

From Knowledge to Impact

**Delivering technical presentations
that make a difference.**

Laurie Brown, CSP

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About the Author



Laurie Brown

Laurie has over two decades of experience as a trainer, coach and speaker, helping her audience improve their communication skills. In that time she has earned a reputation as a highly engaging, fun and effective professional, whose work gets results for her clients.

A key asset that Laurie brings to her work is her range and depth of experience. She has worked in the Middle East, Asia, Australia, Latin America and Europe, including the UK, Panama, Japan, Mexico, Germany, Spain, Australia and Thailand, and throughout the United States and Canada. Laurie has worked with culturally diverse audiences at all corporate levels. Her clients have ranged from Fortune 500 companies and government agencies, to small family-owned businesses.

Laurie is passionate about providing engaging programs that makes a difference. She is the author of *The Greet Your Customer Manual*, *The Teleprompter Manual*, and *Brand-Aid*.

Laurie's interactive, fun approach to learning allows students to discover the methods that will help set themselves apart from the competition. Her clients all agree that working with Laurie has made a difference to their bottom line.

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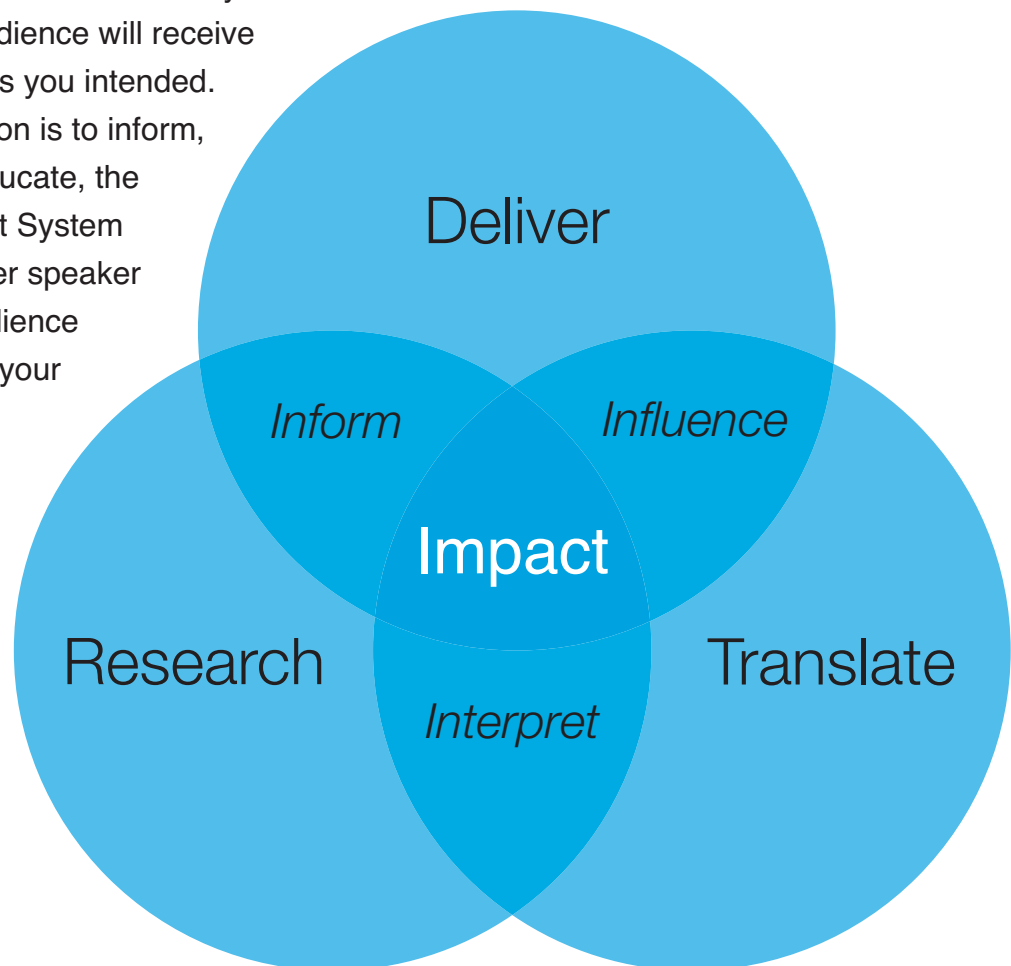
■ The System

Research. Translate. Deliver. These three equally important elements are filters that will remove the noise and clutter from your presentations.

