Planning your presentation

When faced with doing a presentation, it can be difficult to know where to start. This post takes you through the process of planning your presentation.

In this post we will explore:

* The planning process
* Creating an outline for your presentation

# The planning process

# When you’ve got a presentation to do it’s tempting to jump straight on to your computer and start writing it immediately, especially if you’re pushed for time.

# Putting a bit more thought into the planning process will save you time in the long run: it’ll help you to think about all of the different elements that you need to consider, which will ultimately ensure that your presentation is effective, well thought-out and appropriate for your audience.

# There are 7 key stages of preparing for your presentation. In this section we will explore each and the proportion of time you should spend on each.

## 1. Understanding your task — 25%

If you’re doing an assessed presentation as part of your course and have been given a specific assignment question, you’ll need to break it down to ensure that you understand what you’re being asked to do. You’ll also need to check your assessment rubric to ensure you know what you’re being marked on.

For all presentations you’ll need to establish exactly what you’re being asked to do, how long you’ll have and whether you need to include time for questions. This stage also includes researching your topic: before you can present on a topic, you need to know what you’re talking about!

## **2. Establishing your audience — 5%**

You need to know who you’re presenting to in order to ensure that the content and tone of your presentation is appropriate for your audience. We look at this in more detail in [this post](https://medium.com/%40mlemanchester/presentations-consider-your-audience-11a55397c85b).

## **3. Decide your format — 5%**

Depending on the circumstance of your presentation, you may have flexibility to include audience participation, activities, storytelling or other alternative means of communicating your message. If you choose to include some of these elements you’ll need to allow more time to prepare them.

To learn more about designing visual aids try [this resource](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/presentations/design/story_html5.html).

## **4. Identify your key messages — 10%**

Broadly speaking, what are you going to say? As with understanding your task, if your presentation is for an academic assessment you may need to be more rigorous in establishing your arguments.

To learn more about how to develop and organise your argument for an academic assignment, try [this resource](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/developing-argument/).

## **5. Write your presentation — 20%**

The first stage of this is to write an outline: what content will you include, and how will you structure it? You may also choose to write a script for your presentation. This is optional; some people like to have written everything they’re going to say, others prefer to keep it to an overall outline of the content and ad-lib the actual words on the day. Whichever you’re comfortable with is fine. The important thing here is to avoid actually using your script when delivering your presentation; use cue cards instead to keep you on track while maintaining engagement with your audience.

## **6. Create your visual aids — 15%**

Once you’ve planned the content you’re going to cover you can decide on what visual aids you want to use and start creating them.

## **7. Practise, practise, practise — 20%**

The more you practise your presentation, the more confident you’ll be when you come to deliver it. Download this [example project plan](https://education.library.manchester.ac.uk/downloads/handouts/presentation-plan.docx) which illustrates each of the key stages we’ve covered. When you know the date of your presentation, you can work backwards to establish when you need to work on each stage of the planning process.

# Outlining your presentation

Creating an effective presentation takes more than throwing some slides together; you should have your content planned before you go anywhere near PowerPoint (or whichever tool you’re using).In this section we’ll look at how to identify and organise the content for your presentation to create a coherent outline.

The specifics of planning your content will vary depending on your context, but this process is a useful guide that is applicable to all presentations.

## **1. Identify your main points**

Decide on the key things you want to communicate. The number of points you include will depend on how long you’ve got; don’t try to cram too much in! As a rough guide, for a ten minute presentation you should include no more than three key points. Remember that you’ll need to leave time for an introduction and a conclusion. It’s useful to start your planning on paper. Post-it notes work well because you can move them around, which is useful when you come to ordering your main points.

## **2. Put your points in order**

Next you can start to form the structure of your presentation. Your goal as a presenter is to communicate your message to your audience, so you need to make it as easy as possible for your audience to follow along with your presentation by ordering your main points in a logical manner. Consider these questions to help you decide the order:

* What is the relationship between your main points?
* Are they independent of each other, or does one follow on from another?
* Are you comparing/contrasting them?
* Are they a sequence of events?
* Are they themed?

All of these factors will affect how you will want to structure your presentation.

## **3. Select supporting information**

Once you’ve decided on your main points, you can start to flesh out the detail of what you’re going to present to support your arguments. Keep your audience in mind at this stage in particular; their level of knowledge in your topic area should be a key indicator of how much and what level of background information to include.

## **4. Plan your introduction**

What you include in your introduction will depend on your context but as a general rule of thumb you’ll want to introduce yourself and your topic and provide an overview of what you’re going to cover. It can be effective to start with an attention-grabber: short personal stories, striking images, rhetorical questions and controversial statements can all be effective means of getting your audience to sit up and take notice.

## **5. Plan your conclusion**

Note that it is a conclusion, not a summary. While you might include a summary of the key points you’ve spoken about, your conclusion should be more than this. What can you conclude as a result of your key points?

The nature of your conclusion will vary depending on the purpose of your presentation. If you are aiming to inspire, you might include a motivational quotation; if persuasion is your goal, a call to action would make an effective close.