Developing Memorable Presentations

Strategies to Make Your Ideas Stick

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Simple

Distill your idea to its essence

How to implement this:

• Identify the one thing your audience should remember after your presentation
• Create a core message of eight words or less
• Use your core message to guide creation of your presentation

Why does this work?

Our working memory can only actively process a few elements at once (4 ± 1). Experts chunk multiple elements into a single element. Novices are unable to do that when they are first presented with new information. Distilling your message to its essence helps your audience know what is important.


Recommended Further Reading:

Presentation Zen encourages the creation of simple, aesthetically pleasing presentation slides and ties in to the Made to Stick SUCCEsS principles.

Examples of distilled ideas:

Things change, change accumulates

Statisticians build arguments from data

Popular culture is political

Evaluate now, get funded later

Climate change: what is your role?

Poetry: how to see what isn't there

Environment affects your wealth

Finding community and meaning through performance
Unexpected

Gain and maintain attention

How to implement this:

- Break a pattern in your teaching routine
- Present a counterintuitive finding
- Create a knowledge gap through a compelling story or question
- Frame an issue specific to the background of your audience

Why does this work?

We have a limited capacity for attention, and competing information taxes our attentional resources.

To capture attention, learners need salient, novel, surprising, or distinctive stimuli. To properly direct attention, learners need to both “block out” unwanted information as well as focus on desired information.


Recommended Further Reading:

Hidi and Renninger review the extensive literature that links situational interest to various types of cognitive performance. The article makes a strong case for understanding the construct of interest as a core task for teachers engaged in classroom practice.

Examples of gaining and maintaining attention:

Creating a mystery

Bob Ballard, the oceanographer who found the wreck of the Titanic in 1985, began a presentation with a simple opening: “Where did the Titanic rest after it had sunk? And what did the wreckage tell us about the most likely cause of its sinking?”

Presenting a counterintuitive finding

A professor in nursing started class by challenging decisions that are routinely made in the health sciences. For example, nurses who quickly remove a bandage (causing pain of high intensity but brief duration) actually cause more overall perceived pain than removing the bandage slowly (long duration but low intensity per unit time).

Breaking a pattern

Rather than using a more typical overview of goals, objectives, etc., one presentation to museum directors focused on the importance of tactile exhibits for visually impaired guests. The presenter began by turning off the lights, showing directors that there is little to learn or experience in museums for the blind. Within seconds, she had her audience’s attention on solving a problem that could open their museums to new clients.

Highlighting a knowledge gap

A biology professor at the U began her first class in Foundations of Biology with a case study about a physician in the 1860’s who discovered that hand washing prevents certain childhood fevers. The class learned the rudiments of the scientific method over the course of the class period by generating hypotheses about the causal relationship between hand washing and fevers and proposing tests of their hypotheses that would have been appropriate in the late 19th century.
Concrete

Ground your idea in sensory detail

How to implement this:

• Add images to your PowerPoints
  http://www.flickr.com/
  https://www.lib.umn.edu/media/imageguide
• Include demonstrations
• Give specific names to companies, people, locations, etc. in case studies
• Use metaphors to explain abstract concepts

Why does this work?

**Materials that evoke imagery are easier to remember than materials that do not.**
Our memories are structured as networks of connected information. Images and concrete examples allow new information to connect to material already in long-term memory, making it easier to retain.


**It is difficult to pay attention to unchanging stimuli.**
Our brains are designed to be most responsive to changes in our environment. If we hear a particular sound without interruption or change (like someone lecturing at the same pace), we begin to ignore it. Augmenting a lecture with sensory experiences will help maintain attention.


Recommended Further Reading:

*The Art of Changing the Brain* ties what neuroscientists are learning about the human brain to effective pedagogy for the classroom.

Credible

Sell and support your idea

How to implement this:

• Describe your education and experience
• Make big numbers understandable
  www.cjr.org/language_corner/small_bites.php
  http://howbigreally.com
• Provide opportunities for students to
  “test drive” your ideas
• Teach critical thinking

Why does this work?

Students value credibility.
They want to know that instructors have a breadth
of knowledge, insight, and experience that exceeds
their own.


Students learn more when they actively engage
with the material.
Active learning allows students to integrate new
knowledge with existing knowledge and test it.

• Prince, M. (2004). Does active learning work? A
review of the research. Journal of Engineering
Education, 93(3) 223-231.

