

# Bite-Sized Scenario Training™ Delivering Great Presentations



# Delivering Great Presentations

## Bite-Sized Scenario Training

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# 1. Introduction

**D**uring the course of your career, you'll likely be called upon to deliver numerous presentations. This is because they are a primary means of imparting knowledge to others, as well as a way of selling ideas, products and services – and yourself.

Too many of us dread giving presentations. We let fear obscure the fact that they are actually opportunities to impress our boss, our colleagues and our clients with our knowledge and skill.

You should seize these opportunities for the sake of advancing your career, and the best way to do that is through thorough preparation. Good preparation consists of understanding the “mechanics” of presenting and then practicing them until they become second nature.

In this one-hour **Bite-Sized Scenario Training™** session, you'll learn how to prepare and deliver presentations in the most efficient and effective way possible, by concentrating on four fundamental principles:

- Principle 1:** Understanding your audience.
- Principle 2:** Preparing your content to meet your audience's needs and wants.
- Principle 3:** Delivering your presentation with confidence.
- Principle 4:** Controlling your environment for maximum effectiveness.

## 2. Acquiring Great Presentation Skills

**W**hen you give a great presentation, you accomplish an important goal: **you deliver a message with a positive and memorable impact.** Members of your audience leave knowing exactly what they need to know, and what they're expected to do about it, if anything.

However, the benefits of giving a great presentation extend beyond this. People will want to attend your future presentations, because they know they will be worth their while. Also, they'll view you as the "go to" person for accurate and essential information that will help them accomplish tasks faster and more effectively.

Of course, bad or mediocre presentations can have a negative impact on your career. We've all been in tedious meetings during which the presenter monotonously described his or her project in such excruciating detail that, by the end of the meeting, you realize that you'd rather go to the dentist than to another presentation like it!

Or, it may be the opposite situation. You attend a presentation that's flashy, glitzy and highly entertaining but, when you leave, you can't remember what the point of the whole thing was.

In either case, the impact upon audience members is negative.

Obviously, you want to be able to deliver excellent presentations. The good news is that it's really not that hard to do: it all comes down to a commitment to planning and practice. This session will help you along the way, by explaining the four principles of great presentations.

## 3. Principle 1: Understanding Your Audience

This is often the most neglected principle, and this neglect can lead to mediocre or poor presentations. When you are preparing your presentation, never forget your audience's needs and expectations.

When you know your audience, you can prepare content that specifically appeals to its members. Here's an example from real life to show how different audiences expectations of the same presentation can vary:

*A large corporation wanted to brief its staff on a new, high-performance plastic. Jim, a veteran plastics engineer, was asked to give one presentation to his fellow engineers and a second one to the company's salespeople.*

*The first presentation to the engineers was a huge success. Jim described the chemical properties of the plastic and how it behaved in the preparation mold, and explained such subjects as tensile strength, and so forth. Buoyed by his success, Jim gave the same presentation to the salespeople, but it was a resounding flop. Some salespeople fell asleep. Others left the room to make calls. Still others were visibly upset, because they felt Jim's information was useless in terms of accomplishing their main objective – selling the new product to their clients.*

Jim had neglected the first principle of great presentations: understanding his audience's needs and wants. If he had done some basic research, he would have realized that the salespeople needed selling points, such as features and benefits, more than they needed detailed technical data. He could have given the salespeople what they needed by analyzing the following four issues:

### 1. Audience Profile

To get a profile of an audience, ask yourself these questions:

- **What describes the groups of people in your audiences?**  
*In Jim's case above, he had two very different audiences – one technical and one sales-oriented.*
- **What common element unites each audience?**  
*Again, the two audiences had different common elements. The engineers wanted the detailed technical data on the new product, while the salespeople needed the more general information that would help them sell the new plastic.*



## 2. Audience Needs and Wants

Answer these questions to determine your audience's needs:

- **Why are people attending the presentation?**  
*The engineers attending Jim's presentation wanted to know how to make and mold the new plastic for different applications. The salespeople simply needed to know how to sell it.*
- **What do the audience members need to know after you've finished?**  
*The engineers needed technical data. The salespeople needed to know the new plastic's features and benefits.*
- **Do they want to increase their knowledge or be entertained?**  
*The engineers most likely wanted to increase their detailed product knowledge and learn something new. The salespeople wanted to increase their general knowledge of the product, and understand how they could best sell it.*
- **How can you connect their interests with your message?**  
*For Jim, it was easy to connect the engineers' technical interests with his message. He needed to connect the salespeople's interest in selling the product with his message, and jettison much of the technical data in favor of sales points.*

