

High impact Intros and Outros

1. High impact introductions

Introductory elements

1. Arouse attention: include a grabber
2. Give direction: provide a preview
3. Create motivation: what's in it for them?
4. Gain credibility: why should they listen?
 - Indicate the timeframe / length (optional)
 - Refer to questions (if appropriate)

Arouse interest

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 a presenter can endeavour to arouse the audience's interest and attention.

These attention-grabbing techniques are known as **grabbers** (see next section).

Give direction

We should briefly indicate what we will cover in the presentation and in what order. This is particularly important if the message is lengthy or involves a number of presenters. This preview allows the audience to orient themselves to our presentation and provides us with the opportunity to justify our choice of content - why we've chosen to focus on certain topics rather than others.

In shorter presentations we can simply use verbal signals to briefly outline presentation content:

We are going to look at three main issues ... First of all Mei Ling will outline the present situation ... Then Tanja will take a quick look at ... Finally we are going to present our solution to ...

However, in longer presentations verbal cues are insufficient: listeners soon forget the overall framework that was presented at the beginning of the presentation and consequently lose track of where the presentation is heading. So, it is often wise to write up the overall presentation agenda either on a PP slide or the flipchart.

Points to consider when preparing a preview slide

Number the points. We're outlining the content and structure of the message so it makes sense to list rather than simply bullet.

Limit the number of points. Apart from being rather daunting, a long list of points will be difficult for the audience to remember. So, ideally, we should aim to group our ideas in 3 to 5 sections.

Ensure that the points have 'stand-alone sense'. To help ourselves and the audience we should try to write each item in a way which clearly conveys the content of each section. For instance, rather than writing 'Background', we could write something more descriptive such as 'CSR and Singapore Airlines in 2010' or rather than 'Issues' something more meaningful like 'Challenges: increasing costs, dwindling resources'.

Omit 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion'. These don't tell the audience anything about the presentation, apart from the fact that we've got a beginning and an end. In any event, the preview is meant to highlight the body of our message.

Consider using a 'tracker'. 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. This can be done by placing key words which refer to the different parts of the presentation along the bottom of the slide and then highlighting the words as we move from one section to the next. This can look very professional, but of course it can make it more difficult to revise presentation content.

Another alternative is simply to show the preview slide before moving on to a new section. Each time the slide appears we can highlight the section which we're going to deal with next. A third, very flexible alternative, is to show a section slide which only has the title of the part of the presentation we're moving on to. These techniques can help us and our audience to see the forest and the trees.

Create motivation

The audience needs to feel that they are going to gain something from the message. It's what Jerry Weissman (2008) in his book 'Presenting to Win' calls 'the power of WIIFY: What's In It For You'. We need to ask ourselves what would motivate our audience, what would make them want to listen to us. 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 we are offering them. Whatever it is, the audience should be aware of it: they need to be hooked on the motivator at the outset.

Gain credibility

If we have high initial credibility then we can stress or remind the audience of this at the beginning of the presentation. In fact, high initial credibility may well allow us to successfully present unpopular recommendations.

Irrespective of how much initial credibility we may or may not have, we need to enhance our credibility during our communication. We can achieve this by referring to sources of credibility such as rank, goodwill, expertise, image or shared values.

We can of course also gain credibility through our professionalism – the way in which we present our ideas.

Indicate the timeframe

Whether or not we refer to the timeframe will depend on the situation. If our potential business clients have stipulated that we have half an hour in which to present and justify our recommendations then it might be wise to explain how we wish to use that time. If we have been allotted a 30-minute spot on a seminar programme then our audience may not thank us for running over into somebody else's slot. However, time is a culturally-dependent issue. In cultures which are schedule-independent we may annoy, or even offend our listeners by trying to tie down the presentation to a strict timetable. How meticulously we schedule our presentation will depend on audience expectations.

Refer to questions

If we are in a position to define when we wish to take questions, then we may wish to inform the audience that we would prefer to take them during, or at the end of the presentation.

