

## Planning a Presentation

### Gathering Material

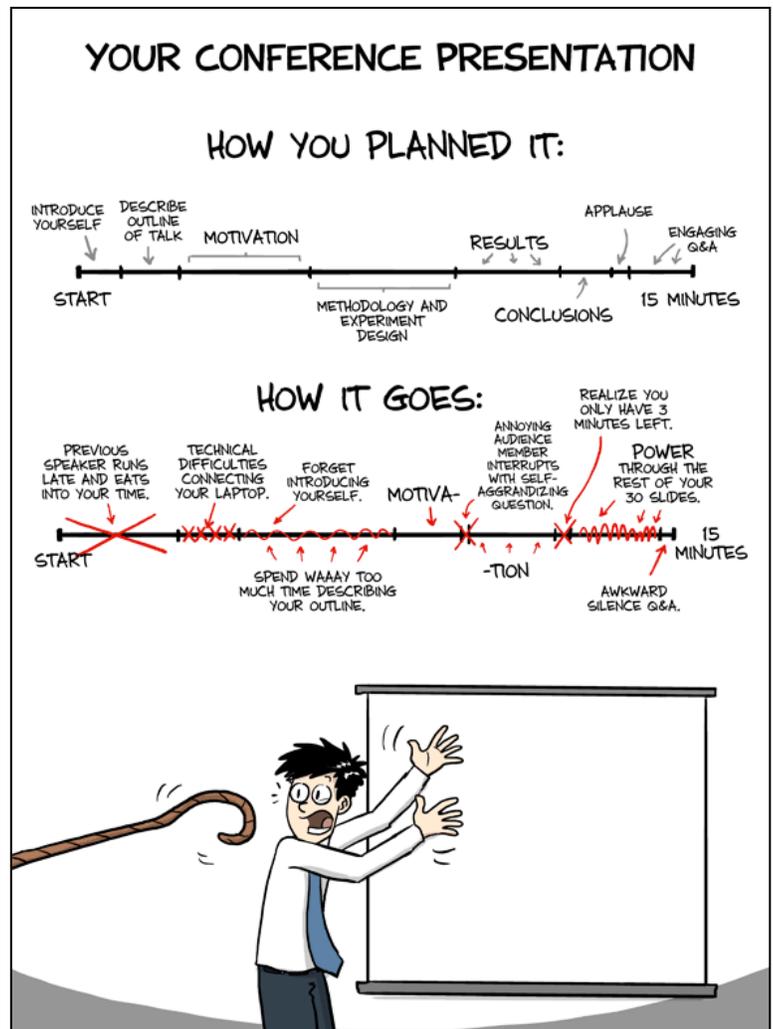
Although each lecture and presentation you give will likely be on a different topic, you can still have a readymade file of standard material that can be applied to any number of situations. This standard material can include anecdotes, stories, or opening lines. A physical file folder or box can be used to store anything from news clippings to cartoons to facts and figures. “Developing an eye for what might be useful in the future is about combining your past experience with the knowledge of what you aspire to present upon, some way down the line” (Theobald, p. 28). Always thinking about what might work for a presentation in the future will help make the process of planning a new presentation easier and more satisfying.

### Relevance

Presentations are more engaging when they are seen as relevant and current. Use recent news items to make abstract concepts more approachable. Even trivia, like a good joke about a celebrity gaffe or Internet meme, can help connect with your audience. When explaining your material using comparisons or metaphors, use something that is common and relatable. “An example is the way that presenters often represent the size of something, relating it to ‘equivalent to the area of four football pitches’” (Theobald, p. 27).

### Individuality

Your presentations should reflect your personality and interests. Students are interested in who you are as a person, and if your lectures reveal a bit about yourself along with the content, they will find them more engaging and memorable. Use personal stories to illustrate points. Students and colleagues will always be interested in hearing about experiences you yourself have had in work or in research. Give all your presentations a personal touch, rather than relying on recycled textbook examples. “Where possible, try to find your own unique way of describing things, rather than relying on what has gone before” (Theobald, p. 27).