## 3. Audience Expectations

Answer this question to determine your audience's expectations:

- **What do people expect in terms of content and length?**  
*The engineers wanted a thorough, detailed presentation in whatever time it took to get the job done. The salespeople wanted the presentation to be as short, effective and entertaining as possible.*

## 4. Audience Knowledge

Answer these questions to assess how much information you need to give your audience:

- **How much explaining do you need to do?**  
*Jim's engineer audience needed as much explanation as possible in order to work with the new product. The salespeople simply needed selected technical points, blended with selling points.*
- **What assumptions can you make?**  
*Jim had easy assumptions to make. One audience was technical, the other was sales-oriented.*

## 4. Principle 2: Preparing Your Content

Let's assume that you've answered the previous questions and you understand your audience. Now, you're ready to prepare your presentation's content. Here are some tips for preparing effectively:

### Don't try to Cover Everything

The writer and philosopher Voltaire said, "The secret of being a bore is to tell all." Great presentations stimulate thoughts, questions and discussion. Develop your content so that it covers the main points, but leaves room for the audience to apply the information to its own circumstances.

### Start With a Great Hook

You only have a few minutes at the start of your presentation to engage your audience, so don't waste this time on background information. Get people charged up and eager to listen, and make it obvious why your presentation is relevant. And don't make them wait for your conclusion: tell them up front what your premise or purpose is. This helps people to stay focused. They may not agree with you at the start, but they'll be able to follow your arguments along the way.

### Prepare Short, Easy-to-Follow Points

Use [chunking](#) to deliver information in bite-sized pieces. If you're using visual aids, follow these tips:

- Keep paragraphs short – start a new paragraph each time you make a new point.
- Use titles to introduce new concepts.
- Try to limit lists and bullet points to no more than five short items.
- Use tables, columns, pictures, and other visuals to aid understanding.
- When giving instructions, be very specific, and separate each step as appropriate.

### Present Your Ideas Logically, With Supporting Evidence

People need to be able to follow the flow of your presentation and, the clearer you can make things, the better they'll be able to understand your message.



## **Outline any Actions That are Required**

Your audience should leave the presentation with a clear idea of its individual assignments and responsibilities, if appropriate, so prepare an outline of actions or steps that you expect members to take.

## **Develop a Strong Close, Including a Summary**

People can absorb and remember only so much information. Close with a strong message and summary, and re-emphasize your main points. To keep the topic fresh in people's minds, consider ending with a question designed to stimulate further discussion.

## 5. Principle 3: Delivering Confidently

Confidence comes from practice. It's as simple as that. When you are totally familiar with your content, your visual aids and your delivery, you can make a great presentation to an appreciative audience. This section will focus on the general areas of visual aids, delivery and style. (For more information about confident delivery, see our articles on [Speaking to an Audience](#) and [Managing Presentation Nerves](#).)

### Visual Aids

Unless your presentation is very short, you'll need visual aids, such as PowerPoint® slides and flip charts, to keep your audience focused.

PowerPoint is very common because of its convenient, easy-to-prepare slides, but beware of becoming so enthralled with its extra features that you distract your audience with so much glitz that you fail to get your message across.

When designing a PowerPoint presentation, follow these guidelines:

- Keep slides or graphics simple and easy to understand.
- Start with the overall concept and then move into the details.
- The information on the slide should add value to your presentation. Remember, it's not meant to **be** your presentation, it's just there as an **aid** to it.
- Use images sparingly. Make sure that they mean something, and aren't just there to fill up space.
- Use pleasant color schemes, high contrast, simple fonts, and bold and italic fonts to add meaning to words.
- Don't use fly-ins, fade-ins, fade-outs, or other animations, unless it's absolutely necessary to emphasize a point. How many times have you been put into a hypnotic state watching words or lines fly by during a presentation?

### Delivery and Style

The way you deliver your content can make or break a presentation. A dynamic delivery that shows your interest in the subject draws the audience in. A droning, monotone voice and stiff posture can put it to sleep. Becoming an effective presenter requires practice and attention to the following guidelines:

- Use gestures for meaning, not for comfort. Try not to talk with your hands, or move about carelessly. Everything you do should have purpose: for

example, gesture to the visual aid to draw the audience's attention to important points.

