

# Giving Presentations People Will Pay Attention To

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## Introduction

Most people, at some point in their career, have sat through a bad presentation. Whether in a conference room or conference hall, there's nothing more painful than watching a presenter drone on and on as they read a novel's worth of bullet points to you from their PowerPoint slides. Conversely, watching a good presenter can leave you feeling energized and excited; ready to take your new-found knowledge and put it to work.

So what makes the difference between a good presentation and a bad one? Why do some people seem so natural and relaxed behind the podium while others look like they'd run screaming at the drop of the hat?

That's what we're here to talk about.

## Stage Fright

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), about 75% of adults suffer from a fear of public speaking. There's even a phobia named after it – Glossophobia. Incidentally, "glosso" comes from the Greek word for "tongue," and of course "phobia" comes from the word for "fear." "Tongue Fear." Sounds appropriate, right? In some cases, the fear is so bad that the speaker can have a panic attack just by thinking about their upcoming presentation.

So what are some common fears you might have when you're speaking in front of a crowd?

- Forgetting your material.
- Appearing to not know what you're talking about.
- Having someone challenge your ideas publicly.
- There's something wrong with your physical appearance.

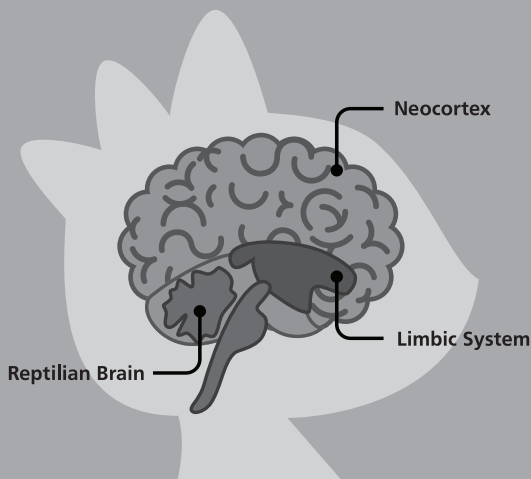
## What Causes Stage Fright?

Fear of public speaking is tied to the “fight or flight” instinct of your reptilian brain. If you think about it, if you were a cave man, you probably would try to avoid being the center of attention – if you were, you may end up being lunch. Clearly, if you’re speaking to a crowd, you are definitely the center of attention. Who knows? There may even be a hungry dinosaur in the audience.

So Reptilian Brain<sup>1</sup> notices that everyone’s looking at you and nudges Limbic Brain. Limbic doesn’t remember having this problem before, but since Reptilian told him this is bad, he automatically feels afraid. Then he asks Neocortex if he knows why we’re afraid. Neo thinks about it a bit and comes up with some reasons, and suddenly everyone is like Dorothy and crew going through the dark forest. “Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!” Neo and Limbic hand over the controls and Reptilian starts pushing the “fight or flight” buttons. The next time around, Limbic goes straight to being scared just thinking about getting up in front of the crowd, because it remembers it happened before.

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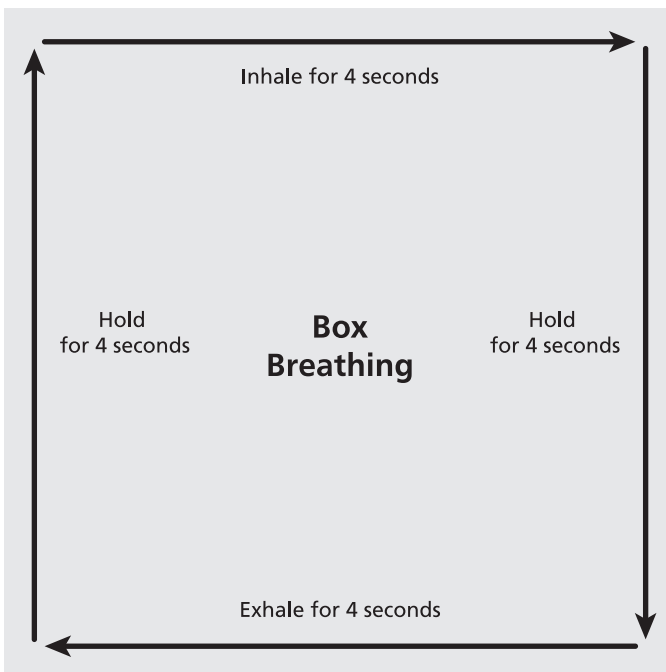
1 Passio, M. (n.d.). *The Triune Brain*. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from <http://www.whatonearthishappening.com/part-1-the-solution/65-the-triune-brain>



## How to Be Cool

That's all well and good, so what do we do about it? Luckily, our Neo has some say in our behavior, and can talk to Reptilian and calm him down. If you can get Limbic Brain and Neocortex back online, you can get through your presentation without running away screaming. Here are some tips:

- Check yourself. Thoroughly. Be sure there's no broccoli stuck in your teeth, your hair is combed, and your slip isn't showing. Every time that particular fear pops up, you can remind yourself that you already checked and still look fabulous.
- Breathe. It's been proven that slow, deep breathing reduces stress and calms the body. One technique you may use is called "box breathing."