Credit: "Piled Higher and Deeper" by Jorge Cham

## Research and Statistics

Statistics and infographics can be great additions to any presentation, however they should be kept as simple as possible. Don't overload your slides with data. The detailed facts and figures for any given topic can be shared with students as course readings, but as illustrations for your points in a lecture they can be confusing and hard to process on the spot. To determine the most effective supporting data for your presentation, "do a self-audit where you consider the type of subjects you are most often asked to talk about, then set aside time to find out some interesting facts" (Theobald, p. 27). This will ensure that you are prepared to address the most relevant points without overwhelming your students.

## Quotations

Including quotes can be a fun way of introducing a topic or making a point. However, they need to be chosen and then placed carefully. When selecting a quote, "strip the quote bare, uncover its real meaning and only then can you decide if it fits with your own content. An irrelevant quotation is worse than not using one at all." Keep in mind length and complexity—one-liners are best in presentations, as they are the easiest to digest quickly. "If your chosen quotation is longer than that, it had better be making a substantial point and one that your audience will be able to follow" (Theobald, p. 31).

## Humor

Humor is the fastest and easiest way to win over an audience, however being funny is hard work! If you want to inject some humor into your presentation, the first thing to consider is your audience. "Begin with stories; they are safer. If you master this art and are brave enough, move on to telling jokes, but make them relevant" (Theobald, p.60).

## Stories

Stories can bring your content to life! Not only are they engaging, but they also improve retention, both for the students and for yourself. Stories can give your lecture a flow that makes the content easier to remember. Theobald outlines the benefits of storytelling as follows:

- *You can make a long-term impact:* "The very fact that people might be able to recall what you told them in story form, much later on, shows that your presentation has the ability to affect behaviors or attitudes far into the future."
- *Stories can make you seem more human:* "Really good presenters often have a clutch of stories that they tell 'against' themselves. Showing our own frailty says to an audience that we are all fallible; we are all in this together."
- *Stories provide anchors:* "Make sure the stories you choose are relevant to the rest of your content and you will have much less trouble remembering your speech. You might simply recall the stories, but then build upon them – you will have a ready-made outline."
- *"A story brings light and shade:* When the content your delivering is heavy going, it is great to be able to lighten the mood and tenet of the speech with a good story."
- *"Storytelling can add to your confidence:* Having some tried and trusted elements of presentation to fall back on is a great confidence booster" (Theobald, p. 46)

Telling a great story requires practice. This is the type of skill that comedians and entertainers dedicate their lives to learning. For ideas on delivery and structure, listen to stories from your favorite storytellers. Hundreds of episodes of storytelling shows like “This American Life” and “The Moth” are freely available for download. Some more tips for improving your storytelling are as follows:

- *Know your story.* If you can’t follow your own narrative, neither will your audience.
- *Stick to the important stuff.* “Whether fact or fiction, the important lesson is to tell what is relevant and leave all the other stuff to one side.”
- *“Paint a picture... fill in the kind of detail that will give your listeners a real sense of what was happening.”*
- *Watch your pacing.* Your “tone of voice, speed, variation, and a sense of drama will change according to circumstances.”
- *Make connections.* “There may be an obvious moral at the end, but if not, be prepared to spell it out. In a presentational context, you need to be able to relate your story directly to the content you are delivering.”
- *Practice, practice, practice.* If you have the opportunity, take your stories out for a few dry runs before using them in a lecture. If you can corner some friends at a bar and gauge their reaction, you’ll get a chance to see what works and what doesn’t (Theobald, p. 50).