- Pause for effect after main points, or after you present a visual aid.
- Step out from behind the podium and connect with your audience. Too often, presenters cling to a podium as if it were a life preserver. This signals nervousness or uncertainty to an audience.
- Talk loudly enough for people at the back to hear you, or use a microphone if you can't.
- Make eye contact with individuals, and hold it for three to five seconds. Any less, and it looks like you are merely scanning the crowd.
- Be passionate – show your audience that you care about what you're saying. A genuine love of a subject transmits itself to an audience and makes people enthusiastic.
- Consider putting up a blank or low-content screen between slides at various stages of your presentation. This puts the attention to where it should be – on you!
- Change your pace and style from time to time.
- Be natural – don't try to be a comedian if you're not.
- Finish early rather than late.

When you present with confidence and authority, your audience pays attention and reacts to you as someone worth listening to.

## 6. Principle 4: Controlling Your Environment

**Y**ou can't eliminate every problem that can occur during presentations, but you can reduce the chances of them happening, and cope with them if they do, with diligent planning and preparation.

Here are some tips for giving a great presentation:

### Practice, Practice, Practice

The ultimate goal is to deliver your presentation note-free. Short of this, you want to be sure you're comfortable with the material, and that nothing comes as a surprise.

The only way you can do this is to rehearse what you are going to say time and again; and to take the time to smooth away awkward turns of phrase and become really confident and comfortable with your content. The point is for the presentation to look effortless, because, when you struggle, it makes the audience focus on you and not on what you are saying.

### Keep the Lights on

When you darken the room, the screen stands out, not you. It also encourages sleep, which you want to avoid at all costs!

### Always Have Back-ups and a Back-up Plan

Things can and will go wrong, so you should plan for as many contingencies as possible.

Here's a real-life example: a presenter was using expensive vinyl binders to hold the manuals for a seminar held at a hotel. The participants asked if they could leave the materials in the room overnight. The presenter saw no harm in this and agreed. But the next day, he discovered that the cleaners had put the manuals in the trash!

These guidelines will help you avoid this sort of problem:

- Always be early, so that you have time to deal with issues before people arrive.
- Be familiar with the tools that you'll be using. Always practice with them ahead of time.
- Test everything exactly as you'll be using it before you go "on stage."
- Pick the right equipment for the environment. For example, if you have a large room, PowerPoint works better than flipcharts.

- Always have a back-up and know what you'll do if none of the equipment works. Remember, the audience has come to hear you and you need to be able to do the job all by yourself, if you have to!

## **Dress Appropriately for the Situation**

Find out in advance what the dress code will be. For example, for an internal presentation, casual clothing may be appropriate. In the event of an external presentation to company prospects or clients, more formal clothing may be expected.

## **Have a Policy for Answering Questions**

Let your audience know up front when they can ask questions, so that you aren't interrupted at inappropriate times.

## **Finish on Time, Every Time**

Last impressions are just as important as first ones, and people will appreciate it if your presentations end on time.

## 7. Scenarios

In our scenarios, we look at two presentations that didn't go well. As you read each one, think about how you would do things differently. Make notes of your observations and answer the questions at the end.

### Scenario 1: Lakshay's new Product Presentation

Lakshay has been given a 30-minute slot in a day-long program to introduce the company's new "Impact 9000" product to staff. The purpose of the presentation is to give a general, company-wide introduction to the 9000 to create internal excitement for the product, and to get everyone "up to speed," so they can spread the word to prospects and customers intelligently and enthusiastically.

The audience is a mixture of managers, administrative personnel, salespeople, and plant personnel.

Lakshay uses PowerPoint slides to illustrate the product's features, benefits and technical specifications. He's prepared thoroughly for this presentation and has a slide for every one of the 9000's considerable technical features. He spends about 30 minutes of the meeting on these features. During most of the presentation, he averages about one detailed PowerPoint slide every 60 seconds.

Forty minutes after he started, Lakshay gets a polite reception from his audience. He's disappointed because he'd expected a more wholehearted response. In fact, he sees a few stifled yawns and glazed-over eyes. He also notices that the next presenter is not happy with him.

#### Question 1:

**What do you think went wrong?**

**Question 2:****How should Lakshay have managed the presentation differently?****Scenario 2: Alessandra's Sales Presentation**

Alessandra is a self-confident woman who prides herself on her ability to master new skills and knowledge quickly. She's been asked by her manager to make her very first sales presentation to Samir Rashid, an executive with an agricultural equipment manufacturer. She's spoken over the phone with Samir, and has the impression that he's a down-to-earth, plain-spoken, laid-back type of man. He's told her that he grew up on a farm and that he farmed for years before coming to work for the agricultural equipment company.

