Impactful and engaging presentations

Whenever you give a presentation, you are taking up the audience's valuable time. This means that you are responsible for providing value to them. This input will look at key aspects of preparing and delivering impactful, engaging and convincing business presentations that are easy and enjoyable for the audience to listen to.

Very often, people begin preparing their presentation by opening, for example, PowerPoint, Keynote, or Prezi, and starting to type in things on visuals. This, however, is often a very ineffective approach that results in a poorly planned presentation with one of several of the following problems:

1. too much content in the presentation: information overload
2. unclear presentation structure: no clear storyline
3. poor presentation visuals: often way too much information on them
4. lack of enthusiasm in the delivery

To avoid these problems in your presentations, plan first: define your objective, choose your content (section 1 in this input), and plan your storyline (section 2). Only once all of this is ready, you can start thinking about what kinds of visuals would support your story (section 3). Finally, you will need to deliver your presentation effectively. Sections 4 and 5 will look at how to use nonverbal communication to support your message, and how to ensure a strong Q&A session.

1 Avoid information overload

When you start planning a presentation, remember to first define your communication objective and analyse your audience. Going through these two stages is crucial, because assessing what you want to achieve with your presentation (objective) and clearly defining who your audience is – what they know / don't know, how they feel and how you think they can be persuaded – will have a huge impact on the content that you choose and how you organize it.

1.1 Be ready to kill your darlings

It is critical to remember that the presenter often knows a lot more about the topic than the audience does. Because the audience's capacity to absorb a lot of information during a short presentation is quite limited, you need to very carefully pick and choose content.

In other words, you need to be ready to 'kill many of your darlings'; you need to be able to leave out some points that may be important, but are not the most relevant for that particular audience and objective. This way, you can avoid ending up with a 'data dump presentation', the kind you have probably often experienced as an audience member: a presentation that has so much content that it is both exhausting and ineffective.

1.2 Select your presentation content systematically

When you are selecting content, remember to think about the audience and whether it makes sense to deliver your message in a direct or indirect way (see input 1). Informational messages are always direct, whereas persuasive messages can be direct or indirect.

Once you have thought about the most suitable approach, the following three steps help you plan the content for your presentation:

1. Decide on what your overall communication objective is: 'By the end of this presentation, I want my audience to…' and create a short, easy-to-grasp and interesting title that reflects this objective.
2. Define the key claims (ideas/reasons/benefits), preferably 3, that you will use to support the objective.
3. Think about which stories, examples, statistics etc. you will use as evidence to support each of the key claims.

These steps are based on different models presented by e.g. Gallo (2014), Minto (2009), Munter and Hamilton (2014), and Thomas (2004). Please refer to them for further readings on how to select presentation content.

Here are two examples of using the steps above to choose content for a persuasive presentation:

Example 1: Systematic presentation planning steps

- **Objective:** By the end of this presentation, I want my audience to start using three time management techniques to help them have more free time (by being more effective).

- **Presentation title:** Adopt time management techniques - have more free time

- **Key claims (the techniques):** 1. Schedule your priorities (Stephen Covey); 2. Prioritize your to-do lists (Eisenhower's principle); 3. Start every day by 'eating the frog' (Mark Twain).

- **Evidence, i.e. support for claims:** for each of the techniques, provide quantitative and/or qualitative evidence for the impact of starting to use the tool: getting more done in shorter time → having more free time.

Example 2: Systematic presentation planning steps

- **Objective:** By the end of this presentation, I want my top management audience to consider moving towards a more customer-centric focus to product development.

- **Presentation title**: Partnering with customers to drive R & D brings significant benefits

- **Key claims (benefits):** 1. Increases possibility of innovation and customized products; 2. Reduces development lead times significantly 3. Creates a closer customer relationship, enhances our brand and gives us a competitive advantage

- **Evidence, i.e. support for claims**: for each of the claims (benefits), provide quantitative and/or qualitative evidence for the impact of implementing a more customer-driven approach. Evidence could include for instance customer survey results, voice of own personnel at customer interface, case examples, research data.

1.3 Consider building your content into a story

When you think about what to include in the presentation, remember to think about what is interesting to the audience. Then, to make your audience motivated to keep listening to you from the very beginning all the way to the end, consider building your content into a story.

