

1.

## PowerPoint makes us boring.

The typical PowerPoint slide has a heading and a list of points underneath. Unfortunately, the human mind knows this linear structure well, quickly recognizes it, and wanders off to do something else. Consequently, the participant doesn't pay attention to the slide or the presenter. Most presenters understand that problem, so they spice up the slide with clip art, a trick that is used so often it has become trite.

The best solution is to break up the linearity. Because most slides make several points—supported by data—that relate to the

conclusion, switch the display order of the information. Present supporting data with points on the first slide and show the data and draw the conclusions on the next. If you have more than one presenter, switch presenters between slides, too. The key is to give the attendees something to keep them engaged.

# Stop Death by PowerPoint

## 5 secrets that presentation coaches don't know.

By W. Christian Buss

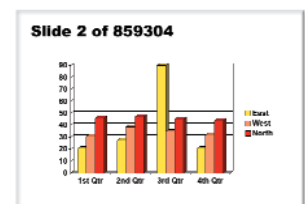
IN 1906, William Jennings Bryan wrote a book that analyzed famous speeches. In his introduction about ancient Greek oratory, he noted this anonymous quote: "When Cicero spoke people said, 'How well Cicero speaks!' but when Demosthenes spoke they said, 'Let us go against Philip.'" He explains why: "It is a compliment to a public speaker that the audience should discuss what he says rather than his manner of saying it; more complimentary that they should remember his arguments, than that they should praise his rhetoric."

Training professionals earn a living by motivating and supporting change. And to master their presentation and speaking skills, they often enlist the help of presentation coaches and software such as PowerPoint. But trainers

need to go a step beyond that if they want to motivate participants to support the march against Philip.

### Lead the way

There is no doubt that PowerPoint helps us make pretty presentations and that our coaches help us mind our body language. But PowerPoint and the world around us contain hidden traps that reduce the effectiveness of almost every presentation we see and make. Think about the boring presentations you've witnessed—and the times that you've put the audience to sleep. What could you have done differently to keep the audience's attention? The following five tips offer suggestions to keep your next presentation on target and on your participants' minds.

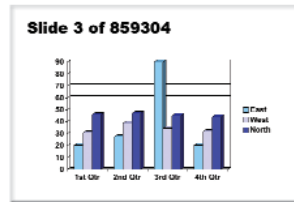


2.

## Reports and textbooks kill presentation effectiveness.

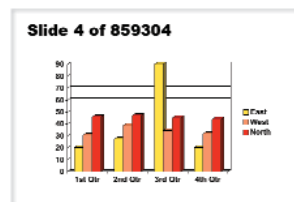
Many presenters use written materials such as reports or textbooks to construct presentations. While participants can read hundreds of words per minute, a presenter can only speak between 125 and 150. In other words, participants simply cannot process as much information from a presentation as they can from a book.

Therefore, don't try to put all of the written material into your presentation. Instead, view the presentation as a short executive summary of the text conclusions. A better strategy is to prepare the presentation first and use it to guide the written report.



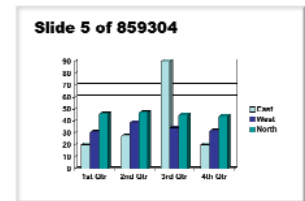
**3. Forget almost all of what you know.** We have all seen a presenter get to a particular slide and then “do a mind dump” of everything she knows about the topic. That’s a natural reaction, given all of her research, planning, writing, and rehearsing: She wants to share all that she knows. The problem is that she knows more about the topic than can be discussed in a session. And unfortunately, her verbal elaboration becomes a tedious dissertation that quickly loses steam.

The solution is to limit the amount of time you spend on each slide to between 30 and 60 seconds. Training presentations require more time per slide, but that time should be devoted to participant discussion or explanatory examples—not more information. That is one reason why straight stand-and-deliver teaching is often less effective than more experiential learning modes.



**4. Script each slide, but don't read it.** Each slide has a purpose for existence—take-away value. It should develop a point from material presented before it and lead to the slides that come after it. A well-structured presentation can be understood by reading the titles and their take-away points only. If your presentation meets that test, then it will communicate effectively.

Remember, your audience can read words faster than you can speak them, so don't use the slide as your script. A double dose of the same information will only bore audience members. Also, do not to read short segments or quotes for emphasis and never read the slide title—it adds no value to the presentation.



**5. Start the presentation before they arrive and finish it after they leave.** Your presentation objective is to maintain control of the information that is disseminated. As participants gather, they will be talking. Interact with them so you know what they are talking about. Your presentation may need to respond to concerns that arise in their conversations.

The nature of question-and-answer sessions often can cause presenters to lose control of the information flow. To combat that problem, one strategy is to omit key information from the presentation. When someone asks about it, use the discussion to give information that you wanted participants to have. That way, you are not facing unexpected questions on the spot. Another strategy is to have friends in the audience ask the key questions. When they ask the questions, you answer them in front of the entire group.

The purpose of presentations is to drive some kind of change among audience members. And as Demosthenes demonstrated, you cannot get them to march against Philip if they are bored, confused, or lost. Hopefully, these five tips will help you lead the charge.

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