Carpe Geo Finishing School: Presentations

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AppGeo

Q: What is a presentation?

A: according to *The Oxford Dictionary:*

> The process of presenting a topic to an audience. It is typically a demonstration, introduction, lecture, or speech meant to **inform**, **persuade**, **inspire**, **motivate**, or to **build good will** or to **present a new idea** or product.
>
> [emphasis added]

Q: What is <u>not</u> a presentation?

A: Your slide deck is not the presentation. What *you* say and convey through story, tone, body language, gestures, and presence before your audience is the presentation.

The deck is a minor (and optional!) piece of supporting material. Whatever you do, don't treat the deck as the heart of your presentation.

A good rule of thumb is to **create your presentation as if you have no slides at all.** How will your story unfold? What will you describe? What key piece of information are you hoping to convey?

Getting Ready

What's at stake?

First impression

Credibility

Thought leadership

Sale

New colleagues
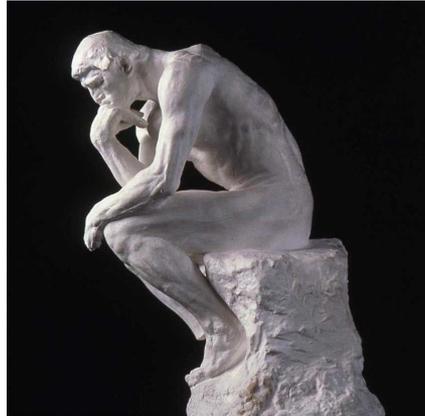
→ **Treat every presentation as important**, because it is!

Know your audience

Is this a formal presentation? Or a situation where you want the audience to engage? For engagement, it it usually better to withhold discussion until you have completed your presentation. Otherwise, you risk losing momentum, losing your storyline, not covering key points, etc.

Audience dynamics

Friendly? Or likely to oppose your ideas?

Similar in background knowledge? Or wide range?

Time of day impacts

Setting impacts

Contextual impacts (from other speakers, incidents, etc)

➔ Audiences generally are "pulling for you" and want you to succeed.
➔ Everyone *likes* an engaging speaker, even if they disagree with content.

Constructing Your Presentation

The importance of storyline

We have evolved to absorb stories as a primary means of communication. **Stories engage us**. Stories store more completely in memory.

Stories have a beginning, middle, and end. The **arc** of a story describes the emotional flow and climax.

We meet our hero, life is good. Adversity strikes. Our hero digs deep and overcomes it to triumph in the end. (Gettysburg Address, MLK's "I have a dream")

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Focus on "Why?"

Build your storyline to answer the "why" question. Why should I care? Why is this different or better?

Simon Sinek: start with why

https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?

Organizing your content

Try starting with *Post-it*™ notes. Write **one** key point or idea on each *Post-it*. When you have your raw material, start organizing the *Post-it*s into a storyboard. Add missing pieces. Remove redundant or extraneous ideas. Consolidate wherever you can by combining similar ideas into one stronger idea. Be ruthless at this stage and strive for a **strong story supported by the most compelling points**. Anything tangential should be removed. Review your storyboard with others and adjust.

Start creating your slide deck only after your storyboard is complete.

Images are stronger than text on your slides

You should tell the story, as opposed to writing the words on your slides.

Images are powerful -- use them to create strong associations with your ideas.

The words on your slides are an outline or key phrases and are not for you to read, verbatim. You should be explaining, using stories, illuminating those key phrases. Provide color commentary.

Do not assume that an explanation is obvious and therefore unnecessary. Explain your points clearly.

This slide is intentionally ironic.

Slide transitions and animations

Modern presentation software offers many different "flashy" transitions between slides. Use these **sparingly**, or not at all, as they draw attention away from your message and shift it to something unimportant. Fades are among the the classiest transitions and can lend an air of more thoughtful pacing to your deck.

Animations can be very effective, but again, use them only where necessary so that they will be impactful and stand out from the rest of your slides.

Learn to **advance your slides without pausing** your verbal delivery. That way, the slides will more naturally augment what you are saying.

Personalize and connect

It's much more compelling to use **personal stories** than abstractions or hypothetical examples.

