Outlining a Presentation Using the Assertion-Evidence Slide Design

Once you have selected a slide design, it is important to develop a presentation outline before creating your slides. Planning your content first will help guide you as you design the presentation.[1] First, structure the presentation around meaning and the big picture, such as the general idea(s) you wish to present. Then, develop supporting key ideas with details.[2] Organize the ideas and points in a logical sequence, from the most to the least important.

Addressing the following guidance questions at this level of the process will help you identify what you need to address during the introduction. Focusing on and answering these questions in your introduction will help grab the attention of the audience:

- What exactly is the topic?

- What topic is the audience going to learn about?

- Why is this topic important?

- What information background is needed to understand the topic?

- In what order will the topic be present?

During the planning process, also consider how long it will take to deliver the information. If you develop the presentation without considering timing, you may end up with too much material, and it is better to develop the right amount of material than to edit a presentation that is too long. Remember, the more points you make, the fewer points the audience will remember.[3] Table 1 on the following page provides the criteria of what to consider when outlining your presentation, based on the Assertion-Evidence slide design.[4,5,6,7,8]

Table 1. Criteria for Presentation Outline (Based on the Assertion-Evidence Slide Design)

Criteria for Outlining the Presentation	Important Considerations
Topic and Objective	• What is the purpose for speaking? • What is expected of you (e.g., to present concepts, theory, advice, inspire, persuade, educate)? • What topic will be presented?
Audience	• Who is the audience? • What is the audience's knowledge or familiarity with your topic? • What you want the audience to learn or do? When defining the audience and developing the messages, always consider the following about the audience: • Relationship with event. • Knowledge and experience concerning. • Age. • Level of education. • Language to be used both in written and oral form. • Cultural rules. • Topic-based local levels of outrage (based on the principles of risk).
Develop the Key Message	• What is your main message? • What are the key messages? • What is the essence of your message(s)? The key messages are the core messages you want the target audiences to hear, remember, and react to. However, key messages are based on opinions. Thus, you will need to provide evidence or an explanation to support the delivery of your message.[9] • Think of various ideas to develop the messages or key points you want to communicate. Do not limit yourself. • Develop messages or key points to communicate the most important ideas you identified. Repeat the process as many times as necessary until you have three messages or points. • Identify data or supporting information for your messages and key points. Do not discard any information that has been annotated in the development and identification process. It is possible that such information will be useful as supporting points.
Type of Message	When presenting as a guest of an organization or agency, make sure that your message coincides with your host's goals or purpose, and that it works well with the type of presentation you are expected to deliver (i.e., one that is to persuade; inspire; educate; advocate; promote; discuss; or to be informative, such as by reporting on an event, updating the facts, clarifying the status of an event, dispelling rumors, responding to media requests, etc.).
Audiences Questions Based on the Key Messages	Anticipate and identify the three top possible questions on the key messages that will immediately get your audiences involved in your issue.

Criteria for Outlining the Presentation	Important Considerations
Assertion–Sentence	• Determine the assertion-sentence that expresses the answer to each question in a clear and succinct manner. • The sentence should only take one or two lines with only 8–14 words in 28-point font when presented on a PowerPoint slide. However, the sentence should not be so short that it is cryptic. • The sentence should be at the top of the slide as a left-justified headline. • Avoid wordiness if you use the Assertion-Evidence design style. If you decide to use another non-bullet slide design, make sure to follow its appropriate rules designs. • Determine which information or complex concepts would benefit from being presented with specific visual or audio aids.

Assertion–Evidence	• Support each assertion sentence with evidence or an explanation and visual aids (e.g., photos, images, charts, graphs, diagrams, maps).
	
	• Evidence can be presented through:
	  – An example or story (evocate emotion, which is the easiest way to explain complicated ideas in a memorable way).
	  – Statistics (make the point more convincing).
	  – Endorsement (a respectable person).
	  – Explanation (as a way to present something complex or difficult to understand).
	  – Flowcharts (to illustrate a process).

Transition Sentences	• Use transition sentences in a conversational way to introduce or to state each of your key messages.
	
	• Recap the message and its supporting points to emphasize information or reinforce the points you have made. Avoid saying, "my keep message is this…"
	
	• Consider having at least one slide between each key message or section that signals a change from one section to another or a change in topic. These slides may contain the following:
	  – Transitions between the presentation's beginning and its middle.
	  – Transition between the middle and its conclusion.
	
	• At the end of this presentation, re-emphasize the information or reinforce your message. You could use phrases such as the following:
	  – "Here is what I want you do to…"
	  – "My recommendation is this…"
	  – "My most important point is …"

Opening	• The first 30 seconds will determine whether you are connecting successfully with the audience.
	
	• Make sure to answer questions your audience may have:[10]
	  – What exactly is the subject?
	  – Why is this subject important?
	  – What background is needed to understand the subject?
	  – In what order will the subject be presented?
	
	• Have a good opening to your presentation to immediately catch the interest and attention of your audience. Give the audience enough information that puts the work in an understandable context and builds their curiosity.
	
	• Consider telling an anecdote or bring up an interesting statistic. Avoid using trite phrases or technical words (e.g., Thank you for having me.).

Criteria for Outlining the Presentation	Important Considerations
Structure	Determine what kind of structure you want to use to present content and build your story (e.g., convincing, memorable, scalable).

Design the Slides	Items such as the headline style, typography, font colors, and background should all be considered when designing the slides.
	
	 • **Headline style:** Use only one or two lines with only 8-14 words.
	
