

## 12: Business Presentations - Part 1

### Chapter Objectives

- Create oral presentation materials that reflect standards of effective presentations
- Apply the standards of effective presentation to Business Writing
- Demonstrate formatting and designing of presentations
- Evaluate presentations for effectiveness

### Introduction

A common assignment in business writing courses—not to mention in the workplace—is to prepare and deliver **presentations**, a task most of us would be happy to avoid. However, while employers look for coursework and experience in preparing written documents, they also look for experience with presentations as well.

Business presentations will be prepared differently face-to-face than in an online environment. You would see many presenters use flip charts, PowerPoint, and other visuals for face-to-face presentations. If you are presenting online, oral reports can be sent in as "scripts," or audio versions can be transmitted live or recorded. You might also use PowerPoint and Prezi presentations as well.

Most people would rather have root canal surgery without Novocaine than stand up in front of a group and speak. It truly is one of life's great stressors. But with some help from the resources that follow, you can be a champion presenter. Learning how to have effective presentations can help you close a big deal or explain information to your colleagues at work.

### Topics and Situations for Presentations

For a presentation in a business writing course, imagine that you are formally handing over your final *written* report to the people with whom you set up the hypothetical contract or agreement. For example, imagine that you had contracted with a software company to write its user guide. Once you have completed it, you have a meeting with the chief officers to formally deliver the guide. You spend some time orienting them to the guide, showing them how it is organized and written, and discussing some of its highlights. Your goal is to get them acquainted with the guide and to prompt them for any concerns or questions.

The first step is to figure out a topic. It is important to remember what you did in the writing process and apply the same steps here. Start with brainstorming some possibilities on what you want to present:

- **Purpose:** One way to find a topic is to think about the purpose of your talk. Is it to instruct (for example, to explain how to run a text editing program on a computer), to persuade (to vote for or against a local business-related bond issue), or simply to inform (to report on citizen participation in the new recycling program)?
  - *Informative purpose:* A presentation can be primarily informative. For example, as a member of a committee involved in a project to relocate a distribution center, your job might be to give an oral report on the condition of the building and grounds at one of the sites proposed for purchase.
  - *Instructional purpose:* A presentation can be instructional. Your task might be to train new employees to use certain equipment or to perform certain routine tasks.
  - *Persuasive purpose:* A presentation can be persuasive. You might want to convince members of local civic organizations to support a city-wide recycling program.
- **Topics:** You can start by thinking of a business-related subject, like how computers aid innovations in customer service or the impact of climate change on tourism. For your presentation, think of a subject you would be interested in talking about, but find a reason why an audience would want to hear your report.
- **Place or situation:** You can find topics presentations or make more detailed plans for them by thinking about the place or the situation in which your report might naturally be given: at meetings for your employer? at a city council meeting? at a meeting of the board of directors or high-level executives of a company? Thinking about a presentation this way makes you focus on the audience, their reasons for listening to you, and their interests and background. As in all business writing situations, identifying and understanding your audience is of the utmost importance.

## Contents and Requirements for Presentations

Once you have picked a topic for your presentation, it is time to organize your thoughts. The focus for your presentation is clear, understandable presentation, and a well-organized, well-planned, and well-timed discussion.

When you give your presentation, use the following as a requirements list as a way of focusing your preparations:

- **Situation:** Plan to explain the situation of your oral report and who you are. Make sure that there is a clean break between this brief explanation and the beginning of your actual report.
- **Timing:** Make sure your report lasts no longer than the time allotted.
- **Introduction:** Pay special attention to the introduction to your talk. Here's where you tell your audience what you are going to present.
  - Indicate the *purpose* of your oral report
  - give an *overview* of its contents
  - find some way to *interest* the audience
- **Visuals:** Use at least one visual—preferably slides using presentation software (such as Powerpoint, Keynote, or Prezi). Flip charts and objects for display are good, but avoid scribbling stuff on the chalkboard or whiteboard or relying strictly on handouts. Make sure you discuss key elements of your visuals. Don't just throw them up there and ignore them. Point out things about them; explain their significance to the audience.
- **Explanation:** Plan to explain any complex aspects of your topic clearly and understandably. Don't race through complicated, technical information—slow down and explain it carefully so that your audience understands it.
- **Transitions:** Use "verbal headings"—by now, you've gotten used to using headings in your written work. There is a corollary in presentations. With these, you give your audience a very clear signal you are moving from one topic or part of your talk to the next. Your presentation visual can help you signal these headings.
- **Planning:** Plan your report in advance and practice it so that it is organized. Make sure that your audience knows what you are talking about and why, which part of the talk you are on, and what is coming next. Overviews and verbal headings greatly contribute to this sense of organization.
- **Closing:** End with a real conclusion. People sometimes forget to plan how to wrap up a presentation and end by just trailing off into a mumble. Remember that in conclusions, you can:
  - *summarize* (go back over high points of what you've discussed)
  - *conclude* (state some logical conclusion based on what you have presented)
  - provide some *last thought* (end with some final interesting point but general enough not to require elaboration)
  - or some combination of the three
- **Questions:** And certainly, you'll want to prompt the audience for questions and concerns.
- **Timing (again):** As mentioned above, be sure your presentation is carefully timed. Some ideas on how to work within an allotted time frame are presented in the next section.

The sample chart in Figure 1 below can help you with your organization and brainstorming.

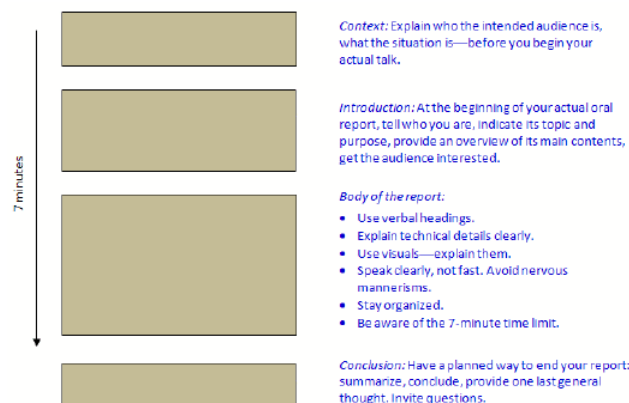


Figure 1: Diagram of the 7 minute oral presentation. (CC BY 2019; Tiffani Reardon)

Just as different writing assignments have unique expectations from you as a student, presentations will also vary depending on the assignment. Carefully read the assignment and directions before you try to create an outline for your presentation.

### Planning and Preparing Visuals for Presentations

Presentations are quite common in both academic and professional settings, and, because they are such an important part of how you'll likely present your ideas and information to an audience, it's helpful to have some basic information on how to create effective visuals for your presentation.

The basic purpose of a presentation is to give you a way to present key ideas to an audience with visual support. Your presentation shouldn't be full of text. It is meant to provide you with speaking points, and detailed notes should be kept from your audience. You want to keep your slides clear, clean, short, focused, and you want to keep your audience from using the expression that we sometimes hear in reference to long, boring presentations: "death by PowerPoint."

### Common Presentation Tools

The right tool for the job depends, of course, on the job. In this case, that means examining your audience and objective. If, for example, your task is simply to present "the facts," there's no need to consider interactive tools and techniques. If, however, your objective is to educate and/or inspire, you may want to consider a range of options for involving your audience, engaging them as participants or even co-presenters. For example, some workshops require participants—generally in group—to solve challenges or "stand and deliver." That is, to review and present a segment of the material to the audience or peers. Or perhaps your goal is to engage a group in a training or strategic planning exercise. In this case, you would want to incorporate tools that support participative learning and collaboration such as Post-It Note Pads, or packages of smaller note pads (don't forget markers, pens and highlighters) that can be arranged and rearranged as a pattern or plan emerges. Also consider easels, dry erase boards and other surfaces that lend themselves to idea sharing.

