

# PRESENTATION PRIORITIES: AUDIENCE, VOICE, DELIVERY, AND VISUALS

## ***Dynamic Presentations by Amanda Quibell***

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## **With every presentation, you should make a priority of**

- Your Voice is the Most Important Part of Your Speech
- Engage Your Audience: Don't Spit Random Words at Generic People
- Delivery Advice: Managing Eye Contact, Movement, and Gestures
- Don't Ruin a Great Presentation with Terrible Slides



# YOUR VOICE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR SPEECH

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## Why Your Voice is the Most Important Instrument

The most important part of your delivery has to be your voice. You are not an actor in a silent film, a mime in a skit, nor a person giving lessons on lip reading. You are a presenter giving a speech. If your audience can't hear you or understand your words, then you have failed. Like any other skill, strengthening your voice takes practice, but it is time well spent. This chapter gives you reasons for why you should develop your voice and includes activities and videos to help you improve your voice.

### How to Speak so that people want to listen

**Watch How to speak so that people want to listen – Julian Treasure (10 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/elho2S0Zahl>)** for examples of each of these.

### Vocal Qualities

#### Vocal Qualities – Text Version

#### Register

*Definition:* Refers to the pitch range of your voice, from high to low.

*Example:* When speaking up in your nose, the pitch is higher, while speaking from your chest gives a lower, more authoritative tone (Treasure, 2014).

## Timbre

*Definition:* Describes how your voice feels or its texture.

*Example:* People prefer voices that are rich, smooth, and warm, “like hot chocolate”; training with a voice coach can help improve timbre (Treasure, 2014).

## Prosody

*Definition:* The sing-song or melody in your speech that adds meaning.

*Example:* Monotonic speech, lacking prosody, can be challenging to listen to. Repetitive prosody, or uptalk, where every sentence sounds like a question, restricts effective communication (Treasure, 2014).

## Pace

*Definition:* Refers to the speed of your speech.

*Example:* Speaking quickly can convey excitement, while slowing down emphasizes certain points; silence, used strategically, can be a powerful communicative tool (Treasure, 2014).

## Pitch

*Definition:* The highness or lowness of your voice.

*Example:* Changing pitch can alter the meaning of a sentence, such as asking “Where did you leave my keys?” with a higher pitch for curiosity or a lower pitch for frustration (Treasure, 2014).

## Volume

*Definition:* The loudness or quietness of your voice.

*Example:* Using loud volume can express excitement, while lowering your volume can capture attention; constant broadcasting is discouraged for considerate communication (Treasure, 2014).

**Source:** Vocal Qualities H5P by Amanda Quibell is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0

Working on your voice is important! If you have an attractive voice, people tend to attribute other positive characteristics to you. Research highlights that those with attractive voices are believed to be warmer, more

likable, and more honest (Shang & Liu, 2022). Those with confident voices are believed to be more dominant and are perceived to be higher achievers (Fagan, 2019). Strengthening your voice can help you with your speech, but it can also help you in other parts of your life. A strong voice will help you in your job interview, in meetings, and in interpersonal relationships.

This chapter is mostly made of exercises for you to try to strengthen your voice. Reading the activities will not help you, doing the activities will. As with all skills, you won't necessarily improve with one try, it takes practice!

## Warm Up Your Voice

### Do a Five-Minute Vocal Warm-Up

1. Loosen up and shush: Loosen up your upper body, take a deep belly breath and then say shhhh
2. Tongue Trills: Descending and ascending
3. Hum it Up: Hum up and hum down
4. Chant: Meem, Mime, Mohm, Moom
5. Pronounce: Ma, Pa, Ta

**Watch 5 vocal warm up exercises before meetings, speeches and presentations (9 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/7eDcHZZn7hU>) to learn how to warm up your voice using these five steps.

## Work on Clearly Articulating Words

Articulation refers to the clarity of the sounds you produce. The opposite of articulation is mumbling. Try putting a pencil in your mouth horizontally and then read your textbook out loud working on keeping your lips off of your teeth to exaggerate the sounds.

**Watch The best exercise for articulation (1 min) on YouTube** ([https://youtube.com/shorts/R8p51Y6R6pA?si=z5kINOJ\\_vYU1TYu1](https://youtube.com/shorts/R8p51Y6R6pA?si=z5kINOJ_vYU1TYu1))

## Articulation Practice

Another way to work on articulation is to do the practice drills. Here are some suggestions from *Communication in the Real World*.

- Say “Red Rover” ten times, overenunciating each *r*.
- Say “Wilbur” ten times, overenunciating the *w* and *r*.
- Say “Bumblebee” ten times, enunciating each *b*.
- Say “Red-letter, yellow-letter” five times, making sure to distinctly pronounce each word.
- Say “Selfish shellfish” five times, making sure to distinctly pronounce each word.
- Say “Unique New York” five times, enunciating the *q* and *k*. (To really up the challenge, try saying, “You need, unique, New York.”)

## Bring Your Voice Up Front

Bring your voice from the back of your throat to inside your mouth. Practice bringing your voice forward by trying this exercise.

Say the words “coal, coal, coal.”

Now, do it again. Say the words “coal, coal, coal” as you hold one hand in front of your mouth and feel the air pushing out on your hand. Do it several times to feel the air.

Now say the words “coal, coal, coal,” but this time let it drop to the back of your throat. Notice that the air is no longer pushing on your hand.

When people have strong, energetic voices, they have their voices upfront. When people are tired, weak, or unenergetic, they have their voices in the back of their throats. As speakers, we want to have strong energetic voices.

Now you understand what we are trying to do. Try it one more time each way: “coal, coal, coal.” This time, don’t just feel for the air difference, but also listen for the difference in sound.

## Practice Regularly

It is not enough to want to get better; you have to practice.

**Watch 5 vocal exercises for a more powerful voice (2 mins) on YouTube ([https://youtu.be/3A\\_rI31vdBI](https://youtu.be/3A_rI31vdBI))**

## Practice These Phrases

Once you have your voice warmed up, voice coach Graham Williamson suggests you practice these phrases. As

you speak them, try to keep an even tone and pace as if you were speaking one long word with no break in between.

1. Many men munch many melons.
2. Mandy made marinade in May.
3. Major Mickey's malt makes me merry.
4. My mom's marvelous modern manicure.
5. Mervin Maclean's mess marred my marmalade.

## Magnify Your Voice

Having a strong, clear voice is important for speechmaking. The best way to learn to amplify your voice is with practice. Amplify doesn't mean to scream, it means to use the force of your breath and the amplification provided in your mouth to make the sounds strong and clear.

Try talking to your furniture. Right now, look at a chair that you can see and say, "Hello chair." Imagine seeing your words as rays of light traveling to the chair. Now, look out of a window or a door and see an object farther away and try it again. For example, you can look out the window and say, "Hello tree" and imagine your words traveling to the tree. Try this for various objects at varying distances.

Arguably you may feel silly doing this but trust the process and give it a try. Practice with things inside your room and outside your window. Feel the air and notice the difference.

## Practice Changing Your Volume

To practice changing the volume of your voice, Williamson suggests counting exercises. Try to do it in one breath.

1. Count and gradually increase the loudness.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Count to 10, gradually increasing your volume from 1-5, then start again at 6 with gradual increase in volume until you reach 10. 5 and 10 should be the loudest numbers in the exercise.

2. Count and gradually decrease the loudness.

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

Count to 10, gradually decreasing your volume from 1-5, then start again at 6 with gradual decrease in volume until you reach 10. 1 and 6 should be the loudest numbers in the exercise.

3. Count and increase the loudness on every 2nd number.

1 **2** 3 **4** 5 **6** 7 **8** 9 **10**

Count to 10, increasing your volume equally on every second number. Odd numbers should be quiet, even numbers should be louder.

4. ... on every 3rd number.

1 2 **3** 4 5 **6** 7 8 **9**

Count to 9, in sets of 3, where the first two numbers are quiet, and the third is louder. 3, 6 and 9 should be loud, while the other numbers are quieter.

5. ... on every 4th number.

1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 **8** 9 10 11 **12**

Count to 12, where every 4th number is louder. 4, 8 and 12 should be spoken loudly, the rest of the numbers should be quieter.

6. ... on every 5th number.



1 2 3 4 **5** 6 7 8 9 **10**

Count to quietly to 10, with numbers 5 and 10 spoken loudly.

Try more breath exercises here: Voice Projection Exercises (sltinfo.com) (<https://www.sltinfo.com/voice-projection-exercises/>)

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## Yawn to Open Up

1. Yawn a couple of times really big. Feel the back of your throat open when you are yawning.
2. Now try a big yawn, as you exhale close your mouth, let out a sigh. The goal is to open your throat.
3. Focus on the back of your throat opening up. Now yawn right before taking a big breath to open up the back of your throat. Relax your larynx and your head and neck muscles.

### **Watch The yawn and sigh approach for voice release (2 mins) on YouTube**

(<https://youtu.be/ybePyh8DHck>) for step-by-step instructions.

(Turn up your volume, the video is very quiet).

## Exercise Your Vocal Folds

1. Grab a straw and prepare to try this technique.
2. Put the straw in your mouth, pinch your nose, and hum.

**Watch Public speaking tips: Use a straw! (2 mins) on YouTube** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zUCkRfXamM>)

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## Use Pauses for Effect

A pause can be a way to help give your presentation impact. A pause can:

- **Help Comprehension:** Pauses give people time to understand what you're saying.
- **Emphasize A Point:** They make key ideas stand out and stick in people's minds.
- **Build Suspense:** Pauses can make your audience curious about what's coming next.
- **Show Confidence:** Using pauses makes it clear you know your stuff and are in control.
- **Keep People Interested:** Well-timed silence helps to keep your listeners engaged in what you're saying.

Don't be afraid to take a moment of silence—it's a great tool for good communication.

**Watch The importance of pauses (2 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/qdje4DVNcTo>)

## Avoid Filled Pauses

Um, uh, ok, like, ya know. All of these happen to even the best speakers, but they are distracting. According to one study, recording yourself and listening to your speech is one way to reduce ums. Another trick is to replace the filler word with the word “period” or “pause” in your everyday speech to help your filler awareness. Why do we use filler words? We use filler words because we are afraid of silence and pauses. As an advanced speaker, you should begin to think of pauses as a purposeful thing you do for emphasis. Eliminating those “ums” will make you sound more organized and confident.

In the video below, **hesitation phenomena** is explained. Replacing empty filler words like “um” or “uh” with intentional pauses and words like “look” can help your audience understand.

**Watch Why do we, like, hesitate when we, um, speak? – Lorenzo García-Amaya (6 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/FsMWbVrjucg>)

## Avoid Uptalk

Uptalk is where the voice goes up at the end of sentences. To many listeners, uptalk makes the speaker sound uncertain, insecure, and annoying. Within other circles (groups of uptalkers), the use of uptalk may signal that the speaker is “one of us.” UK Publisher, Pearson, interviewed 700 managers on the use of uptalk and this is what they found:

- 85% thought it was a “clear indicator of insecurity.”
- 70% found uptalk annoying.
- Of those, 50% said that uptalk would hinder the prospect of employees and interviewers.
- 44% stated that they would mark down applicants with uptalk by as much as a third.

The evidence is clear that in professional circles, uptalk can hurt your credibility. Record yourself while giving a speech and listen for uptalk. Start being aware of when you do it in everyday speech.

**Watch What is uptalk? (3 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/HEfMwri22SM>)

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## Keep Your Voice Healthy



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### Stay Hydrated.

Staying hydrated helps your body lubricate your vocal cords. It can take up to six hours for the water you drink to get to your vocal cords so you need to hydrate hours before your speech. You cannot wash off your vocal cords. You cannot slick them down with water.

### Limit Alcohol and Caffeine.

Balance alcohol and caffeine consumption with water. Drink one glass of water for each cup of coffee or alcoholic beverage.

### Humidify.

Use a humidifier when the air is dry to keep your throat moist.

### Avoid Inhaling Smoke.

Do not smoke and avoid second-hand smoke. This also includes avoiding other airborne pollutants as much as possible.

**Protect Your Voice.**

Project your voice, don't scream. Avoid vocal extremes. Too much shouting or too much whispering can damage your voice.

**Warm Up Your Voice.**

Before you give a speech, sing, or teach. Practice humming and gliding.

**Resist Dairy: It Makes You Snotty.**

Dairy products can thicken mucus and clog you up. When you get excess mucus, you are likely to damage your voice by repeated throat clearing.

