

THE
Media
COACH
PRESENTATION TRAINING

How do I prepare?

Preparation is the key to success. Here are a number of things to bear in mind:

Audience Analysis (Don't skip this stage!)

Consider the following checklist. You may need to make some phone calls to get the answers:

- Who will be there?
- Why are they there?
- What do they hope to get out of your presentation?
- How many people will be in the audience?
- What background knowledge will they have?

Beware! Many speakers assume the audience know more than they do. Even if some know a lot, many others may not. Cater for mixed levels of knowledge.

Structuring Your Material

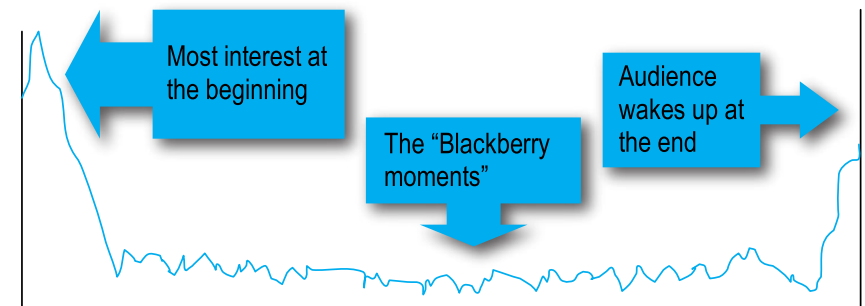
This is a crucial stage dealt with in detail on pages 5 to 7.

Be Interesting

You've got your message, you've got your structure. Now make it interesting.

Remember, you're competing with high quality entertainment and news television. Your audience is used to receiving information in entertaining and sophisticated packages. No one is going to concentrate on you just because you are there, you have to fight for their attention.

A graph of attention levels during an average presentation would probably look something like this:



This is one reason to deliver your over-arching Key Message at the beginning and at the end.

The rest of the time, you need to use every trick you can to keep your audience engaged. Here are some things to consider:

How do I Prepare - continued

Widgets

This may be hard to do or inappropriate but if there is any way to present the audience with a three-dimensional item that they can see - or better still, handle - it will hugely increase the impact of your presentation.

Examples

One businessman allegedly taped a 'widget' to the bottom of every seat in the hall. At one point in the presentation he asked people to reach down, untape the widget and examine it. He then said: "Ladies and gentlemen, you have the future of the company in your hands."

A seller of wind turbines might take a fan blade as the unique component of the company's equipment to an analysts' presentation.

Aid agencies looking for funds might pass around samples of Corn Soya Blend, a basic and cheap combination of grains, to illustrate something that can restore malnourished children to health.

Pictures, Video and Sound

All of these have their place.

- **Pictures can enhance most presentations. Companies often have their own archives; you can take your own digital photographs; you can often find pictures on the internet**

that can be used. Don't ignore newspaper and magazine articles, these can be very useful to show the progress of public perception.

- **Nowadays it is surprisingly easy to insert even home-shot video into a presentation. Keep it short and punchy – a minute may be enough.**
- **Sound can also be inserted, but take care with background music – it can easily produce the "wrong" tone for some of the audience, or be a distraction for others. Or even drown out your voice.**

Examples

A UN agency started many presentations around the world with a one-minute video 'advert' that had also been screened on CNN and BBC World. A lot of money and effort went into condensing the work of the agency into that one minute and it started many presentations on the right note.

A medical presentation by a very senior consultant used a number of images of newspaper stories and medical trade press articles to illustrate the growing understanding and medicalisation of the obesity problem. The audience were able to clearly read the article headline and the date. In some cases key phrases were highlighted to make a point.

How do I Prepare - continued

Graphics

Charts and diagrams can illustrate your point superbly. But keep them simple. Less is usually more.

When you introduce them, give the audience a few seconds to just look at the image and orientate themselves. It is often appropriate to then explain the key elements; in particular it is nearly always helpful to say:

“on the x axis we are plotting abc and on the y axis of course it’s 123”.

