

# **The art of the presentation**

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Everyday millions are suffering death by PowerPoint yet our effectiveness as educators depends on our presentation skills. The following are notes to help you improve your presentation whether it be a 5 min, 30 min or one hour lecture.

### **Presentation format**

- I. Introduction (20%)
- II. Body (60%)
- III. Conclusion (20%)

### **I. Introduction:**

Use the introduction to convince the audience they should listen to you. You need to explain why they should pay attention and what's in it for them.

Attention getters:

- Startling statistic
- Fascination fact
- Stimulating question

Part of the introduction is the preview. You must explain where you are going and how you will get there.

### **II. Body:**

The body should have a few main points that are interconnected. Do not force feed too much information.

**The 10 minute rule.** The audience will lose interest in about 10 minutes and you need to work to regain their attention just about every 10 minutes. This can be done with the power weapons that slice through inattention – the weapons to use are **connectives**.

**Connectives** are words that connect your ideas together and also force you to stop and see who is not following you and get them back in line with where you are going. There are three types of connectives: **Transitions, Internal Previews and Internal summaries**. Transitions simply state what you will be discussing in the next slide or two. Internal previews outline what will come next over the next part of your presentation. Internal summaries review the points you want the audience to remember from a section of your presentation.

### **III. Conclusion:**

**A lecture is like a symphony** – you know when the end is coming. It is startling when the speaker simply announces he or she will stop there. Conclusions must be planned out just like the introduction. **Make your endings memorable.**

## Dos and Don'ts

### Don'ts

- Don't start with a joke because the audience response is unpredictable and you may then begin with the audience having a negative feeling about you.
- Don't start out with an apology for the same reason.
- Don't give a laser light show with the pointer.
- Don't use clip art.
- Don't use low resolution images that appear pixilated (< 800X600 or 480K).
- Don't use pictures that have copyright or stock images labeled across them
- **Don't read from your slides because the audience can read faster than you can speak and they cannot read and listen at the same time.**
- Don't utter those thinking sounds: ahs and ums.
- Absolutely minimize the use of bullet points.
  - **Bullets kill**
  - **Kill bullets**

The most common complaint about a speaker is that he or she read their bullet points to the audience. **People have trouble remembers bullet points** – nearly all bullet points can be converted to a memorable image. It is your job to help your audience remember the points of your presentation – and you do not achieve that reading to the audience and by reading your bullet points. **See the article “Five ways to reduce the amount of text on your slides” placed after these notes.**

A useful exercise to break the habit of **uttering thinking sounds** (e.g. UHH, UMM, OK, etc) is to practice speaking in phrases and listen (embrace) the silence. Brian Johnson who wrote the articulate advocate called this exercise “minding the gap”.

Example:

“Ask not

(Listen for the silence)

What your country can do for you.

(Listen for the silence)

Ask what you

(Listen for the silence)

Can do for your country”

(Listen for the silence)

## Do's

- Practice eye contact
- Tell stories. Much has been written on the power of story telling to transmit your ideas and view points.
- Repetition works. Repeat the information you want the audience to know. Never hesitate to use repetition. That is why pop tunes use refrains – so that you can remember the words.
- Use analogies and metaphors. Analogies and metaphors are like flypaper for the mind - they get thoughts to stick. They form a bridge from what the audience knows to the new information you would like them to understand and remember.

**Vision trumps other senses.** We are incredibly good at remembering pictures, less good at remembering the spoken word and much less good at remembering written text.

## Slide design

- **Good slide design is like a Zen Garden** (from Garr Reynolds presentation zen).
  - It is uncluttered and simple.
- Consider having only one thought per slide.
- Examine each slide for signal to noise. Seek to increase the signal and eliminate the noise.
- If it does not contribute to understanding, delete it. Beware of templates and logos that encroach on your teaching space. Logos do not add anything – so ask yourself why are you putting them on your slide.

## Rules about Text

Text on a slide should be like a billboard - big and easy to understand. Use font that is **sans serif**. BLOCKS OF UPPER CASE ARE HARDER TO READ.

## Rule of thirds.

Divide slide into thirds horizontally and vertically. The powerpoints on the slide – the place where the eye tends to look for information is at the corners of the middle box.

**Color combinations.** Use the color wheel.

Color combinations that work

- Complimentary (colors across the wheel)
- Analogous (colors adjacent on the wheel)
- Monochromatic (colors that are different shades or tints)
- Achromatic (black and white with use of one color)

**Present information – not data.** Do not do data dumps. Use handouts if you believe the audience needs to see details or large amounts of data. Do not simply handout a copy of your PowerPoint slides. If your slides are stand alone then email them and cancel the lecture.

## Tools

Slide:ology by Nancy Duarte

Presentaiton zen by Garr Reynolds

Slideshare

Flickr

Kuler (for color combinations)

Six Minutes Speaking and Presentation Skills Blog. Andrew Dlugan

Picnic – free photo editing program on line

The Articulate Advocate: New Techniques of Persuasion for Trial Lawyers. Brian K

Johnson & Marsha Hunter

Made to Stick. Chip Heath & Dan Heath

Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School. John Medina

The following is a compilation of interesting online or blog articles

## The 7 Deadly Sins of Public Speaking by Andrew Dlugan

# 7 Deadly Sins of Public Speaking

### Deadly Sin #1: Sloth

*Sloth*, or *laziness*, is committed by speakers who *fail to prepare*.

Speaking in public, whether formally or informally, is an essential activity that requires effort. Yet, the majority of people expend no effort to improve their effectiveness as a speaker. Tragically, they are content to drift from one frustrating presentation to the next.

**“Speaking in public, whether formally or informally, is an essential activity that requires effort.”**

You can avoid sloth in a number of ways:

- Enroll in a public speaking course
- Read public speaking books
- Read public speaking blogs
- Join Toastmasters or another local speaking club
- Study great speakers
- Hire a speaking coach

(By reading this article, you’re making the effort to improve. Sloth has no claim on you!)

Failing to prepare for life by improving your speaking skills leads to a chain of excuses, characterized by...

### Deadly Sin #2: Envy

*Envy* is characterized by a false belief that great speakers are simply *lucky to have been born with natural speaking skills*.

You’ve heard the excuses from your colleagues, haven’t you?

- “She’s so lucky! She’s a *natural* speaker!”
- “Hmph! It’s *so easy* for him to speak in front of people.”
- “No, I couldn’t deliver the proposal. I’m *not a speaker*.”

People who are envious of the “natural” skills of others are more likely to apply misguided solutions when confronted by an unavoidable speaking situation:

- They steal stories and anecdotes from others rather than creating original ones
- They copy PowerPoint slides from others even if they don’t *quite* apply
- They mimic the oratorical style of others and lack authenticity

Because of bad habits like this, speakers suffer from lack of confidence. They know the stories, the slides, and the words are not their own. Nervousness results because they fear being exposed, and this nervousness leads to crazy behaviors like...

### **Deadly Sin #3: Lust**

**“Please don’t picture the audience naked, especially if I am in your audience.”**

The *lustful* speaker attempts to calm their nerves by applying the common (yet terrible) advice to *picture the audience naked!*

Please don’t picture the audience naked, especially if I am in your audience.

In theory, picturing your audience naked makes them *seem* as vulnerable as you *feel*. It may provide a brief lighthearted moment to feed your teenaged appetite, but it won’t help you speak better.

More likely, it will cause an additional distraction and impede your efforts to connect with your audience. Consider this: how easy is it for you to communicate something meaningful to a room full of naked people? Can you inspire them? Impossible.

Nervous speakers who avoid this lustful deadly sin are, unfortunately, still prone to committing another deadly sin...

### **Deadly Sin #4: Gluttony**

*Gluttony* is exhibited by speakers who believe that *more is always better*.

More slides, more bullets, more examples, more facts, more numbers, more details, more words — more of everything.

Packing all possible material into your presentation and then speeding through it is flawed, despite your best intentions to provide maximum value. More is (usually) *not* better. Cognitive research shows that people have a limited capacity to absorb information. Overloading that capacity will reduce their ability to absorb anything at all! Quantity is no substitute for quality.

It is better to focus your presentation on your core message, select only the very best support material (facts, slides, anecdotes), and speak at a reasonable pace. Supplementary material, if necessary, belongs in a handout.

All of this gluttony — too many slides, too many stories, too many details — leads the speaker down a dark and dirty path towards...

### **Deadly Sin #5: Greed**

**“Speaking for more than your allotted time violates the contract you have with your audience, and that’s never a good thing.”**

*Greed* is the deadly sin of excess, and is committed by a *speaker who goes over time*.

Does this sound familiar?

- “Oh, is that clock correct? I’m only halfway through...”
- “I haven’t gotten to the good part yet...”
- “Are there any objections to cutting our lunch break in half so I can finish this?”

Speaking for more than your allotted time violates the contract you have with your audience, and that's never good. People are busy and do not appreciate having their time wasted. Nobody will complain if you finish a few minutes *early*.

If you go over time, negative emotions begin to fill the room, making you more susceptible to experience...

### **Deadly Sin #6: Wrath**

*Wrath*, or uncontrolled anger, is committed by a speaker who handles problems in the worst possible way.

