

The complete presentation mastery toolkit: 14 things you can do today to improve your presentations



A GOOD PRESENTATION COULD BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SUCCESSFUL IPO AND A FLOP, A NEW CLIENT AND A WALKOUT, GETTING A JOB OR NOT. THIS EBOOK CONTAINS RESOURCES, APPS, IDEAS, TOOLS AND TIPS TO HELP DELIVER COMPELLING PRESENTATIONS

1. Introduction	3
2. Once upon a time... ..	4
3. The architecture of great talks	5
4. If you need slides or visuals: Find the presentation tool that works for you	6
5. 10:20:30	7
6. Present naked	8
7. Learn from stand-up comedians.....	9
8. Rhetorical devices	10
9. The neuroscience of a good presentation.....	11
10. Find great images	12
11. The power of video.....	13
12. Using graphs and tables.....	14
13. The Book of Jobs.....	15
14. The TED Commandments.....	16
15. Last minute presentation tips	17
16. One more thing	18

1. Introduction



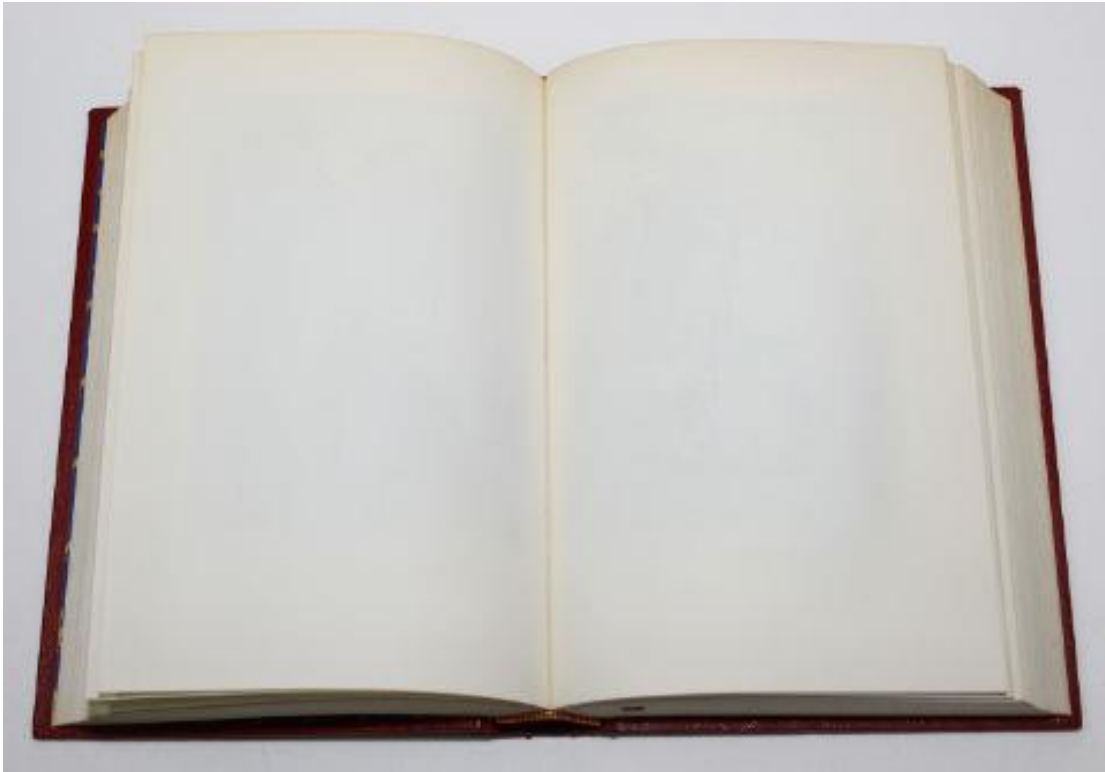
A good presentation could be the difference between a successful IPO and a flop, a new client and a walkout, getting a job or not.

Preparing your presentation is often left to the last minute or an 'it will be alright on the night' approach.

It takes work and it means business.

We've collected 14 resources, apps, ideas, tools and tips to help you give better, more compelling presentations.

2. Once upon a time...



Tell a story. Storytelling is what makes us human. It's how we've shared knowledge and passed down what we know for over 40,000 years, because stories ignite an emotional response and get remembered.

If you've got a strong idea, argument or story behind your presentation (and you should do, otherwise why are you giving it?) then you don't have to worry about using slides or visuals to prop you up. Just go tell it.

How do you tell a story? Follow Aristotle's lead: beginning (set up), middle (conflict or problem) and end (resolution). Or take a tip from Pixar's 22 rules of storytelling.

