

Developing Effective Presentations: Tactics and Tips

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An Online Continuing Education Course for Engineers

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Developing Effective Presentations: Tactics and Tips



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Course Overview

I was excited at first when a friend of mine suggested developing a course on making presentations.

“This will be a snap!” I thought because I had built a career in the corporate world making presentations. But as I began to think more about it, I remembered all the planning and effort that went into the design of the slides (or pages on a flip chart), their content, sequence, visual impact, length of the presentation, the strategy behind the presentation, and many other considerations.

As it all began to come back to me, I realized “a snap” was not the best description. It used to involve a lot of hard work and effort because there are different kinds of presentations used for different reasons.

For example, a presentation intended to **give information** to the audience such as the announcement of a new policy or a new initiative would be much different from one designed to **get information** such as getting feedback about a recent issue or event.

But as simple as that sounds, you can break it down farther into “give-information-with-no-discussion-expected” (such as the upcoming blood drive with the where, when, why details included) or “give-information-and-expect-a-lot-of-discussion” such as the company is changing health plans in the fall with a new premium and co-pay schedule.

Then there is **brainstorming (problem solving) or strategic planning** presentation when you must filter the useful ideas from the flood of chatter that always results.

And none of those has anything in common with a presentation that must be **persuasive so you can get something** such as additional resources or approval for a new initiative.

At that point, my mind was racing. I started to think about what else a potential presenter must consider before getting started.

Here are a few things included in this course:

- ***Presentations aren't given in a vacuum; there must be some meeting management skills considered, too.***
- ***What is the purpose of the presentation/meeting building toward?***
- ***You must start with the desired outcome in mind and then design backwards from there.***

- *What are the specific take-aways that you must have as a result of your presentation?*
- *Assuming that “time is money”, how can you determine whether the cost of the meeting (salaries, resources, and anything else) is justified by your presentation? (A link to the bullet above)*
- *Who must be in the meeting? Who should be in it? Is there anyone who should not?*
- *How will you engage the audience as quickly as possible? (You’ll have about the first seven seconds to either grab them or lose them!)*
- *If it’s an information giving presentation, will you also need handouts? If so, what will they contain? When will you give them out – before, during, or after your presentation?*
 - *Will you anticipate a lot or a little discussion afterward?*
 - *Will there be follow-up meetings?*
 - *How much do you tell them each time?*
- *If it’s an information getting presentation, how will you collect the data without derailing the meeting? When will there be a follow-up to share the results of the data collected?*
- *If it’s a brainstorming/problem solving (BS/PS) presentation/meeting, how will you collect the data quickly? Since this is typically a creative process, it is easy to get off-track with the flow of ideas. How will you stay on track without discouraging contributions?*
- *If it’s a persuasive presentation, how can you make your case more compelling? How much data should you provide to make your case but not so much that it gets bogged down in minutia? Can you imagine what questions they could ask instead of just focusing on the ones they probably will ask and be prepared for them?*

I will assume in this course that you will be making a PowerPoint presentation because that is the world standard. However, traditional flip charts can be used successfully with this same content.

Having resolved those first few considerations, you must then package it with “10-20-30” as a guideline:

- "10" = the maximum number of slides you should have. Remember, the audience thinks their time is valuable and you don't want them to think you are wasting it.
- "20" = the maximum length of time it should take. Adults catch on quickly and if you haven't made your point by now, staying longer won't help very much.
- "30" = the minimum sized font you should use on your slides

Finally, research conducted by the National Training Laboratories¹ identified average training retention rates by method of training/teaching used. Although your presentation may not be formal training, you can see how the retention rates vary with the method of presentation.

Training/Teaching Method	Retention Rate
Teach Others or Use Immediately	90%
Practice by doing	75%
Discussion Group (Presentation Q&A)	50%
Demonstration	30%
Audio-visual	20%
Reading	10%
Lecture (the "data dump" method)	5%

Please keep in mind that you are dealing with busy adults who may think they have a lot of better things they could be doing instead of sitting through another presentation. We will focus on keeping your content crisp, focused, and use the *least amount of time necessary to achieve the desired outcome*.

¹ <http://lowery.tamu.edu/Teaming/Morgan1/sld023.htm>

The WIIFM ("What's in it for me?") Factor

Whether your audience is voluntary or mandated, each individual is mentally weighing the value of the time they will spend listening to your presentation in relation to what they could be doing elsewhere. *The extent of their engagement and retention is based on the simple, self-serving concept going through everyone's mind as they sit waiting for you to begin: "what's in it for me" (WIIFM) to spend time listening to you?"*

Think back to the last presentation you attended. Did any of these thoughts go through your head?

- "So what? Why would I care about this?"
- "OK, I got it! Let's move on..."
- "Where is he going with this?"
- "How much longer am I going to have to endure this?"

Those are some of the most common unseen obstacles your presentation will have to overcome with your audience if you want it to be successful.

Also, the WIIFM concept is not necessarily bad: it's natural to think about your self-interest. And it's not always about money or tangible things. It could be about improved self-image, enhanced status or recognition.

We have already discussed the WIIFM factor in every presentation you will create from now on. **ON "WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM (WIIFM) TO BE AN ANSWER!** **ION TO DELIVER THE**

We will talk a lot more about this in the next section.

What this course covers

This course is about the tactics and tips for creating an effective presentation and conducting a successful presentation. This course is made.

It does NOT cover verbal communication techniques. Toastmasters and Dale Carnegie are excellent resources for gaining presentation skills while this course focuses on creating visually compelling PowerPoint presentations about your business or organization.

To view the remainder of the course material and to take the quiz for PDH credit, you must purchase the course.

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