



Your Complete Guide To

Presentation Preparation

Have you ever felt that you didn't use your preparation time wisely?
Whether you have weeks or just 10 minutes, this guide will help you prepare to shine.

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The Complete Guide to
**PRESENTATION
PREPARATION**

You might have weeks to prepare your speech. You might have just 10 minutes. No matter what, this practical guide will help you prepare the best way you possibly can so you will shine.

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Speech is power.
Speech is to
persuade, to
convert, to
compel. It is to
bring another out
of his bad sense
into his good
sense.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

About this Guide

This guide is for anybody who has ever felt ill-prepared for a presentation.

Ill-prepared might mean that you wasted your prep time by concentrating on the wrong things. It could be that despite your best intentions, the forces of the universe (or your boss, board, committee or customers) conspired against you. That robs you of the time you need to do a proper job. Or maybe, you are just a procrastinator. Perhaps you find yourself, once again, at the 11th hour; with nothing ready to say and no one else to blame *but* yourself.

Work with what you've got

This guide begins with the assumption that you need to start from where you are. Let the advice set out here help you overcome your fear of the blank page (or the blank slide). You may not have the time to spend hours in prep-mode before you have to speak, but there are a few tricks that might make it seem like you have done just that.

Most people have a sense of those presentations and speeches that matter. The ones for which they will make sure they set aside plenty of time to prepare. These are few and far between. Your life is likely to be full of competing priorities and interruptions. You can't always control the call to speak. You may have several weeks, 7 days, 1 day, an hour, or a measly 10 minutes.

This guide to *presentation preparation* will help you do the best you can with

whatever time you have available. We hope it will give you the confidence to step up more often, take control of the room, share your ideas and inspire change.

Over a century ago, Louis Pasteur gave the advice; '*chance favours the prepared mind*'. He was guiding scientists, but this can also relate to the communicator. Of course, it would be best to take the time to analyse your audience, ponder your purpose, create meaningful content, practice, practice, practice and to deliver with confidence. Such luxury is rarely possible.

Read on for tips on how you can make the most of the time you *do* have.

Preparation matters and so does agility.

More than TWO WEEKS to prepare

The gold standard. Luxury! You have plenty of time to analyse, ponder, prepare and practice. Try not to jump in straight away. Use the extra time to give your creativity space.

Typical context

Chances are if you are concerned about your presentation this far out, then the stakes are reasonably high. These are the presentations that matter. In the personal or professional context, you know you will have lots of eyes on you. Perhaps you feel the pressure. The way to shine is to prepare. You *can* take control. The effort you put into the planning stage should manifest as a speech that is fit for purpose from a speaker who has taken the time to do their best.

Here are some likely scenarios that fit this category:

- New leader town hall
- Best man/woman speech
- Your wedding or significant event
- Conference keynote
- Industry or professional association function
- Subject matter expert address
- Formal 'TED' style speech

STEP 1: Clarify the brief

At this stage, you should do everything you can to clarify expectations. When in doubt, ask specific questions of organisers and stakeholders.

- Who will be in the audience? (numbers, expectations, background)
- What are the expectations of the key stakeholders?
- What is the context within which this presentation or speech will be delivered?
- What is the culture of the organisation or assembled audience?
- Who will be speaking before and after?
- What are the details of the physical environment?
- Are there any subjects that should be avoided?
- Are there any points that are a high priority?
- Finish this sentence: This would be a great presentation if...

STEP 2: Research the field

Rather than starting with a completely blank slate - consider what you or others have done in similar situations. Look for inspiration among speakers you admire, living or dead; on or offline.

What is the note you would like to strike? Big picture - consider how your presentation will create change - in the minds or deeds of your audience.

- Is this an opportunity for people to get to know the real you?
- Are you looking to encourage a new way of thinking?
- Do you need to communicate a technical concept to a non-technical audience?
- Perhaps you are looking to disrupt the status quo.

Without over-engineering, the process, try to land on a brief mission statement (no more than a sentence or two) about what you want this presentation to achieve.

Then look to the greats. Consider the inspirational speeches of JFK, Winston Churchill or Nancy Astor, the revolutionary words of Martin Luther King, Barbara Friedan and Greta Thunberg or the scientific revelations from Marie Curie, Richard Feynman or Amelia Earhart and the leadership moments of Abraham Lincoln, Queen Elizabeth I and Teddy Roosevelt.

Why take your cue from ho-hum presentations that tend to bore and underwhelm?

STEP 3: Ask big picture questions

What do I want my audience to think, feel or do differently as a result of listening to my presentation?

