The Secret to Persuasive PowerPoint® Presentations

Your presentation needs you to tell the story

We've all been there: a presenter stands before you and displays detailed slides like the one below. Or reads each slide out loud. Does it make you wonder why you couldn't just read the report instead?

When you're projecting slides in front of an audience, you should be the main storyteller. Your slides are the tools that reinforce your story.

Six Steps to Persuasive PowerPoint® Presentations

1. Think about what you want to achieve

2. Decide on your content

3. Structure your content logically

4. Grab attention at the start and drive action at the end

5. Engage your audience with a variety of evidence

6. Design your slides with projecting in mind

Your challenge:

Create a stand-up presentation that

- engages your audience
- delivers your message
- drives your presentation goals.

Your key to success:

Plan your storyline first

Consider what lawyers do to present their case to a judge or jury. They plan what pieces of evidence to use to advocate a position. Then they logically tie these pieces of evidence together to persuade their audience.

To create a successful stand-up presentation, you need to be a strategic storyteller too!

What happens if you don't plan?

Mistakes will be made! Your audience and message may be lost! And you may not achieve your goal, defeating the whole purpose of your presentation.

Planning first helps you avoid mistakes and saves you from

• confusing the listeners about your message

• leaving your audience wondering why they should care

• lacking logical structure or flow to your

• using graphs with vague titles.

1.

Think about what you want to achieve

### Start by thinking first, opening PowerPoint later

To create a powerful presentation, resist going straight to making slides. It's too easy to get distracted by slide design and lose sight of your audience, message, goals, and storyline.

Instead, it's more efficient to start by answering these key questions:

What do I want my audience to believe or do? This helps you focus on your desired outcome, not only on what you want to say.

Who is my audience and what's in it for them? They ultimately decide whether to believe or do what you say.

What's the main message I want them to remember?

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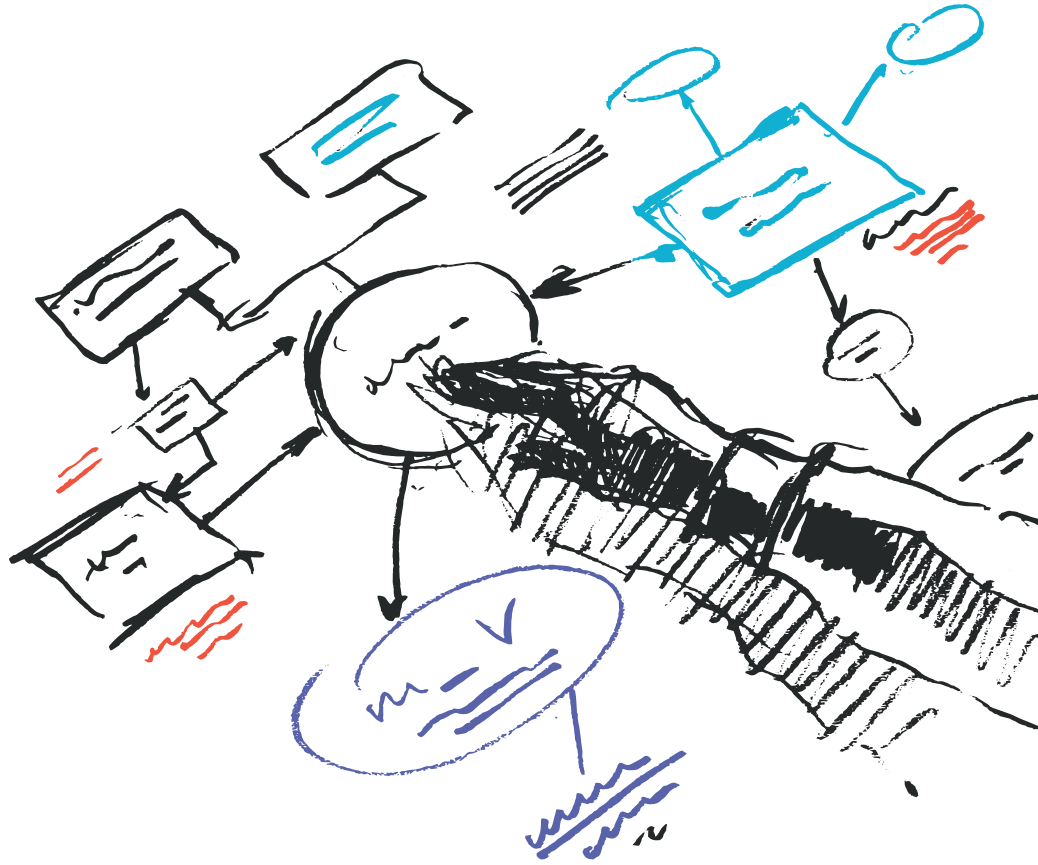
Decide on your content

What does your audience really need to know?