Are all three necessary?

Absolutely, because only when all three are working together will you be able to move from Knowledge to Impact.

When you use these filters in the way described in this book, your audience will receive your signal exactly as you intended. Whether your intention is to inform, sell, persuade, or educate, the Knowledge to Impact System will make you a better speaker and ensure your audience gets the most out of your presentation.



■ Research

Presumably, you are well versed on the topic you are presenting, yet equally important as being a subject matter expert (SME) is being an audience member expert (AME).

Having the expertise of an AME will allow you to structure your presentation in a way that will provide the greatest understanding and value to your audience. This knowledge will change how you write, organize, and create visual aids for your presentation.

As an AME, what do you need to know about your audience before you write and deliver your presentation? Why are they at your presentation? Are they there to evaluate you, your company, your processes or your products? What are their expectations? What

is important to your audience? Are they there to be persuaded to a different point of view or are you there to educate them? This is really important to know because you will want to craft your presentation around this information.

Having the expertise of an AME will allow you to structure your presentation in a way that will provide the greatest understanding and value to your audience.

There's much that you need to know about your audience: What community or organization are they a part of? Is your audience a mix of many businesses or business units or is it all a relatively uniform group?

What are the demographics of your audience? Is your audience primarily men or women or an even mix? What is the age range of your audience? What is the cultural makeup of your audience—a multi-cultural group or a group of people from primarily one culture? What is the educational level of your group?

Research who is speaking before or after you. Are they your competitors? Are they SMEs with a different perspective? What else is going to be on the agenda?

■ Research

Research the venue where you will be speaking. How many people will be in the audience? What will the seating be like? Will you be seated or standing?

Another key aspect of your audience to consider is their level of experience or familiarity with the subject. Your audience can fall into a number of different groupings:

- People who have no knowledge of your topic but are open to learn.
With this audience you need to be very careful to speak to the level of their understanding. If you can discover why they want to or need to know, the subject that you are presenting, you can create a dynamic presentation that really makes a difference.
- People who are your peers and want to learn new information from you.
With this audience, you can speak to their knowledge of your topic. You will want to spend some time in advance of the presentation to discover what likely questions they may have about your topic.
- People who have an opposing point of view.
With this audience you need to seriously consider their point of view so that you are prepared to easily and comfortably respond to questions and pushback.
- People who are made up of high level executives.
With this group you want to get immediately to your main point. For example, in a twenty-minute presentation, you might choose to get to the substance of your presentation in the first five minutes and leave the remaining fifteen minutes for questions.

■ Research

Audience Checklist

- What is their cultural orientation? What is their native language?
- Is their attendance voluntary or mandatory?
- What position(s) do they have (hierarchy)?
- Does the audience have any bias? What is it?
- What is the level of understanding of the subject?
- How familiar are they with the terminology that will be used in the presentation?
- Prior to this presentation, does the audience share a set opinion of me or my organization? Are they, or will they be supportive?
- What is the audience expecting to do with the information I am presenting?
- What is the age range of my audience?
- What is the gender of my audience?

■ Translate

You have done your research. You know who is in your audience and why they are attending your presentation. Now you need to remove the noise and clutter that keep your message from coming across with maximum impact.

It can be tempting to give the same presentation to different audiences. You have already done all the work. You created the PowerPoint, you wrote the script, you might also have given the presentation before so it may seem easier to just reuse it. Maybe change a slide or two and repeat. This is a huge mistake! If you don't "translate" your message to your audience you are in danger of not effectively communicating and losing your audience.

If you don't "translate" your message you are in danger of losing your audience.

Below are some tips to help you translate your expertise and make sure your message has the desired impact.

