PRESENTATION DOMINATION

10 tips to boost the impact of your research presentation

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WHY BELIEVE US?

**HANS** My heroes? Researchers like you, ready to change the world. With facts and creativity. Yet, dull and unclear presentations stand in your way. And that is where I step in, helping you make a difference creating clear and activating presentations. My base camp is in Belgium, yet my second home lies in Mexico. I not only contribute my time to The Floor is Yours, but also work for VLIR-UOS, an organization promoting active collaboration between researchers and students ranging from Belgium, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

**TOON** I am a great fan of both researchers and journalists. Really. If only those two idols of mine would communicate with each other. Enter the field of Science Communication and witness how science can be presented, with people actually listening. Being both an engineer and journalist has given me plenty of Research and Communication know-how. Let me present you with the tools needed, and let’s take action together.
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WHY BOOST YOUR PRESENTATIONS?

The Floor is Yours is providing researchers at colleges, universities and companies with the help needed to give clear and activating research presentations with impact.

Let’s face it, the vast majority of research presentations is unappealing, demotivating and unclear. Result: a massive waste of energy and time.

After all, how can you transfer knowledge and attract funding or new partners with your audience half asleep, doodling away or planning dinner?

And that is a pity, because with a well-aimed presentation you could very well convince your co-workers, bosses, user committees and whole conferences of the value of your research. Enough with useless presentations! Do it well, or leave the room.

But what is the secret behind a solid research presentation? Continue reading this expert guide and discover the 10 tips we will give you to start creating clear and activating research presentations, today!

Enjoy!
Hans and Toon
THESE 5 DEADLY SINS WILL WRECK YOUR PRESENTATION

How much time are we devoting to presentations worldwide? How much money are universities and companies coughing up to have people attend presentations that have very little effect? And why do not all presentations have their intended effect?

LET’S FIRST DO THE MATH

Recent numbers show that around 30 million presentations are being held worldwide each day. Worldwide. 30 million. Assuming that a presentation lasts an average of 20 minutes, that means 600 million minutes are spent each day by people speaking with PowerPoint in the background.

If each presentation is attended by 12 persons on average, that means that the presenter and his 12-headed audience are together sacrificing uh... *grabs his calculator*... around 16,250,000 full working days for this. Or rather, every 24 hours a total of almost 1150 years of presentations are given and attended. Each and every day. I won’t bother equating this to an average remuneration, but I can assure you that it would be quite a lot.

Allow me to repeat this one last time, to truly let those numbers sink in: every 24 hours a total of 1150 years of presentations are given and attended. No wonder expressions like Death by PowerPoint or PowerPoint Poisoning have leapt into
existence.

If all those presentations and hours invested would actually amount to anything, we could only applaud this. But in all honesty, most of those daily 1150 years of presentations are going absolutely nowhere. Your audience still hasn’t a clue about the content of your research or has forgotten all about your talk before even having left the venue. Let alone, them taking action or handing you a great big bag of money for further research. And that is a pity. Because research is really of concern to everyone.

**THE FIVE DEADLY SINS**

Most presentations fail to achieve their intended effect, and that is because they fall victim to one or more of five deadly sins.

With each of those wrongdoings, a presenter is wasting his and his audience's time, energy and attention.

The five deadly sins in the world of Presenting are:

1. **No clear point:** Presentations should have one, maximum two main ideas. Presentations with no clear point will leave you wondering: Now what was that about?
2. **No benefit to the audience:** These presentations do not appeal to the audience and often bring to mind the question ‘So what?’
3. **No clear structure:** These presentations skip from one subject to another and do not hold a clear line. You wonder: ‘Hold on, how did the speaker get to this point? I must have missed a couple of slides.’
4. **Too detailed:** Alongside the relevant facts, all too many overly technical or irrelevant pieces of information are provided. A common mistake in research presentation, which is easily revealed by such speaker comments: ‘This slide is rather difficult to read, but…’ or ‘This graph seems complicated, but …’ Otherwise put: too many slides overflowing with excess information.

5. **Too long:** After all, after how many presentations have you honestly thought they had been too concise?