Don’t assume the audience will work this out quickly enough– even if it is written on the graphic. Some of them will have poor eyesight and don’t forget that you are standing a good deal closer.

Personal stories or anecdotes

People love stories and they remember them.

“Last week I was in California talking to Arnold Schwarzenegger’s staff ...”

“Last year I was in Malvern where they still have working street gas lamps ...”

Make the story personal, visual and if possible evocative. But it must be relevant. You can throw in some extraneous facts for colour, but overall the story should illustrate your point and thus serve to reinforce your Key Message. Beware a great anecdote that bears no

relation to the message – the audience may remember the story but not the point of your presentation.

Perils of PowerPoint

The PowerPoint software developed by Microsoft for business presentations is both a blessing and a curse. For very inexperienced presenters, PowerPoint is a useful crutch; it helps them organise their information and present something in a logical form.

One of the key reasons for its success is that it combines three things:

- The slide show
- The speaker’s notes
- The handout

One of the main criticisms of PowerPoint is that it combines three things:

- The slide show
- The speaker’s notes
- The handout

It is really worth understanding that PowerPoint is best used as a slide show. The speaker’s notes are something you have in front of you, something the audience cannot see. Similarly, a PowerPoint presentation simply printed out is rarely a good handout. Trying to

How do I Prepare - continued

make it an acceptable handout will almost certainly compromise the slide show.

One of the biggest critics of PowerPoint is Edward Tufte, author of *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*. He argues that the use of bullet points in PowerPoint presentations can dilute arguments to nonsense and fails to allow the audience to see the connections between different parts of an argument.

Presentation trainers regularly see clients whose presentations improve dramatically when the PowerPoint projector is switched off. In reality a slide show is often expected, so here are some guidelines if you are going to use PowerPoint:

- If you want to do a really good presentation, you should separate the slide show from the speaker's notes – and make the handout a separate but related document.
- Limit the information on the slide. A good guide is a maximum of five lines with a maximum of five words per line.
- At every stage ask yourself if there is a picture you could use instead of words. The picture doesn't have to tell the whole story – just prompt an element of your story. Some of the best presentations are simply a sequence of pictures and graphics – each of which are explained by the presenter.

- If you are using graphics, ask yourself how much information you can leave off the slide. Can you show just a portion of the graph, or should you highlight one area? How many numbers/dates do you need on the axis?
- Limit the number of fonts you use on your slides. A consistent style is essential if you are not to look amateur. It helps to learn how to use PowerPoint MasterSlides, which can build in that consistent style for you. (Note you can have more than one Master per presentation, allowing you two or three related styles.)

Summary

- Analyse your audience.
- Identify your Key Message.
- Split the argument into chapters and identify the evidence for each chapter.
- Consider all ways you can lift the entertainment value of the presentation – widgets, video, sound, pictures, graphics, personal stories.
- PowerPoint – don't be complacent. Keep the format consistent, limit the use of bullet points, prepare speaker's notes and handouts separately from the slide show.

What do I say?

Structuring your material is critical to ensuring it is clearly understood.

Define your Key Message

A member of your audience walks out of the room after your presentation and bumps into a colleague. "What was that about?" asks the colleague.

If you did a good job, there will usually be a clear one-line answer and it will be the same answer for every member of your audience.

This is your Key Message. It is the main theme, the main purpose of your giving the presentation. And unless you are clear before you start what your Key Message is, the audience is unlikely to be taking it away with them.

Consider these two different opening statements to a presentation:

- "This is a background briefing on this project so far...."
- "I want to tell you that as of today we have completed three-quarters of this project; we have two major outstanding issues and a number of minor ones."

The first is likely to send your audience to sleep and encourage you to ramble around recent history. The second gives a strong summary of the presentation and sets you up to deliver a well-organised outline of the project so far.

Organise your information

Once you have decided your main Key Message, you need to organise the presentation into chapters that together illustrate or support it.