Because she's so busy and feels she can carry the presentation with ease, Alessandra doesn't practice, and she waits until the day before the meeting to take 30 minutes to assemble her materials (PowerPoint slides, and so on) for the meeting.

She and her manager meet with Samir the next morning, and she begins the presentation. The slides are slick, well-produced and full of great, animated imagery, charts and graphs. As far as Alessandra is concerned, the presentation is highly professional, and she knows Samir will be impressed by it.

She speaks rapidly and confidently at first. Then, Samir starts asking questions and interrupting the flow. She cannot answer some of the questions, and this causes her to lose her train of thought. Annoyed, she quickly draws his attention away from the questions and back to the slides. However, he politely insists on asking more questions. She can't answer these questions either and, soon, she is dismayed to see her manager take over the presentation.

By the end of the meeting, she can see that both Samir and her manager are unimpressed with her efforts.



**Question 1:**

**Which principles of great presentations did Alessandra ignore?**

**Question 2:**

**What SHOULD Alessandra have done that would have impressed Samir?**

## 8. Suggested Solutions

### Scenario 1: Suggested Solution

#### **What do you think went wrong? How should Lakshay have managed the presentation differently?**

Lakshay would have received the enthusiastic response he expected if he'd remembered two things – the objectives of the meeting and the nature of his audience. Remember, one objective was to generate internal enthusiasm for the Impact 9000. He blunted that enthusiasm by spending far too much time on the technical features.

He also overwhelmed the audience with too many detailed slides (about one per minute). To his largely non-technical audience, it felt like the information was zooming by them, and they didn't have time to absorb it. A purely technical audience would likely have loved his presentation, but Lakshay was presenting to a general audience that needed only a broad picture of the Impact 9000.

Moreover, he should have emphasized the product's features and benefits, rather than its technical specifications. A general audience understands these aspects and can explain to prospects and customers that the 9000 can offer them substantial benefits, such as saving money, making money, saving time, or reducing errors.

Finally, in his eagerness to explain the product, Lakshay ran 10 minutes over his allotted time. That meant that his audience lost interest, and he irritated the next presenter.

### Scenario 2: Suggested Solution

#### **Which principles of great presentations did Alessandra ignore? What SHOULD Alessandra have done that would have impressed Samir?**

Alessandra did several things wrong. First, she let her pride get the better of her and failed to practice her presentation! She waited until the day before the meeting to do any substantial work on it, when she should have run through it with co-workers several times to work out any bugs.

Second, as part of her preparation, she should have learned more about the needs and products of the agricultural equipment company. She was unable to answer Samir's questions.

To Samir, this indicated three things. First, Alessandra had failed to do her homework on his company and, therefore, would not do good work for him.

Second, she demonstrated that she didn't feel that Samir and his company were important enough to warrant thorough preparation, and, if this were true, there was no reason to spend money with her company.

Third, Alessandra forgot what she'd learned over the phone – that Samir was a laid-back, plain-spoken man with a farming background. He didn't care about the slickness of her PowerPoint visuals; he wanted information that went straight to the point. In effect, by the end of the presentation, he thought Alessandra was talking down to him, and saw no reason to pay money to her company in order to be insulted.

For her next presentation, Alessandra needs do her homework on the client's products, design the presentation to meet the needs of her audience, and, above all, practice her presentation several times in the days before meeting the client.

## 9. Key Learning Points

**B**eing asked to deliver a presentation needn't be the nerve-racking experience that so many of us dread. If you grab the opportunity with both hands, and approach it with a positive outlook, you could turn an anxious challenge into a real boost for your career.

This session looked at the key points to consider to help you deliver a confident, informative and well-received presentation:

- **Prepare thoroughly.** Be familiar with your content, and rehearse what you are going to say over and over again.
- **Know your audience.** Make sure you understand who you are presenting to, and what they need to know.
- **Be enthusiastic.** If you believe in your content and care about your subject, you will generate the same enthusiasm in your audience.

## 10. Apply This to Your Life

**E**ach time you give a presentation, remember the four principles at every stage of developing your content:

- Principle 1:** Understanding your audience.
- Principle 2:** Preparing your content to meet your audience's needs and wants.
- Principle 3:** Delivering practiced presentation, with confidence.
- Principle 4:** Controlling your environment for maximum effectiveness.

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