what kind of visualization will make our story interesting and engaging?

We should only have one key claim per slide and that claim should be in a strong message heading wherever possible, e.g. '80% of customers prefer purchasing from selective distribution channels'. The rest of the slide should then contain information that supports our claim in, for instance, a graph or chart, or key figures. As the presenter we are there to give the details, to elaborate and highlight.

Having minimal content on slides means the audience focuses on us, and we as a presenter, in turn, can focus on delivering the story.

Principle 2: Employ visual visuals to enhance the narrative

"Whether you're a CEO, a salesperson or a biochemist, you must understand how to connect with an audience, how to construct a powerful narrative argument, and how to visually display information for maximum audience comprehension."

Renowned persuasive presentation expert Nancy Duarte (2015)

Recent empirical research into cognitive functioning by Richard Mayer (2009) clearly shows that keeping slides simple and free of unnecessary information is the best way to engage an audience and enhance their ability to recall ideas.

It seems that bullet points are the least effective way to deliver important information.

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In Mayer's experiments learners who read text supported by illustrations recalled information 65% better than those who only had text.

Because bullet points are not very effective in delivering important information, **try to avoid bulleting**. Sometimes bulleted points are essential, and in such cases it is important to keep in mind the '66' rule: an absolute maximum of 6 lines per slide, 6 words per line. However, bulleted lists are very easily unexciting and exhausting, and often fail to highlight what the key messages are that the audience should understand and remember. Therefore, it is always best to think of other ways to display our main ideas.

Instead of bulleting, try to visualize ideas as much as possible and consider carefully how many slides are actually needed; most presentations rely too heavily on slides, even though what the presenter says should be the main focus. As the presentations expert Garr Reynolds (2008) has stated, "slides should be **as visual as possible and support our points quickly**, **efficiently and powerfully**. The verbal content, the verbal proof, evidence, and appeal/emotion come mostly from our spoken word."

Here are a few tips for how to make memorable visual visuals:

1. Start with a blank canvas instead of using a ready-made template when designing visuals; templates are overused, and often not very appealing visually. Of course, most companies have their own templates, which will limit what we can do.

2. Decide on key points, the ones we really want to highlight on the visuals, and spend time to find real, high-quality images that will help the audience remember them. Visuals that have only your key messages, supported with relevant, high-quality images, will help plan and deliver an exciting, interesting and engaging presentation. Make sure, however, to consider copyright issues. Use your own original images or those available through the Creative Commons License.

3. Do not use clipart or poor quality photos, as these can give a very unprofessional feel to the presentation.

Principle 3: Avoid chartjunk

One of the dangers of encouraging the visualization of ideas is that the presentation slides contain a lot of what Edward Tufte (1993), the renowned expert in graphical design, called 'chartjunk'. This means unnecessary lines, arrows, shading, borders, icons, ClipArt and 3D elements.

Overall, when thinking about slide design, aim for simple. This includes, for instance, using only a few colors, an easy-to-read, sans-serif font and avoiding unnecessary items such as lines, shapes, symbols, and logos that do not play a key role in support of the message.

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Principle 4: Use animation sparingly

Animation can be a very effective way to gently add information to graphs and charts. For, example in a technical presentation the presenter might start with the overall building blocks of a very complex process and then add more detail and complexity bit by bit using animation. Or, in a sales pitch, the presenter could show a graph of projected revenues for different products by bringing in information little by little. However, do not use animation excessively as this can easily lead to a restless presentation.

Principle 5: Ensure everything is visible and legible

Avoid slide content that the audience cannot see clearly as this will irritate and frustrate them. To ensure the audience can see everything:

- Use a large enough font: when using more text than just the message heading make sure the font size is an absolute minimum of 18, even when labelling charts and graphs, and preferably larger.
- Make sure that text stands out from the background: there should be a stark contrast between the actual text and the background colour.
- Choose images that are simple and clearly linked to the message.

To help prepare effective and engaging visuals, take a look at good examples of effective visual design on the Internet. Here are a few websites that provide some useful ideas:

http://www.garrreynolds.com/preso-tips/design/

https://visage.co/11-design-tips-beautiful-presentations/

Compose images using the Rule of Thirds

'Composing your photos based on a simple grid of thirds is a trick used by movie producers, graphic designers, and professional photographers. Using the rule of thirds leads to aesthetically pleasing and professional-looking imagery.' Duarte (2009)

This simple guideline proposes that we should see an image as divided into nine equal parts by two equally-spaced horizontal lines and two equally-spaced vertical lines, and that important compositional elements should be placed along these horizontal or vertical lines, or their intersections, called power points.