- What are the expectations of the people in the room?
- What impression do I want to create? (try identifying three words that represent you at your best)

Clarity of purpose is critical.

STEP 4: Brainstorm

It is time to activate your creativity and let the analysis fade into the background.

What do you **really** want to talk about?

It is an open slather where you could do just about anything. To ultimately achieve the effect framed within the criteria and purpose you have established. This step is all about generating ideas that will help you deliver the most original and relevant presentation possible.

A word of caution...

Do not open powerpoint or any other slide making tool at this time. It will constrain your thinking and strangle creativity.

Here are some brainstorming tricks that might work to overcome the fear of the blank page:

1. Mindmap

Write your anchoring idea in the centre of the page and branch out. Allow yourself to free-flow ideas. Stand back and see if you can spot some interesting connection.

2. Freewriting

Take out a blank sheet of paper or open a blank document on your word processing tool of choice. Turn off all distractions and set a timer for 15 minutes. Let loose. Without thinking of spelling or grammar, let your ideas flow. Your goal is to continue writing until the time is up.

3. Vocal rambling

Record your voice, best done in privacy. Open the voice recording app on your smartphone and go for it.

4. Phone a friend

If any of the above make you self conscious or if you are stuck, phone a friend or colleague. Bounce your ideas off them, ask for feedback and seek advice. Be ready to discount any or all of the ideas that come your way.

5. Sticky note frenzy

Sticky notes are a great tool when brainstorming. Their size means you zero in on one idea per note. For the visual thinkers, stick them on the wall. You can move them around, stand back, spot connections and add to the think tank whenever you walk by it.

STEP 5: Walk away, ruminate & ideate

When I was an undergraduate, I had a philosophy professor who shared some sage advice on creativity. He was giving us advice on essay preparation, but this approach translates across many creative endeavours. It is something I have never forgotten.

Walk away from your work. Stop consciously trying to solve the problem. Allow your subconscious mind to take up the slack. Go off and do whatever it is that you do - whether that be mundane, therapeutic or physical. Give the ideas time to percolate. Just see what might rise to the surface.

STEP 6: Clarify purpose

Overt & Covert Purpose

When you come back to the project, hopefully, you will have a renewed sense of what your true purpose for the presentation should be. Make sure you capture that before it slips away. I often advocate for capturing both the overt and the covert purpose.

- The **overt** purpose is what you will articulate at some point in your presentation. This is where you tell your audience what you want them to get out of your talk.
- Also, consider your **covert** purpose. If you want to make your audience feel a certain way - it is unlikely that you will state your intent. Instead, use stories, images or quotes that will evoke an emotional response.

STEP 7: Refine your approach

Help yourself out by jotting down a rough architecture for your speech. You have some choices here about the best structure to use - select the flow that you think will serve your overall purpose best. Make sure you consider this against the analysis you have already done on the audience, the length of time you will be speaking, set up of the room, and so on.

My advice is that you keep your outline as succinct as possible. The headings do not matter at this point, just the basic structure. The more linear thinkers amongst us will gravitate to an outline such as this - I. II. III, A, B, C, 1, 2, 3, a, b, c... The more visual thinkers may like to use a storyboard approach.

STEP 8: Craft killer content

Now is the time to populate the structure of your presentation. Consider every point you want to land in support of your overall purpose. Balance your logical argument (including the use of evidence) with the best emotional appeal.

The intention of this guide is not to provide a comprehensive overview of content creation. But make sure your presentation has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Capture the attention of your audience and signal where your presentation is going. Move through supporting information in a well organised manner and sum it all up at the end.

STEP Nine: PRACTICE

Check timing, pace, flow

Time to practice.

Your first dry run might be a bit wobbly. That's ok, edit and refine as you go. Your words will always sound different when you speak them aloud. Watch out for

phrasing that sounds stilted, jokes that might be looking for a better home and assertions that lack sound reasoning.

By your second, third or fourth run through you will find your groove. Your words will start to flow. You will know when to speed up, slow down and pause. Work on refining the transitions from introduction to the body, between topics and through to the conclusion.

After your second or third full run-through, you will begin to inhabit your presentation. You may not have memorised those words but knowing the inflection points will make the words effortlessly flow.

STEP 10: Get feedback

Now it's time to get some outside help. Ask a trusted advisor to listen to your presentation and give you some honest feedback. Make sure you brief them on the type of feedback you are looking for and the context.

Don't seek feedback from anyone you don't already admire or respect.

Record yourself delivering your presentation. Watch the video and make any necessary adjustments. This is a simple piece of advice and most of us already have the technology in our pocket - most of our clients find it pays dividends.

