# Preparing a Presentation

## Communication Skills

# Table of Contents

# Preface

This eBook follows on from 'Planning a Presentation' and explains how to create a complete presentation based on your aim, audience, key message statement, and the key points you have identified.

You will learn:

- How to orientate the audience so that they are on board from the beginning of your presentation

- Why repetition of your key message is so important and how to incorporate it into your presentation structure

- How to use the five-stage format and the concept of transitions to structure your content

- How to draft, edit, and organize the main body of your presentation in the most efficient way possible

- How to write a compelling introduction, summary, and conclusion that will keep the audience focused on your key message

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# Introduction

This eBook follows on from 'Planning a Presentation,' which explained how to create an outline plan based on your aim, audience, key message statement, and the key points that support this message. 'Planning a Presentation' describes a four-stage process:

### 1. Identifying 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.

### 2. Knowing 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.

### 3. Defining 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.

### 4. Outlining the 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 completed these four steps, you will be in a position to create a presentation that is well structured, clear, and concise. This eBook describes this process in detail using the example that was introduced in 'Planning a Presentation,' so please read that eBook before reading this one.
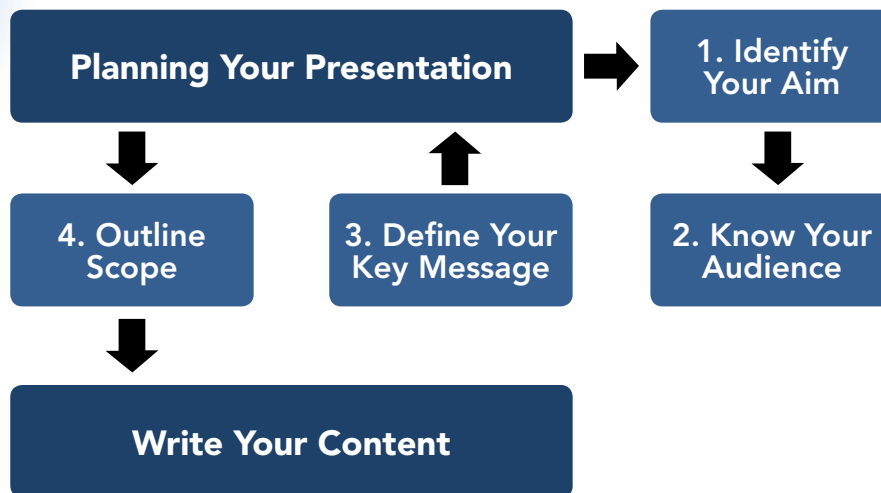
At the end of the planning phase you will have an outline scope that will form the basis for writing the detailed content. You now have to decide exactly what you will say and how you will structure the key points to ensure that your audience walks away from your presentation having understood your key message.

The amount of time you allocate to this stage will depend on how important the presentation is and how much time you have available. You will usually be able to spend significant time on content preparation for high-impact presentations because of their importance to you and your department. These presentations are usually to your senior management or external groups (outside your team, reporting structure, or organization, e.g. users, suppliers) and are often repeated several times during the decision-making process. So, the better prepared your content is the more persuasive your argument will be.
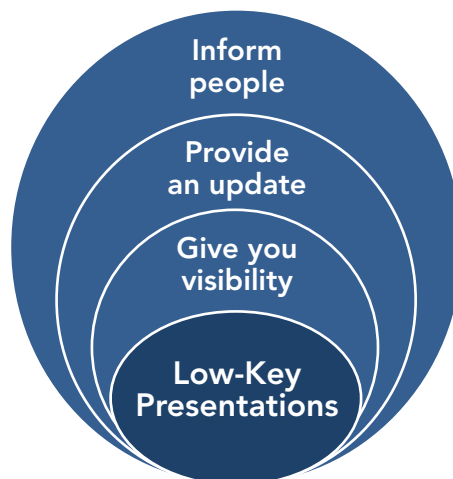
Most of the presentations you give will probably be fairly low-key and will involve keeping your team up to date with progress, new working practices, and procedures. Whilst it can be difficult to justify spending much time preparing for these types of presentation, you should still follow the five-stage process described in this eBook because if information is significant enough to warrant being presented, then it should be presented in a way that is as clear and concise as possible.

Remember, the competencies you display during presentations can help your career prospects, particularly if you can show that you are a persuasive speaker. Taking the time to prepare your content properly will ensure:

- Your argument is well structured
- Your key message statement is understood
- Your visibility is maximized
- You gain the support you need.

## KEY POINTS

✔ This eBook follows on from 'Planning a Presentation,' which explained how to create an outline plan based on your aim, audience, key message statement, and the key points that support this message.

✔ This eBook explains how to decide exactly what you are going to say and how to structure the key points.

✔ The competencies you display during presentations can help your career prospects, particularly if you can show that you are a persuasive speaker.

# Repetition and Timing

There is an old saying about presentations that you should tell the audience what you're going to tell them, then tell them, and finally tell them what you've told them. As the great orator Winston Churchill said:

*'If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver.*

- *Hit the point once.*

- *Then come back and hit it again.*

- *Then hit it a third time—a tremendous whack.'*

This does *not* mean repeating the same thing three times. In each of the three ways you tell your audience something, you are meeting three different objectives. The first phase ('tell them what you're going to tell them') needs to serve a very particular purpose and that is to avoid leaving the audience behind at the very beginning of the presentation.

| Tell them what you're going to say | • Orientate audience<br>• Why you are presenting<br>• Relevance to them |
| --- | --- |
| **Tell them** | • Define outline & sequence<br>• State your 3 to 5 key points<br>• Sum up each point before introducing next one |
| **Tell them what you've said** | • Review most importants points<br>• Restate relevance to audience<br>• Bring to logical closure |

Bearing in mind that the audience is unlikely to remember more than one key message it is essential that you focus your presentation on that message. The way you emphasize the message can be through repetition, illustration, and placement.

The most important place for emphasis is the beginning and the end when the audience is at its most receptive. That is why it is vital to use the beginning of the presentation to define its scope and to impress on the audience what it is you want them to take away from it. Similarly, at the end of the presentation you need to summarize the most important details and provide a conclusion.

It is also necessary to orientate the audience at the beginning of a presentation because they have no opportunity to look up any background information and they can only take on board the information in the order that you give it to them.

This is very different to providing written information because with a written document the reader can either look at the table of contents or simply read through the headings page after page in order to give themselves a clear idea of what exactly the document is about and in what order the topics will be presented. They can also see how long the document is, how long each section is, and approximately what sort of detail it goes into.

This has the effect of mentally preparing them to receive the information in a way that is not possible with a presentation, unless you outline it before going into the substance of the presentation itself.

| A Reader | A Presenter |
|:---:|:---:|
| ⬇ | ⬇ |
| Scans a document to gauge | Should Outline |
| ⬇ | ⬇ |
| Length | Length |
| ⬇ | ⬇ |
| Structure | Structure |
| ⬇ | ⬇ |
| Depth of information | Depth of information |
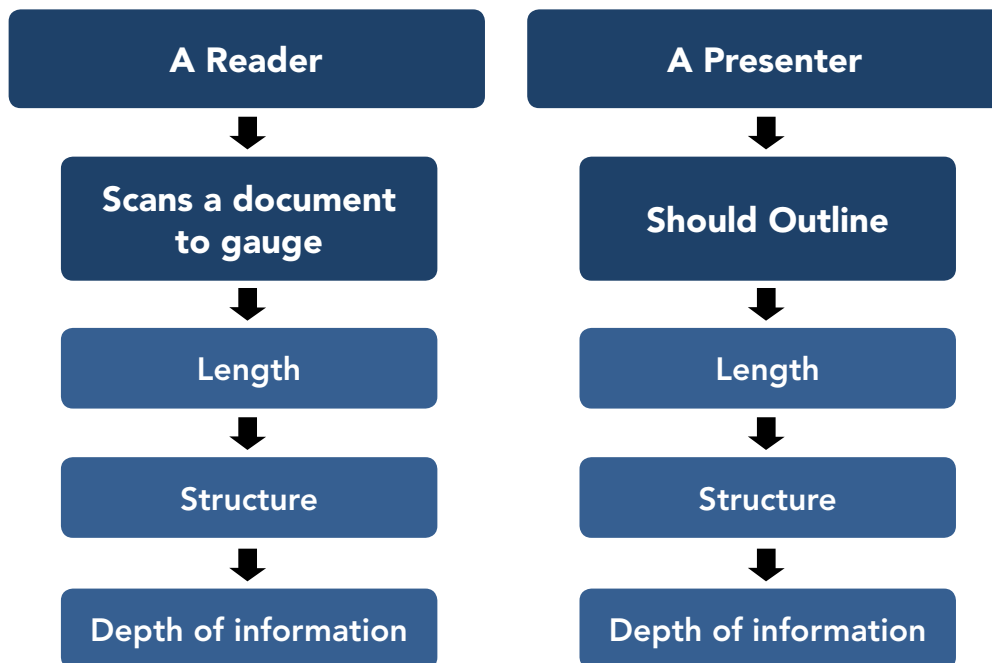
Do not be tempted to overlook this process because the audience depends entirely on you for this initial orientation phase and if you do not do it well you will make things more difficult for yourself than they need to be. Obviously, you can only provide this information once you have decided on these things, which will be at the end of the preparation stage, but you need to remember to make it a part of your introduction and to allow enough time for it.