Proponents of the "rule of thirds", among them modern slide design gurus Nancy Duarte and Garr Reynolds, claim that images are more dynamic and engaging if the main subject is not placed in the centre.

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How can we apply the Rule of Thirds to our slides?

1. Try to choose photographs which use the Rule of Thirds.

2. Use editing software to scale, crop, or position photographs to follow the rule.

3. When looking through photographs, find a small area within a larger photograph that you can use.

4. Combine images with text so that one or both obey the Rule of Thirds. Two great ways to do this are to choose photographs with either: large areas of uniform color on top of which you can place text with good contrast, or a solid color background so that you can move the photograph around seamlessly.

Adapted from material extracted from http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/rule-of-thirds- powerpoint/ Andrew Dlugan on 26 April, 2012

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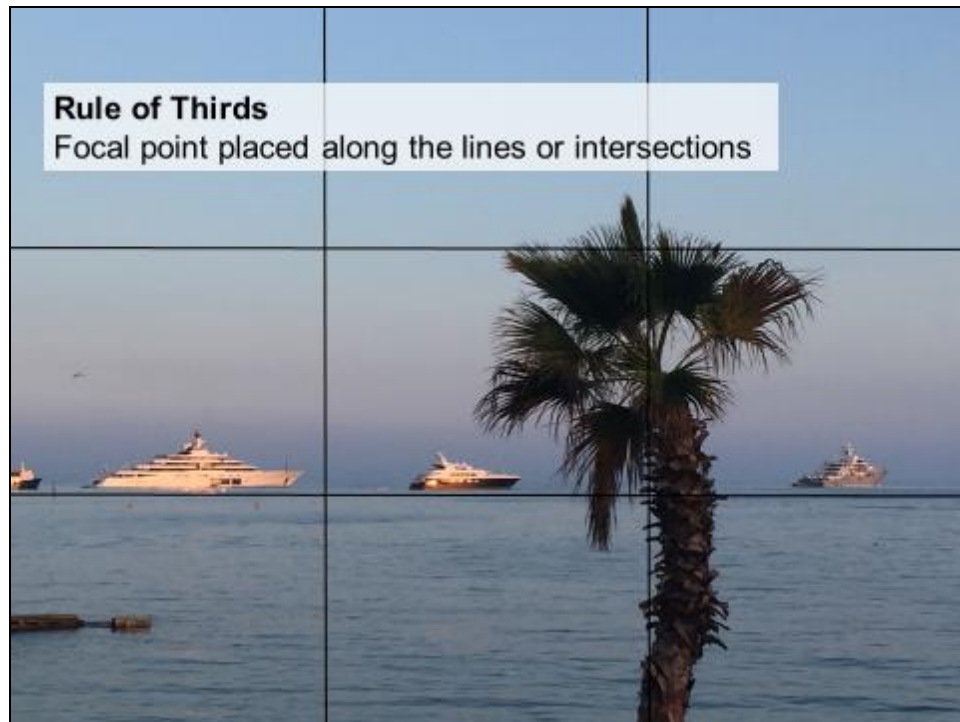
6 questions to ask when crafting TEXT slides

1. Does the heading convey the main message of the slide?

If our slide does not have a title, the audience will have to draw its own conclusions. Headings, or titles, clarify our main ideas and highlight key messages.

Types of headings

Topic-specifying headings describe the subject of the visual but they don't say what is important about it, how the audience should interpret it, or what conclusions our audience should draw from it. Many presenters use topic headings because they are easier to write. e.g. *Distribution of employees by age. Productivity by region.*

Message headings, on the other hand, ensure that our audience focuses on the aspect of the information we want to emphasise. Most business presentations are presenting an argument of some sort and these descriptive headings can help highlight the key points of this argument: *TLC accounts for 50% of revenue, Sales peaked in Q4.*

Rhetorical headings are dynamic and engaging and can also stress the main message of the slide: *Why consider new acquisitions?*

2. Do bullets and headings have 'stand-alone sense'?

Text slides should be 'stand-alone' - they should make sense on their own before we elaborate on them.

Sometimes presenters project their notes, rather than the information the audience needs, the real message.