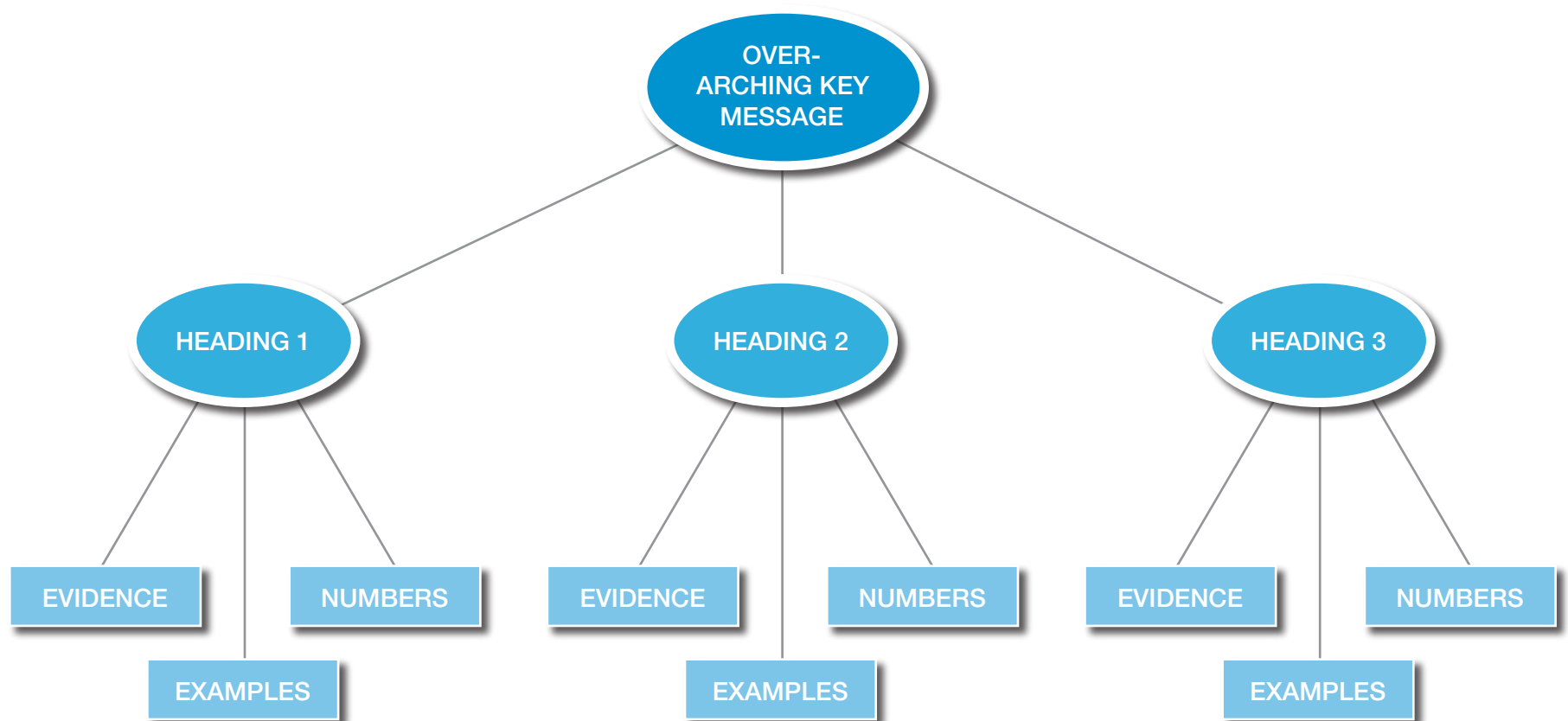
There is no absolute rule on how many chapters you need in your presentation but three is a good number and the more you have, the more likely it is that your main Key Message will become diluted.