The beginning of the presentation should also serve to answer the questions:

- Why are you the person giving the presentation rather than someone else?
- What relevance does the topic of the presentation have to the members of the audience personally?

There is another old saying that states that successful presentations should have a good beginning and a good ending, and that these should be as close together as possible.

Successful Presentations have a

GOOD beginning

GOOD ending

which are as CLOSE as possible

Whilst intended to be humorous, this saying does make a valid point, which is that brevity is important. Even experienced public speakers struggle to hold an audience's attention for more than about 40 minutes, and 20 minutes is a realistic maximum for most people who are presenting a work-based topic.

No matter how much supporting information you have, you need to set yourself a strict time limit and discard anything that will take you over it. If you feel that 20 minutes is not long enough then ask yourself how many times you have heard anyone say that they wished a presenter had spoken for longer, or that a presentation was too short.

You need to bear all of the above points in mind when you begin the process of turning your initial plan into a presentation script. If you ignore the need for repetition, audience orientation, and the fact that your time is limited, you will end up with a presentation that lacks impact and is too long.

## KEY POINTS

✔ An effective presentation requires a certain amount of repetition in order to get the message across to the audience.

✔ You should 'tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, and finally tell them what you've told them.'

✔ The first iteration serves to orientate the audience as to who is presenting what, and why.

✔ The second iteration represents the substance of the presentation.

✔ Finally, you need to review the most important points, restate why they are relevant to the audience, and bring the presentation to a logical close.

✔ Remember the need for repetition when you are preparing the content other-wise you will end up with a weak presentation or one that is too long.

# Preparing Your Content

Bearing in mind the points made earlier, you are now in a position to begin writing the detailed content of your presentation based on:

- Your aim
- Your key message statement
- Your three to five supporting key points
- Your knowledge of the audience

Every presentation is different and whilst it is possible to provide general guidelines, it can be quite difficult to see how these apply in practice. For the remainder of this eBook we will use the example that we introduced in our eBook 'Planning a Presentation' (available free from www.free-management-ebooks.com). In this example, you have been asked to inform your senior managers of the findings of a recent customer satisfaction survey.

| Your Presentation Aim |
| :---: |
| Explain reasons for poor customer satisfaction and suggest solutions |

In this scenario, the survey has highlighted that there is some degree of dissatisfaction with customer service and you have been asked to present this information to senior management. Your presentation is one of several that will be given during the day and you have been allocated a 30-minute slot. Because the information you are presenting is fairly contentious you should allow at least ten minutes for questions, which means that you need to develop a 20-minute presentation.

This background enables you to plan your presentation and to define your presentation aim and develop a key message statement. You know your presentation environment consists of the following:

- **Audience**—Executive Board
- **Audience Knowledge**—strategic level, based on an expectation of growth offering a 'good' return on investment.

- **Agenda**—Yours is the first presentation after lunch.
  - The last presentation before lunch was by the Chief Finance Officer who was updating the executive on the current financial situation against annual targets.
  - After your presentation the executive will be discussing potential business partners, led by the Chief Executive Officer.
- **Time Slot**—you have been allocated 30 minutes on the agenda.

The implications of these aspects of your presentation environment are summarized in the following table. Your audience will be strategic thinkers and will not be particularly interested in operational issues unless they have a financial impact.

| Environment Factor | Details | Its Impact on your Content |
|---|---|---|
| **Audience** | Executive | Strategic thinkers with focus on bottom line and investment returns. |
| **Audience Knowledge** | Strategic Level | They will know Customers, their contribution to overall revenue, market status and the level of investment the organization has made in them. |
| **Agenda Position** | Graveyard Slot | Being just after lunch you will need to get your audience's attention quickly. |
| **Prior Item** | CFO—budgets and targets | Will focus your audience on poor performing areas and how they can be brought into line with targets. |
| **Following Item** | Potential Business Partners | Your audience will be thinking about which possible partners offer the best growth and investment potential. |
| **Time Slot** | 30 minutes | Present for 20 minutes & 10 minutes Q&A. |

Even though the customer satisfaction survey contains a lot of interesting information, this audience taken as a whole will only be interested in how this dissatisfaction affects the bottom line. In other words, what needs to be addressed to retain key customers and encourage them to sign up for additional services? Whilst individual audience members may be interested in specific areas of the survey, the executive as a whole will not want to hear about individual cases, so you need to present the information in strategic terms.

This is further reinforced by the executive's view of customers, which tends to be in terms of:

- Percentage contribution to revenue
- Share of their market sector
- Sector importance to the organization
- Impact customer could cause through negative press coverage
- Level of investment the organization has made in servicing the customer

You have been given the one slot no-one wants: the first after lunch. This is commonly known as the graveyard slot because your audience has just eaten and after a break it usually takes people a while to get back into a work-related mindset.

In the 'Planning a Presentation' eBook the importance of a key message statement was discussed. The aim of a key message statement is to engage the audience straightaway by making it clear that what you are about to say is important to *them*.

In this example, you could choose a key message statement like

> *'Results of the Customer Satisfaction Survey' or*
>
> *'Issues that have affected our customers' perception'*

However, both of these are fairly bland and are unlikely to get anyone's attention. Using something like

> *'What our customers really think of us' or*
>
> *'Why we could lose $500,000 of business this year'*

are better options because they are attention grabbing without being over the top. In practice, you would use your knowledge of the organization to decide on a key message statement that supported your aim and was backed up by your key points.

In this example it is unlikely you will have your time slot shortened because the former presentation has overrun, but you will need to plan for this if your agenda position falls between other agenda items. Remember you need to have sufficient time to get across all your points to ensure your audience fully understands your message.

All these factors mean you will need to produce a high-impact presentation. This is because the message and key points you make will have implications throughout the organization.

