

Planning a Presentation

Communication Skills

Team FME

www.free-management-ebooks.com

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Preface

One of the most important management skills to develop is the ability to quickly plan and structure a presentation so that you can give a strong performance even when you have minimal time in which to prepare it.

This eBook describes a simple four-step process that you can use to create a presentation plan, whether you are making a formal presentation to senior management or a routine presentation to your own team.

You will learn:

- The importance of creating an aim statement to help you focus on what to include in your presentation
- The key facts you need to find out about your audience before you begin
- How to define your key message statement and why this is such an important step
- How to produce an outline scope as efficiently as possible
- How to quickly draft your content so that you can go forward into the preparation phase

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Introduction

There are essentially three types of presentation that you as a manager will need to make as part of your normal responsibilities and activities:

- To your team
 - At the beginning of a new project to orientate your team
 - To give regular progress reports during the project
 - To inform your team of new working practices or procedures
- To senior management
 - To brief them on the current state of your project or the work of your department
 - When they need to make a decision in your area of expertise and have asked you to make recommendations or present the relevant facts in a clear and structured way
- To other groups
 - External to the organization, e.g. user groups, customers, or partner organizations
 - Internal—those outside your reporting structure

Already you can see that the reason for and the purpose of each type are quite different.

To Your Team

When considering the best way to communicate with your team, a presentation is just one of the many tools you can use. You should ask yourself whether or not the presentation is really necessary.

If you do decide to give a presentation to your team, you can make it as long as you want and you can give yourself enough time to prepare. Most of the time, this sort of presentation is concerned with progress reporting, or with some change in the way things are going to be done.

These events seldom justify visual aids or much in the way of rehearsal. However, you will still need to plan the content of your presentation carefully. Giving a presentation that you have not planned properly can detract from your authority as a manager because it makes you look disorganized.

To Senior Management

When you are presenting to senior management you will usually be told how long you have available, but you may find yourself with less time than you were initially allocated if a previous presenter overruns or an item on the agenda takes longer to deal with than anticipated. You will sometimes have to prepare for this type of presentation at short notice.

In this situation, your role would usually be limited to providing information to aid senior management's decision-making process. They may take account of your recommendations, but you would be unwise to make too strong a case for any particular decision, as this could appear presumptuous. In the worst case, you may be seen as an obstacle if the final decision does not follow your recommendations.

You will need to plan the content carefully in order to get your message across as clearly and concisely as possible and it is usually a good idea to use visual aids to help you do so. You should also rehearse the presentation thoroughly so that you can give a confident performance.

To Other Groups

The third type of presentation you will give as a manager is to other groups—either those external to your organization, or within your organization but outside your area of responsibility. These presentations usually involve more than simply passing on information; you are often aiming to change the audience's perceptions or behavior in some way.

Before going into detail about how best to prepare for each of these types of presentation, it is worth saying something about the likely attitude of the audience that you can expect to find yourself presenting to. This is something that most presentation books tend to gloss over, particularly when they have been written by people who specialize in public speaking. These authors are used to performing in front of an audience that has a genuine interest in what they have to say. This could be because they are delivering a training course that people have paid to attend or they are giving an after dinner speech that people have *chosen* to come and listen to.

In contrast, most of the audiences that you present to will not have chosen to come and listen to you speak; they are there because it is a requirement of their job. Your audience will generally consist of individuals who all have busy schedules and who will think that your presentation drags them away from their day-to-day work.

People already feel that there are too many presentations and that most of them go on far too long. There are very few circumstances in which you will find an audience that is enthusiastic about what you are about to say. When you get up to speak the most common thought likely to be in people's minds will be 'This had better be short, to the point, and worth listening to as I've got a stack of things to do!'



Your overriding concern when preparing a presentation should be twofold:

1. You need to engage with the audience as quickly as possible, preferably within the first ten seconds of your presentation.
2. You need to get your message across in such a way that the audience stays engaged.

If you fail to do either of these things then you will be seen to be committing the unforgivable workplace crime of *wasting people's time*.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ There are three types of presentation that you as a manager will need to make as part of your normal responsibilities: to your team, to senior management, and to other groups.
- ✓ Presentations to your own team are usually low-key events that don't justify much preparation but which still need to be clear and concise.
- ✓ Presentations to senior management usually involve reporting progress or making recommendations. They are important to your career and need to be planned in such a way that they can be cut short if necessary.

- ✓ Presentations to other groups often justify significant preparation because you are often aiming to change the audience's perceptions or behavior.
 - ✓ Most people are preoccupied with their day-to-day work and will 'zone out' of a presentation if they think it does not affect them directly.
 - ✓ You have about ten seconds to capture people's attention at the start of your presentation and you need to make a continuous effort to retain this engagement right up to the moment you finish speaking.
-

Everyday Management Presentations

Most books about presentations have been written by people who make their living from teaching high-impact presentation skills. High-impact presentations are those that are designed to 'sell' something to the audience. They include sales presentations, those that need to convince the audience to accept a big change of some sort, and those designed to entertain the audience, like an after dinner speech. These books tend to make certain assumptions. For example:

Any worthwhile presentation needs to have a 'wow' factor

You always have enough time to prepare an unforgettable presentation

Your audience needs to be entertained

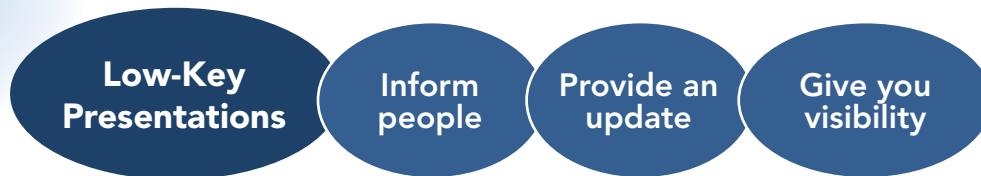
These assumptions may be valid for high-impact presentations but they don't apply to most management presentations because:

You will usually be presenting information rather than a 'vision'

Quite often you won't be able to justify much time to prepare

Your audience wants you to be brief, so they can get back to work

Whilst it is true that you may occasionally have to make a high-impact presentation, most of the time the information you are presenting will be fairly low key, and you will struggle to find the time to prepare and practice in your already busy schedule. This means that you need a quick and easy method of structuring information so that you can present it in a way that gets your key message across as efficiently as possible.



It is important to note that when we talk about a low-key presentation it does not mean that the information is unimportant or that you don't need to prepare properly. A low-key presentation is simply one where you need to inform others or keep them up to date on an issue or project. You may use it as an opportunity to boost team morale, or make a recommendation to senior management, but you are not 'selling a vision,' trying to change people's attitudes in some major way, or trying to entertain them.