### ***Planning Your Presentation***

According to Rotondo and Rotondo, you should ask yourself three questions before you begin scripting out a presentation:

1. What do I want my audience to gain?
2. What might they already know about my topic?
3. What is the objective of the presentation? (p. 14)

When faced with a blank piece of paper and no idea of how to start, begin with your overarching concept for the lecture and then break it down into manageable pieces. One method of doing this is the “list of three” rule. Try to limit yourself to three main points and then three sub-points to each point. This strategy will keep you focused, disciplined, as well as making your content easier to remember. When possible, use alliterative keywords for your three points. These will not only stick with your audience, they will improve your recall as well (Theobald, p. 39).

Once you have your main points worked out, convert it into an outline. Look over your topics and think about the best way of organizing them. Rotondo & Rotondo present this list of potential formats with which to organize your presentation:

- *Chronological:* recount events in order
- *Narrative:* using storytelling methods to lead the audience on a journey
- *Problem/solution:* state a problem, present the reasons, suggest solutions, summarize
- *Cause/effect:* states the cause and explains the effect(s)
- *Topical:* breaks the main topic down into subtopics
- *Journalistic:* divides the content into who, what, where, when, why and how (p. 23).

Give yourself a number of “break points” throughout your presentation. These are places that allow for you to adjust the length of your presentation. A break point can be a video clip, or a short activity for the audience. These can either give you the time to assess your progress in the presentation while the audience is otherwise engaged, or they can be removed should you sense you are running overtime or that you will need more time to cover a complex point (Theobald, p. 82).

## Visual Aids

These can be either visual aids for your audience, for you to use a prompts, or both. The simplest of these is the humble cue card, followed by the low-tech flip chart, and the ubiquitous PowerPoint presentation.

## Flipcharts

The flipchart may not have the high tech capabilities of a product like PowerPoint, however with a flipchart you will never have to worry about technical difficulties ever again (or at least anything worse than a dying marker). With no fear of crashed computers or compatible files, flipcharts are ready to go at all times. Tips for using flipcharts in your classroom:

1. *Prepare the flipchart ahead of time!* You can do this at home or just before the presentation. If you have a page that you want to flip to easily, mark it with a sticky note. If you have any important points you want to remember, write them in faint pencil on the page and you can jog your memory without anyone being the wiser.
2. *When writing on the flipchart, try to stand to the side of the easel and reach across.* This will help you avoid presenting the audience with your back or preventing them from seeing what you’re writing.
3. *Keep your own contributions to the flipchart simple, just a few bullet points or a drawing.* However, if you brainstorm an idea with the audience, it’s okay to end up with a cluttered sheet, as it shows how many fantastic ideas have been generated. As the presenter you will then have to make some sense of it” (Theobald, p. 74).

## PowerPoint

You can use visual aids to organize, outline, develop, and time your content. With PowerPoint and cue cards, the presentation is easily rearranged and material can be quickly added and removed. Don’t overload your slides or cards with information. Instead use short points that will prompt your memory. As you hone your presentation further, these descriptions should get more and more succinct.

Too many PowerPoint presentations consist of the presenter reading large portions of text directly off the slide. However, if the students can get by with just the slides, they don’t need you. Strip the slides down as bare as possible. Theobald provides the following exercises for developing presentations in PowerPoint:

1. Try compiling a presentation where each slide contains just a single word.
2. Try compiling a presentation where each slide contains just a single image (Theobald, p. 36).

Beyond "keep it simple," there are a few tips that can help keep your slides clear, effective, and accessible:

1. Avoid premade templates and clipart - your students will have been subjected to the same material a million times over and there will be nothing to make your content memorable or engaging.
2. Use high quality photographs or images that pop!
3. Avoid sound effects, distracting backgrounds, or gratuitous animations and transitions.
4. Pick high contrast colors for the text and background of your slides. Keep the number of colors in your presentation to a bare minimum.
5. Use sans-serif fonts, as they are easier to read. Keep the number of fonts in your presentation to a bare minimum.
6. Emphasize text with *italics* rather than underlining. Underlines can obscure letters and make text difficult to read.
7. Use a large font size. The bigger the classroom, the larger the font. Don't use anything smaller than 28-point. Large lecture theatres may require a 40-point font.
8. Leave a border around any text. Projectors may cut off the edges of your slides. If your presentation is recorded, captions for the visually impaired may be added, obscuring the bottom portion of the slide.
9. Cite your sources. Be a model of academic integrity for your students and provide them with a list of works cited in your PowerPoint slides. This can be included in the notes section of the final slide. (Kapterev, Delwiche & Ananthanarayanan, and the University of Western Ontario)

