

The 10 top mistakes people usually make when delivering presentations – *Probably!*

Ian Henderson and Martin Eldon



While there is some disagreement on exactly how long an adult's attention span is, we believe that it has almost certainly reduced over the last decade. We have seen one suggestion quoted on www.fortunemagazine.com that indicates that in this age of the internet attention spans have plummeted from 12 minutes in 2005 to five minutes.

Such statistics are always there to be challenged, but it is probably no surprise to learn that TED Talks, some of the most watched and popular presentations, are limited to 18 minutes. This amount of time is thought to be long enough to say what you need to say credibly but yet short enough to hold your audience's attention.



¹<https://www.ethos3.com/2015/01/how-to-conquer-short-attention-spans/>

Mistake #2

No Purpose or Focus

Incredibly this is a mistake that we see quite a lot. The presenter has not given any thought to what the purpose is to their presentation. They get some content together, make some slides or graphs – or both – and then stand up and give a talk that has no purpose or point to it. They just deliver information.

Doug Stevenson, an American presentation guru, talks of a presentation being like a multi-lane highway that people travel along. He refers to the need to be clear about knowing why you are speaking and being clear about your core message. According to Stevenson, you should be able to write the purpose of your talk in 12 words.

He goes on to extol the virtue of also being absolutely clear of knowing what's in it for your audience. We have learned over the years that just because you have got your audience in the room does not mean that you have got your audience in the room and unless they are clear about why they should listen to you and your message you will lose them.



So, before you write your next talk spend some time getting clear on the real purpose of it and why is it important to the people that have gathered to listen to you.

Mistake #3

No Clear Structure

OK, you have got your purpose clear in your mind and know what's in it for your audience to pay attention to you. You are good on the focus element. The next mistake that people frequently make is that they have no clear structure. They get loads of content together. They open up PowerPoint and hey presto they get going. No purpose or point to it. They just deliver information.

This approach is common and produces presentations that lack flow. Flow is particularly important if you want to grab your audience and keep your audience. In this context flow is the logical order or sequence of your information. People point to the great presenters and say how easy and informal they make it look. Well, we can tell you that the great presenters know exactly what they are doing. They have a clear structure or flow and work to it, even if they do make it look easy.

There are many different types of flow. In his best-selling book, *Presenting to Win*, Jerry Weissman lists 16, yes 16, different types of flow; including modular, chronological and spatial to name but three. We believe it is important that the audience can see and understand where you are taking them and that you make it easy to follow them. As we mentioned above, Doug Stevenson uses the analogy of a highway to describe the journey.

There will be times when you come off the highway to make a point. It is important that you take the audience with you, that you signpost where you are going and that you get back onto the highway to

continue the journey. We have seen many presenters take their audience off on a side track that the audience don't understand and then never get back to the core message.



Another structure that we have used many times was taught to us by Steve McDermott, pictured here with Ian. Steve is 3 time winner of The European business speaker of the year. He calls it the 5 Peaks structure. The first peak is where you grab the audience.

Peaks two, three and four are where you give them the key points of your talk and the last peak is your close.

There is something powerful about the number three. If we are doing a business presentation we never have more than three points, each with a maximum of three supporting points.



² Jerry Weissman, "Presenting to Win – The Art of Telling Your Story"
Prentice Hall 2006

Mistake #4 No Hook or Grab

So, you get a great build up from the MC and a round of applause greets you as you step up to the podium. And then you snatch defeat from the jaws of victory! The first words that come out of your mouth are 'me focused'. It sounds something like this.



"Hello, my name is..... Tonight I'm going to talk about....."

The alternative is that you open up by insincerely thanking the audience for inviting you to talk to them; **"Hello my name is.....and I'd like to thank you all for inviting me here tonight to talk to you about....."**

The thing is that first impressions count – a lot – and you only have a few seconds to make a positive impression on your audience. Boring introductions, like the ones above are pretty much guaranteed to turn a lot of people off. We are not saying don't tell them who you are or that you are grateful. Just don't waste those valuable first few seconds doing it.

