

5.1

Organizing a Visual Presentation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify key ideas and details to create a concise, engaging presentation.
2. Identify the steps involved in planning a comprehensive presentation.

Until now, you have interacted with your audience of readers indirectly, on the page. You have tried to anticipate their reactions and questions as all good writers do. Anticipating the audience's needs can be tough, especially when you are sitting alone in front of your computer.

When you give a presentation, you connect directly with your audience. For most people, making a presentation is both exciting and stressful. The excitement comes from engaging in a two-way interaction about your ideas. The stress comes from the pressure of presenting your ideas without having a delete button to undo mistakes. Outside the classroom, you may be asked to give a presentation, often at the last minute, and the show must go on. Presentations can be stressful, but planning and preparation, when the time and opportunity are available, can make all the difference.

This chapter covers how to plan and deliver an effective, engaging presentation. By planning carefully, applying some time-honored presentation strategies, and practicing, you can make sure that your presentation comes across as confident, knowledgeable, and interesting—and that your audience actually learns from it. The specific tasks involved in creating a presentation may vary slightly depending on your purpose and your assignment. However, these are the general steps.

Follow these steps to create a presentation based on your ideas:

1. Determine your purpose and identify the key ideas to present.
2. Organize your ideas in an outline.
3. Identify opportunities to incorporate visual or audio media, and create or locate these media aids.
4. Rehearse your presentation in advance.
5. Deliver your presentation to your audience.

5.2

Getting Started: Identifying and Organizing Key Ideas

To deliver a successful presentation, you need to develop content suitable for an effective presentation. Your ideas make up your presentation, but to deliver them effectively, you will need to identify key ideas and organize them carefully. Read the following considerations, which will help you first identify and then organize key ideas:

- **Be concise.** You will include the most important ideas and leave out others. Some concepts may need to be simplified.
- **Employ more than one medium of expression.** You should incorporate other media, such as charts, graphs, photographs, video or audio recordings, or websites.
- **Prepare for a face-to-face presentation.** If you must deliver a face-to-face presentation, it is important to project yourself as a serious and well-informed speaker. You will often speak extemporaneously, or in a rehearsed but not memorized manner, which allows for flexibility given the context or audience. You will need to know your points and keep your audience engaged.

5.3

Determine Your Purpose

As with a writing assignment, determining the purpose of your presentation early on is crucial. You want to inform your readers about the topic, but think about what else you hope to achieve.

Are you presenting information intended to move your audience to adopt certain beliefs or take action on a particular issue? If so, you are speaking not only to inform but also to persuade your listeners. Do you want your audience to come away from your presentation knowing how to do something they did not know before? In that case, you are not only informing them but also explaining or teaching a process.

Writing at Work

Schoolteachers are trained to structure lessons around one or more lesson objectives. Usually the objective, the mission or purpose, states what students should know or be able to do after they complete the lesson. For example, an objective might state, “Students will understand the specific freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment” or “Students will be able to add two three-digit numbers correctly.”

As a manager, mentor, or supervisor, you may sometimes be required to teach or train other employees as part of your job. Determining the desired outcome of a training session will help you plan effectively. Identify your teaching objectives. What, specifically, do you want your audience to know (for instance, details of a new workplace policy) or be able to do (for instance, use a new software program)? Plan your teaching or training session to meet your objectives.

5.4

Identify Key Ideas

To plan your presentation, think in terms of three or four key points you want to get across. In a paper, you have the space to develop ideas at length and delve into complex details. In a presentation, however, you must convey your ideas more concisely.

One strategy you might try is to create an outline. What is your main idea? Would your main idea work well as key points for a brief presentation? How would you condense topics that might be too lengthy, or should you eliminate topics that may be too complicated to address in your presentation?

5.5

Use an Outline to Organize Ideas

After you determine which ideas are most appropriate for your presentation, you will create an outline of those ideas. Your presentation, like a written assignment, should include an introduction, body, and conclusion. These components serve much the same purpose as they do in a written assignment.

- The introduction engages the audience's attention, introduces the topic, and sets the tone for what is to come.
- The body develops your point of view with supporting ideas, details, and examples presented in a logical order.
- The conclusion restates your point of view, sums up your main points, and leaves your audience with something to think about.

A young man named Jorge developed the following outline. He relied heavily on this outline to plan his presentation, but he adjusted it to suit the new format.

Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carbohydrate Diets

- I. Introduction
 - A. Background
 - B. Thesis/Point of view
- II. Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets
 - A. USDA nutrition guidelines
 - B. Potential flaws in USDA nutrition guidelines
 - 1. Effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar, insulin
 - 2. Relationship to metabolism and obesity
- III. Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss
 - A. Short-term effectiveness for weight loss
 - B. Long-term effectiveness not established
- IV. Other Long-Term Health Outcomes
 - A. Cholesterol and heart disease
 - B. Blood pressure
 - C. Diabetes
- V. Conclusion

5.6

Planning Your Introduction

In your previous courses, you learned techniques for writing an interesting introduction, such as beginning with a surprising fact or statistic, a thought-provoking question or quotation, a brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept or connects your topic to your audience's experiences. You can use these techniques effectively in presentations as well. You might also consider actively engaging your audience by having members respond to questions or complete a brief activity related to your topic. For example, you may have your audience respond to a survey or tell about an experience related to your topic.

Incorporating media can also be an effective way to get your audience's attention. Visual images such as a photograph or a cartoon can invoke an immediate emotional response. A graph or chart

can highlight startling findings in research data or statistical information. Brief video or audio clips that clearly reinforce your message and do not distract or overwhelm your audience can provide a sense of immediacy when you plan to discuss an event or a current issue. A PowerPoint presentation allows you to integrate many of these different media sources into one presentation.

Tip

With the accessibility provided by the Internet, you can find interesting and appropriate audio and video with little difficulty. However, the clip alone will not sustain the presentation. To keep the audience interested and engaged, you must frame the beginning and end of the clip with your own words.

Jorge completed the introduction part of his outline by listing the key points he would use to open his presentation. He also planned to show various web links early on to illustrate the popularity of the low-carbohydrate diet trend.

- Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carbohydrate Diets
- I. Introduction
 - A. Background—popularity of low-carbohydrate dieting (show websites)
 - B. Thesis/Point of view—Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for all dieters who want to lose weight or improve their health.

5.7

Planning the Body of Your Presentation

The next step is to work with the key ideas you identified earlier. Determine the order in which you want to present these ideas, and flesh them out with important details. [Section 3](#) discusses several organizational structures you might work with, such as chronological order, comparison-and-contrast structure, or cause-and-effect structure.

How much detail you include will depend on the time allotted for your presentation. Your instructor will most likely give you a specific time limit or a specific slide limit, such as eight to ten slides. If the time limit is very brief (two to three minutes, for instance), you will need to focus on communicating your point of view, main supporting points, and only the most relevant details. Three minutes can feel like an eternity if you are speaking before a group, but the time will pass very quickly. It is important to use it well.

If you have more time to work with—ten minutes or half an hour—you will be able to discuss your topic in greater detail. More time also means you must devote more thought into how you will hold your audience's interest. If your presentation is longer than five minutes, introduce some variety so the audience is not bored. Incorporate multimedia, invite the audience to complete an activity, or set aside time for a question-and-answer session.

Jorge was required to limit his presentation to five to seven minutes. In his outline, he made a note about where he would need to condense some complicated material to stay within his time limit. He also decided to focus only on cholesterol and heart disease in his discussion of long-term health outcomes. The research on other issues was inconclusive, so Jorge decided to omit this material. Jorge's notes on his outline show the revisions he has made to his presentation.

II. Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets

A. USDA nutrition guidelines

B. Potential flaws in ~~USDA nutrition guidelines~~

1. Effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar, insulin

condense?

2. ~~Relationship to metabolism and obesity~~

III. Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss

A. Short-term effectiveness for weight loss

B. Long-term effectiveness not established

IV. Other Long-Term Health Outcomes

A. Cholesterol and heart disease

~~B. Blood pressure~~

~~C. Diabetes~~

Tip

You are responsible for using your presentation time effectively to inform your audience. You show respect for your audience by following the expected time limit. However, that does not mean you must fill all of that time with talk if you are giving a face-to-face presentation. Involving your audience can take some of the pressure off you while also keeping them engaged. Have them respond to a few brief questions to get them thinking. Display a relevant photograph, document, or object and ask your classmates to comment. In some presentations, if time allows, you may choose to have your classmates complete an individual or group activity.

5.8

Planning Your Conclusion

The conclusion should briefly sum up your main idea and leave your audience with something to think about. As in a written paper, you are essentially revisiting your thesis. Depending on your topic, you may also ask the audience to reconsider their thinking about an issue, to take action, or to think about a related issue. If you presented an attention-getting fact or anecdote in your introduction, consider revisiting it in your conclusion. Just as you have learned about an essay's conclusion, do not add new content to the presentation's conclusion.

No matter how you choose to structure your conclusion, make sure it is well planned so that you are not tempted to wrap up your presentation too quickly. Inexperienced speakers, in a face-to-face presentation, sometimes rush through the end of a presentation to avoid exceeding the allotted time or to end the stressful experience of presenting in public. Unfortunately, a hurried conclusion makes the presentation as a whole less memorable.

