

BEFORE THE MIC



HOW TO
COMPOSE
MEANINGFUL,
MEMORABLE, AND
MOTIVATIONAL
PRESENTATIONS

GLENN GIBSON

PRAISE FOR *BEFORE THE MIC*

“This book wisely addresses ‘style over substance’—the former, vacuous without first attending to the raw material. Once that’s in place, everything else will flow . . . and deliver. The use of songwriting as an analogy—i.e. the creation of original material, straight from the heart—is a recurring theme throughout this brilliant book of ideas and life-changing advice on how to write captivating presentations.”

—**RORY MACDONALD**, songwriter from
Celtic rock band Runrig

“Glenn Gibson provides the reader with a concise, well-organized guide to preparing oneself to deliver a high-impact presentation to any audience. Full of helpful tips and preparation tools, this is required reading for both experienced and inexperienced speakers.”

—**WILLIAM D. SULLIVAN**, Vice Admiral, US Navy (Retired)

“Of the thousands of presentations I have seen over the course of my thirty-year career, Glenn Gibson has delivered or helped write some of the very best. Glenn’s coaching and collaboration have been invaluable to my development as an effective presenter, which is an essential competency of any organizational leader.”

—**BILL PRIEMER**, president and CEO, Hyland

“I have been awed by many of Glenn’s presentations over the years, and I’m thrilled he is sharing his method in *Before the Mic*. Whether you love getting in front of audiences or the thought makes your stomach flip (like it does mine!), this book will give you a step-by-step process to build and deliver a message that resonates and remains with your audience. If you want what you present to matter, *Before the Mic* is the book for you. Glenn’s advice goes beyond presentation skills and offers actionable steps to help you figure out what you want to say and then how to say it so it matters to the audience.”

-MARY MCKNIGHT, CEO, Next Phase Solutions, LLC

“I’ve given hundreds of keynotes in my career. No matter how many presentations you’ve given—and no matter how good you think you are—you’ll find great advice and motivation in *Before the Mic*. Read it now, before you make your next presentation, whether it’s for small group of colleagues or an audience of thousands.”

-JOHN MANCINI, president of Content Results, LLC

“I have had the privilege of hearing Glenn speak more than a dozen times over the past decade. Each and every time, Glenn has found a way to teach in a memorable and entertaining way, and now I know his secrets! Glenn’s book is as polished, professional, and engaging as his presentations.”

-MICHAEL CARR, president and CEO, Naviant, Inc.

“This book is the secret sauce to being an aMMMAazing presenter. The guidance presented by Gibson is spot-on. It captures all the elements of how to create an aMMMAazing presentation in an easy-to-consume and actionable workbook format. A must-have for anyone who has to get up in front of an audience and tell a story!”

-MARISA KOPEC, CEO and founder,
Winning Methodologies, LLC

“The ability to effectively communicate in a group setting is a fundamental skill to a successful career. Glenn expertly unlocks the keys that you will learn to propel your career to the next level.”

-JIM WANNER, chief expectations officer, KeyMark, Inc.

“Glenn is an amazingly captivating presenter who has mastered the art of building a presentation. *Before the Mic* is a must-read for any salesperson looking to grab and keep their prospect’s attention . . . and compel them to take action! In a world where deals are won or lost over videoconferencing, this critical skillset has become more important than ever. Glenn teaches his readers the new way to create a rockstar presentation every time!”

-JENIFER HEIN, marketing director, Naviant, Inc.

“He [Glenn Gibson] is one of the most gifted presenters I’ve ever encountered, and I am fortunate enough to have him as a colleague. Let’s be honest. Most presenters aren’t very good. Those that are good usually do a nice job of keeping you engaged. But it is a precious few presenters that are truly memorable. People think that memorable presentations equate to big personalities, or great use of graphics or videos. Truly memorable presentations, though, come from meticulous preparation, understanding your audience, the subject matter, and the goals you have for the audience to take away from the presentation. That is what Glenn does better than anyone I’ve seen. So, before your next presentation, learn how Glenn used these methods to turn an introduction of a juggling act (seriously) to a crowd of 2,500 people into one of the best customer presentations I’ve ever seen.”

-ED MCQUISTON, chief operating officer, Hyland

“We learned so much from this amazingly helpful book. Glenn Gibson’s book focuses on the most important part of a speech: the writing. This book is clear, instructive, and teaches his excellent approach to writing the presentation you really want to give. Everyone who writes speeches can learn something from this book. Read it, do what Glenn says, and you will write excellent, effective, emotional presentations.”

-JON WEE AND OWEN MORSE, comedy and
juggling duo, The Passing Zone

“The perfect book to recommend to anyone and everyone who is involved in delivering successful and effective presentations. It’s an essential gem that you not only read but can actually use! Easy to read, nicely illustrated, packed full of practical, no-nonsense, tried-and-tested advice, guidance, helpful templates, and easy-to-use tools. Brilliant!”

-STUART RICHARDSON, businessman, entrepreneur,
and author of the TRIM course

“The concepts shared in *Before the Mic* have fundamentally changed the way I present. I am able to more confidently present to small group meetings all the way up to audiences of thousands. Read this book! It will help you to write Meaningful, Memorable, and Motivational presentations!”

-JOHN PHELAN, chief product officer, Hyland

“When he is in front of the mic, Glenn’s superpower is his ability to draw in and delight the audience. Though we can’t learn his charm, in Glenn’s new book we can learn his techniques on how to make every presentation meaningful and memorable.”

-RACHEL YOUNG, marketing executive, former
Forrester SiriusDecisions portfolio marketing research

“Glenn has always been my ‘go-to’ person when I’m creating key presentations. He provides that perfect insight to ensure your message hits its audience with a bullseye. Watching Glenn deliver a presentation is always amazing. Make no mistake; it is not just the allure of the Scottish accent that makes Glenn a killer presenter. He understands how to deliver a compelling message with actionable takeaways for the audience.”

-SAM BABIC, chief innovation officer, Hyland

“Glenn Gibson is a natural, talented presentation artist who has developed a scientific formula to creating aMMMazing presentations. His tried-and-true approach is quick to model and easy to learn. Glenn’s methods are honed by years of experience, research, and practice, which has turned his artistic gift into a repeatable science that we can all follow to create aMMMazing presentations each and every time!”

-AMY MAXEY, manager, global conferences and events, Hyland

“I have had the pleasure to see Glenn speak live on many occasions. I cannot think of another person who does a better job captivating an audience and making each and every presentation fun and exciting! It is great to see his talents captured as a resource for us all to improve such an important skill!”

-MATT CHARLSON, CEO, Databank

“This book will improve your performance in front of people. Glenn’s unique insight into how to perfect your presentations coupled with his musical analogies make this a must-read!”

-MARK GRIMES, comedian and actor

“Transforming the experience of public speaking from drudgery to privilege, that is the magic of Glenn Gibson. In this beautifully written book you’re sure to quickly learn the unique, meaningful, and lasting approach to coaching anyone to honor the microphone. Keep it simple, make it relatable, and have fun. Dig in!”

-BRENDA KIRK, CIO

BEFORE THE MIC

HOW TO COMPOSE MEANINGFUL, MEMORABLE,
AND MOTIVATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Written and Illustrated by

G L E N N G I B S O N



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First Edition

**To my dad, Alistair, who always encouraged me to be
fearless before the microphone, and to my boys,
Finlay and Oran, who I hope to inspire to do the same.**