To help you think about how to do this, look at e.g. Nancy Duarte's (2012) Harvard Business Review post on 'How to Structure Your Presentation Like a Story, https://hbr.org/2012/10/structure-your-presentation-li, or a blog post by Ffion Lindsay (2014) on different story-telling techniques, http://www.sparkol.com/engage/8-classic-storytelling-techniques-for-engaging-presentations/.

1.4 Use only terminology that the audience will understand

Whenever you give a presentation, remember that you want to create inclusion, i.e. make every member of the audience feel that you are targeting the presentation at them. To ensure everyone can follow you, avoid company speak, abbreviations, and jargon that the audience might not understand. Also, explain any unfamiliar terms, and use only language that makes your ideas accessible and understandable.

2 Structure your presentation clearly

To help your audience, your presentation should be as easy as possible to listen to. This means you need to have a clear overall structure and then signpost effectively during your presentation.

In addition, opening and closing your presentation with impact is crucial, because it is at these two key moments that the audience is paying the most attention, at least if you clearly let the audience know when you are opening / closing. The following sections will take a closer look at some of the key elements of an impactful opening (section 3), and a powerful conclusion (section 4).

2.1 Make your presentation structure crystal-clear

Below is a very typical presentation structure that makes the audience's job easy. Note, however, that in short presentations there might not be a preview.

2.2 Use explicit signposts during your presentation to help the audience

Remember that when you present, your audience hears everything that you say for the first time. To help them follow your presentation, you first need to make sure that everything in your presentation is pointing in one logical direction i.e. towards achieving your communication objective. Then, when you are presenting, you need to tell them where your presentation is heading – not just at the beginning, but also throughout.
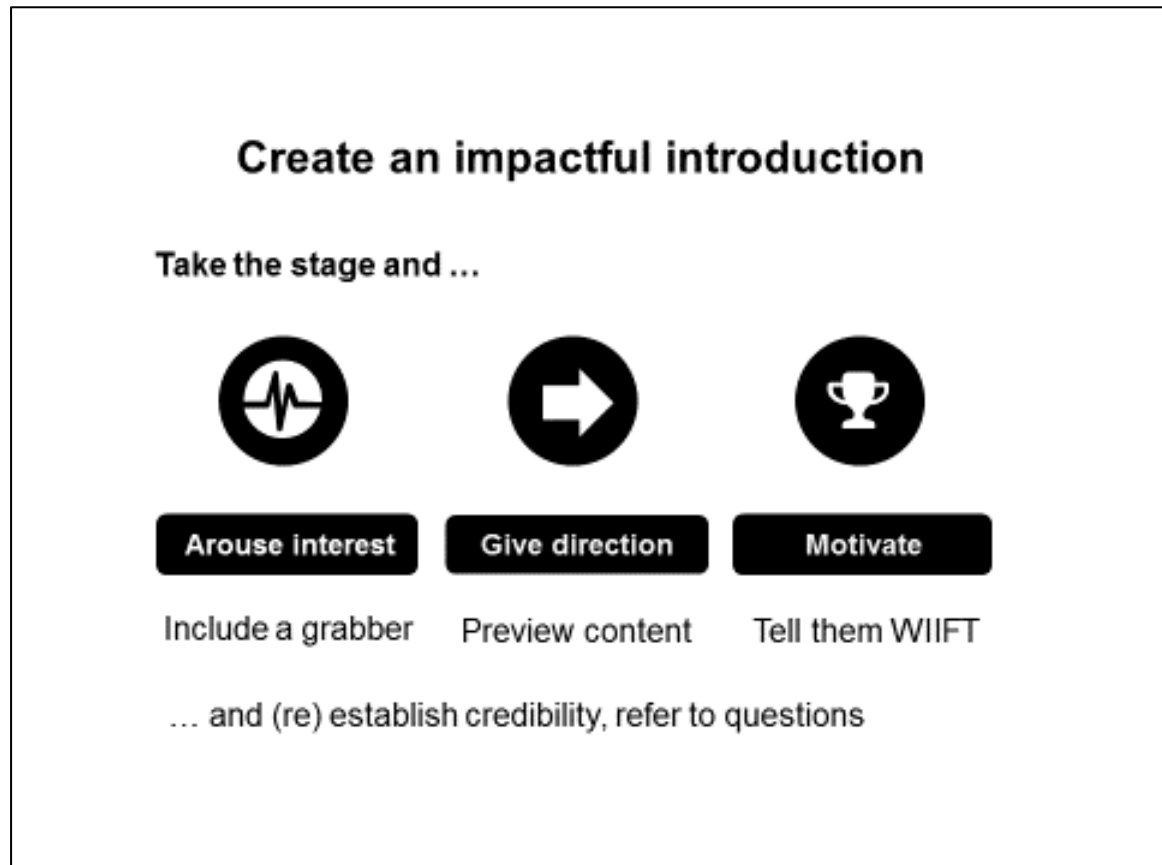
Explicit signposting between different parts of your presentation will make your audience's job a lot easier. Examples of explicit signposts are below. Notice the repetition – this explicitness helps your audience stay on board.

