

## CHAPTER 16

# PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint is the jacks-or-better of the corporate world—you've got to have it in order to stay in the game. Just try giving a seminar without PowerPoint or showing up at a meeting with, gasp, paper handouts. I live in mortal fear that my eulogy will be delivered as a broken PowerPoint stack. (*Damn it. Can't anyone get this projector to work?*)

PowerPoint gives the patina of professionalism to even the most amateur presentation. A few snappy bullet points, a stately background, and voilà—you've turned Fox into the BBC. PowerPoint presentations obfuscate facts, hide evil, and stifle questions. The devil is in the lack of detail. Everyone knows it, but everyone plays along anyway. Despite it all, you must master the art of PowerPoint presentations.

When asked to present some slides about your new invention to the vice-president of research and development, you might just be at a defining point in your career. Will you grab the funding, or will you get bogged down in a morass of mediocrity?

## The Golden Rule of Presentations

Your ideas will fall flat if you cannot keep your audience's attention.

## PowerPoint and the CEO

"We had 12.9 gigabytes of PowerPoint slides on our network. And I thought, What a huge waste of corporate productivity. So we banned it. And we've had three unbelievable record-breaking fiscal quarters since we banned PowerPoint. Now, I would argue that every company in the world, if it would just ban PowerPoint, would see their earnings skyrocket. Employees would stand around going, 'What do I do? Guess I've got to go to work.'" [Scott McNealy, CEO of Sun Microsystems, in an August 1997 interview with the *San Jose Mercury Times*.]



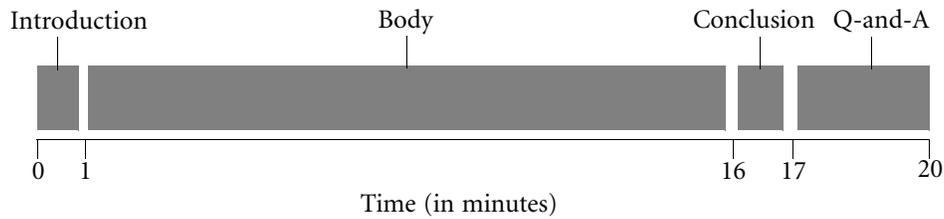
## Organizing a Presentation: The Big Picture

Table 16-1 provides a rough algorithm for organizing a short PowerPoint presentation.

**TABLE 16-1** Approximate Division of Time and Slides in a Short PowerPoint Presentation

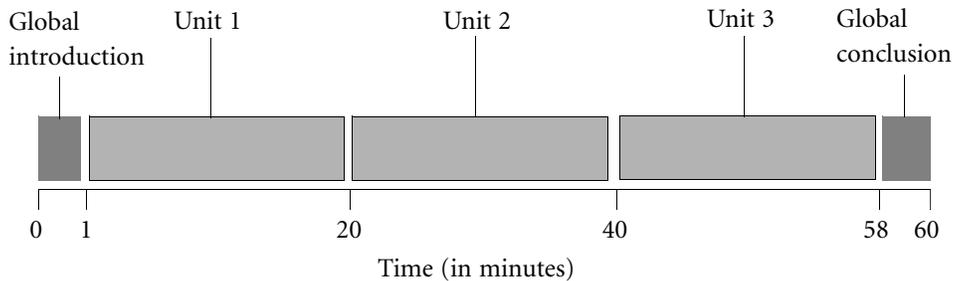
Section	Approx. Percentage of Your Time and Slides
Introduction	5%
Body	75% to 80%
Conclusion	5%
Question-and-answer (Q-and-A) session	10% to 15%

For example, in a 20-minute presentation, divide your time as shown in Figure 16-1.

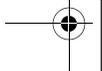


**FIGURE 16-1** Time allocation in a typical 20-minute presentation.

If a presentation consumes more than 20 minutes, divide it into distinct units. Give each unit its own introduction, body, and conclusion. In addition, layer in a brief introduction and conclusion covering the whole presentation. For example, Figure 16-2 shows one way to organize a one-hour presentation into three units.