CONTENTS

Preface xiii

Introduction 1

SECTION 1: THE AMMAZING PRESENTATION THEORY

Chapter 1: The First *M*: Meaningful 21

Chapter 2: The Second *M*: Memorable 35

Chapter 3: The Third *M*: Motivational 53

SECTION 2: SECRETS OF STRUCTURE

Chapter 4: A Meaningful Introduction 73

Chapter 5: A Memorable Body 83

Chapter 6: A Motivational Conclusion 91

SECTION 3: THE JAM SESSION WRITING PROCESS

Chapter 7: The *J* in JAM: Jot Everything Down 115

Chapter 8: The *A* in JAM: Articulate Your Words 145

Chapter 9: The *M* in JAM: Make Your
Presentation Tools 155

Conclusion 179

APPENDIX: TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

aMMMAzing JAM Session Writing Process Checklist 187

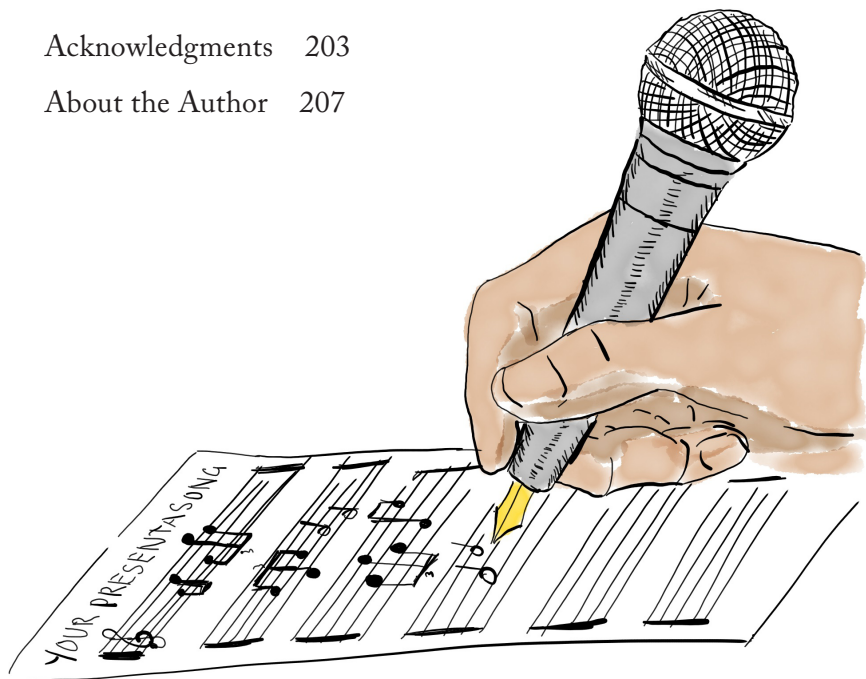
aMMMAzing Outline Template 191

aMMMAzing Slide Deck Structure Template 196

aMMMAzing Presentation Evaluation Checklist 198

Acknowledgments 203

About the Author 207



PREFACE

HELLO THERE! THERE ARE HUNDREDS of books available on the topic of presentations, so why should you read this one?

After decades of examining the art and science of presentations through reading, doing, and observing, I realized that many books touch on topics across the entire spectrum of presentations—what to say, how to say it, what your slides should look like, how to appear confident, how to handle questions, and how to generally be a superstar in front of a live audience. It would be overwhelming to try to improve in all of these areas at the same time, but on top of that, I noticed a lack of advice around the hardest and most time-intensive part of the whole experience—the actual *writing* process.

I've built a career out of writing presentations, for myself and for others. Over the past twenty years, I've composed thousands of presentations, which have been delivered to audiences numbering into the thousands at a range of in-person and virtual industry conferences, events, and training sessions around the world.

Over the years, I've honed a repeatable methodology that I use to write all of my presentations, and I've created a range of tools, templates, and tricks to help me create my words and visuals

quickly while working on multiple projects and presentations simultaneously. I have trained hundreds of executives and sales professionals using this methodology, and I've used it to write keynotes, sales pitches, board presentations, and even eulogies, commencements, and wedding speeches!

I've also been privileged to pick up several presentation awards¹ along the way.

I decided to write down my methodology and include it in a book that is different from those others by focusing on just one aspect of presentations, arguably the most important aspect to get right *first*: the writing process. This book concentrates on all of the work and preparation necessary to get you ready before the mic is in your hand.

I set out to write this book in the same way that I would approach writing a presentation on the very same topic. As I jammed out my ideas, I used the very tools, methodologies, and best practices that are contained within these pages, what I call the aMMMazing presentation theory. I also held myself accountable to apply the principles of aMMMazing presentations throughout each section.

In this book, I've culled all of my years of professional knowledge to help anyone create stronger presentations, every time. This book takes an approach that can best be described as “words first, visuals last.” This method will help you focus on writing captivating presentations, which can then be delivered with or without the aid of a slide deck in any delivery setting. When you do need

1 List of Presentation Awards: Winner of Top Presenter Award, Hyland Software TechQuest Event, 2010 and 2011; Best Pitch, Tech Week North East Ohio Spin Association (NEOSA), 2012 and 2013; Most Wanted Product, Tech Week NEOSA, 2012 and 2013; Dale Carnegie Best Innovation Presentation 2018; Association of Intelligent Information Management Pitch Perfect Winner, 2016. Here's a link to my pitch: <https://sharebase.onbase.com/en-AU/resources/press-releases/sharebase-by-hyland-wins-first-aiim-pitch-perfect-award>.

accompanying visuals, this method will forever help you improve your slide decks, because you will create your slides to complement the words you've already written, not the other way around.

This has never been more important than it is now, in a world where presenting over video conferencing is the norm. In these situations, not only are you in a different *room* from your audience, you are now being given less time than ever to present.

In these situations, how do you grab and retain the attention of your audience, make your key points, and spur them to action in such a short window of time?

Not only will this book help you get your point across with beautiful words and simple visuals, but it will also help you figure out what your *point* is in the first place.

Whether you love speaking in front of others or you only do it because you have to, I wrote this book to help you increase your confidence in your material, which is the foundation of all other presentation skills.

Are you ready to learn how to compose captivating,
aMMMMazing presentations? Read on!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent 'G' and 'l'.

INTRODUCTION

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN you are standing before the mic and about to begin speaking in front of a room full of people?

Which of the following best describes you?

- Nervous
- Excited
- Terrified
- Energized
- Sweaty
- All of the above

Perhaps you don't present very often and the idea of public speaking fills you with dread. Or, on the other end of the spectrum, maybe you present all the time and you feel totally comfortable commanding the attention of a room or a video-conferencing session.

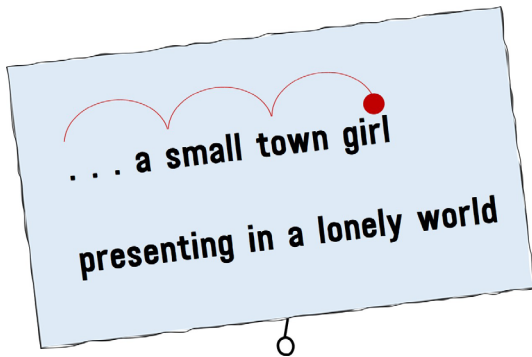
What if you learned that how you *feel* about speaking in front of an audience is irrelevant as to whether you can be effective at it or not? To understand what I mean, let me ask you a question.

How do you feel about singing karaoke?

When you see those neon lights advertising “Live Karaoke Tonight,” are you like a moth to a flame, or would you march in the opposite direction? If you stumble into a bar with live karaoke, do you go seeking a tiny pencil to write down “Sweet Caroline,” or do you lock yourself in the bathroom?

You might wonder, what does it matter? What on earth does karaoke have to do with presenting?

The obvious route is to draw a comparison between the karaoke singer reading the words from a monitor and the presenter who doesn’t know what they are saying until the words appear on the projector screen. I could take this further and talk about how most slide decks (and Prezi canvases) should have a bouncing ball over the words for the presenter to follow, and then discuss how terrible that style of delivery is. But that is not the point of this book, even if it is true.



Whether you love or loathe karaoke, there is a direct comparison between singing and presenting.

Think about it.

In both situations, in person or in a video-conferencing session, you are going to—

1. “Take the stage” in front of a room full of people (some of whom you know and some you don’t)
2. Take command of a microphone (literally or metaphorically)
3. Make sounds with your vocal cords

And in both situations when you begin, whether you like it or not, your audience will be—

4. Looking at you, observing your facial expressions and your physical movements
5. Listening to you, hearing the noises that are coming out of your mouth
6. Reacting to you, forming an opinion based on what they see and hear

For some, these facts are the very reasons they feel anxious when presenting (and perhaps also would never sing karaoke even if their lives depended on it). Those who enjoy performing in front of people find these same facts energizing.

Whether you are in front of a virtual audience or standing in front of a room full of people, let’s consider a vital question:

Why doesn’t it matter how we feel when all eyes in the audience are on us?

Imagine for a second that you are out for a night with your friends and you witness the most *amazing* karaoke singer you have ever seen. This person gets up with all the bravado and swagger of Mick Jagger, whips the crowd into a frenzy, and belts out

songs with breathtaking soulfulness. All you can think is *What a performer!* You might reflect on your own stage presence and think, *I wish I was that confident in front of an audience.* You might even think about occasions when you get up in front of others to present and begin to reason, *If I want to be a really inspiring presenter, I need to have the swagger of Jagger! I need to focus my energy on my stage presence.*

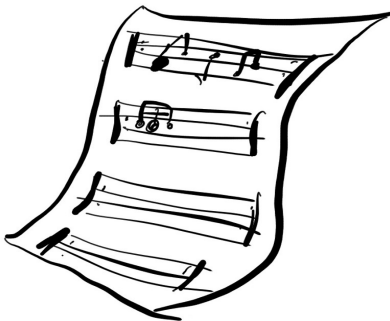
My answer to that line of reasoning is NO! That's not true! That's not true at all!