**Avoid Throat Clearing and Limit Coughing.**

Coughing and throat clearing are hard on your voice. Try sipping water or sucking on a non-menthol or non-eucalyptus cough drops. It is better for your voice to cough than to clear your voice multiple times. The need to clear the voice often comes from thick mucus—staying hydrated thins the mucus and reduces the need to clear your voice.

**Avoid Speaking from Your Throat**

Use your breath to carry your voice. Speak from your core and use your diaphragm to support your breath. If you speak from your throat, your voice will begin to sound raspy, and you will struggle to maintain volume in even a three minute speech.

**Key Takeaways**

Remember This!

- Having a strong voice can help you as a speaker, but it can also help you professionally.
  - Vocal qualities include: Volume, Pitch, Pace, Timbre, Tone, Prosody, Pace, Silence
  - Do vocal exercises to improve the strength of your voice.
  - Using proper air control helps your voice.
  - Avoid vocal fillers and uptalk.
  - Work on sounding natural when you're reading a script
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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “Why Your Voice is the Most Important Part of Your Speech: If They Can’t Hear You It is Only a Frustrating Exercise in Lip Reading” In *Advanced Public Speaking* by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC BY 4.0. / Content has been streamlined, introduction revised video links updated, uncited quotes removed, references added where missing. Removed section on occupational voice

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# ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE: DON'T SPIT RANDOM WORDS AT GENERIC PEOPLE

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*The success of your presentation  
will be judged not by the knowledge you send  
but by what the listener receives.*

*Lilly Walters, Secrets of Successful Speakers*

There are four words that can change everything about how you look at public speaking. These four words can alter how you look at nervousness, how you design your content, the way you present, and the way the audience receives the message. What are these words? **“It is not about you.”**

## It is Not About You

It is not about you; it is about your audience. Most of the time, speakers think, “*I have this great message I need to tell people*” or “*I need to inform them of what I know.*” In each case, it is about “*I*”. To be a successful speaker, you have to change your way of thinking. A speech is not about *you*, the speaker, it is about *them*, the audience. It is about the fact they need something, and you can provide it for them. They may need information, they may need to be inspired, they may need to know about a product that will improve their lives, they may need to celebrate a special moment. They have needs and when your message meets those needs, your audience will be transformed.

Chris Anderson of TED talks says, The truth about “speaking your truth” is this: “If the audience doesn’t understand how your truth applies to them, or what they get by learning about your dreams, they’ll tune out or quickly forget what you’ve said.” The more you think about your audience and explore who they are and what they need, the more you can tailor your speech.

*Treat your audience as guests  
who’ve consented to give you  
some of their precious time and attention.*

*Don’t abuse their gift  
by making them feel like captives  
who are compelled to listen to you.*

*Vivian Buchan, Make Presentations with Confidence*

## Give Your Audience Something of Value: Audience Before

## Content

A speech is a gift you give the audience. Chris Anderson, the curator of TED Talks, says, “Focusing on what you should give, should be the foundation of your talk.” From the moment, you are tasked with giving a speech, you should ask yourself what gift you have to give. One way to think about it is the acronym ABC-audience before content

Game designer Jane McGonigal tells her audience she is giving them something valuable. She suggests she will give them seven and a half extra minutes to their life. Watch her introduction to hear for yourself.

**Watch The game that can give you 10 extra years of life (19 mins) on TED  
([https://www.ted.com/talks/jane\\_mcgonigal\\_the\\_game\\_that\\_can\\_give\\_you\\_10\\_extra\\_years\\_of\\_life](https://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life))**

I’m a gamer, so I like to have goals. I like special missions and secret objectives. So here’s my special mission for this talk: I’m going to try to increase the life span of every single person in this room by seven and a half minutes. Literally, you will live seven and a half minutes longer than you would have otherwise, just because you watched this talk (McGonigal, n.d.).

Speech is about serving your audience instead of serving your agenda. One group of speech coaches, Ginger Public Speaking, (<https://www.gingerleadershipcomms.com/>) emphasize being servant speakers. They illustrate the difference between *taking* and *servicing* this way:

**Normal public speaking can focus more on *taking* from an audience:**

- *I need them to listen to me.*
- *I need them to look interested in what I’m saying.*
- *I need them to laugh at my jokes.*
- *I need them to affirm my expertise.*
- *I need them to know how good I am.*

**Servant speaking is all about building a community:**

- *I want to give my community what they most need to hear.*
- *I believe my message will bring benefit to those listening.*
- *I want the people listening to me to feel a part OF something not apart FROM something.*

Every speech, every time, is about connecting with the audience. Think about who they are and the perspective they bring. Think about their wants, their needs, their desires, and their perspective. Public



speaking is about serving, it is about giving a gift.

**Watch TED's secret to great public speaking | Chris Anderson (8 mins) on TED** (<https://youtu.be/FOCpMAww28>)

Did you notice three out of four of the key features that Chris Anderson mentions have to do with the audience?

- 1. Limit your talk to just one major idea.**
- 2. Give them a reason to care.**
- 3. Build your ideas based on what the audience already knows.**
- 4. Make your idea worth sharing. Who does this idea benefit?**

*The information in this video is for a specific context—how to give a TED Talk—but many of the lessons apply to public speaking in general.*

## Getting into the Mind of Your Audience

“Speakers do not give speeches to audiences; they jointly create meaning with audiences,” according to scholars Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary, to create meaning, you need to think about what your audience already knows. You need to get into the mind of your audience. The key to good speaking is to put an idea in the mind of your audience. For this to work, you need to think about them and their worldview. To do this, you need to research your audience as well as your topic.

Frank Luntz knows all about how to get in the mind of an audience, it's what he does for a living. He is an American political and communications consultant and he polls audiences to find out their beliefs. He specializes in helping speakers find what words best resonate with audiences. He says:

You can have the best message in the world, but the person on the receiving end will always understand it through the prism of his or her own emotions, preconceptions, prejudices, and preexisting beliefs. It's not enough to be correct or reasonable or even brilliant. The key to successful communication is to take the imaginative leap of stuffing yourself into your listener's shoes to know what they are thinking and feeling in the deepest recesses of their mind and heart. How that person perceives what you say is even more real, at least in a practical sense, than how you perceive yourself.

This means not just looking at an audience in terms of demographics, but rather, what are their goals, why should they care, what do they need?

## Ask Yourself, What Do They Need?

Many of you are reading this book because you are in a public speaking class. If so, you are thinking, “What

do I have to do to make an “A” on this speech?” or “What is the least I can do to get my college credit?” Notice that both approaches focus on “I.” Realize when you give your presentation, there will be an audience of college students that *need* something. What do they need? They need not be bored. They need to think it was worth it to come to class. They need to learn things. They need to be inspired. If it is a persuasion speech, don’t think about what you need to persuade them to do, think about them and how their lives will be improved if they listen to your speech and act on the important issue you presented. If you are giving a ceremonial speech, think about how you can make them feel a part of something—make them feel included.

*The goal of effective communication*

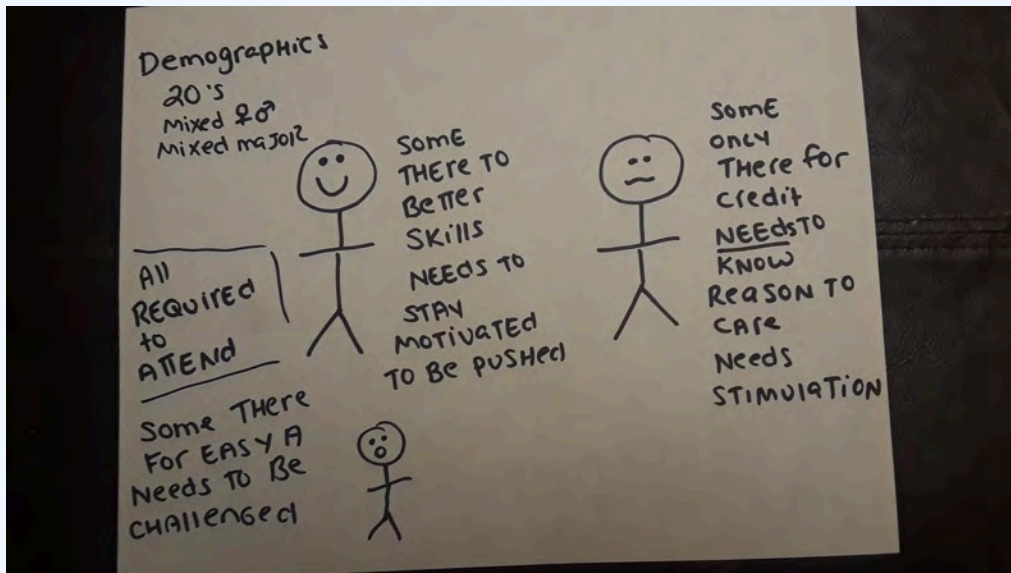
*should be for listeners to say*

*‘Me too!’ versus ‘So what?’*

*–Jim Rohn, motivational speaker*

Write down what your listeners need and why they are at the event. It is easy to think about the tangible reasons they attended, but it is helpful to think about the emotional reasons they are there. Are they there to bond with friends? Are they there to be inspired? Are they there because they have to be? What reward do they get for coming? Notice in some of the examples, there are things like “to feel good,” “to know more,” “to connect.”

Make yourself a graphic of the target audience members. You can draw stick figures and note particular information about the audience members. As you write your speech, keep looking at this reference so you keep the audience’s needs in mind.



Example audience demographics: 20’s, mixed genders, mixed majors. All are required to attend. Some are there for an easy A, needs to be challenged. Some there to better skills needs to stay motivated/to be pushed. Some only there for the credit, needs to know the reason to care, need stimulation. **Source:** “Needs” by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC BY 4.0

Nancy Duarte, the author of *The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations*, suggests you ask yourself these questions about your audience.

1. **Lifestyle:** What does a walk in their shoes look like?
2. **Knowledge:** What do they already know and not know about your topic?
3. **Motivation and Desire:** What are their wants and desires? What motivates them?
4. **Values:** What is important to them? How does their use of time and money reveal their priorities?
5. **Influence:** What influences their behaviors and thoughts?
6. **Respect:** What makes them feel respected? How do they give and receive respect?

Try Duarte's tool: Audience Needs Map | Duarte

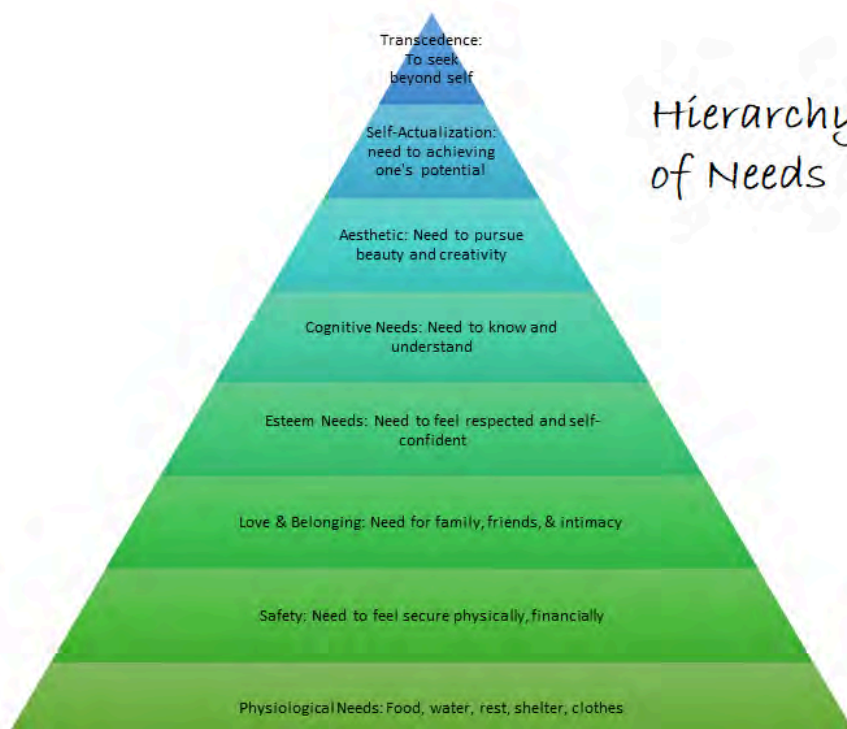
## Consider the Audience's Needs

*People don't remember what we think is important.*

*They remember what they think is important.*

*John Maxwell, leadership expert*

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is one tool you can use to help you analyze audience needs. Work through the pyramid and see if you can relate each level to your topic in some way. This is particularly helpful to use it as a brainstorming tool when constructing speeches. In short, psychologist Abraham Maslow suggested people are motivated by their needs and they seek to satisfy their needs. For our purposes, we won't delve into the larger theory but rather acknowledge that people seek to satisfy their needs. The more you identify and talk to their need and demonstrate how those needs can be satisfied, the more likely they are to have a positive response to your topic (and more likely to be persuaded).