- *During the next ten minutes, I will present three time management techniques that are easy to use and will help you have more free time: scheduling your priorities, prioritizing your to-to-lists, and starting each day by eating the frog.* (preview at the beginning)
- *Let's start by looking at the first time management technique, Scheduling your priorities…* (details…)
- *Now that we've looked at the first time management technique, Scheduling your priorities, let's turn our attention to the second technique, Prioritizing your to-do-lists...* (details…)
- *Third, now that we have discussed how to schedule your priorities and prioritize your to-do-lists, let's focus on the last time management technique, Eating the frog…* (details…)
- *To conclude, by scheduling your priorities, prioritizing your to-do-lists, and starting each day by eating the frog, you will be able to work more effectively – and thereby have much more free time on your hands.*

3 Start with an effective opening

This section looks at how you can open your presentation with impact. We will first discuss the four key elements of an impactful opening (taking the stage, arousing interest, giving direction and motivating the audience). The section will end with a discussion of two optional elements when you open your presentation (re-establishing credibility and referring to questions).

Create an impactful introduction

Take the stage and …

Arouse interest	Give direction	Motivate
Include a grabber	Preview content	Tell them WIIFT

… and (re) establish credibility, refer to questions

3.1 Take the stage before you start speaking (key element 1)

The very first moments of your presentation, before you say anything, are the most critical. During the very first seconds, you need to build a connection with the audience nonverbally and let silence fall in to the space where you are presenting. In other words, you need to take the stage.

Getting the audience to listen and letting the silence fall usually takes about 5-15 seconds depending on the audience. This is not a long time, but most people fail to take the time and instead start the presentation too early, when the audience is still settling down and not really listening.

Only once you feel that the audience is really ready to listen to you (and you will feel this if you are patient enough; it is literally a moment when you can hear the silence has landed), you can start with impact.

Engage the audience from the first moment

After taking the stage and letting the silence fall, the very first things that you say are extremely important; the saying, 'You never get a second chance to make a good first impression' is truer than ever in this hectic world we live in.

You need to get the audience fully engaged from the very start, and help them see what they will gain from listening to you. Otherwise, they will soon lose interest and stop listening. This is true whether you are giving a short informal talk to co-workers during a meeting, or a more formal 30-minute speech in a large auditorium.

Quite often people start their presentation by something like "hello, my name is so and so and I am here today to talk to you about XYZ". Unfortunately, this is not in any way impactful, and unlikely to arouse your audience's interest.

So, how can you create interest? Below are three key elements of an impactful opening – arouse interest, give direction and motivate the audience – as well as 2 optional elements (re-establish credibility and refer to questions).

3.2 Arouse interest with a grabber (key element 2)

There are numerous ways in which we can try to arouse the audience's interest. These attention-grabbing techniques are called 'grabbers': something you say or show which immediately captures the audience's attention and focuses on your presentation objective.

Examples of different kinds of grabbers are discussed in more detail below. Whichever you choose, however, make sure your grabber meets the following criteria:

Criteria for grabbers

Appropriate for the audience. Make sure everyone in the audience can understand and appreciate your opening. Avoid starting with something that is off-topic, confusing, or potentially offensive. For example, even though humour can be an excellent icebreaker, an inappropriate joke that is not appreciated or understood by the audience will get your presentation off the track right at the beginning.

Based on the message objective. The question you ask the audience, the story you tell, or the data you show should always reflect the main goal of your presentation.