Whether you're presenting to a K-12, higher education, or business audience will also influence your choice of primary and supplemental tools: handouts, product samples, giveaways, worksheets, and snacks (yes, even for the adults). If your assignment is to develop and present a business presentation to be delivered to your Business Communications class peers, the topic, format and any supporting materials may be pre-defined. But don't stop there. If you're proposing an edible garden space on campus, you could make or hand out seed packets. Think about how to differentiate yourself and your proposal—whatever you're proposing—in a way that's relevant and memorable.

Similarly, if you're presenting to your management team, there may be a company standard template and tools that you're expected to use. Again, you can distinguish yourself by your knowledge and application of learning and design principles. Even basic facts and figures can be rendered beautifully. Instead of handing out a hard copy of your presentation or supporting charts, graphs or worksheets, consider creating an infographic that distills those insights into a single visual aid. Also consider the logistical and technical details including the room layout, lighting, temperature controls, WiFi and electrical outlets and bathroom facilities.

There are various formats you can use to create effective presentations. Depending on your operating system, there is Keynote for Mac computers while PowerPoint is a Microsoft product; there are also online options such as Prezi. These applications are easy to use and can provide step by step instructions.

There are various types of presentation formats you can use:

- **Presentation software slides:** Projecting images ("slides") using software such as PowerPoint, Keynote, Google Slides, and Prezi, to name a few. One common problem with the construction of these slides is cramming too much information on individual slides.
- **Poster board-size charts:** Another possibility is to get some poster boards and draw and letter what you want your audience to see. Of course, it's not easy making charts look neat and professional.
- **Handouts:** You can make copies of what you want your audience to see and hand them out before or during your talk. This option is even less effective than the first two because you cannot point to what you want your audience to see and because handouts may distract the audience's attention away from you. Still, for certain visual needs, handouts are the only choice. Keep in mind that if you are not well prepared, the handouts become a place for your distracted audience to doodle.
- **Objects:** If you need to demonstrate certain procedures, you may need to bring in actual physical objects. Rehearse what you are going to do with these objects; sometimes they can take up a lot more time than you expect.
- **Zoom, Teams, Google Hangouts (conference style software):** We are seeing more and more companies using this type of software to conduct business meetings. Since people are conducting virtual meetings with increased frequency, learning how to

use this software to present your presentations is very important.

Take some time to make your visuals look sharp and professional—do your best to ensure that they are legible to the entire audience.

As for the content of your visuals, consider these ideas:

- **Drawing or diagram of key objects:** If you describe or refer to any objects during your talk, try to get visuals of them so that you can point to different components or features.
- **Tables, charts, graphs:** If you discuss statistical data, present it in some form or table, chart, or graph. Many members of your audience may be less comfortable "hearing" such data as opposed to seeing it.
- **Outline of your talk, report, or both:** If you are at a loss for visuals to use in your presentation, or if your presentation is complex, have an outline of it that you can show at various points during your talk.
- **Key terms and definitions:** A good idea for visuals (especially when you cannot think of any others) is to set up a two-column list of key terms you use during your presentation with their definitions in the second column.
- **Key concepts or points:** Similarly, you can list your key points and show them in visuals. (Outlines, key terms, and main points are all good, legitimate ways of incorporating visuals into presentations when you cannot think of any others.)

During your actual report, make sure to discuss your visuals, refer to them, guide your audience through the key points in your visuals. It is a big problem just to throw a visual up on the screen and never even refer to it.

As you prepare your visuals, look at resources that will help you. There are many rules for using PowerPoint, Keynote, Google Slides, and Prezi down to the font size and how many words to put on a single slide, but you will have to choose the style that best suits your subject and your presentation style.

Presentation software also allows you to take a presentation to the next level—engaging your audience verbally and visually as well as aurally. What's particularly powerful about using presentation software and other visual aids is the ability to use imagery to bridge cultural and language gaps and arrive at a shared understanding of the issue/opportunity at hand. Using multimedia—images, photos and video and animation—that supports your point also provides repetition and can increase retention.

You may also have heard about the presentation skills of Steve Jobs. The video that follows is the introduction of the I-Phone. As you watch, take notes on how Jobs sets up his talk and his visuals. Observe how he connects with the audience, and then see if you can work some of his strategies into your own presentation skills. This is a long video; you don't need to watch it all, but do take enough time to form some good impressions.