Nonetheless, these low-key presentations are important because you are visible to your own team or to your senior management, both of which are important to your career because:

- A motivated team who will go the extra mile for you will enable you to achieve more.
- Being seen as a dependable performer in front of an audience can help your promotion prospects.

Remember, when it comes to presentations about the benefits of a recently completed project or a new process, people tend to assign disproportionate credit for the work to the individual who makes the presentation, even if that person is presenting on behalf of a team. In fact, the stronger the presenter the more credit the audience assigns to him or her. This is not exactly fair but it is another good reason for becoming an accomplished presenter if you want to get on.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Most management presentations are fairly low-key and involve passing on information.
- ✓ These low-key presentations are still important because you are visible to your own team or to your senior management, both of which are important to your career.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Presentations

Some managers hold the mistaken belief that routine progress reports to their team must be formally presented. In reality, it is best to ask yourself if sitting in a presentation is the most productive use of your team's time. If your answer is 'No' then send an email or intranet file to convey to your team the same information without interrupting or reducing your team's productivity.



If your answer is 'Yes' then you need to spend the time properly planning what actually needs to be presented and keeping a tight control on the scope of the presentation. It is usually a better idea to give a presentation only when you have something exceptional or urgent to report, or something that would benefit from being delivered face to face.

The principal advantage of any presentation is that you can interact with your audience. If you are presenting information in a document, on the other hand, you have to make certain assumptions about your audience. This means that you present your topics and arguments in such a way that meets the preconceived image you have of the audience. If your assumptions are incorrect, then the information that you send out may not have the effect you want it to.

The second advantage is that when presenting you are able to observe the reactions of the audience based on their body language and can thus revise certain elements of your delivery on the spot. For example:

If you notice a lot of blank looks when you are presenting a certain point then you can address this by going into more detail or providing context so that everyone understands what you are saying.

Presentations offer you the opportunity to:

Interact with audience

Observe their reactions

Gauge level of their understanding

Emphasize key points

Assess the level of acceptance of your message

In addition to helping you immediately gauge your audience's degree of understanding, a presentation allows you to assess the level of acceptance of or resistance to what you are saying. For example:

Making a short presentation to your team about a proposed change in working practices can give you a good indication of whether the change is going to be readily accepted or not.

This facet of presentations should not be overlooked because it offers you an immediate insight into the prevailing mood. By picking up on nonverbal signals within your audience you can try to address any immediate concerns that people might have.

The number of ways you can emphasize your key points is much greater in a presentation than a written report. In a document you can only repeat or place emphasis on a point once. In a presentation you can do both of these things, plus you can alter the style of your delivery to suit the needs of your audience and message, which is extremely useful.

Examples of ways to emphasize key points in a presentation include:

Using pauses, speaking more loudly, becoming more animated, or moving closer to the audience.

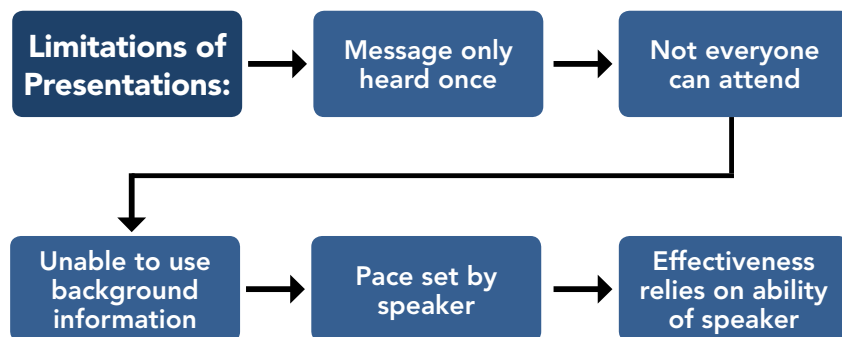
Another advantage of presentations is that you can use visual aids to explain and describe your points, and thus help your audience to fully comprehend your message. For example,

Visual Aids enable the presenter to:

- *Use interactive illustrations*
- *Build up an image to aid understanding of concepts*
- *Show a sample or prototype*
- *Draw attention to or emphasize key elements*
- *Use pictures or diagrams instead of words.*

As a presenter you can also include demonstrations. This can be particularly useful for things like software or physical products. This enables you to tell a story in a more engaging way than you can in a formal document.

Finally, when you make a presentation you know exactly who has attended and you are able to assess their degree of comprehension through questioning and observation. This is impossible with a written report because you have no way of gauging the level of understanding your recipients have gained. Some people may have only scanned it and others may have not read it at all.



Whilst there are many advantages to presenting your message, these must be weighed against the limitations of this form of communication. Most notable is the fact that your audience only has this one opportunity to hear and understand your message. In many working environments it is impractical to have everyone attend a single meeting so you will have to rely on those who attended passing on the information, or you will have to present your message more than once.

If your presentation does not have a handout then attendees will have no formal point of reference to use in the future. So a presentation does not always mean that you can avoid

preparing a document; in some instances you will have to do both. Some of the audience may have taken notes but how do you know if these notes are an accurate reflection of your message? They also have no way of rereading or passing on your message as they would if it was written in a document.

Audiences often like to have access to background information to help them understand issues and problems. You simply do not have the time to provide all this during your presentation, but you can provide references and a glossary within a handout to support this need. Such tools will help you to overcome the problem of presenting to an audience where the individuals have differing levels of understanding and expertise.

An obvious limitation of presentations is that their effectiveness relies on the ability of the speaker to deliver the message. The speaker also may not be able to set a pace appropriate to the audience's level of understanding.

Many good speakers lose their audience's attention because their preferred style is to have questions only at the end. Whilst allowing questions at the end is often recommended, it runs the risk that your audience will switch off from what you are saying or forget a valuable question or query by the time you have finished your presentation. As an effective presenter there are several simple techniques you can use to avoid this. For example:

- You can prompt for questions at the end of each point or section of your presentation.
- You can note questions as they arise on a flip chart so nothing is lost.

After making a judgment on whether or not a presentation is the most effective and productive way for you to convey your message you need to carefully plan it. You need to clearly define its aim and key message. You also need to make sure that you understand your audience and ensure your presentation overcomes as many of the limitations as possible.