Consider the needs of your audience. At the bottom of the Hierarchy of Needs triangle/ largest area are physiological needs (food, water, rest, shelter clothes). The next level up is safety (need to feel secure, physically, financially). Above safety is love & belonging (need for family, friends & intimacy). Esteem needs are higher than love & belonging, including need to feel respected and self confident. Cognitive needs (need to know and understand) are the next level up, followed by Aesthetic (need to pursue beauty and creativity). The second highest tier is self-actualization (need to achieve one's potential) and the highest tier (top of the triangle is transcendence (to seek beyond self). "Hierarchy of Needs" by Lynn Meade, licensed under CCO

Let's work through an example of this. Imagine you are doing a speech to persuade people to take a self-defense course at a local gym.

- **Physiological needs:** People need to sleep: I can remind listeners that they sleep better once they exercise. They will sleep better knowing they can protect themselves. Taking a self-defense class will help them get a good night's sleep.
- **Safety needs:** People need to feel safe: I can remind them of crime statistics to make them feel unsafe so they take the class to regain a sense of safety.
- **Belonging needs:** People need to belong: I can encourage them to take the class with a group of friends or I can remind them of times they missed spending time with friends because they were uncomfortable being out late at night alone. Take a self-defense class will give them the confidence they need to go out with friends.
- **Esteem needs:** People need to feel good about themselves: I can remind them how bad it feels to not be able to fend for themselves and tell them how good it feels to have the confidence to know how to defend themselves. Learning new skills makes you feel good. Independence feels good.
- **Cognitive needs:** People have the need to know, so I can tell them about the science of some of the techniques and why they work.
- **Self-actualization needs:** People need to feel safe, they need to know and belong, so they can work to fulfill their life's goals. A college student who is afraid to walk to their night class, might skip class and then fall short of their personal goal of graduating.

*Designing a presentation without an audience in mind  
is like writing a love letter and addressing it:  
To Whom It May Concern.*  
– Ken Haemer, Presentation Design Manager

## Recipe for Listenability

### **Listenability: What does that mean in plain English?**

By using easily understood phrases and words and giving the audience a reason to listen you are making your speech listenable.

Think of your speech in terms of listenability. Communication scholar D.L. Rubin says, “Listenable discourse is characterized by linguistic and rhetorical structures that ease the particular cognitive burdens

listeners face.” (What do you think about that quote, appropriate to the audience of this book or unnecessarily wordy and full of big words? Was it a listenable quote?)

In plain English, make your speech easy to listen to. How do you do that? Glad you asked; here are a few ways.

## To Be Listenable, Find Common Ground

Seek to establish a connection with your audience right away. Find common ground or draw from common experiences. If you are talking to a civic organization read their mission statement and seek commonalities. Work in the common ground such as, “Like you, I am passionate about finding a better solution for the homeless in our area.” Recognize similarities if they represent a cause that matters to you, if you have a hometown team in common, if you all ate a catered lunch, or if you all walked uphill to get to class. It is no coincidence when speakers come onto a college campus, they almost always mention one of these: The mascot, the sports team, a place on campus, a famous eating establishment, or a campus hero. These details draw the audience in to listen. People appreciate a speaker who took the time to think about them it will increase both liking and credibility.

Sometimes a speaker will use the same speech with different audiences and common ground has to change. Julie Miyeon Sohn, Toastmaster’s competitor, reflected on what she learned about adapting to an audience. Her failure to adapt caused her not to win at the World Championship of Public Speaking:

“One thing I would do differently is changing how I select my speech topic. My story about learning English was well received in Korea because the Korean audience had all had a similar experience to mine. However, I failed to connect with the audience at the semi-final because the story was not very relatable to the international audience. I would change my story to something more universal so that everyone can relate to it regardless of their race, nationality, and age.”

In order to find common ground, you need to take time to get to know the audience. In addition to the traditional research, one speaker suggests reading up on the news before you speak and draw references to things most people might know. Make sure the examples you give are now by most audience members. Speaker Nancy Duarte shares her common ground mishaps:

I referred to an airline, (an example of amazing customer service, Open Skies) to an audience of American business executives, forgetting that an airline with only one route (NY-Paris) wasn’t something many of them would know.

Even if most of your audience knows about your common ground reference, they may have differing opinions about it. Nancy Duarte says,

I learned this the hard way with the same audience, telling them, proudly, how a former customer had asked

me for referral to a therapist (everyone goes to therapists in NY!), which provoked guffaws from brawny macho Midwesterners.

Finding common ground with your audience, not only gets their attention, but it helps them get on the same wavelength—literally. Princeton neuroscientist Uri Hasson says the more commonality between a storyteller and listener, the more brain imaging shows that the brains sync up. Let that sink in. When you find common ground through story, it shows up on a brain scan. Your audience’s brain scan lights up in the same places yours does—that is incredible. Thinking about your audience and then finding common ground is crucial to your success.

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The royal road to a man’s heart  
is to talk to him about the things he treasures most.

*Dale Carnegie, Author, Speaker*

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## To Be Listenable, Reference Someone in the Group

When possible, go to a speaking event early and talk to several people. Engage them in friendly conversation and then ask them questions related to your topic. During your presentation, point them out and say, “Derek was telling me that...” The audience’s attention zooms in when you acknowledge someone from the group. If you don’t have time to visit beforehand, you can always reference the host who invited you. Mentioning anyone they know can draw the audience’s attention.

## To Be Listenable, Tell Them How It Applies to Them

To keep the audience’s attention, talk about what they care about the most—themselves. Get the audience on your side by telling them why this speech is relevant to them. Don’t just assume they know, help them make those connections. Typically, highly engaged, and knowledgeable audiences, need only a light reminder of the topic’s application. For those that are not very knowledgeable or not motivated listeners, you need to tell them specifically how it applies and why. One easy way to do this is to say, “So what, who cares...” Another way is to simply ask the audience, “Why do you think this should matter to you?” Then, answer the question. Laura Tempesta, Sports Bra Expert, Inventor & Founder of Bravolution, gave a TED Talk about bras and cleverly found a way to relate to the whole audience. Watch to see how she engages the WHOLE audience and makes them want to listen.

**Watch You'll never look at a bra the same way again – Laura Tempesta (19 mins) on YouTube**  
([https://youtu.be/GrxJ-9\\_qXeM](https://youtu.be/GrxJ-9_qXeM))

*So, let's take a look at the design of the bra and the limits it imposes. And for those of you who don't wear bras, I'm assuming you've encountered a few along the way and are familiar with the technology.* Laura Tempesta

## To Be Listenable, Use the Language of Your Audience

Author, William Butler Yeats said, “Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people.” Make sure that the words you use match the vocabulary and the knowledge level of the audience. Throughout your speech, define your terms clearly and carefully. Be careful not to use jargon or “insider” language that will exclude listeners who aren't “in the know.”

Watch this Wired video where an astrophysicist explains gravity in five levels of difficulty. (You don't have to watch the whole video, just watch a little bit of how she talks to each person to get the point). This is an excellent example of talking about the same topic to different audience members.

**Watch Astrophysicist explains gravity in 5 levels of difficulty (36 mins) on YouTube**  
(<https://youtu.be/QcUey-DVYjk>)

Finding the right vocabulary and the right tone for the right audience takes a lot of thought and practice. Alan Alda and the Center for Communicating Science issued a “flame challenge” and they asked scientists to explain a flame to 11-year-olds.

Watch more on Alan Alda's 'Flame Challenge' Illuminates Importance of Communicating Science  
(<https://youtu.be/hS6rOCdy-uo>)

*Here is perhaps the simplest case  
of persuasion.  
You persuade a person only  
insofar as you can talk their language  
by speech, gesture, tonality, order,  
image, attitude, idea,  
identifying your ways with theirs.  
Kenneth Burke, American literary theorist*



## To Be Listenable, Use Inclusive Language

Inclusive language means many things. It means speaking to the knowledge level and education level of your audience. It also means designing sentences where you invite them to be a part.

NO: I know *most people* worry about what goes into *their* food.

YES: I know most of *us* worry about what goes into *our* food.

The use of “us” and “our,” makes the sentence more personal and friendly. As much as possible, use personal pronouns with your audience. As Shel Leanne points out in the book, *Say It Like Obama: The Power of Speaking with Purpose and Vision*, these words help to “send the message that the speaker and those listening are on the same team, in the same boat, facing the same fate.”

## To Be Listenable, Give the Audience a Map of the Journey so they Won't Get Lost

Tell them what you are going to say, say it, and then tell them what you said. Along the way, help them stay on track by telling them where they are headed. “Now that we talked about this history of this, I want to share with you the future of the product.”

Always keep the focus on what is the point of your speech. Nancy Duarte, presentation expert suggests, “Every bit of content you share should propel the audience towards that destination.”

## To Be Listenable, Take the Audience's Perspective

Your speech is a journey, and you are taking your audience on that journey with you. Chris Anderson, TED Talk curator says, “It is your job to know about your fellow travelers. What do they need from the journey and how can you help them, so they enjoy the trip and they don't get lost?” Delve into the audience's mind, what is their perspective of your topic?

### Consider This

When the country music singer, Garth Brooks arrives at the venue, he sits in many of the seats that are pointing at the stage and asks, “What am I doing for this person.” As a speaker, it is good to sit in the many (symbolic) seats of your audience and ask, “What am I doing for this person?”

## To Be Listenable, Ask for Audience Participation

Actively involving your audience helps them stay alert and attentive. All too often, speakers seem to spit random words at generic people. The audience is supposed to passively sit back and take in whatever comes their way. An audience is made up of people who need to be considered, addressed, and engaged and it is your challenge to figure out how to connect. Consider using one of the following when engaging your audience:

- Ask rhetorical questions.
- Take an informal poll.
- Ask for a volunteer.
- Have them write something down.
- Ask them to talk with their neighbor about a topic.
- Have everyone yell the answer at the same time.
- Tell them there will be a “test” at the end.

**Watch Toastmaster’s World Champion of Public Speaking, Darren Tay Wen Jie (3 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/v26CcifgEq4>) to see how he relates to the audience.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/dynamicpresentations/?p=195#oembed-5>

**Video source:** Toastmasters International. (2016, August 21). *2016 World Champion of Public Speaking, Darren Tay Wen Jie* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/v26CcifgEq4>

### Look at All the Ways He Connected with the Audience

Darren Tay said in a Business Insider interview that he emphasized the importance of making audience members feel like he was talking directly to them. One way he does this is by asking rhetorical questions of the audience: “If you are all wondering whether the underwear Greg used was clean, I had the same question.” Look at this list of all the ways he connects with the audience in this speech.

- He opens by staring at them directly.
- If *you* are all wondering whether the underwear Greg used was clean, I had the same question.

- Mr. contest chair, fellow toastmasters, and anyone including those watching worldwide. If *you* are looking at Calvin Klein here, stop staring! My eyes are up here.
- “I gonna knock you in my teeth and punch you in the guts and laugh at your sorry behind. He didn’t quite use the word- behind. I just cleaned up the words because *this is a toastmaster program*.”
- And, have *you* ever wondered why a bully needs to tell you the exact sequence that they gonna bully you?
- *My friends*, whenever I heard those words, my hands would tremble. *Have you ever felt so fearful*, that you cannot eat or sleep?
- *My friends*, as much as we tried to deny it, we are our toughest and strongest bully. We beat ourselves up and put ourselves down. *Have you ever felt* that you are not good enough? I thought that way.
- I’m standing on stage now in front of two *thousand of you* and more are watching worldwide but I am not afraid anymore. I am in control because I am acknowledging it, I am stepping out of it, observing it, and watching it weaken and fade. My friends, *let’s all not run away* from our inner bullies anymore. *Let us* all face our inner bullies and acknowledge its presence and fight. *Let us all* be together as a family supporting one another because we can all outsmart and (outlast).

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## Don’t Make Assumptions

Make a list of the known demographics of your audience and create a profile. Make a list of what you know about them and what you assume about them. Be honest, but don’t let that profile lead you astray. Don’t create unrealistic stereotypes and expectations based on the way you profiled them. For example, just because your audience is made up of seventy-year-old women, does not mean that they have the same values as your conservative grandma. Most of us naturally default to grouping things based on what we already know—don’t assume.