- **Be a hero.** Before you go out on stage, take a moment to do a couple of “superhero” poses. One is the “Wonder Woman” pose – stand with your legs slightly apart, arms bent at the elbows and fists on either side of your waist, like you’re facing down a bad guy. You can also try the Victory pose – hands up in the air like you just don’t care, in a slight “V” shape. Studies have shown that these power poses boost confidence, and they kind of look cool. I wouldn’t recommend the Victory pose on stage, but Wonder Woman may make an appearance if your confidence starts to lag.
- **Know your material!** If you know your material inside and out, you’ll be far more confident and can draw on that confidence when you start to feel scared.
- **Make friends with the audience.** You don’t have any problems talking to your friends, right? If you view the audience as a big group of friends, you’re less likely to be afraid of messing up or doing something stupid. I recommend talking to a few audience members before your program begins. This way you can establish a connection with them before you get on stage, and if you start to feel scared you can talk to them directly.

If these aren’t working for you:

- **Get a coach.** Public speaking coaches not only give you pointers on poise and diction, they can also help you get more comfortable at the podium.
- **Find a Therapist.** They’ve gone through a lot of schooling to learn how to help people get over their anxieties. They can provide you with strategies to overcome your fear and deal with the stress.

- **Medicate.** Believe it or not, there are medications out there that can help. Beta blockers stop the physical response to anxiety, making it easier for you to calm down and get through your presentation. Talk to your doctor about whether they'd be appropriate for you, then use as directed if he writes you a prescription.



## The Hero Pose

In the animal kingdom (including humans), opening up your body – pushing out your chest, putting your arms back, spreading your legs – is a sign of power. The act of making your body larger is a display of power and dominance. Conversely, “closing up”, or making yourself smaller – scrunching your shoulders together, hunching your back, crossing your arms – is a display of submission. A Harvard study has proven that taking on a “power pose” for two minutes created a physiological change in the test subjects’ minds, increasing testosterone output (affecting confidence and assertiveness), and decreasing cortisol levels (affecting stress).<sup>1</sup>

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1 Cuddy, A. (2012, June 1). Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are. Retrieved September 15, 2015, from [http://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are)



## Why Do We Present?

Consider this. On one hand, you have a person who has information. On the other, you have an audience of people that needs that information. Presenting is the format through which you give them that information.

Whether you're the head of a department in a staff meeting, the Executive Director of a non-profit organization, or a renowned scientist at a conference, you getting up in front of people has been identified as the most efficient way of transferring the data. You could put it in an email or write a book, but somebody somewhere decided that it would make more sense for a human being to provide the information in person.

A human being. You are the presentation. That means that the information should be conveyed orally – not through the tools you use during your presentation.

Look at the definition for the word "rapport:"

***rap-port*** /ra pôr, r pôr/

noun. a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well.

Sound about right? If you can establish a good relationship with your audience, they're going

to walk away with a complete understanding of everything you've given them. You will have communicated to them the information that you have to present, they have understood everything you said, and everyone feels close and harmonious.

So how do you build a rapport with your audience, when you have a limited time in front of them? To put it simply, you begin by understanding them.

## The Audience's Brain

You've probably heard of Myers-Briggs, and if you have, you know that there are many different ways that people think. As you begin to develop your presentation, you have to keep in mind that all of those people are out in the audience, and many of them don't think the same way you do. This can make it difficult – you can't just go up and give the information the way you would want it – you're going to lose some people.

I'm going to use a modified version of Myers-Briggs called Emergenetics® when I talk about thinking preferences. The four thinking preferences that Emergenetics® refers to are Conceptual, Social, Analytical and Structural thinking. Everyone uses some of each type of thinking, but most people have a preference for one or two, and those preferences are wide and varied.

- **Conceptual Thinking.** This is the big picture stuff; pie-in-the-sky, "what-if" thinking. Those with a preference for conceptual thinking can often "see" something that doesn't exist as if it were a tangible thing.
- **Social Thinking.** Social thinkers are very "people" oriented. They make great customer service representatives because of their ability to empathize and intuitively understand the customer's needs.