Here are some typical generic headings / bullets with suggested improvements:

- Generic: Background information
  Better: ***Customer perceptions of the HotShot brand***

- Generic: Main findings
  Better: ***Millenials prefer purchasing from selective distribution channels***

- Generic: Recommendation
  Better: ***Focus on sophisticated scents at an affordable price***

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3. Are there too many lines? Are they too long?

Generally speaking text visuals are overused. They also often contain far too much information. If we include all the information then apart from making it difficult for our audience to read, we fail to highlight key points.

Follow the **66** rule: A maximum of **6 words per line**, **6 lines per slide**.

4. Is it legible: can everyone read it?

Use sufficiently large print: 36-44 for titles, 24-32 for main headers, 22-28 for body text. Ensure that your slide is legible even from the back of the room.

5. Are there too many different fonts and styles (letterjunk)

Avoid using too many typographical elements (boldface, italics, underlining), outline and shadow styles, and different fonts at once.

6. Is there conceptual and grammatical parallelism?

Conceptually parallel: Bullet points should be comparable and at the same level of specificity. They should have the same relationship and relate in the same way to the main idea presented.

This list is not conceptually parallel.

Main findings:
- All the steps in the process were carefully monitored
- 15% of raw material was defective
- The finished product was tested at 5 minute intervals
- 2% of the seals received insufficient adhesive

Points 1 and 3 describe how the research was carried out. Points 2 and 4 state the results.

This list is conceptually parallel:
Pricing will depend on:
- coastal location
- neighbourhood amenities
- number of bedrooms
- quality of furniture and fittings

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Grammatically parallel: each bullet point should begin in a similar fashion. Research shows that, apart from strengthening the connection between the items in the list, this increases the readability of the text. There are no hard and fast rules for the choice of the grammatical structure used for bullet pointing, but the following are some tips for selecting grammatical structures.

Examples

Bullets after a topic-specifying title often use nouns or noun phrases:
Milestones

- 2000: Merger with R & M
- 2001: Acquisition of I -Tech
- 2004: Joint venture with G-NET

Bullets after a message heading often use the imperative form of the verb

3 steps to an effective strategy
1. Analyse the audience
2. Define the objective
3. Select suitable content

Slide Design Checklist

Content

1. Are there a suitable number of slides? Fewer can be more.

2. Is there a title slide? Is it effective?

3. Do you need a preview slide?

4. Is there too much information on any of the slides?

Design

5. Is there enough variety: visual as well as text slides?

6. Is there any 'chartjunk' (unnecessary shading, borders, 3D, ClipArt etc.)?

Text

7. Do headings clearly indicate the objective & content of the slides?

8. Do text slides stick to the '666 rule'?

9. Is there conceptual and grammatical parallelism on all slides?

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6 **key points to consider when using video clips**

Video clips can make a presentation more impactful and engaging. They can be used to quickly illustrate ideas, to explain complex processes or to entertain.

Here are a few key points to consider when you're planning to put a video into your presentation.

1. **Relevance**: Is the clip you intend to use fully relevant for this audience and objective? This is something to seriously consider if you are planning to use for instance a YouTube clip.

2. **Added value**: What added value does the clip bring to the presentation? Is it worth all the time and effort in preparing the clip or could you achieve the same result with a few well-designed slides?

3. **Length**: Is the clip too long? Videos are great for capturing attention but audiences tend to tire easily. Aim to limit clips to 1-3 minutes.

4. **Position**: Where is the best place for the clip in the presentation? Why? Sometimes a very short clip can be very effective right at the beginning of a presentation. Other times it might be better to first talk to the audience before launching into a video.

5. **Transitions**: How will you link the video to what went before and what follows? What will you say to introduce the video? What will you say immediately after?

6. **Equipment**: Check and double-check the equipment. Is the necessary hardware and software available? Is the sound on? Is the volume sufficient?

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2.4   Ensure enthusiastic nonverbal communication

The initial impression that we give as a communicator is crucial. Our appearance, facial expression, gestures, body movement and mannerisms may have a decisive effect on the audience's reaction to our presentation.

Many studies over the last 30 years indicate that non-verbal cues carry a lot of the message, at least when the communication is planned, organized, and rehearsed to meet a specific objective. (Mehrabian-1971, Crumbley-2001, Caso-2006, Rosip-2004, Coulson-2004, De Gelder-2006)

5 tips for a strong nonverbal presence

Here are some points that can help you to enhance your nonverbal presence:

Tip 1: Look natural

A natural posture is one that is not forced for the occasion or a copy of someone else's style. We should aim to gesture in front of an audience exactly as we would if we were having an *animated conversation* with a friend. Of course, if we are presenting in a large space we may well have to exaggerate our movements a little. In any event, the audience should get the impression of a *relaxed but confident* speaker.