There you have it, a list of five deadly sins we should never commit again. There are no 50 quick prayers to absolve these sins, but instead you will merely be punishing yourself and your audience. Those five wrongdoings will in no time blow your presentations to pieces, completely alienate your user committee and have your audience promptly nod off to *Death by PowerPoint*.

Every day there will be around 16,250,000 full work days that are going to waste to failing presentations. Sure seems like a lot of time to be sinful…

**WHAT TO DO**

Avoid falling prey to these five deadly presentation sins. With every future presentation, take a good look at your slides with this list in mind and keep out of harm’s way.

(1) *This number can be found in the excellent book ‘Presenting to Win: The art of telling your story’ (Jerry Weissman)*
DRAWING THE AUDIENCE’S ATTENTION

GIVE THE AUDIENCE WHAT THEY WANT

What is it that the audience wants to know from you? In creating your presentation, leave out the ideas that are only of interest to you yet don’t mean as much for the audience.

Create an open mind for your topic among your audience. Why is this topic of interest to your audience? Avoid introducing your presentation with a context analysis, only to wait until the very end to share your core message. People will have long lost interest. First introduce the main idea that is of interest to your audience and only then continue with the details.

Your presentation pitch is the key to drawing the audience’s attention. Instead of setting out with ‘Good afternoon, my name is ... and I will be talking to you about...’, which will kill anyone’s motivation in seconds, let the audience first find out why this will be worth tuning in to. Which question will this presentation offer an answer to? How will this benefit the audience? Once that is out of the way, introduce yourself and share your link to the presentation’s topic.

TELL A STORY

People best remember stories. A good story is remarkably more efficient than a board filled with facts & figures. What do you as an organization or person stand for? Do you also really believe in what you do? Use real and personal stories to illustrate your point.
BE AUTHENTIC AND ENTHUSIASTIC

Why should your audience believe you if you don’t believe your own words? Don’t give the audience an information-spewing robot, but instead present to them a person passionate about his cause.

The audience should be connecting with you as a speaker. Do not hesitate sharing a personal anecdote. And above all, believe in your presentation.

CASE STUDY: MICHAEL BRAUNGART, FLUSHED AWAY

How far should you go to draw the audience’s attention?

Imagine this: A presenter sitting on a chair in front of a full audience, making us believe this is his regular morning moment on the toilet. Pure genius, or over the top? This is Michael Braungart, a chemical scientist who claims we are in need of products that will not end up as waste, but instead be part of a biological cycle. Throughout his presentation, Braungart leads his audience from one surprise to the next, by providing unexpected links and striking examples. He points out how the earth’s population of ants is four times the human population. Yet, contrary to humans, ants do not create waste. Human materials need to be reinvented.

So, perhaps you wouldn’t want to go as far as Braungart in drawing your audience’s attention. But don’t forget that to make a difference, you may need to step out of your comfort zone.

Watch the presentation on TED.com

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PRESENTING A CLEAR MESSAGE

CREATE A CLEAR STRUCTURE

A clear structure will help your audience to better understand the message throughout your presentation and to then feel a need to act upon it. Give your structure a natural feel. Have it focus on the essential elements and make sure your main message is sufficiently revisited.

We distinguish three main components:

1. The opening serves to draw the audience’s attention and to make them receptive for your message. The opening should not so much inform, but rather touch on emotion.

2. The central section serves to build up your core message step by step. This is where logic steps in.

3. The conclusion intertwines emotion and logic by linking your message to a particular action. We want to motivate the audience into doing something or into forming a certain opinion.

These three components could look like this:

OPENING

• Attention grabber: link the topic of the presentation to the audience’s needs: which need in particular will the presentation offer an answer to?

• Mission: what will your course of action be as a speaker to address this
need? What is your relationship to the topic?

- **Core message:** don’t hesitate communicating the main conclusion, the take-home message, at this point already. Repeating this message regularly can never hurt.

- **Summary:** introduce the content of the central section of your presentation.

**CENTRAL SECTION**

- **Point 1**
  - Transition: communicate where in the presentation you are and how each point supports the main message.

- **Point 2**
  - Transition
  - ...

**CONCLUSION**

- **Review:** quickly recall the main points of the presentation’s central section and highlight the link to the original problem.