Recognize the expertise of your audience. You may be an expert in your field, but it's likely that your audience consists of experts too! They may not know your subject matter as well as you do, but they're professionals who are well-versed in their fields. Their objective in attending your presentation is to learn something that's going to help them do their job better. Don't overwhelm them with detail that doesn't help them achieve that objective. Build on what they know, and not what they don't know!

■ Translate

Earlier we talked about the signal-to-noise ratio. You should also consider the signal-to-clutter ratio. Clutter is information that may be true, interesting and even essential to a subject matter expert such as yourself, but perhaps is just a distraction to the “other” experts in your audience. Think about Where’s Waldo — Waldo is signal, everything else clutter.

There is a finite bandwidth for information transfer and retention. There are only so many things you can talk about in one presentation, so you need to choose them wisely.

You must get across what is really needed by your audience. Ask yourself “what is the essence of my message that is going to help my audience achieve their objective?”

Dealing with Details

It is easy to get bogged down with details.

Details can be important, and sometimes, they’re the focus of your presentation. But excessive detail won’t move your message forward, and may cause you to lose your

audience. Too much detail may intimidate or bore someone unfamiliar with your field, who is hearing about it for the first time in your presentation. That listener is likely to shut down and miss the rest of what you have to say (a darkened presentation room and an avalanche of arcane detail is equivalent to a blanket and a glass of warm milk — practically an invitation to doze off). On the other hand, audience members who are familiar with your field may over-focus on the details and miss the broader message you are trying to convey.

A darkened presentation room and an avalanche of arcane detail is equivalent to a blanket and a glass of warm milk — practically an invitation to doze off.

■ Translate

In that case, you might spend the entire question and answer period discussing a decimal point that is irrelevant to the main message.

Simplify

You might be afraid that simplifying your message is the same as talking down to your audience. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Dr. Steven Shepard, a physicist and President of Thermal Wave Imaging, Inc. says, “It is helpful to remember that your audience doesn’t need all of your expertise. But you should realize and acknowledge the fact that they are the resident experts in what they do.’

‘Whether you’re talking to the engineers who design the aircraft, the technicians who maintains them, or the executives who decide whether or not to build or buy them, they are experts. By being cognizant of this bi-directional expertise you will make sure that you never talk down to your audience.’”

Shepard described how he prefaces a discussion of a differential equation by using a familiar concept of a car’s speedometer. He doesn’t start off by asking if his audience understands calculus. With a few well-designed slides and a compelling narrative, he proves to them that they do.

Pay Careful Attention to Acronyms, Jargon or “Tech Talk”

Your expertise may contain insider information that is coded in acronyms or technical

■ Translate

words that your audience may not know. They may be essential tools for communication among professionals, or they may be “Inside Baseball” terms. If they’re important, define them and explain why they’re important and give examples of how they’re used. If they’re not important in the context of the audience’s objective, get rid of them.

Using this type of language will leave your audience feeling confused or even worse, stupid. Test your rewording. Even when you translate the technological jargon it may still may be too complicated for your audience. If you need to use acronyms or jargon, you should define and or explain the acronym and/or jargon before you use it.

Use Analogies

Pat Hicks, Environmental Remediation Scientist, explains his technique, “A typical analogy I use to explain the technical challenge of a large contaminant mass concentrated in a relatively small source area volume would go something like this:’

‘Presentation to a technically competent group:

The large contaminant mass concentrated in the source area justifies application of an aggressive mass destruction technology. A more passive approach in the source area will result in residual contaminant mass that will dissolve into the adjacent aquifer over an extended time frame, resulting in a prolonged remediation project and maximum project cost. Application of more passive remediation technologies at the source area cannot destroy contaminant mass at a sufficient rate to realize optimum project schedule and budget.

■ Translate

'Presentation to a less-technically competent group:

"It's like trying to suck a bowling ball through a drinking straw..."

Use Vivid Familiar Imagery

Describing the complicated process of heat transfer, Shepard has the audience imagine a pitcher of water in which a drop of Easter egg food coloring gets dropped. He has them think about how the color at first moves rapidly through the water, then remember how it slows down until eventually the entire pitcher is one even color. Afterwards, he explains that the mathematics of heat transfer may appear formidable, but it works exactly like the drop of dye in that pitcher of water.