As a speaker, you should always remain in control. No matter how bad your presentation is going, keep calm. Don't let these frustrations provoke you:

- When you make a mistake (even a big one), resist the urge to draw more attention to it by cursing yourself in an attempt to draw pity.
- When an audience member is disrupting the room, resist the urge to "solve" it with sarcasm.
- When the room or venue logistics fail, don't start blaming the organizers or anyone else. Instead, roll with it and move on.
- When an audience member is heckling you, do not take the bait.

Getting angry — whether at yourself, someone in the audience, or some other factor — is one of the worst things you can do. Your audience will feel uncomfortable and your credibility will be diminished considerably.

Finally, the first six speaker sins are all symptoms of the deadliest speaking sin of them all...

### **Deadly Sin #7: Pride**

*Pride* is committed by a speaker who believes that *public speaking is about them*.

**It's not.**

- It's never about you.
- It's never about your impressive accolades in your introduction.
- It's never about your dazzling delivery where you channel Churchill.
- It's never about your sumptuous slides which prominently feature your company logo beside dazzling 3-D pie charts.

Public speaking is always about the audience and the message you want to convey. Failing to put the audience first will kill any presentation. You need to perform audience analysis to discover how best to structure your presentation and deliver the message.

**"It's never about you. Public speaking is always about the audience and the message you want to convey."**

Avoid this sin by starting to analyze your presentation from the audience's perspective. Amazingly, most of the other speaking sins will go away.

- You'll recognize that you need to prepare. (Sloth)
- You will realize that you are uniquely capable of delivering your message to this audience. (Envy)
- You will trim all of the fluff to deliver a message which is focused and easy-to-understand. (Gluttony)
- You will respect the time your audience has given you. (Greed)

- You won't saddle your audience with your problems. (Wrath)

As for Lust when speaking, well... that's just silly.



The Seven Deadly Sins of Public Speaking

1. **Sloth:** failing to prepare for your speech or presentation
2. **Envy:** believing that great speakers are born with their skills
3. **Lust:** quelling your nerves by picturing the audience naked
4. **Gluttony:** believing that more words/slides/facts/numbers is always better
5. **Greed:** speaking over your allotted time
6. **Wrath:** rigidly reacting to problems and losing your cool
7. **Pride:** placing yourself ahead of the audience

## The 25 Public Speaking Skills Every Speaker Must Have

by Andrew Dlugan

Every public speaker should be able to:

1. **Research a topic** – Good speakers stick to what they know. Great speakers research what they need to convey their message.
2. **Focus** – Help your audience grasp your message by focusing on your message. Stories, humor, or other “sidebars” should connect to the core idea. Anything that doesn't needs to be edited out.
3. **Organize ideas logically** – A well-organized presentation can be absorbed with minimal mental strain. Bridging is key.
4. **Employ quotations, facts, and statistics** – Don't include these for the sake of including them, but do use them appropriately to complement your ideas.
5. **Master metaphors** – Metaphors enhance the understandability of the message in a way that direct language often can not.
6. **Tell a story** – Everyone loves a story. Points wrapped up in a story are more memorable, too!
7. **Start strong and close stronger** – The body of your presentation should be strong too, but your audience will remember your first and last words (if, indeed, they remember anything at all).
8. **Incorporate humor** – Knowing when to use humor is essential. So is developing the comedic timing to deliver it with greatest effect.
9. **Vary vocal pace, tone, and volume** – A monotone voice is like fingernails on the chalkboard.
10. **Punctuate words with gestures** – Gestures should complement your words in harmony. Tell them how big the fish was, and show them with your arms.
11. **Utilize 3-dimensional space** – Chaining yourself to the lectern limits the energy and passion you can exhibit. Lose the notes, and lose the chain.



12. **Complement words with visual aids** – Visual aids should aid the message; they should not be the message. Read slide:ology or the Presentation Zen [book](#) and adopt the techniques.
13. **Analyze the audience** – Deliver the message they want (or need) to hear.
14. **Connect with the audience** – Eye contact is only the first step. Aim to have the audience conclude “This speaker is just like me!” The sooner, the better.
15. **Interact with the audience** – Ask questions (and care about the answers). Solicit volunteers. Make your presentation a dialogue.
16. **Conduct a Q&A session** – Not every speaking opportunity affords a Q&A session, but understand how to lead one productively. Use the Q&A to solidify the impression that you are an expert, not (just) a speaker.
17. **Lead a discussion** – Again, not every speaking opportunity affords time for a discussion, but know how to engage the audience productively.
18. **Obey time constraints** – Maybe you have 2 minutes. Maybe you have 45. Either way, customize your presentation to fit the time allowed, and respect your audience by not going over time.
19. **Craft an introduction** – Set the context and make sure the audience is ready to go, whether the introduction is for you or for someone else.
20. **Exhibit confidence and poise** – These qualities are sometimes difficult for a speaker to attain, but easy for an audience to sense.
21. **Handle unexpected issues smoothly** – Maybe the lights will go out. Maybe the projector is dead. Have a plan to handle every situation.
22. **Be coherent when speaking off the cuff** – Impromptu speaking (before, after, or during a presentation) leaves a lasting impression too. Doing it well tells the audience that you are personable, and that you are an expert who knows their stuff beyond the slides and prepared speech.
23. **Seek and utilize feedback** – Understand that no presentation or presenter (yes, even you!) is perfect. Aim for continuous improvement, and understand that the best way to improve is to solicit candid feedback from as many people as you can.
24. **Listen critically and analyze other speakers** – Study the strengths and weakness of other speakers.
25. **Act and speak ethically** – Since public speaking fears are so common, realize the tremendous power of influence that you hold. Use this power responsibly.

## Reducing the Amount of Text on your PowerPoint Slides

### Jon Thomas’ Blog with tips, techniques, and research in the art of presenting and presentation design

The cornerstone to an effective PowerPoint or Keynote presentation is idea of “Simplicity.” Keeping your slides as simple and image-based as possible will keep your audience visually engaged and will help them recall your message more easily.

Filling slides with useless text can be detrimental to your presentation’s health. I say “useless” because what’s written on a slide is (or should) also coming out of the presenter’s mouth. If they’re saying it, why does it also need to be on a slide? Too much text can be detrimental because the audience will inevitably read it, thus ignoring the most important part of the presentation – THE PRESENTER! Even worse, since the audience can’t read and listen at the same time, they’ll sometimes do neither, giving the message a 0% chance of making an impact and being recalled.

Putting significant amounts of text onto a slide seems so natural though. It’s the way 99.9% are presentations are made. It helps the presenter stay on track. It aids the presenter in remembering

all the points they wanted to touch. While these points bear some truth, they're all excuses in my book. With a little education in effective presenting (and by reading this blog, you're already ahead of the game), ample preparation time and lots of practice, you won't need any text on those slides to make a killer presentation.

## **Five ways to reduce the amount of text on your slides**

### **1. Remove all text from your slides and place them in your notes section**

If you're working from a presentation you've already made, this is the first place to start. You can use the notes section while you practice presenting the slides, and even keep them near you while you present (in printed form) if you simply can't part with the text. This is also a great way to disseminate your slides AFTER you present. Thus, you're not inclined to have text on your slide because you want to use it as a leave-behind (which is often used as an excuse for using so much text).

### **2. Find an image that represents the point you're trying to make**

The sweat equity you put into it will pay major dividends. Even if your audience doesn't "get it" right away just by looking at the image, that's okay! You're right there, as the presenter, to fill in the missing pieces to complete the puzzle. Once they view the image, their attention come right back to you because you hold the valuable information. If you have text on your slide, their attention may remain on the slide as they read instead of listening to you.

### **3.If necessary, add a short title or data point**

Not every slide can be one singular image. The slide from the previous point probably needs a little more to help the audience member along. Slides with a short one or two-word title, statistics, diagrams, or quotes can be effective. A number of these exist in all of the presentations I make. Just try to keep the text to a minimum and the font to a legible type and size.

### **4.If you must, break up the bullet points onto multiple slides**

Sometimes it is required that you leave the text unaltered, or maybe you're redesigning a PowerPoint for someone else and can't personally ensure that enough preparation and practice will be done. When bullet points are entered on a slide, presenters will often put as many as they can fit, resulting in font sizes nearing single digits. Instead, ditch the bullet and put each "point" on its own slide. This should give you ample space to jack up the font size. It also prevents the audience from reading ahead.

### **5. If all else fails, you can use different colors and font sizes to highlight the important points**

Okay, so this doesn't technically reduce the amount of text, but it can help highlight the important points. Choose colors that contrast to ensure that the important words catch the eye. I like to use brighter colors, like a lime green, for the important words and darker colors, like black, for the rest. With all presentations, try your best not to compromise. If it can be expressed in a sole image, leave it that way. If it can't, use as few words as possible. Simply remember that the audience is there to hear you, so the important information should come out of your mouth, not typed on the slide for them to read.

## Brent Dykes Seven tips for using analogies.

1. Can your audience relate to the analogy?
2. Does your analogy clarify your concept?
3. Is your analogy short and simple?
4. Is your analogy boring?
5. Can you use strong visual images with your analogy?
6. Can your analogy go the distance?
7. Is there "loose wiring" in your analogy that prevents it from communicating effectively?