**FIGURE 16-2** Time allocation in a typical 60-minute presentation.



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## The Number of Slides

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Asking how many slides you need is kind of like asking a programmer the generic question, how many lines of code do you need to write a program? There just isn't enough information to answer this question precisely. Nevertheless, one popular rule of thumb states that you should estimate two minutes per slide. Personally, I find that audiences prefer more rapid presentations, so I like to estimate around 80 seconds per slide.

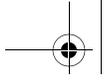
Parameters affecting the time per slide include the following:

- size of audience
- number of bullet points per slide and amount of text
- information density of graphics

As the size of your audience increases, you typically go through slides at a faster pace. Large audiences generally only interrupt your slides to ask questions during designated Q-and-A periods. Small audiences (seven or fewer) will feel much less self-conscious about interrupting you, and it may take several excruciating minutes to get through controversial slides. When audience members are highly familiar with each other, then the pace also slows. For example, if you are presenting to a 30-member lab team that has worked together for several years, you can expect plenty of interruptions. When audience members are primarily strangers to each other, interruptions drop.

Denser slides obviously take longer to consume, although sparse slides that require compensating voice-over also consume too much time.

Slides that contain complex graphics also take a long time to consume. They typically require long-winded voice-overs. So, for example, a presentation that contains mainly complex graphics might proceed at a pace of 5 or 10 minutes per slide.



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## The Opening Moments of a Presentation

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I cannot underestimate the value of a positive first impression. In every communication medium—from movies to stand-up comedy to newspaper articles and right back to PowerPoint presentations—the first few seconds are the most critical. During those first few seconds, your audience will decide whether you are worth their focus. Succeed at the start, and your audience will root for you. Screw up the beginning, and you'll be scratching desperately for attention and approval.

So, how do you succeed in the opening moments? At the risk of sounding like a 3:00 AM infomercial, the key is confidence—you must believe in your heart of hearts that your presentation is valuable and that your ideas are critical. Dogs may or may not be able to sense fear, but audiences absolutely sense a lack of confidence. Humans attend to confident people; all the slick PowerPoint graphics won't bail the unconfident out of trouble.

### Opening with a Joke

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Some people tell jokes well. If you are one of those people, I recommend beginning your presentation with a relevant witticism. When you are one of many presenters, a little levity makes your presentation stand out from and rise above the others. Your presentation will be the one that people remember. Naturally, you have to sniff the mood of the room before telling a joke; in some situations, attempts at humor are destined to fall flat. Generally speaking, though, the joke is a little gift you present to your audience. Like most gifts, it is the thought that counts—the audience will appreciate you just for trying. In fact, the joke need not be particularly funny for you to succeed.

Always beta-test your jokes. Nothing ruins a presentation faster than offending someone in your audience. Make sure your beta testers include a wide range of people. One of the safer domains is to poke fun at your own profession.

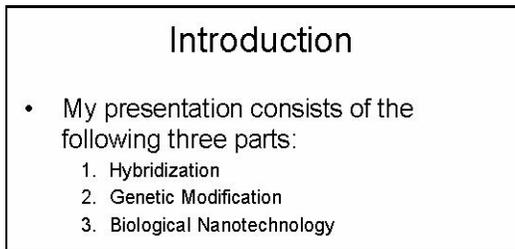
By the way, spontaneous remarks always get a bigger laugh than prepared ones. So, prepare some spontaneous remarks.



## Introductory Slides: The Traditional Approach

Since the opening moments are critical, your introductory slides better be good. The traditional approach to an introduction is to “tell ’em what you’re going to tell ’em.” I refer to this approach as the romantic-comedy style of overviews because your audience will know exactly how it is going to end just from watching the first few minutes. We will now consider a few examples of this style.

The slide in Figure 16-3 is direct and concise, but it is suboptimal. The simple title (“Introduction”) does not mean anything. If someone were to come across this slide a few weeks after the presentation and read the title, would he or she remember what this presentation was about? What is this presentation really about, and why would an audience member want to pay attention to it?