Story Telling

In an article in *INC.*, Geoffrey James said, "The human brain automatically organizes everything into stories,

"We sat down and saw some slides and this guy talked about them for a while and then we all got up and left."

because that's how we understand the meaning and context of everything around us. So if your presentation doesn't tell a story, your audience's mind will create one. Unfortunately, it will sound like this: "We sat down and saw some slides and this guy talked about them for a while and then we all got up and left."

Story telling is the best way to get your audience to remember what you said. In an article on information visualization, Nahum Gershon and Ward Page wrote: "A well-told story

■ Translate

conveys great quantities of information in relatively few words in a format that is easily assimilated by the listener or viewer. People usually find it easier to understand information integrated into stories than information spelled out in serial lists (such as bulleted items in an overhead slide). Stories are also just more compelling.”

Once you have effectively translated your message in order to help your audience get the most out of your presentation, you are ready for the next filter, delivery.

■ Deliver

Relaxation Techniques

Just as we talked about noise and clutter in the translation phase, it is equally or more important in the delivery phase. Nervousness is noise that can be easily eliminated from your presentation by using some of the following techniques.

Practice, Practice, Practice.

You really can't over prepare. Don't memorize your speech (that can mess you up if you forget a word or idea) but practice saying your ideas out loud.

Do Relaxation Exercises:

Deep Breathing

Take three slow, deep breaths and slowly release them, then return to your normal breathing. See the diagram on page 17.

Isometric Exercises

Curl your toes for a count of five and then release. This technique will work very well right before you begin speaking—and no one will be aware of it.

Press against a wall, or on a table for a few seconds with all your strength. This will open up your shoulders and help your voice be more powerful. Tense up parts of your face, forehead, mouth, neck, and shoulders. Then consciously relax them. (Any conscious tightening and relaxing of muscles will work.)

■ Deliver

Yawning

Yawn widely a few times to relax your face and throat. Now, with a lot of breath, try speaking or perhaps counting (1, 2, 3, up to 10). Next, count or speak while thinking about, but not actually, yawning. The throat will feel and stay open.

Prepare Your Voice

Warm up your voice with a hum. Hum gently, and when you feel your voice motoring easily, start to play with different notes. Hum a tune. Think of this process as a massage of the vocal chords. If you have dry mouth drink pineapple juice, strawberry juice, honey or eat olives. Ice water, tea, coffee, milk and beer are all bad for your voice.

Smile

A smile will open the throat and pick up the vocal quality we associate with the high energy vocal tone of emotionally charged moments.

Remember to Breathe

As you sit or stand waiting to start your presentation—breathe.

As the nerves surge through you—breathe.

As you walk up to start your presentation—breathe.