## Six Techniques for Presenting Data

1. Explain the data axes
2. Highlight subsets of data
3. Dig deeper to unwrap data
4. Place labels close to data points
5. Answer the "Why?" questions
6. Complement data with energetic delivery

## The Advantage of Depth instead of Width in a Presentation Jon Thomas

A major fault of presentations that is seldom addressed is the tendency for most presenters to create presentations that are wide instead of deep.

If you're presenting something, anything, that usually means you know a great deal about the subject. To use a personal example, I've been playing volleyball for 13 years, coaching for nearly 10. I know a great deal about the game, but often the players I'm coaching don't. I could sit them down for hours and hours and teach them the game of volleyball. Problem is, there's not one person in this world that wants to listen to me talk hours on end about volleyball. I'm a (self-proclaimed) interesting guy, but not THAT interesting. Even if they were THAT interested (not likely), that's simply too much information to consume in one sitting. Much of the information will go in one ear and out the other to make room for other, more recent information.

The same thing happens when a presentation is too wide. A "wide" presentation is one that covers a vast amount of information without going into much detail on any one point. It's the curse of knowledge. The presenter often knows far more than the audience, since it's their job to teach/enlighten them. Unfortunately, without a concentrated effort to reduce and simplify the presentation to a few key points, a presentation can become too wide, thus teaching them a little about a lot, instead of a lot about a little. Since the time constraint never changes (you're given 40 minutes to speak), the more "points" you add to the presentation, the less time you have to elaborate on those points. **The audience gets a shallow view of many points, resulting in few, if any, being recalled. Thus, both the audience and the presenter's time has been wasted.**

Instead, narrow your presentation focus to a few key points. Go a little deeper to explain each of those points in a way that the audience will be able to keep up with, understand, and retain. Even if your audience doesn't remember every little detail, you have a much better chance at having them retain your most important takeaways.

## 4 keys to successfully teaching a complex subject

Many people present to teach or train and sometimes the topic is complex. It may be technical, have many parts, or just be difficult. What can you do to help your audience understand and remember what you say?

I think there are four steps you can use to get the best results.



### Simplify

**The more complex the subject, the more you need to simplify.** This sounds impossible, but what it means is that you must **break down the information into smaller pieces**. Even rocket science is made up of small principles that are simple. Yes, when you put them together, they're complicated, but if you start with the complication, you'll lose everyone.

You might have to remind people of topics they've already learned. But if you clearly build the blocks that make up the entire topic, you can make learning easier and more successful.

### Repeat

**Repetition helps people remember**, but you need to repeat in the right way. Each repetition needs to have the focus of the learners. This is why writing the content on the slide and reading it makes learning harder, even though it's repetition. The two messages compete and make focus harder.

Instead, speak out the information and show it with some sort of relevant graphic. Or black out the slide (you can do this by pressing the B key while in Slide Show view). And of course, repetition is one of the values of homework exercises.



## Connect

Our brain has an easier time learning if we can **connect a new subject to something we already know**. So connect what you're saying to a familiar or simpler topic. Provide examples of the principles you're teaching or **use metaphors**. Let's say that you're talking about various ways that insurance companies calculate health insurance premiums. You talk about community-rated insurance (one of the types) and say that it's used for small companies that are just starting to offer health insurance to their employees. Then you give an example, saying, "Let's say you've owned a small company with 10 employees for a few years and now you think you can offer your employees health insurance. You go to an insurance company and they tell you that because they don't know anything about the health of your employees, they'll use community-rated insurance."

There's another side to connecting. We often don't think of teaching as an emotional activity but learning definitely is. Studies show that people remember incidents better when they are connected with a powerful emotion. You don't have to artificially add a sappy tinge to what you teach, but when you connect with your learners, they will pay more attention and value what you say more highly. Both attention and perceived value will help learning. Explaining why your topic is important will add emotional power. Showing that you care about your students will do the same.



## **Apply**

**Provide an opportunity for your learners to apply what you teach.**

Homework exercises are one way. Assigning a group project that simulates a real-world situation is another great technique. **When an audience does some activity, even a small one, to use what they've learned, they're more likely to carry the information over into their work or life.**

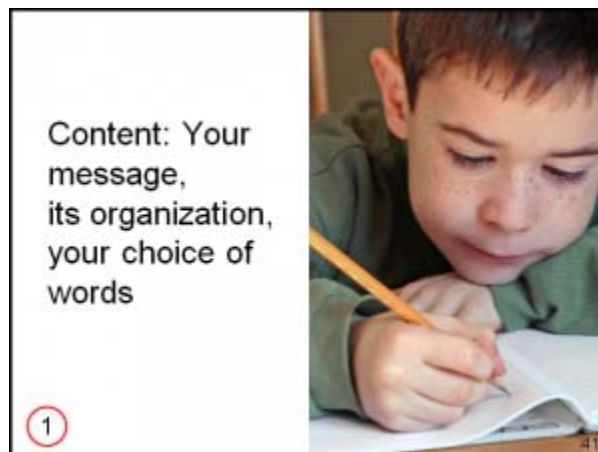
## **A quick way to design better photo slides—the 3-side rule**

Here's a quick way to improve the design of slides that include some text and a photo. This type of slide is very common. But it doesn't look very striking.



Here's the principle: **Make the photo touch 3 sides of the slide.** When you do this, your slide will look bolder and clearer. The impact will increase. And it will simply look better. There are 3 ways to make this photo touch at least 3 sides of the slide:

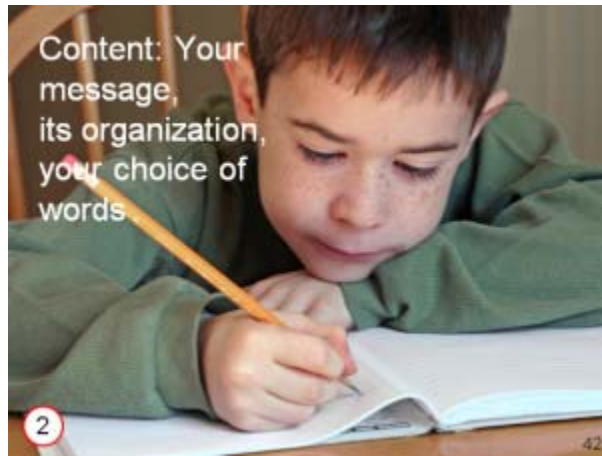
1. A vertical image covering 1/2 of the slide



2. A horizontal image covering most of the slide



3. A horizontal image covering the entire slide





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## 1. Show your passion

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If I had only one tip to give, it would be to be passionate about your topic and let that enthusiasm come out. Yes, you need great content. Yes, you need professional, well designed visuals. But it is all for naught if you do not have a deep, heartfelt belief in your topic. The biggest item that separates mediocre presenters from world class ones is the ability to connect with an audience in an honest and exciting way. Don't hold back. Be confident. And let your passion for your topic come out for all to see.

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## 2. Start strong

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You've heard it before: First impressions are powerful. Believe it. The first 2-3 minutes of the presentation are the most important. The audience wants to like you and they will give you a few minutes at the beginning to engage them -- don't miss the opportunity. Most presenters fail here because they ramble on too long about superfluous background information or their personal/professional history, etc.

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## 3. Keep it short

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Humans have short attention spans when it comes to passively sitting and listening to a speaker. Audience attention is greatest at the opening and then again when you say something like "In conclusion...." This is just the human condition, especially so for the busy (often tired) knowledge worker of today. So, if you have 30 minutes for your talk, finish in 25 minutes. It is better to have the audience wanting more (of you) than to feel that they have had more than enough. Professional entertainers know this very well.



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## 4. Move away from the podium

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Get closer to your audience by moving away from or in front of the podium. The podium is a barrier between you and the audience, but the goal of our presentation is to connect with the audience. Removing physical barriers between you and the audience will help you build rapport and make a connection.

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## 5. Use a remote-control device

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To advance your slides and builds, use a small, handheld remote. A handheld remote will allow you to move away from the podium. This is an absolute must. [Keyspan](#) has two good ones. I highly recommend the [Keyspan Presentation Remote](#). Many people like the [Interlink remote](#) as well.



## 6. Remember the “B” key

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If you press the “B” key while your PowerPoint or Keynote slide is showing, the screen will go blank. This is useful if you need to digress or move off the topic presented on the slide. By having the slide blank, all the attention can now be placed back on you. When you are ready to move on, just press the “B” key again and the image reappears.



## 7. Make good eye contact

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Try looking at individuals rather than scanning the group. Since you are using a computer, you never need to look at the screen behind you — just glance down at the computer screen briefly. One sure way to lose an audience is to turn your back on them. And while you're maintaining great eye contact, don't forget to smile as well. Unless your topic is very grim, a smile can be a very powerful thing.

## 8. Keep the lights on

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If you are speaking in a meeting room or a classroom, the temptation is to turn the lights off so that the slides look better. But go for a compromise between a bright screen image and ambient room lighting. Turning the lights off — besides inducing sleep — puts all the focus on the screen. The audience should be looking at you more than the screen. Today's projectors are bright enough to allow you to keep many of the lights on.



