TOOL

Effective Content Structure for an Impactful Presentation

Learning how to structure and give a good presentation is a valuable skill. We took a look at many different kinds of presentations and have provided some useful tips that you can use to structure your next presentation. We take a look at the important considerations that go into planning it and some things you can do to ensure its effectiveness.

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Presentation Tips & Checklist

Though different in scope, format and intent, different kinds of presentations all share a few important similarities that you should keep in mind when structuring your presentation. We've compiled a short checklist to help you as you plan your presentation.

What You Will Need

Hammermill® Color Copy Digital, 28LB
Highlighter, Pens or Markers for Coloring and Personalization

Content

To whom are you presenting?
Do they know you? If not, start with a very short introduction that presents the most important credential or experience that gives the audience a good reason for listening to you.

How much time do you have?
The number of slides or pages isn't as important as the number of ideas. Keep your presentation as simple as possible. Assume your presentation is going to take more time than you think. Be sure to allot extra time at the end for questions or feedback. No one complains if a presentation finishes early, but they can get nervous, distracted, or irritable if it runs long.

What is the goal of the presentation?
What is the action or outcome of the presentation you are trying to achieve? Having a clear idea of what you want to accomplish helps you structure it to achieve your goals and determine if your presentation was effective.

Is the goal tied to audience needs or interests?
For your presentation to be effective, the audience needs to understand how the information you are sharing will benefit or impact them. A short sentence at the beginning telling them what to expect and why it is important, can really help them focus their attention and stay engaged.

Is there a logic to the organization of your contents?
There are a number of different ways to structure an effective presentation, but the classic approach is to start with an introduction that outlines the rest of the presentation, followed by the body of the presentation and then a summary.

- Tell them what you're going to tell them
- Tell them
- Tell them what you've told them

Using repetition in your presentation can be helpful for the audience. Repetition gives your audience a better chance at remembering, and it gives you a greater chance of success. A roadmap is also helpful to include, and will make it easier for the audience to find the next section in case they get distracted.

Does this logic align with your goals?
Does the flow of your presentation work to support your desired outcome, or does it work against it? Does one point follow logically from the last? Do they build upon one another to present a clear idea, or course of action? Are there needless digressions? If your audience is trying to figure out where the presentation is going or what is happening, they are not listening to you. Side trips can disorient your audience, so try to make sure everything you are talking about is relevant and helping to make or support an important point.

Make your point, then prove it.
For each section, present your idea and then give the information or examples that prove it. If you start with the proof, your audience will be wondering where your presentation is going and won't be listening. Keep your proof as succinct as possible; only present what is necessary to make your point credibly.

CONTENT REVIEW
• Does your presentation have a clear goal or purpose?
• Do your points build upon one another to achieve this goal?
• Is the structure of your presentation clear?

Style
Once you have drafted your presentation and worked out the flow of the contents, you are free to focus on the details that can make it stronger.

Are you making more than one point per slide/page?
The number of pages or slides isn't as important as people tend to think. A 50-page document with one idea per page is far more easily understood than a 5-page document with ten points on each page. Presenting more than one idea per page makes it very likely that your audience will focus on one particular point and not on the others.

Are you talking to them or at them?
Have you structured your presentation as a friend or as a lector? Your audience will likely be more receptive to your message if you present it as part of a journey you are on together. If you show you are invested in the outcome, they will be too. If, instead, your presentation takes the tone of a lecture, you put your audience at an emotional distance and that will make them less receptive.

Are there laundry lists in your presentation?
Avoid using more than six bullet points on a page. More than six and
your bullet points seem like a laundry list, and none of the points will
be remembered. Break the information into smaller groups if you must
discuss multiple items.

Is the presentation dramatic or compelling?
Pacing is important. Is your presentation boring? Does it build energy
or lose energy? Is there anything surprising or unexpected that will keep
your audience interested and engaged?

How are you supporting your point?
Telling a short story or using a quote to prove your point can be more
emotionally engaging where appropriate. Of course, if you are presenting
your company's quarterly results, a story might not be a good idea– your
investors are looking for the numbers. Give them the numbers, then tell
the story if it is helpful and effective.

Is it credible?
Is your supporting information credible or anecdotal? If you are telling
a story, is it familiar and believable or does it seem unusual or like an
outlier? If someone told you the story as proof of a point, would you
believe them?

If there are claims of fact, are they supported by research or other metrics?
If you use research to prove your point, tell people where it came from.
If you are using metrics, use ones that are familiar and believable to your
audience. Distorting data to make it fit your point works against you.

How much is enough?
Use the minimal amount of credible information to support your point.
Each story, chart, or data point should bring something new. Repetition
helps people remember important points, but redundancy is tedious.

Are there visuals to help make difficult concepts clear?
Using imagery or charts can add variety to a presentation while making
difficult concepts easier to understand. Use them wisely. A presentation
that is all imagery or charts quickly becomes as tedious as page after
page of bullet points.

Are there any surprises?
While the logic of your presentation should be clear, your thinking and/or your presentation should include the unexpected. If your audience can anticipate what is coming page after page (or slide after slide) they will lose interest. Identify sections of your presentation that are potentially monotonous and see if there is a different way of presenting the information to keep it fresh and interesting.

STYLE REVIEW
• Is each page or slide clear?
• Is your supporting information believable?
• Is it engaging?

CONTENT COMPONENT	Y/N	INFO
Defined Audience		PRIMARY
		SECONDARY
Length of Presentation		UNDER 15 MINS ☐ OVER 30MINS ☐
Goal of the Presentation		
Intro		WHY HERE
		WHAT THIS PRESENTATION IS ABOUT
Primary Message		
Audience Benefits (Why Impact)		
Audience Impact (How Effect)		
		EVIDENCE | CHARTS ☐ NUMBERS ☐ QUOTE ☐

Presentation Checklist: Checklist Template

CONTENT COMPONENT	Y/N	INFO

Message 2

PRIMARY MESSAGE

Audience Benefits
(Why Impact)

Audience Impact
(How Effect)

EVIDENCE | CHARTS ☐ NUMBERS ☐ QUOTE ☐

Message 3

PRIMARY MESSAGE

Audience Benefits
(Why Impact)

Audience Impact
(How Effect)

EVIDENCE | CHARTS ☐ NUMBERS ☐ QUOTE ☐

Message 4

PRIMARY MESSAGE

Audience Benefits
(Why Impact)

Audience Impact
(How Effect)

EVIDENCE | CHARTS ☐ NUMBERS ☐ QUOTE ☐

Presentation Checklist: Checklist Template