Tip 2: Build in calm, controlled and purposeful body movement

Used well, body movement can create variety, make the presentation more engaging, and allow us to build rapport with the audience. This movement should always be calm, controlled and purposeful. We need to choreograph the movement so that it does not appear restless and distract from our presentation.

Purposeful, calm movement will help us avoid two common problems that easily make presentations unengaging: standing stiffly in one place (e.g. next to the visuals or the computer) or speaking from behind a podium (which seems safe to the presenter but is very distant).

Here are some ways in which we can create natural movement in our presentations:

- come out from behind a desk/computer/podium
- use a presentation clicker: allows us to control the slides from anywhere in the room
- begin by speaking directly to the audience centre stage before showing slides
- blank the screen during a longer pause and move away from the PC/laptop to talk directly to your audience
- move closer to the audience when initiating the Q&A session

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Overall, avoid any uncontrolled movement such as pacing up and down nervously like a caged animal, sudden, erratic movements, and rocking back and forth or from side to side. This kind of nervous uncontrolled movement can make the audience feel uneasy.

Tip 3: Use supportive gestures

Generally speaking, we should attempt to use gestures so that our hand movement appears natural and supports the message.

We should move our hands and arms as we would do if we were having a lively conversation with somebody. The recommended space for hand movements to display confidence is in between your neck and waist. We can use gestures to create visual representations of the concepts you are dealing with; to support, emphasise or clarify points; and to draw the audience's attention to key issues on our slides.

There are some hand and arm postures which are generally regarded as unsuitable and distracting: hands in pockets, hands handcuffed, arms crossed, hands clasped in front ('fig leaf') hands clasped behind the back ('the parade rest'), hands on hips ('the angry parent'), and wringing the hands nervously.

Tip 4: Avoid mannerisms

Presenters often have mannerisms which may cause distraction: coin-jangling, fiddling with a pen, playing with the pointer. The latter is one of the most commonly misused presentation tools. Presenters often end up conducting an imaginary orchestra, or pointing at members of the audience like an angry schoolmaster. Admittedly, mannerisms are difficult to suppress, but these distracting mannerisms should be replaced with something else that seems more natural and is less distracting.

Tip 5: Ensure good quality eye contact

Good eye contact helps you establish contact with the audience and enables us to monitor the audience's reactions. It is also equated with openness and honesty. One study (Hasling, 1992) found that speakers who were regarded by their audience as 'sincere' looked at their listeners on average 63.4% of the time, whereas those who got an 'insincere' rating maintained eye contact for only 20.8% of the time.

If you are using slides in the presentation, it is important to link what we say to what we show. However, be careful that we do not end up staring at the screen with our back to the audience, or giving them the cold shoulder. A good rule of thumb is to always keep our body facing the audience and only turn our head to the screen as we refer to points on the slides.

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Aim to share eye contact with all of your audience

We should try to share eye contact evenly amongst audience members: maintain eye contact with one person for a few seconds before moving on to another person and staying with them for a similar length of time. In a large room, we can try to ensure that we look at each section of the audience equally.

There are some kinds of eye contact that you should avoid, such as the 'eye dart' - moving rapidly from one person to another like a hunted animal - or 'the copy reader', which, as the name suggests means reading from notes.

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2.5   Use vivid and expressive language

Use spoken English

- Speak in short, simple utterances
- Employ concrete rather than abstract words
- Paraphrase: put ideas into your own words
- Don't read your notes, use them to remind you what you should say

Be cautious with jargon

Abbreviations, acronyms, and trade lingo speed up communication if everybody in your audience is familiar with the terms used. If you are uncertain as to whether your audience is familiar with specific terminology, either avoid using it or simply explain the jargon the first time you use it. Jargon is a very useful shortcut when you know what it means, but it can be frustrating if you don't.

Be expressive

Highlight key messages by giving words and phrases extra stress and a higher pitch level. Ensure that your audience focuses on the key points and that you are interesting to listen to.

Use pitch change and a pause to indicate that you are moving from one section of your presentation to another. Let the pitch of our voice fall on the final few words of one topic, follow this by a short pause, and then use a higher pitch to show that you have begun a new part of the presentation.