STEP 11: Dress rehearsal

Whilst it is not always possible, it is helpful to perform your presentation, end to end, in space where you will be delivering. Get a feel for the physical environment and how that might impact your ability to move around.

Map out your physical performance as if you are choreographing a routine. It will help you iron out any awkward movements. Make sure the scale of your movements match the size and scale of the space. Bigger room = bigger gestures.

STEP 12: Mindset preparation

Before you deliver your presentation, it is time to get your head in the game. By now you should know the speech, you should feel it in your bones, you need to make sure the right version of you steps out onto the stage. Here are a few tips to consider:

- Do you have a friend in the audience? Someone who supports you and likes what you have to say? Imagine you are in conversation with them.
- Power posing - Heard of the research from Amy Cuddy? Hey, it can't hurt. Walk around like superman for 2 minutes before you go on.
- Last-minute rehearsal - The first 30 seconds - play it over a couple of times in your head.

The audience is just a collection of people who are interested in what you have to say. If you feel nervous, don't tell them and make no apologies whatsoever. You have your opening down-pat so go and deliver it. Be democratic with your eye contact. Be inclusive with your gestures and act like you're in a conversation.



It usually
takes me more
than three
weeks to
prepare an
impromptu
speech.

MARK TWAIN

What to do if you have ONE WEEK

Rest assured, you have enough time to research, plan, design and execute a well-crafted presentation.

Typical context

The sorts of presentations you might think about with a week to go, include:

- Townhall / all-hands update
- Shorter (20mins ish) keynote address
- Sales pitch
- MC gig
- Subject matter expert appearance

Here is what you can do, day by day, to get the best result and feel good about your performance.

Carve Out Time

These steps have been created under the assumption that you have other things to do in the week leading up to your presentation; like your day job, looking after your family, or generally NOT obsessing about public speaking.

Best Practice

- Create blocks of time in your diary for the week ahead (at least one hour per day)
- Use some of your downtime (i.e. commuting and chores) to allow your ideas to rise to the surface.

- Capture any new and relevant ideas (set up a file on your phone for this purpose)

7 Days Out: Clarify

Set aside an hour or so to do some planning. Answer the following questions:

Use a blank sheet (paper or virtual) to capture your notes.

- What do I want my audience to think, feel or do differently as a result of listening to my presentation? (This is your PURPOSE)
- Who is in the room? And, what do I know about their background, profession, industry?
- What are the expectations of the people in the room?
- What impression do I want to create? (Try identifying three words that represent you at your best)

If you can't answer these core questions, reach out for help. Engage with the organiser, a trusted colleague or a few of the attendees if you can.

Today is the day to clarify expectations and check your assumptions. This step will ensure you don't waste time building the wrong presentation.

You have now created your brief. Let this ruminate overnight while you get on with your life.

6 Days Out: Create

Today is the day for creativity. You will spend your allocated time exploring the broader concepts of your topic. What could you do, beyond the mundane and cliché questions that typically frame presentations? Consider how you will surpass expectations, use this opportunity to make an impact and get people to consider a new perspective or share new ideas.

Spend some time playing with new ideas. All too often, we adopt a rather dull approach because we fail to push our thinking. Think about the presentations and speeches you have seen - how many really stand out, and why?

Use a simple but flexible method to capture your thoughts. It could be:

- Sticky notes
- Index cards
- Mind map
- Drawing
- A linear scaffold

Don't move on until you have decided:

- Clarity of purpose - what do you want your audience to think, feel or do differently as a result of listening to your presentation?
- The delta - to achieve this purpose, what is the before and after for your audience? From what mindset or understanding or skill level will you move them from, and what is the future state?
- What is your vision for the presentation? Is it a tried and true 3x3 structure, a story or perhaps a facilitated activity that generates audience participation?
- What further information do you require to draft the presentation? Make a list and gather only the information that you need.

5 Days Out: Research & Organise

Dedicate this time to gathering and organising your research. You will also refine your purpose and land on the critical arguments, evidence, stories and other creative elements you think should be included.

Get help if you need it, or if you have helpful colleagues and friends that have the time and inclination to assist.

Now is the time you can sift through past presentations and other resources. Find the graphs, case studies, facts, stories and metaphors that have worked for you in the past. But only select those that serve your purpose and use what you know will work for the audience.

For example, a 'fire-side chat' style presentation will not work with copious slides of data. Equally, your board of directors may be frustrated if your quarterly business update takes the form of a fable.

Common sense applies.