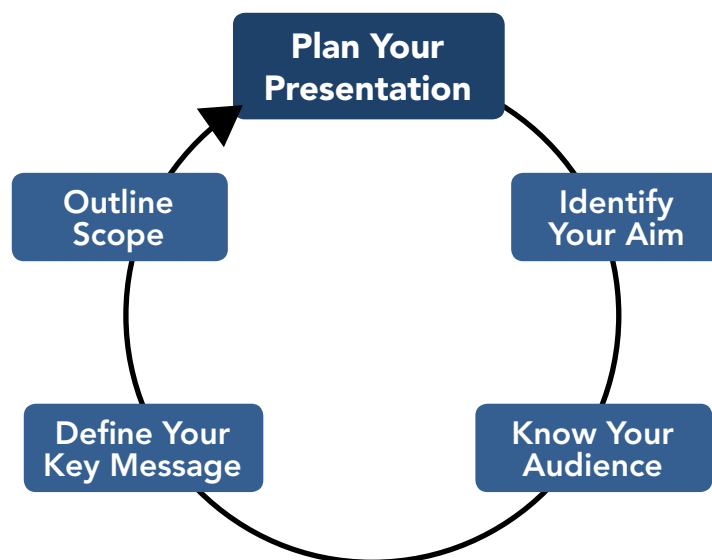
By working through the stages of planning a presentation outlined in the next section you can ensure that your presentation achieves its aim.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Presentations offer you the opportunity to: interact with your audience, observe their reactions, gauge the level of their understanding, emphasize key points, and assess the level of acceptance of your message.
- ✓ The disadvantages of presentations include: the message is only heard once at the pace of delivery set by the speaker; some people may be unable to attend; and the effectiveness relies very much on the ability of the speaker.

Planning Your Presentation

The amount of effort you put into planning your presentation will depend on how much impact it needs to have and how much time you can justify. In the case of a sales presentation that you are going to give regularly, this could amount to several days. Similarly, if the presentation is important to your career then you should spend as much time as you have available.



Irrespective of how much time you have, the best approach to planning is to use a method that will give you a usable structure as quickly and efficiently as possible. You can always refine it later if necessary. There are four key stages to planning your presentation:

1. Identify your aim
2. Know your audience
3. Define your key message statement
4. Outline the scope.

Identify Your Aim

The first stage of the planning process is to decide on the precise aim of your presentation. This should be in the form of a goal that summarizes what it is that *you* personally want to achieve from delivering it.



Your aim is *not* the 'title' of the presentation and it is *not* something that you want your audience to see. Its purpose is to concentrate your own mind on exactly what it is you are trying to achieve.

If you think of your presentation in terms of a journey then your aim describes the final destination that you want to take the audience to from wherever they are at the moment. Even in low-key presentations, where the primary objective is to inform the audience, there is usually a secondary objective, which is at least as important because it supports your own goals. For example:

Scenario 1

You are giving a monthly progress report to your own team:

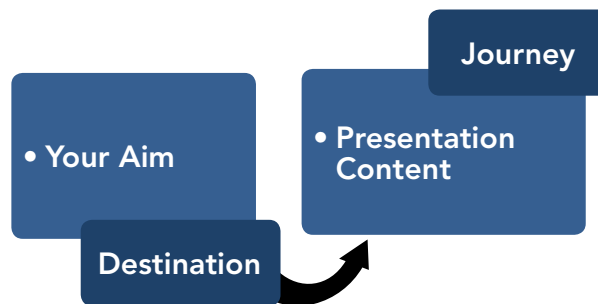
- *Its primary objective is to keep the team up to date with progress.*
- *Your secondary objective may be to find out if there are any group concerns that you need to address in order to preempt problems or boost team morale.*

Scenario 2

You are giving a presentation to other managers in your own organization:

- *Your primary objective is to inform them about some changes that you are making that will affect them.*
- *Your secondary objective is to answer any concerns that they may raise, and to get them onside and enthusiastic about implementing those changes.*

In both of these examples the secondary objective is the one that provides the justification for presenting the information rather than simply sending it out as an email or document. It is also the one more closely aligned to your own personal goals.



From the outset you must be absolutely clear on the aim of your presentation so that you stay focused throughout the preparation phase. The following table gives you some examples of the different aims you could have for three different types of presentations you may need to give.

Audience	Your Presentation Aim
Your team	Persuade them to work extra hours and through next weekend Persuade them to accept the new shift system Persuade them to accept a change to organizational culture
Senior Management	Persuade them to give me extra funding for my project Make recommendations based on my research and findings Justify my future budget Explain reasons for poor customer satisfaction data
Other Groups	Persuade customers that price rise is justified by new product features Persuade prospective customer to shortlist our organization Get support from other departmental managers for new project Educate support team about customer needs

All of these example presentation aims are written from your own point of view. In the case of presentations to your own team, the aim will be something that you have decided on from the outset. In the case of presentations to senior management, you will usually have been asked to make the presentation and your aim may be rather less obvious.

For instance, you have been asked to present the figures on the budget you have requested for next year. You may decide that your real aim is to justify these figures and prevent them from being reduced. Changing your aim from the obvious

'Inform the board of my budget requirements for next year'

to the more precise

'Justify to the board my budget requirements for next year'

is a subtle change in wording, but makes a significant difference to how you decide to structure your presentation because it explicitly changes the focus from simply reporting the figures to gaining a commitment to accept them. Using the word 'justify' will focus your mind on defending the parts of your budget that you see as vulnerable, for example by showing how they fit into your organization's strategic plans.

Another example would be a situation where you have been asked to present the results of a customer satisfaction survey in which the organization has performed poorly. Changing your aim from

'Inform the board of results of customer satisfaction survey'

to

'Explain reasons for poor customer satisfaction data and suggest options to fix the problems'

will keep you focused on the most important aspect of the material you are going to present: in this case, suggesting options to fix the problems that have been identified. If you just presented the survey results without this focus, it could look as though you didn't understand the implications of the survey, you didn't think any action was necessary, or you had no ideas about how the problems could be addressed. Changing the focus of your presentation from just reporting the results demonstrates that you have already grasped the negative implications, have identified the main reasons for this perception, and are able to suggest possible solutions.

Remember, think of your aim as a final destination, and your presentation as the journey to it. Everything in your presentation must contribute to delivering your audience to that clearly defined destination.

The aim is to some extent dependent on your audience, which is not a problem when you are presenting to your own team or senior management because they are familiar to you and you will usually have a clear idea of what the 'starting point' of the journey is. In other words, you know what they already know and what is important to them. Knowing these things makes it relatively straightforward to work out what you need to tell them to take them to the destination. However, when you are presenting to the 'other groups' category, you may need to spend some time thinking about the make up of the audience before you can make this judgment.