- **Analytical Thinking.** If you like to see charts and graphs, you have a preference for analytical thinking. Analytical thinkers are objective and factual, taking a logical approach to anything that may arise.
- **Structural Thinking.** As the word “structural” implies, these are the folks who like guidelines and order. They like to know what’s going to happen and when.

Your audience has all of these people in it. As you’re presenting, they each have different buttons that you’re going to have to push if you want to reach them. Here’s what they’re looking for:

### ***Conceptual Thinkers***

- Keep the presentation moving along, changing tracks every 10 to 15 minutes.
- Don’t hold their hand – leave something for them to extrapolate on their own
- Use lots of color
- Give an overview and a summary

### ***Social Thinkers***

- Build a rapport
- Keep eye contact
- Tell stories involving people
- Give them examples of how concepts apply to specific people/roles

## ***Analytical Thinkers***

- Establish your credibility
- Provide facts and figures
- Provide written materials

## ***Structural Thinkers***

- Provide an Agenda
- Give specific details
- Highlight key information
- Provide guidance for implementation

As you develop your presentation, go back to these guidelines to be sure that you have something for everyone. You will build a rapport with everyone in the audience, and you will maximize their understanding of your information.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Browning, PhD, Geil. *Emergenetics®: Tap Into the New Science of Success*. Harper Business, 2005. Print.

## **The Nitty-Gritty**

Have you ever watched a Ted Talk? Theater-style rooms are filled to capacity to watch these presentations. They generate millions of internet views. So what is their secret? How can they get – and keep – so many people interested in what they have to say?

The simple answer is that they build a rapport with their audience. As far as content goes, they've included something for every type of thinking preference, as we discussed before, but it goes beyond that. These presenters have broken through so that the audience feels like they are a part of the presentation, even if they're watching it on their computer years later.

## **Your Presentation Style**

This is a difficult topic to write about. To boil it down, in the words of the genie in Aladdin, "*bee yourself.*" Your presentation should feel like a conversation with friends, so you want to act the same way you do with your buddies. Not doing so will make you appear fake and insincere, undermining your credibility. Don't try to tell jokes unless you're good at it – doing so will just feel awkward for everyone.

## The Podium

The first thing you'll notice during a Ted Talk is that the speaker doesn't stand behind a podium. This is hugely important to building a rapport with your audience. If you think about it, a podium is a barrier between you and the people you're talking to. You may as well be sitting in a bulletproof guard booth, because that's the image that you're projecting. Standing behind a podium undermines the rapport that you're trying to build with your audience because you're setting yourself apart from them. Use your podium as a table to hold a glass of water and your cue cards, but otherwise, try to stay away from it.

So if you're not standing behind the podium, what do you do? That's simple – walk around! Go watch a video of Steve Jobs launching a new Apple product – he never sits still. Neither do the people doing the Ted Talks. Walking around while you're giving your presentation provides myriad advantages.

- **Confidence.** First and foremost, walking around can boost your confidence. Think back to our power poses. If you're standing still with your hands up on a podium, your body is confined to a small space and likely closing up. Walking around allows you to open up, and maybe even throw a "Wonder Woman" or two into the mix.
- **Closer Connection.** Another advantage of walking around is that you're able to connect more with your audience. If you're walking from one side of the stage to the other, it places you closer to people on each side of the room. They feel like you're talking to them individually, improving that speaker-audience bond that you're trying to build.
- **Brain Blast.** From a physiological standpoint, the bilateral movement also stimulates both sides of your brain, maximizing functionality.

The left side of your brain's ability to remember improves, as does your ability to communicate. The right side helps you tie your slides to your content, and assists in developing the abstract concepts that you may be presenting.<sup>3</sup>

## The Direct Connection

It's important to remember that your audience is made up of separate people. It may be 10 or it may be 200, but it's still a collection of individuals. As such, they're going to feel better if you talk to them individually. So how do you do that?

- **Eye Contact.** Duh. Read 100 articles about public speaking, and they'll all mention eye contact (if they're at all good). Eye contact is hugely important when you're speaking to an audience because it's connecting you to individuals. Each person you look at in the eye feels like you're speaking directly to them, which makes them feel special. In a large enough audience, you're also making the people around them feel special, because each of them feels like you're looking at them. Eye contact also has the added bonus of helping you forget that you're talking to a crowd if you're a member of the 75% club.

Actually looking at your audience also provides you with the opportunity to gauge their response to what you're saying. If they look confused, you may find that you have to elaborate on a specific topic, even if it isn't in your original script. If someone looks terrified when you look at them, you know not to single them out with a question.