Short and to the point. Your introduction should not be long-winded – you need to move swiftly to the core of your message. The grabber needs to be concise and relevant. Ideally, you use max. 10 seconds for the grabber.

Something you are comfortable with. It is probably not a good idea to start with something outside your comfort zone. If you are not a good storyteller then you should perhaps avoid beginning with an anecdote. Or, if you do not want to get involved in a discussion at the outset, then you should perhaps try to avoid an interactive opening.

Types of grabbers

Surprise: Surprising statistics, engaging images, interesting facts or figures and controversial claims can be very effective ways to start a presentation and arouse audience interest. They enable you to target the listeners' attention to the main message of the presentation.

Anecdote: An anecdote is a short account of an interesting or humorous incident. If an anecdote is used it must be interesting, appropriate and relevant to the topic, and there must be a smooth transition from the anecdote to the subject being dealt with. It is perhaps one of the most difficult techniques for a presenter to carry off well as it relies on the presenter's ability to 'tell a good story', something which only a few people can do well.

Quotation: This could involve referring to the company mission statement, visions or values, or it could be a quotation from the CEO or a renowned expert in the field whom the audience admires and respects. A quote can be used to enhance your own credibility and also as evidence to support your position on a particular issue.

If you choose this form of grabber, you need to ensure that it is pertinent to the topic, concise, and leads naturally into the topic of your presentation.

If you use a quotation make sure it is not too lengthy. You should read through it, or at the very least give the audience time to read it. Also, open up the quotation – interpret or clarify what is written, add further comments or explanation.

Real question: This is clearly a good way to involve the audience. It also allows you to carry out ongoing audience analysis and further tailor the content of your presentation to suit audience needs and interests.

However, you need to think carefully about what kind of question you ask. Should you pose a closed question which simply requires a show of hands? Or should you ask an open-ended question to get the audience's opinions? If you go for an open-ended approach you should be prepared for the fact that you may not get any reaction at all, or the response may not be the one you intended. Also, if you get a response you did not expect, how will you deal with it and link it to your presentation objective?

Rhetorical question: Rhetorical questions, i.e. questions that you are not expecting an actual answer to, are lively and engaging: they require the audience to contemplate the key issues you want to deal with. This is a fairly easy method to exploit.

If you use this method, make sure you actually give the audience time to think about the question. Most people fail to do this, and instead jump directly from the question to their presentation. By leaving a (long) pause after the question, you can add a lot of impact to your presentation.

Samples / Exhibits: Brochures, product samples and other types of exhibits can add colour to the presentation and bring it to life. You should always consider carefully when and how you intend to use them, and what you are going to say about them. Handouts are usually best distributed before or after the presentation, rather than during when they may well become an unwanted distraction.

Humour: Good use of humour can create a relaxed atmosphere and bond the presenter to the audience. However, humour is a high-risk opener, because it may well be that the audience does not share your sense of humour. Jokes and humorous comments can backfire and end up embarrassing, irritating or simply confusing the audience. Therefore, if you do use humour, make sure it fits your own style, is appropriate for everyone in the audience, and relates to the topic.

3.3 Give direction by previewing content (key element 3)

If the message is more than just a few minutes long or involves a number of presenters, you should consider giving a brief preview of what you will cover in the body, and in what order.

Verbal signals should be used to outline presentation content, e.g.:

- *I'm going to start by recapping the main findings from the survey before going on to give our recommendations and implementation plans ...*
- *First of all Jae Lee will outline the present situation ... Then Mari will look at ...*
- *Finally we are going to present our solution to ...*

In longer presentations, you need a written agenda/preview slide to help the audience follow the overall storyline. However, preview slides can be very dry and dull if not well designed, which can significantly reduce the audience's interest toward your presentation. Here are five tips to help you in designing them.

Five tips for preview slide design

1. **Replace 'Contents', 'Agenda' or 'Index' with a more interesting heading.** This could e.g. be the overall title of the presentation.

2. **Limit the number of points**. Long lists of points are daunting and difficult for the audience to remember. So, ideally, you should aim to group ideas into 3 sections (equivalent to the three main claims discussed above in section 1). Omit 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion'. These do not tell the audience anything about the presentation, apart from the fact that there is a beginning and an end.

3. **Consider visualising the structure.** Rather than simply listing the content, try to visualise it. This will allow you to start your presentation in a more engaging way.