- **Conclusion:** create a clear call to action.

- **End note:** link back to the start of your presentation and motivate the audience.

This structure was inspired by the book ‘Trees, maps and theorems - Effective communication for rational minds’ by Jean-Luc Doumont.

**CREATE A CLEAR AND SIMPLE MESSAGE**

If the audience were to remember one thing, what would it be? Your entire
presentation should focus on that single message. Continue repeating it throughout your presentation. Make sure both your text and illustrations contribute to that message.

State your message as simple as possible without losing track of the core idea. Compare this to replacing 679/194 by 7/2, or shortening π or ‘pi’ to 3,14 for clarity’s sake.

Too many details, and your audience will slowly drift away. For more details, refer to a background document.

AVOID ABBREVIATIONS, JARGON AND ENDLESS FIGURES

Avoid abbreviations. Don’t rely on your audience being familiar with the abbreviations you use on a daily basis. Avoid technical jargon, unless you are sure that your audience knows it too. Instead, look for alternative terms that everyone will understand. Always try to find out all you can about your audience’s background ahead of time. And when you do use a technical term, remember to quickly clarify it.

When listing several arguments, opt for three bullet points. Exceeding that number will make it more difficult for your audience to process the information. Five bullet points is the absolute maximum.
MOTIVATING THE AUDIENCE TO ACTION

CREATE A CLEAR CALL TO ACTION
Whether the audience will actually follow your thoughts is out of your hands as a speaker, seeing the multitude of other influencing factors that are in play. Instead, focus on motivating the audience and having them feel involved to act upon your presentation message.

Do not assume that the audience will themselves define this call to action. A first step would be to clearly describe to them what exactly it is you are expecting.

UTILIZE THE FINAL WORD
Pay special attention to your presentation’s conclusion. This conclusion should ensure that your message sticks in people’s minds and that the audience knows what is now expected of them. Anything else you add after this conclusion will solely bring its purpose down. Allow the audience to first applaud after hearing your presentation, and only then give them an opportunity to ask questions.

AIM FOR LOW-HANGING AS WELL AS HIGH-HANGING FRUIT
Minimize the number of steps the audience needs to take to perform an action. Do not expect the unexpected, but rather ask for a small first step. Provide low-hanging fruit, giving the audience a quick win. Alongside that, communicate to them a slightly more challenging goal, which could very well be reached in the long run. Are there any tools for the audience to use? Can they come to you for advice? Tell them this.
TIPS FOR PRESENTING WITH SLIDES

START FROM A BLANK PAGE

A presentation will stand or fail by the efforts you put in preparing it. But how do you start preparing? Take a blank piece of paper. First find an answer to each of the core questions. Then draw up a clear structure. Only when this is finished, should you compile everything into a PowerPoint or other presentation model. Never start working in PowerPoint before your structure is fully planned out.

NO SLIDES ARE BETTER THAN POOR SLIDES

Slides are there to support oral presentations. In some cases other tools, such as a flip-over, white board or nothing at all may actually be more effective. First define which tool is most effective in bringing your presentation for a certain situation and audience.

Poor slides distract the audience. No time to prepare high quality slides? Then leave out the slides and focus on delivering a clear and solid presentation. Drop the slides but fine-tune the talk.

KEEP TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS RELEVANT

Research has shown that it is more difficult to process information when it is simultaneously presented in spoken and written form (PresentationZen by Garr Reynolds). Your slides should solely contain the information needed for your
audience to grasp your message. Present your audience with a visual model of your message as often as possible. Never go over 20 words per slide.

When showcasing illustrations or figures, make sure only essential information is shown. A large graph with only one important detail to show will distract. When presenting an image, make sure that the message is clear and is not washed away by smaller details. Always use high-resolution images or figures when projecting on a large screen.

SLIDES ≠ NOTES ≠ HANDOUTS

Many speakers attempt to save time by having their slides function both as speaking notes as well as handouts for the audience. As a result, the audience has a harder time following the presentation, the speaker has more eye for the slides than his audience and the handouts completely miss their effect. Each of these tools requires a different approach. Handouts should be in the form of a fully outlined text that can also be read independent of the presentation. Again, make your slides or handouts stand out, or leave them out.