Why? Because here's the unavoidable truth—and the critical point of this book: Even the most amazing karaoke singer in the world is not the person who actually wrote the song.

When you present, you are not just the performer—you are also the *composer*.

Composing a great song is a lot, lot harder than simply performing it. Anyone can get up and sing karaoke. But most karaoke lovers have never written even one song, never mind a great song or a timeless classic.

Similarly, anyone can get up in front of a room, click through a slide deck, and verbalize words as they appear on a screen, like a karaoke singer. But not everyone knows how to compose a presentation that is truly worth listening to.



THIS



BEFORE THIS

I have seen many confident presenters stroll on stage, work the room, add humor at all the right places, click through a lovely looking slide deck, and overall, be quite entertaining. Yet, when they are done, they have left me wondering what the point of it all was.

I've also seen presenters who, on their first impression, seem as though they will have a boring delivery style but have ended up delivering some of the most memorable, thought-provoking, motivational presentations I've ever heard.

Now, before any presentation aficionados start weeping and gnashing their teeth, I'm *not* claiming that the delivery style of the presenter is unimportant. I am saying that it is secondary to the composition of the presentation itself. The most incredible presenters out there have both: well-composed presentations delivered in entirely engaging ways. But there are plenty of brilliant presenters who, even though they are not the most attention-loving, spotlight-grabbing, or microphone-hogging kind of people, can still tell a great story and captivate the audience.

But what about slide design? Many presenters feel that if their slides could just look better, everything would be OK.

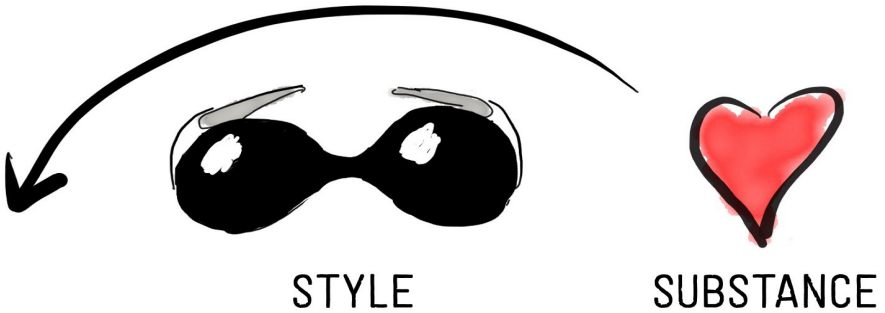
I've had many requests from people seeking help to turn their bullet-point-ridden slide decks into gorgeous graphics. They feel that if someone can help them do that, they'll have turned a boring presentation into an incredible one.

In engagements like that, I've noticed a consistent trend over the years: By asking some basic questions to understand what the presentation is trying to accomplish, we usually end up putting the existing deck to the side and instead focus our attention on the *content* and *structure* of the information. We rarely end up working (initially at least) on the design, look, or layout of the slides.

The point is that learning to compose a great presentation requires skills that have nothing to do with stage presence, graphic

design, or even confidence in front of an audience. There is simply no point in working on (or even worrying about) your presentation style or the design of your PowerPoint deck, Keynote slides, or Prezi canvases until you learn how to write something great.

This book focuses on the concept of “substance before style.”



To take a significant leap forward as a presenter, the first question that you need to ask yourself is not “How can I improve my PowerPoint game?” or “How can I increase my confidence in front of an audience?” The first question you need to figure out is “**Are the presentations I write worth *listening* to?**”

Are you already a confident presenter?

If so, cherish that natural ability but don't rely on it. It's easy to fall into the trap of "winging" presentations, throwing together some thoughts at the last minute, or relying on experience, confidence, and humor to get you through as you "speak to the slides."



Focusing on the art of composing presentations will help you add tremendous substance to your personal style. This skill set will also help you to identify and avoid pitfalls common to a relaxed delivery style, such as the following:

- Going over time, which can frustrate your audience and dilute your overall impact
- Going off on tangents, which can be fun to do but can make it hard for your audience to follow and often obscure your most important points

This book provides tools and techniques to help you write (and then deliver) well-composed presentations, in your own personal style.

Are you a nervous presenter?

Take heart! When you focus your energy on composing your presentations, it takes your attention away from yourself and puts your focus where it should be: on your content. By the time you present, you will know that you have something of value to share, and this will breed natural confidence as you deliver your well-composed presentation in your own personal style.



COMPOSING A PRESENTATION = COMPOSING A SONG

If there's a similarity between the act of presenting and the act of singing, then we can also draw the comparison between the act of composing a presentation and the act of composing a song.

Now, you might be thinking, *Hold on a second! Are we saying that writing a good presentation takes as much creativity, inspiration, and time as it does to write an actual song? That makes it sound hard!*

Actually, yes. That's exactly what I'm saying!

Writing captivating presentations is an art, which takes skill, creativity, and time.

However, just like the art of songwriting, it *can* be learned. And, like anything else, it's not too hard when you know how to do it.

Have you ever given thought to your personal presentation-writing approach? For example, do you follow a process or a certain methodology? Have you developed any "hacks" to expedite your writing process? When you start working on a new presentation, do you know exactly where to begin and which activities you should begin to schedule? Or do you feel stressed and wait until the last minute?

This book will help you find good answers to all of these questions. We'll cover methods, rules to follow, hacks to try, ideas to play with, and tools to use that will help you develop and solidify your own personal writing style.

Taking the time to develop your presentation-writing style is a wise investment. When you are excited to share something that you've created, you will shine brightly every time you deliver a presentation, which will help you to develop a reputation as an excellent presenter. This, in turn, can make you stand out in your career. The concepts in this book will help you tackle every presentation you write with confidence.

So, if writing a presentation is like writing a song, let's ask a simple question to get started: If you wanted to learn the art of songwriting, where would you start?

Any experienced songwriter would tell you that you'd need to understand some essential songwriting concepts:

- 1. Song theory:** The fundamental principles and ideas present in the music genre you want to write
- 2. Song structure:** The common structural elements present in songs of your chosen genre
- 3. Songwriting process:** Methods for developing your lyrics and melodies

Since we are comparing presentation writing to songwriting, we will use these same concepts as they relate to presentations:

- In Section 1, we'll focus on *presentation theory* and explore the essential principles and ideas present within the types of presentations many people aspire to write.
- In Section 2, we'll explore the *structure of presentations* and review a tried-and-tested framework you can use for your own presentations.
- In Section 3, we'll do a deep dive into the *presentation-writing process*, where we will explore a step-by-step method for creating melodious words for your presentations.

When exactly does one “take the stage”?



Any time you are asked to prepare something to say to an audience, you are delivering a presentation. I know that might sound obvious, but it's not. Obviously, there are occasions with a big fat “this is an important presentation” label on them, perhaps at a company-wide meeting, at a conference, or at an event, maybe even as the maid of honor or the best man in your best friend's wedding.

For a moment to qualify as a presentation, the audience doesn't have to be thousands of people sitting in chairs while you take the stage. The audience could be just one person, perhaps your boss, who wants to hear your idea. It could be a department meeting where you are asked to update the team on progress or share your plans. Whenever you have the occasion to present to one person or a thousand, you should view it as an opportunity to present something of value and leave a deep impression with your audience.

The principles in this book apply to every presentation scenario, regardless of the number of people you'll be talking to.

When you write your own material, you can present in your own style

When you observe a dynamic, vivacious presenter, it's easy to think, *I wish I was more like that!* While it's great to be inspired by others, try to focus on being yourself rather than someone else.

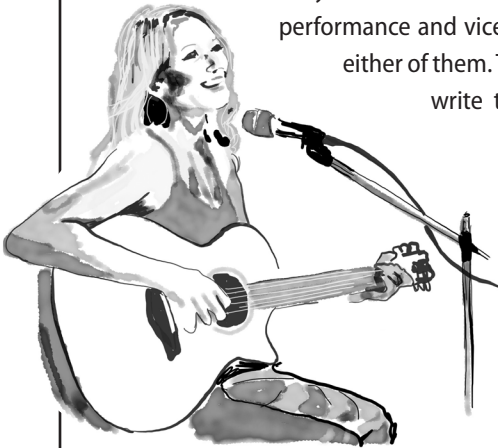
Here's what I mean: I think that U2's Bono is an incredible front man. U2 concerts are a spectacle to behold as Bono owns the stage and works the crowd like a master puppeteer.