## 9. Use a TV for small groups

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If you are presenting to a small group, then you can connect your computer to a large TV (via the s-video line-in). With a TV screen, you can keep all or most of the lights on. Make sure your text and graphics are large enough to be seen on the small the screen. You will probably have to increase the type size significantly



## 10. At all times: courteous, gracious, & professional

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When audience members ask questions or give comments, you should be gracious and thank them for their input. Even if someone is being difficult, you must keep to the high ground and at all times be a gentleman or lady and courteously deal with such individuals. The true professional can always remain cool and in control. Remember, it is your reputation, so always remain gracious even with the most challenging of audiences.

## 1. Start with the end in mind

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**Before you even open up PowerPoint**, sit down and really think about the day of your presentation. **What is the real purpose of your talk?** Why is it that you were asked to speak? What does the audience expect? In your opinion, what are the most important parts of your topic for the audience to take away from your, say, 50-minute presentation? Remember, even if you've been asked to share information, rarely is the mere transfer of information a satisfactory objective from the point of view of the audience. After all, the audience could always just read your book (or article, handout, etc.) if information transfer were the only purpose of the meeting, seminar, or formal presentation.

## 2. Know your audience as well as possible

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Before you begin to formulate the content of your presentation, you need to ask yourself many basic questions with an eye to becoming the best possible presenter for that particular audience. At the very least, you need to answer the basic "W questions."



- **Who is the audience?** What are their backgrounds? How much background information about your topic can you assume they bring to the presentation?
- **What is the purpose of the event?** Is it to inspire? Are they looking for concrete practical information? Do they want more concepts and theory rather than advice?
- **Why were you asked to speak?** What are their expectations of you?
- **Where is it?** Find out everything you can about the location and logistics of the venue.
- **When is it?** Do you have enough time to prepare? What time of the day? If there are other presenters, what is the order (always volunteer to go first or last, by the way). What day of the week? All of this matters.

### 3. Content, content, content

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No matter how great your delivery, or how professional and beautiful your supporting visuals, if your presentation is not based on solid content, you can not succeed. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying that great content alone will carry the day. It almost never does. **Great content is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one.** But your presentation preparation starts with solid content (appropriate for your audience) which you then build into a winning story that you'll use to connect with your audience.

**A word of caution:** Though I am emphasizing how important content is, I also am begging you to spare your audience a "data dump." A data dump — all too common unfortunately — is when a presenter crams too much information into the talk without making the effort to make the information or data applicable to the members of the audience. A data dump also occurs when data and information do not seem to build on the information that came earlier in the presentation. Sometimes it almost seems that the presenter is either showing off, or more likely, is simply afraid that if he does not tell the "whole story" by giving reams of data, the audience will not understand his message.

Do not fall into the trap of thinking that in order for your audience to understand anything, you must tell them everything. Which brings us to the idea of simplicity.

### 4. Keep it simple

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**Simple does not mean stupid.** Frankly, thinking that the notion of simplifying is stupid is just plain, well, "stupid." Simple can be hard for the presenter, but it will be appreciated by the audience. Simplicity takes more forethought and planning on your part because you have to think very hard about what to include and what can be left out. What is the essence of your message? This is the ultimate question you need to ask yourself during the preparation of your presentation. Here's a simple exercise:

**EXERCISE:**

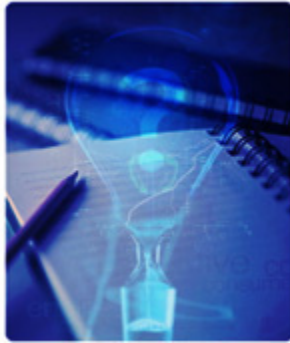
If your audience could remember only three things about your presentation, what would you want it to be?

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_



## 5. Outlining your content

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I suggest you start your planning in "analog mode." That is, rather than diving right into PowerPoint (or Keynote), the best presenters often scratch out their ideas and objectives with a pen and paper. Personally, I use a large whiteboard in my office to sketch out my ideas (when I was at Apple, I had one entire wall turned into a whiteboard!). The whiteboard works for me as I feel uninhibited and freer to be creative. I can also step back (literally) from what I have sketched out and imagine how it might flow logically when PowerPoint is added later. Also, as I write down key points and assemble an outline and structure, I can draw quick ideas for visuals such as charts or photos that will later appear in the PowerPoint.

Though you may be using digital technology when you deliver your presentation, the act of speaking and connecting to an audience — to persuade, sell, or inform — is very much analog.

Cliff Atkinson in his 2005 book, ["Beyond Bullet Points,"](#) smartly states that starting to create your presentation in PowerPoint before you have your key points and logical flow first worked out (on paper or a white board in my case) is like a movie director hiring actors and starting to film before there is a script in hand.

### More on "planning analog"

I usually use a legal pad and pen (or a whiteboard if there is enough space) to create a rough kind of storyboard. I find the analog approach stimulates my creativity a bit more as I said. No software to get in my way and I can easily see how the flow will go. I draw sample images that I can use to support a particular point, say, a pie chart here, a photo there, perhaps a line graph in this section and so on. You may be thinking that this is a waste of time: why not just go into PowerPoint and create your images there so you do not have to do it twice? Well, the fact is, if I tried to create a storyboard in PowerPoint, it would actually take longer as I would constantly have to go from normal view to slide sorter view to see the "whole picture." The analog approach (paper or whiteboard) to sketch out my ideas and create a rough storyboard really helps solidify and simplify my message in my own head. I then have a far easier time laying out those ideas in PowerPoint. I usually do not even have to look at the whiteboard or legal pad when I am in PowerPoint, because the analog process alone gave a clear visual image of how I want the content to flow. I glance at my notes to remind me of what visuals I thought of using at certain points and then go to iStockphoto.com or to my own extensive library of high-quality stock images to find the perfect image.

## 6. Have a sound, clear structure

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Take a page out of the McKinsey presentation handbook: presentation structure is paramount. Without it, your wonderful style, delivery and great supporting visuals will fall flat. If you took the time in the first step to outline your ideas and set them up in a logical fashion, then your thinking should be very clear. You can visualize the logic of your content and the flow of the presentation. If your ideas are not clear first, it will be impossible to design the proper structure later when you create visuals and/or supporting documents. Your audience needs to see where you are going. And it is not enough to simply have an "agenda" or "road map" slide in the beginning that illustrates the organization of your talk. If you do not actually have a solid road of logic and structure, then



an outline slide will be of no use. In fact, the audience may become even more irritated since you made the promise of organization in the beginning, but then failed to deliver the promise with a presentation which is muddled and lacks focus.

## 7. Dakara nani? (so what?)

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In Japanese I often say to myself, "dakara nani?" or "sore de...?" which translate roughly as "so what?!" or "your point being...?" I say this often while I am preparing my material. When building the content of your presentation always put yourself in the shoes of the audience and ask "so what?" Really ask yourself the tough questions throughout the planning process. For example, is your point relevant? It may be cool, but is it important or help your story in a very important way...or is it fluff? Surely you have been in an audience and wondered how what the presenter was talking about was relevant or supported his point. "So what?" you probably said to yourself. "So what?" — always be asking yourself this very important, simple question. If you can't really answer that question, then cut that bit of content out of your talk.



## 8. Can you pass the "elevator test"?

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Check the clarity of your message with the elevator test. This exercise forces you to "sell" your message in 30-45 seconds. Imagine this is the situation: You have been scheduled to pitch a new idea to the head of product marketing at your company, one of the leading technology manufactures in the world. Both schedules and budgets are tight; this is an extremely important opportunity for you if you are to succeed at getting the OK from the executive team. When you arrive at the Admin desk outside the vice-president's office, suddenly she comes out with her coat and briefcase in hand and barks, "...sorry, something's come up, give me your pitch as we go down to the lobby..." Imagine such a scenario. Could you sell your idea in the elevator ride and a walk to the parking lot? Sure, the scenario is unlikely, but possible. What is very possible, however, is for you to be asked without notice to shorten your talk down, from, say, 20 minutes, to 10 minutes (or from a scheduled one hour to 30 minutes), could you do it? True, you may never have to, but practicing what you might do in such a case forces you to get your message down and make your overall content tighter and clearer.

Author, Ron Hoff (["I Can See You Naked"](#)) reminds us that your presentation should be able to pass the David Belasco test while you're in the planning stages. David Belasco was a producer who insisted that the core idea for every successful play he produced could be written as a

simple sentence on the back of a business card. Try it. Can you crystallize the essence of your presentation content and write it on the back of a business card? If the task is impossible for you, then you may want to think again and get your message down pat in your mind. This too is certainly something you do before you ever begin to open up PowerPoint (Keynote).

## 9. The art of story telling

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**Good presentations include stories.** The best presenters illustrate their points with the use of stories, most often personal ones. The easiest way to explain complicated ideas is through examples or by sharing a story that underscores the point. Stories are easy to remember for your audience. If you want your audience to remember your content, then find a way to make it relevant and memorable to them. You should try to come up with good, short, interesting stories or examples to support your major points.



In addition, it is useful to think of your entire 30 minute presentation as an opportunity to "tell a story." Good stories have interesting, clear beginnings, provocative, engaging content in the middle, and a clear, logical conclusion. I have seen pretty good (though not great) presentations that had very average delivery and average graphics, but were relatively effective because the speaker told relevant stories in a clear, concise manner to support his points. Rambling streams of consciousness will not get it done; audiences need to hear (and see) your points illustrated.