Have you ever sat down to write a presentation and not known where to start?

Sometimes it's because you have so many ideas you just don't know where to begin.

A strategy

Decide what content to include by asking: *What information do I need to reach my goal with this audience?*

- Write down everything you think your audience will need to agree with your recommendation or conclusion. What will they care about? That's how you'll keep them engaged.

- Cross out any ideas and points that aren't essential for making your case. This helps you avoid dumping your data and overwhelming your audience.

  After this, you'll use logic to make sure what the audience actually needs to know stays in.
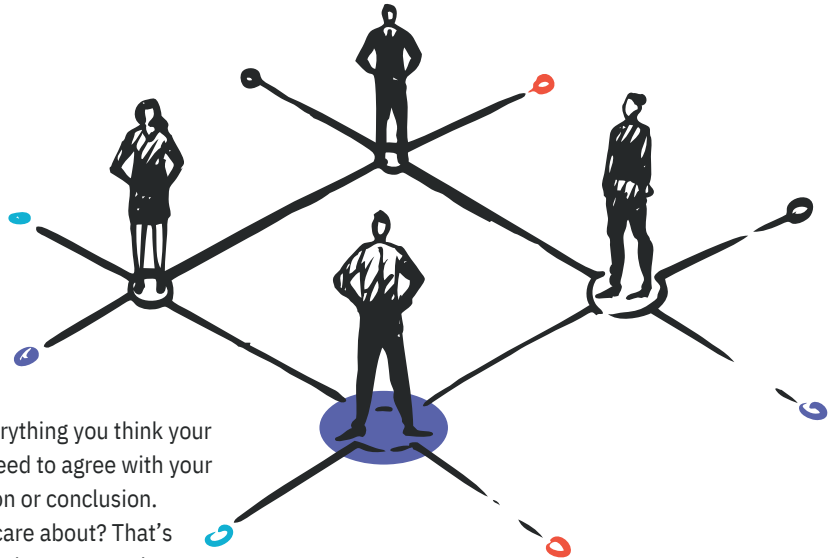
3.
Structure your content logically

Lead them with logic: compel your audience to agree

Each section of your presentation will have a main point, one that helps you convince your audience to agree with you. Using logic to structure your points will help you lay out a storyline that persuades your audience. This is the key to winning proposals and reports, too.

Consider again how lawyers make their case. They open with a key message ("you will find my client not guilty") and then present their points and evidence logically to lead the jury to accept that message. Using logic is also key to creating a compelling business story!

An example

Suppose you're recommending a change to your company's travel and expense reporting software.

One way to logically structure your ideas is to imagine

- leading with your key message—your recommendation
- having your audience then resist: "Why make a change?"

In response to that question, you lay out the most compelling 3 or so reasons your audience should agree with you. For example, the new system (1) saves time, (2) reduces costs, and (3) increases compliance.

Each reason is a main section of your presentation. And within each section, you include data points or facts that logically support that main reason or point.

By logically defending each of your reasons (time, cost, compliance) along the way, you persuade your audience to accept your recommendation to change the software.

4.
Grab attention at the start to drive action at the end

Use the opening and close of your presentation to create a strong first impression and a memorable lasting one.

At the start: Engage your audience to win them over

You are standing in front of the room at last. Which would capture your attention? A slide entitled "Adopting a new travel and expense reporting system," or one that stated "Last year we lost $1,000,000 due to non-compliance with our current travel and expense system"?

It is vital to engage your audience at the start to pique interest in hearing your story. Don't be bland or generic with your opening slides. Draw your listeners in by telling or showing something interesting or surprising.

Use a quote, a story, a picture, or a statistic. Your attention-grabber can be visual, verbal, or both!

