

# EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION SKILLS



THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE A MESSAGE OR IDEA TO AN AUDIENCE IS A CORE SKILL. WHETHER YOU ARE A SALESPERSON, MANAGER, TEACHER OR STUDENT, IF YOU KNOW HOW TO PRESENT WELL YOU WILL FEEL MORE CONFIDENT, GET BETTER RESULTS AND ACTUALLY ENJOY DOING IT!

UNFORTUNATELY MANY PEOPLE GET THIS SO WRONG AND THIS IS MAINLY DUE TO LACK OF CONFIDENCE, PREPARATION AND KNOW HOW AND THIS GENERALLY MEANS;

- BORING SLIDES WITH TOO MUCH CONTENT.
- THE PRESENTER ACTUALLY READING THE SLIDES.
- POOR QUALITY IMAGES.
- JARGON AND TOO MANY BUZZWORDS.
- A DRONING MONOLOGUE WITH NO ATTEMPT TO ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE.
- A LONG SESSION WITH NO BREAKS.

But it doesn't have to be like this if you follow some simple advice.

## ■ First things first

A presentation can be to educate, inform, entertain or persuade, so before you do anything, understand why you are presenting, to whom, and what you (and they) want to achieve.

## ■ What's the Big Idea?

Before you think about how the presentation should look and flow, you need a theme, or topic. Let's call this your "Big Idea" because this is what you really want the audience to remember. This is critical because your entire presentation should be built around your Big Idea. What you then need is a headline that describes it.

## ■ The Headline

This must summarise your Big Idea and be clear, concise and attention grabbing. It must be easy to understand and describe perfectly what your whole presentation is about. An 'overview' is dull, boring and uninspiring. A new way of doing something or a brand new idea is far more interesting. But avoid using hyperbole and jargon just to grab attention.

## ■ The Story

Before you decide on things like slide layouts, colour schemes or images, write the story which supports your idea. Split it into slide-sized chunks and you have slide notes to make sure you cover everything. Not only does this mean you'll know the content inside out, it also means you can ditch all those annoying bullet points and slides full of text that everyone hates!



# PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Here are a few golden rules that you really must obey when you put your presentation together.

## Be Different

Avoid using standard Powerpoint templates because these make you look the same as others. Either use a clean, white background or better still create your own distinctive design to reflect your brand.

## Keep it simple

Padding is a killer because it distracts attention from the important things. That's why simplicity is the essence of clear communication.

The ability to say more with less content is a skill. It takes effort but it's worth it because it separates the great presenter from the bore. Simplicity isn't 'dumbing down' though, it means distilling your story to the core and eliminating padding. The goal is to make maximum impact with minimum content. Challenge every word on a slide and eliminate anything that doesn't add value and help understanding.

## Special effects and transitions

Messages should stand on their own so don't overdo transitions, special effects and sound tracks.

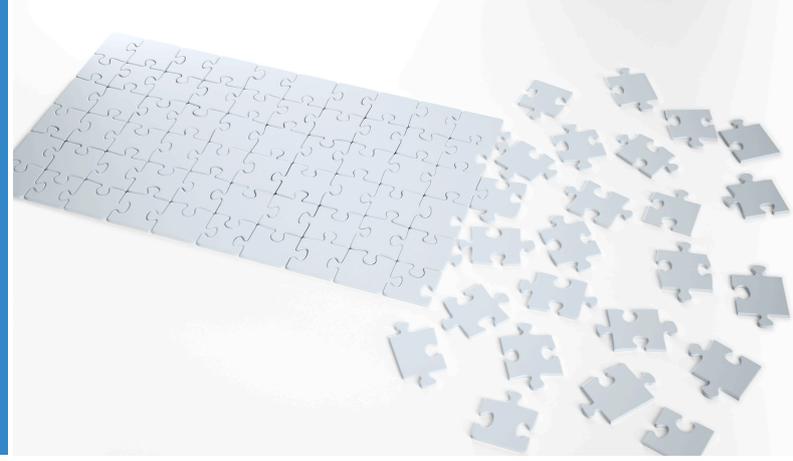
Only use any of these if they add to the user experience and help to put your message across in a better way. Simple fades between slides are usually the best choice.

## Images

Images make a bigger and more lasting impact than words alone, as long as the image is the right one.

Don't use images purely as 'eye candy' that have nothing to do with the content on the slide. Select an image that's a strong visual metaphor that will make your point and leave a big impression on the audience. Make it something they will remember.

And always use high quality images, preferably photographs and avoid free, cheap or bad cartoon images and clip art. These are generally horrible, they look cheap and nasty and give a very bad impression.



## Ditch the furniture

Anything on a slide that doesn't reinforce the message is padding and should be ditched.

This includes company logos, copyright notices and confidentiality statements. Even slide designs with boxes or abstract shapes can be a problem if they distract attention. If you must add your logo and company name just put it on the first and last slide or make it small and semi-transparent.

## “Bullets can kill.”

Excessive use of bullet points in a presentation will kill any chance you have of being memorable. Your audience will get bored and simply stop listening.

Your presentation should be like a film documentary that tells a story with images and the spoken word. Make slides visual and eliminate text unless it's essential. If you must use a bullet list for an agenda, try not to exceed the 'read limit' of more than six lines a slide.

## Space

This is a technique to isolate and emphasise a word, phrase or image for maximum impact. Not only is it great at drawing focussing attention, it also looks elegant, sophisticated and quite cool.