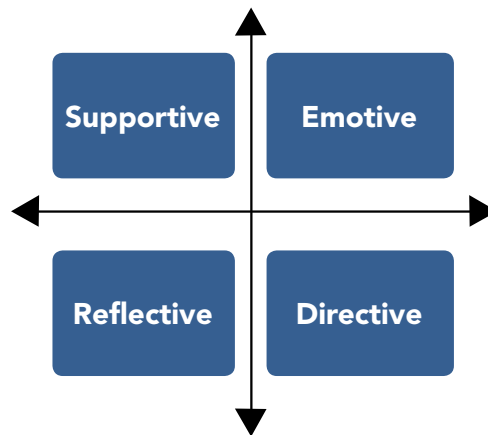
KEY POINTS

- ✓ The amount of effort you put into planning your presentation will depend on how much impact it needs to have and how much time you can justify.
- ✓ Use a method that will give you a usable structure as quickly and efficiently as possible; you can always refine it later if necessary.
- ✓ The first stage of the planning process is to decide on the precise aim of your presentation. This focuses your mind on what it is that you are trying to achieve.
- ✓ The aim represents what you want the presentation to achieve. It is NOT the title of the presentation.

Know Your Audience

Several authors have attempted to make audience profiling scientific by assigning supposedly characteristic personality traits to particular types of job or levels of seniority. This type of audience profiling began in the 1960s with the work of Manning and Reece.

Their model for audience profiling suggests that members of your audience will fall into one of four categories—Supportive, Emotive, Directive, and Reflective. This provides you as a presenter with four discrete patterns of behavior that you can easily recognize and predict.



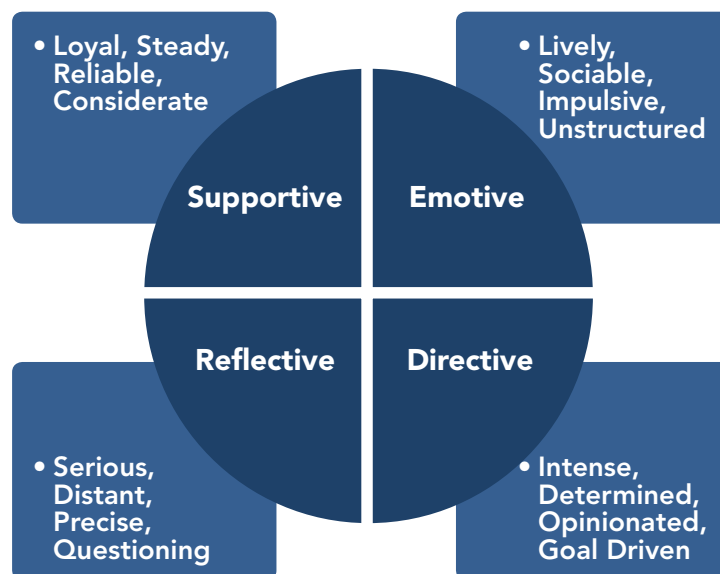
Each category has its own needs and preferences that give you general guidance on how they interact and relate to other people and is indicated by the axes.

Horizontal axis—represents the level of dominance an individual will display. (Low to High dominance from left to right.)

Vertical axis—represents the levels of sociability an individual shows in their behavior. (High to Low sociability from top to bottom.)

Personality Types

Manning and Reece went on to describe the traits associated with each personality type and provide presentation guidelines for each one. The diagram below gives you an overview of each type of personality you will find in your audience.



Their descriptions for each type are:

- **Supportive personalities**—are high in sociability and low in dominance, often fearing change. They tend to be loyal, steady, solid, and reliable good workers.
- **Emotive personalities**—are people-oriented, preferring broad pictures to too much detail. They tend to be sociable, animated, spontaneous, unstructured, and welcome change.
- **Directive personalities**—are high in dominance but low in sociability. They tend to come across as intense, pushy, determined, and opinionated individuals who are often perceived as aggressive and unfriendly, especially if they encounter resistance to their goals at work.
- **Reflective personalities**—are low in both dominance and sociability. These individuals tend to be serious, precise, and questioning, often appearing aloof and stuffy. They often occupy product-related jobs such as scientists and engineers in which it is beneficial to be attentive to detail.

What is important is that you are able to discern each of these personalities in your audience and the proportion of the total that each one represents. The following table provides you with some general guidelines for how to make your presentation match each type.

Personality Type	Appropriate Style of Presentation
Supportive <i>(often largest part of audience)</i>	Use words that show you 'care' about consequences, especially if change is likely. In your argument show you have anticipated any contentious issues.
Emotive	Describe issues in broad terms—give details in a handout. Keep presentation short & to the point.
Directive	Keep to the facts & describe issue or problem in terms of how it affects their working practices. Cover your points or arguments in a logical sequence.
Reflective	Ensure that you give plenty of details. Give handouts to support your arguments Anticipate and prepare your answers to likely questions & objections.

This type of audience profiling has been ‘reinvented’ many times since, usually as part of some new presentation method that is being sold. Whilst it may have value, in as much as it encourages you to think in a logical way about the likely make up of your audience, its use in the real world is limited because you simply cannot define people’s personalities in such a simplistic way, and even if it were possible to do so, many audiences are fairly mixed.



Even though profiling is an imperfect tool, it can help you understand your audience. However, you will also need to make a conscious effort to assess their needs as part of your planning in order to create an effective presentation that will resonate with them. There is no mystery to doing this—all you need to do is to think about what is important to your audience.

Presentation Aim: Show benefits of the recent investment.		
Your Team	Needs to know	Impact and changes to operational processes and procedures
Senior Management		Savings & efficiencies gained
Other Group		The new benefits they will have

For example, if you have been asked to present the benefits of a recent investment your audiences would have different needs:

- Your team or those lower in the organization need to know what the impact is on their day-to-day work.
- The executive need to know what efficiencies have been gained as against money spent and benefits accrued.
- Others, such as Users of a product, need to know what new benefits or features they now have.

Having already established what you need to communicate to your audience you must consider what they themselves want to get from the presentation. The best that you can hope for is that people will go away with an understanding of one main theme or at least the gist of what you are talking about.



This may sound rather pessimistic, but in reality it is usually very difficult to achieve much more than this with the majority of any audience. A small percentage might be prepared to put in the required effort to follow your arguments and the finer points of your reasoning, but most will not.

Therefore, as part of your planning you must think carefully about the *one* thing you want your audience to remember. You have to be absolutely clear about it right from the start of your planning and preparation.

Once you have established the 'need' of your audience and the 'main' point you want them to walk away with you have to take into account the size of your audience. The bigger your audience the greater its diversity in terms of background and level of knowledge will be. Generally speaking, this means that the size of the audience will have a bearing on the level of complexity and detail that you can put into your presentation. In general the larger the audience the simpler the content needs to be.

Audience size will also have a bearing on the kind of visual aids that will be appropriate and whether or not you should rely on notes or a full script. Generally speaking, with small audiences it is inappropriate to read a speech verbatim from a text, whereas if you're addressing a large audience in a conference environment from a lectern then this method can be appropriate.



Before you go any further, there are three questions that you need to have the answers to, as they cover areas that could cause you problems later if you don't address them now.

