

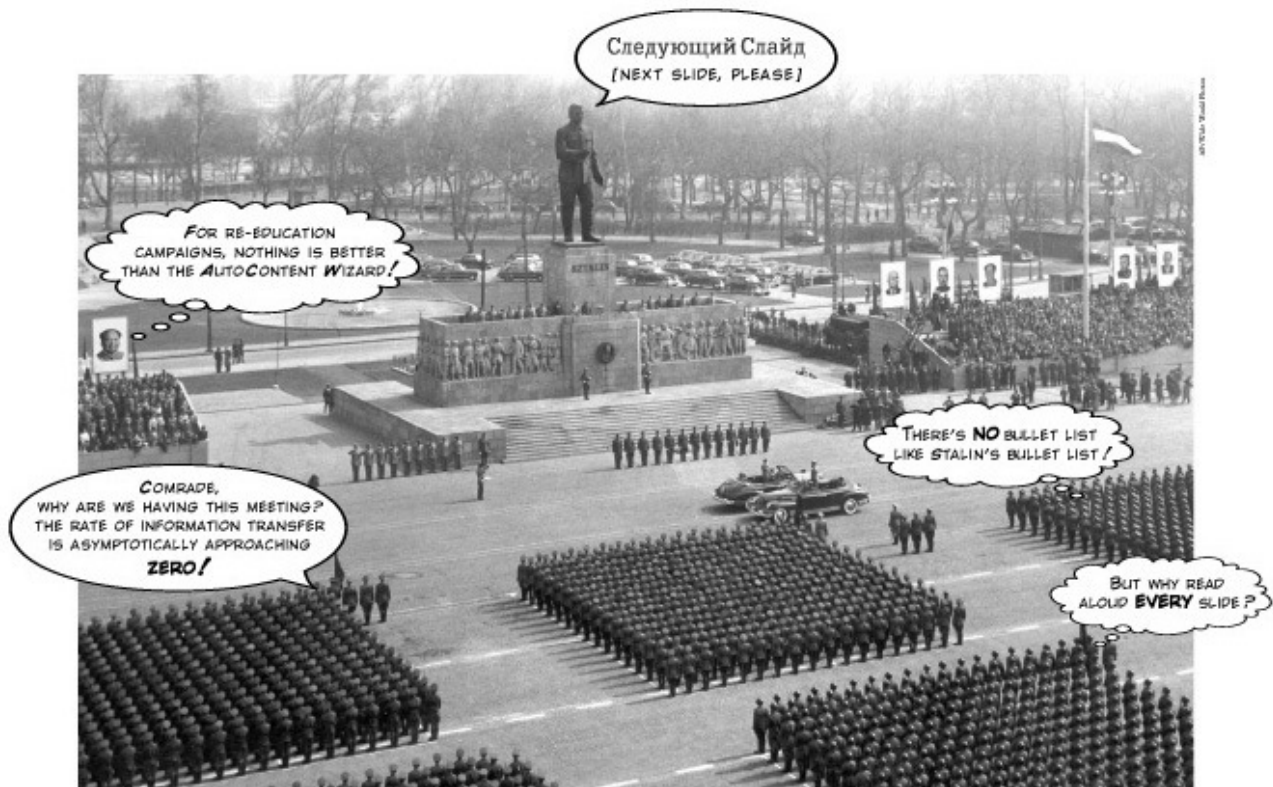
Presentation Skills

Public speaking is one of the hardest things to master. The trick to delivering a powerful presentation is to prepare carefully, take it slowly on the day and be enthusiastic about your topic. But presenting is not just about speaking to an audience of 1000s – the one-on-one presentation you give to you boss can be just as important to you career and needs the same skill set discussed below.

Planning your presentation - prepare with care:

Start, by thinking about your audience and what aspect of the topic they are most likely to be interested in - you should be able to state the purpose of the presentation in an easy sentence. Then list your key points and write down the general structure of the presentation ahead. If you need to, write down every point that you want to cover and practice until you are totally comfortable with the material.