# The Five-Stage Format

When you have the content in the form of a basic draft that you are happy with, you can then begin to turn it into a presentation. Most presentations should follow the five-stage format shown in the diagram below. This may look unnecessarily complicated at first sight, but it is actually very easy and natural to use in practice.

```
┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────┐    ┌────────────────┐
│ Five Stage   │ →  │ 1. Pre-  │ →  │ 2. Introduction│ → transition
│ Format       │    │ Intro    │    │                │
└──────────────┘    └──────────┘    └────────────────┘

┌──────────┐              ┌──────────┐              ┌──────────┐
│ 3. Main  │ → transition │ Main     │ → transition │ Main     │
│ Body     │              │ Body     │              │ Body     │
│ Point 1  │              │ Point 2  │              │ Point 3  │
└──────────┘              └──────────┘              └──────────┘

transition → ┌──────────────┐ → transition → ┌──────────────┐
             │ 4. Summary   │                 │ 5. Conclusion│
             └──────────────┘                 └──────────────┘
```
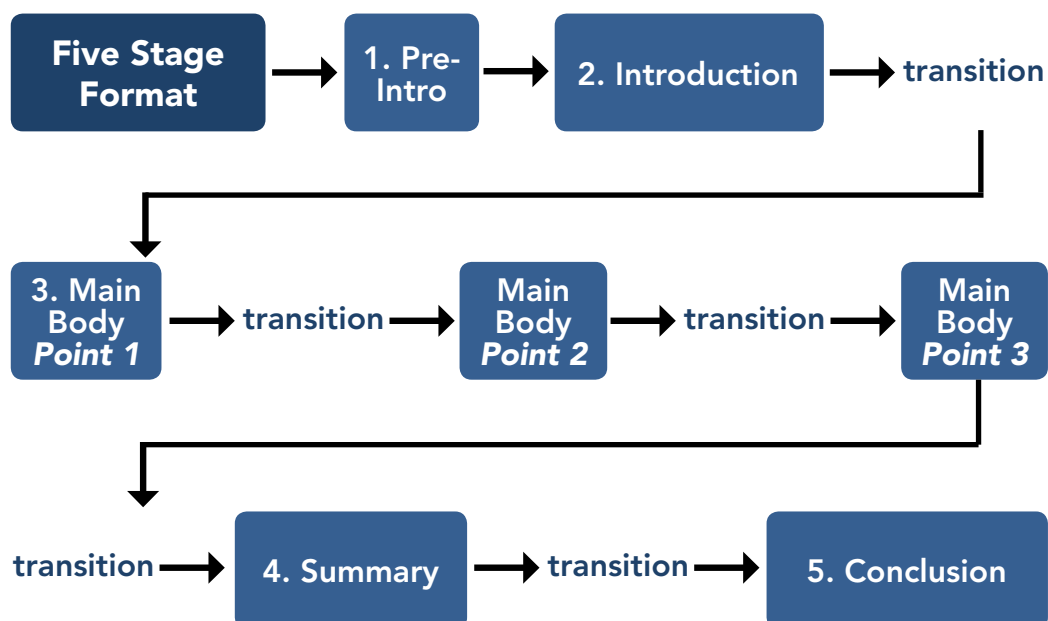
One of the features of this method is the use of transitions between each of the stages and the main body key points as shown in the diagram above. The benefit of these is that they enable you to satisfy the needs of a mixed audience by allowing for different levels of knowledge. This enables you to focus on different groups at different points, yet retain the interest and attention of your whole audience.

This means that you start at a level of detail that orients everyone by serving as an introduction to the key point, showing its importance and relevance. For each key point of the main body you begin at a level where you're confident everyone will follow your meaning. Then go into more detail for that part of the audience that requires more depth, whilst accepting that some non-technical members of the audience may have difficulty following you.

However, you bring them back on board at the end of that topic by summarizing what you have just said in language you are confident that everyone will understand. Provided that you keep your introductions and summaries relatively close together and keep reminding the audience that you are going to summarize the detail you can generally keep the audience's attention even if some of them cannot always follow the detail of what you are saying.



The first major transition occurs between the introduction of your presentation and the beginning of the content. Usually the main body will be broken down into several key points, each followed by a transition. Finally, there will be a transition between the end of the main body and the conclusion.

These transitions represent important points for the audience. The purpose of each transition is to sum up what has been said previously and to introduce the next key point or section. For example, when making the transition from the introduction to the beginning of the main body you should say something like:

*'Now that I have explained what this presentation is about and why I am presenting this material to you I would like first of all to describe...'*

When making the transition from one key point to another you could say something like:

*'As I've just explained... (summarize). This brings us on to the next point (introduce)...'*

All of these transitions are designed to orientate your audience and particularly to reengage with people whose attention has wandered off. Even those people you manage to lose during the detailed parts of your presentation should be able to follow the outline of it if you handle the transitions well.

For example, if you need to go into technical details about the IT infrastructure in order to support one of your key points, then you may lose audience members who are unfamiliar with that area of the business. However, you may not be able to avoid going into detail because you need to influence the people who do understand it. Your transition into this technical area could be something like:

*'My second point concerns the inability of our IT infrastructure to support the number of customer calls we have at peak times. This is happening because...'*
*(Detailed Technical Explanation)*
*'... So, as I've just explained, we can't deal with the number of customer calls we're getting which is causing problems with customer retention. This brings me to my third point...'*

Always remember that the audience does not have the luxury of being able to go back and re-listen to part of your presentation. It is quite easy for them to become lost if they are distracted or they start thinking in detail about something you have said.

No matter how well you structure your material, it is always possible for the audience to become disoriented. Bearing this in mind you should use the transitions to bring people back on board at regular points. For example:

*If someone loses the thread part way through the second point your transition to point three should sum up point two to the extent that they can then follow you even if they had temporarily become lost.*

For transitions to be effective they must be built in from the start. This means that you have to allocate a portion of time to each one. In a 20-minute presentation the timings could follow the pattern shown in the table below:

| 5-stage Format for 20-minute Presentation | Time Slot |
|---|---|
| Pre-introduction<br>Introduction | 30 secs<br>1.5 mins |
| Transition | 30 secs |
| Main Body—5 points | 12 mins |
| Transition (30 secs) between each point | 2 mins |
| Summary | 2 mins |
| Transition | 30 secs |
| Conclusion | 1 min |
| **Total time** | **20 mins** |

Remember, these transitions are absolutely crucial because they will encourage most of the audience to stay engaged with you to the end. If you find yourself short of time then it is better to omit the detailed description of a key point (you can deal with it in the summary) than it is to omit the transitions between the key points you do present.

## KEY POINTS

✔ When you have the content in the form of a basic draft that you are happy with, you can then begin to turn it into a presentation.

✔ The five-stage format of a pre-introduction, introduction, main body, summary, and conclusion is suitable for most workplace presentations.

✔ One of the features of this method is the use of transitions, which serve as introductions and summaries to each point made.

✔ These summaries enable you to focus on different groups at different points, yet retain the interest and attention of your whole audience.

✔ You need to allow sufficient time for these transitions when preparing the content because they are crucial for keeping the audience engaged until the end of your presentation.

## Stage 3—Main Body

This is the first stage of the presentation to prepare because all of the other stages are dependent on it. The most common problem that people have when developing a presentation is to underestimate how long it is going to take to deliver.

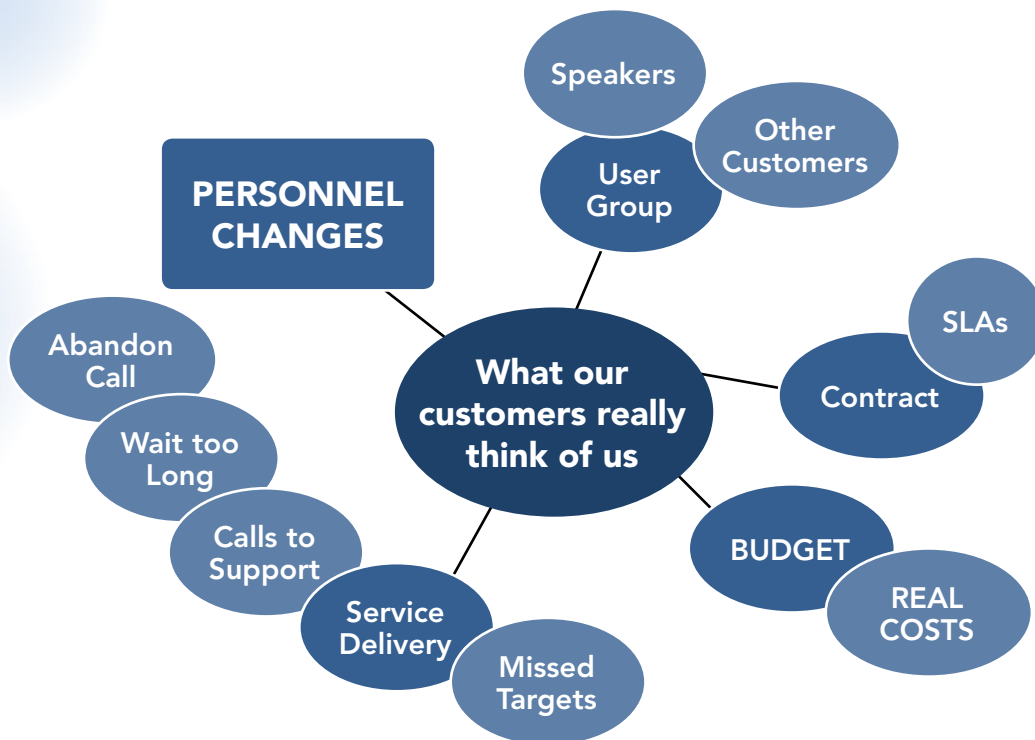The ideal speed for a presenter is about 100 words per minute.