Of course all 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, in most situations it is essential for a presenter to capture his/her audience's attention, arouse interest in the subject matter and, in some way or other, indicate the areas which are going to be covered.

Grabbers

Criteria for Grabbers

A grabber must be

- appropriate for the audience
- based on the message objective
- relatively short
- something you're comfortable with

Examples of grabbers

Surprise	Real question
Anecdote	Rhetorical question
Powerful visual	Samples / Exhibits
Quotation	Direct reference

Surprise

Interesting facts and figures, surprising statistics and controversial claims can be very effective ways to start a presentation and arouse audience interest. They enable the presenter to target the listeners' attention to the main message of the presentation. They can sometimes get the audience to look at the topic from a slightly different perspective, one they may not have considered. This can be very effective if we want the audience to modify or reconsider their position on an issue as in a persuasive message.

Of course we must be wary of the danger of sensationalism or over-exaggeration as this may well damage our credibility.

Anecdote

An anecdote is a short account of an interesting or humorous incident. Some cultures exploit anecdotes in presentations more than others. For example, they are used fairly frequently in English presentations, in particular dinner speeches. 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 is perhaps the most commonly mentioned device in presentation literature. It 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 our own credibility and also as evidence to support our position on a particular issue.

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

It is often a good idea to read through the quotation. This way we can ensure that everyone has read it. It also allows us to interpret or clarify what is written and to add further comments.

Real question

This is clearly a good way to involve the audience. It also allows us to carry out ongoing audience analysis and further tailor the content of our presentation to suit audience needs and interests.

However, we need to think carefully about how the audience might respond to our question. We should be prepared for the fact that we may not get any reaction at all, or the response may not be the one we intended.

Rhetorical question

Rhetorical questions are engaging. They require the audience to contemplate the key issues we want to deal with. These types of questions are particularly effective if we are taking a 'need-satisfaction' or 'problem-solution' approach as the actual questions may lead the audience to formulate an answer, or series of answers, by which they will arrive at the solution the presenter advocates. This is a fairly easy method to exploit.

Samples / Exhibits

Brochures, flyers, and other types of exhibits can add colour to the presentation and bring it to life. We should always consider carefully how we intend to use the sample or exhibit and what we wish to say about it. It's usually a good idea to give the exhibit to the audience after the presentation rather than right at the beginning as this can distract your audience's attention.

Direct reference

A direct reference to an occasion or group that the audience is familiar with or something near to the audience in time, space or interest.

What about humour?

Humour is a high-risk opener especially when we are communicating cross-culturally. To begin with, it may well be that the audience does not share our sense of humour. Jokes that backfire can cause embarrassment both for the presenter and the audience. Inappropriate comments can even alienate our audience. If the opening falls flat then the presentation is off to a poor start.

Humour must fulfil 3 criteria. It must:

1. fit the presenter's personality and style
2. be appropriate for every member of the audience
3. relate to the topic or occasion

If jokes work well then they can help to create a relaxed atmosphere and bond the presenter to the audience. However, there is always the danger that jokes sound contrived and do little to focus attention on presentation objectives.

2. Powerful conclusions

Powerful conclusions

1. Repeat key messages
2. Call for action
3. Refer back to the introduction
4. Finish on a high note

Repeat key messages

The conclusion is the final 'tell them' in the traditional presentation organisation formula and it should aim to focus attention on the main ideas that have been dealt with. If the presentation has a number of main points then they must be brought together in a condensed and unified form that sums up their overall significance. We should be careful not to introduce new ideas, as this only blurs the message and confuses the audience.

Call for action

Persuasive presentations are meant to bring about change so the conclusion should state or imply what we expect our audience to do, believe, or know as a result of our presentation.

Refer back to introduction

Presentation experts argue that good conclusions always refer back to the introduction. The presenter can make a direct reference to a statement, rhetorical question, anecdote or data used in the introduction.

Finish on a high note

We should aim to leave the audience with something to think about. Here are some examples:

- The predictive close: what the future will bring.
- The authoritative quotation: quoting from a highly-respected person.
- The dramatic close: e.g. citing impressive statistics.