ONE IDEA PER SLIDE

Have each presentation point be on a separate slide. Instead of saying what can actually be seen on the slide, the ‘what’, refer to the ‘so what’ or why that piece of information is so important. For example, instead of opting for the figure title ‘Overview of popular travel destinations’, consider writing ‘London is top European destination among Canadians’ (always keeping in mind your personal
message).

**LEGIBLE TEXT AND IMAGES**

The horror of being presented with illegible text or images. Make sure also the people in the back row will be able to view your text and images. Use a minimum font size of 24.

**BE SEEN AND HEARD**

Stand up straight and speak to the audience. Try not to look towards your slides too often. Do not hide behind a lectern, but stand in the middle of the room, in front of your audience. Use an automatic slide advancer, instead of going back and forth to the computer. Make sure everyone can see and hear you. Use a microphone if your voice does not project adequately or if you are in a large room. Inquire beforehand as to the venue where you will be presenting and to the number of expected persons.

**PRACTICE IN ADVANCE**

A good presentation requires plenty of preparation and practice. The more time you commit to the preparations, the better the result will be. Practice in front of the mirror, the webcam, your partner or a colleague.

Find out in advance how much time you will be allowed for your presentation. Honor that time. Skipping slides or going past your time may result in annoyance with the organizing committee and the audience.
5 WAYS TO LET YOUR TITLE DO THE WORK FOR YOU

You only make a first impression once, so do it well. The title of your presentation will be that first impression. It will be there on your welcome slide and in the conference brochure and should draw everyone’s attention in a positive way.

We often believe that a good title should be a summary of our presentation. Yet, that would be just about the dullest option of them all.

A title should talk the public into joining your presentation, with you promising a great deal of captivating content in exchange for a couple of minutes of their precious time.

But what makes a title so riveting for it to stand out above the rest? In pursuit of an answer, I did some research of my own, comparing titles on several websites of popular science magazines.

What struck me was that high-rating articles often follow the same pattern. Here are the five keys to success:

1. KEEP THINGS CONCISE

It is a universal truth that people lose interest in long titles. Stick to a maximum of 10 words.
2. USE NUMBERS
From kindergarten up, we have learned to structure the world using our fingers: two flowers, three cookies, four pencils. A number in the title appeals to us and brings structure.
E.g.: 10 Offbeat Things Humans Have Launched Into Space (howstuffworks.com)

3. ASK A QUESTION
Challenge your audience. Asking questions triggers thinking and engagement from them. Choose your question wisely and really speak to their imagination.
E.g.: How does color affect you? Take the quiz (howstuffworks.com)

4. ESTABLISH SURPRISING LINKS
Establish a link between scientific research and day-to-day matters. Or bring two things together which at first glance do not have much in common.
E.g.: What Twins Reveal About The Science Of Faith (popsci.com)

5. USE POPULAR TERMS
Certain words draw more attention than others: Just as ‘Britney Spears’, ‘Google’ or ‘George Clooney’ draw more clicks on the internet, words like ‘sex’ and ‘innovation’ work particularly well in titles.
E.g.: Sex With Humans Made Neanderthals Extinct? (science.nationalgeographic.com)
80% SUCCESS WITH PECHAKUCHA

The Japanese term ‘PechaKucha’ can easily be translated as ‘blah-blah’. PechaKucha should be pronounced as one word (petsha-kutsha).

PECHAKUCHA: THE ESSENCE IN 20 IMAGES AND 20 SECONDS PER IMAGE

PechaKucha is a presentation method based on the 20x20 formula: 20 images and 20 seconds per image. A presentation lasts exactly 6 minutes and 40 seconds. No hassles with speakers going over their time allowed: the slides advance automatically.

PechaKucha speaks to the imagination, with you telling your story using 20 images. No text at all, or a couple of key words at most. This method allows the images to do the talking.