Vary the pace

Vary the speed at which you speak during your presentation to avoid a monotonous, constant rate. Slow down when talking about key issues. Verbally punctuate your ideas. Be especially careful not to rush the introduction to your presentation. Presenters are often nervous at the beginning of the presentation and this can lead to a rather fast rate of delivery. Remember the audience needs time to get accustomed to your voice.

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Signpost your presentation

Clarify the structure of your presentation, verbalise transitions, indicate what point you have reached and highlight important issues:

Outline the overall structure: briefly preview the structure of the presentation
- *I'd like to start by outlining the overall parameters ...*
- *I've divided my presentation into three main sections.*
- *First of all ...   Secondly ...*
- *Finally / I shall conclude ...*
- *I'd like to wrap this session up by ...*

Verbalise transitions: Tell them what is coming next, why it is significant, how it fits into the overall structure, how it relates to previous ideas:
- *So far we've had a look at the present market situation in China. What I'd like to do now is present 5 key factors that I think we need to address when considering our overall strategy.*
- *So, what options do we have? Let's now take a look at 3 possible scenarios which….*
- *I think that you will find the next diagram very revealing.*

And when you show a slide, say a few introductory remarks about it:
- *As you can see our growth towards the end of the third quarter was dramatic especially if we compare it with the same period last year.*
- *What I'd like you to look at in particular is this middle section of the process. You'll notice …*

Highlight key takeaways: emphasise the points you'd like them to remember
- *So, what are the main benefits of moving over to this system?*
- *The next point I'd like to look at / to deal with is ...*
- *This brings me / us to the most significant improvement.*
- *The key issue here is ...*
- *The most significant change is ...*
- *So, the point I'm making is ...*

Summarise key points: finish by highlighting your core messages
- *So, to sum up …*
- *I'd like to end by summarising the main reasons for ...*
- *I'd like to finish by once again reminding you all of the main benefits of ...*

The words and expressions you choose and the tone of your voice should suit the audience you are addressing.

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2.6   Prepare to facilitate the Question-and-Answer session

The Q and A period, whether at the end or during the presentation, is a crucial part of the presentation as it gives you the opportunity to strike up a dialogue with your audience. A skilful presenter can use this period to try and persuade the audience to accept his/her arguments and ideas.

10 rules of thumb for Q & A facilitation

1. Ask politely for questions

    - *If you have any questions, I'd be very pleased to answer them now.*
    - *Right, if you have any questions, I'll do my best to answer them.*

2. Show verbally and nonverbally that you are listening attentively to questions.

    - *Yes, I think that's a very relevant / crucial / critical issue*

3. Check the answer is adequate

    - *Does that answer your question?*
    - *I don't know if that answers your question*

4. Divide rambling questions into smaller sections before answering.

    - *So, if I've understood you correctly, you're asking X and Y. Let me take X first.*

5. If you don't fully understand a question, ask the questioner to politely repeat it. If it's still unclear try paraphrasing it and then ask the questioner to confirm that you've understood it correctly.

    - *Sorry, I'm not quite sure if I understood your question.*
    - *Sorry, could you say your question once again please?*
    - *If I've understood correctly you're highlighting the point that ….*

6. Relate your answers to your presentation objective and content.

    - *Quite, and as I said in my presentation this becomes a serious issue particularly when we're considering brand management.*

7. If you don't know the answer, say so, but do something about it.

    - *Off the top of my head I can't remember the figures but I'll talk to our chief engineer who's done the calculations and email you.*
    - *I'm afraid I don't know the answer to that. I think the Head of Production, Mark Sturbridge, would be able to help you. I'll ask Mark to …*

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8. If you need some time to gather your thoughts consider repeating the question or asking the audience how they would deal with it.

    - *So, you're suggesting that one solution would be to …*

    - *Good question. How would the rest of you deal with this in your own units?*

    - *Good point. What would be your answer?*

    - *True. Let me think about that for a moment.*

9. If a question focuses on the questioner's interests only, decide whether it is appropriate to bring the discussion back to your own communication objective or to change the focus to meet their needs.

    - *That's an interesting point. I wish we had more time to discuss it …. Perhaps we could look into more after the presentation is over.*

10. If a questioner is aggressive or hostile, don't react in a similar manner. Recognise the questioner's concerns and answer them in a calm and non-confrontational manner. Attempt to defuse the situation. Never embarrass or insult a questioner.

    - *I can see that this is a key issue for you and I can only say that …*

    - *I understand how you feel about this. From my perspective all I can say is ….*

    - *This is certainly a very contentious / controversial / emotive issue …*

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