Business speaker and comedian Steve McDermott says that once you have got them in the room you have to keep them in the room. Your opening lines have got to grab your audience, make them sit up and take notice. It's all about making a connection with them. We would suggest never opening with a joke.

Humour's great, but telling a joke is a risky strategy if you haven't got that connection. We suggest that you look at Sir Kenneth Robinson's TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en



Sir Kenneth Robinson

His opening line goes like this, **"Good morning. It's been great hasn't it? I've been blown away. In fact, I'm leaving."** The audience laughed. He had built a connection with them in those few words.

Other ways you can grab your audience include:

- Asking a question – preferably one that you already know the answer to and that is designed to elicit a positive response and create a desired state in the audience
- Tell them a story – preferably one that is both short and relevant to a key theme
- Using a quotation or familiar saying – again, one that is well known and relevant to what you are going to tell them

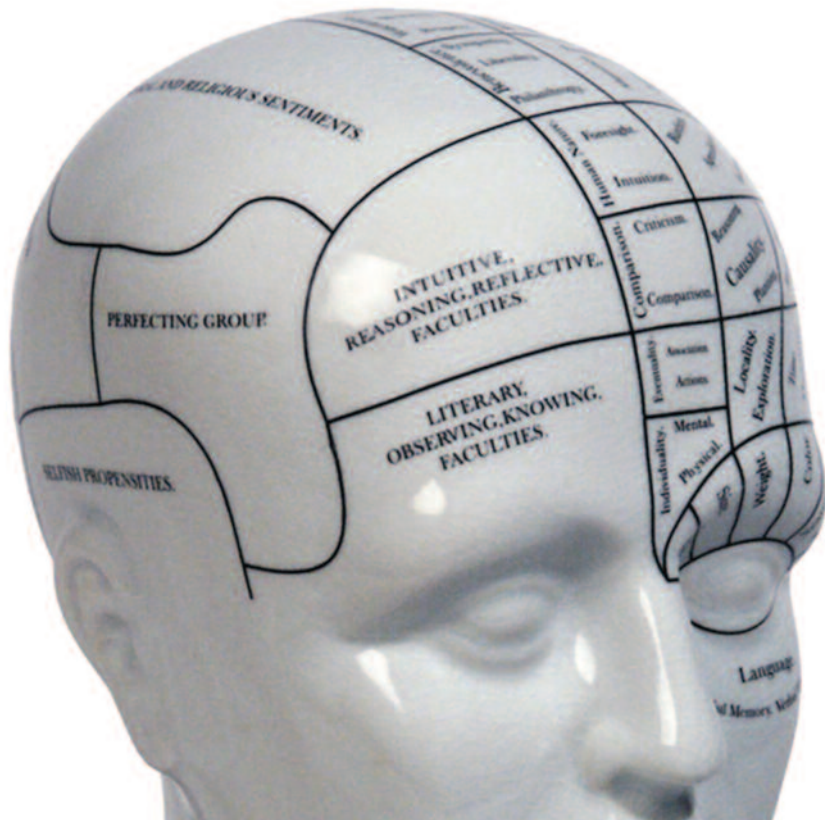
One of the strongest ways to build an emotional connection with an audience is to be vulnerable. Now, this can be uncomfortable for some folks.

To see how this can be done, a great example of this is Brene Brown. In her TED Talk, "The Power of Vulnerability" she uses self-effacing humour to make herself vulnerable. You can see the video here http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en#t-77447. Audiences love speakers who demonstrate vulnerability. It does not detract from your credibility; it can actually enhance it as you connect with your audience at a human level. It's a powerful way of building deep rapport.

10 Mistake #5 Speaking to Only the Logical Brain

You will be familiar with the idea that we all have a left and right brain. The intellectual left brain is usually credited with dealing with our logical, analytical functions while our right brain is more 'creative' and emotional.