Don’t assume you know about your audience’s abilities and interests based on age or on gender roles.

## Your Credibility is Linked to the Audience’s Opinion of You

Every time you speak, you are building credibility, maintaining credibility, or diminishing credibility,

according to Ryan Sheets, Director of the Business Communication Lab at the University of Arkansas, your credibility (ethos) is linked to what the audience thinks of you. An audience expects you to not only have knowledge but also to be trustworthy and sincere. What they think about you translates to how much they will listen to your message. That opinion is formed by looking at the way you are dressed, how you carry yourself, the words you say, and the way you address them.

Your credibility is tied up in their opinion of you and whether they think you care about them.

## Thinking About the Audience Makes You Less Anxious

When you realize speech is not about you having something to say but rather, you are giving the audience something of value, it changes things. Not only will you give a better speech, but you will benefit yourself as well. When you think about the needs of the audience, you become less nervous. Focusing on their needs and the topic helps you focus on providing a service rather than delivering a performance.

- Instead of thinking, “I am so nervous,” try thinking “the audience really will benefit from knowing this.”
- Instead of thinking, “I will persuade them to do this” change your thinking to “their life will be better if they try this.”

If you pick a topic you are passionate about and if you believe in it, you will begin to care more about the importance of the topic and less about your own personal discomfort. If you feel a little nervous, think about how your information can improve lives or change people’s perspectives. Make your topic so important that you forget to be nervous.

Quit being so self-centered. It’s not about you— it’s about the audience. They need something and you have it. Writer Ambrose Redmoon said, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.”

Don’t be selfish. It does little good to have all that experience and all that knowledge and keep it to yourself. Author Marianne Williamson says, “Your playing small does not serve the world.” It is worth a little discomfort for the awesome privilege you have to change, educate, motivate, and persuade your audience. They need this information, and you are the one lucky enough to get to give it to them. When you spend all your time thinking about how to connect with the audience and how to help them understand what you have to offer, you have less energy to spend worrying about if you are nervous.

*I tell myself that what I have to say in any speech  
is important for people to hear,  
and that I prepped for it,  
and am well versed in it.  
So basically knowing that what I have to say is worth hearing*

*makes me confident in saying it.*  
*Andrew Powell, Former University of Arkansas Communication Student*

## Audience Analysis Tools

There are many ways to gather information about the audience. Here are a few of the most common and a list of the pros and cons of each

### Interview

- Ask the person who invited you to tell you about the audience.
- When possible, interview a member of the audience.
- Sometimes, it is helpful to ask someone outside the group to give you their impressions of the group.

### Pros

- Gives great insider information.
- Often yields quotable items.

### Cons

- Are time-consuming.
- The interviewee always represents a limited perspective.

### Survey

- Send out an electronic survey.
- Do an informal survey by those who pass by in a break room or lunchroom.
- Have the leadership administer a survey.

### Pros

- Allows you to know key opinions.
- Gives the audience the first impression of you as someone who wants to be prepared.

## Cons

- Surveys may become a burden to people who don't want one more thing to do.
- People often say what is expected rather than what they really feel.

## Internet Research

- Search the internet for information about the group, the person, the venue.
- Check out professional- LinkedIn- and social media-Facebook, Instagram, Twitter- sites for information.
- Look up the mission statement of the organization.
- Find pictures of the venue.

## Pros

- Gives you an overview of who they want people to think they are.
- Helps you identify the priorities of an organization.

## Cons

- It can be/feel a little creepy to look at family photos of someone on their Facebook and Instagram.
- Mentioning you looked at their social media can freak them out.

## Demographic Data

Demographic data can come from statistical sources or it can come from asking questions to the person who invited you to the venue.

- Race
- Religion
- Age
- Professional status
- Education level

- Sexual Orientation
- Beliefs

**Pros**

- Gives you an overview of who they want people to think they are.
- Helps you identify the priorities of an organization.

**Cons**

- Can result in stereotypes.
- Can be time-consuming.

When we think a speech is about what we have to say, we get it wrong. The whole reason you are giving the presentation is for the audience. The speech is about them, and your job is to figure out who they are and what they need before you write even the first word.

**Key Takeaways**

## Remember This!

- The most important thing to remember is it is not about you; it is about the audience.
- Focus on making your speech listenable.
- Make a list of what your audience needs and the reasons they are listening to your speech.
- Don't stereotype or make assumptions about your audience.
- Know the right words to use for your specific audience.
- Use a variety of tools to gather information about your audience.

## Extras to Help You with Understanding Audience

### Further Resources

Actor and writer Alan Alda trains communicators by teaching them basic improvisational techniques. The goal is to help them to gain empathy and to learn to read people better. In this video, he explains a couple of ways to gain empathy with your audience.

**Watch Alan Alda: Grow your empathy through better visual perception (10 mins) on YouTube** ([https://youtu.be/qulq\\_n5zbTs](https://youtu.be/qulq_n5zbTs))

**Watch Keeping your audience engaged (7 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/JHl4yUQMBYA>)

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “Engage Your Audience: Don’t Spit Random Words at Generic People” In *Advanced Public Speaking* by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC BY 4.0.

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# DELIVERY ADVICE: MANAGING EYE CONTACT, MOVEMENT, AND GESTURES

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*You can speak well*

*if your tongue can deliver the message of your heart.*

– John Ford, celebrated Irish American director

In this chapter, you will be provided with practical tips to strengthen presentation skills and cautioned away from misleading advice. The most valuable actions to take when it comes to enhancing presentation skills are: (1) nurturing the belief in personal improvement through practice, and (2) understanding that the objective should be establishing a connection with the audience, rather than striving for flawless perfection.



Photo by Natasha Hall, used under Unsplash license

## Believe You Can Improve

When you think about speaking are you tempted to believe, “Some people are just born good speakers” or “I just wasn’t made for this public speaking stuff.” If that is you, you may have what Stanford researcher, Carol Dweck calls a “fixed mindset.” She suggested that we have a *fixed mindset*—people are just born to be good at things or we have a *growth mindset*—people, with effort, can learn new skills.

When it comes to public speaking, you should work on having a growth mindset and acknowledge that effort is needed for mastery. You can improve, but it may take work. Especially with public speaking, practice equals progress. Adjusting your belief to a growth mindset frees your self-limiting beliefs and allows you to move beyond what you thought was possible.

Those who think they got their success from effort often can go farther than those who believe success is due to their natural ability. The key to making the change is to continually recognize your effort: “I gave it my best, I really stretched myself today, I put a lot of time into this, and I can tell it made a difference.” In addition, Dweck suggests the simple change of adding the word “yet” to your self vocabulary helps keep you growth-focused. Instead of saying, “I’m not good a public speaking,” say “I’m not good at public speaking yet.” Believe if you work hard enough, and practice enough, and get help when needed, you can improve and grow.

## The Power of YET

Avoid saying, “I can’t do this”  
but rather say “I can’t do this **yet**”

In one case, you are telling your brain to quit trying  
in the other version, you allow yourself to be open to possibilities.

Never say, “I’m not good at public speaking.”  
but rather say, “I may not be a perfect speaker **yet** but what I have to say is important  
so I will work and keep getting better at it.”

Believing you can improve is an important first step! Many speakers who begin timid and insecure are able to rise to become confident, and powerful in only a few months. Some people seem to know how to succeed at public speaking naturally, but for most of us, it takes work. Realize with practice, you can improve as a speaker. If you are one of those lucky natural speakers, realize you too have room to improve.

Now, let’s talk about two specific presentation skills where you can improve—eye contact and gestures.

## Eye Contact

### Bad Advice—Look at Their Foreheads

You might hear advice like this: “Don’t make eye contact with the audience because they will make you nervous. Don’t look at their eyes—look at their foreheads.” Test this theory out; just for fun, walk up to a friend and begin to speak to their forehead to see how they react. It just looks weird! Chances are your friend will say, “What the heck are you doing?”

That is the same thing your audience will think if you stare at their foreheads. Honestly, it is harder to focus on foreheads than it is to look in the eyes.

### Bad Advice—Imagine Your Audience Naked

You have probably heard this advice: “Just imagine your audience naked.” This is the WORST advice; it actually might make eye contact more awkward! One speech coach said, “Depending on your audience, this is too exciting or too disgusting.” Although this piece of advice is designed to make you feel more at ease, but it

doesn't work. I do not know about you, but the thought of speaking to a room full of naked people does not make me feel relaxed.

## Bad Advice– Stare at Random Spots Above Their Heads

Well-meaning teachers sometimes say, “Look at the back wall.” If you look over the person, you miss the person. Ask yourself, why is eye contact so frightening? Is it because there is a person connected to those eyes? Is it because if we look at the person, we have to acknowledge their existence? One nonverbal researcher says, “Eye contact makes interaction an obligation.”

When you make eye contact, you must recognize I am speaking to a real person with feelings, expectations, and dreams. If I make eye contact, I must realize a speech is an interaction and I have an obligation to that person. If I make eye contact, I become much more aware they expect something from me and I feel obligated not to waste their time.

The other reason this is bad advice is it makes you look odd, and you will lose credibility with the audience. It is a strange thing to talk to walls. If you are a speaker, it looks strange for you to look over the audience's heads to stare at the wall. I guarantee the audience feels strange when you do it. Even in a large audience where you can't make eye contact with everyone, you should at least find people throughout the room to look at.

## Bad Advice– Follow the Eye Contact Formula

A lot of well-meaning advisors will say things like “Make eye contact for 3-5 seconds with each person” (the three-second rule) or “scan the audience from left to right” (the lighthouse technique) or “find three places in the room and look to those” (the umpire technique). The advice is not entirely bad, but the problem is it puts too much pressure on the speaker. If I am counting the seconds or working on the perfect eye contact pattern, then I am missing the point of being conversational.

## Good Advice on Eye Contact

The most important advice I can give you on eye contact is to JUST DO IT. Find friendly faces around the room and look at them. Find those nice people who smile and nod and then begin looking at them in the room. Looking at them helps you gauge whether they are listening.

When speaking to a large audience, you may have to make audience contact instead of eye contact. Look at various areas where the audience members are seated to create the feeling that you are looking at them.

## Benefits of Eye Contact

There are many benefits to making good eye contact. Communication researcher Steven Beebe conducted a study where he discovered an increase in eye contact increases a speaker's perceived credibility. Other research suggests eye contact impacts focus memory, and recall. Eye contact helps the audience to see you as credible, and to remember your message more—what is not to love about that?

Watch the video, below by Dananjaya Hettiarachchi and notice how he looks directly at audience members. It is obvious why he is the world champion.

**Watch Dananjaya Hettiarachchi – World Champion of Public Speaking 2014 – Full Speech (8 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/bbz2boNSeL0>)

## Practical Tips for Maximizing Eye Contact

- If you struggle with eye contact, at the top of every page of your notes write—“Make eye contact.”
- Have your friends sit at various places throughout the room so you have a few friendly eyes you can talk to.
- Practice with people. Sure, it is helpful to record yourself, to practice talking to a wall, and to speak to a mirror, but those are no substitutes for what happens when you speak to people. Find some friends and practice with them. Chris Anderson, of TED, says: “Perhaps the most important physical act onstage is making eye contact. Find five or six friendly-looking people in different parts of the audience and look them in the eye as you speak. Think of them as friends you haven't seen in a year, whom you're bringing up to date on your work.”



Photo by Chris Montgomery, used under Unsplash license

## Eye Contact in Online Presentations

Increasingly, business presentations are being made in the online environment. The pandemic forced schools to use online learning tools where teachers give lectures online and students give presentations online. In addition, many businesses are conducting job interviews through virtual platforms. It is likely you will encounter an online speech and it is helpful to understand the unique differences. If you are making your presentations online, eye contact means looking into the camera.

Draw a smiley face on a notecard and tape it beside your camera to remind you to look at your audience. It is tempting to try to make eye contact with the faces on your screen, and it is OK to look at the faces on the screen to remind you of your audience but spend the majority of your presentation time looking into the eyes of the camera.

It can be helpful to tape your notecards on a wall behind your computer or phone screen so you can glance at them briefly and then speak directly to your audience. Do not try to read your speech off your computer or phone screen; it will be obvious to the audience you are reading.

### Cultural Note

Eye contact can vary from culture to culture and person to person. Just because an audience member looks away from you, it may not mean they are not interested. Consider the following differences.