I also happen to really enjoy the singer Jewel (I have a signed book of her poetry—don't tell anyone). The last time I saw Jewel perform live, she sat on a stool, played her songs, and told a few stories in between—it was an excellent, enjoyable evening.

However, it would be weird for Jewel to try to emulate Bono's

performance and vice versa. In fact, it wouldn't work for either of them. The fact is that both Jewel and Bono write their own songs, which they then confidently perform in their own unique style.

Similarly, when you write presentations that you are proud of, you can feel confident in your material and can then focus on delivering them in your own personal style.



Help! I have a presentation coming up, my slides are very wordy, and I don't have time to read and apply this book before I present!

If you have a wordy, wordy, wordy slide deck, here are two quick-fix options for you:

Option 1

Do these steps in order, as they can dramatically improve the effectiveness of your slides:

Step 1: Reduce your paragraphs to sentences.

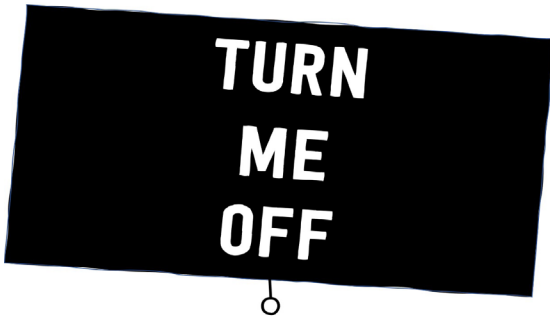
Step 2: Reduce your sentences to bullet points.

Step 3: Replace your bullet points with icons, images, or diagrams. (See Section 3 for examples.)

Even if you only have time for Steps 1 and 2, at the very least, your slides will be easier to look at and digest.

Option 2

If you don't have any time at all to work on your slide deck, this is my top tip: Turn off the projector and use your slides as notes.



So many presentations would be exponentially better if nothing was projected. The only thing that is accomplished when you project wordy slides is that you distract your audience from what you are saying and overwhelm them.

If you have ever tried reading something while someone is talking to you (shout out to my beautiful kids . . . sorry!!), you know that it's *really* hard to read and listen at the same time.

When you project words on a screen, your audience will start reading what's up there, whether you want them to or not. They'll also read the words on the slides faster than you can read them aloud. By simply turning off the projector, your audience will listen to you much more attentively, and you won't have to feel self-conscious that your slides aren't pretty.

If you want to improve your presentations before you have finished reading this book, just use this hack: Use your existing slides as notes but don't project them.

Try it!

SECTION 1:
**THE AMMMAZING
PRESENTATION THEORY**



THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES,
IDEAS, AND CONCEPTS BEHIND
THE VERY BEST PRESENTATIONS

INTRODUCING THE AMMMAZING PRESENTATION THEORY

IF YOU WERE GOING TO write an actual song, first you'd have to figure out what kind of song you wanted to write. There are many musical styles out there: pop, rock, jazz, folk, classical, electronic, punk . . . the list goes on and on and on.

I'd hazard a guess that you'd want to write songs in your favorite genre of music. In other words, you'd write a song that you yourself would like to hear.

This is a great way to think about your presentations: Apply the golden rule to “deliver presentations to others that you would have them deliver to you.”

Here's a caveat, though: In the slight chance that you are a big fan of acid jazz or psychedelic black metal—yes, that's an actual genre—the whole point of this analogy is that your goal should be to write something that your *audience* really enjoys listening to.

Let's use the term “radio friendly” as our goal. This still leaves a lot of room for your own personal taste, and this expression

captures the idea that our goal is to write something with mass appeal. One definition for “radio friendly” regarding songs is “suitable for the mainstream; appealing to popular taste, free from profanity.” I’m sure you would agree that these are all excellent things to strive for in our presentations!

With that in mind, how do you write a presentation that is enjoyable to listen to, easy on the ear, and engaging?

You simply have to make your presentation *aMMMAazing!*

WHAT IS AN AMMMAZING PRESENTATION?

First of all, that’s not a typo!

The three *M*’s in “aMMMAazing” represent the three hallmarks of exceptional presentations: *meaningful*, *memorable*, and *motivational*. A truly great presentation is all three of these things.

The three *M*’s mean that we are proactively involving the audience in multiple ways. We are trying to reach their heart by creating something meaningful for them. We are trying to involve their brain by structuring and presenting our information in a way that will make it memorable. We are also trying to influence our listeners’ actions as we strive to motivate them.



If you think this is all fluff, think about the opposite of the three *M*’s. Do you want your presentation to be meaningless,

forgettable, and unable to incite any positive action whatsoever? Of course not! In fact, we could say that the opposite of an aMMMAzing presentation is a **BAD** presentation: **Boring And Dull**. BAD presentations are forgettable because they don't connect with the audience and often overwhelm the listeners with too much information, audibly and visually.

DON'T WRITE BAD PRESENTATIONS!




It must be said that no one who prepares or delivers a presentation ever intends for it to be boring and dull. The unfortunate fact is, though, many presentations we hear (and perhaps have delivered ourselves) have come across this way. When the information is disorganized, when your eyes and ears are overwhelmed with too many words, and when you didn't quite catch *why* the information was important to you, that's where we experience the opposite of the three *M*'s.

At this point, you might be thinking, *Whoa there! The presentations I normally deliver are just informational. All this talk of affecting feelings, coming up with memorable points, and wanting my audience to be motivated doesn't apply to me.* It's true that some presentations must contain a lot of information and maybe the purpose is simply to update your listeners, but the three *M*'s apply to all presentations, not just keynotes or when you are on a big stage.

Perhaps you are presenting financial updates or information from spreadsheets to another department. Do you want your listeners to understand why the information matters to them? Do you want them to remember at least something after you present? Is there a reason why you are sharing the information with them? I'm certain that the answer to at least one of these questions is yes.

If not, then one may wonder why you are presenting the information in the first place.

Given that people listen to presentations with their ears and listen to songs with the same ears, just for fun let's apply the three *M*'s to both to see how these same concepts apply in our analogy. Next, let's discuss each *M* in turn to explore how to make your presentations meaningful, memorable, and motivational.

| Body parts involved (besides ears) | The <i>M</i> | Songs | Presentations |
|---|---------------------|--|---|
|  | Meaningful | Great songs are <i>meaningful</i> to you. They reach a deeper part of you, make you feel something: happy, sad, reflective, or angry (if you are into psychedelic black metal). | Captivating presentations are <i>meaningful</i> to you. They reach your heart and make you feel or think differently about something. |
|  | Memorable | Great songs are <i>memorable</i> . They have catchy melodies, hooks, riffs, and lyrics that stick in your mind. | Captivating presentations are <i>memorable</i> . They are easy to follow and contain thoughts that we will remember, sometimes for a long time. |
|  | Motivational | Great songs <i>motivate</i> you. They make you want to do something: tap your feet, tap your fingers on the steering wheel, sing along, dance, cry, or tell that person how you really feel about them before it's too late. | Captivating presentations <i>motivate</i> you. They inspire you to take action, to do something different than you did before, to make a decision, or to tell that person how you really feel about them before it's too late (OK, I was just joking with that last one, unless it's a presentation about relationships). |

1

THE FIRST M: MEANINGFUL

HOW DO WE ENSURE THAT our presentations are meaningful to our audience? Here's the principle we should keep in mind whenever we have a new presentation to create: Ask questions first, create content later. It should be “ready, aim, fire!” instead of “ready, fire, aim.”



READY, AIM, FIRE!



READY, FIRE, AIM!

So, what questions should you ask? I have been involved in many presentation brainstorming sessions over the years. Without

any guidance, the brainstorming sessions usually revolve around what the presenter wants to say. We need to shift the conversation to what the audience needs to hear.



Before we go any further, let's take a little quiz.

Question: When I start working on a new presentation, the first thing I am most likely to do is

- a. Open a slideware application and start typing.
- b. Grab a pen and paper.
- c. Ask questions.

If you answered A, put down the laptop and step away from the slides. This is the hardest path to creating an aMMazing presentation. Please choose another answer. Section 3: The JAM Session Writing Process will go into detail as to why this is not the best answer.