[Steve Jobs iPhone Presentation](#)

### Designing the Presentation

When creating a presentation, you want to make sure it is visually appealing and easy to read for your audience. When you start to think about the layout of your presentation, make sure to have an outline of how you want your presentation to flow. This will help you make sure you cover all your points. Make sure that your presentation is spaced out well and your content does not look cluttered on the slide. You want to have less text and use more bullet points. You want to also have visuals to highlight your topic. The supplemental information below will help you create a slide that highlights bullet points, illustrated points, and speaker props.

[https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Graduate-Writing-Center/GWC%20Guides/Genres/Powerpoint\\_Presentations.pdf](https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Graduate-Writing-Center/GWC%20Guides/Genres/Powerpoint_Presentations.pdf)

The following video will help bring it all together:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iwpi1Lm6dFo>

### Speaker Props

This type of presentation is random pictures that will flash across your screen. You have to be careful when using it as it could be distracting for the audience and some people cannot handle flashes like that. The video below is an example of this type of presentation.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=RrpajcAgR1E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=RrpajcAgR1E)

### Fonts and Size for Your Presentation

When you are creating your presentation, make sure to pick a font and size that is easy for your audience to read. Your audience needs to be able to read the information being projected in the room. Remember you could be in a conference room or an

auditorium. Make sure you are using the same font throughout your presentation and the font is appropriate for your topic and audience. It can be distracting if you have various fonts throughout the presentation.

#### Tips

1. Use a font that is easy to read
2. Make sure the font and the background are compatible
3. Make sure your title font is bigger than the content and stands out
4. The common size is 24 font
5. Bold important information

### Fonts in Both Mac & PC Versions of PowerPoint

\*Available in PowerPoint Online

• Arial*	• Calisto MT	• Corbel*
• <b>Arial Rounded MT Bold</b>	• Cambria*	• Courier New*
• Baskerville Old Face	• Cambria Math	• Curlz MT
• Batang	• Candara*	• Dubai
• BatangChe	• Century*	• <i>Edwardian Script ITC</i>
• <b>Bauhaus 93</b>	• Century Gothic*	• ENGRAVERS MT
• Bell MT	• Century Schoolbook*	• Franklin Gothic Book*
• Book Antiqua*	• Colonna MT	• Gabriola
• Bookman Old Style*	• Comic Sans MS*	• Garamond*
• Calibri*	• Consolas*	• Georgia*
• Calibri Light*	• Constantia*	• Gill Sans MT*

Figure 4: The best fonts to use in PowerPoint. Source: [TemplateMonster](#)

### Presentation Design Aesthetics

For our purposes, **aesthetics** refers to the beauty or good taste of a presentation aid. Earlier we mentioned the universal principles of good design: unity, emphasis or focal point, scale and proportion, balance, and rhythm. Because of wide differences in taste, not everyone will agree on what is aesthetically pleasing, and you may be someone who does not think of yourself as having much artistic talent. Still, if you keep these principles in mind, they will help you to create attractive, professional-looking visuals.

The other aesthetic principle to keep in mind is that your presentation aids are intended to support your speech, not the other way around. The decisions you make in designing your visuals should be dictated by the content of your speech. If you use color, use it for a clear reason. If you use a border, keep it simple. Whatever you do, make certain that your presentation aids will be perceived as carefully planned and executed elements of your speech.

### How to Choose the Right Colors

Color is very important and can definitely make a strong impact on an audience. However, don't go overboard or decide to use unappealing combinations of color. For example, you should never use a light font color (like yellow) on a solid white background because it's hard for the eye to read. You should also realize that while colors may be rich and vibrant on your computer screen at home, they may be distorted by a different monitor. Remember that you want the color to be suitable for all audiences; some people are color blind and cannot see certain colors. While we definitely are in favor of experimenting with various color schemes, always check your presentation out on multiple computers to see if the slide color is being distorted in a way that makes it hard to read.