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3 Melina, R. (2011, January 12). *What's the Difference Between the Right Brain and the Left Brain?* Retrieved September 15, 2015, from <http://www.livescience.com/32935-whats-the-difference-between-the-right-brain-and-left-brain.html>

- **Group Participation.** People love to converse. Even introverts enjoy the interaction of another person if they already know them. If you can include your audience in the presentation, it vastly improves the rapport because it changes the dynamic from “I talk and you listen” to “let’s talk.”
- **One-on-One.** These can be fun. You’re looking around the audience, making eye contact, and you see someone who has a gleam in their eye. They’re completely behind what you’re saying, and their body language tells you that they are confident enough to be singled out. Talk to them!

*“You know what I’m saying, right?”*

*“You look like you’re pretty excited about this.”*

*“Check out that guy. He can’t wait to go home and talk to his wife about this.”*

Choose your “victim” carefully. Don’t point to someone who has “frog mouth”, or someone who doesn’t keep eye contact when you’re looking around – those will backfire on you. Individually, the confident individuals will get a rush out of directly participating, and the audience will note that you’re paying attention to them. You may even get a chuckle, which is always a good sign.

- **Polling.** The easiest way to encourage participation is to poll the room. “Raise your hand if...” automatically signals the individuals that they have an opportunity to offer information that is beneficial to the group. Be sure to sprinkle these questions through your presentation.



- **Taking Questions.** This is a tricky one, but it can be hugely beneficial to your rapport with the audience. The great thing about taking questions is that it's the most direct participation that the audience can take part in, and provides a fully interactive experience for them. They feel like you care what they have to say and it gives you the opportunity to more fully explain things that the audience doesn't understand. Keep in mind, for everyone that asks a question, there are ten people out there that won't, simply walking away not fully comprehending. They're often hoping that someone else will ask the question they want answered.

*However.* Taking questions can open a huge can of worms. If you allow them during your presentation, it can sidetrack you from your train of thought and ruin the flow. Taking questions after you're finished allows you to maintain your course, but it doesn't feel as interactive. Some people also have a tendency to offer their own information, which could cloud or even counter what you're trying to convey. You also have to keep an eye on your time, as questions can easily make you go over.

- **Small Group Breakout.** Depending on the size of your group, small group breakouts can be a lot of fun for your audience. Your groups will get to discuss the material with each other, providing a "total immersion" experience for them. Recall will improve because they're implementing the knowledge while it's still fresh. It will also give you an opportunity to walk around and talk to individual groups, allowing you to connect with them and get some one-on-one face time. Some tips:
  - Only do breakouts if you have enough time in your program

- Keep the groups small – 4 or 5 is a good number
- Instruct the audience on how to form their groups – in some cases you may create them beforehand from a list, but most likely you'll tell them to grab the people closest to them. This will ensure that they form their groups quickly and get right to work.
- Give groups a specific assignment. This will keep them focused and keep the program moving along.

## **Your Presentation Slides**

Your presentations are simultaneously the most important and least important part of your presentation. It's the most important because a bad slide deck can completely tank your presentation. On the other hand, it's the least important because you should be able to give your presentation without them. Sound scary?

When you're standing up in front of the audience, you are the presentation. This means that the content of your presentation deck should be minimal and succinct – they're there to listen to you; not read a projection screen. The audience should be able to process the information shown in seconds and return their attention to you. Each slide should be a billboard – not a book.

Now you're thinking that this is all well and good, but they're going to want a copy of your presentation and if there isn't any substance to it, it'll be useless to them. The answer to that one is simple – your handouts will contain everything you say. We'll talk more about that later.

## Bullets

In their efforts to make life easier for the technologically-challenged, Microsoft has ruined more presentations than anyone in the history of presenting. How, you ask? They made the default slide type a bullet-point slide.

Bullet points are the single biggest enemy to presenter-audience rapport. Why is this? When you've got text up on the screen as you're presenting, the natural response by the audience is to read the text. They have now broken off their relationship with you and are forming it with the screen behind you. You've lost them! They're not paying attention to you anymore – you don't have the information. The screen has it! Not only that, and this is worst by far, it's possible that you may not be paying attention to them. There are words up there on the screen, and it is a very easy thing for presenters to fall into reading them just like everyone else in the room – particularly those that aren't comfortable speaking in front of a crowd in the first place.

Suddenly, you're looking at the screen, rather than your audience. They're looking at the screen, rather than at you. Often times the presenter ends up reading the slide to the audience right off the screen. Now everyone is reading. Rapport is broken. Babies are crying and there is rioting in the streets. Presentation fail.