Preview your main message

Your opening should typically include your key message and why your audience should care about it. Confirm your specific goals to keep everyone focused.

At the conclusion: Reinforce your main message

You previewed your conclusion in the opening, and you supported it during the body of your presentation. Close your presentation effectively by concisely and clearly restating your main message to imprint it on your audience.

Drive your presentation goals

Your close should also set the stage for the action or attitude you want from your audience. Be specific with what you want the audience to do or think, even if it's just inviting them to contact you with questions.

And don't skip your close, even if your presentation gets cut short. Cut out some other part. Don't miss the chance to make your final impression with your audience!

5.
Engage your audience with a variety of evidence

Persuade with stories and pictures as well as facts and numbers

You'll definitely need facts to compel the audience to share your point of view. For example, you might use different types of data analyses to prove the new travel and expense system will save costs over a five-year period.

But people use both logic and emotion to make decisions. (When you choose a hotel, for example, you might consider guest reviews and pictures along with facts like price and location.) So include stories, images, and examples, too. Testimonials or actual quotes will help your ideas stick by appealing to your audience's emotions.

Be relevant and reinforce

When you use images, charts, photos, or graphs, make sure your visual aid is truly relevant. It should clarify your ideas, not confuse your audience.

And don't forget to give the image, chart, or graph a meaning-laden title and caption, too, to make your intended message clear and control your audience's takeaway.

Consider if handouts help your presentation goals

Has this happened to you? Your slide has so much information your audience starts asking questions about content that's not germane to your point.

A strategy

When planning your supporting points, think about what it will take to keep your audience focused on your message while you're presenting it. Consider whether you need both slides and handouts. You might decide a handout effectively supplements your message and answers anticipated questions.

Ask yourself:

1. Why would I use a handout with an audience?

2. When would I use a handout?

   • As a preview?

   • As a takeaway?

   • For absentees?

3. How can I control my message if I have to send my slides as a handout?

4. Do I need an executive summary?

5. If so, when do I provide it?

Your answers to these questions will depend on your audience members and your specific goals for your presentation.

6.
Design your slides with projecting in mind

Create slides that will have an impact when projected

When you (finally!) open PowerPoint and create slides, keep your audience in mind. Their focus will stay on you if your slides complement the story you are telling, but don't contain every point. Edit for clarity and conciseness.

### No scripts allowed! Observe these guidelines:

1. Don't clutter your slides or overdo bullets.

2. Make slides easy to read with a large enough font.

3. Limit text to 6 lines on a page, 6 words on a line—think of the person in the back row.

4. Animate some content to reveal slide items as you talk.

5. Use the Notes section in PowerPoint instead of your slides to prompt you.

If you've done a good job designing slides for a stand-up presentation, your deck should not stand alone—your presentation should need you to be effective. A stand-alone presentation is a very different animal.

Practice your presentation so your planning pays off

Rehearsal is critical to a stand-up presentation's success. Leave time to practice to reduce nerves and make your presentation go smoothly.

Practice timing, introducing your slides, and using any other tools and handouts. Anticipate audience questions and prepare and practice clear answers. You will now be ready to deliver a powerful presentation that engages your audience and achieves your goals!
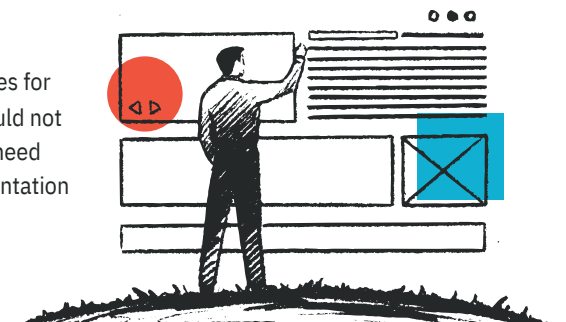
About Ariel

Ariel develops powerful and authentic communication skills to drive better performance for leaders and teams. Our integrated suite of programs is delivered via classroom, virtual classroom, and a digital offering to provide flexibility in learning. Whether you need to develop your next generation of leaders, connect global teams, or keep your workforce engaged and motivated, we can tackle your most pressing business challenges to ensure that your teams write, speak, lead, and sell with impact and emotional intelligence.

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