If you answered B, this is much better than answer A. This might sound foreign in our digital age, and we'll expand on this concept later on. But this is still not the best response.

If you answered C, fantastic! Your head is in the right place. Before starting work on any presentation, it is essential that you first ask some key questions. Not only will this ultimately expedite the creation of your presentation, it is essential if you want your presentation to be meaningful to your audience. Want to learn three essential questions that will forever improve your presentations? Read on!

There are three simple (but essential) questions to ask that will help you figure out what your audience wants to hear. These may sound basic, but you must know the answers to them if you want your presentation to be meaningful.

TIP! Write down the answers to these questions because they will help you figure out the most meaningful information to include.

1. Who is my audience? _____
2. What do they care about? _____
3. What do I want them to do? _____

The answers to these questions help you to channel your thought process to include the right things in your presentation. Let's examine these essential questions one at a time. Once you have the answer to each question, *write it down*.

1. Who is my audience?

I can't even count the number of times that I've been deep into a brainstorming session when someone will say, "Oh, by the way, who's the audience?" and then we find that the answer changes the direction of our thinking. Sometimes the answer to that question is obvious, but it also can be surprising. For example, in one brainstorming session for a keynote presentation, the assumption was that the audience mostly consisted of longtime attendees of the event. After drilling into the registrants, we discovered that

most were first-time attendees. This had a significant impact on the material that we decided to include.

Notice that the question is “Who is my audience?” instead of “Who is in the room?” Sometimes the answers to these questions are the same, but sometimes they are not. For example, there may be a group of executives around a board table, but the audience you are *really* targeting is your boss and your CEO. Therefore, you should tailor what you are saying to them specifically.

On other occasions, there is a massive room full of people at a conference. You can’t possibly create one presentation that is going to be meaningful for every single individual, but you can appeal to a majority if you are able to collectively describe the attendees as a group. So, you would need to give some thought as to who they are as a group and why they are there.

Plenty of templates out there can help you identify and analyze who is in your audience. Some of these tools are simple and useful, but some include *way* too much detail for most presentations. For example, some tools suggest that you find out the ratio of men versus women, age range, religion, ethnicity, and other personal details—there would have to be a very good reason to find out details like this. I find that simply defining who your target audience is, in general terms, is good enough.

Here are some examples, where I’ve defined the audiences at conferences where I’ve presented:

- Thousand-plus marketing professionals who have paid to learn best practices and new ideas
- Prospective clients (and some competitors) who don’t yet fully understand the value of my company’s offerings
- Fifteen hundred-plus existing customers in a variety of roles—from end users to executives

Once you've determined who your audience is, then you need to figure out the answer to the second question.

2. What do they care about?

If you want to make sure that your presentation is meaningful to your audience, you must try to answer this question the best you can. Let's look at this list of common presentation scenarios and consider some reasonable high-level questions to help you contemplate what these audiences may care about.

- **Pitching your product or service to a prospect**
 - What does your prospect care more about?
 - a. Your company and products
 - b. Solving their own business challenges and improving their bottom line
- **Presenting an idea to your boss**
 - What does your boss care more about?
 - a. The details of how you are going to implement your idea
 - b. How this idea will improve her department (and make her look good to her boss)
- **Speaking at a conference**
 - What do the attendees care more about?
 - a. Your company history and competitive differentiators
 - b. Learning new ideas and ways of doing something
- **Presenting a team overview at a company meeting**
 - What do these employees care more about?

- a. Your team's organizational structure
- b. How your department and function can help them in their jobs
- **Presenting a financial update to all employees**
 - What do the majority of your employees care about?
 - a. Company profit margins
 - b. Job stability, benefits, and their own prospect of getting a raise

Of course, these are all generalized, but hopefully, these questions and the *B* answers illustrate the point. Figuring out what your audience cares about (and what they don't care about) can help you fundamentally shape what you choose to include and how you choose to frame it. In that last example, impressive company profit margins are certainly an important thing to communicate, but the message will be stronger if you can draw a direct correlation to how it benefits the people who are working so hard, rather than just the absent shareholders.

You may also want to take this one step further and ask about the sentiment of the people in the room because this often determines what they care about at that moment. For example, let's say you are going to talk to an existing customer and are trying to convince them to buy more from you. Are they happy with your relationship? Are they angry over something that doesn't work as expected? Are they disappointed in a recent interaction? Knowing this level of detail can make the difference as you frame your information in a way that adds meaning for them.

After we've figured out who we are talking to, next we ask my favorite question of all.

3. What do I want them to do?

Notice that it's not "what do I want them to *know*" but "what do I want them to *do*."

Every single time I pose this question to someone during a brainstorming session, the immediate response is . . . silence.

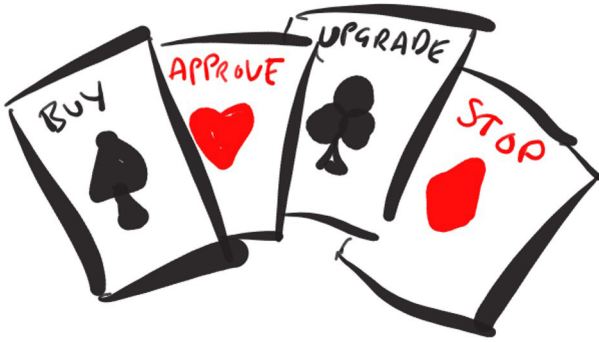
The reason for the silence is that the answer to this question is not always obvious.

After the silence, the most common response is "Well, I don't want them to *do* anything. I just want them to listen."

My response to that is "If your audience will not do anything different as a result of your presentation, what was the point of talking?" I know that's kind of annoying to hear, but it's worth thinking about.

Here are some examples of goals or actions that you might have in mind for your audience:

- To buy what you are selling (an idea, product, or service)
- To agree to act on your idea
- To stop doing something
- To appreciate something that they didn't previously
- To upgrade to a new version
- To engage with your team and know how to do it
- To increase their confidence in you, your team, or your company
- To donate time, energy, or money



PICK A VERB, ANY VERB

So basically, pick a verb that you want your audience to do, and craft a sentence around it. That is the goal of your presentation. This can serve as your “true north” when deciding what you should include. And by the way, once you have written down the goal of your presentation, it’s worth revisiting as you go through the brainstorming and writing process. Presentations often suffer from “presentation creep,” where there are so many good ideas that you want to cram them all in. Keeping the goal for your audience firmly in mind will help you select the best ideas, cut out unnecessary content, and resist the temptation to throw in additional details not aligned to your goal.

THE THREE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS RESULT IN SOMETHING GAME-CHANGING

If you ask these three essential questions every time you write a presentation, you’ll quickly realize something monumentally important: *The answers will be different every time you present!* Each audience is unique and has unique cares. And based on these factors, your intended goal for them might vary too. This

means that the information you include in your presentation should be tailored to your audience, every time. That is really worth thinking about.

There is no such thing as a “stock” presentation. Let me rephrase that. There is no such thing as a stock presentation that will work for all audiences and situations. Even if you have a corporate fact sheet or slide deck where you pull standard content from, if you want to make your presentation meaningful to your audience, you must *always* tailor your presentation to them.

THE CORPORATE DISEASE

Speaking of stock slide decks, let’s look at why presentations should be tailored to your audience every time you present, instead of grabbing a stock deck from a shelf and just talking through it. This is something that I like to call the “corporate disease” of all presentation formats.

I am no conspiracy theorist, but I do think that there must have been a secret society of powerfully boring people that got together back in the early ’80s. This cabal decided to create the most mind-numbing of all presentation formats they could think of, then secretly seeded it throughout corporations around the world. For the past forty years, organizations have adopted this format en masse and have continued to churn out corporate presentations accordingly.



**Society of Really Rotten Yarns NOT Society of Remarkably Riveting Yaks*

Here is the format of the corporate disease presentation:

The Corporate Disease Agenda

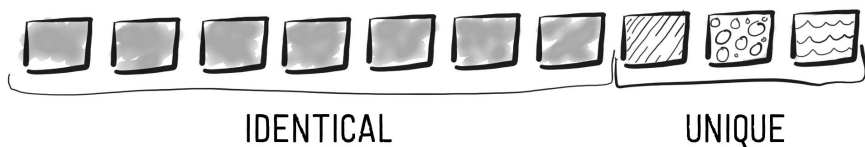
- **Our History**
 - Background of our company
 - Where we are based
 - Number of employees
 - Partnership status with other vendors
- **Our Company Values**
 - They are just like yours!
- **Our Obligatory Logo Slide** of Impressive Companies We've Worked With
- **Our Placement on Analyst Reports**
- **Our Products or Services**
- **Our Demo** (If There's Time!)