This means that if you have 15 minutes available for the main body, then you can comfortably deliver about 1,500 words. If you have five key points then you could allocate 300 words to each one.

However, this takes no account of the need for transitions or the fact that you may need to explain something further because you are getting blank looks from the audience. In reality, 200 words would be the limit for each of the five points and you cannot say much in 200 words.

An alternative approach for a 15-minute main body would be to cut the number of key points down to three, as this would allow you about 400 words for each one and would also mean that there are fewer transitions. Both of these factors would almost certainly result in a more powerful and memorable presentation.

Trying to cram too much in is the number one cause of failure for business presentations. The result is invariably a weak presentation that fails to get the message across because of insufficient repetition, poor transitions from one topic to another, and a rushed conclusion. It is also stressful for you as a presenter to realize that you have too much material for the time available. The later you realize this, the worse it is because it means that the other areas of your presentation—the introduction, summary, conclusion, and any visual aids and handouts you may have already prepared—will be compromised.

The most important thing to remember when you are working through this stage is that getting rid of unnecessary material is the best use of your time and will lead to a clear and concise presentation that is relatively stress free to deliver. Be ruthless and get rid of anything that is not absolutely necessary. In the unlikely event that your presentation is going to be too short, you can always add it back in later with minimal effort.

This mind map shows your final five key points and the updated key message statement for the executive. Your next action is to decide the priority of these five points and what facts you will include for each point. There will be several facts and figures for each key point: your task is to decide which are the most important.

This process is an iterative one—you will work through each key point several times before you arrive at the final information and wording for each one. You may find yourself refining the number of key points in the presentation as you reassess each one in the light of the key message statement. This may occur for several reasons:

- The time slot is too short
- A key point argument is too emotive or subjective
- One or two points are no longer as 'key' as those you retain
- The concept of a key issue is too complex
- The data for a key point is insufficient or weak so has to be excluded.

A significant part of your work in this stage is to come up with transitions between each of your key points. These are important as these regular reminders of what you have just

said and whereabouts you are in the overall structure are absolutely crucial for keeping the audience with you. The audience cannot be relied on to remember the overall structure of your presentation, nor can they be relied on to have followed any detailed arguments.

Transitions also enable you to offer segments of your audience more depth in a key point without the risk of losing the remainder. As you sum up what you have said on a key point in language you're confident that everyone will understand you will bring everyone back on board with your roadmap. For example you could say:

> *'Having just explained... (summarize). We now need to look at ... (introduce next point)'*

In the example, the outline scope shown in the mind map resulted in you having five key points:

- Personnel changes
- User Group
- Contract
- Budget
- Service Delivery

Now you need to add information to each of these points and then assess how well that information supports your key message statement. This stage is by far the most time consuming of the five stages and requires the most mental effort.

However, it is the most important stage because no one will take your key message statement seriously unless you present compelling evidence to support it. As you work through the evidence you have, you may find that it changes the emphasis of the key message statement. Many of the presentations that you give will evolve in this way be-cause the act of assembling, sifting, and organizing facts can make you see things in a new light or realize that the evidence does not support your preconceptions.

Your next action is to decide the order of these key points and then find the right words to explain each message in a way that gets them across to the audience. There is no shortcut that you can apply to this step. You need to write the content of each key point out in full using a word processor or dictation software, editing as you go.

This process is essential if the structure of your final presentation is going to be clear and logical because:

- You can keep track of everything better when it is on paper than when you're just thinking about it.

- You can keep going back to cross-check the content against your key message statement.

- Writing things down makes it easier to check logic and objectivity.

- Writing everything down will force you to decide on the best order for the material.

- You can see where repetition is necessary and where it is harmful to your argument.

- You will be able to shape the overall flow and give everything the right amount of emphasis.

- The end result forms the basis of your presentation handout, which can be used in the event of cancellation or given to non-attendees.

The Appendix illustrates how evaluating the evidence from the customer satisfaction survey and using the associated mind map can change preconceptions about how many key points need to be included in the presentation and how they are made up. This is a very detailed study and is included to show how this process evolves using a realistic example.

## KEY POINTS

- ✔ The most common problem that people have when developing a presentation is to underestimate how long it is going to take to deliver.

- ✔  Set a maximum word count depending on the time you have available.

- ✔ Remember to allow time for transitions and repetition.

- ✔ Use your mind map to help you produce a first draft of each key point using a word processor or dictation software.

- ✔ This is an iterative process in which creating the draft information for each key point may cause you to refine, combine, or discard some of them.

- ✔ This process may also cause you to refine your key message statement.

- ✔ Continue until each key point strongly supports your final key message statement.

✔ The output from this stage is a final key message statement, a list of support-ing points, and a first draft of the information that you are going to present to support each one.

*Key Point Guidelines*

This process will produce your initial content, which you then edit down so that each of your key points meets the guidelines listed in the following diagram.

| **Key Point Guidelines** |
| --- |
| Short sentences, no more than 20 words |
| Discard filler words & phrases |
| Make sure any complex concepts are as easy to follow when spoken |
| Replace 'ugly' words or sequences of words |
| Remove colloquial phrases, clichés, or management jargon |
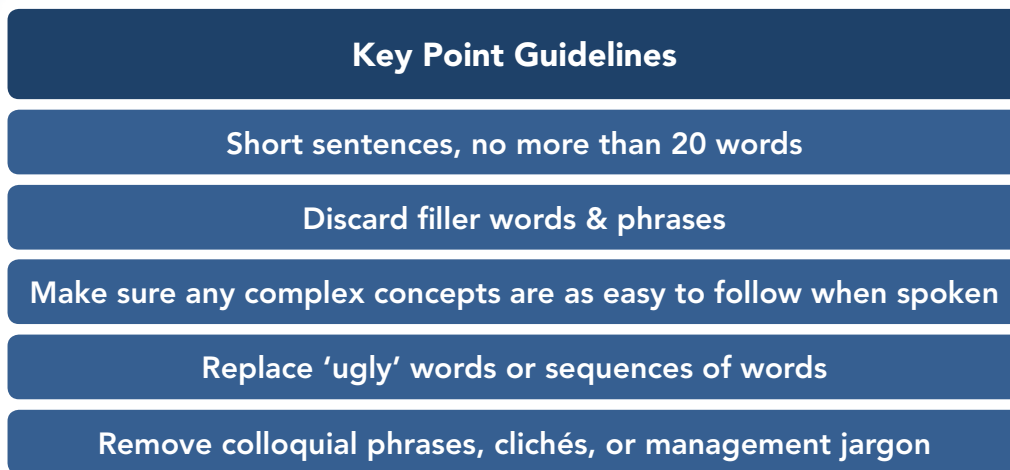
Management jargon and clichés often go unnoticed in everyday conversations, but in a presentation they quickly become tiresome to your audience, and they can even turn them off. These expressions have been rendered meaningless through heavy repeated use in inappropriate contexts. They are often used to mask a lack of knowledge, rather than pro-viding information or ideas of real value and should be avoided wherever possible.

| **Clichés** | **Management Jargon Corporate Speak** |
| --- | --- |
| • 'At the end of the day'<br>• 'Don't get me wrong'<br>• 'Needless to say'<br>• 'Make or break'<br>• 'Do you get my point?' | • 'Paradigm shift'<br>• 'Win-win scenario'<br>• 'Blue-sky thinking'<br>• 'Take ownership'<br>• 'Leverage' (used as verb) |

As you continue preparing your content you should continually ask yourself two questions when describing each key point of your presentation:

*Will the audience understand this point?*

*Will they be interested?*

If even after asking these questions you are tempted to use clichés or jargon, think about replacing them with what you really mean—for example, instead of a phrase such as 'going forward,' you could say 'next month,' 'next fiscal year,' or 'as soon as we can.'
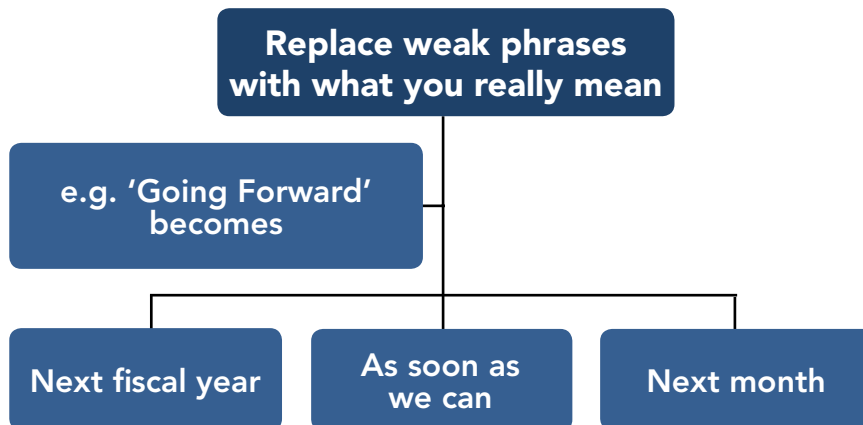


Using technical jargon may be appropriate for your audience if most of them will understand it, but don't forget it is essential your audience identify with your key message statement and the implications it has for them.

