

Persuasive Virtual Presentations

Presentations are a hybrid form of communication, a combination of oral speech, text, and images. They've become one of the standard ways professionals share information with groups and, increasingly, with individuals as well. To create a powerful presentation, you need to distinguish the slide deck itself from your presentation as a whole. Too often we elevate the deck itself as the main event, but your voice should never play second fiddle to a screen.

Powerful Presentation: 4 Essential Steps

Step 1: Decide whether you'll use slides

Slides can be a powerful ally in your ability to communicate with an audience. They can also undermine your presentation by giving people something besides you to focus on, so use them selectively. In smaller, informal settings, it's better to use a whiteboard or handouts than a big glowing screen. When you do use slides, create them after you've prepared your key messages.

Step 2: Plot it out

Fundamentally, presentations are a kind of storytelling. An effective presentation, like a good story, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Begin with provocative new idea or a conflict. The middle of your presentation can be used to elaborate the problem and your proposed solution by going back and forth between the way things are now and the way they could be. Toggling between your current reality and a better, alternative future creates excitement and tension. Make a hard sell at the end of your presentation. Either summarize key points for a compelling appeal to the minds of your audience or, instead, speak directly to their hearts.

Step 3: Prepare your visuals

Think "less is more." People should be able to understand a slide in three seconds. Follow these tips to make your visuals memorable.

- *Slideshow ≠ talk.* Don't lay out your entire argument on a slide.
- *One idea per slide.* People can only process a single stream of information at once.
- *Storyboard on sticky notes.*
- *Fresh visuals.* It's better to pick a slightly weird metaphor or image than something tired and forgettable.

Step 4: Perform like a pro

- *Rehearse.* Don't memorize your talk word for word; it will sound stiff and boring.
- *Have a plan for interacting with your audience.*
- *Stick to the schedule.* One of the biggest ways you can show respect for your audience is by starting and ending on time. If you've allotted time for questions or other kinds of participation, honor that commitment.