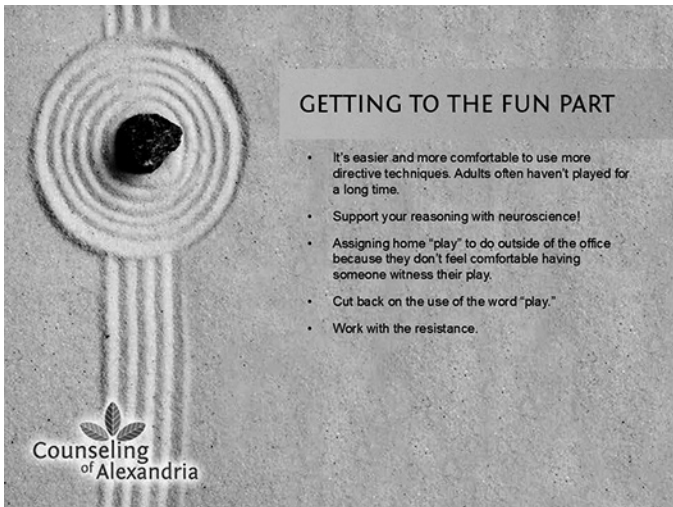
But bullets provide the information, don't they? Alas, no, they don't. You provide it. If you're using bullets at all, they should be used to introduce key points before you talk about them. They should only be a few words. And once you start talking about the first point, they should go away as quickly as possible, or the audience will still be looking at the slide.

"But I've got a lot of information to provide. How are they going to get that information if it's not on my slide?" You'll tell them, of course. And in

order to keep them listening and not writing down everything verbatim, you're going to tell them up front that everything you say is going to be provided in the handouts they'll get as they walk out the door. Remember, those will be provided in narrative format, so if you go with the modified version of your on-screen presentation, that is where you can go to town with your bullets.

## Breaking the Bullets

How do we get away from bullet slides? Here is a slide from a typical on-screen presentation:



It's got a header and five bullet points that each contain a full sentence. The information on the slide is important, so the audience has to be able to walk away with the information.

If this slide were to be on-screen, the audience is automatically going to start reading the information. Attention is now diverted away from the speaker, and rapport is broken.

In order to maintain rapport, you're going to split this slide into multiple slides, each containing the words that were in your bullets, and nothing more. As you begin talking about each concept, the title slide will be on screen. There's not a whole lot to read, so the audience's attention will be on you. They'll still be getting all of the text that would have been in your "book" slide, but you'll be saying it to them rather than them reading it off your slide.



## ***It's Okay Sometimes***

So is it ever okay to have bullets? Yes, but very sparingly. At the end of a section, before you transition to the next topic, a bulleted list provides a great way to re-cap what you just talked about. The structural thinkers in the audience will appreciate this, and the repetition will facilitate moving the information into long-term memory.

When creating your recap slides, keep text to a minimum. If appropriate, use the same text that you had on your individual slides to help jog your audience's memory. Instead of displaying the full text at once, make the list build as you review each point. That will keep the audience focused on you, as they won't be reading ahead.

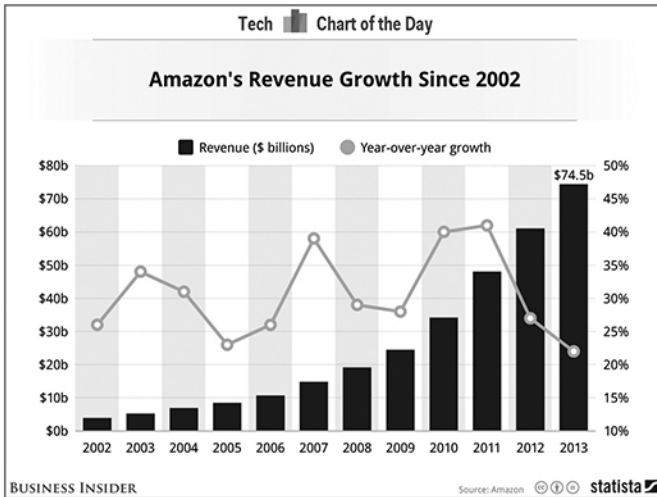
## **Charts & Graphs**

Charts and graphs are often a necessary part of a presentation – remember, those analytical thinkers are looking for them. But they also take the audience's attention away from you. Once you put one up, they're going to start looking at it and their brains are going to kick into gear. They first look at the chart to determine what the information is that's being displayed. Next, they figure out how the format works. Finally, they start looking at the data points, digesting each one. You might be talking, who knows? They're not paying attention to you, they're processing data.

As your chart is up on-screen, you may be talking about the overall concept being displayed, such as financial trends, or you may be talking about individual data points. The audience's attention may shift to you as you begin talking about a data point, but then it's going to go back to looking at the others.

## Concept Charts

Let's look at a concept chart.