Rehearse the presentation thoroughly, particularly if you have been allocated a speaking time (eg, at a conference). Allow time for questions (but have things to say if there are no questions - running short is nearly as bad as running over!).



Edward Tufte, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*

- Consider the 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint:
 - a PowerPoint presentation should have 10 slides,
 - last no more than 20 minutes, and
 - contain no font smaller than 30 points.
- Remember the 6:6 rule:
 - Too much information on a single slide is unreadable especially when it is projected on a big screen.

- Use bullet points:
 - i. Using bullets not only makes your slide readable
 - ii. They also add to the impact of your presentation.
- Maximum of six bullet points in a slide.
- Maximum of six words in one line.
- Contrast the text with the background.
- The text highlights what you are saying
 - Don't read the slides, talk to the slides...
- Avoid the overuse of clip art and animation,
 - It detracts from the focus of your presentation, but.....
- Do use smart design in preference to words see¹:
 - Presentation Zen: http://presentationzen.blogs.com/presentationzen/2005/09/whats_good_powe.html
 - Edward Tufte: <http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/powerpoint>
- Complex charts and reference materials should be handouts
 - Not PowerPoint slides
- Allow your audience adequate time to read information slides:
 - Minimum 30 seconds (very simple slide)
 - Average 2 minutes per slide
- Rehearse – talk through your delivery several time (5 or 6). Remember, the spoken word is quite different from the written word!
- Use aids such as highlighted text and large notes to keep you on track (but don't read these either).
- KISS - keep it simple².

Delivering your presentation³:

On the day:

1. Get a good night's sleep beforehand. Eat a healthy breakfast and try and free your schedule, so you're more relaxed going into the presentation.
2. Check out the venue – before you speak (even the day before) walk around the room or auditorium, sit in different seats to see what your audience will see and make sure you know exactly how the technology works. Practice using the presentation technology and know where the 'help' is most conferences have on-site technical support staff.
3. Before you present, spend 15 minutes going over your presentation. Then take 15 minutes off. Don't make last minute changes!! Use the quiet 15 minutes to manage your reaction to nerves:
 - a. Go to the toilet beforehand and avoid stimulants; you already have a powerful stimulant in the form of adrenalin in your system. Have a small drink of water to off set the dry-mouth effect of adrenalin.
 - b. Then use the next 5 to 10 minutes to park any extraneous thoughts and worries that may interfere with your concentration, don't ignore them - they need acknowledging (or they will come back at the most

¹ For more on **page layout** see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1065_Page_Layout.pdf

² Most presentations involve **explaining something** – the basic rules of 'good explanation' also apply: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1090_Effective_Explanations.pdf

³ For many more hints and tips on public speaking see: <http://www.genardmethod.com/home>



- inappropriate moment), either physically write them down and put the note somewhere safe or use a virtual technique such as the ‘Actors Box⁴’ to hold them for a while.
- c. Then concentrate on your breathing for 5 minutes⁵. This focuses your thoughts, relaxes you and gets rid of any nerves.
4. **Delivering the presentation:** Remember, the open and close of your presentation are the most important parts. So put in extra effort into the opening to make it memorable - *"In less than a minute, your audience forms impressions of you and your credibility based on what you say and how you say it"*.
 - a. Your greeting is an essential element of your presentation, it is your first and best opportunity to establish rapport with listeners and you only get one chance to make a good ‘first impression’.
 - b. You need to compel your audience's attention as you begin your speech, launch your presentation with a ‘grabber’ something original, intriguing, and slightly creative.
 - c. Preview of Your Speech. Let the audience know what you're going to talk about and where you're going with this topic: Tell 'em what you're going to say, say it, then tell 'em what you said. Listeners need to know the direction you're going in so they can follow you there. Here's an acronym that might help: **B-L-U-F**, or Bottom Line Up Front.
 5. Main points, with evidence. Make sure you clearly lay out the main points you're going to talk about.
 - a. Big topics need a place for you and your audience to "land." And when you deliver those points, back up each one with evidence.
 - b. Use vivid and visual language, what means more ‘female parent’ or ‘mother’ - short impactful sentences employing simple words, and that include images and metaphors, will bring your presentation to life.
 - c. Effective transitions are essential for your presentation to be a logical and organic whole. At the end of each major point, use an internal summary followed by an internal preview of the next point *"Now that we've seen examined the system of alliances that existed in Europe at this time [internal summary], let's look at what happened in late July and early August 1914 that led to war"* [internal preview]. Transitions should contribute to your talk's logical shape.