Tip

Time management is the key to delivering an effective presentation whether it is face-to-face or in PowerPoint. As you develop your outline, think about the amount of time you will devote to each section. For instance, in a five-minute face-to-face presentation, you might plan to spend one minute on the introduction, three minutes on the body, and one minute on the conclusion. Later, when you rehearse, you can time yourself to determine whether you need to adjust your content or delivery.

In a PowerPoint presentation, it is important that your presentation is visually stimulating, avoids information overload by limiting the text per slide, uses speaker notes effectively, and uses a font that is visible on the background (e.g., avoid white letters on a light background or black letters on a dark background).

5.9

Identifying Opportunities to Incorporate Visual and Audio Media

You may already have some ideas for how to incorporate visual and audio media in your presentation. If not, review your outline and begin thinking about where to include media. Presenting information in a variety of formats will help you keep your audience's interest.

Use Presentation Software

Delivering your presentation as a slideshow is one way to use media to your advantage. As you speak, you use a computer and an attached projector to display a slideshow of text and graphics that complement the speech. Your audience will follow your ideas more easily, because you are communicating with them through more than one sense. The audience hears your words and also sees the corresponding visuals. A listener who momentarily loses track of what you are saying can rely on the slide to cue his or her memory.

To set up your presentation, you will need to work with the content of your outline to develop individual slides. Each slide should focus on just a few bullet points (or a similar amount of content presented in a graphic). Remember that your audience must be able to read the slides easily, whether the members sit in the front or the back of the room. Avoid overcrowding the slides with too much text.

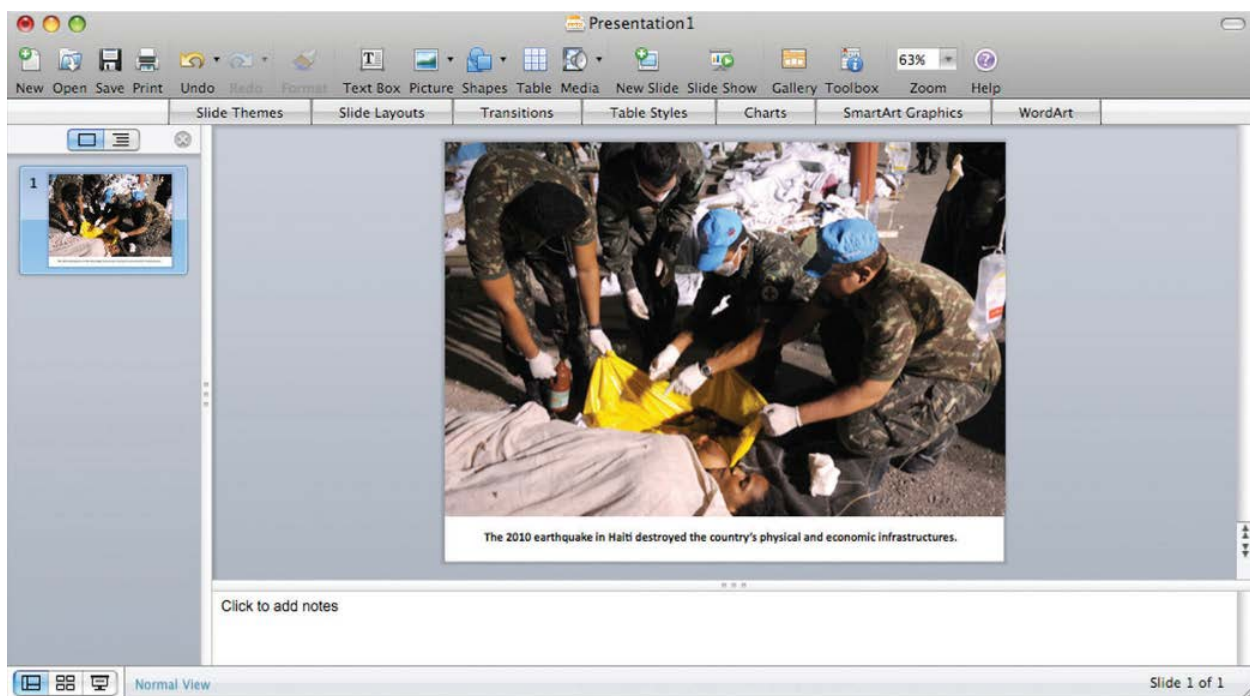
Using presentation software, such as PowerPoint, allows you to incorporate graphics, sounds, and even web links directly into your slides. You can also work with available styles, color schemes, and fonts to give your presentation a polished, consistent appearance. Different slide templates make it easy to organize information to suit your purpose. Be sure your font is visible to you audience. Avoid using small font or colored font that is not visible against your background.