I know that you've seen this format. You have probably delivered this format. And maybe, by some weird chance, you created a slide deck in this format for a company, and now you are wondering how you got infected by the corporate disease.

Here's when I first noticed that this was a problem: A few years ago, I had the opportunity to participate in a product pitch night in Cleveland, Ohio. Ten local companies had the opportunity to deliver a ten-minute pitch of their products and services to a group of business owners and executives. At the end of the event, the attendees would vote on a variety of categories related to the pitch.

Seven out of the ten pitches followed this exact format. What completely blew my mind was that, even though all of the companies offered unique products and services, all of their presentations were so similar that it was even hard to differentiate one company from another!

All companies had a founding date and were proud of where they were from. All of them had stellar core values. All of them had analyst recognition (with their company shown as a dot on a quadrant, wave, or report). All seven of these near-identical pitches didn't even get to the problems they solved or even what they did until the very end of their ten-minute slot. And even then, most of them either ran out of time or didn't fully explain the value! These presenters had a full ten minutes to pitch the value of their products (which is plenty of time to make a great pitch), but for some inexplicable reason, they opted to include so much irrelevant corporate information that the value of their products was lost.



These presenters did not ask or answer the three essential questions. If they had, they never would have delivered that content to that audience because it just wasn't relevant or what the night was actually about. It's not a stretch to imagine that this is the exact same deck that these companies use when pitching their products and solutions to prospects.

Walking away from this event, I realized something that every sales organization should take to heart: If this presentation format makes it almost impossible to differentiate between companies that offer completely different products, imagine how difficult it makes it for you to differentiate your company from your competitors who solve the exact same problems you do!

Here's another observation about why this format is ineffective: The real problem isn't just that everyone delivers the same outline; the real problem is who the presentation is focused on. Look back at the first word of each major bullet point in the corporate disease agenda. You probably didn't pick up on it at first, but the first word in each of these points is "our." It's problematic when the focus of the information is on the presenter rather than on the audience. The corporate disease outline is focused on the company that is delivering the presentation, not on the needs of the people in the audience and what they care about.

This is not to say that your company's history, partnership status, and other successes are totally irrelevant. I'm also not saying that you should throw away your corporate slide deck. It's all about context, the order of the information, and when this information is the headline or when it's supporting material. The presentation should be more about your audience than about yourself.

Imagine being invited out on a first date and talking about yourself for the first forty-five minutes, trying to convince your date they did the right thing by asking you out. I'm no romantic guru, but I'm not sure a second date would be forthcoming.



In the scenario of pitching to a prospect, remember this: Your prospect already knows (and likes) enough about your company to have invited you along to pitch your solution in the first place.

To illustrate the point, let's stick with our prospect-pitching scenario in a sales situation and revisit the three essential questions in that context.

1. Who is the audience?

- a. Answer: Perhaps the chief technology officer, CEO, or another key decision-maker

2. What do they care about?

- b. Answer: Probably solving their problems and improving their bottom line

3. What do I want them to do?

- c. Answer: Get the best solution to their challenges (which is what we are offering!)

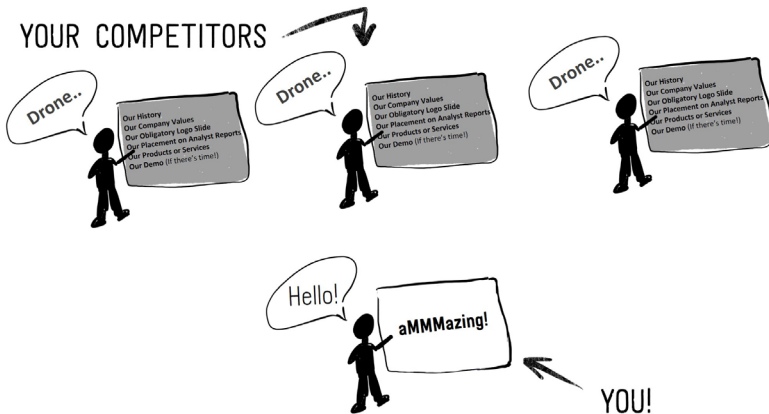
Now, go back and examine the content from the standard corporate disease pitch deck. When you look at this presentation scenario, is your history, core values, analyst recognition, and product breadth and depth the most important information to begin with? Probably not. What is relevant is how you can uniquely solve their challenges and help your prospect achieve their goals—so why not start with that?

Now we can get back to our songwriting analogy with all of this in mind. If you were to start writing a song for someone special, would you include lots of lyrics about yourself or lots of lyrics meaningful to them? The answer is fairly obvious!

When you are writing a presentation, you are writing it for your audience, so make it about them.

Are you in sales? Consider this! When you show up to deliver a pitch, your prospect is likely going to hear pitches from several of your competitors. Let's assume that your competitors will show up and deliver the corporate disease format. They will all end up sounding exactly the same to your prospect. That's where your presentation itself can become one of your greatest differentiators (if you follow the steps in this book!).

YOUR COMPETITORS



2

THE SECOND *M*: MEMORABLE

NOW THAT WE KNOW HOW to narrow our information down to the most meaningful content, let's consider the second *M*. How do you make sure that your presentation is *memorable*—that your audience will remember your key points?

If you want to write memorable presentations, the first thing you need to embrace is this reality: *Your audience will not remember everything that you say.*

Without getting into the science of it, think back to the last presentation you heard. Unless you have a photographic or eidetic memory, you likely do not remember every single word that the presenter said. If you think really hard, you might be able to remember a few of the things the presenter said. You might also remember that you were hungry, that the room was cold, or that the slides were difficult to read. Or you might struggle to remember it at all.

Embracing the reality that your audience will, at best, only remember a few things about your presentation in the minutes, hours, and days following it is one of the most liberating concepts of all when it comes to writing presentations. Why? Because once you embrace this concept, you can take control of it.

Through this revelation, you will realize that adding specific memory-aiding techniques to your presentation is a really good idea. We are going to cover three of those techniques that will help your audience remember what you want them to remember, rather than leaving it to chance.

These are “the rule of three,” mnemonics, and repetition.

THE RULE OF THREE

If you found yourself on fire, you wouldn't have a lot of time to do a Google search for what to do. Instead, you would “stop, drop, and roll.”

You may not remember that it was Dick Van Dyke who made this phrase famous in an educational campaign in the '70s (did a lot of people spontaneously combust back then?), but you'll be glad he used the rule of three when he promoted this phrase because our brains find it very easy to remember things in threes. Even dry data like phone numbers are grouped into threes to make them easier to remember (which was handy when we needed to remember phone numbers).

Take a moment to think about three-word phrases that you know and where they are used. Can you finish these phrases?

- **In advertising:** A Mars a day helps you work, rest . . .
- **In literature:** Friends, Romans . . .

- **In sandwiches:** Bacon, lettuce . . .

Think about stories and rhymes that have been passed on by word of mouth for generations: Goldilocks and her three fluffy companions, the three little pigs, and the three billy goats gruff. If you have ever sat down with a kid and told them any of these tales from memory, you have experienced the weird phenomenon that not only is your brain able to recall the three main characters, but it is also able to fill in a remarkable amount of detail around them, even if you haven't read or heard the story yourself in years.

A plethora of articles extol the benefits of the rule of three, proving that it works with even more examples and interesting theories as to *why* our brains easily latch on to things in threes, so I won't belabor it here. The point is that it is a very powerful memory aid, it works, and if we want people to remember what we've been talking about, we should use it.

In fact, once you connect the dots between the rule of three and the fact that your audience will only remember a few things you say, you can use this to your advantage. You can highlight the three things that you want them to remember within your presentation.

While there's a lot of content saying that you should use the rule of three, there's not as much advice for how to do it. It's a classic case of "easier said than done."

So how do you do it? As shown in the previous examples, one obvious way is to coin a three-part phrase that everyone will remember. If you can do that, that's great! However, there's one specific application of the rule of three that I highly recommend, and it's perhaps the most practical application of the rule of three in presenting. I have made the following rule about the rule of

three for the presentations I write: *Always have exactly three items on the agenda. No more, no less.*

To do this, it means that you have to arrange all of your material into three topics, headings, or main points. When you are previewing your agenda during your introduction, your slide might look something like this:



Your immediate reaction might be “That will never work for my presentations because I usually need to cover way more than three things.” This doesn’t mean that you can only cover three points or that it restricts you from covering everything you want to (assuming you’ve already selected only the most meaningful information). It does, however, require you to spend some time brainstorming, arranging, and rearranging your ideas until you can organize them into three simple, *memorable*, and digestible topics. This is one of the best ways to make your information appealingly simple.