THE BENEFITS OF PECHAKUCHA

- Success rate of regular presentations: 20%. With PechaKucha: 80%! Why?
  PechaKucha pushes speakers to thoroughly practice before presenting
- The audience loves PechaKucha. The presentations are concise, original and focus on a story.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF PECHAKUCHA

- Creating and delivering a PechaKucha presentation not only takes time but also requires plenty of practice. Not every speaker is up for that.
- The automatic slide advancement after only 20 seconds can be daunting
for certain speakers.

20X20: DOGMA OR GUIDELINE?

Would 21 images or 25 seconds per slide also be allowed? No. The automatic slide show makes sure you will feel the need to practice your presentation well in advance. The 20 images only-rule forces you to choose your images wisely to optimally illustrate your story. The disadvantages of this rigid 20x20-mould completely fade in comparison to the many benefits. Not every good presentation goes by the 20x20 formula. But when applied, the formula does almost always bring about strong presentations.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A PECHAKUCHA-EVENT

There is PechaKucha creating software available, but you could just as well use PowerPoint or another program to achieve the same result.

To organize a PechaKucha presentation series, follow these steps:

• Invite several speakers and ask them to send to you beforehand their 20 images, be it in PowerPoint or another program. Request high-resolution images. Videos or animations are not accepted. Clearly state that there should be no text or at most a couple of words on each image slide. No need for the speaker to provide an opening or end slide: You the organizer will be responsible for that.

• Discuss in advance what will be the general topic of the presentation. Point out to the speaker that he should arrive well prepared. The presentation can be practiced in PowerPoint or another program by setting the automatic slide transition to 20 seconds. Decide on a deadline for the images to be
sent in. For transferring larger files you can use www.wetransfer.com.

- Have you received all images from the speakers? Paste them together in PowerPoint or a similar program. Create an opening slide for each presentation stating the name of the speaker. This will be followed by the 20 slides and finally an end slide, possibly containing the name of the event. Set the slideshow to automatic timing, starting with the presenter’s first image and continuing to his 20th and final image. The opening and end slide will not contain an automatic timing, seeing you or a moderator will be taking care of those transitions.

- Inform the speakers on the order of presenting. Provide a mobile microphone.

MORE INFORMATION

Find more information on PechaKucha and view sample videos at

- www.pecha-kucha.org
- Pecha Kucha Brussels

We also organize workshops on presenting and organizing a PechaKucha event. Check out our workshop page!
YOUR RESEARCH ON THE FRONT PAGE
5 LESSONS TAKEN FROM THE TEST TUBE HAMBURGER

Professor Mark Post of the University of Maastricht (Netherlands) makes a hamburger using muscle cells from a cow. The world press gathers in London, where a top chef will transform this hamburger into a true delicacy.

This piece of meat is all of a sudden the talk of the town, whereas at any other given time, no one would have blinked over this field of science. Why is that? And which lessons can we learn from this in presenting our very own research?

Let’s dive into our bag of tricks and show you some of the techniques professor Post used to create his hamburger hype and which you could also easily apply.

1. MAKE YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC RECOGNIZABLE
Ask any random person on the street what a stem cell is. Now do the same, replacing ‘stem cell’ with ‘hamburger’. See the difference?

Everyone knows what a hamburger is. By translating the stem cell research to a recognizable object, a hamburger, professor Post makes his research accessible to the general public. Do the same for your research and look for recognizable applications or find solid links.

Cells could very well be communicating with each other just as people on Facebook. How’s that for a link?
2. PRESENT YOUR RESEARCH IN LAYERS
The news about the hamburger creates plenty of on- and offline buzz. Meat-eaters, vegetarians, farmers, doctors and scientists... each of them gladly voicing their opinion.

Where one is wondering when such a hamburger would find its way to the supermarkets, another may be intrigued by the scientific method used or aptly refer to the world food shortage.

By working in layers, you provide food for thought to everyone. Aim your message at your largest target group, but do not forget to include some elements that will be of interest to the experts too.

3. PLAY WITH THE SENSES
Hear the hamburger sizzling in butter while the chef swiftly adds the red beet juice. There is that subtle meat odor. The tasters notice the lack of fat.

This could very well be a primetime cooking show. We are looking on from our front row seats and can practically taste that hamburger.

Play with the senses during your presentation. Provide extensive details for the audience to imagine what your object feels or smells like. Better yet: really show it to them.