For each chapter you should look for these three related things:

- **Evidence – Support your point. Who says? Why should I believe you?**
- **Numbers – Figures put flesh on the bones. And they sound objective.**
- **Examples – Add the colour. Make it about people if you can.**

What do I **say**? - continued

There is no failsafe template. But here is one way of looking at it:



What do I **say?** - continued

A linear presentation of this structure looks like this:

INTRODUCTION	OVER-ARCHING KEY MESSAGE	OUTLINE CHAPTER HEADINGS	CHAPTER ONE	CHAPTER TWO	CHAPTER THREE	FINALLY
Your name and title and why you are an authority or the right person to speak	This is where you deliver your Key Message with suitable emphasis	Now explain to the audience how you are going to prove or illustrate your key message	Outline the heading and explain how this supports your key message before moving into the evidence. Evidence should include: Facts Stories / anecdotes Numbers Pictures	Repeat as for Chapter One	Repeat as for Chapter One	Repeat your over-arching Key Message, perhaps varying the language a little to avoid sounding repetitive. It should be the last thing the audience hears.

What do I say? - continued

Signposting

This structure is not just for you. You will want to tell the audience clearly what is going on and where you are in the presentation:

“And here is further evidence, should it be needed, that there is a market for this widget”

“These are the facts which convinced us there was a *prima facie* case to answer”

“Moving on to my second message today...”

Summary:

- Organising your thoughts helps you to clarify what you want to say.
- A clear structure helps your audience understand it.
- Each piece of information should support the overall thrust, so make the connection clear.
- Resist the temptation to include unrelated points, unless absolutely unavoidable.

- Templates are for guidance only, do not follow rigidly if the material does not fit.
- A clear structure makes it less likely you will get lost.
- If your time is suddenly cut in half, it is easy to pare down this formula; drop some of the evidence, or simply summarise your less important Key Messages.
- Because the structure of the argument is so clear, it is easy to amend, update or substitute new chapters into your presentation.

Remember

If you are not clear about your key message, the audience certainly won't be. Beyond that, there is no perfect template. Use this suggested structure as a guide, not a rule book.

How do I get ready?

Rehearsal

If you are really concerned about your presentation, use a domestic video camera and give the whole presentation – all the way through. Then review it and make notes on your performance.

Simply speaking the presentation out loud will make a big difference to your final performance. It's a form of 'tongue memory'; if you have said it several times before, it will come out in a more polished and confident manner, even if you are nervous. Some presenters persuade themselves not to do this for fear of getting 'stale'. Don't worry. When it comes to the final 'performance', the presence of the audience will give you a shot of adrenalin and all the rehearsing will make your delivery polished.

Rehearsing with a stopwatch (or on video) will also help you gauge the timings. Bear in mind you will typically take a little longer when it comes to the actual performance but you should have a clear idea of how long each segment is likely to take.

Check the room

If possible go and stand on the podium and ask a friend to sit in the audience and check if they can hear you clearly. Will you use the microphone, or is the room small and quiet enough to make your voice alone more effective?

Check the technology

Technical glitches are best sorted out ahead of the event, rather than in front of a restless audience. So ask for access in advance to set up your equipment and check everything is working. If you are using PowerPoint, it is well worth having your presentation on a flash memory stick as well as your laptop. If another laptop is installed, just plug in the memory stick; if it's your own laptop that's to be used, power it up in advance and introduce it to the projector. Make sure it's switched on early – it can take minutes to power up a laptop. Get the screen image centred and square. In a large auditorium you may also want to check the microphones. It helps to be clear ahead of a presentation whether you will have a fixed stick mike, whether you will have to stand behind a podium, or whether you can have a lapel mike which will give you freedom of movement.

Check the audience

Ahead of your presentation take any opportunity you can to strike up conversations with members of your audience. This can often be done with early arrivals, or in the coffee break. Ask why they are attending and what they are looking to gain from the presentation. Often members of the audience will give you experiences or thoughts that you can use as asides in your presentation.

"I was talking to someone here earlier who is from Scotland – she pointed out the problem is even worse in isolated rural areas of the Highlands because of the age profile of the population."

