

Building Better Presentations

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View Todd's slides online: www.slideshare.net/treubold

View a video of this presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yis6mAnMjTc>

Learn more about the Boreas Leadership Program: <http://boreas.environment.umn.edu/>

DESIGN TIPS:

- **The opening act** – Start with a great intro slide to really grab the audience's attention.
- **Wow, now I understand** – The most effective slides reinforce or highlight the presenter's message.
- **One main point per slide** – Break complex information into multiple slides or prepare a handout that can be left behind.
- **Can you see me now** – Use a font style that is simple and large enough to be read at a distance. If you're not sure, stand at the back of the room and click through your slides to get an idea of what the audience will see. Also, limit the number of fonts in your presentation to 1-2 max (and when in doubt – go with Helvetica).
- **Put your slide titles to work** – Titles on slides should help deliver a message not merely give a name to the slide.
- **If a slide contains more than 75 words, it's likely a document** – Either try to reduce the amount of content on the slide, break the information into multiple slides or prepare a handout to accompany your presentation.
- **If a slide contains around 50 words, it's likely a teleprompter** – Remember, the audience often reads ahead and thus has to wait for the presenter to catch up.
- **Remember the 3-second rule for text** – Can the message on your slide be processed effectively within three seconds? Presentations are a “glance media” – more closely related to billboards than any other media.
- **Keep it simple** – Plain white, gray or black backgrounds work best.
 - Backgrounds should never compete with content.
 - Don't mix backgrounds from different presentations.

- Dark backgrounds are generally considered to be more formal, dramatic and work better for large venues and screens.
- Light backgrounds are typically more informal, have a bright feeling and work better for small venues and conference rooms. White backgrounds are generally better when using cut-out images that are already on a white background.
- If you must have a logo (although generally not recommended), place it in the lower right corner.
- **Consistency is king** – Use a consistent background, color palette (3-4 harmonious colors max), text and images throughout your presentation to enhance professionalism.
- **Placement of elements creates meaning** – Consider contrast, flow, hierarchy, proximity, repetition, alignment and whitespace when developing your presentation.
 - Contrast – Lettering and graphics stand out from the background.
 - Flow – The audience knows the order in which to process the information.
 - Hierarchy – The audience sees the relationship between elements.
 - Proximity – The audience perceives the meaning from the location of elements and senses that information belongs together.
 - Repetition – The consistent use of fonts, visuals, design elements, etc. makes your presentation more professional, less distracting and easier to follow.
 - Alignment – Consider alignment (left, center or right-aligned) when placing text, visuals and other elements on the screen.
 - Whitespace – The audience has visual breathing room on slides.
- **Remember the old adage** – A picture is worth a thousand words. Adding images will significantly increase audience retention of your main points. Full-screen images have the greatest impact.
- **In focus** – Make sure images are a high enough resolution so they won't appear blurry on screen.
- **Cut the clip art** – Please try to avoid using clip art in your presentation. Drawings, illustrations and other graphics are OK, but avoid the cheesy clip art.
- **Color has meaning** – When selecting colors for your presentation, do so with purpose. Also, keep in mind that members of the audience may have trouble seeing certain colors, so don't rely solely on colors to make a point.
- **Data slides are not really about the data. They are about the meaning of the data** – Ask yourself: “What would I like the audience to remember about the data that I'm presenting?”

With data, the goal is to restrain (one message per data slide), reduce (remove the clutter) and emphasize (focus on the main message).

- **The wrong questions** – Instead of asking, “how many bullets should I have per slide?” or “how many words per slide?” ask, “what message do I want to convey with this slide and how can I do it as clearly as possible?”
- **Finally, SIMPLIFY your slides for increased clarity and maximum impact.**

PREPARATION AND DELIVERY TIPS:

- **Start with one very important question** – Do I need slides for this presentation or would a traditional speech have more impact?
- **Check to make sure you brought your big idea** – This is the one idea you want to be sure to leave behind with your audience. Your slides should reinforce this Big Idea.
- **Know your audience** – What do they know about your topic? What are their biases? How can you persuade them that your topic matters? Your goal is to figure out where your audience is and where you want to take them.
- **Have a structure in mind** - This could be chronological, problem-solution, climatic, sequential, etc. Related, storytelling is a great way to make a lasting impression.
- **Relax** – To calm pre-talk nerves, arrive early, mingle with the audience, ask people to sit close and practice, practice, practice.
- **Make a connection** – Start with a story, impressive fact or something to engage the audience right away at the start of your talk. Presenters typically have only 30-60 seconds to grab the audience’s attention, so make good use of this time.
- **Slides are not a Teleprompters** – Avoid reading your slides or overheads to your audience.
- **Get a remote** – A remote will allow you to move away from the podium and build a connection with the audience.
- **Use a microphone** – Being heard clearly is important. You don't want people straining to hear or understand you during the course of your talk.
- **Don't hide** – Get out from behind the podium to connect with the audience.
- **Leave the lights on** – Both the presenter and the slides should be visible.
- **Don't go long** – Stay within your allotted time. Related to this, never skip or apologize for slides.