**FIGURE 16-3** A suboptimal introductory slide.

The slide in Figure 16-4 offers a more instructive title. In addition, it contains date ranges, which technical audiences usually like and which are a nice device for building excitement. On the downside, the second bullet point (“where we’ve been”) is a cliché. After reading this introductory slide, would you really know the true purpose of this presentation?



**FIGURE 16-4** A better title, but too cliché.

On the plus side, the slide in Figure 16-5 clearly states the purpose of the presentation (to provide an overview of creating new fruit species with biological nanotechnology). However, this slide looks like it was written by someone in marketing, which is the kiss of death for a presentation to technical people. To make the slide more appropriate for a technical audience, the writer should excise the word “exciting.” The author of this slide is so over-excited that he provides almost exactly the same words in both the title and the first bullet, which is a waste of the audience’s time. The final bullet will annoy all audience members who are proponents of current technologies.

### An Exciting New Approach to Creating Fruit Species

- This presentation examines an exciting new way to create new fruit species:
  - Biological nanotechnology
- We’ll also explore what’s wrong with current technologies.

**FIGURE 16-5** Too “exciting” for a technical audience.

The slide in Figure 16-6 has a solid title, a good explanation of the topic, and a straightforward approach that should appeal to a technical audience. The only negative is that it does not tell the order in which topics will be presented. To remedy this problem, the author must add a second slide that lists the order of presentation.

### A New Approach to Creating Fruit Species

- This presentation explains how our team plans to create fruit species with biological nanotechnology.
- We’ll compare our approach to hybridization and genetic modification.

**FIGURE 16-6** Best of the bunch.

## Introductory Slides: An Alternate Approach

An alternate approach for writing introductory slides is to “tease ’em what you’re going to tell ’em.” I refer to this approach as the mystery style of overviews because you withhold important pieces of the plot until just the right moment. You can build tremendous interest by promising a surprise and then layering in clues as you proceed. This technique often appeals to scientists since their life’s work is essentially solving mysteries. Consider the gambit in Figure 16-7, which uses mystery style.

### A New Technology for Creating Fruit Species

- Our team has a novel approach, which this presentation will uncover.
- We’ll compare our approach to hybridization and genetic modification.

**FIGURE 16-7** Use mystery techniques to build suspense.

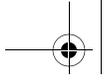
The title is clear enough to reassure audience members that they are in the right place. The first bullet announces the purpose without giving away the punch line. Humans are a naturally curious species, and intelligent humans are even more so. The audience wants to get to the next slide to learn the secret. Of course, the secret won’t be found on the next slide. The secret must be nurtured while you gradually uncover clues. Occasionally, while laying out background information, you should remind the audience of the ultimate goal, as in the final bullet of Figure 16-8.

### Genetic Modification: Summary

- Pros:
  - Desired traits in a single generation
  - More predictable than hybridization
- Con:
  - Expensive
- Our new approach minimizes the expense.

**FIGURE 16-8** Remind the audience that the secret will be revealed later.

In the perfect mystery presentation, you can slowly lead the audience to come to the same conclusions that you did.



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## Body Slides: Pace and Variety

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Modern audiences have extremely short attention spans. Very few people can attend to a speech for longer than 20 minutes, and many attendees will be taking mental vacations after only 5 or 10. To audiences raised on television clickers, PowerPoint presentations get dull very quickly. When giving an hour-long presentation, how do you avoid just talking to yourself for the last 40 minutes?

To hold an audience through an hour-long presentation, you must switch focus every 15 minutes or so. After presenting a series of slides, get the audience to do something; for example, consider the following ideas:

- Ask them questions.
- Do an informal survey.
- Challenge the audience to solve a problem or to brainstorm ideas.

In general, keep the audience's attention cycling between the projection screen, you, and themselves. Never let the audience's eyes rest on one spot for too long; intelligent people go into a trance rather readily. Feel free to dim the projector occasionally and turn up the lights to force the audience's focus to change. Prepare for bland stretches by interspersing some interesting digression slides or examples.

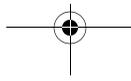
Many people feel that a professional presentation requires that all slides have approximately the same length. In fact, this is not optimal. To keep your audience's attention, it is better to mix the length of slides; in other words, after a few long slides, insert a short slide.