If you want to provide your students with some material to take away with them, you can try the following:

1. Use the slide notes field for more detailed content, then print or PDF the slides with the notes visible.
2. Create a handout with the text you want them to study, rather than cramming it into your slides. You can even put a thumbnail of each slide next to the relevant content to help prompt their memory of what you said in your lecture (Rotondo & Rotondo, p. 47).

## Rehearsal

Running through your presentation out loud is the most effective method of rehearsing. It's only then that you can learn your material, correct your pace, and improve upon any elements that suddenly seem lacking.

To help commit your presentation to memory, Theobald has provided the following memory tips:

- “*Turn the entire presentation into a story in your head.* If there is a narrative flow, you will remember what’s coming next much more easily”
- “*Use alliteration on your main points.* The points are much easier to remember in that format.”

- “*Divide up your script and learn it in bite-sized pieces.* Try to master one section completely before moving on to the next. Learn the start and end sections before anything else.”
- “*Commit your speech to a recorded format.* Most mobile phones have this facility. When you listen back in the car, on your commuter journey or when cooking dinner, try to anticipate the next bit before it arrives.”
- “When you have a reasonable working knowledge of the presentation, *try a dummy run*, making quick mental notes of the bits you struggled over” (p. 85)

## ***Delivering Your Presentation***

Do a final check of your presentation. After you have all your material assembled and arranged, make sure you have met the following conditions. The presentation should first:

- *Tell your audience what you are going to tell them.* “This sets up the presentation and manages the audience’s expectations. It also ‘trails’ what’s coming up.”
- *Tell them* (the body of your presentation should follow the outline you just presented)
- *Tell them what you’ve told them:* the end of your presentation should review and summarize the content of the presentation you just made (Theobald, p. 38).

To calm your nerves before delivering a presentation for the first time, keep this checklist in mind:

- *Prepare:* have a backup strategy for when the projector won’t work or the classroom is out of whiteboard markers
- *Practice:* the more familiar you are with your material, the easier it will be
- *Stay in control:* set the tone for your presentation from your opening line
- *Be early:* give yourself adequate time to set up
- *Avoid stimulants:* coffee will only add to your heart rate
- *Hydrate:* keep water handy at all times
- *Concentrate:* once you get past your opening bit, the rest will flow (Theobald, p. 113)

## ***Evaluating Your Presentation***

Once you have finished presenting your material, make sure to ask for questions. You might get no questions, multiple questions on one specific point, or questions that come completely out of left field. Each of these situations should inspire you to reflect upon your presentation.

If you’ve finished a big lecture and the students have no questions, ask yourself:

- Was my presentation at the appropriate level of difficulty? Was it too simple or too complex?
- Did I present myself as being open to questions or comments?
- Did I present for too long, trying the patience of the students?

If you get several questions about one specific point in the presentation, consider the way you presented the content:

- Was the content relevant and appropriate to the course?
- Was the information organized efficiently and presented clearly?
- Did I provide examples?

If you get questions that seem to come out of left field, i.e. somewhat related to your presentation, but not to anything you specifically said, ask yourself:

- Should these questions have been addressed by the original presentation? If so, should they be added in the future?
- Did the students think the lecture was going to be on something else? If so, is there a way to more clearly indicate the purpose of the lecture before it begins? (Rotondo & Rotondo, p. 168)

## ***Work Cited***

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