Presentations

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2. So the first question I want to address today is why learn to present? What is it that sets presenting apart from some of the other communication methods we might use in this course? Up until this year this course has primarily used multiple drafts of a project proposal that culminated in a final proposal at the end of the semester. And then an hour-long presentation to clients and mentors was tacked on at the end.
3. And these presentations looked a lot like this: Well-intentioned absolute crashing bores. Mind numbing. Absolutely mind numbing. I know because I had to watch a number of them. And it wasn’t really the fault of the student presenters because, you know, what kinds of models do we really have out there? Most PowerPoint presentations are truly awful. PowerPoint has been around since the 1990s and the term “death by PowerPoint” appeared in about the year 2000 and yet here we are still punishing each other and wasting each other’s time. So one of the first reasons to learn to present is just to bring some truly useful and engaging communication into the world.
4. But the second reason is that we have a vested interest in making sure that you are well equipped when you get out of here. The advantage of someone who presents well over someone who doesn’t is so strong that it is almost unfair. As one reviewer of Garr Reynolds’ book *Presentation Zen* put it. “Effective presentation skills is the "killer app" that can set us apart from others in the real world; whether it be teaching, working at a non-profit/ministry, or working in the business world. At some point, we will have to present something, and being able to do a sensational job doing so will dramatically improve our effectiveness.” And of course it’s highly visible.
5. And it isn’t just about some sort of superficial showmanship. In order to put together a clear and compelling presentation you really have to understand what you’re talking about, to get down and fully absorb the details and be able to bring all those things back up and put them into a cohesive whole. And that’s a hugely important skill.
6. I don’t know how many of you have read Daniel Pink’s *A Whole New Mind* or the manga version, *Johnny Bunko* but if you haven’t I’d recommend it along with his more recent book, *Drive*. Pink points out that if you’re training for a job that can be outsourced to someone overseas for a lot less money then you’re obviously training for the wrong thing. So his advice is to train for the things that can’t be outsourced, like being able to conceptualize how the many parts and pieces of things fit into a coherent whole. OK. I’m not suggesting that you can scrap calculus—it’s just that you’re going to have to be able to use it in context.
7. And one of the last reasons I’m going to hit you with about presenting is that if you learn to do it really well, you can use it in all aspects of your life. You may become really good at work and get singled out as a rising star in your company but it is a skill you can take anywhere: to your kids’ school, to the planning and zoning commission, or to potential donors for a cause that you’re involved in. This is a skill that you can use to make a difference in all aspects of your life. So think about it as an essential life skill.
8. OK. So what are the main things we’re going to concentrate on to set your presentation apart and make it memorable? They are Story, Support, and Clarity.
9. We’re going to start with story. What is it about stories that make them such powerful ways to get your point across and keep your audience riveted?
10. Well, first of all, we’re hard wired for stories. Think about kids listening to a really good storyteller. They’re hooked. And somewhere along the way we got this idea that stories are just fiction, that they are even kind of false—and of course they can be used like that. But when we say that we just want the facts, we don’t really.
Anybody can get the facts instantly from Google. No, what we want, what we crave is for someone to pull those facts together into a compelling and meaningful narrative.
11. So what makes a good story?
12. Well, first of all, good stories are illuminating. They make you see things you hadn’t noticed before. They connect the dots in a way that provoke thought. They keep people hooked in because their brains get excited about following the story’s line of reasoning. Seeing those connections come into focus is satisfying at the neural level.
13. And along the same vein, good stories are engaging. They become engaging when the storyteller figures out how to relate something that resonates with the audience—that targets the audience’s interest. Really good storytellers can put themselves in the position of the audience and think, “If I were sitting in this audience, what would I want to hear. What would make this real to me? It’s kind of like when my sister asked me once how I made such great salads and I had to stop for a moment because it seemed so obvious. I said that I just made the kinds of salads that I would want to eat. Same with presentations; if you do nothing else, step back periodically and ask yourself, would I like to watch this presentation?
14. And third, good stories are memorable. There are always those bits and details that people associate with good stories. In presentations a lot of what makes it memorable will be the way you combine your visuals and your narrative so that your visual seep in and clarify—so that they solidify your meaning into something that resonates and gets filed away in the audience’s mind as something important.
15. The next main aspect of a great presentation is making sure that you find ways to persuasively support your case—so it doesn’t feel like everything is about to topple. So how do we get support?
16. A lot of your credibility for these presentations is going to come from the research you are doing to prepare for your design projects, which is why it’s really important to be thorough and to have absorbed the information you are researching so that it doesn’t sound canned. Remember, it’s not just the facts but how you tie them together—and that’s a lot easier if you’ve fully mastered the facts.
17. Concreteness. Having a real life story or anecdote can solidify your story in the mind of your audience. In doing the research for these projects, Dr. Pedrow tries to get students to think beyond the library—to contact people working in the field. That may sound complex but often it isn’t at all. I remember last year one team’s project involved the analysis of wheat and the team was scrambling to figure out some of the economic and societal implications of their design. It finally dawned on them that they knew some local farmer they could ask. And when they did they got a wealth of information that couldn’t be gleaned from research articles only.
18. OK. Here’s one of those super important things to remember when presenting. As you pull together your presentations you’re not only going to be asking yourselves “What’s our point?” but also, “Why does it matter?” This gets hard because you’re often so close to the material it seems obvious. But if you remember nothing else from this presentation, I want you to remember to step back and ask yourselves, “What’s our point?” and “Why does it matter?” Put yourselves in the place of the audience. Are they going to get it? When they leave are they really going to get what you intended? So once again, “What’s our point?” “Why does it matter?”
19. OK. Last but not least, Clarity. This is so important because all of your best intentions are funneled through how clear you are. And clarity seems like it should be so simple but clarity is one of those things you have to work and work and polish to achieve. It’s a ton of work to make it look easy and to slip easily into the minds of your audience. So how do you get clarity?
20. Well first you’re going to determine what the main points are. What do you want the audience to remember? And then you’re going to figure out, “How can we make that memorable?” “How can we make that stick?” That’s where having a really clear image to connect to your words is going to be important; how the story, the anecdotes, the concreteness or the unexpectedness of what you say is going to cause your message to stick.
21. After you've nailed down your main points, you’re going to want to get it into some kind of logical flow so that it’s easy for the audience to follow, so that the dots you are connecting leave them feeling satisfied. So that by the time you get to the end of your story they are going to be nodding their heads in agreement; that they got your points and understood why they matter.
22. Simplicity. Simplicity is key to clarity. You’ll notice on these slides that I’ve used only a few words and no bullet points. The reason is that there is only so much information people can take in on the same channel. If you’re going to show your audience a bunch of words and say a bunch of words at the same time then what you say and what they can see will be in competition.