- In some cultures, it would be considered inappropriate to make eye contact with someone of different gender (or sex).
- When in a high-power culture (a culture where those in power are given higher status and have deferential body language), you may notice those in lower status lower their eyes or avoid eye contact with those of higher status.
- Arabs, Latin Americans, and Southern Europeans tend to make direct eye contact
- Those from Asia and parts of Africa tend to make less eye contact.
- Those on the Autism Spectrum may avoid eye contact to help them focus on the words you are saying.

*“All you need is something to say,  
and a burning desire to say it...*

*it doesn't matter where your hands are.”*

*Lou Holtz, former Arkansas Razorback football coach*

## Gestures

Isn't it funny how we rarely notice what our hands are doing while we are talking? When we get up there to give a speech, suddenly we are aware of our hands, and we can't figure out what to do with them. One of the

frequently asked questions I hear is, “What do I do with my hands?” The short answer is to relax and gesture naturally. Vivian Buchan, author of *Make Presentations with Confidence* suggests, “The only place a gesture comes from is inside you. Gestures come from your heart and soul, your instincts, your interests, and your involvement.” She suggests focusing on your speech and your passion and the gestures will work themselves out. The more you practice your speech, the more you will feel confident gesturing.

“Great speakers keep their body open” according to Dananjaya Hettiarachchi, 2014 Toastmasters International world champion of public speaking. “Failing to make gestures or holding your hands tightly in front of you makes you look insecure. When you’re nervous, you try to cover your vital organs.” It is OK to *feel* nervous, the goal is to try and not *look* nervous. Public speaking instructor Cathy Hollingsworth offered this nugget of advice:

So many times, when speakers are telling a story to their friends in person or even via the phone, gestures are big and descriptive but when speakers get in front of an audience, all of sudden, arms and hands become appendages that have no apparent purpose. This is what I tell speakers: Use your gestures as “bodily visual aids”. Pretend you are in a situation in which there are no electronics to show slides nor is there a whiteboard. How will you get your ideas across to the audience? Easy! Just use your gesturing to take the audience along with you on the speech. Be brave enough to make those gestures big and at least shoulder high. This is not charades, but it is close.

Gestures help you look like a polished speaker. Vanessa Van Edwards did a study and found the top TED talk speakers made an average of 465 gestures in 18 minutes while the less popular speakers made 272 gestures. The top speakers gestured almost twice as much. Gestures not only increase a speaker’s credibility but speakers who gesture are seen as more persuasive and more likable. According to Vanessa van Edwards, “It’s not what you say; it’s how you say it.” She found people rated speakers similarly on charisma, credibility, and intelligence whether they saw the speech with the sound on or off.

When speakers gesture, listeners are better able to learn the content. People who were instructed to gesture while learning new information, had better recall of information. That sounds like a good study tip!

It’s not just your audience that will be helped by your gestures, you will be helped as well. Did you know people who are born blind gesture in some of the same ways sighted individuals do? How do they know to gesture? Why do they gesture? They gesture because it seems to be something they are hardwired to do. They gesture because it seems to help the speaker to think and speak more clearly. I often have my students sit on their hands and then tell a story about their weekend or give directions to their favorite restaurant. It is amazing how many of them struggle to think of directions when they can’t move. It might be said you think with your hands. In a study where they asked children to talk about a game they played, those who gestured while speaking told more details and they spoke with fewer hesitations. The authors suggested gesturing reduces cognitive load. It is easier to hold up your hands and say “The fish I caught is this big” than it is to say, “the fish I caught was big. He was about 10 inches long.” Gestures give us a shortcut to speaking.

In addition, gestures beat out the rhythm of the speech. They help us synchronize our words to our speech. Typically, we speak in chunks of about four to five syllables called a phonemic clause. At the end of



that chunk, we tend to gesture. Try it for yourself. I wrote the phrases as most people say them (phonemic clause). Say these phrases out loud and see what gestures you do naturally.

I don't know where they are  
 I've looked everywhere  
 I simply cannot remember  
 where I put my keys.  
 They were right there table  
 last night.

Read it again. This time, notice you naturally gesture right before the last beat of the phrase. Gestures don't come after the phrase, they come during the phrase. You can tell if someone has been speech coached poorly because they will gesture after the phrase. It looks unnatural.

## Gestures are Good

- They are good for the audience's attention to your speech.
- They are good for the audience's recall of the speech.
- They help you as a speaker to be more fluid in speaking.
- They help to reduce your cognitive load.
- They help you keep the rhythm in your speech.



Photo by Usman Yousaf, used under Unsplash license

With all this information, you know you should gesture throughout your speech. One way to loosen up and find your own gestures is what I call, “getting funky.” After you have your speech written, sing your speech, say it in a funny accent, or rap it while in the shower. As silly as this sounds, it will help relax you and in those funky practices, you will find you begin having more free-flowing gestures.

Students in Dale Carnegie classes often do the Box Factory activity to help them learn to use their whole bodies in their speech.

Dale Dunphy posted as part of a Dale Carnegie course, he had to tell a story of the Box Factory with enthusiasm and emphasize certain words. Other participants talked about the importance of telling the story with their whole bodies.

## The Box Factory

I found myself yesterday near a huge box factory located on a high hill.

Running all around this building was a picket fence about this high.

I walked up to the factory, threw open the door, walked in, and found myself in a long hallway.

At the far end of the hallway was a spiral staircase.

I walked up this spiral staircase, pushed open a sliding door, and found myself in a big room piled high with boxes.

There were big boxes, middle-sized boxes, and very small boxes.

Suddenly, the boxes came tumbling down around my head!

I woke with a start, yawned, stretched, and went back to sleep.

Watch this short clip from Dale Carnegie Training of Western CT as they do this activity (<https://www.facebook.com/296319280422649/videos/686754148045825>).

As silly as activities like this one may seem, they help speakers to relax and to use their whole bodies in speeches.

## What NOT to Do with Your Hands

- Do NOT put both hands in your pockets.
- Do NOT jingle keys or change in your pocket.
- Do NOT hold hands clasped behind your back.
- Do NOT fidget with your pen, necklace.
- Do NOT tap or pound on the podium.
- Do NOT rest your hands on the podium.
- Do NOT wring hands.
- Do NOT play with your hair.
- Do NOT fidget with your clothing.
- Do NOT pick your fingernails.
- Do NOT fiddle with notecards.

**Pro-Tip**

When you feel yourself getting nervous, touch your index finger to your thumb, it is a self-soothing gesture

## Advanced Gestures

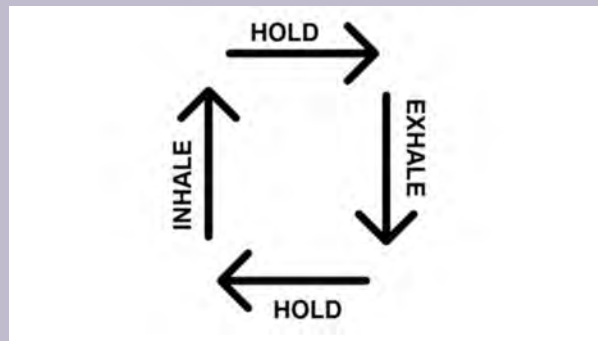
Some of you are still working on relaxing enough to gesture. That is OK, it takes time and like any other skill, with practice, you will get better. Others of you have spoken long enough you are wanting to take your gestures to the next level, this section is for you.

Sabina Nawaz, speech coach recommends people “air out their armpits” when they gesture. That is her way of reminding people to make their gestures large and noticeable and to move their arms away from their torso. Dale Carnegie Trainer, Larry Prevot, says speakers who keep their arms too close to their body remind him of old westerns where the hero is tied up. The rope is around his chest and arms bound tightly, but below the elbow, his hands are free allowing him to finally escape, “Be that hero today. Remove the perceived constraints that are pinning your upper arms against your chest and start using everything at your disposal.” Darren Tay, Toastmaster’s World Champion, said in a Business Insider interview “It’s common for novice public speakers to have their gestures centered either too close to their face, which suggests nervousness, or too low, which is distracting. He said the ideal center is around the belly button.”

In addition to making the arm movements large, the next pro tip is to gesture palms up. Toastmaster Champion Hettiarachchi, suggests you look at the back of your hand and then look at the palm of your hand. Which one relaxes your eye? The palm relaxes your eye which is why great public speakers tend to open their palms towards the audience (video included in bonus features below). In the TED talk, *Power in the Palm of Your Hand* (video included in bonus features below), Allan Pease tells of a study where speakers had 20 minutes to present a proposal using palm-up gestures, palm down gestures, or pointing gestures. Here’s what he found: The palm-up speakers were described as laid back, friendly, humorous, and engaging. The speakers with the palm up gesture maintained 40% more retention than the speaker who used the palm-down gesture. The palms down speakers were described as authoritative, and the pointing speakers were described with negative adjectives.

## How To Stop Shaking When You Are Nervous

In this video, *How to Stop Shaking when You Are Nervous*, Trace Dominguez explains how New York City Police and Members of the Military stop their hands from shaking when they have an adrenaline response. Tactical and box breathing can help you slow down your rapid heart rate and stimulate the vagus nerve. The slower and deeper you breathe, the more relaxed you feel. This technique is done by taking deep breaths through the nose.



### How To Do Box Breathing:

1. Exhale all the breath out of your lungs.
2. Breathe in for four seconds. As your chest rises and air enters let your mind travel up the side of the box.
3. Hold for four seconds and in your mind travel across the top of the box.
4. Breathe out for four seconds and let your mind travel down one side of the box.
5. Relax for four seconds and let your mind travel across the bottom.
6. Repeat at least three times.

According to clinical psychologist, Dr. Symington, This visual of the box “provides a helpful anchor for your attention and quickly allows you to get into the flow of rhythmic breathing.”

**Watch this short video, *How to Stop Shaking When You’re Nervous (4 mins)* on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/yJhI0Du5jO4>), as it relates to box breathing.**

**Video source:** Seeker. (2015, September 7). *How to stop shaking when you’re nervous* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/yJhI0Du5jO4>

## Your Body Language

When does your speech credibility begin with an audience? At first glance. People start evaluating you the moment they see you. If you are pacing wildly in the hall, if you are sitting submissively while playing on your phone, if you are in the bathroom before your speech having a pep talk and a member of the audience sees you, that is when they start the credibility meter. The moment you arrive at the speech venue, you should walk, talk, and act with confidence. I once worked for a company that insisted our car was clean inside and out because the client might see it out their office window and begin sizing up our credibility. If you are a college student, consider the fact that every day your classmates see you in class, you are either gaining credibility or losing credibility. If you sit passively in class playing on your cell phone every day, if you wear pajama pants to class, if you slump over dismissively when others give their speeches, you will have diminished credibility with that audience.

### Posture

Your body tells people how you wanted to be treated. Your body tells people what you want them to think of you. Confident posture tells your audience you believe you are a person of power, and you know what you are talking about. A confident posture shows your audience you are “comfortable in your own skin.” When people see someone with good posture and body confidence, they perceive them to have more positive attributes and to have increased competence and power. Your confident posture helps you as well, as Harvard Researcher Amy Cuddy points out, people who hold themselves confidently also feel confident. Individuals with a confident posture had more positive attitudes and were more persistent when engaging in a complex task.

### To Move or Not to Move, That is the Question

In some situations, you are expected to stand behind a lectern and in other settings, you are standing there with nothing between you and the audience. You will have to adapt to various contexts in your speaking career. In most settings, it is recommended you put as few barriers between you and the audience as possible. When thinking about movement remember, you are a tree—plant your feet but move your branches naturally in the wind. Ok, you can be a tree that moves a little. When you do decide to walk around, make sure it looks purposeful and not nervous—there is a difference between engaged movement and pacing.

The video in this chapter, *Body Language – Gestures and Eye Contact in Public Speaking* shows a variety of speakers and how each adapts to the speech situation. As you watch it, pay special attention to their feet and arms. One of the things that I like about this video is that it shows that there is no one definitive way to do gestures. Each speaker’s unique personality comes out in their body movements. I tell my students that being

a good speaker is about learning to be comfortable in their own skin and learning their unique way of connecting with the audience.

## Movement for Advanced Speakers

For you advanced speakers, it is time to be even more intentional with your movement. Some speakers use the baseball method of movement where they “walk their points”. Imagine a baseball diamond on the floor. When you make your first point, you walk to first base. On your second point, you walk to the second base, and on your third point, you move to the third base. Walking to home plate signals that your speech has come full circle (or full diamond) and you are restating the thesis to show how you are connecting with where you began. This physical representation of your speech can help anchor ideas in the minds of the audience.

Cathy Hollingsworth suggests you use purposeful movement to take your audience with you on the journey.