We remember watching one presentation where the presenter turned the lights off, threw up an Excel spreadsheet that was 50 columns and 100 rows and then proceeded to send most of the audience to sleep by talking through every single line of detail. It had loads of information, it just had no soul. It was sooooo boring!



A presentation aimed at the intellectual brain is:

- Aimed at the more conscious mind
- Focused on content
- About the organisation of facts
- Logical
- Designed to make sense

Whereas, a presentation aimed at the emotional brain is:

- Aimed at the unconscious mind
- Focused on the presentation
- Uses stories and metaphors
- Full of imagery
- Designed to hit home

Please note that we are not advocating neglecting the intellectual side of the presentation. No, we are just suggesting that it is necessary to consider the emotional appeal of your talk if you want to really connect with your audience. Today, it's all about experiences. The great presenters create an 'experience' for their audiences.

If people wanted to be lectured to they would probably sign up for a college class, sit in rows and listen to an expert spouting on about their subject. Maya Angelou, the famous American Civil Liberties Activist once said that an audience will quickly forget what you say and do but they will never forget how you made them feel!

Mistake #6

No Rapport

This mistake is linked to Mistake number 4. It happens when a speaker doesn't pace and lead their audience. Pacing and leading is an NLP term which means the speaker starts from where the audience is; to meet the audience in their world. It would be like a millionaire opening their talk to an audience of homeless people by saying something like, "I'm a millionaire. I live a fantastic life. I have a fantastic house. I have several fantastic cars. I stay in the best hotels".



Now, a few of the audience might just be motivated to change by what they hear thinking that they want some of that. Many, however, will be turned off. It would be a different story, quite literally, if the millionaire paced their

audience by saying something like, "Ten years ago I was broke. Ten years ago I was living on the street. I know what it's like to get moved on by the Police. I know what it's like to be cold and scared. Let me tell you how I went from being broke and living on the street to where I am today."

The audience will probably be thinking something like 'They get it. They know what it's like for me'.

Rapport has many definitions. Most of them refer to it being an unconscious bond based on similarity. By opening their talk telling the audience that they knew what it was like to be broke and on the streets, the speaker builds a bridge with the audience. They show that they care and understand. They demonstrate empathy.

Mistake #7

No Variety of Voice Tonality

Your voice is one of your tools as a speaker. It has certain key facets that you need to be aware of and use to your advantage:

- Its pace (speed)
- Its projection (volume)
- Its pitch (rise and fall)
- Its timbre (whether it's quality is croaky or cut-glass)

When we deliver our Presentation Mastery programme we work with participants to bring a variety of these facets to their presentations. I am going to focus at this point on the main two; pace and projection, as these are the easiest to work with.

To begin with many speakers speak quickly, really quickly, as if they are rushing to get the talk finished! Varying the speed of your voice adds life and interest to your talk. Sometimes you can add a sense of urgency by speeding up.

Most motivational speeches are fast. However, sometimes a slower delivery can add incredible power. In fact, silence can carry immense power when used at the appropriate point in a talk.

A variety of volume also adds interest. Listen to Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Most people know the final few minutes when he talks very loud and very fast. Fewer people know that the early part of that speech is delivered more slowly and quietly.



Mistake #8

No Movement or Too Much!

Let us start with the basic premise that the presenter is the most important visual aspect of the presentation. Not the PowerPoint slide. Not the Excel spreadsheet. You, the presenter!

A presentation is basically a conversation between you and your audience and, as in an everyday conversation, you can create emphasis by using various gestures and movements.

There are many benefits to movement in a presentation:

- It adds energy and variety to your presentation.
- It makes you look more confident – because people who are nervous are generally frozen in one spot.

Also, movement attracts attention. It stimulates peoples' visual senses we tend to pay more attention to something that is moving than something that is standing still. So logically, if you want to be centre of attention, which as a presenter you should, then moving around will attract more attention to you as a speaker.