## KEY POINTS

✔  Edit the key points so that all of the sentences that make up the draft are 20 words or fewer.

✔  Discard any filler words and phrases.

✔  Make sure any complex concepts are easy to follow when spoken.

✔  Replace 'ugly' words or sequences of words.

✔  Remove any colloquial phrases, clichés, or management jargon.

## Finalizing the Main Body

This stage of preparing the content is usually the most time consuming and frustrating because it can be difficult to decide whether something is necessary and if so, how much importance to attach to it. One of the best ways to save yourself time and anxiety is simply to run through an early draft with a trusted colleague from your target audience, maybe someone who is unable to attend the presentation. They will appreciate why you are asking them to review and comment on your content. You should ask them if a point is appropriate, whether they understand it, and if they have any questions.

It does not matter that you don't yet have a proper introduction, summary, or conclusion when you are performing this exercise. These things can wait until you are certain that the main body will support your key message statement and be suitable for the audience.

The act of working through a key point with someone else can often clarify things in your own mind and give you a much better idea of exactly what is needed to support it.

This exercise is something that both parties will benefit from and almost everyone can see the value of, so you're unlikely to be refused if you ask someone to do this for you—especially if you can find someone who cannot attend the official event and you offer to go through your presentation with them. Obviously, this exercise is only appropriate for high-impact presentations when you can both justify the time and effort.
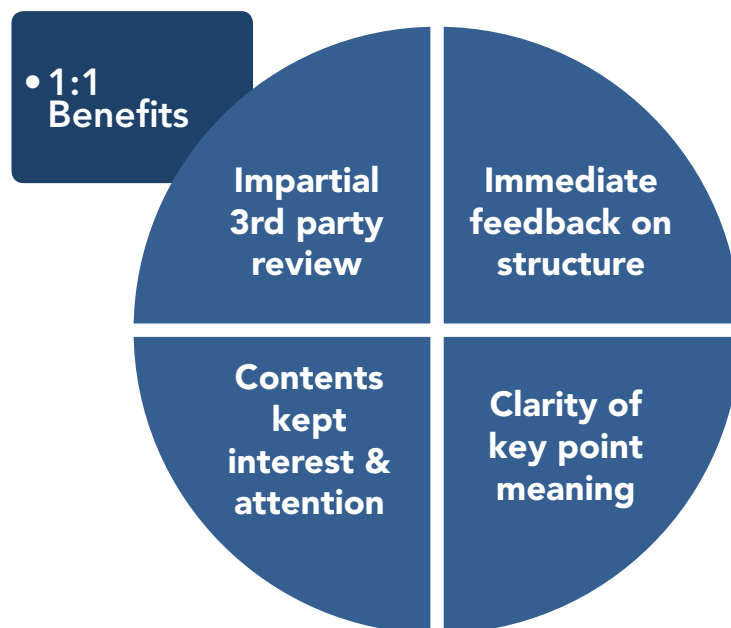
This can work well for you both because they do get to see your presentation, albeit delivered more as a one-to-one, and you get immediate and relevant feedback on the outline and structure. Knowing that the points you have prepared will be understood and are of interest to the audience can also go a long way to alleviating any nervousness you may be feeling before the presentation.

Once you have the main body completed you can move on to the other four stages.

### KEY POINTS

✔ If the presentation is an important one, then work through this draft with a trusted colleague as this can help to get the structure and emphasis right and leave you with more time to fine-tune it.

## Stage 1—Pre-Introduction

At the very beginning of a presentation there is often a brief period when people need to finish conversations, text messages, or whatever else they might be doing so they can settle down to listen. Also, when you first begin to speak your audience has to adjust to your delivery style—not only your voice or accent but also your body language and facial expressions.

This settling down period is usually fairly brief but you do not want to say anything important until the audience is receptive. The purpose of the pre-introduction is to allow these adjustments to take place before you begin your introduction.

Pre-Introduction → gives audience time to be attentive → lets speaker settle into own rhythm

An effective pre-introduction involves saying something that has no other purpose than to get people's attention and make sure that they are listening to you so that they can hear your full introduction.

The pre-introduction is less important if another speaker is introducing you but nonetheless it can still be worth saying a few words to make sure that you have the audience's full attention. There are several strategies for deciding what to say as part of the pre-introduction. You can use a:

- Rhetorical question,

- Reference to something that everyone knows is happening within the organization, or

- Reference to something said by an earlier speaker.

Another reason for a pre-introduction is that presenters who are nervous often race through the first few seconds of their presentation before they settle down into a more measured pace. It can also take a few sentences to adjust the volume of your voice so that everyone in the room can hear you.

The pre-introduction significantly reduces the chances of losing people at the beginning of the presentation. For example, if the first words you plan to say are,

> *'Good afternoon, I'm Jo Smith from finance'*

and only two-thirds of the audience hear you say it, the remaining third are likely to expend their mental energy trying to work out exactly who you are, rather than following the substance of what you are saying.

## KEY POINTS

- ✔ A pre-introduction serves to get people's attention and to ensure that they are listening to you so that they can hear your full introduction.

- ✔ It may be unnecessary if a chairperson or another speaker is formally introducing you, but even then it can help you to judge the volume and pace of your delivery before you say anything important.

## Stage 2—Introduction

There are two big mistakes that you can make at the beginning of the presentation. The first is not being clear about your key message. The second mistake is not being clear about the structure of your presentation. To avoid this, your introduction needs to anticipate the following six questions from the audience:

1. What exactly is the point of the presentation?
2. Why should I care?
3. Who is the person making the presentation?
4. How long is it going to take?
5. What topics are they covering?
6. What order are they presenting them in?

Even if you feel that some members of the audience already know the answers to some of these questions, there is still a persuasive case for going through them. Ideally, by the time you've gone through the introduction *everyone* in the audience should know the answers.

If you are using visual aids then the first two slides that you present should inform the audience of your key message with your credentials and give them a roadmap showing the structure of your presentation. These must be visible long enough for the audience to take them on board.

Do not worry about the time this takes up. One minute spent telling the audience what your key message is and why you are there to deliver it will have a big influence on how much attention they pay and consequently what they take away. Becoming lost at the beginning of the presentation is very frustrating for people in the audience.

**Your Introduction must tell the audience:**

- Your key message
- Your credentials
- Roadmap of your presentation
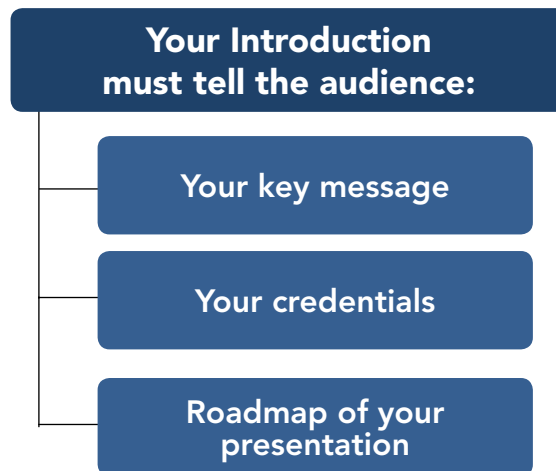
An important function of your roadmap is to inform your audience whether or not your presentation format allows for questions. You may have to ask for questions to be kept to the end to ensure that you get through all your key points in your allotted time.