⁴ The **Actor's Box** is imaginary: a cabinet that's custom-made to hold those intrusive thoughts. Here's how it works:

- Imagine a box small enough (in your imagination), to carry around with you whenever you need to speak in public.
- Use this box as a temporary home for the thoughts that are most likely to spoil the performance you're about to give
- Ten minutes before your talk, find a quiet place where you can be alone. Put the imaginary box down next to you.
- Turn the imaginary key and open the door.
- Now spend the next few minutes thinking of the things that are on your mind or bothering you.
- In each case, give the concern or worry some attention, think about for a minute or so.
- If a decision is required, tell yourself that you'll make one . . . later.
- After you've given each individual concern or worry some time, put it in the box.
- Repeat this step for up to a half-dozen things you'd rather not have on your mind as you speak.
- Shut the door to your imaginary box and turn the key. Put the "key" someplace safe!
- Your worries are now tucked inside your Actor's Box, and since you've granted each of them some face time, they'll be quiet for the time you'll be speaking.

⁵ A good **breathing technique** used to help meditation (and great for calming nerves) is:

- Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and close your eyes.
- *Listen* to your breath for the first minute, paying attention to what happens when you breathe slowly and calmly. Experience the sensations with your body, not your mind. Feel the breath in your throat, your lungs, and then bringing life-giving oxygen to every cell in your body.
- Now, focus your awareness on a visual image you'll "see" in your mind. Choose a neutral colour and shape: a green circle, a yellow square, a blue triangle (if you can't do this focus on a blank 'nothing' and think to yourself 'I am breathing in' – 'I am breathing out', slowly and in time with your breath).
- See that object in as close to crystal clarity as you can manage. As you do, adopt a passive attitude toward any other mental activity. Thoughts will emerge in your consciousness. Simply notice them then let them go on their way. Stay focused on your image. Do nothing; just let your awareness be.
- Your breathing will become slower and deeper. That's what you're aiming for. After 5 minutes, open your eyes and slowly stand. Now try to maintain this level of calmness and relaxed breathing as you go about your presentation.

- d. If you forget something or make a mistake, do not stop and apologise. Keep going and try and relax. Most of the time only you will know you have made a mistake - If noticed by others, it will soon be forgotten.
6. Facts tell and stories sell – have the key data point on your powerpoint slide or in the handout. Use a story to sell the message:
 - a. Fact: *California accounts for 13% of the \$13.84 trillion U.S. GDP.*
 - b. Story: *My lunchtime pizza reminded me that if California were a separate country, its GDP would be comparable to that of Italy.*
7. Close effectively. Ensure that your conclusion is strong by making it **sticky**. Whatever you say at this critical time must continue to resonate with your listeners long after you've finished speaking.

Body Language:

80% of a successful presentation is about body language, and only 20% is about content. So use these tips to communicate the right message through your body:

1. Make eye contact with people at all times⁶ - make sure you look at each part of the audience several times. Don't stare at the ceiling or back of the room as you present. This includes watching their responses, and responding to that feedback. People not only expect you to look at them when you talk. They'll trust you more if you do; and perhaps won't trust you at all if you don't
2. Appear confident - use an open stance, stand tall and proud. Smile and let your personality shine. Don't be overly formal.
3. Remember that relaxed body language conveys honesty and openness. So walk around a little and make use of props.
4. Vary your voice and use slow, open hand gestures. Never have your hands in your pocket or play with a pen. Move your hands to an open position and then pause for effect.
5. Use your hands to help convey images and support your powerpoint slides but don't over do it; eg, hold up three fingers if 3 is an important number in the presentation, or to highlight sizes and shapes.
6. Use the available space to clarify or support your message:
 - a. Choose a different spot to deliver each of your main points. In a small performance space, this may mean taking just a step or two before each point.
 - b. If you're discussing a chronology, move from your audience's left to their right as you talk about each stage or element of a timeline. In Western societies, left-to-right is how we read, and your audience will follow your time progression easily.
 - c. If you're outlining sides of an argument or alternatives, stand in one spot for one side of the argument, in another place for the alternative, then remain where you are or go back to your original position, depending upon which side of the argument or alternative you agree with.
 - d. Get close (proximity) your audience will generally respond more positively to you if you are close to them or remove any obstacles between you and them. Approach your listeners whenever possible, so they feel a physical connection to you. Arrange your performance space with listeners sitting around you in a "U" shape, if possible. Walk up and down the aisles in an auditorium (again, if it's appropriate and easy to do so in your presentation). And take every opportunity to come out from behind a lectern. It's one of the few actual physical obstacles that diminish your relationship with audiences and keep you distant from them.
7. Use props effectively and confidently – handouts, tactile things that relate to the presentation etc.

⁶ If you are an introvert, focused on the content of your presentation practice giving impromptu speeches (2 – 3 minutes, no rehearsal) on subjects you have no knowledge of – you have to look at your audience there's nowhere else to go!



Voice:

Learn how to speak effectively! Your tone, pitch, pace, clarity, projection and use of pauses can help build credibility and connection. Speak slowly and carefully, but passionately. If you're enthusiastic about the topic, then your listeners will be as well. They won't believe you if you just use a flat monotone. Listening to a recording of yourself can be very surprising!

Spark Interaction:

Encourage interaction with others during your presentation. By having others talk for a few seconds, it takes the focus off you temporarily, to let you clear your head and focus on the key points ahead. Another trick to clear your head is to pause while your audience is reading a slide, working out a problem or considering key points you've just mentioned. You need to give something of yourself to the audience to build empathy, real life examples are great.

Watch your audience's body language. Use rhetorical questions, personal examples and eye contact to engage with them. If they are leaning towards you, open and watching what's happening they are engaged. If you are confident enough, encourage questions during the presentation.

'Grounding':

This is a visualisation technique you can use to improve your public speaking confidence. It will also help improve your posture and body language, bringing you closer to achieving a commanding physical presence.

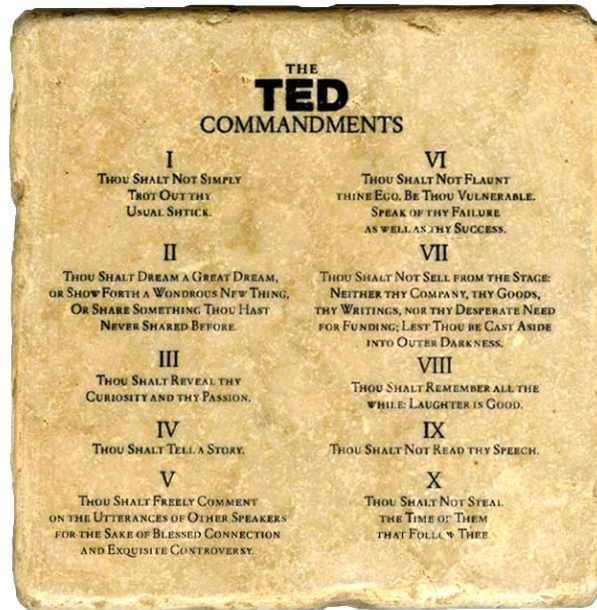
The technique is a fundamental tool of performance that comes to you straight from the world of the actor. When you ground yourself as a speaker, you acquire steadfastness and sense of purpose that is instantly noticeable to your audience. The two steps to ground your performance are:

- Plant your feet firmly on the floor, armpit width apart.
- Imagine that you're a 300-year-old oak tree with roots that go deep and wide into the earth. Like that tree you are firm, secure, and unshakeable.