And as an added bonus, if you move, you may start to feel more confident. That's partly because movement will help dissipate the extra adrenalin in your system. So, ensure that you know what your final message will be. Deliver it with power and leave your audience on a high wanting more."

However, if there is too much movement that law of attraction can have the opposite effect. Moving while presenting has got a bad name over the years because of university lecturers pacing up and down.

Audiences are distracted by mindless, repetitive movement such as rocking backwards and forwards or from side to side. In this case there is a danger that your audience might be so attracted and irritated by your movement that they pay more attention to your movement, not what you are talking about.

We have seen many inexperienced and/or nervous presenters move like a tiger pacing up and down the edge of its cage. The movement might well help them to relieve some of their tension, but it might well end up distracting an audience.

So which is it to be – to move or not to move? The Chinese have a marvellous piece of wisdom for presenters:

"When standing,
stand
When sitting,
sit
Do not wobble"

The key lesson is to plan and prepare ways to use movement and gestures consciously to underpin and enhance your presentation rather than allow your body to react to your state.



Mistake #9

Not Knowing Your Material



This is a quick one to cover. There is just no excuse for this. You should always be the master of your subject. Well, maybe one. If you have been asked to deliver someone else's presentation and you feel you can't say "No" to them for whatever reason.

At this point we want to raise the subject of 'winging it' because you haven't rehearsed your talk. We have been presenters for many years and we have known very, very few presenters who were actually capable of doing this effectively.

For us mere mortal presenters, failing to prepare can have dire consequences; believe me, we know from bitter personal experience!

Mistake #10

A Weak Close

So, you have done a great job building up your audience to a frenzy. They are buzzing, hanging on your every word. They are drooling

Then you snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by closing with something uninspiring like, "That's all I want to say so does anybody have any questions." Or, "Thanks very much, good night."

The end of your talk is automatically a focal point for your audience. Your final words provide you with a singular opportunity to embed a message into the mind of your audience.

A weak ending will diminish your credibility. When the audience doesn't get the completion they crave, your ideas will seem less memorable and you will become instantly forgettable.

A powerful close will leave your audience wanting more and in a positive state about your presentation.



BONUS Mistake #11 Not Being Yourself

When Ian started presenting he used to copy other presenters. He remembers trying to copy a speaker he thought was really good. The speaker wore an expensive pin stripe suit, shirt and tie. He talked from behind a lectern. Ian tried to do exactly the same; except it was never the same.

So, he sought out the advice of a public speaker called Alan Bailey. Bailey was a speaker of some repute on the professional circuit.



We will leave you with his number one tip and one that we have used over the last 25 years as presenters: "**always be yourself**. It's so much easier, and a great deal less stressful than trying to be someone else! Authenticity shines through and audiences love it!"

Want to know more about how the Presentation Mastery Programme can help you avoid making these mistakes?

Have you ever seen someone give a really great speech – one that knocked their audience's socks off? Would you like to know how they did it? Would you like to deliver a speech just like that?

Or, would you just like to stand up and present without feeling nervous or perhaps even physically sick?

Well, the good news is that now you can. The Presentation Mastery Programme is a highly acclaimed, interactive and intensive two-day programme that has been designed to work with two groups of presenters:

1. People who are new to presenting and who don't want to develop bad presentation habits
2. Experienced presenters who want to take their presentation skills to the next level

Both programmes focus on the presenter as the most important part of any presentation, working with their authenticity and confidence helping them increase their **power, passion and presence** when they stand up to speak. But, don't take our word for this. Over the next pages are some genuine comments from genuine delegates who have attended the Presentation Mastery Programme.

If what you read sounds like it might be interesting to you and you feel that it would make sense to have an initial discussion about delivering the programme in your team or organisation please contact us in any of the ways listed on the back page.