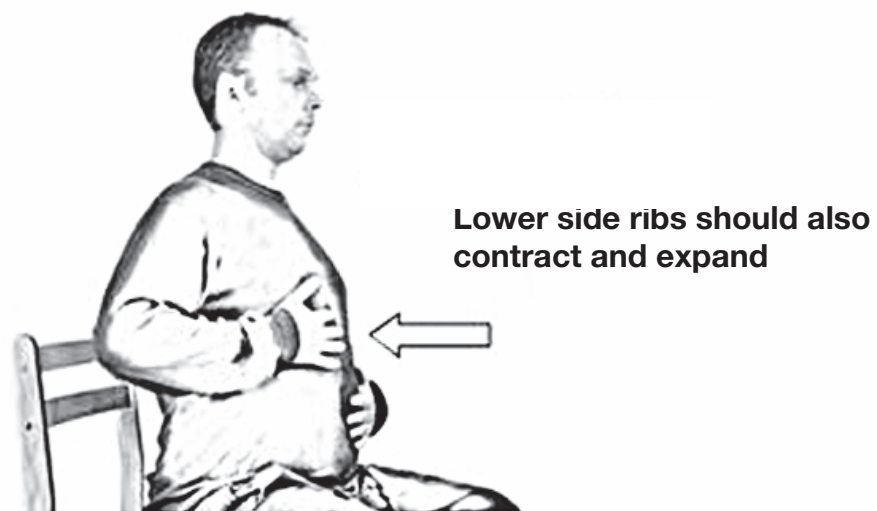
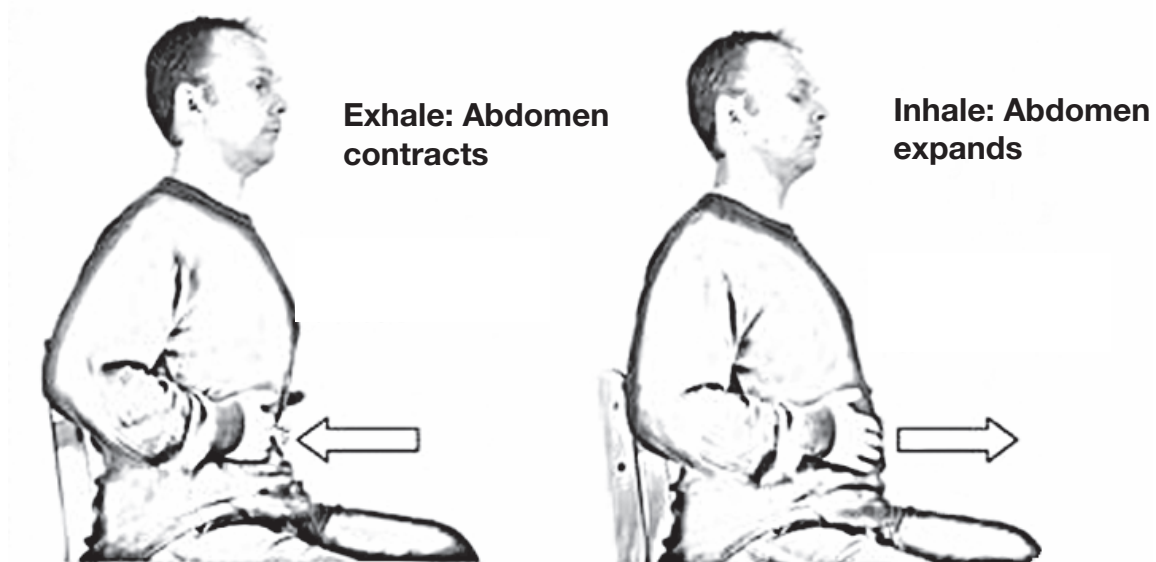
As you begin your presentation—breathe.

Use Positive Mental Imagery

Visualize yourself giving a dynamic and engaging speech.

■ Deliver

Diaphragmatic Breathing



■ Deliver

Presentation Techniques

Body Language

Body language can often add to the noise and clutter of your presentation. Hands in pockets, or worse hands in pockets while jiggling the coins and keys in your pockets can act as a distraction, letting the audiences attention get focused on the wrong things.

No matter how you stand, you always leaving an impression. Make sure it is the impression you want to leave.

To stand in a natural or neutral stance, place your feet parallel about hip width apart. Make sure your weight is evenly balanced over your feet. Knees should be slightly bent. Imagine there is a string pulling your head straight up and that there are roots pulling your feet into the ground.

Your arms should hang relaxed at your sides, fingers relaxed.

Move With Purpose

It is not uncommon for a presenter to roam aimlessly around the stage, or pace like a caged animal. It is not that you need

to be a statue, but you need to move with purpose. Move towards the audience for impact, move backwards to denote the past.

**It is not that you need to be a statue,
but you need to move with purpose.**

Be aware that you should avoid moving backwards when talking about something positive. When you state something positive, like a new innovation or even your name or your company's name and say it while taking a step back it will send a mixed message to your audience. It will appear that you are stepping away from your statement.

■ Deliver

Gestures

Using effective gestures can also help you remove the noise and clutter from your presentation.

Jonah Weiner interviewed Jerry Seinfeld for an article for the New York Times Magazine, in which Seinfeld explained how a simple gesture made a huge difference in his audience's understanding of his joke.