4 Days Out: Write the Thing

Think about what the word 'write' means to you. My advice is that you don't draft everything you will utter in your presentation. The risks are too high where you might get lost stumbling over your script. It will show and generate those dreaded awkward moments. There is also a risk that attempting to write your presentation, word for word, will add unnecessary pressure to an already busy schedule. The lazy among us know how time-consuming this can be.

This advice might not work for everyone. Perhaps you need the security that comes from preparing in great detail or even scripting your talk. For you I have these suggestions:

- Write the script as an exercise in finding the words - more a dry run than a replica of what you must say when you come to deliver the real thing
- If that still freaks you out, and you feel you need to write and memorise your talk, then commit and be comfortable with your decision.
- Note: this means you must find more time between now and the scheduled time of your presentation to memorise your script. Make sure you are comfortable with limited reliance on your notes. Walk around the house, present to the mirror, your family or the cat.

If you are going unplugged, you will still need a plan. It could be a simple one-page outline of the structure of your presentation.

You will also need this blueprint if you choose the option detailed above. Make sure your plan has a clear beginning (capture attention, set the tone, establish a shared purpose), middle (deliver the persuasive content in support of your thesis) and end (synthesise the information and revisit the purpose of the presentation). It is a good idea to revise your notes, using as few words as possible to jolt your memory. One of the most common problems we see with delivery is when speakers become confused by their own notes.

3 Days Out: Visual Support

Now that you have the purpose nailed and content to support it, you are ready to finalise your visual support and choreograph the presentation.

PowerPoint might be the method you use to add visual enhancement to your presentation. It and other slide formats of it are powerful tools that help our audience to absorb our message. There is nothing like a well-designed graph or relevant image to amp up engagement. Beware of the many worded slides! If your slides require tonnes of reading, your audience will stop listening to you.

Consider also, the use of whiteboards or flip charts to build a visual along with your audience. These tools work well when you want to create a shared understanding. Think about how you will use the space available. As much as possible, get yourself out from behind the podium. Go a bit rogue but be aware of any gestures or movement that could potentially distract.

2 Day Out: Practice

The goal for the next 24 hours is to learn the thing.

By now you are clear on what you are trying to achieve. You have found the words and added the right visuals to support your contention. You also have a short form structure to guide you.

Now you can pace it out. Do a few run-throughs. If you are feeling brave, you can get some feedback from someone you trust.

Be aware that last-minute jitters are a thing. Even with the right amount of preparation, they might appear when they are least welcome. If this happens, go back to the purpose and aspiration you set for yourself a week ago. You've done the work.

You will be fine. And you still have a whole day up your sleeve!



Success depends
upon previous
preparation, and
without such
preparation there
is sure to be
failure.

CONFUCIUS

What to do if you have 24 HOURS

No need to panic... yet.

You still have time to organise your thoughts and make an impact on your audience.

The presentation structure is your best friend. But before you start to think about the content to include in your presentation, you need to zoom out to consider the bigger picture. Then zoom back in to define your purpose, structure your talk and gather your supporting information.

Framing

Consider two fundamental framing questions:

1. What do you know about the audience and their expectations?

*The answer will force you to consider the subject from **their perspective**, not yours.*

2. What do you want them to think, feel or do as a result of listening to your presentation?

*The answer will give you your **purpose**. Try not to state a purpose that contains too many conjunctions. Simple is best. Your purpose will drive everything else.*

The Importance of Structure

For most workplace presentations, a basic 3x3 structure will serve you well. If another option immediately comes to mind and you feel confident with it, go for it. Just try not to waste time on this when you can save your creativity for content. A good structure organises your thoughts quickly and effectively. It also guides the signposting of your presentation so your listeners can easily follow.

Here is a basic structure scaffold:

The Power of Three

Your presentation has three components: Beginning, Middle and End. (structure on the following page)

It will also consist of three arguments (or topics) to support your purpose.

- Example 1: If your purpose is to make the audience feel excited about the business plan for the next 12 months, you might talk about 1- The need for change in the business, 2- Key elements of the business plan, and 3- How we will measure success.
- Example 2: If your purpose is to get the audience to comply with a new organisational procedure you might 1- tell a story that illustrates the need for change, 2- Clearly define the new expectations, and 3- Explain the support that will be available.
- Example 3: If your purpose is to persuade the board to adopt your proposal you might 1- Frame the opportunity you have identified, 2- Detail your proposal, and 3- explain how you will mitigate identified risks.

If you have attended any of the [mojologic](#) presentation skills workshops, you know what to do!