### **When to Make a Presentation**

Teachers and seminar leaders are well acquainted with "death valley," which strikes between 30 and 90 minutes after lunch. This is the worst time of day to give a presentation. Seated adults will sometimes fall asleep during this period. Similarly, avoid early morning presentations when speaking to teenagers.

The best time of day to present information is mid-morning (perhaps 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM) or two to three hours after lunch. On the other hand, if you are presenting bad news or speaking to an oppositional audience, schedule your presentation just after lunch, when people tend to be at their most relaxed.

Finally, do not rely too heavily on bulleted lists. Make sure that your slides mix in plenty of graphics, tables, and charts.





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## Mechanics: Fonts and Backgrounds

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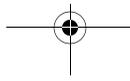
Many presenters obsess about mechanical points such as the appropriate font and backgrounds to use on slides. In fact, this is one of the classic procrastination techniques that many people use before buckling down and writing the copy for those blasted slides.

Don't waste your time worrying about fonts. PowerPoint provides excellent defaults for fonts and font sizes. If you feel a strong need to use a nondefault slide template, create one that uses a sans-serif font. Note, however, that the printed version of PowerPoint slides will look better with serif fonts. For more information on fonts, see Chapter 19.

Many companies and conferences mandate the background for PowerPoint presentations. If, however, the choice for backgrounds is yours, don't just pick a pretty one; pick one that is appropriate for your audience. If your audience is fairly stodgy and conservative, consider unintrusive designs with muted colors. If you are trying to appeal to a younger audience, find a more vibrant background.

When making a long presentation, consider color-coding different categories of slides. For example, you might paint a light green background on all slides containing exercises and a light blue background for all slides containing digressions.

For a multiunit presentation, consider giving each unit a distinct background image. For example, each slide in the unit on hybridization might contain a background image of a pea plant, while each slide in the genetic-modification unit might contain a background image of a microscope.



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## Body Slides: Effective Lists

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Chapter 7 discusses lists. Beyond the general recommendations about lists in that chapter, consider the following additional suggestions for PowerPoint:

- Place rules before examples; in other words, define a rule and then supply examples to support the rule.
- Ensure that second-level bulleted items follow naturally from their first-level superiors.
- Minimize the number of list items at the third level.
- Keep each element fairly short.

The slide in Figure 16-9 violates most of these rules.

**Making Citrus Hybrids**

- Example: the tangelo is a cross between a pummelo or grapefruit and a tangerine. There are many varieties of tangelos and all are much sweeter than pummelos or grapefruits.
  - Some varieties, such as ugli, are chance crosses.
    - The ugli fruit is a cross between a mandarin orange and a grapefruit.
- Most varieties of citrus can be crossed to produce new varieties.

**FIGURE 16-9** A slide with problematic lists.

The slide in Figure 16-9 contains some fine facts; however, these facts are defeated by the following faults:

- The title is misleading; it suggests that the slide will explain how to make citrus hybrids.
- The opening bullet is a borderline run-on, which makes the entire slide a bit too dense visually.
- The second-level bullet (“Some varieties...”) does not follow logically from its superior bullet.
- The third-level bullet is an unnecessary digression.
- Examples are wonderful, but the general principle (“Most varieties of citrus can be crossed...”) ought to precede the example rather than follow it.

The slide in Figure 16-10 is somewhat cleaner.

### Citrus Crosses Easily

- Citrus will cross with most other citrus.
  - Most crosses are intentional.
  - A few famous crosses are accidental.
- Most tangelos are intentional crosses.
  - Tangerines x pummelos
- Ugli fruits are accidental crosses.
  - Mandarin orange x grapefruit

**FIGURE 16-10** A cleaner set of lists.

The preceding slide focuses on the key points (citrus crosses through intention or accident) and provides supporting examples (tangelos and ugli fruits). The original slide mentioned the sweetness of the resulting fruit, but that fact was off topic, so the preceding slide omits it.