4. **Ensure that the points have 'stand-alone sense' (SAS).** To help you as a presenter, as well as the audience, write each item in a way that clearly conveys the content of each section. For instance, rather than writing 'Background', write something more descriptive such as 'Singapore Airlines approach to CSR' or rather than 'Issues' something more meaningful like 'Challenges: increasing costs, dwindling resources'.

5. **Consider using section slides to highlight the structure throughout the message**. In longer, more complex presentations, especially when there are a number of presenters, it may be helpful to make the presentation structure visible throughout the

presentation. You can do this by showing the preview slide before moving on to a new section. Each time the slide appears you can highlight the section that you are going to deal with next.

Another very flexible alternative is to show a 'section slide' that only has the title of the part of the presentation you are moving on to. These techniques can help the audience to follow your storyline, the red thread that runs through your presentation.

3.4 Create motivation - WIIFT (key element 4)

The audience needs to feel that they are going to gain something from the message. Ask yourself what would motivate your audience, what would make them want to listen to you. This motivator may be the promise of new ideas or information, it may be a solution to a problem they have, or it may be benefits that you are offering them. Whatever it is, the audience should be aware of it: they need to be hooked on the motivator at the outset.

In addition to the key elements of impactful openings discussed above, you may sometimes need to (re)establish credibility and tell when you would prefer to take questions.

3.5 (Re) establish credibility (optional element 1)

Rank, goodwill, expertise, image and shared values can be used to establish credibility. Refer back to the readings on communicating strategically for a refresher of what these were.

3.6 Refer to questions (optional element 2)

If you are in a position to define when you wish to take questions, then you may wish to inform the audience that you would prefer to take them during, or at the end of the presentation. Both of these alternatives have advantages and disadvantages, discussed below in section 5 that looks at effective Q&A sessions.

Of course, all of these items do not necessarily apply to every presentation. For many business presentations, rapport will already have been established and for short talks, it may be superfluous to cover the essence of the message or provide direction during the opening remarks. However, always remember to start with some kind of a grabber to get the audience interested and motivated – open with impact.

4   End with an effective closing

The way you end your presentation is also very important, because this is the last thing that you leave the audience with. What do you want your audience to remember from your presentation 24 hours later? Your ending should reinforce this.

You only have about 10-30 seconds to end with impact, so use it wisely. The worst way to end a presentation is by saying something like 'so, umh, I guess that's it', and/or having a 'Thank you' or 'Questions' slide. These add no value. Instead, think of ending in a memorable way that once more reinforces your communication objective and leaves the audience with something to think about, a S.T.A.R moment: **S**omething **T**hey'll **A**lways **R**emember.

Very importantly, signpost verbally that you are going to finish: use e.g. 'to conclude', 'to finish', 'to summarize' or 'to end with today' before you end with impact. This signposting ensures that the audience is fully attentive and hears your impactful ending. Then, have one clear ending.