1. What level of knowledge does the audience have already?

One common way many speakers fail to target the audience is they simply neglect to define their jargon. You should always take time to consider whether the audience knows the terms that you are using and if you're in any doubt you should make these clear.

If you need to cater for people who are not familiar with your own particular business area then keep this in mind from the very beginning.

The reason for asking yourself this question at this planning stage is so that you don't end up having to revisit the content or structure later on, something that takes up far more time than doing it at the start.

2. If there is an agenda, who is presenting before me and after me?

This question may be irrelevant if you are the sole person presenting to your team. But it can have a significant influence on the rest of your planning if your presentation is part of an agenda, whether for your senior management team or

an external group. This is because what has gone before you will have an impact on the mindset of your audience. Does the preceding topic support or conflict with your own?

If someone else from your business area is presenting before you then it is essential to make sure that there is no overlap or contradiction in the material you are each presenting. It can be very distressing to sit there listening to a presenter covering a topic that you yourself are waiting to present.

This situation can be avoided by checking with other presenters to make sure that there is no overlap. This problem can be made worse if your messages contradict each other.

3. Is my time allocation guaranteed?

If you are making a presentation to senior management then you will usually be told what to present and how long you have to do it. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find yourself with less time than you were initially allocated if a previous presenter overruns or something 'more important' comes up.

One strategy to deal with this scenario is to prepare a shorter backup presentation that you can deliver in just a few minutes. If your time slot is cut, then you can deliver this abridged version and then hand out a document containing a management summary and the full text of your original presentation plus any visual aids needed for clarity. Don't hand it out at the beginning otherwise you will find your audience reading it rather than listening to you.

It is usually easier to create the management summary after you have prepared the full-length presentation. However, knowing that you do need to create it together with a stand-alone document means that you can give some thought to these things whilst planning your content. This approach encourages you to prepare visual aids and to use words that work well in a document as well as your spoken presentation.

Our free eBooks 'Preparing a Presentation' and 'Delivering a Presentation' give you more information about the various visual aids available to you and how to select the best method for delivering your message. They also discuss such issues as how and when to use notes or a full script.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ It is essential to know your audience and to make sure that your presentation takes account of their existing knowledge, level of interest, and what they want from it.
- ✓ Audience profiling can help you with this, but you also need to use common sense and experience.
- ✓ Decide on the one thing that you want the audience to remember.
- ✓ Audience size has implications for the level of complexity of your presentation because, generally speaking, the bigger the audience, the less the individual members have in common and the simpler the content needs to be.
- ✓ Audience size will also have a bearing on the kind of visual aids that will be appropriate and whether or not you should rely on notes or a full script.
- ✓ If your presentation is part of a larger event then you need to know who is presenting before and after you, and whether your time slot is guaranteed.

Define Your Key Message Statement

Sir William Lawrence Bragg, the youngest person ever to receive a Nobel Prize, was a distinguished presenter of scientific information to the public. Over one hundred years ago he wrote:

'If the average member of the audience can remember with interest and enthusiasm one main theme, the lecture has been a great success.'

He went on to say,

'I like to compare the composition of a lecture to that of a picture. Is it not held that a picture should have one main center of interest? It may have numerous subsidiary features, but the composition is so cunningly arranged that when the eye falls on these and follows their placing it is subtly led back to the main center of interest and does not fall out of the picture frame.'

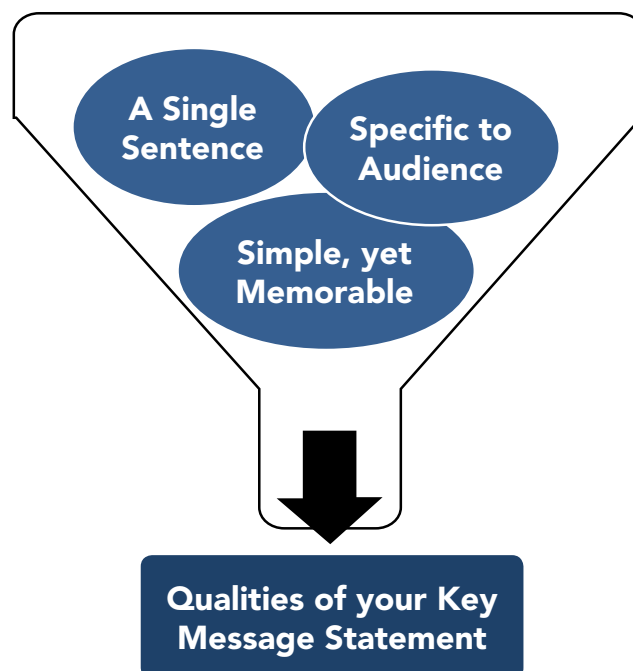
Even though Sir William was referring to lectures, his advice is equally applicable to presentations. People remember very little of the information that is presented to them and it is unrealistic to expect your audience to remember more than one key message or theme.

With that in mind your best strategy is usually to choose your 'key' message carefully and to present only so much information to ensure that it is remembered. Don't forget you can always refer that percentage of your audience who require more detail to a supporting document.

So, how do you decide what your key message is? The best way is simply to take your presentation aim and to rephrase it in such a way that it engages the audience straight-away by making it clear that what you are about to say is important to *them*.

This will give you a key message statement. It does not need to be anything particularly clever or quotable, it just needs to make clear in as few words as possible why the audience should give you their full attention right now. The average workplace audience is polite and well behaved so you can pretty much guarantee that they will give you their undivided attention for about 30 seconds before they switch off, which most of them will if they think that what you are saying does not affect them directly.

The key message statement is what you would say if you only had ten seconds in which to say it. It's what you want the audience to remember. If, after your presentation, you were to ask a member of the audience to tell you the most important thing you were trying to communicate the answer should be the key message statement.



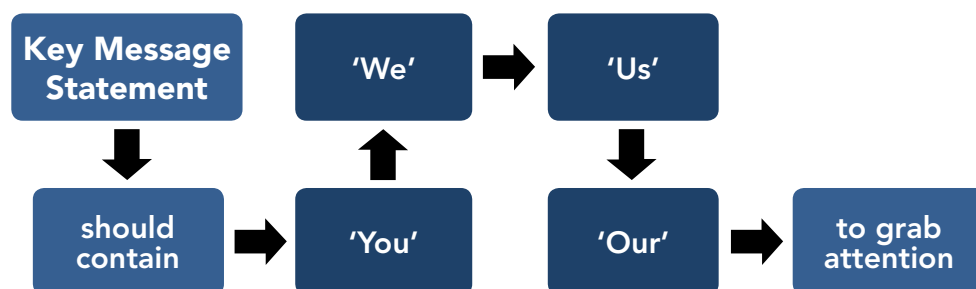
There are three characteristics your key message statement must have. It must:

- *Be created specifically for the audience*
- *Be one sentence long*
- *Be simple enough to be memorable*

Some presentation books would lead you to believe that your presentation is doomed to failure if you do not have an attention-grabbing opening statement. This is just not true with regard to most business presentations where saying something that is obviously overstated will actually detract from your credibility.