The slide in Figure 16-10 still contains too much information for some viewers. An alternate approach is to chop the single slide into two slides as follows:

- Place the rule (crosses are intentional or accidental) on one slide.
- Place the examples (tangelos and ugli fruits) on the next slide.

Yet another approach is to use a single short slide that focuses on the rule and then let your voice provide details of the examples. The slide might look like that shown in Figure 16-11. The downside to this approach is that audience members who look back on their slides won't have a record of the example details.

### Citrus Crosses Easily

- Citrus usually crosses with other citrus varieties.
  - Most crosses are intentional; for example, tangelos.
  - A few famous crosses are accidental; for example, ugli fruits.

**FIGURE 16-11** Focus on the rule in the slide; provide more examples in speech.

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## Audience: The Theory of Relativity

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Your presentation's content and tone should depend on where you are in the organization relative to the people in your audience.

### **If the Audience Is Mainly above Your Level**

Many presenters mistakenly believe that higher management has more technical knowledge than individual contributors. Although some high-level managers do retain their engineering skills, most high-level managers lose technical skills rapidly when they stop using them day to day.

High-level managers get paid to make critical decisions, typically based on financial considerations. Focus your presentation on money, answering questions such as the following:

- How much revenue will this provide?
- How much will this cost to produce?
- How much money will this save the organization?

From manufacturing to biotech to nonprofit, high-level manager ears typically only perk up in response to money and schedules.

### **If the Audience Is at Your Level**

Individual contributors talking primarily to other individual contributors should focus on technical details. Slap on an extra coat of jargon, and keep the nerd-speak rolling. Ignore financial considerations; just get to the good stuff. Beware that this is the most likely audience to stumble down a rathole, so be prepared to shut off worthless debates dictatorially.

### **If the Audience Is below Your Level**

If you are a manager presenting slides to your underlings, your audience may feel a certain sense of fright. They may wonder, *Why is she holding this meeting? Is my job okay?* Audience members are also nervous about being put on the spot. To get your audience to listen, it is sometimes smart to start the meeting with a perfunctory *all is well*.

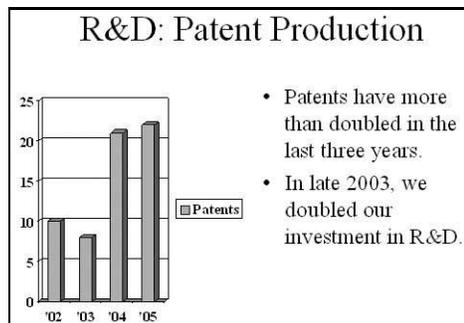
## Graphics

Most audiences view graphics as a treat. However, graphics are an expensive gift, taking long hours to prepare. If you have the time though, graphics do jazz up a PowerPoint presentation.

Although a truly gifted artist can tell a story entirely through graphic slides, the rest of us must learn to provide a mix of graphics and text. Mixing text and graphics on the same slide is okay if the following criteria are both met:

- The graphic is relatively simple.
- The text is brief and supports the graphic.

For example, the slide in Figure 16-12 meets both criteria.



**FIGURE 16-12** Simple graph and simple text shown on the same page.

If either the graphic or text is more complex than those shown Figure 16-12, place them on different slides.

### Beware of Cliché Clip Art

PowerPoint provides a widely used set of clip art. A number of years ago, the novelty of clip art appealed to audiences. (*Wow—that clip art guy is shocked by our first quarter numbers, too.*) Today, though, the included clip art strikes most audiences as somewhat amateurish and cliché. All clip art is not bad. However, audiences now expect more than stock cartoon characters.



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## The Complexity of a Graphic

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Before creating graphics, consider how your audience will view the PowerPoint presentation. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Will the presentation be projected on a high-quality screen, or will it be projected on a wall? Is the wall a bright color?
- Will your audience be close enough to view details in the graphics?
- Will you be able to point (with a light pen or stick) to selected details in the graphics while giving the presentation? (This is always handy.)

One of the classic mistakes in creating graphics for PowerPoint is providing too much detail, particularly when the viewing conditions make it almost impossible for your audience to notice detail. In such situations, frustrated speakers end up spending far too long explaining each graphics slide, which also frustrates the audience. Think it through: if viewing conditions are poor, reduce the detail in your graphics.