There are three different ways to end with impact depending on your overall presentation content and objective.
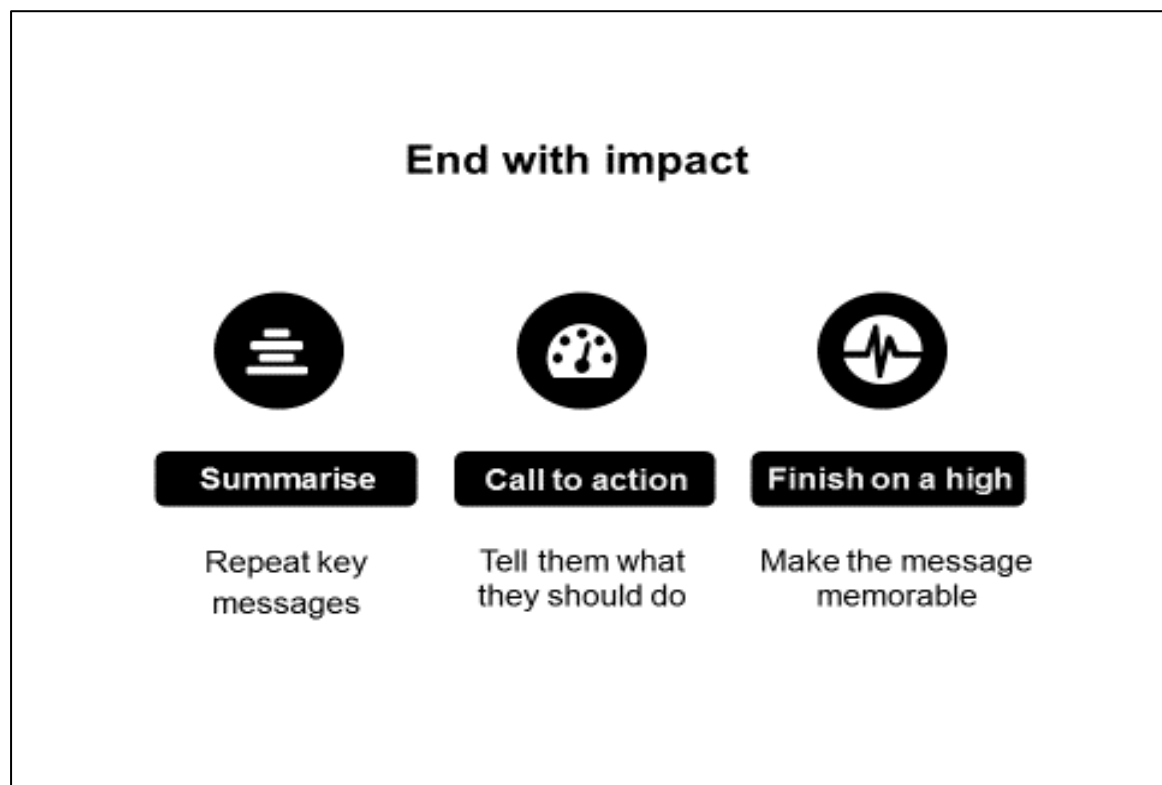
4.1 Summarize – repeat key messages

If you want your audience to remember your (three) key points, provide a very brief, condensed summary of them. Do not start repeating them in detail again; simply state them once more.

Be careful not to introduce any new ideas at the end, as this only blurs the message and may confuse the audience.

4.2 Call for action – tell them what they should do

Alternatively, you might want the audience to take some action after your presentation, as is often the case in persuasive presentations that aim to bring about change in some way.

If this is the case, end the presentation by clearly stating what you expect your audience to do, believe, or know as a result of your presentation. Sometimes it is unrealistic to expect to bring about radical change in a short presentation, so it may well be that you simply want the audience to reconsider their stance on an issue, to question their own line of thinking.

4.3 Finish on a high – make the message memorable

Sometimes, it is not necessary to end with a summary of the key points or a call for action. In a visionary presentation such as the famous 'I have a dream' speech, for example, it would probably have made little sense to start summarizing the key points. Instead, you might want to end by leaving the audience on a high note with a concluding thought. This can, for instance, be a quote from a famous person, clearly linked to the presentation objective.

5 Design visuals that support your message and add impact

Slides are used for three main purposes these days: stand-up presentations, sit-down presentations and report writing. This section focuses on slide design for stand-up presentations where the only information the audience gets is what is said and shown during the actual presentation.

Here are some of the key features and differences of these three types of presentations:

Stand-up presentations. Workshop/seminar papers, product launches, pitching sessions, project presentations to top management, CEO presenting the new corporate strategy or putting across a vision, TED-style presentations.

Sit-down presentations. Meetings where we present our ideas and proposals to colleagues and fellow managers. In these type of presentations participants will often have hard copies of the presentation in front of them. The slides will contain fairly detailed information - project plans, financial analyses, performance data - allowing for in-depth discussion of the ideas presented as well as note-taking.

Report writing. Busy managers with hectic schedules have very little time to read through all of the reports that come their way so many executive reports are now written as a PP slide set rather than a Wordy report.

Many stand-up presentations fail to engage and excite, especially due to the visuals being messy, confusing, or filled with information. In the worst-case scenario, the presenter simply reads through the slides, even though the audience can read what is on the slides a lot faster than the presenter can speak.