Audiences will usually give politicians, evangelists, and salesmen a certain amount of license to make grandiose statements. But you need to be careful when 'grabbing' the attention of your team or senior management that you don't overdo it and 'grab' their attention for the wrong reasons.

This does not mean that that your key message statement is unimportant, but its value does need to be kept in perspective. If you are preparing a sales presentation then it is worth thinking up something compelling that appeals to the audience on an emotional level. Whereas when you are presenting to your own team it usually pays to be honest and objective rather than emotive.



The key word here is 'usually.' There may come a time when you really do need to get your team to do something exceptional. This may be to work extra hours or accept some unpopular change to the way they work. In this instance, a key message statement with some emotional content will be effective in getting their attention because it will be novel and unexpected.

The most important words you can put into the key message statement are 'you' or 'we,' 'us' and 'our' in the context of this team, department, or organization.

The following tables show how presentation aims described in the section 'Identify Your Aim' can be changed into key message statements by reframing them in a way that is 'audience-centric.' The following tables show how an aim statement is reworded into a key message statement depending on the audience.

Note that these key message statements are generic and in practice they would be modified to suit your own particular circumstances. For example:

'Our project will enable you to improve your productivity'

could become something like...

'How project Ajax will help you answer 9/10 customer queries first time'

Audience	Your Presentation Aim	Your Key Message Statement
Your team	Persuade them to work extra hours and through next weekend Persuade them to accept the new shift system Update the team on changes to available budget Review the success of last week's exhibition Persuade them to accept a change to organizational culture	Securing our reputation as a team that can deliver Why the new system will improve the service that we can offer our customers The recent changes to our budget mean that we have to make changes What we achieved & learnt from the exhibition Your career opportunities are greater in our new culture
Senior Management	Persuade them to give me extra funding for my project Inform the board of progress against targets Make recommendations based on my research and findings Justify my future budget Explain reasons for poor customer satisfaction data	Our organization will gain significant benefits from my project We are progressing well against our targets The key benefits my research brings our organization With this budget we can increase our profits by 10% Key issues that have affected our customers' perception

Audience	Your Presentation Aim	Your Key Message Statement
Other Groups	Inform customers of new product features and benefits Persuade prospective customer to shortlist your organization Inform other departmental managers about the implications of your work Educate support team about customer needs	Product X gives you these benefits Your objectives can be attained with our service offering Our project will enable you to improve your productivity What our customers' needs mean for us

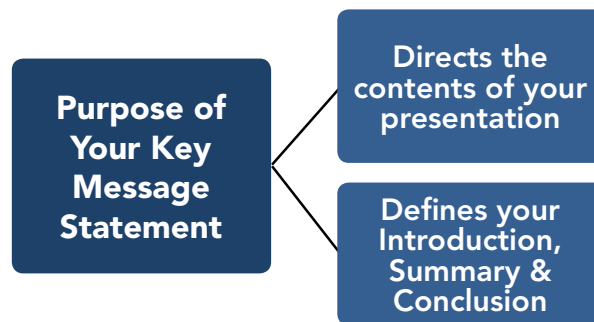
Key message statements do not need to be particularly clever. They are simply ways of stating your aim in a way that your audience can relate to because you are making it clear how it affects them personally.

Always set yourself a defined timeframe to come up with some options for your key message statement and then choose the best one. It is more important to spend time preparing your material and rehearsing it than to come up with something witty or dramatic.

More importantly, you can waste a lot of mental energy endlessly rewriting the statement when in reality it only needs to get the audience to pay attention to you at the beginning of your presentation. They will soon switch off if the content is irrelevant to them or if your delivery doesn't engage them, no matter how brilliant your opening statement may have been.

The key message statement has two purposes:

- Firstly, it makes it easier for you to decide what to exclude from your presentation. It will help you to make quick decisions about what to include and what to omit.
- Secondly, it will help you to write the introduction, summary, and conclusion of your presentation quickly and efficiently.



As you work through the remaining planning stages, you may wish to change the original wording of your key message statement so that it better reflects your presentation's aim. This often happens because working through the planning process can make you see things in a new light. This is another reason not to spend too much time on the key message statement early on.

If you decide that it really is impossible to encapsulate the aim of your presentation in one key message statement then consider making more than one presentation. If the aim is sufficiently complicated to make one key message statement impossible, then it might be better to split the content into two or three separate presentations with a gap between each one.

This will involve some additional overhead, but it may be better than presenting two or three key messages that will dilute each other if you try to get them across in the same presentation.

Two or three shorter presentations, with a break between each one, give your audience the opportunity to focus their attention on each individual message. If your presentation aim really is that broad-reaching, then it may be that the whole audience does not need to hear all of it; splitting the presentation will give you the opportunity to present only the relevant parts to specific audiences, even if these overlap somewhat.

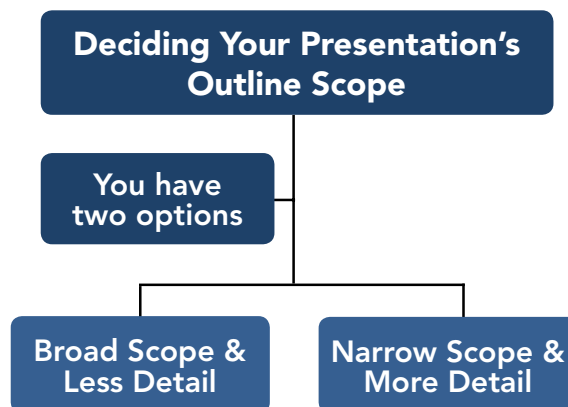
KEY POINTS

- ✓ It is unrealistic to expect your audience to remember more than one key message or theme.
- ✓ A key message statement makes it clear in as few words as possible why the audience should give you their full attention right now.

- ✓ The key message statement must: be created specifically for the audience, be one sentence long, and be simple enough to be memorable.
 - ✓ In most cases, the statement does not need to be clever, witty, or dramatic, but it does need to reflect your own aim for the presentation and should be phrased in a way that is 'audience-centric.'
 - ✓ Set yourself a strict time limit to come up with some options for your key message statement and then choose the best one; you can always amend it later.
 - ✓ A key message statement makes it easier for you to decide what to include and what to omit from your presentation.
 - ✓ It will also help you to write the introduction, summary, and conclusion of your presentation quickly and efficiently.
-

Outline Your Scope

Once you have decided on your key message statement, the next step is to define your outline scope of the material that you plan to cover. The scope of the presentation refers to how much of the topic you address and the level of detail that you go into.