A reasonable formula for good graphics slides is as follows:

One graphics slide should hold approximately the same informational content as one paragraph of text.

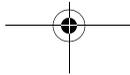
In other words, a graphics slide has about the right amount of detail if you need to speak about one paragraph's worth of words to explain it.

If a single graphics slide requires too much explanation, break it into two or more slides.

### **Printed Graphics in PowerPoint Presentations**

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Many presenters hand out hard copies of their slides to the audience so that their audience has something to write on when trading e-mail addresses and stock tips. Unfortunately, in hard copy, the graphics in PowerPoint slides are often hard to read. If hard-copy versions of slides are truly important, try to keep the graphics simple.





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## Question-and-Answer Sessions

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In a successful presentation, your audience will ask lots of questions. (Lots of questions can also be a sign that you aren't explaining things very well, but we'll hope that this isn't the case.) Questions indicate interest. In addition, the rapid shift of focus between presenter and audience makes it harder for audience members to daydream. Two strategies for Q-and-A logistics are as follows:

- If you are speaking to a small audience, invite them to ask questions throughout the presentation. Encouraging questions helps keep your audience engaged.
- If you are speaking to a large audience, urge them to hold off on questions until the end of the presentation; however, if the presentation is lengthy, provide a Q-and-A session at the end of each unit.

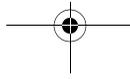
The Q-and-A session frightens some presenters. After all, there is no script for it. In addition, questions can occasionally turn hostile. For best results, prepare for the Q-and-A session just as you would prepare for the rest of your presentation. Practice your presentation on a small group of colleagues, and invite them to ask questions. Have someone record these questions so that you can polish your answers later.

If a live practice session is not a possibility, you must imagine the questions that will be asked and prepare answers for them. Visualize your toughest critic (*That jerk!*) trying to pick your ideas apart. Practice your answers for the worst-case questions. You'll sleep better the night before.

Keep your answers short and focused—never ramble. Thank the first questioner for asking a question, as this will grease the wheels for subsequent ones. If you truly do not know the answer, say so. If you are taking an educated guess, say so.

Okay, you have done all your homework and are ready to take on all questioners and then... no one asks anything. This, too, can be rather uncomfortable. The wise presenter comes prepared with a list of dialog starters on an emergency slide. Turn the tables on your audience, and start asking them questions.

The final question of a Q-and-A session typically concludes the presentation. However, the final questions might wander off the mark or into minutia. Note that the first few moments and last few moments of any presentation are particularly important. Therefore, instead of ending with a final question, you should consider ending by displaying a final slide that truly wraps up your presentation.



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## Different Kinds of Learners

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Just as most people have a dominant hand, most people also have a dominant learning style. In brief, most people are either visual learners or auditory learners. Visual learners acquire knowledge more naturally through what they read or see; auditory learners prefer to gather information through what they hear.

When giving a PowerPoint presentation to a group, both visual and auditory learners will be in your audience. The value of a PowerPoint presentation (as opposed to either a straight lecture or a book) is that you can simultaneously cater to both kinds of learners. What makes this even trickier is that the visual presentation proceeds at a much higher bandwidth than the auditory presentation; that is, people can read text much faster than you can speak it.

To cater to auditory learners, you should always provide a sound track; you may not simply throw slides up on the projector without providing any commentary. To cater to visual learners, you should always provide slides; you should not present new material orally without supporting slides. To complicate matters, a percentage of visual learners are distracted by auditory input. (Not everyone can read when music is on, particularly music with lyrics.)

Within the broad group of visual learners, some learn more readily from pictures than from text. Like a polite host offering a variety of dishes to suit many palates, try to provide a nice mixture of graphics and text.

### When the Audience Is One

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Your audience is not always a group. Sometimes, your audience is just a single person—often your supervisor. In this case, the wise presenter studies the target's learning style.

Does your target generally ignore your e-mail, preferring to get information from you in person? If so, your target is likely an auditory learner. Do not waste too much time writing elaborate slides; she won't read them anyway.