“For many speakers, the hardest thing to resist is walking aimlessly the whole speech. Then, that movement looks like nervous wandering. Instead, take a few steps during a transition and **STOP**. Stay awhile and talk! When you move to the next point or start to tell a story, take a few more steps and **STOP**. Stay awhile and talk.”

I learned one of my favorite tricks at a teacher’s retreat. After about an hour of walking around the room teaching, the conference leader looked at us and asked “Do you see where I am standing? Have you noticed every time I make a big point, I stand in the same place?” He went on to tell us throughout the weekend-long conference he had conditioned us to pay attention to his big idea by standing in the same spot every time he drew a conclusion. When he stood in that spot, we knew what he was about to say was important. This same speaker would stomp with one foot at times as he made a point to get our attention. It was like an exclamation point. He even did a hop using both feet once or twice as a double exclamation point.

The distance you are from the audience and the position of your eyes to the audience can also have an effect. You can create intimacy when telling a personal story by walking closer to the audience or even by sitting down. Moving from behind the podium can signal “I am being vulnerable before you.” Making your eyes the same level as the audience can signal we are on the same level (though the room and size of the audience can influence this). The key is whatever you do, make movement intentional and purposeful (imagine me doing a two-footed hop here!).

**Enlist the Help of a Friend.** Chances are you have some presentation area where you need work. Ask a friend to give you an honest assessment of what you do. For example, I used to rock up and back when I spoke. I had a friend who would move his pointer finger up and back to let me know when I was doing it. It took a lot of practice and several “rockin” speeches, but eventually, I corrected the behavior.

## How To Dress for Your Speech

How do you dress for your speech? The answer should be “it depends.” It depends on the context, the audience, the topic, and the occasion. Kelly Stoetzel, TED’s Content Director says the most important thing is you “wear something you feel great in.” She also suggests “Believe it or not, your clothing can earn you an audience connection before you’ve even spoken a word.” Here are a few guidelines to consider:

1. **Consider the context, topic, and purpose.** It may give you credibility to wear a lab coat as you talk about your experience working as a nurse’s assistant. Wearing hiking gear would be appropriate for a speech on how to rappel, and yoga pants are appropriate for a speech about the sun salutation poses. I’m not telling you to dress gimmicky, but to consider what is appropriate for the topic.
2. **Dress nicer than your audience to enhance your credibility.** If you are talking to other college students in your class and they are wearing jeans and t-shirts, wear nice pants and a collared shirt. If you are presenting to business professionals in suits, wear a suit. It can be a mistake to overdress your audience. If you dress too formally, they will think you are untrustworthy and insincere, however, if you dress too casually the audience might not take you seriously. Whatever you wear, consider the impact. Typically, there is a balance between looking credible and looking approachable. For example, a study of college teachers found teachers who dressed in professional attire were perceived as more organized and knowledgeable while those dressed casually were perceived as more approachable.
3. **Dress professionally to feel credible.** Martin McDermott said, “People elevate their behavior to match their attire.” Dressing professionally can make you feel more confident resulting in enhanced cognition and abstract processing.
4. **Avoid distracting clothing and artifacts.** Unless you are comfortable in high heels, you should avoid them in a speech. Be aware that some dress shoes can be very loud and distracting. If you are tempted to fidget with a ring or necklace, it is best not to wear them when you speak.
5. **Practice in your outfit.** It is a good idea to practice your speech in the outfit you will wear to your speech. It will help you identify any issues like sagging straps or an overly tight shirt that restricts gestures.
6. **Consider the sweat factor.** Typically, people perspire more when they are giving a speech. Wear something that minimizes any sweat stains.
7. **Consider the backdrop.** If you wear black pants and a black shirt, you may get lost in front of a black velvet curtain. If possible, get a picture of or visit the venue where you will be speaking to consider how it will impact your clothing choices.
8. **Consider microphones.** If you will be wearing a lapel microphone, you shouldn’t wear a floppy cardigan. If you are wearing a microphone with a battery pack, you will need a belt or defined waistline to clip it onto. If you are wearing an over-the-ear microphone, your dangling earrings may make loud noises that are picked up by the mic. Always ask what the microphone set up will be days before the

event so you can dress accordingly.

9. **Zip it.** The best advice about clothing rules I have ever received as a speaker is to always check your fly before you speak.

Social psychologist Erving Goffman asks us to consider we are all like actors on a stage. When we are backstage, we may act one way, and when we are on the front stage, we act another. Actors make intentional choices when performing on the main stage; he called this impression management. As actors, we use props, clothing, artifacts, and nonverbal communication to tell people which “character” we are. If we are successful, the audience will view us the way we want to be viewed. Consider which character you will be and be intentional about how to create that character on your “front stage.”

### Thoughts Our Blotchy Friends

Many people get red blotches when they speak in public. Clothing choices can magnify the issue. A crisp white shirt next to a red neck highlights the issue, whereas a black shirt breaks up the red and doesn't highlight it so much.

Of course, the best solution is not to get red. Easy to say, but not so easy to do, huh? Doing deep breathing before a speech, being well prepared, and caring about your speech topic all help. The biggest thing of all is to be aware of your triggers. You might get red when you get passionate, nervous, or are exposed to different fabrics, temperatures, or smells. For some of us, red happens. If red happens to you, it certainly doesn't mean you avoid speaking.

If this is you, you can minimize it, and more importantly, when it happens, the audience can still enjoy your speech. If you get red, you are in good company. Dress to minimize it, breathe deeply, and focus on the message and your audience will too.

### Key Takeaways

- Public speaking is a skill and with practice, you can improve. Keep an open mindset.
- Make eye contact with the audience being sure to look in different areas of the room.
- Gestures should be natural. Gestures help both the speaker and the listeners.
- Open palms and larger gestures can make you appear more approachable.
- Use confident body posture, not just during your speech, but any time you are in sight of



your audience.

- Dress according to the context, speech topic, and audience. Typically, dress a little bit above your audience.

## Extra Resources

### Watch These Videos That Were Referenced in the Text

He starts talking about the palm at 4.35

**Watch Body language, the power is in the palm of your hands – Allan Pease (15 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/ZZZ7k8cMA-4>)

## The Power of YET

Carol Dweck explains how “basic human abilities can be grown and how using “Yet” and “Not Yet” influences learning in different classroom settings. Whether you are teaching kids math or teaching yourself to improve as a public speaker, practicing a growth mindset will be crucial for your success.

**Watch Developing a growth mindset with Carol Dweck (10 mins) on YouTube**

(<https://youtu.be/hiiEeMN7vbQ>)

## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “Delivery Advice: Do Not Imagine the Audience Naked! Managing Eye Contact, Movement, and Gestures” In *Advanced Public Speaking* by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC BY 4.0.

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# DON'T RUIN A GREAT PRESENTATION WITH TERRIBLE SLIDES

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The more strikingly visual your presentation is,  
the more people will remember it.

And more importantly, they will remember you.

– Paul Arden

*Creative Director of Advertising Company Satchi and Satchi*

Professor Lynn Meade tells this story:

“The speaker was a master in his field which is why he was chosen to speak. He was brilliant, he was motivated to share his ideas, and he was great at conversation. The only problem was he was the most boring speaker I have ever heard. He stood at the front of the room and read presentation slides to us for two hours. He rarely looked at the audience. It was the longest two hours of any conference I have ever attended!”

Chances are you have had a similar experience. A speaker has ridiculous amounts of text on a slide and then stands there and reads it to you. Unfortunately for all of us, a lot of college classes are that way. In fact, most of us learned about how to use slides **by seeing our teachers use them—poorly**.

The use of electronic slides—PowerPoint, Presenter, Google Slides, Prezi—is pervasive. Sixty-seven percent of college students reported that instructors used PowerPoint; and of these instructors, 95% used this software all or most of the time. Numerous articles chide that presentation slides might be the death of education.

Many successful speakers have shunned slides altogether. Chris Anderson, head of TED, the highly successful group that leads TED Talks, highlights at least of third of the most viewed TED talks do not use any slides whatsoever.

## The Most Important Questions of All

1. Do I need slides?
2. If I need slides, what does the audience need to get from those slides?

If you sit at your computer and you open your presentation software and begin writing your speech on your slides, you are making a slide show, not a speech. A good speaker always considers what the

audience needs to hear and then uses slides to offer visual support to help the audience understand. If you start with the slides, you've got it backward.

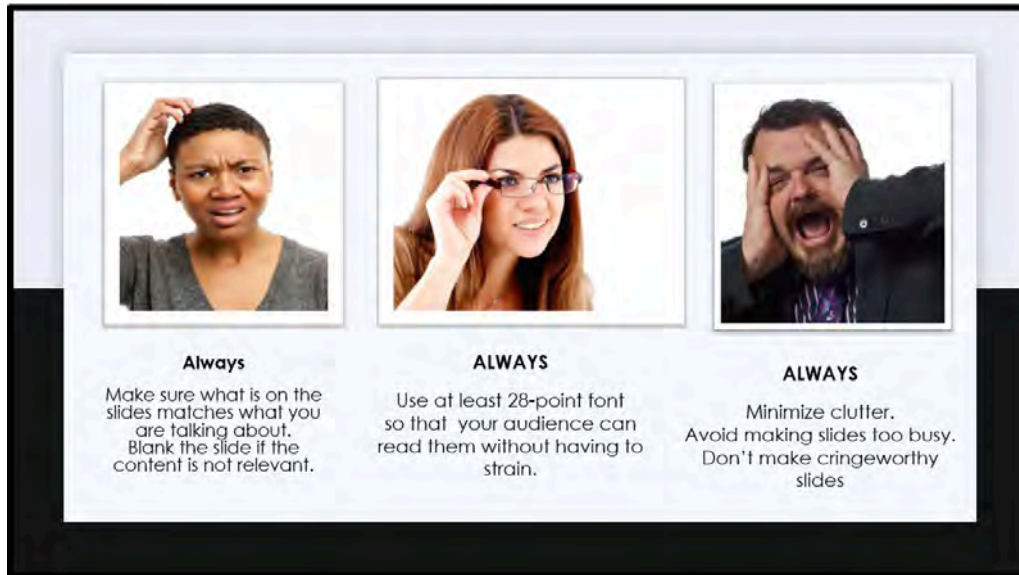
## Slides are Good Because They...

- Can create credibility. (Many people expect you to use slides and meeting that expectation gives you credibility.)
- Help focus the audience's attention.
- Help the audience visualize concepts.
- Help people take organized notes of a talk.
- Helps the speaker stay on track.
- Provides aesthetic appeal.
- Show something that may be hard to describe.

## Slides are Bad Because They...

- Can distract from what the speaker is saying.
- Can hurt the speaker's credibility when poorly constructed.
- Can cause people to mindlessly take notes without thinking about the content.
- Can be boring...especially when a speaker stands up there and simply reads the slides to an audience.
- Can lead to passive listening when a teacher uses them in the classroom and give the students a copy of the slides.

## Rules for Slides



Always: make sure your slide matches what you are talking about, blank the slide if content isn't relevant, use at least 28-point font so the audience can read without straining, and minimize clutter. Avoid making your slides too busy and don't make cringeworthy slides. "Always do this for your slideshow" by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC0.

## Write Your Speech First

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the most important things you can do when preparing your speech is to get away from your slide software. Under no circumstance should you open your slide software (PowerPoint, Presenter, Google slides, Prezi, Keynote, etc.) until your speech is complete **and** you have made a plan for what visuals the audience needs to see.

## Keep Text to A Minimum

No more than six words across and six words down. Chris Anderson of TED specifies,

Even when a text slide is simple, it may be indirectly stealing your thunder. Instead of a slide that reads: A black hole is an object so massive that no light can escape from it, you'd do better with one that reads: How black is a black hole? Then you'd give the information from that original slide in spoken form. That way, the slide teases the audience's curiosity and makes your words more interesting, not less.

## Offer One Idea to a Slide

You can keep text to a minimum by limiting ideas to one per slide. Audience members should be able to glance quickly—about 3 seconds—and get all the information. It is better to have a lot of slides where each has only one idea per slide than it is to have one slide with a list of ideas. Nancy Duarte, communication coach, reminds us that if you have too many words, it is no longer a visual aid but a teleprompter. Estimate approximately how long it will take an audience member to read your slide by timing yourself reading the slide backward.

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*Think of your slides as billboards. When people drive, they only briefly take their eyes off their main focus — the road — to process billboard information. Similarly, your audience should focus intently on what you're saying, looking only briefly at your slides when you display them. Nancy Duarte*

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## Get Rid of the Title (Most of the time)

Most of the time, a title on each slide is not needed. You, the speaker, will say what the content is about; no need to read it—it is just distracting.