You need to make sure that everybody is on board with this from the very beginning. In some instances you may be able to note down questions as they arise on a flip chart and then answer them, if necessary, at the end. This is a useful technique because early questions can often be answered as your presentation progresses. Such questions allow you the opportunity to check for understanding as you go through them in your Q&A session.

The inclusion of your outline or roadmap in the introduction serves two purposes. Firstly, it gives your audience a clear expectation of how many topics you plan to cover. Secondly, the sequence of these topics illustrates the logic of how you will explain your key message and allows the audience to mentally prepare themselves to listen to those topics in the order described.

Outlining the topics in this way removes any uncertainty that members of the audience may feel about being overwhelmed or bored. Many people who have a high workload go to presentations with an inbuilt resentment because of the time being taken up. Anything that you can do to get the audience on your side from the very beginning is worth doing.

This idea of getting as many people on board at the beginning of the presentation will have implications for your key message statement. Ideally it should target the widest possible audience even though the importance of what you're presenting will be different for different audience segments.

Do not assume the audience already knows what the presentation is about simply from the title. Even though you may have been intimately involved with a new IT system or a new business process for many months and assume that everyone in the organization is familiar with it that may not be the case. One or two sentences are often all that is needed to make the point and context of the presentation clear.

There can also be an automatic assumption by some members of the audience that they need to share your background before they are going to understand your presentation.

> *For example, if you work in finance you should make it clear that no specialist knowledge of finance is required if you are presenting to a non-specialist audience.*

By making this clear from the outset you can prevent a number of people from switching off.

One important point is not to give too much background information at this stage and cause the whole presentation to become bogged down before it starts. This will overwhelm the people who need the background information and will bore those who don't. All you need to do is make it clear that background information will be given as and when it is required, and that you do not need to be a specialist to understand what is about to be said.

The audience has no idea where the presentation is going unless you tell them. There is no table of contents and they cannot scan through chapter headings. Orientation is important because people like to know how much of a topic has been covered and how much further the presenter has to go.
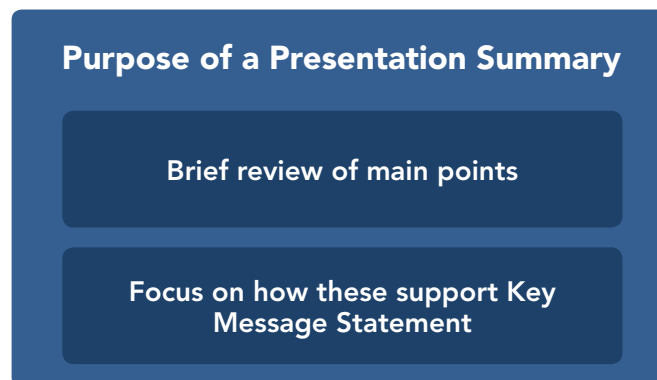
Listening and understanding is hard work and asking someone to follow your arguments without giving them a clue as to exactly whereabouts they are can be very frustrating for them. People dislike not knowing how much content remains to be covered. This leads to anxiety as the audience members are continually asking themselves how much more mental effort is going to be required.

## KEY POINTS

✔ The introduction should tell the audience your key message and your credentials.

✔ It should also tell them how your presentation is structured and how long it is going to take.

✔ The introduction is your first opportunity to make it clear to the audience that following your presentation is not going to be hard work.

## Stage 4—Summary

Now you have defined the content of your main body (which in the case of our example consists of three key points), you move onto your summary. The way a presentation ends can have a big impact on the audience and defining its content needs to be carefully thought out.

**Purpose of a Presentation Summary**

**Brief review of main points**

**Focus on how these support Key Message Statement**

Some speakers find it difficult to draw things to a close. This is something that needs to be done explicitly and cleanly, so don't use phrases like 'in conclusion,' 'finally,' or 'just before I finish' unless you are about to stop speaking. Bringing things to a decisive close means treating the end of your presentation as two distinct tasks:

- The first is a brief summary of the main points. This can be derived directly from the introduction and differs only in that you will focus on reiterating your key points.

- The second is to focus the audience on what you want them to take away from the presentation by restating the key message statement and how the key points support it.

You use this summary to move smoothly into your conclusion.

## Stage 5—Conclusion

The function of the summary is to make it clear that you are moving towards the conclusion of the presentation. Once the audience knows that the ending is near they tend to sit up and concentrate even if their attention has been wandering up to that point.

You should make every attempt to make this conclusion as punchy and memorable as possible. Ideally your conclusion should be one single sentence that refers back to the key message statement. This link back to the opening theme or idea makes it appear that the presentation has a rounded structure and makes it look well planned and logical.

**Presentation Conclusions**

Call to action

Personal experience

Quotation

Humor

Statistical evidence

There are several rhetorical techniques that you can use to make sure the wording of your conclusion is memorable:

- A call to action, if your aim is to persuade your audience to do or accept something.
- A personal experience that shows how one can benefit
- Illustration by using a quotation
- Using humor to demonstrate something
- Using statistics to show the importance of your key message statement

Your conclusion is the last impression you will leave with your audience so make it strong and distinctive. Make sure that your own enthusiasm and passion for your topic come across in your conclusion.

As you finish, you should make sure that you have a visual aid that summarizes the main message. You can even leave this visible during the question and answer period. By continuing to show this conclusion slide during the questions, you increase the chances that the audience will retain the key message.

When your time slot has come to an end or when all questions have been answered your final action is to thank you audience for coming and sparing you their time. It shows that you appreciate them scheduling your presentation into their busy day.

## KEY POINTS

✔ The function of the summary is to make it clear that you are moving towards the conclusion of the presentation.

✔ Summarize by restating the key message statement and how the key points support it.

✔ Your conclusion should be one single sentence that refers back to the key message statement.

✔ This linking back to the opening theme or idea makes it appear that the presentation has a rounded structure and makes it look well planned and logical.

# Summary

This eBook follows on from 'Planning a Presentation,' which explained how to create an outline plan based on your aim, audience, key message statement, and the key points that support this message. This outline plan is the start point for deciding how you will structure the key points to ensure that your audience walks away from your presentation having understood your key message.

This eBook recommends a five-stage method for developing the content of your presentation, as shown in the diagram below.
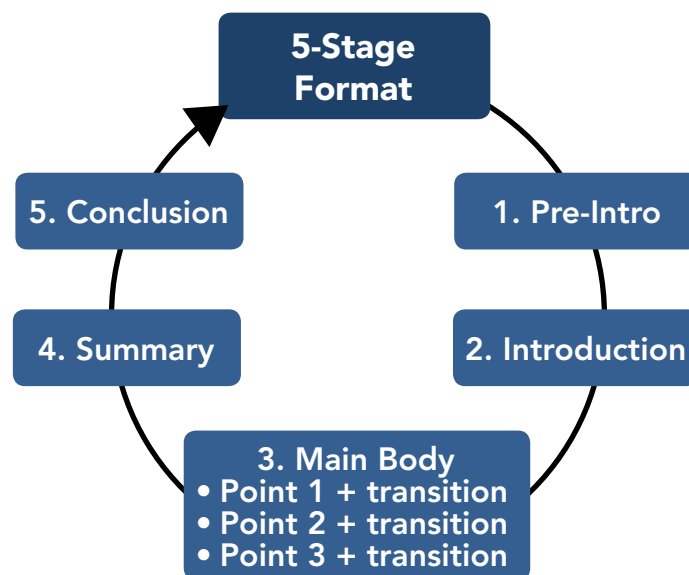


An effective presentation requires a certain amount of repetition in order to get the message across to the audience. You should 'tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them and finally tell them what you've told them.' The first iteration serves to orientate the audience as to who is presenting what, and why. The second iteration represents the substance of the presentation. Finally, you need to review the most important points, restate why they are relevant to the audience, and bring the presentation to a logical close. You need to be aware of this and to factor it in to your time allocations.

For example, if you have a 30-minute slot including five minutes for questions and answers, then you could allow 15 minutes for the main body, which would give you five minutes each for the introduction and the summary/conclusion.

You also need to allow for transitions between points in the main body otherwise your presentation will be very difficult for the audience to follow. This suggests that you should aim for a main body that you can comfortably deliver in about 12 minutes. The ideal speed for a presenter is about 100 words per minute, which means that you should be aiming for about 1200 words for the main body. Remember the need for repetition when you are preparing the content otherwise you will end up with a weak presentation or one that is too long.