Poor slides like this do not work: they do not add any value to your presentation, and can even end up spoiling it, no matter how good a presenter you are. Instead of using your presentation slides as a data dump, or a script / cue card for you to read from, consider the following four principles that this section discusses:

Principle 1: Less is more - highlight only key points

Principle 2: Employ visual visuals to support the key points

Principle 3: Use animation sparingly

Principle 4: Ensure everything on the slides is visible and legible

5.1 Principle 1: Less is more - highlight only key points

The audience's capacity to absorb information in a short time is limited. Once you have decided on your opening, the three key claims, the support for them, and your ending, think about which ideas are the ones that you really want to highlight on your visuals. What kind of a visualization will help the audience remember your key claims? And what kind of visualization will make your story interesting and engaging?

You 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 purchase from selective distribution channels". The rest of the slide should then contain information that supports your claim in, for instance, a graph or chart, or key figures. You as the presenter are there to give the details, to tell the rest of the story.

Having minimal content on slides will enable the audience to truly focus on you, and you, in turn, can focus on delivering the story.

5.2 Principle 2: Employ visual visuals that support your key points

Recent research (e.g. Mayer and Moreno, 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; in Mayer and Moreno's experiments, a combination of text and illustration helped learners recall information 65% better than text alone.

Because bullet points are not very effective in delivering important information, try instead to visualize ideas as much as you can and consider carefully how many slides you actually need; 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:

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

- Decide on your key points, the ones that you really want to highlight on the visuals, and spend time to find high-quality photos that will help the audience remember them. Remember not to have pictures just for the sake of having them; every image in your presentation needs to be clearly related to the topic that you are discussing.

  Visuals that have only your key messages, supported with relevant, high-quality photos, will help you plan and deliver an exciting, interesting and engaging presentation. Make sure, however, to consider copyright issues. Use your own photos or those available through the Creative Commons License.

- Highlight your key numbers visually on slides to help the audience grasp them and to add impact, and then tell the main story behind the numbers (instead of using bullet points).

- Use only high-quality, professional-looking images. Do not use clipart or poor quality photos, as these can give a very unprofessional feel to your presentation.

- Aim for a simple design with only a few colors and an easy-to-read, sans-serif font such as Arial or Calibri that does not use serifs (small lines at the ends of characters). This also means avoiding 'chartjunk' [1]: any unnecessary lines, arrows, shapes, shading, borders, icons, and 3D elements.

- Make sure your visuals pass what Duarte (2012) calls the 'glance test': the audience should be able to comprehend each visual in about three seconds.

Of course, you might sometimes need bulleted points, too. In such cases, keep in mind the '66' rule: an absolute maximum of 6 lines per slide, 6 words per line. However, remember that bulleted lists are very easily unexciting and exhausting, and often fail to highlight what the key messages are that the audience really needs to understand and remember.

5.3 Principle 3: Use animation sparingly

Animation can be a very effective way to gently add information to graphs and charts. For example in a technical presentation a 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.

5.4 Principle 4: Ensure everything on the slides is visible and legible

You should never have anything on your visuals that the audience cannot see, as this will irritate and frustrate them. To ensure the audience can see everything:

- Use a large enough font: If you need to use 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 your text stands out from the background: there should be a stark contrast between the actual text and the background color.
- Choose photos that are simple and clearly linked to your message.

To help you prepare effective and engaging visuals, we strongly encourage you to look at good examples of effective visual design on the Internet. Here are a few websites to give you some ideas:
http://www.garrreynolds.com/preso-tips/design/
https://visage.co/11-design-tips-beautiful-presentations/
https://hbr.org/2012/10/do-your-slides-pass-the-glance-test

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[1] The Visual Display Quantitative Information, Tufte (2001)

6 Use expressive nonverbals to support the message

The initial impression that you give as a communicator is crucial. Your appearance, facial expression, gestures, body movement and/or mannerisms may have a decisive effect on the audience's reaction to your presentation as they carry a lot of the message.

With regard to nonverbal communication, by far the most important issue is that you are actually present on the stage, not only physically but also mentally, as yourself. Many people do not enjoy presenting, so they just start before the audience is even listening, run through the presentation without ever connecting with the audience, and then run away as soon as they can. Instead, take the stage, as was discussed above. Take time to build a connection with the audience, and then, once you start, be there for them.

This section looks at six tips for how you can use nonverbal communication effectively to enhance your presence.

6.1 Have a conversation with the audience, not a presentation to them

Think about your presentation as a conversation with the audience. Be yourself, and aim to gesture in front of an audience exactly as you would if you were having an *animated conversation* with a friend. Of course, if you are presenting in a large space, you may well have to exaggerate your movements a little. In any event, the audience should get the impression of a *relaxed but confident* speaker.