Don't do these things:

- Panic
- Start by opening PowerPoint (at the very least resist this reflex for an hour of planning time)
- Attempt to script a speech end to end (unless it is short!) as you run the risk of getting muddled up and losing your place. Memorised speeches often sound wooden.
- Apologise in any way. I have heard many presenters open with something like; *"sorry, I only found out I had to do this yesterday..."* This will only weaken your position. At worst, it may cause your audience to think that you don't care.

The Basic Structure

1. Beginning

- **Hook** – grab their attention
- **Promise** – How will your audience benefit from listening
- **Outline** the topics you will cover (1, 2 and 3)

2. Middle

- **Topic 1** – Detailed content
- **Topic 2** – Detailed content
- **Topic 3** – Detailed content

3. End

- **Synthesize** the topics you covered by providing key take outs
- **Promise** – reinforce what the audience will have gained
- **Direction** – What do you want your audience to do next?

What to do if you have 1 HOUR

Believe it or not, impromptu speeches can sometimes be the most impactful. Be optimistic about this mindset. After all, what choice do you have?

If you don't have time to cobble together dozens of slides and reams of data, you need to use a conversational tone. Your audience may have the pleasure of hearing from the real, unrehearsed you. That can be a good thing.

Of course, we have all seen instances when a lack of preparation time has generated results that are less than ideal. It can be embarrassing or even damaging to their reputation. There are a few things you can do to prevent this.

Impromptu Speaking Tips

- **Set your purpose**

Given the group, the time you have allotted to speak and the limited time to prepare - what is a realistic and achievable purpose?

- **Use the 3x3 simplified structure**

What three things can you say in support of your purpose? (of course, if you have four things to say or just two, that's fine, jot them down and move on)

- **Practice your opening line**

If you start strongly, with a clear opening, you will be able to build momentum and finish strongly.

What to do if you have 10 MINUTES

Few rarefied creatures are excited by this proposition.

Perhaps the rest of us can learn from the mindset (pathology?) of the experienced extemporaneous, working without a net - kind of verbal adrenalin junkies.

These are my observations followed by suggestions for how you extract the essence of their success:

- **Know thyself**

They have a pre-formulated understanding of their persona and a style they can draw on.

- What are three words that you would like your audience to use when describing your style?

- **Accept the limelight**

They are comfortable holding the space in front of the group. They appear natural and at ease. They make eye-contact, ask questions, engage with their audience.

- Imagine you are having a conversation with a group of people you know and trust. If explaining a technical process, pretend you are speaking to your best friend.

- **Land the point**

Successful speakers that deliver 'off the cuff' talks understand that it is ok to get lost in the middle, wander off on tangents and tell meandering stories. BUT they always do so in service of one, single-minded POINT.

- Have a point. Be clear on the one big thing you want to achieve. This could be framed in the form of what you want your audience to think, feel or do differently. Make that clear at the beginning and the end and let the messy middle unfold.

Extemporaneous Tips

Consider these four questions:

1. What is the ONE THING you can leave your audience with? A new idea, a call to action, a lesson, etc.
2. What impression do you want to create?
3. What are the big themes you would like to cover? Jot them down
4. What is the very first thing you will say?

Avoid a Panic

- Ask an open question as your introduction - either direct this question to the whole group, if it is reasonably small or ask specific people to contribute to the discussion. You have just bought yourself some time and clarified expectations.
- Take a minute to breathe. Or at least 30 seconds. Deep diaphragmatic breathing will slow your heart rate and help you to focus.
- Try a power pose. Amy Cuddy has some interesting research, found [here](#). It certainly can't hurt.
- Suggest a rough agenda - 3 points you plan to cover and check in with the audience - is there anything else you would like me to cover today?

- Slow your pace. If you rush, you will appear nervous. Begin slowly and calmly.
- Change your frame and think of this as a conversation rather than a presentation.
- Visualise yourself at your best. Imagine the audience smiling and nodding as you are speaking.

Final Thoughts

The old adage that chance favours the prepared mind is undoubtedly true. Time is not a renewable resource, so use yours wisely. When it comes to presentations, there is a lot you can do to prepare for the surprises. Seek out opportunities to present more often. Say yes to the requests that make you slightly uncomfortable so you can exercise your presentation muscle. It's never as scary as you think it is going to be. The journey to finding your voice is enhanced every time you say 'yes' and accept the opportunity to speak.

No matter the length of preparation time available, you are now armed with the techniques to make the most of the situation.

If you think you would benefit from formal presentation skills training, we would love to help. Check us out the [mojologic](#) website for more information.

The world needs your ideas.
We want to hear you speak.



A speech reminds
us that words, like
children, have the
power to make
dance the dullest
beanbag of a
heart.

PEGGY NOONAN