## 10. Confidence — How to get it

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place of your anxiety

The more you are on top of your material the less nervous you will be. If you have taken the time to build the logical flow of your presentation, designed supporting materials that are professional and appropriate, there is much less to be nervous about. And, if you have then actually rehearsed with an actual computer and projector (assuming you are using slideware) several times, your nervousness will all but melt away. We fear what we do not know. If we know our material well and have rehearsed the flow, know what slide is next in the deck, and have anticipated questions, then we have eliminated much (but not all) of the unknown. When you remove the unknown and reduce anxiety and nervousness, then confidence is something that will naturally take the

- Weave facts and stories together for boardroom presentations
- Find the right metaphors, analogies and stories for a business audience
- Open strong and seize the audience's interest using storytelling
- Bring structure and meaning to a boardroom presentation using storytelling
- Design more interesting PowerPoint slides using storytelling techniques



## Breaking Bad Habits in Presentations

*"An unfortunate thing about this world is that  
the good habits are much easier to give up than the bad ones."*

*W. Somerset Maugham  
British playwright*



People who speak in public are often not aware of their bad presentation habits. That is until they see themselves on videotape.

If I had a nickel for every time participants in my presentation skills classes are surprised when they see themselves doing something annoying or distracting on videotape, I'd be writing this blog from my villa on a South Pacific island.

The annoying behavior videotape exposes may be avoiding eye contact with the audience, clenching hands into fists, using an abundance of filler words [*um, ah, like, you know*], putting hands in and out of pockets, absentmindedly fidgeting with glasses, hair or jewelry. Whatever it is, it's done without conscious thought.

And whatever it is, it's turned into a bad habit, often as a reaction to nervousness or fear.

Since habits are simply actions that are done so frequently they become involuntary, they don't have to be inherently bad. Luckily, the same pattern of frequent repetition can lead to good habits.

Exchanging bad presentation habits for good ones is hard work, but perfectly do-able.

Here are some steps to get you started:

- First of all, make the bad habits conscious. Watch yourself on videotape and become aware of what habits you've acquired that are distracting to an audience. By becoming conscious of what have been involuntary actions, you gain more control over them. Try and determine when and why you do these things -- in other words, look for triggers that produce the undesirable behavior.
- Clearly determine the desired replacement behavior. For most bad speaking habits, the replacement behavior should be quite obvious. But if you're not sure, consult with a public speaking coach or research the many [books](#) on effective presentations to determine the exact behavior you want to acquire.
- Pick one habit to work on. If there are multiple things you'd like to change, prioritize, picking the behavior you feel will have the most positive impact on your presentations if you change it. If, for example, you're not making frequent and meaningful eye contact with the audience, choose to work on this before you move on to eradicating *ums* and *ahs*.
- Write down a description of the bad habit and your commitment to changing it into a good habit. This creates accountability. Depending on the situation, you might make a public commitment and enlist the support of others to help keep you accountable.
- Give up your rationalizations. This is really another way of saying, "stop making excuses." Just because your peers and colleagues all say '*you know*' in every sentence doesn't mean you should embrace that behavior.
- Engage in positive self-talk and visualization. Every time a negative thought comes into your head telling you this isn't worth it or you can't do it, replace that thought with a positive statement..."Once I eliminate those annoying *ums* and *ahs* from my presentations, I will sound more professional, confident and credible." Visualize yourself giving a presentation without all those filler words and having people come up after your talk to say how clearly they understood your message.
- Be consistent. The bad speaking habit you're working to change may be prevalent in meetings and conversations as well as in formal presentations. Keep focus on it in all these situations.

- Reward yourself when you successfully demonstrate the desired behavior and frequently thereafter as you work to make it involuntary. For example, when you've given a presentation and kept your hands out of your pockets the whole time, give yourself the reward of a movie, a day off exercise or whatever would seem like a treat.
- If you relapse and have a presentation where the bad habit comes back, don't beat yourself up. Acknowledge that this is a progression and sometimes you will revert to the old behavior until the new habit is firmly entrenched. The important thing is not to let this discourage you, but keep going in pursuit of your goal.

## **The 25 Public Speaking Skills Every Speaker Must Have**

by Andrew Dlugan

Inspired by *25 Skills Every Man Should Know*, I pondered a list of the 25 essential skills every public speaker should have. How did I do?

Every public speaker should be able to:

- 1. Research a topic – Good speakers stick to what they know. Great speakers research what they need to convey their message.**
- 2. Focus – Help your audience grasp your message by focusing on your message. Stories, humour, or other “sidebars” should connect to the core idea. Anything that doesn’t needs to be edited out.**
- 3. Organize ideas logically – A well-organized presentation can be absorbed with minimal mental strain. Bridging is key.**
- 4. Employ quotations, facts, and statistics – Don’t include these for the sake of including them, but do use them appropriately to complement your ideas.**
- 5. Master metaphors – Metaphors enhance the understandability of the message in a way that direct language often can not.**
- 6. Tell a story – Everyone loves a story. Points wrapped up in a story are more memorable, too!**
- 7. Start strong and close stronger – The body of your presentation should be strong too, but your audience will remember your first and last words (if, indeed, they remember anything at all).**
- 8. Incorporate humour – Knowing when to use humour is essential. So is developing the comedic timing to deliver it with greatest effect.**
- 9. Vary vocal pace, tone, and volume – A monotone voice is like fingernails on the chalkboard.**
- 10. Punctuate words with gestures – Gestures should complement your words in harmony. Tell them how big the fish was, and show them with your arms.**
- 11. Utilize 3-dimensional space – Chaining yourself to the lectern limits the energy and passion you can exhibit. Lose the notes, and lose the chain.**
- 12. Complement words with visual aids – Visual aids should aid the message; they should not be the message. Read *slide:ology* or the *Presentation Zen* book and adopt the techniques.**

13. **Analyze the audience – Deliver the message they want (or need) to hear.**
14. **Connect with the audience – Eye contact is only the first step. Aim to have the audience conclude “This speaker is just like me!” The sooner, the better.**
15. **Interact with the audience – Ask questions (and care about the answers). Solicit volunteers. Make your presentation a dialogue.**
16. **Conduct a Q&A session – Not every speaking opportunity affords a Q&A session, but understand how to lead one productively. Use the Q&A to solidify the impression that you are an expert, not (just) a speaker.**
17. **Lead a discussion – Again, not every speaking opportunity affords time for a discussion, but know how to engage the audience productively.**
18. **Obey time constraints – Maybe you have 2 minutes. Maybe you have 45. Either way, customize your presentation to fit the time allowed, and respect your audience by not going over time.**
19. **Craft an introduction – Set the context and make sure the audience is ready to go, whether the introduction is for you or for someone else.**
20. **Exhibit confidence and poise – These qualities are sometimes difficult for a speaker to attain, but easy for an audience to sense.**
21. **Handle unexpected issues smoothly – Maybe the lights will go out. Maybe the projector is dead. Have a plan to handle every situation.**
22. **Be coherent when speaking off the cuff – Impromptu speaking (before, after, or during a presentation) leaves a lasting impression too. Doing it well tells the audience that you are personable, and that you are an expert who knows their stuff beyond the slides and prepared speech.**
23. **Seek and utilize feedback – Understand that no presentation or presenter (yes, even you!) is perfect. Aim for continuous improvement, and understand that the best way to improve is to solicit candid feedback from as many people as you can.**
24. **Listen critically and analyze other speakers – Study the strengths and weakness of other speakers.**
25. **Act and speak ethically – Since public speaking fears are so common, realize the tremendous power of influence that you hold. Use this power responsibly.**

## Six Techniques for Presenting Data

Rosling employs [GapMinder](#) to display his statistics. This is a wonderful software tool for displaying data, but the **real magic of this presentation lies in the techniques** demonstrated by Rosling. These techniques are **easy to do**, but I've rarely (if ever) seen them all demonstrated so well in a single talk. The techniques are:

1. Explain the data axes
2. Highlight subsets of data
3. Dig deeper to unwrap data
4. Place labels close to data points
5. Answer the "Why?" questions
6. Complement data with energetic delivery



Let's examine each one and compare this presentation to common approaches.

### Technique #1: Explain the Data Axes

**Common approach.** Graphs are displayed with either no explanation of the axes, or a quick, obligatory "*Here we see variable X versus variable Y*".

As Hans demonstrates, **don't assume that your audience intuitively "gets it,"** particularly when presenting statistical data.

Starting around 2:43, he devotes approximately ninety seconds to:

- Explain what quantities are on each of the two axes (e.g. fertility rates versus life expectancy at birth);
- Provide the background story as to why he chose these two quantities ("*We vs Them = Western World vs Third World*");
- Share his students' prediction as to what the data will show.

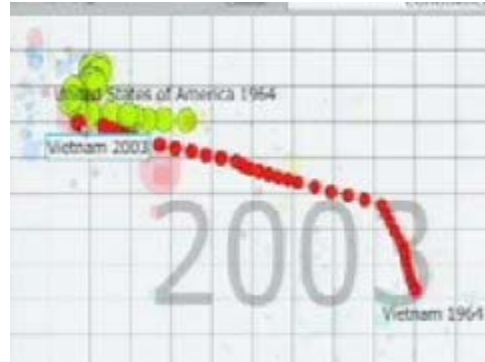


Because of this careful preparation, the audience understands the context thoroughly. A very energetic description of the data follows while the time advances the "movie" for about 45 seconds.