Self-deprecation can be an effective way for you to make it easy for the audience to relate to you (you're just like them, flaws and all!), and therefore establish a stronger connection that can propel you through your presentation.

A personalized connection with your audience will have them "on your side" and more receptive to your ideas.

Learn your lines

Speaking directly to your audience **without slides** (or more likely, from a black, blank slide inserted in your deck at the appropriate point) can be **very powerful**, as it puts all of the emphasis on you and what you are saying. This is an excellent strategy for high-impact, high-importance presentations.

In these instances, you will not have visual cues from your slides, so it is important that you say exactly the right things, with a smooth and flawless delivery. The best way to do that is to **write out the script** for those sections and **practice** it until you have it **memorized**. It is likely that you will edit and improve your script based on the practice sessions.

Delivery

The importance of practice

Practice (or lack thereof) is the Number One Issue with most presentations!

Presentations are a **skill**, and just like any other skill (playing a musical instrument, hitting baseballs, etc), **you improve with practice.**

Practice sessions should mimic the actual presentation: speak out loud, stand up, use your slides, gesture, etc.

Time yourself! You will be surprised that you take longer than you think.

Video-record yourself! You will see things that annoy you, and fix them.

Stage presence

Presentations are theater. You need to do some things that are not comfortable in typical one-on-one or small group conversations:

- Project yourself -- you are in command and when you take charge, your audience will follow you
- Speak clearly and loudly*
- Gesture boldly

* interestingly, a great way to create emphasis is to slow down and lower your volume, so that your audience will "lean in" to hear you.

Step into your presenter role

Here is a tip that has helped me:

At the start of your presentation, **take a tiny step forward** to remind yourself that you are stepping into your presentation, leaving your tentative self behind, and giving yourself fully to the audience.

Like magic, it works.

Posture

Stand tall. Do not slouch. Do not shrink behind the podium.

Keep your hands out of your pockets. Instead, use them to hold the mic, hold the clicker for advancing slides, or for making bold gestures.

Watch a video-recording of your practice session and you will see the "nervous tics" that are annoying. Being aware of them makes them easy to overcome.

Poor posture — Forward head, Flat back

Good posture — Balanced upright posture

Poor posture — Forward head, Rounded shoulders, Weak abdominal muscles, Sway back
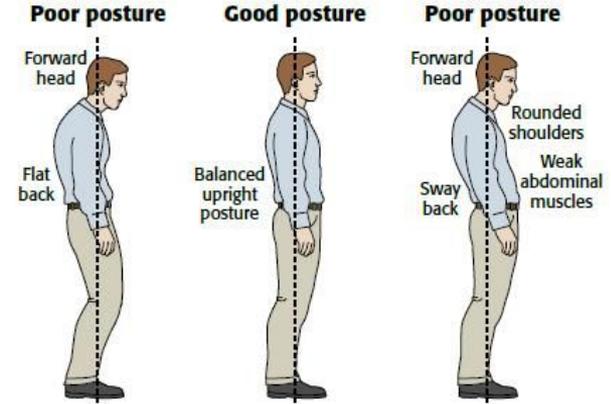
Big gestures

If you want to point to something on your deck, it's better to walk over to the screen and make a **big, full-arm gesture** than to use a laser pointer or point with your finger.

This is theater; you need to be overly dramatic in your gestures. Subtlety does not work from the front of a large room.

"Umm"

Many speakers do this, and audiences are nearly always annoyed with this subconscious verbal tic.

The best way to stop doing this is to **make yourself aware** that you are doing it (most are not). A couple of effective strategies include:

- Have a sympathetic colleague sit in the back and drop a penny into a can every time you say "Umm". Only during practice sessions , of course.
- Video-record yourself and watch the playback.
- Keep score.

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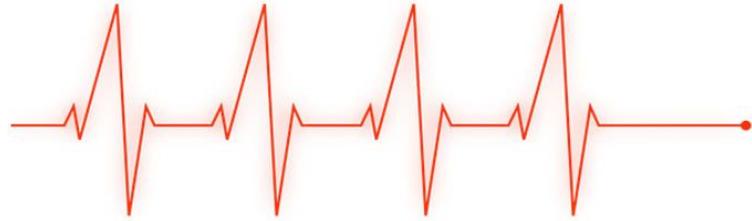
Often, **speakers go too fast**. A presentation is not like a one-on-one or small group conversation and it requires different pacing. The best advice is to **slow down**. It may feel unnatural, but your audience will appreciate it.