Using your presentation aim and the amount of time you have been allocated you need to select one of two options:

- A broad scope with less detail, or
- A narrow scope allowing for greater detail.

Within any timeframe the broader the scope the less depth you can go into; similarly the more depth you go into the less scope you can cover. Depth and scope are things that need to be decided early on, otherwise you can waste a lot of time.

Both depth and scope are affected by how long your presentation will last. There is a well-known saying that states a successful presentation needs a good beginning and a good ending, and these should be as close together as possible.

This sentiment is truer now than ever before. Most people have more work than they can comfortably deal with in a working week and they do not appreciate having their time wasted unnecessarily. Even a well-structured and well-delivered presentation will be unpopular if the audience feels that it went on too long.



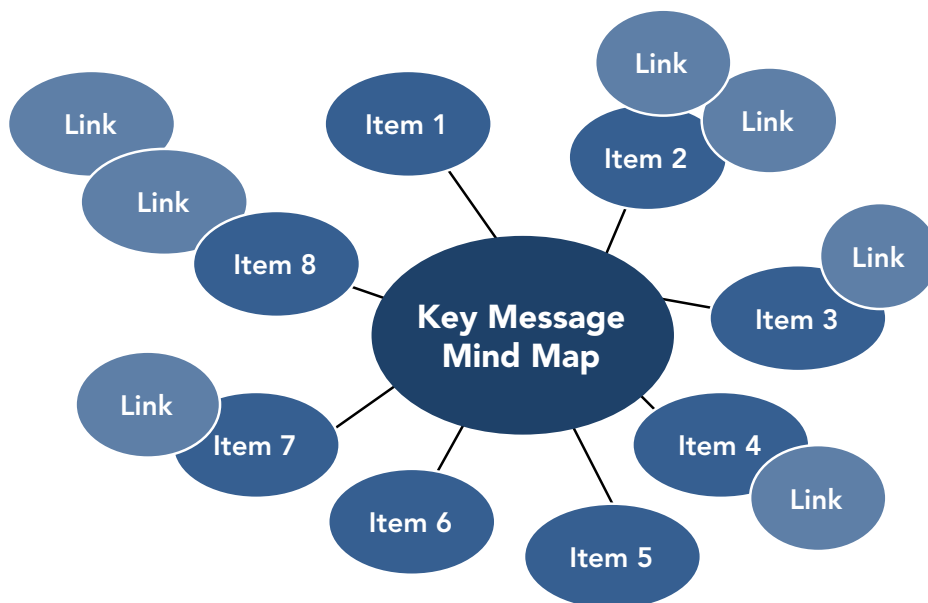
This means that you need to be very honest with yourself and make an objective judgment as to just how important your material is to your audience. One way to achieve this is to come up with your preliminary outline and ask a trusted colleague who is part of your audience for their opinion. This enables you to test these factors and to fine-tune your scope based on their feedback.

This preliminary outline is made up of a series of topics that support the key message statement. The hardest part of preparing any presentation is usually deciding what to leave out rather than what to include. You should aim to support your key message statement with three to five key points. If you have more than this you run the risk that your audience will not be able to keep all the key points in mind. Generally speaking, the more key points you present the fewer the audience will remember.



To come up with your three to five key points you need to write down all of the possible topics that might be included in the presentation. Allow yourself 10-15 minutes to brainstorm these points, which you can list or put into a simple mind map. Do not spend more time on this activity because you will very quickly hit diminishing returns. You can always add additional items later if something essential occurs to you.

The advantage of using a simple mind map over a list is that you can quickly and easily make associations, or links, as well as bringing group topics together without implying a hierarchy. Even if you are not familiar with the mind mapping approach, persevere because it is an effective and efficient planning tool.



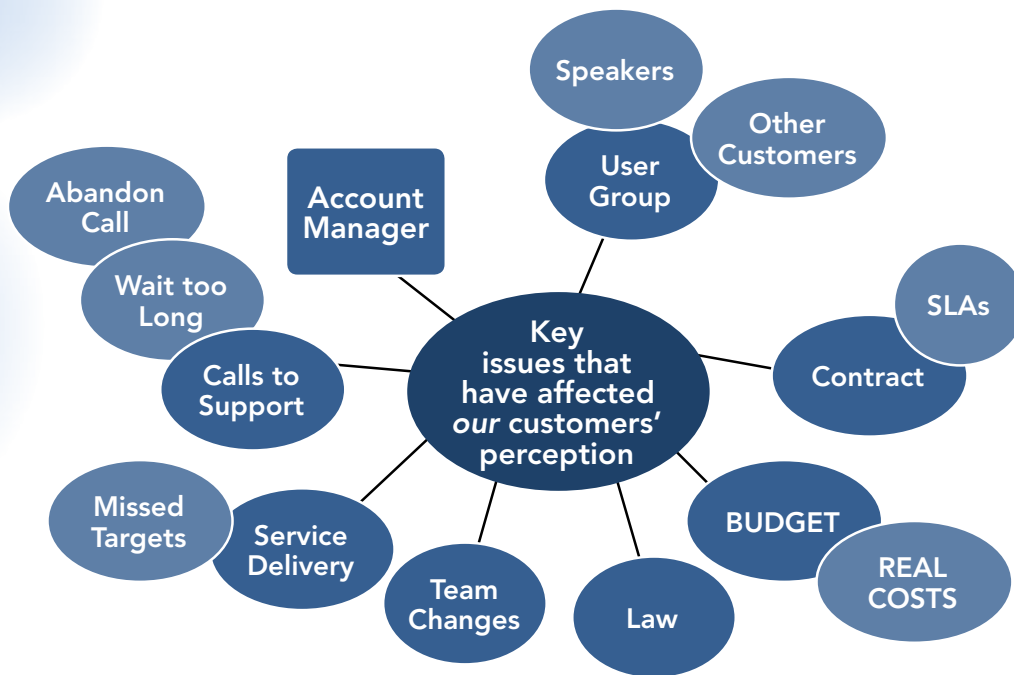
To draw a mind map, take an unlined piece of paper and write out the key statement in the center. Then brainstorm topic items and any associations around the key message. Think of all the material you might possibly use to support it. Try to be as inclusive as possible at this stage. Don't try to edit the list down, just write down everything that occurs to you and don't worry about where to begin, it doesn't matter.

The key to being successful with mind maps is to develop your own style. Tony Buzan, who is credited with popularizing this method, offers the following guidelines:

- Start in the center with an image of the topic, using at least 3 colors.
- The lines should be connected, starting from the central image. (Central lines are thicker and more organic, and get thinner as they radiate out from the center.)
- Use images, symbols, codes, and dimensions throughout your mind map.
- Select key words and print using upper or lower case letters.
- Each word/image is best alone and sitting on its own line.
- Make the lines the same length as the word/image they support.
- Use multiple colors throughout the mind map, for visual stimulation and also to encode or group.
- Use emphasis and show associations and links in your mind map.
- Use radial hierarchy, numerical order, or outlines to embrace your branches and retain clarity.