4. CREATE BLING BLING
Location: a London TV studio. The main actors: a British top chef, tasters from
Austria and the US, and a professor. Price tag: € 250.000, for a piece of meat. The mysterious sponsor: Google co-founder Sergey Brin. People love glamor. Cooking is very trendy. Clever move by the researchers, leaving the university behind them and bringing on the bells and whistles of showbiz.

Why not try it during one of your presentations: more show, less tell.

5. CHANGE THE WORLD

By making meat from stem cells professor Post wants to offer an answer to world food shortage, global warming and animal suffering through slaughtering. Each of the articles or videos covering the hamburger story refers to one or more of these higher goals. It isn’t just a piece of meat, but a discovery possibly impacting each of our futures.

Emphasize how your research is making a difference and what its potential is to change the world.

But what if you applied each of these five tips, and still no front page?

Professor Post also failed at his first attempt. Not every type of research can be easily relayed to something bite-size. Nor is drawing the attention of a Google guru any more straightforward.

But these five tips will at least give you a proper head start.
PRESENTING FOR AN AUDIENCE OF NON-RESEARCHERS: SO WHAT?

The research that you are actively involved in:

A. is fundamental research that will only find its way to the consumer in about 20 years;
B. is pure practical research that is directly applicable in its field of study;
C. lies somewhere in between A and B.

Fundamental research is usually presented to other researchers and persons with a similar mindset.

Practical research, on the other hand, is presented to companies, organizations and consumers who often do not fully understand the diverse problems and finer points of the research work. This calls for a different approach.

HOW DO YOU TALK WITH COMPANIES, ORGANIZATIONS AND CONSUMERS?

You can read up on this topic all you want, but if there is one golden rule for you to remember, let it be this:

Highlight to companies the benefits of your research or product.

Imagine you having done research on dyslexia among children. Out of all your research and expertise you have finally developed a tool which companies, organizations and consumers are free to use. You have built a beautiful website
around this tool, which can be accessed free of charge by professional care providers, concerned parents or other companies.

You have put months, years of work into this. The day arrives that the website goes online. And ... no one responds to it. No expected rush of interest.

So what is behind that?

You are focusing primarily on the features of your tool instead of its benefits. This is a subtle, yet crucial difference when speaking to companies or individuals.

During a presentation rather say:

- ‘Use this tool to easily find care providers near your home’ (=benefit), instead of ‘Use this tool to sort care providers by location.’ (=feature)

See that subtle difference? There being a direct benefit for your audience makes it all the more appealing to them.

It is difficult to focus on the benefits rather than the features. After all, during the entire span of your research you have been substantiating the features of your product.

Let’s take a service like Dropbox, who says:

- ‘Have all your computer files with you always and everywhere, even if a truck should drive over your PC.’ (=benefit),
- which beats saying: ‘Each of your files is saved on our secure servers.’ (=feature)
When presenting research or a specific tool, always have the benefits clearly stand out. Do not blindly assume that your audience will track those down themselves.

**BUT THAT REQUIRES KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE**

You should of course be aware of what your audience wants. What are their concerns? What are they losing sleep over? If your tool could solve just one of those issues, then you have succeeded and you will have them on your side.

That does require you to package your benefit differently each time, depending on the audience you are addressing.

**To professional care providers you might say:** ‘Save lots of time when looking for care providers.’ (not: our website and all information is accessible free of charge)

**To a worried parent you might say:** ‘Make an informed choice based on all the useful information our tool will provide to you.’ (not: our website and all information is accessible free of charge)

**THE POWER OF ‘SO WHAT?’**

Having trouble making the translation from feature to benefit? Ask yourself: ‘So what?’

That is also what your audience will be thinking: ‘Why should this be of any relevance to me?’ The ‘So what?’-question will answer that question for you.
You may even need to ask yourself the ‘So what?’-question more than once before getting to the heart of the matter.

An example:

‘The design of an entrance hall in a hospital has a positive influence on visitors.’ => So what? (1) => ‘A welcoming design will have visitors coming by more often, allowing them to spend more money at the cafeteria and cheering up the patients. => So what? (2) => ‘Happy patients get better sooner, allowing beds to open up more quickly.’