- **Whenever possible, keep it short** – Fifteen to twenty-five minutes, that's generally all you need. Spending the rest of the time answering questions and creating discussion is generally more effective than a longer presentation.
- **Break it up** – Studies have show that attention span drops after the first ten minutes of a talk, so plan on doing something (ask questions, short group exercises, video clips, etc.) to regain the audience's attention.
- **Be inspiring** – Both you and your slides should be provocative enough that people pay full attention to you.
- **Have a S.T.A.R. moment** – Something They'll Always Remember.
- **Finally, great presentations take time and practice to create.**

RESOURCES:

Books and Articles:

- *Presentation Zen, Presentation Zen: Design and The Naked Presenter* by Garr Reynolds: <http://www.presentationzen.com/>
- *Slide:ology and Resonate* by Nancy Duarte: <http://www.duarte.com/books/>
- *Really Bad PowerPoint (and how to avoid it)* by Seth Godin: http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2007/01/really_bad_powe.html
- Professor Scott St. George, "The Art of Scientific Presentations" course: http://www.tc.umn.edu/~stgeorge/Scott_St._George/GEOG8260_Schedule.html

Photo Resources:

- iStockphoto.com – stock photography
- Shutterstock.com – stock photography
- BigStockPhoto.com – stock photography
- Flickr.com – search "Creative Commons" photos under the "Advanced Search" button
- Your own high-quality photos

Presentation Design:

- NoteandPoint.com - <http://noteandpoint.com/>
- Slides the Rock - <http://slidesthatrock.com/portfolio/>
- Duarte Design - <http://www.duarte.com/portfolio/>

Building Better Presentations - Checklist

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PREPARING THE TALK:

- Can I summarize the talk in one sentence? What's the main takeaway message?
- Do I need slides for this presentation or would a talk without visuals have more impact?
- Do I know the audience? Who are they?
- What does the audience know about my topic? What are their biases? Why should they care about the presentation?
- Does the talk have an overall structure (chronological, problem-solution, sequential, climatic, etc.)?
- Have I sketched out the talk based on this structure?
- Does the talk explain why I care about this topic?
- Does the talk help people understand "what is" and "what could be"?

DESIGNING THE TALK:

- Does each of my slides convey a single, strong message
- Have I removed all the non-essential information (background images, logos, etc.) from my slides?
- Do my slides have bullet points? Can I present the same information without bullets points?
- Do I have a good mix of photo, text, illustration and data slides?
- Am I only using one or two fonts?
- Are the fonts visible from the back of the room where I'm presenting?
- Have I reduced the amount of text on my slides to just the essential information?
- Can the information on my slides be processed effectively in a few seconds?
- Am I using a simple background for my slides (plain white, black, gray, etc.)?
- Am I using just one background color for my entire presentation?
- Am I using a consistent color palette throughout the talk with 3-4 colors max?
- Do my text, images, etc. stand out from the background enough? Is there enough contrast on the slides?
- Am I using consistent placement of design elements and text throughout?

- ___ Are my photos and text properly aligned throughout?
- ___ Does my presentation include visuals such as photos, illustrations, etc?
- ___ Are all of my photos clear and in focus?
- ___ Have I specifically selected colors that relate to my presentation or topic?
- ___ Have I simplified data slides as much as possible while retaining meaning?
- ___ Does each of my data slides focus on one main message?
- ___ Have all of my slides been simplified for maximum impact and clarity?
- ___ Do all of the slides reinforce or connect to the main message in some way?
- ___ Have I included breaks or changes of pace at roughly ten-minute intervals? (Such as asking questions; showing short video clips; etc.)
- ___ Do I have a S.T.A.R. moment – Something They’ll Always Remember?

DELIVERING THE TALK / RE-CAP:

- ___ Have I practiced my talk – out loud and standing up – at least five times? In front of others?
- ___ Did I feel relaxed before and during my talk?
- ___ Did I take steps to calm my pre-talk jitters (if applicable)?
- ___ Did I feel prepared during my talk?
- ___ Did I stay within my allotted time?
- ___ Did I begin my talk with a memorable quote, story, fact, etc.?
- ___ Did I avoid “fillers” like ummm, uhhh, etc.?
- ___ Did I avoid reading my slides word for word?
- ___ Did I use a remote and move away from the podium / engage with the audience?
- ___ Was my voice audible throughout the room/hall?
- ___ Did I avoid skipping or apologizing for slides?
- ___ Did I include soundbytes and tweetable information or comments?
- ___ Did I pace/sway/move too much during my talk?
- ___ Did I vary the tone, tempo and volume of my voice?
- ___ Did I feel “authentic” while presenting?
- ___ Was my talk inspiring/motivating/engaging/surprising/etc.?
- ___ Did I ask my audience to take an action or change a behavior?