5.10

Incorporate Visual Media

Even if you do not use a slideshow to complement your presentation, you can include visual media to support and enhance your content. Visual media are divided into two major categories: images and informational graphics.

Image-based media, such as photographs or videos, often have little or no accompanying text. Often these media are more powerful than words in getting a message across. Within the past decade, the images associated with major news stories, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the Abu Ghraib prison abuses from 2004 to 2006, and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, have powerfully affected viewers' emotions and drawn their attention to these news stories.



Even if your presentation addresses a less dramatic subject, you can still use images to draw in your audience. Consider how photographs, an illustration, or a video might help your audience connect with a particular person or place or bring a historical event to life. Use visual images to support descriptions of natural or man-made phenomena. What ideas lend themselves to being explained primarily through images?

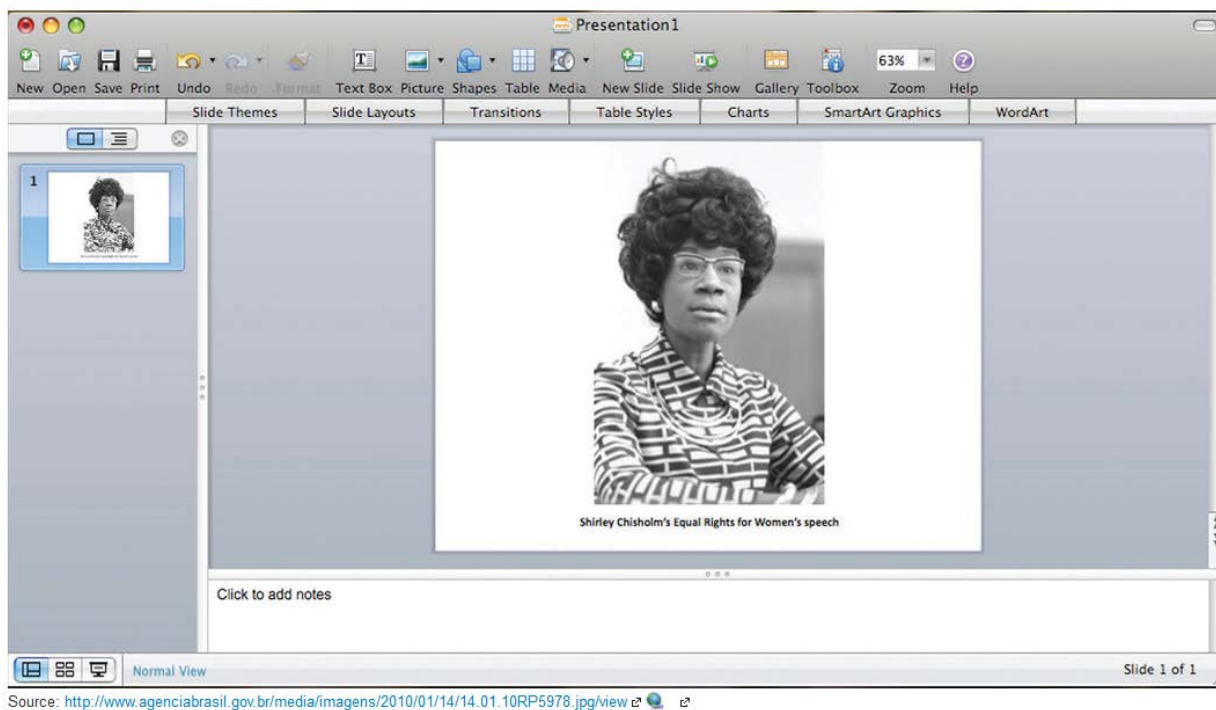
In addition, consider how you might incorporate informational graphics in your presentation. Informational graphics include diagrams, tables, pie charts, bar and line graphs, and flow charts. Informational graphics usually include some text and often work well to present numerical information. Consider using them if you are presenting statistics, comparing facts or data about several different groups, describing changes over time, or presenting a process.

5.11

Incorporate Audio Media

Although audio media are not as versatile as visual media, you may wish to use them if they work well with your particular topic. If your presentation discusses trends in pop music or analyzes political speeches, playing an audio clip is an obvious and effective choice. Clips from historical speeches, radio talk shows, and interviews can also be used, but extended clips may be ineffective with modern audiences. Always assess your audience's demographics and expectations before selecting and including audio media.

Figure 5.2



Readings from:

McClean, S. (2012). *Business Communication for Success*. [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.saylor.org/books/>

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