How do I get ready? - continued

Dealing with nerves

People have their own ways of dealing with nerves. Here are a few ideas:

- Rehearsal is probably the best antidote. Tongue memory may help you out even if your brain freezes. Think of the parachutist who is trained to the point that her body will react automatically, however terrified she is by the jump.
- Make sure you have some 'head space' the night before. Watch a film, go shopping, or read a novel. Think about something else completely to allow yourself time to relax.
- Ahead of the event take a moment to imagine a time after the presentation with people complimenting you, telling you how well it went and how impressive you were. There is a whole science behind this kind of 'programming' and many people find it works.
- Focus on your audience, not yourself. What matters is that the audience understand the message – not that you 'do well'.
- Position a buddy in the audience who will smile and nod you through your presentation.
- Breathe slowly and deliberately just before you go on (check you are not on microphone while you do this).
- Lift your shoulders high and squeeze the muscles tight while breathing in. Then let go, drop your shoulders and expel all the air from your lungs. Do these two or three times.
- Alcohol – for every presenter who finds a shot of 'Dutch courage' helps them improve, there are probably three who make a fool of themselves without realising it. Best avoided.
- Beta blockers are sometimes favoured by orchestral soloists. If you suffer from serious, debilitating nervousness, consult a doctor.

How do I say it?

There is more than one way to be a good presenter. The 'natural communicators' have their own unique abilities; the rest of us can benefit from the following general guidelines:

A good strong start

If you rehearse nothing else, rehearse your opening and closing statements.

Before you are due to start ensure any technology is turned on and ready to go. Allow your audience to settle before you begin speaking. Then look up at them, smile and introduce yourself. If you've already been introduced, make do with a "Thank you and good morning". It's not a bad idea to have your name and title displayed on screen at the start to fix it in people's minds.

A little humour is often good at this point to help both you and the audience relax but don't try it if you are not confident. And humour does not mean tell a joke!

Don't apologise. It is very tempting to start your presentation with apologies about what you perceive as its inadequacies. This is usually the presenter simply showcasing his or her own insecurities. There may be exceptions – such as if you have arrived late and kept the audience waiting – but in general it is best to avoid anything that creates a negative impression.

Face forward

This may sound obvious but many presenters spend more than half their presentation either looking down or, worse, with their back to the audience while they read the PowerPoint slide! Position your laptop or monitor so you can simply glance down at it when you need to. Most of the presentation you should be looking up and forward, addressing the audience directly.

Use your eyes

This is crucial. The best presenters don't just look towards their audience; they look into the eyes of their audience. It applies whether you are presenting to two people in a small meeting or to several hundred in a large auditorium. In a smaller group, up to 20, it should be perfectly possible to make eye contact with every member of the audience every few minutes. With a larger group, pick out faces in all different parts of the audience, front, back, left and right, so that no area of the hall is left uncovered. Every single person needs to feel included.

This makes you more engaging as a presenter but it is also an important check for you. Does the audience look bored or engaged? Are they following you or are they puzzled? If one person looks away to check a PDA or send a text message, do not assume you are doing anything wrong. But if several people are nodding off or doing something else you need to up your game.

How do I say it? - continued

If you are nervous or shy, one tip is to find a friendly face in the audience. There is often one person who is a kindly soul and who will nod and smile you through your presentation. You can use this person, looking back at them every time you get a frown or a tut from someone else. Another option is to ask a colleague to take this role: sitting somewhere in the audience and nodding and smiling encouragement at you during your performance.

Energy and enthusiasm

You may be fascinated by your subject, or bored stiff. Either way, inject some passion into your delivery. If you care, then show it; if not, pretend. Project your voice. Faced with a dull and low-key speaker, the listener is thinking, subconsciously: "If he/she doesn't care about it, why should I?" Passion is infectious, even when it is not totally genuine. Obviously not breathless overkill, just straightforward, old-fashioned enthusiasm.

Typically, people underestimate the amount of energy and effort they should put into delivering a presentation. While in training sessions there are occasionally people we try to tone down, the vast majority need to turn up the amount of effort they put into delivering their information. Projecting your message requires a higher gear.

This does not mean you deliver the whole presentation in a highly dramatic way; in fact 'light and shade' – some variation of tone – is essential. Monotone delivery is great for sending people to sleep.

Use your voice to underline your key points, build up to climaxes, come down the other side.