### Visual and Audio Effects

Everyone who has had an opportunity to experiment with PowerPoint, Keynote, and Prezi knows that animation in transitions between slides or even on a single slide can be fun, but often people do not realize that too much movement can actually distract audience members. While all presentation software packages offer you interesting slide movements and other novelty visual effects, they are not always very helpful for your presentation. If you're going to utilize slide transitions or word animation, stick to only three or four different types of transitions in your whole presentation. Furthermore, do not have more than one type of movement on a given slide. If you're going to have all your text come from the right side of the screen in a bulleted list, make sure that all the items on the bulleted list come from the right side of the screen.

Good writers make conscious choices. They understand their purpose and audience. Every decision they make on the page, from organizing an essay to choosing a word with just the right connotations, is made with their purpose and audience in mind.

The same principle applies to visual communication. As a presenter, you choose the following:

- When to show images or video for maximum impact;
- Which images will best produce the effect you want;
- When to present information using a table, chart, or other graphic;
- How much text to include in slides or informational graphics; and
- How to organize graphics so they present information clearly.

Your goal is to use visual media to support and enhance your presentation. At the same time, you must make sure these media do not distract your audience or interfere with getting your point across. Your ideas, not your visuals, should be the focus.

#### Tips

Here are some tips to keep in mind when creating an effective presentation:

1. Remember to avoid too much text. You should keep your text brief and include talking points only. Detailed notes can be inserted into the notes section (or you can use some other form of notes as you present), but only you should see those notes, unless a professor asks to see your notes to evaluate your presentation as an assignment.
2. Be consistent and clear with your font choices. Helvetica is a nice font for presentations. Make sure your font is large enough that an audience in a room would be able to see your text, even if audience members are sitting in the back of the room.
3. Be careful with your color choices for text and background. You want to make sure your audience can read your text easily. Black on white text is easiest to read but can also be boring for a presentation. Still, when you add color, be sure you are adding color that works and doesn't distract.
4. Add images. Text on slides for every slide is rather dull. Add appropriate images to your slides. Relevant charts and graphs are excellent, as are pictures that will connect to your content. Think about moments where an image can more easily convey information or a message. A powerful image on a slide with no accompanying text can be a powerful way to capture your audience's attention.
5. Make sure your main points are clear. Remember to connect your ideas well and provide background information and transitions when necessary.
6. Keep your audience in mind. Your audience will affect the overall tone and appearance of your presentation. Sometimes, humor can be appropriate. Other times, a more serious tone may be necessary. Just as you evaluate your situation any time you write a paper, you should evaluate your situation for creating a presentation.

## Preparing for the Presentation

Pick the method of preparing for the talk that best suits your comfort level with public speaking and with your topic. However, plan to do ample preparation and rehearsal—some people assume that they can just jump up there and ad lib for so many minutes and be relaxed and informal. It does not often work that way—drawing a mental blank is the more common experience. A well delivered presentation is the result of a lot of work and a lot of practice.

Here are the obvious possibilities for preparation and delivery:

- Write a script, practice it; keep it around for quick-reference during your talk.
- Set up an outline of your talk; practice with it, bring it for reference.
- Set up cue cards, practice with them, and use them during your talk.
- Write a script and read from it.

A good presentation is one that is clear, understandable, well-planned, organized, and on target with your purpose and audience.

It does not matter which method you use to prepare for the talk, but you want to make sure that you know your material. The head-down style of reading your report directly from a script will not work. There is little or no eye contact or interaction with the audience. The delivery tends to lean toward a dull, boring monotone that either puts listeners off or is hard to understand. Also, most of us cannot stand to have reports read to us!



For a variety of reasons, many people get nervous when they have to give presentations. Being well prepared is your best defense against the nerves. The nerves will wear off someday, gradually decreasing with every presentation you give. In the meantime, breathe deeply and enjoy.

