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From Screen To Audience - Proper Slide Delivery

By J. Douglas Jefferys

The only way to assure your presentation audience will stay with you every step of the way is to

maintain proper eye contact throughout your presentation. Proper eye contact involves delivering your presentation as a series of one-on-one conversations with each member of the audience, and holding eye-contact with members through to the end of a thought or complete sentence. Most presenters hold eye contact with any one person no more than one second - to effectively bond with your audience, you need to pump that up to a range more like three to eight.

The image to keep in mind here is that you are never delivering to a group of individuals, but rather to individuals in a group. (When people ask me what's the largest number of people I've ever spoken to, I always answer, "one".)

When presenting a PowerPoint presentation, maintaining proper eye contact becomes difficult if your slides are structured like most we see in the corporate world today - with way too much information than the audience can digest before the speaker feels compelled to start speaking. In order to maintain constant eye contact with members of the audience, you must restrict the volume of information that you toss up on the screen at any one time. Otherwise, you will do what most presenters do, which is to spend much of the presentation looking at the screen. In fact, you must restrict each new parcel of information to that which can be absorbed by both you and the audience in just a few seconds - ten at the very most.

That will set you up to then smoothly and coherently transfer the information from the screen to the audience. We call the procedure for doing this "Absorb, Align, and Address."

Absorb

When new information appears on the screen, all eyes will follow it, and at this point it is OK, and desirable, for you, too, to look to the screen. By doing so, you "give permission" to the audience to get prepared for what's coming next. That's all the screen info should include, too: just enough information to set the stage for what you are going to discuss. At this point, because you are not looking at any individual in the group, you must be silent.

Rule Number 9: If your eyes aren't locked, your jaw must be.

When you have absorbed the data bite, you can now think for a moment on how to phrase what you want to say to start off. This would not include expounding on the point, but merely filling out the talking points to make a grammatically correct statement.

Align

Once you and your audience have had the opportunity to take in this info, you then need to turn your attention away from the screen, and lock eyes (align) with a member of the audience. This is the most difficult part, physically, to perform, as the natural tendency is to begin speaking as soon as you have formulated your statement.

Address

Locked on, you finally can address your selected member of the audience with your version of the talking point.

Understand that if what you're addressing is a bullet point, this address should not be the actual words. You may always say more than the line on the screen, but never, never any less. Keep in mind that the group will read everything that's on the screen, so if you put words up there but don't speak to them, you are actually insulting your audience: These words aren't important enough for me to bother with but I wanted to take up your brain's time and effort just the same.

How many times has this happened to you: You go to a presentation and see slide after slide with all kinds of footnotes and small type, or graphs with legends and data to which the presenter never refers? You're looking at all the elements on the slide trying to figure out which stuff is most important, and then the presenter never even mentions half the stuff you've read. How does that make you feel? For most people, the first slide that contains more information than the presenter chooses not to discuss is the point at which they check out, deciding to figure it all out later from the handout, which, of course, they trash at the first can they see outside the presentation room.

Once learned, the Absorb, Align and Address system is a beautiful thing to behold. Slides designed with this system never suffer from TMI, and thus never have too much for the presenter to deal with. Presenter confidence is high, and the audience feels this big time. The audience is forced to turn their attention to you, because there's not enough information to allow them to jump to their own conclusions. By the same token, you are now able to direct all of your speaking to the audience and not the screen.

But here's the really fun part: When you follow this simple plan for both design and delivery, almost anyone can look and sound like an expert on their subject, regardless of how much prep time they've put into rehearsing the presentation! We prove this in our corporate training classes by having participants deliver other participant's presentations that we have edited and revised to comply with the "rules" (next chapter). Preferably, off course, you would have a good background in the subject matter, so that you can deliver the "meat on the bones" part effectively. But if you know to what the talking

points refer, and you also know that no more material than you can deliver in just a few seconds will appear, you can actually give a presentation for the very first time and sound like you know what you're talking about!

J. Douglas Jefferys is a principal at PublicSpeakingSkills.com, [

<http://www.publicspeaking.com>

] an

international consulting firm specializing in training businesses of all sizes to communicate more efficiently. The firm spreads its unique knowledge through on-site classes, public seminars and high-impact videos.

The Bad Side of a Slide Presentation

By Rafael Van Dyke

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A couple of years ago, I went to a conference for programmers in Arizona, where I had the opportunity to attend several one-hour classes. Virtually all of the instructors used slide presentations to get through the material. Though there was nothing wrong with the material that was covered, the slide presentations they used really did nothing to help them in their session. It would have been just as good for them to print out their speech and give it the audience a copy to read along with.

There were a select few with slide presentations that actually aided in their session. In fact, they were so good that after a while I paid more attention to the presenter than the slide presentation (for me, that an accomplishment!); but they were rare. I'm sure it was because they were programmers; but all the same, allow me to outline why they were so bad:

A Slide Presentation Is Not the Presentation

The first mistake most presenters made was to think that a detailed slide presentation would compensate for poor communication skills, when nothing could be further from the truth. Some of them almost had their entire lecture in the presentation. A slide presentation is to be used as an outline to keep everyone on track, not as your teleprompter. No matter how much you know about a topic, reading most of your presentation makes you look unprepared and certainly not an expert in your field.

A Slide Presentation Is Not a Book

This goes along with the prior point of having too much material in a slide presentation. You can't simply take copy and paste from your book and try to make it into a slide show. The audience doesn't come to a session to read a book on the screen ... you have to summarize it for them. This means that you won't be able to give them all of your knowledge in one hour, and you'll need to cut out some things. If they want more, then maybe they'll read your book.

No, You Don't Have to Get Through Your Material

Whenever I hear a presenter say, "Please hold your questions until I get through my material", that is a major turn-off! Number one, it means that you have too much material (previous point); and secondly, it means that your slide presentation is for you and not your audience. How do you know when a presenter cares about the audience? It's when you hear these words instead, "Does anyone have any questions BEFORE we move on?" I really don't care if you a presenter gets through all of their material, and it's certainly not the reason why I came to the conference.

I've Seen That Template Before

To make things worse at this conference, I saw the same blue PowerPoint template at every other session (you know the one I'm talking about!) Could you be anymore unimaginative? If you're going to do this, take the time to learn how to create your own or have an expert do it for you. And try using a background color other than dark blue, it really is played out.

Oh No! Not Times New Roman!

If it were up to me, the Times New Roman font type would be outlawed in all slide presentations,

websites, and anything that's displayed on a screen. Nothing spells **MEDIOCRE** more than seeing Times New Roman. It's boring. It's old. It's time to move on! Take the time to choose something more appealing.

I realize that this may hurt your pride a little bit; but just remember that it's not about you, it's about your audience. Just remember, "People don't care much you know until they know how much you care".

Rafael Van Dyke is the site owner of [BetterDocuments.com](http://www.betterdocuments.com) and the editor of its articles & newsletters. Go to <http://www.betterdocuments.com> to get download free documents, templates, and expertise. Your documents will never be the same.



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