The “instant reply” is a nice touch which fills the otherwise empty time during audience applause, although I suspect this was added in the post-production by the good folks at TED.

### Technique #2: Highlight subsets of data

**Common approach:** Presenters attempt to explain complex data which they have studied for days, weeks, or months in just a few minutes. The audience grasps little.



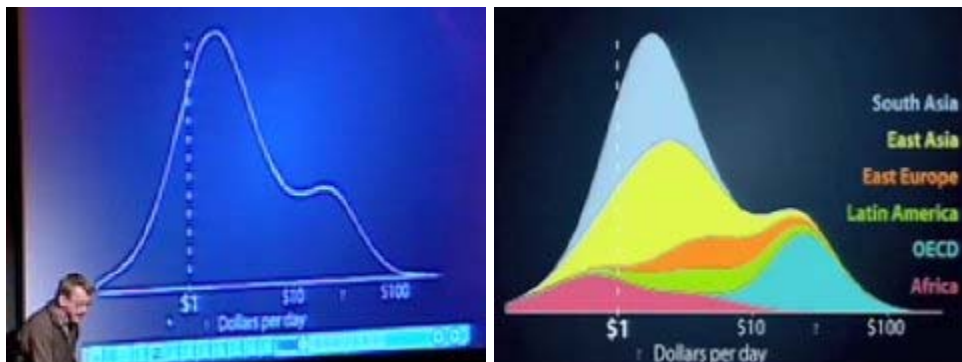
Rosling recognizes the impossibility of explaining all of the data in detail. Instead, he carefully selects and explains subsets of the data.

- **Example #1:** 1964-2003 United States and Vietnam [5:15 to 6:06] This is a clever choice as his (mostly American) audience will easily connect the early part of this period with that of the Vietnam War.
- **Example #2:** 1960-2003. South Korea, Brazil, Uganda, United Arab Emirates [12:22 to 13:40]

### Technique #3: Dig deeper to unwrap data

**Common approach:** Presenters restrict themselves to one level of data inspection. Deeper analysis is often only present in scientific journals.

Several times, Rosling displays first a high-level data view (e.g. one point for a country) and then digs deeper to lower-level view of the data (e.g. country quintiles).



- **Example #1:** Income versus population  
Compare the global curve [7:26] to the one broken down by geographic region [7:54]

- **Example #2:** GDP per capita versus Child survival rate  
Compare the Sub-Saharan Africa bubble [9:48] to the individual country bubbles [9:54]
- **Example #3:** GDP per capita versus Child survival rate  
Compare Uganda bubble [14:12] to quintile data points for Uganda [14:18]

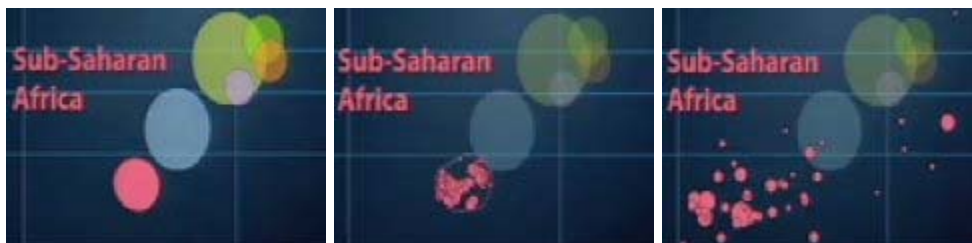
#### Technique #4: Place labels close to data points

**Common approach:** Data legends and labels are often absent. The presenter assumes that the audience will follow their verbal cues. Or, when legends and labels are present, they are often presented far away from associated data points. This forces the audience to visually scan back and forth.



Throughout Rosling’s talk, **data labels are presented right next to the data points**. An example is shown here for the [OECD](#) data point [9:28].

Additionally, the **appearance of these labels is synchronized well with the verbal** component of his speech. In this way, the visual labels complement the audio.



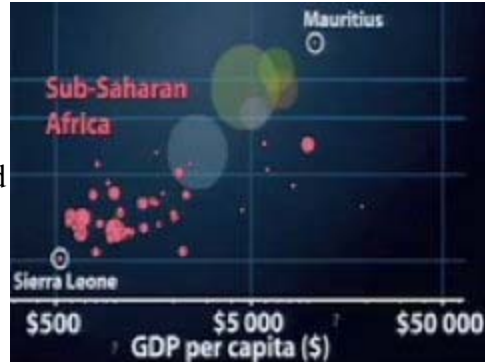
Related to this, there are several instances where GapMinder shows a bubble “about to burst” a second or two before the data is expanded. This is a subtle touch, but an effective measure to **draw the eye to the right spot on the screen**. The Sub-Saharan Africa example shown is from 9:48. Others are at 10:33 and 10:40.

#### Technique #5: Answer the “Why?” questions

**Common approach:** Large data sets are presented, and the presenter often explains only the dominant trend or the one measure of most interest. The audience is left to wonder things like “*Why is that data point there?*” or “*What caused that point to be low/high/odd?*”



Obviously, no presenter can answer every question the audience might be thinking, but Rosling does a good job of anticipating these questions. He anticipated several “*Why?*” questions, and answered them on the spot.



For example:

- Q: *Why does the progress in Vietnam accelerate in the 1990's?* [5:43]  
A: They give up communist planning and go for a market economy.
- Q: *Why is Mauritius so different from most of Sub-Saharan Africa?* [9:54]  
A: Mauritius was the first country to get rid of trade barriers. They could sell their sugar. They could sell their textiles.
- Q: *Why is China moving up and then to the right (when most countries are moving diagonally)?* [11:52]  
A: Mao Zedong bought health to China (up) and *then he died*. Deng Xiaoping then brought money to China (right).

Anticipating and answering the why questions achieves two goals:

1. It allows you to **satisfy the audience’s curiosity while also maintaining an energetic pace** (rather than being interrupted by questions).
2. It demonstrates your **credibility** and solid grasp of the subject.

### Technique #6: Complement data with energetic delivery

**Common approach:** Statistical data is often presented in a dry, clinical manner. Perhaps the theory is that the audience should naturally be excited about data?



The most memorable technique displayed by Rosling is his energetic delivery. Examples are numerous, and include:

- Highly energetic sequence as he narrates 1962-2003 fertility rates versus life expectancy [4:15 to 5:03]. This is the **highlight of the presentation** for me. The audience seems to agree, rewarding Rosling with 13 seconds of applause.
- *Spider-web* shape with his hands to demonstrate how the bubbles burst [9:55]
- Ghost-like acting to accompany “*overlooking the United States, almost like a ghost*” [18:11]
- Approaching the screen numerous times to align his arms and body with the data

The thoughtful presentation of data makes this an understandable talk. **Rosling’s energetic delivery makes it memorabl**

## Eye Contact: 10 Tips to Elevate the Effectiveness of Your Next Presentation

Posted on [September 21, 2010](#) by [Stephanie Scotti](#)



*As a presenter, using your eyes to engage your audience is critical to creating a sense of confidence, establishing credibility, and building rapport. So, what can you do to make your next presentation an eye-opening experience? Consider these 10 tips to elevate the effectiveness of your next presentation.*

**TIP # 1: GREET YOUR LISTENERS AS THEY GATHER**

Before the meeting or event even begins, an initial greeting with direct eye contact helps build rapport, turning strangers into friends.

**TIP # 2: START AND END WITH DIRECT EYE CONTACT**

Once you're introduced —but before you say a word —stop, look out at your audience directly, and smile. End your remarks by looking out, scanning the audience, and smiling.

**TIP # 3: DIVIDE THE ROOM INTO SECTIONS**

Make sure to give each section of the room equal time and energy. Look to the left side for a few seconds, then the middle, then the right. Don't neglect the people in the back!

*Hint: When looking at the back of a large room, it makes more sense to focus on a section or a head in the distance rather than trying to make direct eye contact with someone far away.*

**TIP # 4: LOOK FOR FRIENDLY FACES**

To build confidence, initially make eye contact with people who are smiling, nodding, and showing support for you and your message.

**TIP # 5: USE THE 3-SECOND RULE**

Hold eye contact with a person for 3 seconds at a time. Have direct eye contact with a number of people in the audience.

**TIP # 6: MAINTAIN DIRECT, ROVING, CONTINUOUS EYE CONTACT**

Sweep your gaze across the audience, remembering to engage with people at the very back and far sides as well as those in the front. The rule of thumb is 90% direct, roving continuous eye contact.

**TIP # 7: BE EASY ON THE EYES**

Have sincere eye contact, but careful not to drill holes through people.

**TIP # 8: SPEAK TO THE EYES**

Avoid speaking to your notes, slides, flip chart, ceiling, and the back wall.

#### TIP #9: USE YOUR EYES TO READ YOUR AUDIENCE

Remember, a presentation is more than a one-way communication; it's a dialogue with your audience. As you scan the audience, they are communicating with their eyes, their body language and their facial expressions. Take advantage of this non-verbal communication and adjust your delivery accordingly.