Compare this strong stance with the weak stances some speakers use, with their legs crossed, leaning on one hip, or even standing with their feet touching. Challenges or harsh questions from the audience might just blow those speakers over! By 'grounding', you simply feel more confident and prepared, you're holding your ground!

Get in this habit, and soon other physical expressions of your confidence will begin to emerge. It's a self-regulating cycle, helping to give you physically expressed strength of character as a presenter. Combine this deep-rooted sense of presence with steady diaphragmatic breathing, and you'll look and feel like a person of consequence. Your self-image itself will help lessen your nervousness.

The TED Commandments



TED Talks are some of the best speeches I watch. The speakers are innovators and leaders, dreamers and doers. Many of them are available to download free from <http://www.ted.com/>. One of the reasons the speeches are so good is that TED's organisers send upcoming speakers a stone tablet, engraved with the 'TED Commandments'. They are invaluable guidelines for any speaker or presenter.

To save your eyesight the commandments are:

1. Thou Shalt Not Simply Trot Out thy Usual Shtick
2. Thou Shalt Dream a Great Dream, or Show Forth a Wondrous New Thing, Or Share Something Thou Hast Never Shared Before
3. Thou Shalt Reveal thy Curiosity and Thy Passion
4. Thou Shalt Tell a Story
5. Thou Shalt Freely Comment on the Utterances of Other Speakers for the Sake of Blessed Connection and Exquisite Controversy
6. Thou Shalt Not Flaunt thine Ego. Be Thou Vulnerable. Speak of thy Failure as well as thy Success.
7. Thou Shalt Not Sell from the Stage: Neither thy Company, thy Goods, thy Writings, nor thy Desperate need for Funding; Lest Thou be Cast Aside into Outer Darkness.
8. Thou Shalt Remember all the while: Laughter is Good.
9. Thou Shalt Not Read thy Speech.
10. Thou Shalt Not Steal the Time of Them that Follow Thee

Summary:

People will leave your presentation remembering how it made them feel (emotions⁷), not the words you said. Put your passion about the topic into the presentation. The opening is critical, a strong opening can build a bank of credibility that helps overcome later failings in your total presentation.

If you miss a bit or get lost don't panic! You are probably the only person who knows you have missed a bit or are out of the planned sequence and it looks unprofessional to say you have missed something.

Use the proven structure of *'telling them what you are going to tell them, telling them and then telling them what you have told them'*. Then allow time for questions.

And lastly *'fake it till you make it'* stand tall, look and sound like a great speaker and you will become a great speaker⁸.

The Don'ts...

Talk too long – if you are presenting for more than 20 minutes try to re-engage the audience with something different every 10 to 15 minutes.

Kill the audience with bullet points – death by powerpoint is real! Review design topics above....

Go in underprepared – rehearsal is critical.

Make last minute changes – present the presentation you have rehearsed!

Read from your slides or notes – make sure you know your materials and have rehearse the presentation

Cram too much into the presentation. People's ability to absorb new information is limited as is their concentration spans. Stay focused on the one key message the presentation is intended to convey.

Ignore your audience – manage your body language (open and positive) and the way you speak and sound; these factors contributes over 90% of the impression you create. Maintain eye contact with all of the audience (scan and shift your position).

This White Paper is part of Mosaic's **Project Knowledge Index** to view and download a wide range of published papers and articles see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PM-Knowledge_Index.html

⁷ For more on **the effect of emotions** see:

http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1008_Emotional_Intelligence.pdf

⁸ Psychologist and philosopher, William James (1843 – 1916) suggests you can alter your life by altering your attitude, posture and demeanour. Apply the ideas in this White Paper to act like a great presenter and you will eventually become a great presenter.