3. The architecture of great talks

Persuasive story pattern

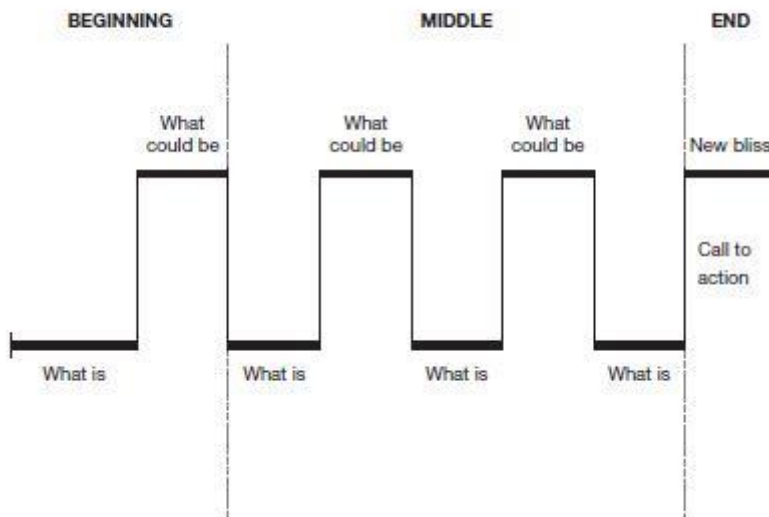


Image source: [Structure your presentation like a story](#), Nancy Duarte, *Harvard Business Review*, October 2012

Most great talks – from Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech to Steve Jobs’s 2007 iPhone keynote – follow the [same structure](#), according to Nancy Duarte. [follow the same structure](#).

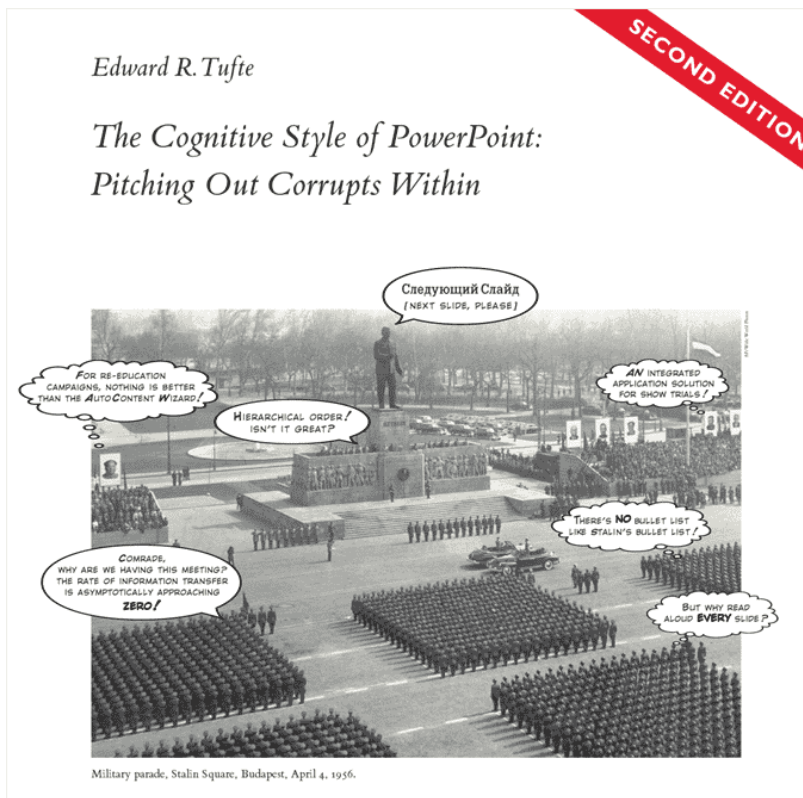
First the speaker lays out what is – the status quo, the current lie of the land.

Then they compare what is with what could be, contrasting the status quo baseline with the loftiness of their new idea.

The speaker repeats this pattern, presenting the status quo as passé, boring and inefficient while pitching their novel vision as the ideal remedy, whether that’s civil rights or a smarter smart phone.

They finish by describing the ‘new norm’ brought about by their idea or product and close with a clear call to action.

4. If you need slides or visuals: Find the presentation tool that works for you



For most people it's going to be **Microsoft PowerPoint**. Love it or loathe it, everyone uses it, often with terrible results, as **Edward Tufte** has noted. But in the hands of someone who knows what they're doing (read: no transition effects, WordArt or cliché stock photography) it's a powerful, versatile presentational tool. Click [here](#) for PowerPoint tips.

Keynote is Apple's answer to PowerPoint. It's the design connoisseur's choice, with better features, easier media integration and a more polished look. More Keynote tips [here](#).