That might sound challenging, but I promise that it is one of the secrets to delivering memorable presentations. By holding fast to the three-point-agenda rule, I find that it helps me, as the

presenter, to organize my thoughts and find patterns and relationships within my information that I had not previously recognized.

Having a three-point agenda may seem like an extreme recommendation, but who really brims with anticipation when a presenter shows an agenda with more points on it than one can even read through? It's a rough place to start if your audience feels overwhelmed before you've even begun.

When you simplify your information into three main topics, it makes it easy for you, as the presenter, to introduce your content, and it makes it really simple for your listeners to absorb and anticipate what you will be saying.

There's another added benefit: It makes it easy for you, as the presenter, to remember what you are going to cover.

Imagine you have a pending presentation, and someone says to you, "What's your presentation about?" This is an easy question to answer because you'll just tell them your topic. But then, what if they say, "That sounds interesting. What are you going to say about it?" Can you summarize the key points of a presentation you are about to deliver without reaching for your slide deck?

Confession Time!

I once delivered a presentation about the benefits of a software application I had been learning (Citrix remote desktop, in case you are interested). In my original presentation, I had so many agenda items that I had to split my agenda over two slides! A two-slide agenda! Can you even imagine!? After realizing that the best presentations use the rule of three, rather than trying to spread my agenda over two slides, I made it my mission to rework it into three points. This is what I ended up with:

1. The Benefits of Citrix

2. How Citrix Works

3. Troubleshooting Citrix Issues

I didn't reduce the actual content, but I did reorganize it significantly. As I reorganized my information, I started to realize that in my first version I had been regularly touching on ideas related to benefits, how it works, and troubleshooting, but they were scattered throughout my whole presentation. When I consolidated all similar ideas and presented them together, my presentation was much better. Not only was the information much clearer for my audience, the result was much more satisfying for me to deliver.

If you have already arranged your information into three topics, you will find it surprisingly easy to recall your key ideas or sections and preview your presentation off the top of your mind. You will find that you can recall a remarkable amount of the detail around your three ideas. If you have not spent the time to do this and have a ten-part agenda, you will find that it is really hard to articulate, or even call to mind, your main ideas.

Here's the point: If you cannot call to mind a brief synopsis of your presentation (without scrolling through your slide deck to conjure up some key points) before you present, how on earth can you expect your audience to remember your key points after you've talked?

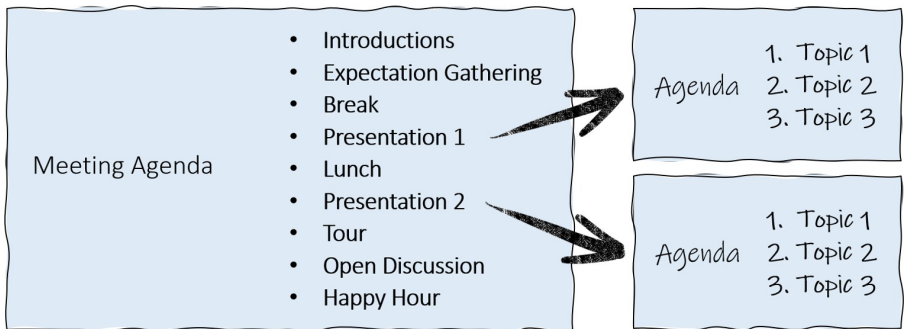
When you take the time to arrange your material into three sections, ideas, or main points, what you are really doing is spending valuable time simplifying your message so that your audience can absorb and remember it. We will cover tips and techniques for how to distill your information into three key ideas in Section 3, but for now, simply bear in mind that a three-point agenda is a rule that we will apply from here on.

Before we examine our next memory aid technique, I will address three common objections to using a three-point agenda.

OBJECTION 1: I NEED MORE THAN THREE AGENDA POINTS FOR MY MEETING!

You might be thinking about meeting agendas that you've built that include breaks, lunch, tours, several presentations, time for questions and answers, and more. If you are, then you are probably thinking that I'm crazy in saying that your presentation should only have three items on it.

There's a difference between a meeting agenda and a presentation agenda. Your meeting agenda can have as many items as you need, but each distinct presentation should have a simple three-item agenda, like this:



The meeting agenda lays out how the time will be spent during the meeting. When the individual presenters take the stage to present, their presentation agendas should be arranged around their three key ideas, aligned to the goal of their individual sessions.

OBJECTION 2: I CANNOT POSSIBLY REDUCE MY INFORMATION TO THREE POINTS!

Someone once approached me and said, “I hear what you are saying about the rule of three and I want to apply it, except that I’m about to deliver a presentation on Stephen Covey’s book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. How do I explain the seven habits if I can only have three main points?” This, as you have probably deduced, was a very good question!

So, I decided to ask a series of questions. Can you guess which ones? I asked him—

1. Who is your audience?
2. What do they care about?
3. What do you want them to do?

Here were his answers:

1. Work colleagues
2. Improving themselves professionally
3. For them to read the book

Now we were getting somewhere! Given that the goal of the presentation was for the audience to *read the book*, we discussed what information would help him accomplish his goal.

He realized that it was not necessary to explain what the seven habits even were! He ended up focusing his presentation on making a compelling case for people to *read the book*. After some brainstorming and applying the methodologies we’ll cover in Section 3, we came up with this simple agenda for his presentation:

1. Why the seven habits matter
2. Results from applying them
3. Where to learn more (read the book!)

Applying the rule of three saved him (and his audience) from the path he was going down, which was trying to cram all the actual seven habits into ten minutes.

Here's the point: Even the most perplexing of topics can be distilled into three main points if you ask yourself the three essential questions and build a presentation to help you meet your goal.

OBJECTION 3: IT SOUNDS HARD, SO I'LL JUST IGNORE IT

If this is your objection, remember this: *It's called a rule for a reason.*

You can try to ignore the rule of three and pretend it doesn't exist, but the rule of three is a bit like gravity; you can't escape it, no matter how hard you try.

You have probably heard the somewhat clichéd phrase “blood, sweat, and tears” before. This phrase, coined by Winston Churchill, is often used when describing the effort involved in accomplishing a difficult task. Did you know, though, that Churchill actually said, “blood, sweat, *toil*, and tears”? The rule of three left the somewhat unnecessary word *toil* behind.

Not only do we remember things better grouped into threes, but our own brain also uses the rule of three to selectively remember the most important points. Who knows if the Canadian-American jazz-rock band Blood, Sweat & Tears knew they were influenced by the rule of three? But one thing's for sure: A band name of Blood, Sweat, Toil & Tears is just not as catchy.

Here's one more example. I mentioned the three little pigs earlier. If you had to tell a little kid that story right now, I'm betting that you could, even if you hadn't heard it or read it in years. There were three pigs, and each one built a house out of a different material: straw, wood, and brick, respectively. The big bad wolf said to each pig, "I'm going to huff and puff and blow your house down." This story is riddled with threes, which is why it's easy to remember.

THREE PIGS, THREE BUILDINGS, THREE WORDS



HUFF!



PUFF!



BLOW!

Did you remember, however, that prior to the wolf climbing down the chimney and getting boiled alive (how graphic!), there's a whole subplot where the wolf coaxes the last little piggy out of his brick house three times? Eventually, the little piggy hides in a butter churn, then proceeds to roll down a hill and totally freak the wolf out, which is what causes him to climb down the chimney and meet his grisly end! Maybe you recall those scenes, but I had no idea until I bought the storybook and

found these details as I read it to my son! Either my parents didn't remember that part when they told the story to me, or I forgot it somewhere along the way. In fact, many printed and online versions of this story omit these details. These seem to be left on the cutting room floor of people's memory. Why? Maybe because they were unnecessary to the overall point of the story? I'll attribute this to the rule of three.

The rule of three is an excellent principle to help you simplify and distill your key ideas as much as possible. You can try to ignore it, but you can't avoid it. People will only remember a few things that you said. The best thing to do is embrace this fact and start organizing your information into three points.

But there are still other techniques to help your audience remember important content along with the rule of three.