## Delivering Presentations

When you give a presentation, focus on common problem areas such as these:

- **Timing:** Make sure you keep within the time limit. Finishing more than a minute under the time limit is also a problem. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse until you get the timing just right.
- **Volume:** Obviously, you must be sure to speak loud enough so that all of your audience can hear you. You might find some way to practice speaking a little louder in the days before the presentation.
- **Pacing and speed:** Sometimes, speakers who are nervous talk too fast. All that adrenaline causes them to speed through their talk, making it hard for the audience to follow. In general, it helps listeners understand you better if you speak a bit more slowly and deliberately than you do in normal conversation. Slow down, take it easy, be clear, and remember to breathe.
- **Gestures and posture:** Watch out for nervous hands flying all over the place. This can be distracting and a bit comical. At the same time, do not turn yourself into a mannequin. Plan to keep your hands clasped together or holding onto the podium and only occasionally making some gesture. Definitely keep your hands out of your pockets or waistband. As for posture, avoid slouching at the podium or leaning against the wall. Stand up straight, and keep your head up.
- **Verbal crutches:** Watch out for overuse of phrases like "uh," "you know," "okay" and other kinds of nervous verbal habits. Instead of saying "uh" or "you know" every three seconds, just do not say anything at all. In the days before your presentation, practice speaking without these verbal crutches. The silence that replaces them is not a bad thing—it gives listeners time to process what you are saying.

## Face Your Audience

“Maintain eye contact” is a common piece of public-speaking advice—so common it may sound elementary and clichéd. Why is that simple piece of advice so hard to follow?

Maintaining eye contact may not be as simple as it sounds. In everyday conversation, people establish eye contact but then look away from time to time, because staring into someone’s eyes continuously feels uncomfortably intense. Two or three people conversing can establish a comfortable pattern of eye contact. But how do you manage that when you are addressing a group?

The trick is to focus on one person at a time. Zero in on one person, make eye contact, and maintain it just long enough to establish a connection. (A few seconds will suffice.) Then move on. This way, you connect with your audience, one person at a time. As you proceed, you may find that some people hold your gaze and others look away quickly. That is fine, as long as you connect with people in different parts of the room.

Pay attention to your facial expressions as well. If you have thought about how you want to convey emotion during different parts of your presentation, you are probably already monitoring your facial expressions as you rehearse. Be aware that the pressure of presenting can make your expression serious or tense without your realizing it.

## Practice, Practice, Practice

It is vital to practice using the technology. Nothing is worse than watching a speaker stand up and not know how to turn on the computer, access the software, or launch his or her presentation. When you use technology, audiences can quickly see if you know what you are doing, so don’t give them the opportunity to devalue your credibility because you can’t even get the show going.

## Always Have a Backup Plan

Lastly, always have a backup plan. Unfortunately, things often go wrong. One of the parts of being a professional is keeping the speech moving in spite of unexpected problems. Decide in advance what you will do if things break down or disappear right when you need them. Don’t count on your instructor to solve such predicaments; it is your responsibility. If you take this responsibility seriously and check the room where you will be presenting early, you will have time to adapt. If the computer or audiovisual setup does not work on the first try, you will need time to troubleshoot and solve the problem. If an easel is missing, you will need time to experiment with using a lectern or a chair to support your flip chart. If you forgot to bring your violin for a speech about music, you will need time to think through how to adapt your speech so that it will still be effective.

### Tips

If you are speaking to a very large group, it may be difficult to make eye contact with each individual. Instead, focus on a smaller group of persons or one row of people at time. Look in their direction for a few seconds and then shift your gaze to another small group in the room.

## Conclusion

This chapter highlighted how to plan, create, and share presentations. There are so many presentation solutions available, so be sure to find one that works with your computer and you feel comfortable using. When you create a PowerPoint, Prezi, Google Slide, or Keynote presentation, be sure to consider the principles discussed.

### Chapter Summary

When creating a presentation, remember to:

- Brainstorm your topic
- Content and requirements for effective presentation
- Planning and Preparing your presentation
- Choose a presentation that fits your audience
- Use a font and size that is appropriate for presentation
- Make sure object and content are position appropriate for your presentation
- Make sure the colors and text are not distracting and in contrast with each other
- Make sure your backgrounds are easy to read and see - remember some people are color blind
- Make sure to pick affects and visuals that are stimulating and pleasing to the eye

All links live as of July 2021.

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