#### TIP # 10 : BE SENSITIVE TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

In the United States, eye contact communicates confidence, credibility and connection. People from Arab countries use prolonged eye contact to gauge trustworthiness. However, in some countries, direct eye contact is seen as challenging and rude. For example, in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, people avoid direct eye contact as a sign of respect. It will be worth your while to know this about your audience ahead of time.

### How to Axe Your Presentation... and Still Deliver Value

by [Andrew Dlugan](#)  
Aug 29th, 2010



You know your content. Success is in view.

But now, your time slot has been chopped in two.

Oh my! Oh my! What will you do?

ACK!

If you've been speaking for a while, this has probably happened to you. If it hasn't yet, it's only a matter of time.

Can you still salvage the presentation and provide value for your audience?

### **Ask Six Minutes**

Josh H. from Montana writes:

I've been witness to at least two presentations in the last two weeks wherein, the originally allotted time was hugely condensed by outside forces.

For example, an expert researcher came to talk to my colleagues about how to facilitate focus groups. She had scheduled 5 hours to present an overview, lead activities, and inspire lots of conversation. She lived 2 hours away, and was an hour away from us when her car broke down, she had to get back to her home city, secure a rental, and drive back. The 5-hour workshop turned into a barely-2-hour rapid fire lecture. This was something she couldn't have prevented.

How do other speakers/presenters/educators design flexibility into their talks for unexpected limitations?

### **Okay, let's start with what NOT to do...**

Your natural response is probably to do one of three things:

1. Quit.
2. Rush through your entire planned presentation.
3. Use all of your original time, going way, way over.

*First, **don't quit.*** Real speakers don't quit, [even when disaster strikes](#). If you quit, you will probably never be invited to speak to that group again. Your credibility will suffer. Even worse, the company or organization you represent will be tarnished.

*Second, **don't rush through the entire presentation.*** I've seen this approach, and it never works. You will be so intent on flying through your content that you'll lose all chance to connect meaningfully with your audience. They won't be able to absorb anything at all. In short, this option takes a bad situation and makes it worse.

*Third, **check your ego.*** The people in your audience have other meetings to attend, meals to eat, and loved ones to hug. They don't want to be stuck listening to you for a lot longer

than they planned. (Okay, I concede that there are *very* special circumstances where they may want you to go overtime, but I have never seen such an audience.)

## Okay, then what DO you do?

Alright, if you are still reading, then you understand that whatever you deliver must be delivered at a reasonable pace, and end when your original time slot was expected to end. How?

### 1. Chop big chunks out.

When you lose half of your time slot (or more), you can't make it up solely by cutting small bits of content here and there. You've got to chop big chunks of your presentation out.

Be merciless. Now is not the time to think about how the presentation would be better with the longer time slot. Now is the time to focus on providing value for your audience with whatever time you have left.

### 2. Plan for it.

It will be difficult to know how much to cut unless you have prepared a lesson plan — a division of your presentation into modules of (approximately) known length.

For example, suppose your presentation is planned for 5 hours in length. Your lesson plan might include modules such as:

- 10 minutes: Introductory story and session overview
- 20 minutes: Examining the status quo
- 40 minutes: 10 principles for improving the process
- 10 minutes: Break
- 30 minutes: Partners exercise
- 20 minutes: Exercise debrief
- 30 minutes: Case studies
- 10 minutes: Break
- 40 minutes: Group exercise
- etc.

If you have this lesson plan with you, it will be straightforward to prioritize modules and select those which add up to the time you have available.

In the example above, perhaps you decide to cut the “partners exercise” and the “exercise debrief”. That's 50 minutes right there. Then, you decide to chop...

### **3. Poll your audience.**

Suppose you have alternatives for material which you can cover within the remaining time. Maybe you have time to review case studies, or time to do some hands-on exercises, but not both. From your point of view, both would be more or less of equal value.

In this situation, you can poll your audience. You might say something like this: “I have two different modules planned for today, but we’ll only be able to cover one effectively in the time remaining. Which would you find most valuable?”

The audience may not be happy about your truncated presentation overall, but they will be happy that you are seeking their input. Maybe you’ll get invited back to deliver the other alternative module.

### **4. Plan two endings.**

**“Whatever you do, decide quickly. The clock is ticking.”**

We’ve already said that you shouldn’t charge arrogantly ahead and go overtime, but in certain circumstances, there is one acceptable way to go past your original time boundary if *some* of your audience *is able* to stay longer. It involves asking for consent.

Here’s how it works. Make a plan to chop modules which allows you to end on time. Consult your audience with something like: “I understand many of you have to leave at 5:00PM to make your flight, and so I’ve redesigned my presentation to end on time. For those of you who are able to stay longer, I would be happy to stay and lead an optional exercise that I have prepared.”

It’s not perfect, but it does show that you are being flexible and trying to meet the needs of as many people as possible. Those who are able to stay late (if anyone does) may really appreciate it.

### **5. Deliver chopped content in another form.**

Even though you can’t deliver the full content as planned, there are other ways to deliver it.

- You could create a handout with the chopped content, and send it out to participants via email. (No, a copy of PowerPoint slides which you eliminated doesn’t cut it.)
- You could capture the eliminated modules on video, and make it available to participants.

- You could offer copies of your book as “compensation”. (This only works if that is fair value on the same topic.)
- You could even offer to deliver the other modules at another time. I recall a multi-day conference where a presenter in this situation offered to deliver “part two” of their presentation during breakfast the next morning.

## **6. Make yourself available for follow up.**

Making yourself available to your audience after the presentation is *always* a good idea, but especially so when, for whatever reason, you couldn’t deliver 100% of what was promised to them. Maybe you could stay behind for more Q&A, or perhaps you agree to take their questions via email/phone and answer them promptly.

## **7. Be decisive.**

Make your new plan as soon as possible. (In the scenario of the broken-down car, you could be making a mental plan while driving, and be ready to implement it as soon as you arrive.) The time constraints are bound to be an elephant in the room, so deal with it by assuring your audience that you have revised the agenda. It will ease tensions, and allow everyone to focus on having a productive session.

Whatever you do, decide quickly. The clock is ticking.



## Lecturing from the Lectern

Most people love to hide behind the lectern.. It makes them feel more secure. The only reason speakers should use a lectern is to hold notes. Here are a few guidelines to make the lectern work for you.

**Don't lean.** Create some space. Step back six to twelve inches from the lectern so that you can't lean against it.

**Stand up straight.** Slumping posture will create a sloppy appearance. Anchor your feet shoulder width apart and stay grounded. If you sway back and forth, you'll look like a metronome. You don't want to put people to sleep with hypnotic movement.

**Prepare the lectern in advance.** Place a glass of water underneath it. Position your notes for maximum readability. Get familiar with any dials or buttons. Know how to turn on the reading light. Adjust the microphone. You don't want to fumble with the panel.

**Don't staple your notes.** Place your manuscript to the left. Slide the top page from the left to the right. This will prevent the noisy flipping of pages.

**Gesture high and wide.** The lectern is a barrier. If your gestures are waist high, your audience won't see them. If you don't use gestures, you'll appear stiff.

**Push your energy.** You're not entirely visible and you're reading your notes. So increase your vocal variety and enthusiasm. It may seem exaggerated to you, but it will sound just right to the audience.

**Step to the side of the lectern.** Don't stay glued behind a wall of wood. Begin your presentation by stepping out in front to make your opening remarks. Then step behind the lectern to begin your speech. Find places where you can come out once again by telling a short story or giving an example. This helps you to connect with the audience.

**Adjust the lectern for height.** In some cases you may be able to request a special lectern if you're very tall or very short. If you're shorter than 5 feet three inches, you may want to stand on a platform behind the podium to give you added height. Another option is to use a table podium.

Don't make the lectern a barrier between you and your audience. Practice these principles for a polished presentation

## 11 ways to use images poorly in slides



As digital cameras have become ubiquitous, and cheap (or free) photo websites plentiful, more people than ever are using images in presentations. Images are not appropriate for every kind of talk, but even when images are appropriate (such as keynote/ballroom style presentations), people are still making the same common mistakes. So here are some things to keep in mind if you use images in your next talk. (*Get a larger version of the "slides" image [here.](#)*)

### Case study: a single slide

Let's imagine you are preparing a presentation for a large audience on current issues in Japanese education. One issue facing schools and universities in Japan today is the decreasing number of potential students due to fewer children being born. So our sample slide touches on the low fertility rate in Japan in this context. You could either use a full-bleed image like the one on the left below or a smaller image of a photograph of a school yard in Japan as seen on the slide on the right below. If you chose the slide on the right you could also have a simple line chart fade in as you talk about the declining rate as a long-term trend.