Though it might not seem like it, this slide has a great deal of complexity for the brain to figure out. The growth of gross Amazon revenues in the blue bar graph by billions of dollars. The yellow line graph shows the percentage of growth for each year as compared to the year before.

Think about what your brain has to do to process that information.

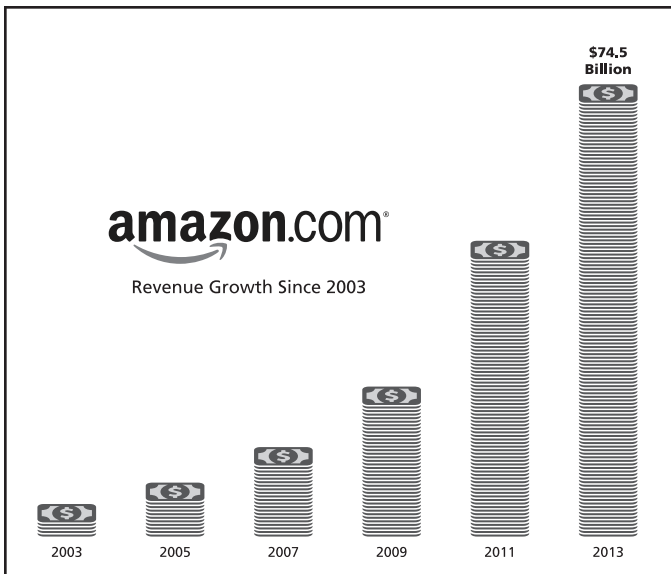
1. It takes a moment to read the title of the slide
2. It looks through the memory banks to try to figure out what "Amazon" is
3. It has to figure out that it's looking at two different data sets at the same time
4. It has to identify what each data set is and separate them for processing
5. It has to figure out how the gross revenues are organized (by billions of dollars)



6. It has to look at the data point for each year – 12 different data points – and figure out what the revenue amount was for that year
7. Now it has to switch gears to process data points by percentage rather than revenue
8. Next it has to look at each of the 12 data point and figure out what the percentage is for that year (remember, each data point is processed separately)
9. Finally it has to figure out the correlation between the revenue percentage and the gross revenue amount for each of the 12 data points

During all of that, you've been speaking. Need I say more?

So to deal with that, we're going to split this into two slides. The first will show the revenues.



Remember, the point of this slide is to talk about the concept – revenue growth. As such, the only numbers that really matter is where they started from and where they ended. The first thing I've done is cut the number of data points in half. The concept of significant growth is still conveyed just by looking at how high the bars go, but there is less clutter on the chart for the brain to process. Second, I removed the dollar amounts for each year. Again, the only numbers that are important are the first one and the last one, so those are still there. In addition, I only included years for the first and last data points.

So now the brain doesn't have as much to do:

1. It identifies that it's looking at revenue growth
2. It identifies the very recognizable amazon.com logo and deduces that the data must be related to that organization
3. It notices that it's trending upward
4. It sees that the first year shown is 2003, and what the revenue was for that year
5. It sees that the last year shown is 2013 and what the revenue was for that year
6. If it's interested, it calculates that the amount of growth between 2003 and 2013 was \$X.
7. It returns its attention to you, the speaker

That was a lot quicker, right? Looking at the numbers above, there were seven steps to the original chart and six now. That's not much of a difference, right? Wrong. Keep in mind that with the first chart the brain was looking at the information provided for 12 different data points three different times. Technically, there were 40 steps in the original chart. Separating the two charts, reducing the number of data points and removing the actual

numbers has conveyed this concept far quicker to the audience than before, and their attention returns to you much faster. The line graph would be displayed on a second slide very similar to the first, though the data points would probably not be reduced because of the more volatile nature.

## Detail Charts

So what if the data points are important?

Reported Annual Crime In Alexandria

Statistic	Reported incidents	Alexandria /100k people	Virginia /100k people	National /100k people
Total crime	3,225	2,171	2,262	3,099
Murder	5	3	4	5
Rape	21	14	27	25
Robbery	118	79	55	109
Assault	114	77	110	229
Violent crime	258	174	196	368
Burglary	249	168	323	610
Theft	2,427	1,634	1,640	1,899
Vehicle theft	291	196	103	221
Property crime	2,967	1,998	2,066	2,731

Once again, let's look at what the brain has to do to process this chart:

1. Identify that the chart shows the reported annual crime in Alexandria
2. Identify that there are 10 different categories that are being listed
3. Identify that the first statistic for each category is the total number of incidents that have been reported

4. Identify further that Alexandria is being compared to the Commonwealth of Virginia and the whole United States
5. Figure out that in order to make those statistics relate to each other in scale, they've divided the total number of incidents by the populations of each location per 1,000 people
6. Note the numbers for each of the 10 data points and compare each of the three locales

Once again, the poor presenter has been left talking to the wall while the audience sits and thinks. Many in the audience will be looking through the entire chart, in spite of which individual data point the speaker is talking about.