Seinfeld said “I had a joke: ‘Marriage is a bit of a chess game, except the board is made of flowing water and the pieces are made of smoke.’ “This is a good joke, I love it, I’ve spent years on it. There’s a little hitch: ‘The board is made of flowing water.’ I’d always lose the audience there. Flowing water? What does he mean? And repeating ‘made of’ was hurting things. So how can I say ‘the board is made of flowing water’ without saying ‘made of’? A very small problem, but I could hear the confusion...

A simple gesture took a complicated idea and made it come to life.

“So,” he continued, “I was obsessed with figuring that out. The way I figure it out is I try different things, night after night, and I’ll stumble into it at some point, or not. If I love the joke, I’ll wait. If it takes me three years, I’ll wait.” Finally, in late August, during a performance, the cricket cage snapped into place. “The breakthrough was doing this” — Seinfeld traced a square in the air with his fingers, drawing the board. “Now I can just say, ‘The board is flowing water,’ and do this, and they get it. A board that was made of flowing water was too much data. Here, I’m doing some of the work for you. So now I’m starting to get applause on it, after years of work. They don’t think about it. They just laugh.”

A simple gesture took a complicated idea and made it come to life in a way that helped the audience. What is true for Seinfeld’s joke telling is also true for you. Here are some examples of types of planned gestures you can use to make sure your point is understood.

■ Deliver

You can use a combination of natural and planned gestures.

Approachable: Palms up; open arms

Credible: Palms down; open arms

Assertive: Fingers move together as if you are doing a karate chop

Enumeration: Use your fingers, palm forward, raised to your shoulder, to count

Spatial: Use the space around you to describe time or elements

Anchoring: Moving to various parts of the stage to place imaginary objects or themes

Eye Contact

You need to make meaningful eye contact with members of your audience. Eye contact should last three to four seconds and you should finish expressing your thought before moving on.

In a large audience use the “Z” method. Make eye contact with someone in the far left of the front of the audience; then make contact with another person in the far right of the front audience; then make contact with someone in the middle of the audience; then make eye contact with someone in the far left at the back of the room, and then finish with someone in the far right at the back of the room.

Vocal Quality

Your vocal habits can also add to the noise and clutter. By learning good vocal habits you can filter out the noise and clutter.

Filler Words “Um,” “Ah,” “So”

These sounds or any other verbalization of thought can be distracting or down right irritating. Videotape yourself when you present to discover if you have this habit. If you want to remove them from speech, try to use a pause instead of the “um” or “ah.”

■ Deliver

Another more brutal way is a form of “shock therapy”. Ask a friend to watch you practice your presentation. Have him or her make a loud buzzer sound every time you say a filler word. This helps you become aware of your habit and your mind will slow down enough to keep you from saying the filler word to avoid hearing the buzz.

Tone or Resonance

Tone or resonance allows you to carry sound with less vocal tension. Resonating cavities are your chest, throat, nasal cavities and head. To increase resonance, practice humming and place the hum in each of these various cavities.

Range

We have a much bigger vocal range than we normally use. Say the words “ka”, “ga” and “ha” using the lower, middle and upper register of your voice to expand your range.

Articulation

In order to be understood by your audience, you need clear articulation of your words. Practice by warming up your articulators—your lips, teeth and tip of your tongue. Place your tongue on one side of your mouth and say “red leather yellow leather.” Repeat with your tongue on the other side of your mouth. Repeating tongue twisters also works well to help you articulate.

Power

Placing your breath correctly from within the area of your diaphragm allows you to have authority in your voice, and projection, without over-using your vocal chords.

Pausing

Pausing allows you to slow down, reduce “ums,” regain audience attention, add drama, create anticipation, and gives you time to collect your thoughts. It also gives the audience time to digest your information and allows you to change subject more naturally.

■ Deliver

PowerPoint Creation

Too many PowerPoints created for technical presentations, are full of graphs or unreadable text, which add to the noise and clutter. Here are some simple rules that will help you get your message out to your audience.

One Idea Per Slide

When presenters create slides that are cluttered with way more information than the audience can take in, they dilute their message. Don't tax your audience's attention with this overload. When you have too much text on a slide your audience can get ahead of the message you are speaking.