Does your target tend to ask you for written summaries following face-to-face meetings or insist that everything be written down? In this case, your target is likely a visual learner. A crisp executive summary page, followed by supporting pages of details will go a lot further than blah blah blah.

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## PowerPoint Speech: The Basics

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Many technical presenters put far too much time into perfecting slides and not nearly enough time into practicing what they will say. The next few pages provides advice on improving the “sound track” to your PowerPoint presentation.

You must first perfect the following basics:

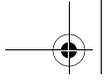
- **Speak loudly enough to be heard.** Project your voice. Imagine that you are launching your voice to the back row.
- **Speak clearly.** Enunciate the final syllable of each word—make sure you catch all the consonants.
- **Make eye contact with different people in different parts of the room.** If eye contact frightens you, stare at foreheads instead of eyes. (Your audience won’t know the difference.)
- **Stand up straight.** Don’t slouch. Square your shoulders. Bend your knees slightly. Breathe.
- **Drink something warm (not hot) just before speaking.** Never drink ice water.

### **When I Turn on the Projector, You Will Fall into a Deep and Satisfying Sleep**

Your listeners, no matter how well educated, have a very short attention span. You are at war to keep their focus. To win the battle, avoid entrancing your audience. Just about any form of repetition can put intelligent audience members into a mild trance. To fight it, you must seek discontinuities by altering the following:

- **The speed of your delivery.** Slow down once in a while, and speed up once in a while.
- **The volume of your delivery.** Emphasize points by raising or lowering your voice.
- **The body motions of your delivery.** Never rock rhythmically. Never move your hands rhythmically. Feel free to walk around, particularly if you are using a wireless microphone.

If you must hold an audience's attention for a long time, try to change topics every 15 minutes or so.



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## PowerPoint Speech: Lessons from the Pros

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You don't have to be a superstar performer to deliver a good PowerPoint speech. Nevertheless, technical speakers can benefit from the secrets of professional entertainers.<sup>1</sup> Treat your listeners as an audience whose attention you must hold. Learn to engage your audience. If you don't have their attention, your message will be lost.

### **These Tips Aren't for Every Audience**

As with any form of communication, you must know your audience. If the forum at which you are speaking is very conservative, then beware of many of these suggestions. If, however, the forum is somewhat more casual, then take these suggestions seriously and emerge as the audience's favorite presenter.

### **Lesson 1: Entertainment Pros Provide a Pre-Show**

A pre-show is, not surprisingly, the information that precedes the show. All forms of professional entertainment provide a pre-show to build an audience and to build excitement; for example, consider the following:

- Movies provide trailers.
- Theatres provide playbills.
- Television provides teasers and ads.

Technical speakers can sometimes provide a pre-show. Your pre-show might take the form of an e-mail to your audience. Perhaps you'll have someone distribute interesting handouts related to your presentation a few minutes before you speak. Perhaps these handouts will suggest something intriguing or puzzling.

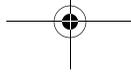
Get the audience to anticipate your speech before you say your first word.

### **Lesson 2: Pros Deliver a Grand Finale**

Good shows end with something big. Again, the beginning and ending of any presentation are the most memorable moments. Therefore, try to pull off a surprise just near the end, such as a fascinating revelation from your research. Better yet, promise your listeners something exciting but don't deliver on it until the end of the presentation.

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1. I developed this chunk from my experience as a professional juggler.



### Lesson 3: Pros Study Their Body Language

Many professional entertainers watch tapes of themselves. If you have never seen a tape of yourself giving a presentation, you should endure it soon. You will be amazed at what you discover. For added thrills, invite some friends to review the tape with you. Don't worry—this is just as “natural” a process as having a friend edit your writing.

While watching the tape, compare your body language with the following ideals:

- Stand up straight but not too stiffly.
- Lean forward slightly, which projects energy and enthusiasm.
- Project confidence by keeping your body expressions expansive and open. Never hunch your shoulders.
- Project optimism by moving your hands upward.
- Move around a little. Don't feel that you are tied to the podium. You can even move into the audience from time to time.
- Move your hands a bit. Just don't flap your hands enough to go into flight.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the beginning of any presentation is the most important part. Always stride confidently to the podium when it is your turn.