## Reduce Cognitive Load

It is better to help the audience focus on the main point in the slide. By keeping things simple, it reduces the audience's cognitive resources. There are several ways you can reduce cognitive load.

- Avoid busy backgrounds they can drain mental energy.
- Eliminate unneeded titles.
- Use basic, easy-to-read font.
- Ask yourself if the company logo or school banner is needed on the slide or if it just becomes one more thing.
- Keep background colors consistent
- Format photos and illustrations in the same style.



## Use Pictures Instead of Words When Possible

People retain more information when what they see on the screen supports the message they are hearing.

*We are incredible at remembering pictures.*

*Hear a piece of information,*

*and three days later you'll remember 10% of it. A*

*dd a picture and you'll remember 65%.*

*John Medina, author of Brain Rules.*

## Learning Recall Related to Type of Presentation

**Table 1: Recall over time**

<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Ability to recall after 3 hours</b>	<b>Ability to recall after 3 days</b>
Spoken lecture	25%	10-20%
Written (reading)	72%	10%
Visual and verbal (illustrated lecture)	80%	65%

## Avoid Distracting Slide Transitions

There is rarely a time when you should use the transition feature of the software. Things that twirl, cube, swap, and swoosh rarely help the audience to focus on your idea. Most of the time, they are just cheesy and distracting. Three transitions that can be used with a level of professionalism are cut, fade, and dissolve. The easiest rule is if you do not have a reason for a transition, don't do it.

## Use Easy-to-Read, Plain Font

Use 28-point font and larger. Do not use more than three different sizes and make the size variants purposeful. It is best to stick with a plain, sans-serif font such as Helvetica, Arial, or Tahoma. There are two types of font, serif (with fancy tails) and san serif (without fancy tails). The Plain, san serif font is easiest to read when projected.



The letters on the left are plain, san-serif font, and the ones on the right are serif, or fancy font. “Latin alphabet S (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=serif+vs+san+serif&title=Special:Media Search&go=Go&type=image>)” by Eirik1231, licensed under CCO

## Go For High Contrast

Always go for the highest contrast. I recently attended a special event and the speaker projected his slide and then looked back at it surprised and said, “Sorry, you can’t see the red letters.” The speaker had attempted to put red letters on a black ground—this is always a no-no because it rarely shows well. It is best to pick a dark blue or black background and put white or yellow letters on it. You can also use a white or yellow background with dark black or blue letters (While JP Philips in the video *Death by PowerPoint* -below- advises against it, it is still a professional standard).

## Use Minimal Bullets

If you do have bullet points, make sure you have more than one point because let’s face it, bullet points are for making lists and one point does not make a list. In addition, you should never have more than six bullet points because then you would have too much stuff on your slide.

Bullets belong to the Godfather.  
Avoid them at all costs.  
Dashes belong at the Olympics,  
not at the beginning of the text.  
Chris Anderson, TED Talks

While I’m not sure I fully support eliminating all bullets, I do warn you to use them sparingly.

## Use Blank Slides

You do not always have to have a slide behind you. Insert black, blank slides between points when you need to talk to the audience without the distraction of a visual.

## Have a Backup Plan

Technology is evil and is the enemy of all that is good. It will crash on you. You should always have a backup plan and you should always be prepared to speak even if your slides do not work. You should always have notecards or print out your slides to reference. Then, if the projector bulb goes out or the computer crashes, you can still make your presentation.

## Test Your Slide Show, Videos, and Clicker/Remote

You should always practice using your slides. It is helpful to test out your presentation on your friends or trusted colleague and ask them to give you feedback. When you get to the place where you will give your presentation, it is a good idea to pull up your slides and make sure they work with the clicker/remote. It is a good idea to carry extra batteries with you too. Test the volume of your videos and make sure they play properly. Finally, make sure you know where the audio-visual person will be in case you have any problems. If you are a student, have a friend who can come up and fix your slides while you keep your speech going.

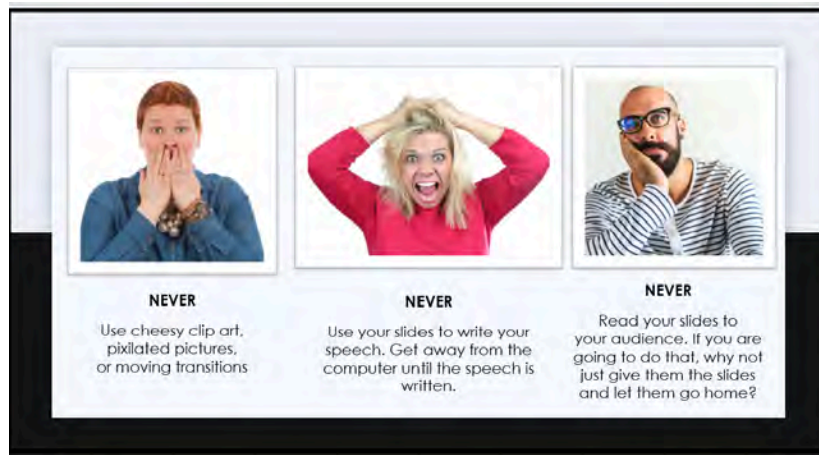
## Avoid the Laser Pointer

A laser pointer highlights any shakiness you have in your hands. If you want to highlight something on a slide, use a graphic arrow.

## Make Reminders on Your Notes to Change Your Slide

Many student presenters will turn on their presentation slides and during the speech forget they are there. After they conclude their speech and we have applauded, they will look back at the projector and say, “Oh, here is my visual aid,” and then will rapidly click through the seven slides they should have shown us during the speech.

To avoid this, practice with your slides and mark on your notecards where to advance your slide. One way: draw an “S” in a circle and then color in the circle with a highlighter.



Never: Use cheesy clip art, pixilated pictures, or moving transitions, never use your slides to write your speech. Get away from the computer until the speech is written. Never read your slides to your audience. If you were going to read them, why not just give them the slides and let them go home? “Never do this for your slideshow” by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC0

## Point Your Body and Your Eyes Towards the Audience Not Towards the Slides

Your feet indicate where you want to go. If your feet are pointed towards the door, you are indicating you want to go out the door. Similarly, if your feet are pointed towards the back wall where your slides are located, it indicates you want to go towards your slides and not towards the audience. In short, you have turned your back on your audience. **Point your feet, your hips, and your head towards the audience.**

Keep your eyes on your audience and not your slides. Having brief slides helps. If you only have a few words or a nice photo on your slides, you are less tempted to stand there and read to the audience. In addition, having your notes in front of you as opposed to using your slides as your notes helps you keep pointed forward. Just remember, talk to your audience, not your slides.

## Use Movement Minimally

These days, there are many different types of presentation slides. One of those is Prezi. For many (like me), the movement in Prezi creates a nauseous feeling. If you decide to use this tool, keep movement limited.

**Watch The hidden power of smiling – Ron Gutman (7 mins) on YouTube to see a TED Talk that effectively uses Prezi** (<https://youtu.be/U9cGdRNMdQQ>)

## Give Credit for Visuals When Possible

When possible credit to the originator of the photo. Simply write “Photo credit: Name or originator of the photo.” Usually, 12-14-point font credit is centered under the photo or in the bottom right-hand corners. Be consistent in the way you do your citations. Citing your graphic may not look as nice as a plain slide, but it shows you have integrity, and that you give credit where it is due. Make sure you have a legal license to use the photo or they are listed as Creative Commons; better yet, do as a friend of mine does, always use your original photos.

### Thoughts About Fair Dealing (Canada)

The internet makes it easy to get photos, videos, and music that you can use in your presentation. Just because it is easy to get, doesn't mean it is legal.

Chances are you are using this textbook because you are a college student. Because your presentations are of an educational nature, many uses of external content are covered under Fair Dealing copyright laws, which means you can use small amounts of copyrighted material once for educational purposes *if* you give credit to the authors.

Once you graduate and work for a company, what was once considered free to use is now under a different system. For example, you may have to get permission to use someone's photos or you may now have to pay to use a music clip.

Check your Library's Copyright guide (<https://library.georgiancollege.ca/copyright-at-georgian/forstudents>) for information about student use of copyrighted information. Don't hesitate to ask for help from your Professor or the library if you have questions or concerns.

## Use Photos Wisely

When using photos, it is usually best to make them full screen if the picture is the point of the visual. If they are a decoration to the point, format them so they are visually pleasing and balanced with the words. If you do use a smaller photo, use a plain background. Always use pictures with the highest resolution possible and always give photo credit. In the college classroom, students prefer pictures and “visually rich” slides if they were relevant to the content of the lecture. In addition, they preferred minimal text and limited bullet-point lists.

## Don't Do This!

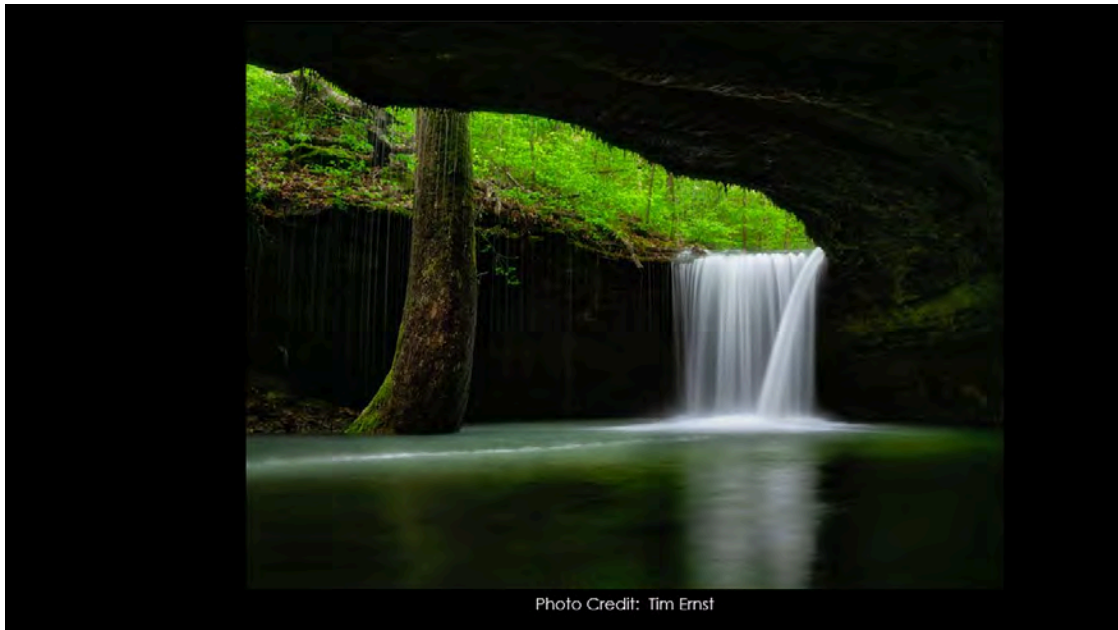


There are many things wrong with this slide: The background is distracting, there are too many photos, the heading should be spoken by the speaker and not written, and the photo credit is too large. "Slide sample" by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC0

### What's Wrong With This Slide?

- The background is distracting.
- There are too many photos on the slide.
- The heading is not needed—the speaker should say it.
- The photo credit is too large.

## Do This Instead!



Notice that the picture takes up most of the slide, the background is plain, and the photo credit is simple and doesn't distract. Notice that the picture takes up most of the slide, the background is plain, and the photo credit is simple and doesn't distract. "Slide 3" by Lynn Meade, licensed under CCO

## What's Right With This Slide?

- The picture is clear and takes up most of the slide.
- No unnecessarily distracting words
- The photo credit is balanced and an appropriate size.
- No caption is needed because the speaker will tell about what it is and where it is

## Want to Take Your Slide Composition to the Next Level? Check out these Resources

- To see a great explanation with examples of why certain slide layouts work, see Effective PowerPoint Slides for Business (<https://www.presentation-process.com/powerpoint-slides.html>)
- To see samples of good and bad use of photos on slides, check out Presentation Zen (<https://www.presentationzen.com/presentationzen/visuals/>).
- To take your visual composition to the next level by using the rule of thirds to compose slides,

check out the rule of thirds (<http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/rule-of-thirds-powerpoint/>).