And here’s another danger if you write down everything you’re going to say: you are likely to end up reading it. As Guy Kawasaki pointed out, nothing makes you look stupider or that you don’t know what you’re talking about than reading your own slides. Besides, the audience can read them faster silently than you can read them aloud. But the truth is that if you have those words up there and you begin to panic or get distracted you’re going to wind up reading those words to get back on track. Believe me. I’ve done it. So keep it simple.
23. But the main thing you’re going to want to keep in mind as you pull together your presentations is what gets the message across and what is extraneous noise that gets in the way? Keep trying to pare it down to the essentials. Keep thinking, “If the audience will only remember one or two things, what do we want that to be?”
24. OK. Before we move on to some of the other details about how to put your slides together and how the assignment will work, let’s find out how I did? So, what ideas from this presentation stuck?
How did I do?
Making your point with visuals.
Number of bikes sold (2002-2007)
Over 5,000 bikes sold in 2007
3.2% of Japanese are “Obese”

Japan  3.2%
France  9.5%
Canada  22.4%
Mexico  24.2%
USA     32.2%

OECD Factbook 2007
Ecological Era: Organic Foods

Arable Land in Organic Production by Continent

- 66% [N. America]
- 23% [Oceania]
- 1% [Africa]
- 2% [Asia]
- 1% [Europe]
- 1% [L. America]

Source: SOEL-FIBL Survey 2007
Arable land in organic production

- Europe: 66%
- N. America: 23%
- L. America: 7%
- Asia, Africa, Oceania: 4%
Arable land in organic production

- Europe: 66%
- N. America: 23%
- L. America: 7%
- Asia: 2%
- Oceania: 1%
- Africa: 1%
Arable land in organic production

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Source: SOEL-FIBLSurvey 2007
Arable land in organic production

- Europe: 66%
- N. America: 23%
- L. America: 7%
- Asia: 2%
- Oceania: 1%
- Africa: 1%
Schematic drawing of the pulsed laser ablation / deposition system used to make thin films.
PLA of a solid target with deposition on an on-axis mounted substrate.
PLA of a solid target with deposition on an on-axis mounted substrate.