Your ‘So what?’ question should always be answered, keeping your audience in mind. In the example of the design of the entrance hall, you are speaking to the finance managers of the hospital and not to the visitors themselves.

You are selling your tool or research to actual people and companies, each having their own set of problems and issues.

If your research is able to solve those issues and you are able to communicate that well, then you can expect their undivided attention throughout your presentation.
HOW TO REMEMBER WHAT TO SAY DURING A PRESENTATION?

Avoid crowding your slides with information. But then how should you remember what to say during your presentation? Reading from cheat cards demonstrates little self-confidence, yet dumping your entire script on slides, is also not an option.

So here comes the oldest trick in the book, one that is over 2000 years old...

REVISITING THE ANCIENT ROMAN REPUBLIC

We have learned quite a bit from the Romans, but imagine also being able to pick up from them ways to efficiently remember presentations.

I doubt this story being 100 percent true, but it does present us with a wonderful technique to help you remember and structure your presentation. Presenting the technique of the Roman Columns.

HOW CICERO COULD SPEAK FOR HOURS IN THE ROMAN SENATE WITHOUT NOTES OR SLIDES

Here is the story: Cicero, the great Roman speaker, could speak for hours on end in the senate. What made this so exceptional was that he had absolutely no notes, papers, let alone slides or PowerPoint to back him up.
Even more remarkable was his ability to make these lengthy speeches into a highly engaging event.

In today’s age it is hard to still imagine anyone being able to deliver engaging hour-long speeches. But this man was said to have everyone hanging on his every word. After each of his speeches admirers would flock to him, desperate to know how this man could talk so incessantly without reverting to even the smallest piece of text.

Cicero would stroke his beard (truth be told, the man had no beard) and answer: ‘It is not very complicated. As you know, I walk through the senate when I am presenting. When I pass by a column, I tell a story. The first column will have me discussing taxes, the second the grain shortage.’

Cicero knew well in advance which story he would tell when passing by each column. When preparing his speech, he would visualize the senate and the path he would walk through it while telling his story. The columns created a certain structure and basis in his story.

And that is how Cicero remembered exactly what he wished to say.

**HOW DO ROMAN COLUMNS BRING STRUCTURE TO YOUR PRESENTATION?**

We have warned against slides overflowing with data. Why not empty your brain
during a brainstorm session on a blank piece of paper, as opposed to doing the same on your slides! Select five to six core topics from the range of ideas that have made it to your paper.

These will be your five or six Roman columns.

If there are certain ideas that in no way fit into the five or six Roman columns which you have just drawn up, then ask yourself if they are in fact relevant. You will likely be able to mark them off. Go ahead!

When each of the Roman columns has been drawn up and you have given each idea a spot of its own, it is time to start thinking about a structure and flow. Which order will your columns be in? What is their relation to one another and what will you be touching upon first?

Finally, when your Roman columns have been erected and your main ideas have made their way to a solid structure on paper, only then start working on your slides.

**CREATING A ROMAN COLUMN IN POWERPOINT**

It is only a matter of creating a slide that will inspire you to start telling a story.

Refrain from filling this slide up with notes (we cannot stress this enough). Follow Cicero’s example: He had absolutely nothing with him and is celebrated as being the greatest Roman speaker of all time. Not for being backed by a fancy PowerPoint
presentation, but for his power to speak. Cicero saw the first column in the senate and started speaking, and so should you. Take a slide and add an image that will trigger you and your story. Feel free to add a couple of words to the image as an aid. But tell a story.

You will appear so much more natural for not reading from your slides. Nor will you feel the need to glance at your slides while turning your back to the audience. Your slide contains nothing more than an image and several words at the most, so there is really no reason to look.

BUT, BUT... WHAT IF I DO FORGET WHAT I WANTED TO SAY?

Do not start with the top, if you still have doubts. But how about starting small and applying the technique of the Roman columns to structure your presentation:

1. Find five to six core elements around which you will build your slides.
2. Do not hesitate putting more text on your slides during your first attempt.
3. With each presentation, try adding less and less text to your slides. Continue with this until you are left with the bare minimum: a column without notes.