	 • **Typography**
	   – Use a sans serif font such as Arial, Calibri, or Gill Sans
	   – 28-point font size for the headline
	   – 18- to 24-point font size for the body
	   – 14-point font size for the references
	   – Use **bold** fonts
	   – Avoid setting text in *italics,* underline, or ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.
	   Verify whether the font size will be big enough based on the size of the screen and the size of the room.[11]
	
	 • **Font color**
	   – Avoid using underline to emphasize. Instead, use different colors in the font. Underlines may signify hyperlinks.
	   – Use dark letters against a light background.
	   – Use light letters against a dark background.
	   – Avoid using cobalt blue as a font or border color, as the human brain has difficulty bringing that color—which is a combination of red and blue—into focus. Likewise, using red and blue on the same slide can be distracting.[12]
	
	 • **Background**
	   – Avoid using a background that makes the text barely legible or can be distracting.
	   – Use a dark blue or black background for talks in a large room.
	   – Use a light background for talks in a small room and for teaching.
	   – Some combinations that usually work well are as follows:[13]
	     ○ Dark green, dark purple, or dark navy with white or yellow text.
	     ○ Light blue, light green, light gray, or white backgrounds with black, dark navy, or dark green text.
	   – If you are not sure if your color choices have enough contrast, check them on a Web-based Color Contrast Calculator.[14]
	
	 • **Charts**[15]
	   – **Pie Charts:** Used to show percentages. Limit the slices to 4 to 6 and contrast the most important slide either with color or by exploding the slice.
	   – **Vertical Bar Charts:** Used to show changes in quality over time. Best presented if limited to 4 to 8 bars.
	   – **Horizontal Bar Charts:** Used to compare quantities. For example, comparing sales figures among the four regions of the company.
	   – **Line Charts:** Used to demonstrate trends.
	
	 Note: If you are planning to present proportions or shares without the use of pie charts or bars, consider the following:
	
	 • Use a diagram or chart with an image of people or other objects to represent proportions.
	
	 • Use a recognized symbol if you need to group similar symbols.[16]

Criteria for Outlining the Presentation	Important Considerations

Slide Types	In the guide *How to Make an Effective PowerPoint Presentation*, Olivia Mitchell mentions four types of slides that speakers can use in their presentations:[17]
	
	• **Assertion-evidence slides:** To provide visual evidence or an explanation to support each assertion-sentence that you have on the same slide. Thus, each of these slides will support the body of your presentation. There are three main types of visual evidence:
	
	  – An image or photograph which directly represents or is a metaphor for what you are talking about.
	
	  – A chart to help people visualize your statistics.
	
	  – A diagram which helps your audience understand the concept or process you are describing.
	
	• **Key message slide:** To highlight the key message on a simple background to prevent your audience form being distracted. Consider showing the key message slide twice—once near the beginning of your presentation and a second time at the end.
	
	• **Preview/summary/agenda/timeline slide:** To provide the audience a separate slide between each section of the presentation, which can help the audience follow the presentation.[18]
	
	• **Black slide:** To ensure that the audience's attention is focused on you when there is no slide. Simply include a slide with a black background when a slide is not needed. If you forget to include a blank slide, use the "B" key. When the "B" key is pressed during a PowerPoint presentation, the screen will go blank. Press the "B" key again to have the slide reappear.[19]

Summary and Conclusion Slide[20,21]	At the end of the presentation, provide:
	
	• **A summary of the most important details and concepts discussed.** Signal that the summary is beginning by stating, "In summary…." As M. Alley mentioned, repetition is important in scientific writing and speaking because, on average, people remember about 10 percent of what they hear. For that reason, at the end of a scientific presentation, **repeat the most important points** so that the audience is more likely to remember them.
	
	• **A big-picture perspective on the work followed by your key message**, which will provide closure to the presentation. Here some examples:
	
	  – A discussion of the work that needs to be done (+) key message
	
	  – "Here is what I want you do to…" (+) key message
	
	  – "My recommendation(s) is …" (+) key message
	
	  – "My most important point is…" (+) key message
	
	  – Looking at the technical work from the vantage point of the big picture discussed at the beginning of the talk (+) key message.

Question and Answer (Q&A) Slide	• Include and arrange the most important images (in a smaller size) from your prior slides on the Q&A slide. Do not turn off the projector or leave your conclusion slide in place as you answer questions. • Prepare in advance possible questions that might be asked. Also, prepare the answers to these questions.

Criteria for Outlining the Presentation	Important Considerations
Visuals[22]	Including visuals in your presentation will help the audience understand your messages and follow you during your presentation.[23] Consider the following: • **An agenda slide** presented visually will help the audience understand the section and follow you during your presentation.[24] • Visual aids supporting each **assertion-sentence** will help ensure that everyone in the audiences gets the point you wanted to make. (A **clear and succinct sentence** expressing your key messages gives your message longevity.) • When **points are highlighted** the audience can get back on track quickly**.** The audience can also ensure they understand your main points. The more points you emphasize, the less emphasis each one has, diluting your messages. • If you plan to include a **longish quote,** put the slide up and be silent while the audience is reading. Do not read the quote for them first or move on to the other slide without giving audience time to read it. • If you need to use **unfamiliar words, acronyms, or jargon, include** them on the screen to help people grasp and remember the terms. • If you use **photography,** incorporate words directly on the image so the image is linked with your point in their memory. • When you are **showing data in the form of a graph or chart,** include a concise sentence explaining the meaning of the data. • For any **diagram (simple or complex)**, include text labels to identify the diagram components.

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16 Paradi, D. 2011. PowerPoint Slide Makeover: Showing Proportion Using a Diagram. Available at http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=BQ1ViEMPLdk. (Accessed February 17, 2011).

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