You can use a mind map to help you produce a first draft using a word processor or dictation software. This can then be edited to produce a useable draft that has a logical structure and is free of clichés and jargon.

If the presentation is an important one, then work through this draft with a trusted colleague as this can help to get the structure and emphasis right and leave you with more time to fine-tune it.

Once you have the main body completed you can move on to the other four stages, which can quickly and easily be developed from the key message statement and the main body.

The introduction should tell the audience your key message and your credentials, as well as making it clear how your presentation is structured and how long it is going to take.

The summary should make it clear that you are moving towards the conclusion of the presentation by restating the key message and how the key points support it.

Finally, your conclusion should be one single sentence that refers back to the key message statement, something that makes it appear that the presentation has a rounded structure and makes it look well planned and logical.

# Appendix

This Appendix illustrates how the mind map created as part of the planning process is used in the creation of the main body of the presentation.



This mind map shows your final five key points and the updated key message statement for the executive. Your next action is to decide the priority of these five points and what facts you will include for each point. There will be several facts and figures for each key point: your task is to decide which are the most important.

This process is an iterative one: you will work through each key point several times before you arrive at the final information and wording for each one. You may find yourself refining the number of key points in the presentation as you reassess each one in the light of the key message statement. This may occur for several reasons:

- The time slot is too short
- A key point argument is too emotive or subjective
- One or two points are no longer as 'key' as those you retain

- The concept of a key issue is too complex
- The data for a key point is insufficient or weak so has to be excluded.

In this example, the outline scope shown in the mind map resulted in you having five key points:

1. Personnel Changes
2. User Group
3. Contract
4. Budget
5. Service Delivery

Now you need to add information to each of these points and then assess how well that information supports your key message statement. This stage is by far the most time consuming of the five stages and requires the most mental effort.

**Personnel Changes**

The findings of the customer satisfaction survey highlighted several areas related to changes of personnel within the organization that caused customers to be unhappy with the service they received. In some cases they stated that if they had known what it was going to be like they never would have become a customer.
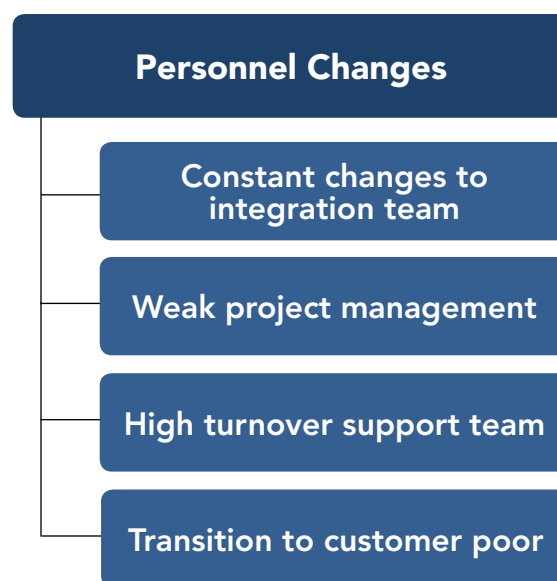
The main issues are shown in the diagram above. Three of the four relate to the management of the customer's transition from a new sales customer into account management and support services. How these translate to what you will present to the executive can be described as follows:

- There is no consistent approach to project managing the transition from sales to account management.

- There are no formal procedures and processes to either manage or monitor the quality of the transition service.

- Nothing is properly or consistently documented.

- The personnel are constantly changing so the customer has to keep giving the same information.

Once the customer's service becomes fully operational the same issues persist. But the most damning thing from the customer's perspective is that the support team that they were led to believe would be dedicated to them and understand their business needs, never materialized. Finally, after attending the User Group they realized their situation was not unique and they felt they had been fobbed off with lies and half-truths.

These details translate into your presentation facts:

- Lack of consistent project management methodology is costing the organization 10 percent more in costs than was put forward in the business case that is the foundation of the customer contract.

Adopting a formal methodology would solve three of the above issues because there would be formal processes and procedures that generate quality documentation that could be used throughout the organization.

- Productivity and development of the organization's personnel would benefit from formal project management as each individual would be committed to the transition or support team for a set period with agreed role descriptions.
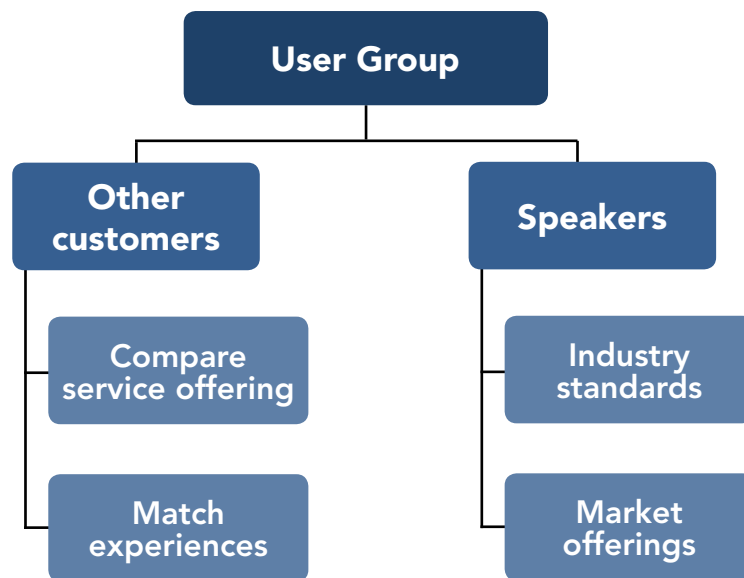
You would back these factors up with examples where the problems and issues caused by the constant personnel changes created operational issues for a customer and in some instances were severe and had a significant financial impact.

This is definitely an area your executive team should be made aware of and the key point should be renamed 'Project Management.' At this point in the process of producing your content you are not sure how urgent or important this key point is in comparison with the others.

**User Group**

As a result of the survey you became aware how your own user group could work against the organization if not carefully managed.

It also showed that too few of your own personnel—account managers, support staff, service managers, etc.—were present throughout the user group. If more of your personnel had been present then many of the complaints made by customers could have been easily refuted and their significance reduced.

```
                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │   User Group    │
                        └─────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────────┴──────────────────┐
       ┌─────────────┐                       ┌─────────────┐
       │    Other    │                       │  Speakers   │
       │  customers  │                       └─────────────┘
       └─────────────┘
     ┌──────────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────┐
     │     Compare      │                  │    Industry      │
     │ service offering │                  │    standards     │
     └──────────────────┘                  └──────────────────┘
     ┌──────────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────┐
     │      Match       │                  │     Market       │
     │   experiences    │                  │    offerings     │
     └──────────────────┘                  └──────────────────┘
```

The marketing department needs to ensure that every speaker or member of discussion panels is closely briefed on what is required. The information they intend to present to the user group should be vetted and if any discrepancies arise they can be dealt with before the event. This gives the organization the opportunity to respond to new industry standards or market offerings without being put on the spot.

After compiling the facts related to this area from the customer satisfaction survey you realize that this is not an area your executive team will see as important. They will consider

it an issue to be addressed by account management and marketing, who should be setting expectations and ensuring the format of the user groups is complimentary to the organization, respectively. Therefore this point is deleted from your mind map and main body.