- To see the types of slides a professional designer make, check out Nolan Haim's portfolio (<https://www.nolanhaimcreative.com/presentation-design-portfolio>)

Nancy Duarte: [For visuals], I think people tend to go with the easiest, fastest idea. Like, "I'm going to put a handshake in front of a globe to mean partnership!" Well, how many handshakes in front of a globe do we have to look at before we realize it's a total cliché? Another common one — the arrow in the middle of a bullseye. Really? Everyone else is thinking that way. The slides themselves are supposed to be a mnemonic device for the audience so they can remember what you had to say. They're not just a teleprompter for the speaker. A bullseye isn't going to make anyone remember anything. Don't go for the first idea. Think about the point you're trying to make and brainstorm individual moments that you're trying to emphasize. Think to the second, the third, the fourth idea — and by the time you get to about the tenth idea, those will be the more clever memorable things for the audience.

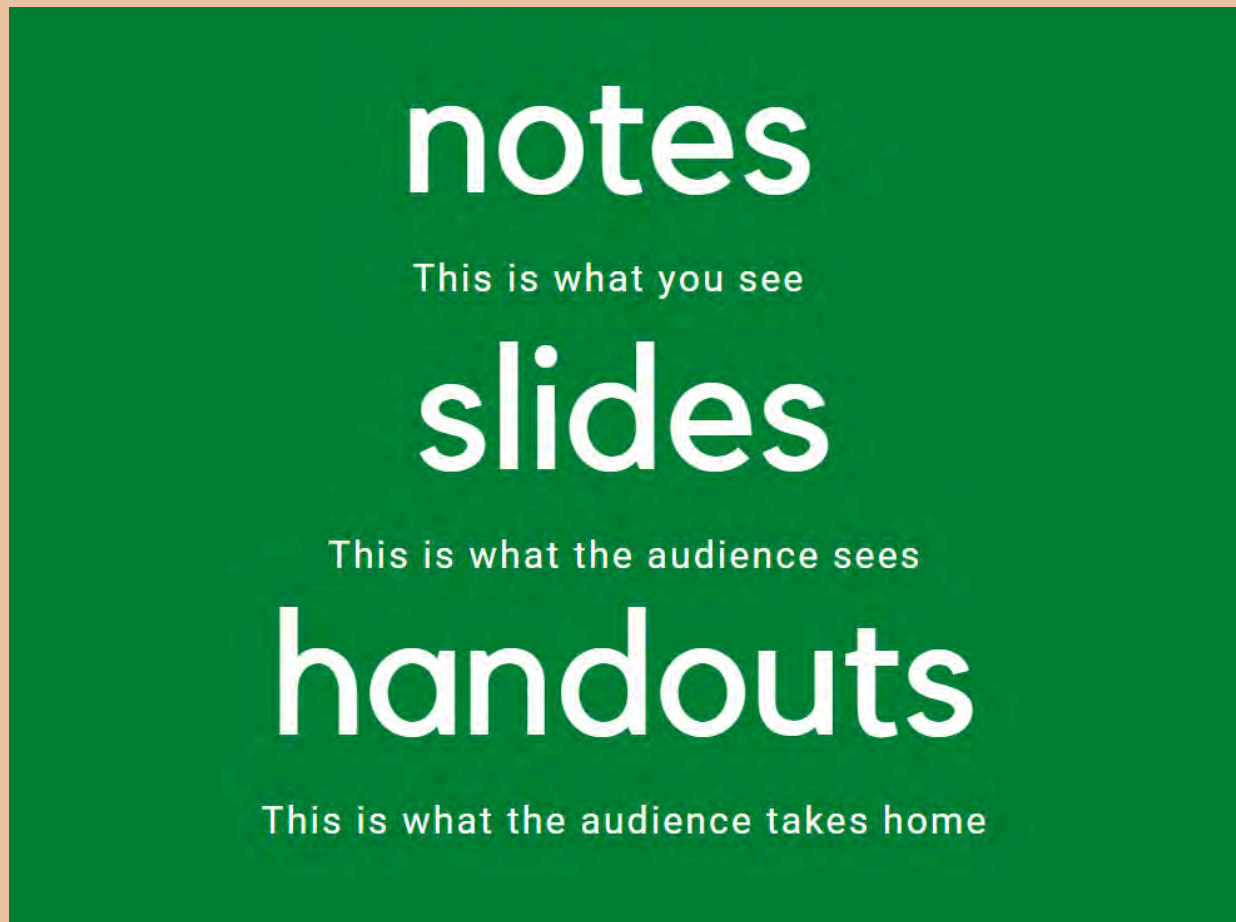
**Watch Photos that will make you want to save the Everglades – Mac Stone (21 mins) on YouTube** (<http://Photos that will make you want to save the Everglades - Mac Stone>) as he shows photos that make "You want to save the Everglades."

## **Be *in* the Image but Not *on* the Image**

Stand near your slides but don't stand where you will be a shadow on your slides. Sometimes a presenter will stand far away from their slide causing the audience to have to bounce back and forth with their attention. On the other hand, practice with your slides at the venue and have a friend let you know where you can and cannot stand. If it is easy to stand in front of the slides, I will sometimes put tape on the floor to indicate where to stand and put a tape boundary to remind myself where not to stand.



## These Are Not the Same



Notes are what you see. Slides are what the audience sees. Handouts are what the audience takes home. “The difference in notes, slides, handouts” by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC0.

### Should I Give Out My Slides As a Handout?

One BIG mistake novice speechmakers make is they use their slides as their notes, their visual aid, and their handout. In this model, a speaker opens up the presentation software and writes their speech on the slide. When the day of the presentation comes along, the speaker stands in front of the audience and reads the slides to the audience. Finally, the speaker gives the audience members a copy of the slides to take home.

- **Delivery Notes** are what you look at during your presentation. They should have details about what you will say, they should have reminders for when to advance your slides, and they should have notes reminding you to project your voice or to look up.
- **Slides** are the projection the audience sees. They should be purposeful, brief, and concise, and designed to help listeners understand.
- **Handouts** are the items you give the audience to take home with them. It should provide only the information the audience needs to remember after your presentation is over.

*Never, ever hand out copies of your slides, and certainly not before your presentation. That is the kiss of death. By definition since slides are “speaker support” material, they are there in support of the speaker...You. As such, they should be completely incapable of standing by themselves and are thus useless to give to your audience, where they will simply be guaranteed to be a distraction. The flip side of this is that if the slides can stand by themselves, why the heck are you up there in front of them? (David Rose as quoted in Presentation Zen)*

With that said, when students spend their attention copying slides, they do not spend time listening to the lecture. Making the slides available to students to use during an educational lecture may reduce cognitive load and encourage learning. However, if the slides are so detailed the student can get all the information from the slide, then they may not attend class or they may not take any notes of their own which reduces learning. It is a delicate balance of structure but not all the content.

## How To Avoid Death by PowerPoint

**Watch How to avoid death by PowerPoint (21 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/lwpi1Lm6dFo>)**

### Excerpt from *How to Avoid Death By PowerPoint*

*Okay, ladies and gentlemen, welcome. There is a question which has puzzled me for quite a while, and that is, why do our PowerPoints look the way they look? Or rather, how on earth, can we accept that they look the way they look? How can you do that?*

*And do you know what's even more intellectually challenging for me to understand, is how can a person sit over here in this meeting room with ten others, observing this dismally bad PowerPoint filled with charts, graphical elements, page numbers, fading away five, seven minutes thinking of other things. You know the feeling, the boredom, the waste of time!? This person, after 40 minutes, he/she will stand up, a bit dazed, trotting off to his own office, coming to his own computer, flipping it up, going like: oh my god, I've got a presentation tomorrow, and I do have a PowerPoint to build. Now what is the chance that this person will build an equally bad PowerPoint as the one that he/she was by herself tortured by in the other conference room? Is that a big chance? Yeah. David JP Phillips, TED Speaker. How to Avoid Death By Power Point*

### David JP Phillip Provides This Solution

1. Only put one idea per slide.
2. Make spoken and projected content match. Don't make an audience chose between listening to you or looking at your slide. Sweller and Mayer conclude there is something in our brain called the redundancy effect, and it works like this. If the audience has to pick between reading text on a slide or listening to you talk, they have a hard time focusing and cannot recall most of what was said.
3. Build slides with minimal distractions. We pay attention to moving objects, signaling colors, contrast-rich objects, big objects. Build your slides with this in mind. For example, only have a large title if it is the most important, otherwise, make it smaller.
4. Avoid using full sentences on slides.
5. Contrast controls your focus. If you use a white background, it draws attention away from the speaker.
6. Do not put too many objects on your slide. Go for six or less.

**Source:** Phillips, D. J. P. (2014, April 14). *How to avoid death by PowerPoint* [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://youtu.be/lwpi1Lm6dFo>

## Watch These Creative Uses of Slides

Notice how Tim Urban uses slides to engage the audience. Instead of long lists of words, he uses funny drawings, which results in the audience hanging on his every word.

**Watch Tim Urban: Inside the mind of a master procrastinator (14 mins) on YouTube**  
 (<https://youtu.be/arj7oStGLkU>)

## How to Put Citations in Slides

When considering the how and when of citations, it is important to consider the context of your speech. Different contexts will require different types of citations. Many speakers have ended their presentation with, “And here’s my reference page.” That has got to be the most boring way to end a speech ever! Don’t do it. There is **never** any reason to project your reference page for your audience to see. Depending on the context, however, you may include your reference on your slide.

**Table 2: Handling References in Different Types of Presentations**

A student in a public speaking class	A College Teacher	A Businessperson Making a Formal Presentation:
<p><b>In class, you should always verbally mention your research and you should turn in a complete reference page.</b> Teachers will vary if they want you to include the full reference on the bottom of the slide. You should always ask the teacher.</p>	<p>Typically, in graduate-level classes, students and teachers are expected to offer full citations. These are likely to be in the form of a reference page given to the audience in paper or electronic form. Each discipline is different. When in doubt, include the full reference at the bottom of a slide.</p>	<p>You will have to read into the context of this one. You should always mention any research to give you credibility but whether you put a citation on the slide will vary from place to place. When in doubt, err on the side of including the citation. Business presentations rarely include citations on photos.</p>

### Key Takeaways

#### Remember This!

- Slides should always be used purposefully.
- Write your speech before making your slides.
- It is better to have many slides that each make only one point than it is to have few slides with many points.
- No more than six words across and six words down, use at least 28-point, plain (san-serif) font.

## Bonus Feature

Watch a part of Sonaar Luthra's speech for a great example of slide usage. The pictures help us to understand and remember and he avoids unnecessary words.

**Watch Sonaar Luthra: Meet the water canary (4 mins) on YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/gv1ApCmctVQ&t=27s>)

For those of you interested in Multi-Media Learning Principles, this chart explains how to each principle applies to good slide creation.

## Multimedia Learning – Moreno and Mayer

Learning the principles behind why and how it works can help you remember how to apply them. This chart shares with you some of the best practices from multimedia research on the principle and the application of visual media.

**Table 3: Best Practices & Principles in the Application of Visual Media**

<b>Principle</b>	<b>What does it mean?</b>	<b>What does it mean for your slides?</b>
<b>Multiple Representation Principle</b>	For meaningful learning to occur, both channels (verbal and visual) should be used at the same time in a way learners can connect the information from each channel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say it and show it on your slide to help people remember things.</li> <li>• It is helpful to access the visual and auditory parts of the brain to help people connect.</li> </ul>
<b>Temporal Contiguity Principle</b>	<p>Don't be talking about one thing and have a picture up of something else. Verbal and visual content should be presented together in contiguous time.</p> <p>Putting words and pictures explaining the same content into working memory at the same time is beneficial.</p> <p>If the information is out of synch, the brain is less able to connect the information from the two inputs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make your words and pictures presented simultaneously.</li> <li>• Don't be talking about one thing and have a picture or graph of something different on your slide.</li> </ul>
<b>Split Attention Principles and Modality Principle</b>	People learn best when their attention is not split between spoken and visual words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is better to say things in your speech rather than write sentences on a screen.</li> <li>• Keep text to a minimum.</li> <li>• Better to use pictures instead of words.</li> </ul>
<b>Redundancy Principle</b>	While two channels of content that support each other can be more effective, too much can cause cognitive overload.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is best to talk and show pictures rather than talk, have words, and show pictures.</li> <li>• When you speak words and you project words and then you add a picture, it causes overload.</li> </ul>
<b>Coherence Principle</b>	Background sounds and music can overload auditory channels and distract.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure everything on the slide is related to the message.</li> <li>• Skip the distractions.</li> </ul>

<b>Image Principle</b>	People do not learn better when the speaker's image is on the screen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No need to show your headshot.</li> </ul>
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## Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “Don’t Ruin a Great Presentation with Terrible Slides” In *Advanced Public Speaking* by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC BY 4.0.

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