What delegates have said about the Presentation Mastery Programme:

"A fantastic programme that kept my interest right until 4.45 on the last day. I really enjoyed the style, the pace and the skill and expertise of the facilitators. I feel a lot more confident now about making presentations."

Sue Perkins Department of Health (London)

"Fantastic. The structure was spot on. The group involvement created a positive atmosphere throughout. It was presented with the techniques and skills that were being taught so, as a participant, you could see how they came together."

Samuel Gaunt Robert Bosch (Denham)

"I never thought I would be able to stand up in front of a group and deliver something that they would be interested in. This training has helped me greatly and practice will help me to improve even more."

Steve Ambrose Princes Ltd (Wisbech)

"We asked you to help us blow their socks off in Pasadena. Well, when our team had finished our presentation the floor was strewn with socks. Thank you so much."

Keith Watson Soundcraft/HarmanPro (Potters Bar)

"The presentation was excellent. It held my attention for the whole time. The content was above and beyond what I expected. Ian (the facilitator) demonstrated all the skills he spoke of. It was refreshing not to have too much PowerPoint. This will be very helpful in my role. Thank you."

Jane Bennett Department of Health (London)

"The workshop got us to where we needed to be in terms of an important presentation we have got to do. Ian was very supportive and provided guidance that helped increase the confidence of the presentation team."

David Griffin Volker Fitzpatrick (London)

"A great course - the best I've been on & the one I feel I've taken the most away from. I was very anxious before the course but felt (the trainers) put us at ease & created a comfortable but challenging environment to learn in - thanks"

Katy Dyson United Biscuits (Hayes)

"I never knew that I could make a presentation on VAT on biscuits and cake sound interesting!!"

Julian Ogden Pladis (Liverpool)

"The Presentation Mastery workshop was delivered to the site's senior management team. Even though most of them had experience in delivering presentations, every one of them without fail found the workshop to be thought provoking and practical."

Kevin Parker Premier Foods (Wisbech)

"I went from being petrified and nervous to quietly confident all in the workshop. I appreciated the encouraging feedback I got on my presentations."

Karl Cullimore MSC (Ipswich)



Meet the Presenters



Ian Henderson is the Director of Training at Eagle Training Ltd, one of the UK's leading providers of leadership and management training.

Since leaving BP in 1993 Ian has worked with people from many blue chip organisations in the UK, US and Europe including United Biscuits, Premier Foods, Robert Bosch, Siemens, Vodafone, Halliburton and The Home Office.

Ian is now the Director of Training of Eagle Training, delivering leadership and management training programmes and, of course, the Presentation Mastery Programme, which he delivers with Martin Eldon, our senior

training consultant. A keynote speaker of repute, Ian is noted for his enthusiastic, entertaining and informative speaking style. He is the author of over 50 articles and *Algenon's Story*, his first book, was published in 2008.

Ian and Martin have delivered The Presentation Mastery Programme together for several years. The feedback they constantly get is that it is unlike any other Presentation Skills course. David's comment below is typical of the responses we receive from delegates...

"Amazing! Both trainers are brilliant. What a way to learn. It changes the status quo on training. Due to this new style of training other managers like me or leadership would benefit from this - helped me to improve far more than I thought I could. Thank you both"

David Sanderson United Biscuits (Carlisle)

Martin has been a member of the Eagle team since 2005. He has over 30 years experience in the field of leadership and management training, and coaching. For many of those years he has trained people to become masterful presenters by using the strategies and techniques offered by NLP, of which he is a certified trainer and master practitioner.

Like Ian, Martin believes that the presenter is the most important part of any presentation. As he says, "I love working with all of the Presentation Mastery delegates – it's always challenging, exciting and fun. It's really rewarding to see the progress that delegates make and the increase in their confidence to stand up and be themselves when they deliver their talks."



Want to Know More?

If you would like to know more about the Presentation Mastery programme and how it can help you be remembered for all the right reasons you can contact us in any of the following ways:



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