A word of warning – increasing your energy does not mean speeding up your delivery.

Pace and pauses

Your presentation needs to be fast enough not to leave people bored but slow enough to be easy to follow. Do not be afraid to pause. Pauses are important either side of your Key Message and your chapter headings or subsidiary messages. They are one of the signals to the audience that what you are saying is important. Also pause every time you present complicated information and slow down your delivery.

Movement

Any movement you make during your presentation should enhance your communication, not distract from it. So:

Don't

- Turn your back on the audience... with rare exceptions when you are pointing to key information on a chart or graphic.
- Stand stiffly.
- Have your hands firmly behind your back or gripping the podium.

How do I say it? - continued

Don't (continued)

- **Be rooted to one spot.**
- **Sit slumped in a chair in an overly relaxed manner. In fact there are few presentations that should be delivered sitting.**

But also don't

- **Pace up and down across the stage.**
- **Move repeatedly in front of any projector.**

Do

- **Use your hands and the trunk of your body to emphasise or illustrate key points. (It is rare to find someone who uses their hands too much although waving your arms around is clearly not appropriate. Most people need to be encouraged to use their hands as they talk.)**
- **Step forward to emphasise a key point and then move backwards where appropriate.**

Some people have 'tics' they are barely aware of. The only way to iron these out is to either have a colleague give you honest feedback or to watch a recording of yourself. The video camera is actually a more efficient way of doing this as it gives the brain a chance to see and understand exactly what you are doing and therefore how to change it. When it is simply spoken about, it is easily forgotten.

Lead the audience

Have a clear map in your head of where your presentation is going and where you are at any one point. Share this information with the audience at appropriate points. Be clear that you have concluded one point or chapter heading and are moving on.

"So that is just some of the evidence we've amassed which convinces us there is a market for this product. Now let's move on to my second point: that profit margins of 10% or more are possible in this market."

This signposting is important for allowing your audience to rejoin your argument if they have been distracted or lost the thread. Don't overdo it.

Similarly, if you are showing charts or graphs, take the time to talk your audience through what they are seeing. Again, judgement is involved. A standard dollar/yen currency chart will be very familiar to anyone dealing in forex and it would be ridiculous to explain what they are looking at. However, in general people tend to overestimate how much their audience understand.

Laser Pens

These devices can clearly be useful in pointing out specific areas of data on a graphic. However, some people get hooked and use them in the most ridiculous way – pointing to the words as they read

How do I say it? - continued

out the bulletpoints (just in case the audience want to sing along, perhaps) or even scribbling across a picture with the light as they say 'this is a picture of our factory last year'.

So use laser pens very sparingly. Check it is working before the presentation, and check it again five minutes before you go on. Give some thought to what you will do if it does not work.

Interruptions

In a small group it is better not to ignore interruptions. Your audience will be distracted if someone joins the group, if a phone goes off or if someone comes in with coffee. A good presenter will pause and even react: allow the person to answer the phone and leave, say hello to the new group member, say thank you for the coffee. This makes you as a presenter feel more comfortable and also stops the audience losing the thread of what you are saying.

Clearly, if it is a large group this may not be appropriate and it is a question of judgement as to how disruptive the interruption is.

At the end

Don't let your performance peter out as you come to the end. Give yourself a pause between the end of the main body and the final summary and repetition of the message. If you are taking questions, consider saving your final statement for after the Q&A.

Don't expect perfection

Finally, it is important to remember that 'no one died'. In television, presenters or anchors are often heard to say 'it's only television' when things go wrong. At the end of the day, if the audience understood your messages you have achieved your aim. If you are not an experienced and confident presenter, things will probably not go perfectly, but put it down to experience. Being highly critical of yourself will not help you give good presentations in the future. In most cases your audience will be more than used to very poor presentations and if you have made an effort they will appreciate it. If you are not fully satisfied, make a note of what you would do differently next time – and file it as a reminder.

And remember – the best way to improve performance is to organise feedback from honest colleagues and/or to watch your own rehearsals on video.

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