Pauses are an effective way to **create emphasis**. Plan for them strategically as you design your presentation. Tell the audience you have something important to say, then pause before you say it.

Another good method for emphasis is to **repeat key points**. You can say "this is worth repeating", then pause, and repeat it.

Live demos

These are risky! In many situations, it's better to mimic a live presentation with a carefully constructed set of slides; "*Near-live*". Few will know the difference and the risk is removed. In some ways, this is actually better, as there will be no waiting for potentially slow online responses.

If you must do a live demo, **have an offline backup** ready to go.

In conference settings, it's common for WiFi to go down or be very slow.

Remote presentations (via web video sharing)

This is a tough one. You give up <u>a lot</u>. Preference should always be to present in front of the group in person, but this is not always possible.

You will probably not be able to see your audience and therefore you will not get the audience feedback cues that are so important. You will be "flying blind."

It can also be difficult to have both you (as presenter) and your slides visible to the audience. If it's not possible for both views to be enabled, you may need to toggle between you, giving explanations, and your slides. Try to avoid being an audio-only presenter.

Facility Factors

Dress and stage placement

You can expect to be presenting in a semi-darkened room, so **avoid dark clothing**. Bright, sunny colors are best. If wearing a suit or jacket, remove the jacket to present yourself as more approachable.

Never stay seated! Even if other presenters do this (in small, round-table settings). Stand and command attention, preferably at the front of the room.

When you arrive, assess the space by standing in the back of the room.

Generally **stand to left of screen** (audience perspective). We read left to right.

Avoid standing behind a podium. Step to the side, if possible, toward center.

Own the room

This is your presentation. Your time. Your chance to shine.

Avoid starting with any sort of apology (*I'm not very good at this, That last speaker will be really hard to follow, I hope I don't put you to sleep*)

Watch the room as you speak: Are they paying attention? If there are signs of inattention, you may need to adjust your delivery: louder, slower (most err on side of too fast), repeat things for emphasis, etc.

Microphone skills

Yes, it feels unnatural to hold the mic, and yes, it makes you self-conscious. Get over it. Never ask to skip using the mic.

Hold the mic like an ice cream cone you are ready to lick, close to your mouth. If it sounds too loud, the person handling the sound board can adjust.

Maintain the mic position throughout your presentation. Change hands if you need to. Do not point with the mic or allow it to drop away from your mouth.

If you use a lavalier mic, clamp it high on your clothing.
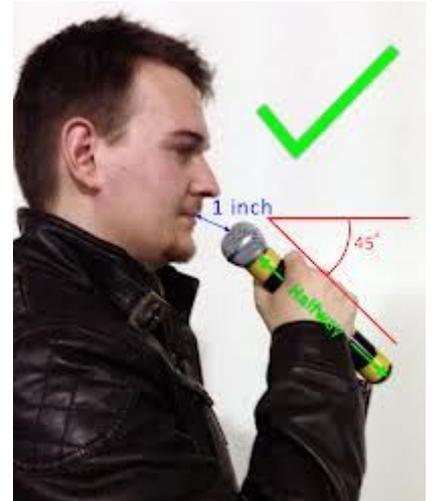
Setup & testing

Good presenters do not leave anything to chance. Load your presentation file on the computer connected to the projector *ahead of time*. Nobody wants to watch you set up during your presentation time.

Test out everything beforehand: lighting (adjust as needed to maintain screen visibility and provide adequate light for you to be clearly visible), sound system (using someone at the back of the room to verify -- better to err on the side of higher volume; someone in the audience may be hearing-impaired), WiFi if planning a live demo, projector (especially brightness and focus).

Redundancy and Plan B

Spit happens. Be ready to deal with it. Best approach is to quickly try to recover, and if necessary, abandon the original approach and **get back "on message"** in some form as quickly and unapologetically as you can.