6.2 Slow down and use pauses

Many presentations fail to have the best possible impact because the speaker appears to be in a rush; either simply speaking too fast and/or speaking without any real pauses between words, sentences, and points. This is exhausting for the audience to listen to, and often very difficult to follow.

Instead of overwhelming the audience with speed, go back to tip 1, and think about your presentation as a conversation with a friend. You would (hopefully) not exhaust your friends with a breathless story, so do not do it in your presentation either. Slow down and use calm pauses for impact; as Mark Twain said, "no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause."

6.3 Build in calm, controlled and purposeful body movement

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

Purposeful, calm movement will help you 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).

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Here are some ways in which you can create natural movement in your presentations:

- come out from behind a desk/computer/podium
- use a presentation clicker which allows you to control the slides from anywhere in the room
- consider beginning your presentation by speaking directly to the audience centre stage before showing any slides
- blank the screen during a longer pause and move away from the PC/laptop to talk directly to your audience
- consider using the flipchart to write up key figures or to create visual representations of the points you are making
- move closer to the audience when initiating the Q&A session

Overall, avoid different uncontrolled movements. These are e.g. mannerisms such as touching your hair; fiddling with a pen; or playing with the clicker – or then any other nervous 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. Movement that is not purposeful can make the audience feel uneasy.

6.4 Use supportive gestures

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

Try to move your hands and arms as you would do if you were having a lively conversation with somebody. The recommended space for hand movements to display confidence is in between your neck and waist. You 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 your 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. Of course, this is not to say that you could not deliver an excellent presentation with e.g. your hands in the pockets; it might well be suited to some more informal contexts, and being present on the stage and enthusiastic about your presentation is in any case much more important than small details.

6.5 Use slides well

If you are using slides in the presentation, it is important to use them with impact. Two main issues contribute to this.

1. **You should only display a certain visual after you have introduced it.** For example, if you have a visual with an impressive quotation, first say something like "I would like to share a quotation with you" and then, when you are ready to actually read the quotation to the audience, click to change to the slide that has the quotation on it. Most people put on each

slide too early, in which case the audience has already had time to take a look at what is there before the presenter gets to the point. This results in low impact.

2. **Link what you say to what you show so that the audience understands the purpose of each visual.** However, be careful that you do not end up staring at the screen with your back to the audience, or giving them the cold shoulder. A good rule of thumb is to always keep your body facing the audience and only turn your head to the screen as you refer to points on your slides. The good news is that when you have visual visuals rather than visuals filled with text, it will be much easier for you to use them in a meaningful way.

6.6 Ensure good quality eye contact

Good eye contact helps you establish contact with the audience and enables you to monitor the audience's reactions. It is also equated with openness and honesty. One study[2] 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.

You should try to connect with everyone in the audience by sharing eye contact evenly: 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, you can try to ensure that you 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 being over-reliant on notes.

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[2] Hasling (1992)

7 Prepare to facilitate the Q & A

The Q & 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 further persuade the audience to accept their arguments and ideas.

7.1 Decide on whether you want questions during or after the presentation

If the choice is up to you, decide if you would like to take questions during or after your presentation. Both strategies have advantages and disadvantages:

Questions during the presentation make your presentation more interactive, which will mean that your audience might be more attentive. However, this approach may mean that you have time management problems and you are not able to deal with all the points you wanted to cover. So, you need to factor in time for questions and also be ready to deal with any unwanted digressions.

Questions at the end enable you to better control the use of time. However, this approach may mean you lose the audience's interest and attention, particularly if you have a longer presentation. Also, it means there is less opportunity to check audience understanding.

7.2 Prepare for possible questions before the presentation

Besides deciding on when you would like to take questions, you should also prepare before your presentation to anticipate the questions you will be asked, especially the critical and challenging ones, and bring along any necessary extra information (back-up slides, links, documents) to answer them.

If you prepare many back-up slides, you can also have a table of contents-slide with hyperlinks to the individual back-up slides. This enables you to move quickly between slides when someone asks a specific question that you have prepared for.

In conclusion, the key aspects of preparing and delivering impactful, engaging and convincing business presentations discussed in this input will help you in providing true value for your audience.

8 References

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