If you're looking for simple, elegant fun, look no further than **Haiku Deck**. Easy to use, it also has great resources, with beautiful templates, [free design tips](#) and a pool of more than 35 million free photos available under Creative Commons.

Prezi takes a different approach to the three above. It uses a zoom and pan presentational style to create a more interesting presentation that will stand out from the crowd. But beware: the dynamic visuals can become dizzying and messy if overdone. Check out Prezi's list of [100 resources for better presentations](#), and [Prezi tips](#).

5. 10:20:30

If you have to use slides, try the [10:20:30](#) rule: 10 slides, 20 minutes, 30-point text. Or the Haiku-like [PerchaKucha](#) format.

You don't need to rigidly stick to this presentation diet, but it's a good starting point. If you can't get your message across in 10 slides and 20 minutes, you've got some distilling to do.

But if you don't want to use a PowerPoint...

6. Present naked



Go naked says presentation guru Garr Reynolds. By this he means cutting everything superfluous from your presentation. Fewer, emptier slides; getting out from behind the podium and PowerPoint; and acting and talking like a human, not a jargon-spouting corporate lackey. As Reynolds puts it, be more Yoda and less Darth Vader.

7. Learn from stand-up comedians



(Louis C.K. Image source: [Wikipedia](#))

No notes, no podium, no deck. You can't get much more naked than stand-up comedians.

Here are three lessons you can learn from them:

- **Work the crowd.** Look at people, ask them questions, target your stories at them – involve your audience. You're sharing information with them, not giving them a lecture.
- **Use your body.** Stand-ups understand the power of body language, adapting their movement to the rhythm and tone of their material, and using it to signpost punchlines.
- **Timing and intonation.** The best comics use timing and the tone of their voice to give their jokes maximum impact. Don't just drone on. Remember to breathe, talk slowly (you always speak faster than you think you are when presenting) and leave pauses or speak more deliberately when you're emphasising a key point.

8. Rhetorical devices



If it worked for Cicero, Churchill, Reagan and Jobs, [rhetoric can work for you too](#).

- **Anaphora (repetition).** Think of the force of Churchill's 'We shall fight...' speech and Thatcher's 'No. No. No'. Repeat key words and phrases to hammer home your message.
- **Metaphor.** Use metaphors, allegories and similes to provide sensory comparisons. These are particularly useful if you're trying to explain something very technical.
- **The rule of three.** Veni, vidi, vici. Liberté, égalité, fraternité. Things that come in threes are inherently satisfying, and people tend to remember them. What three things do you want your audience to remember about your presentation?
- **Anadiplosis.** Use the last word or phrase to begin the next. 'Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.' – Yoda.
- **Antimetabole.** Repeat words or phrases in successive clauses, but in reverse order. 'Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.' – John F. Kennedy.
- **Rhetorical questions.** Ask rhetorical questions of your audience and take straw polls. It gives a natural break to your presentation and involves the audience in your presentation.

Check out the [handbook of rhetorical devices](#) for more clever words to impress your friends and more tips on persuading everyone else.

9. The neuroscience of a good presentation



Facts and figures activate only two parts of your brain – the language comprehension centre (Wernicke’s area) and the language processing centre (Broca’s area). Your audience might take in some of what you’re saying, but it’s not going to set anyone’s world on fire.

If, however, you tell stories, ask questions, employ visual language and use images and videos, you also stimulate the motor, visual, auditory and olfactory cortices of your audience.

Numerous studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) have found that simply reading sensory language – coffee, kick, lavender – ‘lights up’ similar areas of the brain as are activated when we actually touch, smell, hear or taste the object the word refers to. That’s why metaphors – ‘the singer had a velvet voice’ – are more effective than literal, descriptive language – ‘the singer had a good voice’.

Make your audience feel, touch and taste your presentation and your message will hit home and be far more memorable.

10. Find great images

Don't fall back on hackneyed stock images. Use powerful images that emphasise your point and add some punch to your presentation.

If you don't want to pay and you don't have any of your own photos, try:

- [Wikimedia Commons](#)
- [Flickr](#) (filter by 'all creative commons' or 'commercial use allowed')
- [Pixabay](#)
- [Google Images](#) (go to 'advanced search' in settings and filter by 'free to use or share, even commercially')
- [Openphoto](#)

11. The power of video



Videos can be great addition to you presentation. They can inject a bit of unexpected humour into your presentation or explain a particularly complex process. But they can also be a big mistake.

Ask yourself if you actually need a video. Does it add anything, or is it just summing up something you could have said yourself?

If you do use one, make sure it's no more than 30 seconds, or you'll lose your audience.