So how do we deal with this one?



This one's easy. Since the presenter will likely be talking about each data point individually in the first place, we simply break each one into a separate slide.

Now the locales are represented graphically, so the audience doesn't have to read them. The first time they see a slide like this, the audience will translate each graphic into the locale being represented and identify the scale at which the numbers are being reported. After that, it's smooth sailing. They identify which data point is being discussed, then notice the three numbers, note that some are bigger than others, then return their attention to the speaker.

## **Graphics**

If you look at both of the "after" charts, you'll notice that I replaced some of the text with graphics. On the Amazon slide, their logo was added, and the bar chart is now made up of dollar bills. On the police slide, the names of the locations were replaced by the seal from each.

Our brains are able to process and identify graphics faster than words, even if it's just one or two. The amazon.com logo can be instantly translated, particularly if the individual has seen it before. Seeing the word "Amazon" kicks off a more involved process: the brain has to put the word into context to try to decipher it. To make things worse, the "A" in our chart was capitalized, which the popular website doesn't do. Suddenly the brain has to figure out which "amazon" is being referenced – the jungle or the website. True, our amazing brains can do this very quickly, but a recognizable graphic is far faster.

## **Photography**

A picture is worth a thousand words, right? There's actually a scientific reason for that. Recognizable images draw on the long-term memory to be identified, requiring less brain power for processing. If you already know what an apple is, your long-term memory can instantly identify one in a photo and move on.

One way is to use photography is to directly illustrate your point. Using a photo of Wonder Woman when talking about power poses provides a good example of what you're talking about, displaying both the pose and a figure that the audience already associates with power.

You can also use photography in your title slides to help set the mood and help convey the subject you're introducing. Seeing a photograph of a woman sitting in lotus position effectively conveys a transition into a discussion about meditation faster than the word displayed on the slide, and it appeals to those in the audience with a preference for social thinking.

Here are some tips regarding photography:

- ***Pick a style.*** Going from a photo featuring soft focus and pastel colors to a shot that's sharp and crisp, using bright primary colors can be jarring, and it conveys a subconscious lack of stability. The style of the images should reflect your brand. A babysitting service would likely go for imagery that is bright and colorful, conveying playfulness and energy. A yoga studio, on the other hand, would go for a more subdued style with a calming color palette.
- ***Don't use Google.*** When you're looking for a picture, it's always tempting to go to Google and do an image search, then pull down something that seems appropriate. I cannot caution you against this enough. I have had more than one client ignore my warnings, then receive an \$800 invoice in the mail from Getty Images for a photo they used in a blog post. Resist the urge!
- ***Look at the image carefully.*** You want to be sure that there's nothing potentially offensive to your audience that you didn't notice.

If you don't have your own images, there are a number of stock photography websites that can help. Some allow you to purchase images individually, others requiring the purchase of "tokens" or a subscription. For display on-screen, you probably don't need anything larger than most sites' "medium resolution" option. Here are a few that you might take a look at:

Fotolia.com                      Thinkstock.com  
Photodisc.com                  istock.com  
stock.adobe.com

## Color

Our brains thrive on color. Our brains use it to connect neuropathways, making it easier to process data, reason, remember and tap into creativity. In a study published in *MIS Quarterly*<sup>4</sup>, researchers found that color led to improvements in decision-making, particularly when participants had limited time to perform tasks. So naturally, using color in your presentation should be a no-brainer, right? Besides, you have all those conceptual thinkers to worry about. So here are some guidelines:

- **Work with a palette.** You want your colors to be consistent throughout your presentation, so pre-set a palette to work with. Naturally, PowerPoint has a wide array for you to choose from, but you will probably want to set colors that go with your brand. If you have a designer, ask them to create one for you.

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<sup>4</sup> Bensabat, Izak, and Albert Dexter. "An Investigation of the Effectiveness of Color and Graphical Information Presentation Under Varying Time Constraints." *MIS Quarterly* 1 Mar. 1986: 59-83. Print.

- **Choose colors cautiously.** There are myriad websites that provide guidance on choosing colors. Many of them talk about “Color Psychology.” Take these with a grain of salt—many of them say the same thing (“blue is the color of the sky and water – it’s calming”), but they fail to take into account cultural influences. For example, in Japan, the color white signifies death.
- **Don’t blind your audience.** For backgrounds, choose muted colors. If they’re too bright, the content in your slides will be illegible at best. At worst, your audience will get a headache.