Bring your presentation on at least 2 devices (cloud, laptop, thumb drive)

Other things to be prepared for (all have happened to me):

- WiFi down
- Projector doesn't work
- Other speakers went long and you get a shortened time allocation
- Fire alarm goes off

Et Cetera

Practice, practice, practice!

If you remember nothing else about presentations, this is the most important point.

Initial practice sessions on your own (standing up, speaking out loud, timing yourself, video-recording yourself)

Secondary practice in front of peers. This will provide audience reactions and ability to see how well you are connecting. Ask for constructive feedback, but do not allow your presentation practice to be interrupted. Ask them to make notes and take the critiques after you finish.

Favorite resources

Edward Tufte, **Visual Explanations**, Graphics Press, 1997. Chapter 3, *Explaining Magic,* provides a fascinating look at how magicians use disinformation strategies, which are the polar opposite of great presentations.

Nancy Duarte, **Resonate**, John Wiley and Sons, 2010; and **Illuminate**, Portfolio/Penguin, 2016. These two books are excellent for understanding the importance of story and storyline arc to creating great presentations.

Toastmasters (next slide)
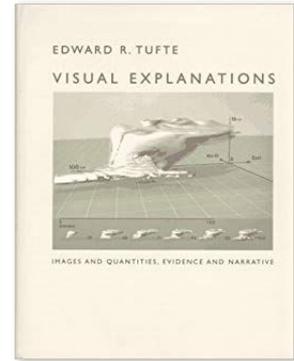
Toastmasters

This is a great organization with chapters all over the world. They have an excellent model for developing your presentation skills with other peers trying to improve theirs.

Tons of local chapters, or start a new one!

www.toastmasters.org
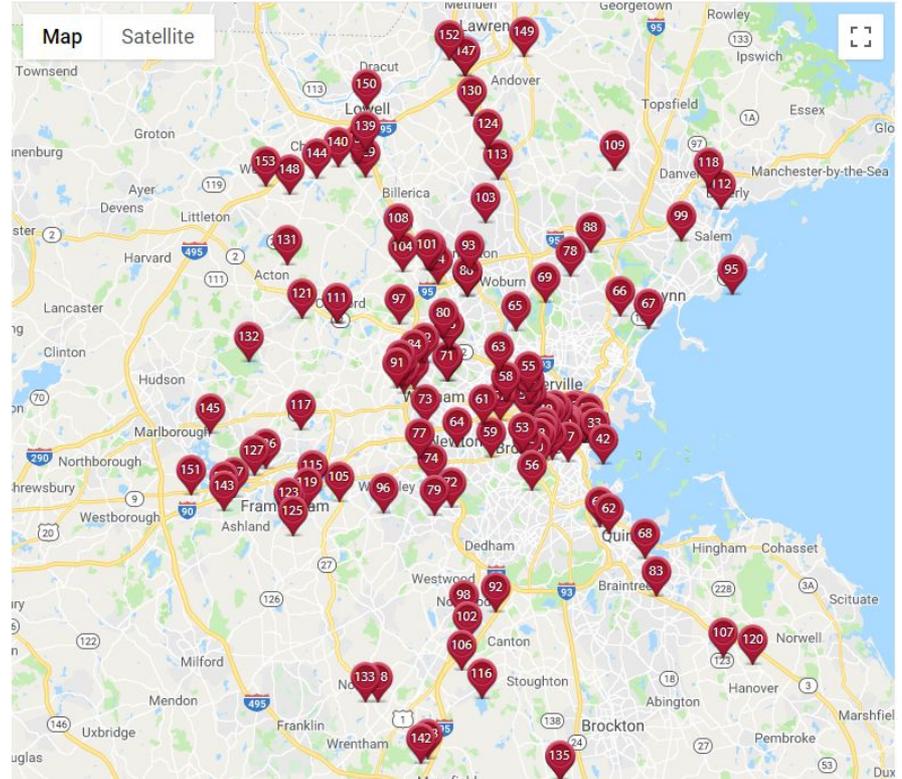
Search results for TM chapters near 24 School Street, Boston

Good luck! You CAN be a great presenter!