MNEMONICS

Mnemonics is the technique of using memory aids such as rhymes, poems, acronyms, acrostics, images, and other mental association concepts to help remember complex things. These mnemonic devices can stick in your mind for years to come.

Coming back to our songwriting analogy for a second, there's a direct relationship between songs and mnemonics. For example, many children learn the "ABC" song, which is not really a song at all. It's just the alphabet put to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." The melody aids the memory.

Similarly, many songs that you hear include a hook. This might be a highly recognizable phrase, a melody, or a riff that catches your ear and gets stuck in your head. Here are some famous examples:

- The opening piano riff in "Clocks" by Coldplay

- The strings in the song “Bitter Sweet Symphony” by the Verve (a hook they found so catchy they borrowed it from the Rolling Stones)
- The bass groove in “Seven Nation Army” by The White Stripes, which is so catchy that football fans (a.k.a. soccer fans!) spontaneously chant this throughout the globe

These song elements catch your ear and are often repeated a few times throughout the song, therefore becoming memorable.

What is the counterpart in presentations? Here are some examples of a hook in a presentation:

- Analogies
- Quotes from a famous person or a customer
- Stories or anecdotes
- Customer case studies
- Statistics
- Rhetorical questions
- News articles

When you include one or more carefully chosen elements like these, they can create a deeper and more memorable impression than just your raw information alone.

Story Time!

I once created a presentation to help employees get on board with some large organizational changes that were coming. I wove in an analogy that illustrated the positive effects that can happen when organizations drive market changes rather than react to them. One of the leaders involved in driving the organizational change told me, “You need to get rid of the analogy and get straight to the details of what’s changing—that’s what’s most important.” Unfortunately (or should I say, fortunately), this conversation happened the day before I was due to deliver the presentation, and I had already created, rehearsed, and timed the entire thing.

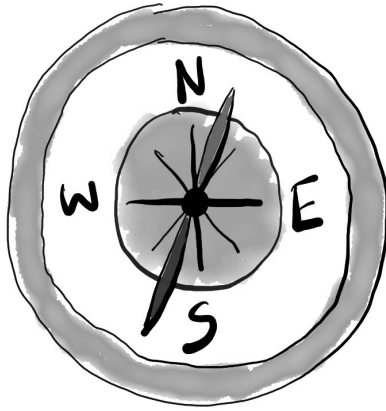
As I was planning on delivering the presentation several times to a variety of departments over a period of a few weeks, I proceeded with the presentation as planned on its first airing. I decided that I would make changes (if necessary) based on the response.

Afterward, one of the people in the audience said to me, “I knew *what* was changing in our organization, but I never really understood *why* we were going through all this change. Your analogy really helped me grasp it.” Interestingly, the person who said this was a model example of the audience we were trying to target.

The point is that sometimes a well-chosen analogy or story can help to communicate broader or more impactful ideas than the information alone. Even years later, people mentioned that same presentation to me, referring to it by the analogy I used.

Your “hook” might ultimately help you make a deeper and more memorable impression than just the details of the topic at hand.

Another example of a memory aid technique is acrostics. For example, how do you recall the order of the points on a compass? Personally, I Never Eat Shredded Wheat.



A well-known business example is SMART goals. Without turning to Google (I promise), I grabbed a pen and paper and jotted down these words from memory: Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-Based. A quick Google search to validate my memory revealed a slight difference: Specific, Measurable, *Achievable*, *Relevant*, and Time-Bound. Even with this slight discrepancy, I'd argue that this technique still worked amazingly well. I learned these definitions from a single presentation several years ago. While the words in my memory were slightly different, the general concept and ideas stuck in my mind. I'd consider this a win considering all of the presentations that I've heard and not remembered anything from in the last decade!

Let's go back to the presentation on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Let's say that the presenter had an hour to speak on the topic rather than ten minutes. Let's assume that his goal changed (given the time allowed) from wanting the audience to read the book to learning the seven habits. I would still insist on a three-part agenda for the presentation, and it might look something like this now:

1. Why the seven habits matter
2. What are the seven habits?
3. How to apply them

In this structure, the presenter would explain the seven habits one by one during the second topic. But what if he wanted to help his audience to remember them? For reference, here are Stephen Covey's seven habits:²

1. Be proactive.
2. Begin with the end in mind.
3. Put first things first.
4. Think win-win.
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
6. Synergize.
7. Sharpen the saw.

This is a big list and therefore hard to remember. Also, you can't boil them down to three because there are literally seven of them! How could a presenter help an audience remember all seven? The presenter could identify the main word from each habit and then create a mnemonic as a fun memory aid, as follows:

People Enjoy Feeling Wise Using Stephen's Saw

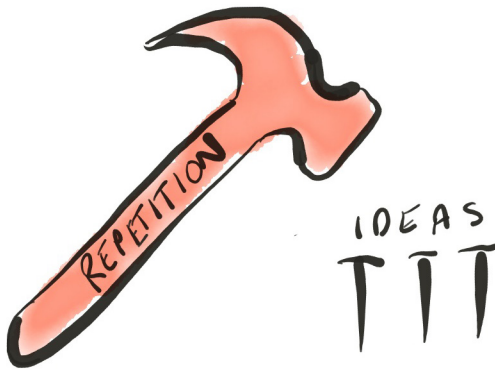
2 Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

This sentence is easier to remember than the seven points alone and can help someone remember the first letter of the key word within each of the seven points in order. Our brains are amazing tools because often, with the simple trigger of one letter, we can recall the rest of the detail that was otherwise buried in the deepest recesses of our minds.

Obviously, these take some time to think through, but they can be fun to create and share, and can help your content stick in people's minds.

REPETITION

If the rule of three and mnemonics can help you create memorable content, then the concept of repetition is like the hammer that can drive these same points home.



Just as you rarely drive a nail home with one hit of a hammer, the concept of repetition means that you need to hit on your key ideas at least a few times throughout your presentation. There's a Latin proverb that says, "Repetition is the mother of all learning." I don't think anyone would argue with that.

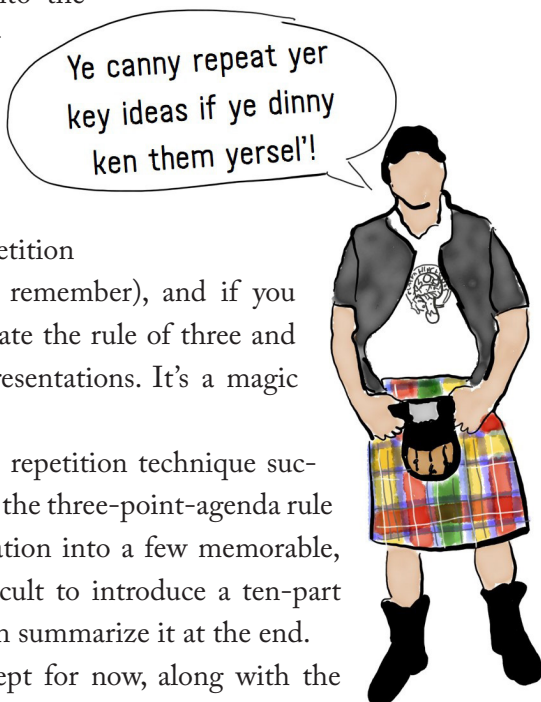
But what things should you repeat throughout your presentation? While repetition is the easiest of all the memory aids to apply, we have purposefully added it at the end of this chapter on making your presentation memorable, because we've now identified some of the things that you should repeat.

If you have identified your three key ideas, come up with a hook, and created some mnemonics to really make them stick in people's minds, you should repeat these throughout your presentation.

Have you ever heard the adage "Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you told them"? This concept applies as much today as it did when the words were first recorded in the early 1900s. It's the simple concept of "introduce the idea, explain the idea, summarize the idea." I'll show how you can build this concept into the structure of your presentation in Section 2. This simple advice is very interesting because the phrase itself incorporates the rule of three and repetition (and is therefore easy to remember), and if you apply it, you will incorporate the rule of three and repetition in your own presentations. It's a magic trick for presentations!

However, to apply this repetition technique successfully, you have to apply the three-point-agenda rule and simplify your information into a few memorable, repeatable topics. It's difficult to introduce a ten-part agenda, explain it, and then summarize it at the end.

To wrap up this concept for now, along with the



Latin proverb, I thought I'd include a modern-day Scottish proverb: "Ye canny repeat yer key ideas if ye dinny ken them yersel'."*

Translation: "You cannot repeat your key ideas if you don't know them yourself."

**I'm Scottish and I just wrote it, so that counts as modern-day Scottish, right?*

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