Critical thinking is essential.
Errors in judgment are ubiquitous and often
consequential. Guidance in identifying and
analyzing complex problems is a key task for
educators


Recommended Further Reading:

The Skillful Teacher provides down-to-earth advice on teaching based
on over 20 years of research and classroom experience.


This IDEA Center article, Helping your students develop critical
thinking skills, divides critical thinking into specific skills students
need and provides ideas for assignments to reinforce each stage.

http://theideacenter.org/research-and-papers/idea-papers/idea-paper-no-37
Emotional

Motivate your audience to care

How to implement this:

• Determine what your audience cares about
• Link your content to something your audience cares about
• Tell your audience why you care - let your enthusiasm show

Why does this work?

**Emotion can make information more memorable.** Communicating ideas that reward, punish, or make our audience feel any other emotion, increases their interest to learn about them.


**When your audience is motivated toward your goals, they are more likely to learn.** The goal of your audience for learning may differ from your goals. When some of their goals align with yours, powerful learning can occur.


Recommended Further Reading:

“What factors motivate students to learn” is a chapter in *How Learning Works* that describes different ways students are motivated and provides practical advice for your teaching.

Stories

Inspire and teach your audience how to act

How to implement this:

- Stories should focus on deepening student learning about the content
- Mentally rehearse your stories to sharpen the details surrounding your core message
- Use compelling language and strong images to engage the audience

Why does this work?

Stories are a universal grammar for conveying information. Storytelling is the most recognizable tool to draw an audience into a presentation. Not confined to any one academic discipline, stories about the content leverage the considerable power of relevant, real-life events to deepen student understanding.


Recommended Further Reading:

Gottschall uncovers the storytelling instinct in all of us and how we are shaped by the stories we listen to and tell. His book reinforces the value of telling stories as a way of deeply influencing the perspectives of our audience.


This chapter is a compendium of recent thought on narrative inquiry in education. It is highly detailed and complete in examining how story can serve as a pedagogical tool to engage students in understanding academic content.

## SUCCEsSs Checklist for Self Evaluation of Presentations

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<th>Acceptable</th>
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<td>SIMPLE – Identified and distilled the core idea of the presentation into compact form</td>
<td>I distilled the core idea in eight words or less and created a compact format for other ideas and concepts</td>
<td>I distilled a few main points of the presentation into compact form but not the overall core idea</td>
<td>I did not distill the core idea or many of the main points into a compact format</td>
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<td>UNEXPECTED – Designed an approach to gain and maintain the attention of the audience</td>
<td>I introduced the content in a distinctive or memorable way and maintained audience attention by creating and filling knowledge gaps</td>
<td>I relied on the informational value of the content to gain and maintain audience attention</td>
<td>I did not develop or implement a plan to gain or maintain audience attention</td>
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<td>CONCRETE – Included or elicited relevant examples grounded in sensory experience</td>
<td>I included or elicited multiple meaningful examples to clarify abstract ideas or concepts</td>
<td>I included or elicited a small number of examples to help the audience remember and understand the content</td>
<td>I did not include or elicit relevant examples to clarify abstract ideas or concepts</td>
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<td>CREDIBLE – Created conditions to help the audience believe in the key messages of the presentation</td>
<td>I deepened the believability of the content through credible data, persuasive arguments, and/or connections to audience experiences</td>
<td>I occasionally used data, rational argumentation, and/or linkages to audience experiences to enhance credibility of the content</td>
<td>I did not take advantage of good data, persuasive arguments, or connections to audience experience in a way that would deepen credibility of the content</td>
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<td>EMOTIONAL – Organized the presentation to help the audience care about the subject matter</td>
<td>I displayed or discussed content through images or language specifically chosen to increase the emotional resonance of the content</td>
<td>I occasionally used images or language that had emotional appeal in order to help the audience care about the content</td>
<td>I did not use images or language in a way that would increase the emotional resonance of the content to the audience</td>
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<td>STORIES – Used stories about the content to inspire the audience to act or to illustrate problem solving</td>
<td>I illustrated the core idea and a number of main points with meaningful stories</td>
<td>I used at least one story to inspire the audience or deepen problem solving but did not take advantage of other opportunities to do so</td>
<td>I did not leverage stories about the content to inspire the audience or illustrate problem solving</td>
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