TED's master of slide decks, Aaron Weyenberg, suggests [setting video to click to play](#). Otherwise, if there's a delay in the autoplay, you start panic clicking and jumping forward through your presentation, making for an awkward few moments while you navigate your way back.

Playing a video also gives you a chance to take a sip of water, check your notes and relax for a moment.

Here's how you insert videos into [PowerPoint](#), [Keynote](#), [Haiku Deck](#), and [Prezi](#).

12. Using graphs and tables

If your presentation calls for lots of data, cut it down to the bare essentials – only display what's strictly relevant to your key message. You can share the rest of the data in a paper handout or online before or after your presentation.

And don't put up a chart or table and then not explain it; put it into context and [bring it to life](#). But **do not** glam up your graphs and tables. They are meant to be boring – it lets the data shine. Keep them two dimensional, and don't use drop shadows or funky borders and backgrounds.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has a good four-part guide about how to present data – ['Making Data Meaningful'](#).

Borrowing a table or chart from another source? Reproduce it yourself (if it's simple enough). This will give you control over the typography, colour and size, and will keep the look of your presentation consistent.

If you think the data are too complicated for a graph or table, or there are too many, use an infographic. They're visual and easy to scan, they lend a narrative structure to the data and they're eminently shareable online.

HubSpot has [10 free infographic templates](#), and there are plenty of [free online infographic tools](#) to make your own.

13. The Book of Jobs



Yes, the black turtleneck and the choreographed keynotes were easy to mock, but Steve Jobs knew what he was doing, and now every company the world over is emulating his presentation style.

What was his secret?

- **Passion.** Be enthusiastic about your idea. If it's a 'boring' topic find an angle of it that you're passionate about and amplify that.
- **Sell the benefit, not the technology.**
- **Build simple, visual slides.** If you use text, keep it short and sweet.
- **Prepare and practice obsessively.** Jobs may have made it look effortless, but he poured hours and hours of practice in the weeks running up to his keynotes.
- **Have fun.** Humour's a tricky one. It can work for some and fall flat for others, and it should only be used in the right context. But if you're comfortable with it, use it, especially if there's a technical hitch and you're stalling for time.
- **Inspire.** It's hard to make quarterly reports inspirational, but end strong by recapping your three key points and giving a call-to-action.

14. The TED Commandments

TED starts devising presentations with the speakers six to nine months before the event itself, going through countless revisions, rehearsals and plenty of fine-tuning.

So, counterintuitively, sounding natural and off-the-cuff takes practice.

Most people don't have the luxury of nine months to prepare their presentations and won't have the time to memorise it, but make the most of the time you have. Try to at least get it down to a set of bullet points on some note paper to refer to if you get lost.

TED also issues its speakers with a set of 'The TED Commandments'. If you can get past the false piety, it contains some sound advice.

- Thou Shalt Not Simply Trot Out thy Usual Shtick.
- Thou Shalt Dream a Great Dream, or Show Forth a Wondrous New Thing, Or Share Something Thou Hast Never Shared Before.
- Thou Shalt Reveal thy Curiosity and Thy Passion.
- Thou Shalt Tell a Story.
- Thou Shalt Freely Comment on the Utterances of Other Speakers for the Sake of Blessed Connection and Exquisite Controversy.
- Thou Shalt Not Flaunt thine Ego. Be Thou Vulnerable. Speak of thy Failure as well as thy Success.
- 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.
- Thou Shalt Remember all the while: Laughter is Good.
- Thou Shalt Not Read thy Speech.
- Thou Shalt Not Steal the Time of Them that Follow Thee.

15. Last minute presentation tips

Long-time TED speaker coach Gina Barnett gives [several tips for right before you get going](#).

- **The audience is on your side.** Your audience wants to see you succeed; they want to hear your ideas, learn something and be entertained.
- **Accept the unexpected.** You start late, you've got the wrong connection lead for the projector, your clicker won't work. Something will go wrong. Just take a breath and roll with it.
- **Beware of repetitive motion.** Judicious use of hand gestures and walking around can exude confidence, but don't over gesticulate, rock back and forth, or pace around. You go from looking authoritative to agitated.
- **Get excited.** Rather than trying to calm yourself down, channel your nervous energy into excitement. [Tell yourself that you're excited](#); listen to your favourite music; do some callisthenics or [power poses](#) to drop your cortisol levels (the 'stress hormone') and release testosterone.

16. One more thing



There is no magic formula for presentations.

You have your own quirks and habits, and only you know the specific context and audience of your presentation.

But using the tools, tips and resources above will give you a competitive edge and help you excel at not only presenting, but all forms of professional communication.

Break a leg.

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One more thing: Marco Paköeningrat