Admitted, an image alone will not always do the trick. In research, graphs and figures are often more important than what is actually being said. Then place your graph central as a Roman column and start your story there.
In no case reveal your conclusions on the slide.

In other words, if Cicero was able to talk hours on end using this technique, then we should at least be able to give our audience an engaging speech of half an hour, right?
OVERVIEW OF TIPS FOR SPEAKERS

[1] THESE FIVE DEADLY SINS WILL WRECK YOUR PRESENTATION
- No clear point
- No benefit to the audience
- No clear build-up
- Too detailed
- Too long

- Give the audience what they want
- Tell a story
- Be authentic and enthusiastic

[3] CREATE A CLEAR MESSAGE
- Use a clear structure
- Create a clear and simple message
- Avoid abbreviations, jargon and endless figures

[4] MOTIVATE THE AUDIENCE TO ACTION
- Create a clear call to action
- Utilize the final word
- Aim for low-hanging as well as high-hanging fruit

[5] PRESENTATIONS WITH SLIDES
- Start with a blank piece of paper
- No slides are better than poor slides
- Keep text and illustrations relevant
- Slides ≠ notes ≠ handouts
- One idea per slide
- Keep text and images legible
- Be seen and heard
- Practice in advance

[6] FIVE WAYS OF LETTING YOUR TITLE DO THE WORK FOR YOU
- Keep things concise
- Use numbers
- Ask a question
- Establish surprising links
- Use popular terms
[7] 80% SUCCESS WITH PECHAKUCHA
- The main idea in 20 images and 20 seconds per image
- Practice your presentation well in advance
- Use images to tell your story

[8] YOUR RESEARCH ON THE FRONT PAGE
- Make your research topic recognizable
- Present your research in layers
- Play with the senses
- Create bling bling
- Change the world

[9] PRESENTING FOR AN AUDIENCE OF NON-RESEARCHERS: SO WHAT?
- Discuss the benefits of your research or product
- Know your audience
- Translating a trait into a benefit: So what?

[10] HOW TO REMEMBER WHAT TO SAY DURING YOUR PRESENTATION
- Use Roman columns to construct your story
- Choose five or six central columns
- Cross off anything irrelevant to those columns
- Use images triggering your memory to tell a story
- Limit the amount of text
INTERESTED IN MORE INFO AND EXPERT GUIDES FROM THE FLOOR IS YOURS?

Check out our The Floor is Yours glog for many more tips for speakers, organizers and audience members, especially aimed at research presentation.

Each of our expert guides is available to you free of charge through our blog. Take a look!

Are you interested in a particular topic on which you can't find any information, drop us a line at info@thefloorisyours.be. We may write a blog post or expert guide on it.
THE FLOOR IS YOURS
A SELECTION OF OUR WORKSHOPS

Can you give a compelling research presentation?

What if you do not think you are a good speaker? Could you still give a good research presentation? Could that presentation even leave a big enough impact on your audience to have them really remember your content?

Guiding you along with plenty of tip & tricks which have not yet found their way into this expert guide, we will help you in making a research presentation with impact. Learn more at:
www.thefloorisyours.be/en/workshops

Implementing PechaKucha

The 20 slides and 20 seconds per slide formula may seem cumbersome. We will teach you all you need to know to organize a successful research event and help you in prepping your speakers.

PechaKucha is not just a new trend in presentations, but a dynamic way of bringing ideas across. Quick, visual and convincing. Read about it at:
www.thefloorisyours.be/en/workshops

How a good research poster can have a bigger impact than a presentation.

Each researcher will be giving poster presentations at some point in his career. And often you will be there among hundreds of other posters presenters. That sparks the question: How can you stand out among all other research? How can you get the most out of a seemingly useless activity?

The key is in bringing across your message in a clear and compact manner. But how do you bring a 30 page paper together on one poster? Discover more at:
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GET IN TOUCH

Have something on your mind? Have a question or a problem? Let us help you out!

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Also check out our blog with many more tips and tricks to further guide you along.
www.thefloorisyours.be
10 tips to boost the impact of your research presentation