One of the key benefits a mind map has over a list is that it does not assume any particular order. It also makes it much easier to decide which topic areas can be grouped together. Remember, the purpose of your mind map is to clarify the items you need for your outline scope. It is not meant to be a work of art.

The diagram below shows an example of a mind map. This particular example is developed in the next eBook in this series 'Preparing a Presentation,' and is shown here only to illustrate how you can use mind maps to quickly impose order on a lot of apparently unrelated information.



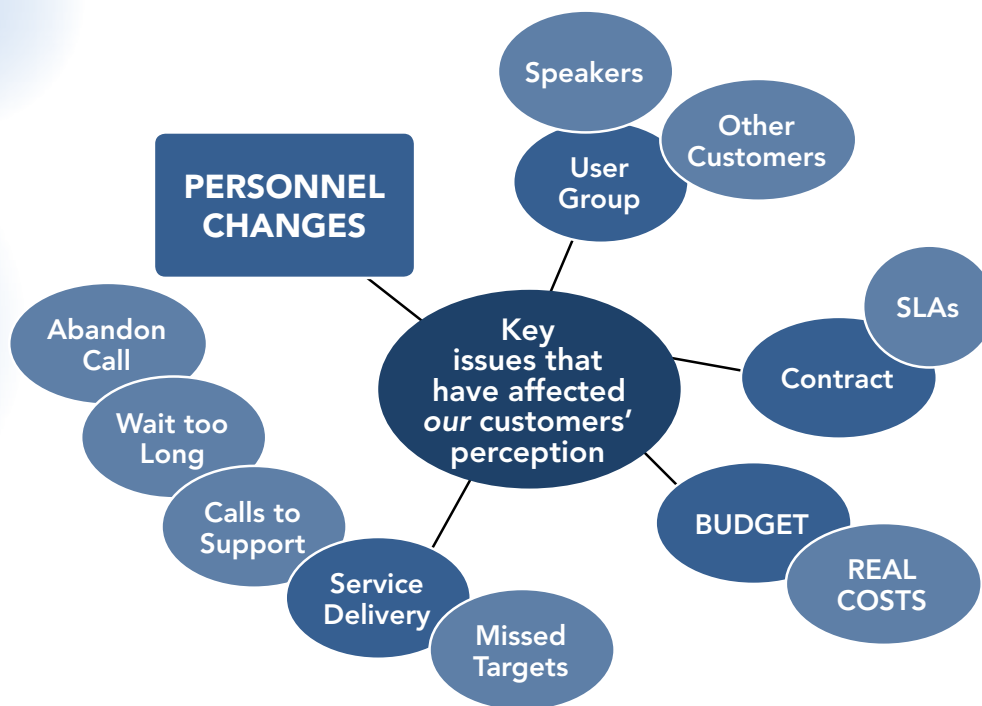
In the diagram you have eight items that you need to reduce so that you have between three and five key points to support your key message statement. Remember, the objective of the presentation is simply to convince the audience to accept your key message. Do that, and the presentation will be a success.

Firstly, you need to look at where you can combine elements so that you avoid repeating points or having to discard items unnecessarily. For example:

You may choose to combine 'Account Manager' and 'Team Changes' into one item, 'Personnel Changes.'

This task should take you no more than five minutes and it is important to get it done quickly without worrying too much; you can always split the items later if necessary.

Secondly, you need to identify items you can discard, for example 'Law.' This means those that aren't essential to your key message statement or those you don't have sufficient time for. You must keep only the essential points.



Continue this exercise until you have between three and five key points that support your message statement. You may find this difficult if you feel you have more than five legitimate points, but don't forget: the more key points you present, the fewer the audience will remember! Having more than five key points also increases the likelihood that the audience will become bored and switch off.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Using your presentation aim and the amount of time you have been allocated, select whether you need a broad scope with less detail, or a narrow scope with greater detail.
- ✓ A successful presentation needs a good beginning and a good ending, and these should be as close together as possible.
- ✓ A presentation needs three to five key points to support the key message statement.
- ✓ Use a mind map to get all of the possible content documented in a way that lends itself to being reorganized as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- ✓ The audience will only be able to take so much on board. The more material you present the more you risk individual audience members switching off.

Summary

As a manager, there are several types of presentation that you will need to make as part of your normal responsibilities. These include presentations to your own team, to senior management, to internal groups outside of your reporting structure, and to external groups like suppliers, customers, and partners.

In almost all of these cases, individual audience members will be preoccupied with their day-to-day work and will 'zone out' of a presentation if they think it does not affect them directly. People already feel that there are too many presentations and that most of them go on far too long. There are very few circumstances in which you will find an audience to be enthusiastic about what you are about to say. When you get up to speak the most common thought in people's minds is usually 'This had better be short, to the point, and worth listening to as I've got a stack of things to do!'

This means that any presentation you give should engage the audience as quickly as possible and should keep them focused on your message all of the time you are speaking. To achieve this, you need to develop an approach to preparing presentations that gives you a clear 'key message' and supporting structure, so that even when you don't have much time to prepare you can still capture and hold the audience's attention. This eBook recommends a four-stage process to achieve this.

Identify Your Aim

The first stage of the planning process is to decide on the precise aim of your presentation. This focuses your mind on what it is that you are trying to achieve.

Know Your Audience

It is essential to know your audience and to make sure that your presentation takes account of their existing knowledge. Audience profiling can help you with this, but you also need to use common sense and experience.

Audience size has implications for the level of complexity of your presentation because, generally speaking, the bigger the audience, the less the individual members have in common, and the simpler the content needs to be. It will also have a bearing on the kind of visual aids that will be appropriate and whether or not you should rely on notes or a full script.

Define Your Key Message Statement

You can only expect your audience to remember one key message or theme. This should be summarized in a key message statement, which forms the title of your presentation.

The best approach is to set yourself a strict time limit to come up with some options for your key message statement and then choose the best one because you can always amend it later if you need to. The key message statement is important because it makes it easier for you to decide what to include and what to omit from your presentation.

Outline Scope

A presentation needs three to five key points to support the key message statement. The most efficient way to decide on these is to use a mind map to get all of the possible content documented, and then to create your key points based on your aim, audience, and the key message statement.

Once you have identified:

- the aim of your presentation;
- the key message statement; and
- three to five key points that support the key message statement

you are ready for the next stage, which is to take this information and to create a presentation that is well structured, clear, and concise. This process is described in detail in the eBook 'Preparing a Presentation,' which you can download free from this website.

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