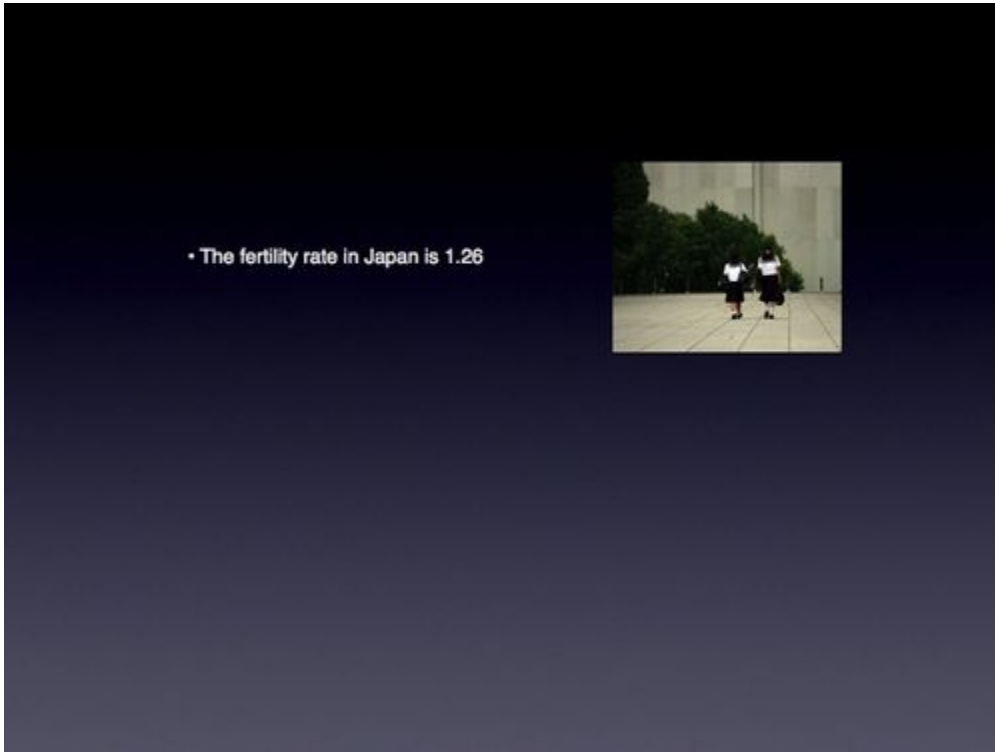
### The common mistakes

For our sample here we'll use the photo on the left above as a starting point. How many different ways could we use the same image (at different resolutions)

inappropriately or use a different image in a way that is less effective than the one on the left? Here are eleven common mistakes:

**(1) Image is too small**

You do not have to go full bleed with an image, but this particular image does not work at a such a small size (The slide is 800x600, this image is 183x152.)



**(2) Image is placed randomly on slide**

The image may be large enough now to be seen easily, but it's put willy-nilly on the slide. Usually this results in the text getting lost in the background (though in this case the text is still legible). Looks accidental.



**(3) Image is almost full-screen but not quite**

Again, nothing should look accidental. This looks like they were going for the full-bleed background image effect but just missed. Now the software background template can be seen just enough to become a bit of noise



**(4) Image is of poor quality (pixelated)**

This is all too common. This happens when you take a low-rez jpeg (from a website, for example) and stretch it out. Oh, the humanity!



**(5) Image is of poor quality & contains watermark**

Even worse is to take a free comp from a photo website and stretch it out. This introduces distracting visual noise (and says you are either cheap, lazy, or both). If you cannot afford images (or do not have a camera, etc.), then it's better to use none at all.



**(6) Image is stretched horizontally & distorted**

This is all too common. This occurs when people stretch out an image to make it "fit."



**(7) Image is stretched vertically & distorted**

This becomes a distraction and looks odd. Are young Japanese students really 8-feet tall these days?





**(8) Presenter tiles image**

Just because the software lets you tile an image, does not mean you should use this feature. Now the background image has too much salience (even if it did not have watermarks).



**(9) Clip art is chosen**

Avoid off-the-shelf clip art (though your own sketches & drawings can be a refreshing change if used consistently throughout the visuals).

## Fertility rate in Japan

# 1.26



Source: WHO

### (10) Image is lame & has nothing to do with content

Not sure what two guys shaking hands in front of a globe has to do with the fertility rate in Japan. Yet even if we were talking about "international partnership" the image is still a cliché.



**(11) Background image has too much salience (text hard to see)**

Sometimes the image is actually a pretty good one but it just needs a bit of editing so that the text will pop out more. The slide on the left below is not horrible but the balance is off and the text does not pop out as much as it could. For the slide on the right below, the image is cropped for better balance, giving more space for the text to breath (and a transparent box is added to help the text pop out a bit more, though there are other ways to do this).



**Text & images**

Text *within* images is but one way to use text/data and images harmoniously. As

always, much depends on the topic and the context. Images can be very powerful and effective if used with careful intention. The question is not do you have too many? or too few? but rather what's your intention? You can give a good presentation without any images at all, but if you do use images in slides, try to keep these eleven tips in mind.

There are clearly more than eleven ways to use images inappropriately, what are some of the ones that you have observed over the years? Would love to hear your stories

## **5 Steps To Keep Your Presentation Within Time**

It's really not that hard to finish your presentation on time. Just follow these five simple steps:

### **#1 — Know Your Allowed Time**

Have you ever heard a speaker walking away from a venue muttering: "I thought I had longer"?

This is the result of poor communication between the speaker and the event organizer. Both the speaker and the event organizer end up looking bad in this scenario.

Make sure you are always aware of how long you have to speak. Verify with the event organizer before the event.

### **#2 — Plan Your Content and Edit as Necessary**

For many speakers, the problem is not knowing how much time the audience is giving them. The problem is being unreasonable with how much they can say within that allotted time.

Most people overestimate how much material they can adequately cover within a given time. They want to "share everything" and "leave nothing back". On the other hand, the wise presenter develops strong self-awareness about how long it takes to effectively deliver their message.

When you are planning, also consider:

Q&A: Allow time for audience questions, either within your presentation or at the end.

Activities: Allow adequate time for any planning audience activities or exercises. One of my challenges is that I tend to underestimate how long it takes to explain an activity and “break into groups” before the exercise even starts.

Breaks: For longer presentations, budget time for breaks for stretching, bathroom visits, coffee, or meals. This all comes out of your allotted time. In a typical full-day (8-hour) training course, for example, you might only have 6 hours of instruction once you subtract out all of the breaks.

Cut mercilessly to make sure the material you intend to deliver can be delivered within your time constraints. It’s better to present the appropriate amount at a pace which the audience can absorb rather than whizzing through too much material so the audience grasps nothing.

### #3 — Rehearse Effectively

Until you gain experience as a speaker, you may not be able to accurately gauge how much content fits within a given time. For example, how many pages would you write if delivering a 30 minute commencement address? How many case studies can you cover in a lunch-time seminar?

“If you go over time while rehearsing, you’ve got to cut material.”

The best way to measure how long it will take is to time yourself while you rehearse effectively:

Rehearse standing up and speaking out loud. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that you can just “whisper” your way through your slides while sitting in front of your computer. Your pace will be different while standing.

Speak to a test audience, even if all you can arrange is one person. This eliminates the tendency to “practice within yourself” as some speakers do while rehearsing. Just one audience member forces you to make eye contact and look for audience feedback. It also simulates a bit of the pressure you may feel with a real audience. You can also get valuable feedback by asking “How was my pace? Did I go too fast?”

Make it as close to the real thing as possible. If you'll be using a presentation remote to advance your slides, then rehearse with one. If you'll be moving around in the "real presentation", then do so as you rehearse. If you can rehearse in the room where you'll be presenting, do so. The more closely you can mimic the real thing, the better your time estimate will be.

Make it a dress rehearsal. If I'm planning to wear a suit when presenting, I like to rehearse in one. For me, the act of dressing up creates the same nervous energy and tends to give me more accurate timing.

Rehearsing in this way allows you to accurately time your presentation under close-to-real circumstances. If you go over time while rehearsing, you've got to cut material.

#### #4 — Start on Time

How many times have you seen a presenter ask for "just 5 more minutes" at the end of a one-hour presentation, despite having started ten minutes late?

Do everything in your power to start on time. Arrive early, sort out your technology, and make sure everything is set to go when your time starts. Don't waste a moment.

Your exact start time isn't always within your control. For example, I know of one company where "lunch-time seminars" always start at 12:15. If you are invited to speak in this forum, you've got to know that. A thorough discussion with the event organizer should reveal this.

#### #5 — Measure Your Progress and Adjust

For short speeches (say, under 15 minutes), you can probably just launch into it and hit your end time target within reason (assuming you have rehearsed it).

Want to learn more?

For 7 tips on cutting your presentation on the fly, read [How to Axe Your Presentation... and Still Deliver Value](#).

For longer presentations, however, you can use a more strategic approach:

As you rehearse your content, note how long it takes for each "block" of your presentation. (Get someone to time you if necessary.)

This gives you a number of intermediate time targets. For example:

12:05 – Start presentation

12:15 – Introduction and case study introduced

12:30 – Case study and lessons learned complete

12:50 – Live demonstration complete

12:58 – Q&A complete. Applause.

Write down these targets and have them with you as you present, perhaps on a small notepad by your water. (I do it with red pen and big letters.)

As you reach the end of each “block”, check the clock. If you are running behind, you can adjust your pace. For example, if you are starting the live demonstration at 12:35, then you know you are 5 minutes behind, and you’ll have to cut planned material to “catch up.”

If necessary, recruit an assistant with a watch to help you monitor your intermediate targets.

### Summary

Speaking over your allowed time is disrespectful and will annoy at least some people in your audience. It’s a privilege to have their attention, whether it’s for 5 minutes or 5 hours. Don’t abuse it! End on time — every time.