Some people in your audience are highly attuned to body language and will pick up all sorts of clues from it. Some will be trying to detect whether you are telling the truth, or at least whether you believe in what you are saying. Therefore, tell the truth and believe in what you are saying.

#### The Mute Button: Your Best Instructor

Would you like some help on body language? Consider watching television with the sound off. Watch your favorite comedians, and see how they invite you in through relaxed body gestures. Watch politicians try to convince you of their point of view through persuasive hand motions. Watch how the posture of news reporters conveys gravity or intensity.

### Lesson 4: Pros Consider Costuming

Professional entertainers consider what to wear. They try to figure out what kind of costume will help their presentation.

Believe it or not, some engineers and scientists *do* attend to what you are wearing. Of course, most engineers and scientists take a certain pride in their fashion blindness. However, for those few in the audience that do care about your clothes, try to figure out which clothes will help your cause.



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## PowerPoint Speech: Overcoming Fear

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If you are thumbing through this book in a bookstore, then there is a mighty good chance that you turned directly to this page. After all, a stunning percentage of people are afraid of public speaking. Climb a cliff? No problem. Explain to an audience how you climbed that cliff? Terrifying!

If the fear of public speaking is limiting your career, you should strongly consider working with a professional speech coach or possibly some sort of behavioral therapist (such as a hypnotist).

Many speakers fear the fear itself—they are afraid of freezing up and having a panic attack. They are also afraid that the audience will detect the fear and think less of them. These are certainly common fears, but you should know the following two facts:

- Even most professional performers experience stage fright.
- Experimentation strongly suggests that a certain amount of fear actually *helps* your presentation. This “fear” would seem to be our way of getting our bodies ready for a peak performance.

The best way to overcome fear is to practice the audio portion of your presentation over and over again. Practice it when you are in the shower. Practice it when you are in the car. Practice it right before you go to sleep. The social psychologist Robert Zajonc has noted that an audience helps the dominant response and hurts the nondominant response. In other words, if you *truly* know your speech, you will probably deliver it better in front of an audience than when alone. Conversely, delivering an unpracticed speech in front of an audience often leads to poor performance.

### Practice Relaxing

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You have undoubtedly heard someone tell you to relax by taking a deep breath. Everyone knows it works, but most people forget to breathe when tense. To force those soothing breaths, consider the following two techniques:

- If you will read from notes, write the stage direction “[deep breath]” at the end of every paragraph. In other words, script your breaths.
- If you will speak without notes, then when practicing, remember to practice taking a deep breath at the same points in your presentation. The deep breath will then become just as automatic as the rest of your speech.





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## Summary of PowerPoint Presentations

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The night before giving your big PowerPoint presentation, obsess over the following questions:

- Have you rehearsed the entire presentation? Have you rehearsed multiple times?
- Is your opening strong? (Note that I'm saying *strong*, not *long*.) Are your first words interesting? Are you opening with a joke? Will that joke appeal to your audience?
- If your presentation is longer than 15 or 20 minutes, have you divided your presentation into discrete sections? Does each section contain a distinct beginning and end?
- Are your slides well organized? Does each slide follow naturally from the preceding slide? Are the slides organized into discrete sections?
- Are any of the bulleted list items run-ons? Do any slides contain too many list items?
- Do the text and graphics on each slide make sense?
- Have you fixed all spelling errors and typos?
- Is your presentation appropriate for your audience? Will supervisors or underlings take the presentation the right way?
- Do any of your graphics require more than a minute of explanation?
- Can your graphics be seen from the back of the room?
- Do you have a convincing and memorable conclusion?
- Will you be nervous? If so, do you have a scheme for fending off panic?

Finally, consider a few practical matters:

- Where is the printed material? Where are the notes? Where are the slides?
- Does the microphone work? Is it a clip-on microphone? If so, what part of your clothes will you clip it on to?
- Do you know how to work the projector?
- What will you wear?

Sleep tight.