Let your audience take in your message in “bite-sized” pieces. Keep to one idea per slide.

Slides are cheap. Let your audience take your message in “bite-sized” pieces. Keep to one idea per slide.

Simplify

Strive for a simple graphic. Nancy Duarte, author of *Slide:ology* wrote in the Harvard Business Review, HBR Blog Network “Research shows that people learn more effectively from multimedia messages when they're stripped of extraneous words, graphics, animation, and sounds. Lots of extras actually take away meaning because they become a distraction. They overtax the audience's cognitive resources.’

‘So when adding elements to your slides, have a good reason: Does the audience need to see your logo on each slide to remember who you work for? Does that blue swoosh add meaning? If not, leave it off. The same goes for text. Keep it short and easy to skim. Scale the type as large as possible so the people in the back of the room can see it.’

■ Deliver

PowerPoint Delivery

Another good reason to remove most of the text from your PowerPoint slides is to keep you from reading it word for word. Nothing is more frustrating to an audience than to have the presenter read to them while facing the screen.

IRRE Method

If there is something you want to have the audience read try the IRRE method. The initials stand for Introduce, Reveal, Read, Expound and are used to help you remember these steps.

I *Introduce*

In this step you have a blank slide behind you. (To get a blank slide you can hit the B key on the computer's keyboard for a black background, or hit the W key to get a white background. You can hit the same key to bring your slides back up.)

Introduce the topic you are about to cover and tell them you would like them to read the next slide.

R *Reveal*

With this step you bring up the slide you were referring to and then turn to face the screen keeping angled so you are not totally turned away from your audience.

R *Read*

In this step you read the slide to yourself silently. When you are done, you turn to face your audience so that you can see if they are done reading the slide.

E *Expound*

When the majority of your audience is through reading you can expound on the information on the slide.

■ Deliver

Avoid Casting a Shadow on the Screen

Make sure you have time to see the space you are presenting in before you start your presentation. Discover the area you can present from that keeps you clear of the projection.

Use “Pop-Ups” or Verbal Direction to Guide Your Audiences Attention

Avoid using a laser pointer, especially one that you wave at the screen in circles. To avoid creating “shadow puppets” keep your hand from reaching into the screen to point out a section of the slide you want your audience to be paying attention to. Instead, add a

To avoid creating “shadow puppets,” keep your hand from reaching into the screen.

box or circle to the PowerPoint slide that directs the audience’s attention or have that area “Pop-Up”. You can also direct them by saying “I want you to focus on the third bullet in the list,” or “Look at the upper right hand corner of the slide.”

Handouts

Handouts are a great way to make sure that your audience is able retain the ideas you shared in your presentation. Here are some ways to make sure that the handouts help your signal is clearly understood.

Wait Until Your Presentation is Done Before Giving Out Your Handout.

When your audience has access to your handouts during your presentation you invite them to not pay attention to you. Often they are reading ahead of where you are or stuck on a point you made earlier.

Do More Than Print Out Your Slide Deck.

If you want to leave a handout, take the extra effort and create a handout that really helps your audience understand and remember what you spoke about.

It has become standard to simply print out your slide deck. But even though it might be “the standard” doesn’t mean it is a good idea.

■ Deliver

Garr Reynolds refers to the practice of printing out your slides as a leave behind as a “Slideument.” In his book *Presentation Zen*, he stated “The slideument isn’t effective and it isn’t efficient, and it isn’t pretty. Attempting to have slides serve both as projected visuals and as stand-alone handouts makes for bad visuals and bad documentation.”

To be different and effective, use a well-written, detailed document for your handout and well-designed, simple, intelligent graphics for your visuals. Now that would be atypical. And while it may take more effort, the quality of your visuals and takeaway documents will be dramatically improved.”

■ Conclusion

It may feel like the ideas in this paper will add hours to your preparation. Remember the phrase, “Go slow, to go fast.” Moving the process quickly won’t give you the results you desire.

If you follow the guidelines in this white paper you can successfully filter out all the noise and clutter from your presentation allowing your audience to receive your signal.

Your message will be understood and retained. And isn’t that what you want and need?

■ Contact

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