### Contract

The customer satisfaction survey gave very specific feedback on the aspect of contract management. It fell into two broad areas: the contract agreement; and the other SLAs (Service Level Agreements) that were meant to define the service in detail.
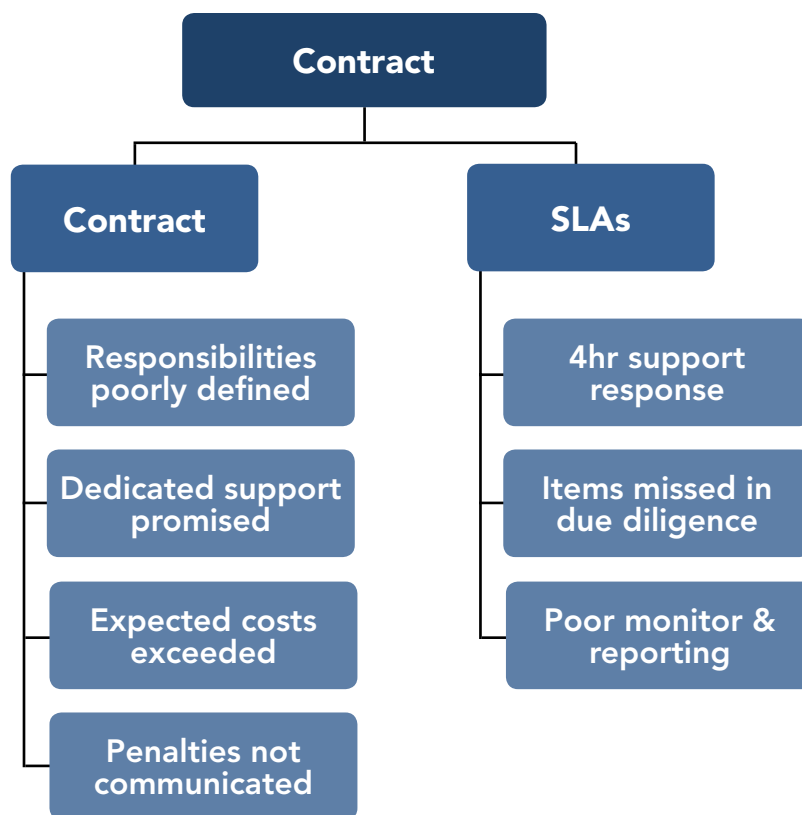


The main issues related to the contract are outlined in the diagram above and can be translated for the executive as:

- Poorly written contracts were costing the organization both time and money because activities where often repeated. This includes the lack of communication of pertinent details to relevant departments such as penalties incurred from missed targets. Estimated on average to be between 2–4 percent of contract value.

- Could be considered in breach of contract for lack of dedicated support team. Implications of legal fees and bad PR.

Regarding the main concerns prompted as a result of bad management of SLAs the executive need to understand the following:

- Gaps discovered in the due diligence process, which should have defined the complete service and all associated responsibilities, destroyed the trust customers had in the organization's knowledge of their service. This resulted in expensive personnel being involved in fire-fighting avoidable problems and unable to perform their own role. Lost additional service sales 10–20 percent of contract value.
- Poor service delivery monitoring and reports resulted in penalties being invoked costing the organization over $1million.

The area of contracts and SLAs is an area your executive team is often involved with, so it is a higher priority than your 'Personnel Changes' key point. This key point should be named 'Documentation' rather than 'Contract' as lack of or poor documentation is the main issue. With two further key points yet to define you cannot make a decision as to whether this is your first point or not.

**Budget**
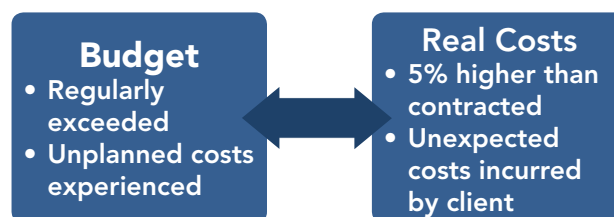


Each of the facts listed in the diagram above can be traced back to the contract or SLAs. The purpose of both these documents is to provide closely defined terms that are intended to prevent the unexpected and unplanned from happening. If these documents have been thoroughly prepared and agreed then no surprises should occur for either party outside of an 'act of God,' legal obligations, or changes in government. From the findings of the survey it is apparent that this has not been the case as actual costs experienced by the customer have been up to 5 percent higher than contracted.

After collating the information in this area you can see that it overlaps considerably with the key point 'Contract' and therefore these two points should become a single key point, 'Documentation.' If the issues in the contract area were addressed and resolved then the majority of the problems identified under 'Budget' would disappear.

**Service Delivery**

From the number of items under this heading on the mind map it is quickly discernible that this is a significant problem area. But is it of concern to the executive?

```
                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                    │  Only 80% targets met │
                          ┌────────┐└──────────────────────┘
                          │ Missed │┌──────────────────────┐
                          │Targets ││ Support unaware of    │
                          └────────┘│   target/penalty      │
              ┌──────────┐          └──────────────────────┘
              │ Service  │          ┌──────────────────────┐
              │ Delivery │          │    Wait too long      │
              └──────────┘          └──────────────────────┘
                          ┌────────┐┌──────────────────────┐
                          │Calls to││    Abandon call       │
                          │Support ││                       │
                          └────────┘└──────────────────────┘
                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                    │   Lack of callback    │
                                    └──────────────────────┘
                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                    │    No resolution      │
                                    └──────────────────────┘
```

So that you can present a realistic and balanced picture of what is happening in Service Delivery you have discussed with the service delivery manager his side of the feedback from the customer satisfaction survey. What you find is that there is either a serious lack of or poor communication from other departments to service delivery. For example:

- Contents of the SLA are not shown to service delivery. How can you deliver a service if you don't know the expectations the customer has been given?

- Service delivery only become aware of a target when the customer tells them they've missed it!

- The service delivery manager does not get the support call management system reports. Also, the current system only shows the support desk how many calls are waiting. It does not tell them how long a call has been waiting nor how many

calls to support are abandoned before being answered, although it does have this capability.

These details along with the findings shown under 'Service Delivery' in the diagram above show that there are severe problems with communications within the organization. From the previous key points the financial implications of this have been seen in missed opportunities to sell additional services and penalties paid out to customers for missed targets.

By addressing the lack of internal communication customers will quickly notice an improvement in the service they receive. So the key points to make to the executive are:

- The loss of 2–4 percent of contract value can be reduced quickly by improving internal communications in the following ways:
  ○ All contract targets and corresponding penalties, along with the appropriate SLAs, should be explained and copied to the service delivery manager and the individual responsible for that particular customer. These can then be passed onto all other relevant people in the department.
  ○ The service delivery manager should receive the support call management reports.
  ○ The support call management system should be altered so that the support can see how long calls have been waiting and how many calls are abandoned. This will enable better staffing of the support desks during busy times.

Many of these changes involve minimal financial outlay; they are more concerned with altering or defining certain key processes and procedures that will enable the organization to support customers better and in accordance with the contract obligations. They'll also be quickly seen by the customers too.

'Service Delivery' is definitely an area your executive team should be made aware of because of the impact it is having on your industry reputation and your long-term viability as a service provider. Of all your original five key points this is the most important and should be presented first.

It also should be renamed 'Internal Communications' because in most cases it is the lack of such communications that creates the problems. By addressing these issues the organization can ensure existing customers are more content. With a concerted long-term effort they could be persuaded to renew their contracts and remain customers.
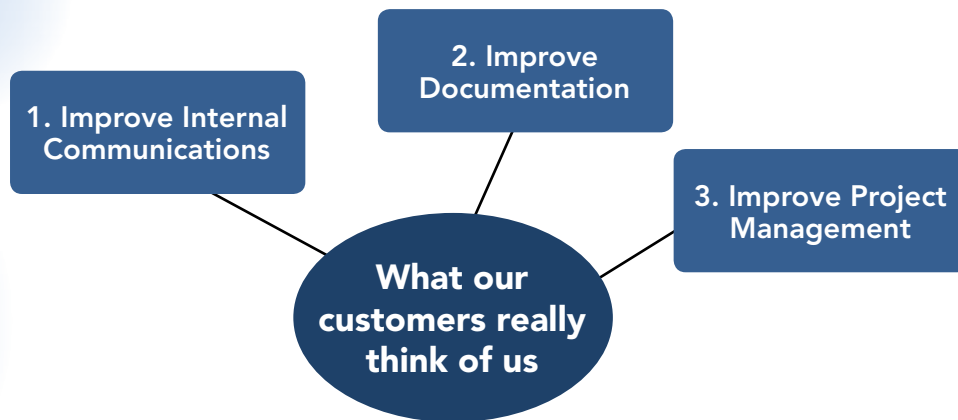
Your second and third key points now become 'Improve Documentation' and 'Improve Project Management.' You would then work through each of your remaining key points to further condense and refine your message to ensure clarity and understanding. Remember to pay particular attention to all your transitions as these are designed to orientate your audience and particularly to reengage with those who have drifted off.

# Other Free Resources

The Free Management eBooks website offers you over 100 free resources for your own professional development. Our eBooks, Checklists, and Templates are designed to help you with the management issues you face every day. They can be downloaded in PDF, Kindle, ePub, or Doc formats for use on your iPhone, iPad, laptop or desktop.

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