And here are some ways to use color:

- **Signal transitions.** When you’re going from one topic to another, change the color of your slide background. This will tell your audience that you’re switching gears, and prepare their brains for that change.
- **Enhance meaning.** Use brightly-colored text (sparingly) to highlight keywords or important points in your slides. You can also create “theme slides” with consistent background and text colors that are sprinkled throughout your deck to signal the important points for that section.
- **Improve object recognition.** This particularly applies if you’re creating graphical elements. A red octagon is going to be instantly recognizable as a stop sign, where a green one will take time to process. (That is, unless an individual is color blind, in which case it will look the same either way.)
- **Show associations.** What color are Democrats usually identified with? Republicans? Either using conventional color associations such as these or creating your own, you can easily



signal information that relates to a particular group or classification. Emergenetics is another example of this – conceptual is signified by yellow, social by red, analytical by blue, and structural by green. If you were doing a presentation on Emergenetics, you would use those colors in your slides to show which thinking preference you're talking about.

## Handouts

I mentioned it above, and now I'm going to expand on it. If at all possible, do not distribute handouts until after the presentation is over. By now you probably know why, right?

If your audience has your handouts in advance, they're going to start looking at them. If they're reading through them, they're not listening to you. Once again, there's a complete breakdown in communication and rapport isn't being established. Ka-blooey. There goes your presentation.

Be sure to tell your audience in the beginning that they'll be getting handouts. If they feel like they have to take detailed notes, they won't be paying attention to you. Invite them to take basic notes, but be clear that they'll walk away with all of the information you're providing.

Wait a second. The slide deck doesn't have any substance to it! You've got some headline slides, a few re-cap slides with really basic bullets on them, and a few individual data points from your charts. How is that going to help? You've got two options here:

- a) have a second version of your slide deck that contains the full information, or
- b) write up the information in a different format.

## **The Alternate Slide Deck**

Your alternate deck will look the way your deck may have if you weren't following all of this great guidance. The reader will be able to go through it and get all of the meat of your presentation, sadly without your dynamic presentation skills.

- Go to all of those title slides you have, which would have been crammed into a single bulleted list, and turn them into headline + content slides. The slide title will become your headline, then fill in the information you gave when you talked about each section. You'll still have five slides instead of one, but now each one will elaborate on the subject.
- Before each of those individual data point slides, add a slide with the full chart or graph. On the data point slide, include the information you gave when you talked about it.
- You can remove the re-cap slides now – those are a function of an oral presentation, and are no longer necessary.
- Any graphic- or photograph-only slides can be dropped. You can include your thousand words now, and you're not competing for attention anymore.

## **The Narrative Format**

I am a far bigger fan of providing handouts in a more narrative format. This allows you to write in your own voice, and is a more natural way for people to read. You can elaborate on specific points, and provide references and additional resources.

A narrative format can also extend the use of the handout. You can pull out different sections and turn them into blog posts. You can even turn the

material into a whitepaper or ebook, providing the opportunity to generate additional revenues from it.

You may or may not know it, but the document you've been reading is provided as a handout from a workshop I give. Because of the format, I'm able to expand on each topic, and provide more context than a slide deck format allows. This document provides a perfect example of what your handouts can be, and is useful on its own or as part of my workshop.

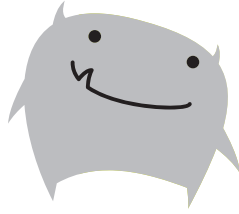
## Boiling it Down

All right, here's the cheat sheet, in case you don't want to read my ramblings. You really should read them though; there's a lot of good information there! Plus I took a lot of time to put all of this down, so it would only be polite.

- If you've got stage fright:
  - Look yourself over thoroughly before getting on stage
  - Breathe deep
  - Know your material
  - Stand like a superhero
  - Make friends with the audience
- Understand your audience's brains and include something for everyone
- Establish your credentials early
- Provide a basic agenda
- Be yourself
- Don't just stand there
- Encourage audience participation

- In your on-screen presentation:
  - Don't use bullets
  - Don't use bullets
  - Don't use bullets. That one is so important I said it three times.
  - Keep the amount of text on your slides to a bare minimum
  - Don't worry about how many slides you have
  - Don't show detailed charts and graphs
  - Include lots of visuals – photos, icons, graphics and color
- Regarding handouts:
  - Don't distribute handouts until after your presentation (and let the audience know at the beginning that they'll be receiving them).
  - My recommendation is to put your handouts into narrative form (like a whitepaper or booklet), rather than giving them a copy of your on-screen presentation.
  - If you do go with the alternate deck, include all of the information you gave in person. This will probably mean creating many more slides.
  - Include citations and source references as necessary.





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