

# Do's and Don'ts of Presenting

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## BEFORE YOU PRESENT

### Do Check the Room Early

The time to discover that the layout isn't right, or the AV isn't properly positioned, or the remote doesn't work is before the session starts. If possible, check the room the night before; otherwise as far in advance as possible. Sit in on preceding speakers to see how things are working. Get a feel for the space.

### Don't Accept the Default Setup

Meeting rooms are designed to be flexible. Chairs can be moved. Tables can be added. Lighting levels can be customized. Podiums and head tables can be repositioned or removed. Work with the site coordinator in advance to make sure the environment works for you, not against you.

### Do Sit in the Back Rows

It's normal for presenters to focus on the front of the room. But what will those in the back of your audience have to deal with to follow your presentation? Double-check lighting levels and sight lines for those with the poorest seats in the house – not just straight back, but in front corners, too.

### Don't Assume Everyone Can See

Make a point of asking, early in your presentation, if your visuals are clear, in focus and easily readable for everyone in the audience. A moment's adjustment early on can save whispered complaints and disgruntled evaluations later. And it's a simple mark of respect for your listeners.

### Do Troubleshoot Your AV

Make sure you're comfortable with the way your visuals are set up, the workings of remotes and other controls, the cues you may be giving to a technical staffer or assistant during the presentation, and extraneous factors (like noise from equipment or the way your microphone is positioned). Preprogram a quick-dial button on your cellphone for the site's AV crew.

### Don't Let the Gear Unglue You

Anticipate, even practice, responses to common glitches. What will you do if your computer crashes in mid-presentation, or the sound level suddenly drops, or the battery in the remote control dies? How will you fill time while a technician tries to restore normal operations? Expect the unexpected: Plan now for smooth recoveries later.

### Do Change the Bulb

Even with today's long-life projector lamps, odds are that someday you may have to stop in the middle of a thought (probably a key point) and switch out an old bulb with a new one. Before your audience arrives, know where to find the spare lamp and how to change it. (And remember: Bulbs are hot – follow the manufacturer's instructions for replacing the bulb – they are there for your own safety!).

## Don't Become a Lightbulb Joke

How many presenters, AV technicians and supposedly helpful audience members does it take to change a lightbulb? Only one – if you've prepared for the eventuality. If you can't restore light to the projector immediately, be prepared to continue with your presentation without it (savvy presenters consider handouts "backup AV").

## Do Preload Web Images

If you will be incorporating visuals from the Internet, save them to your computer's hard drive, a memory card or CD-ROM in advance. That way, your audience doesn't have to sit while you scroll to the right spot. And make sure to preview imported visuals while setting up your AV to judge their appearance in the specific conditions in which you'll be presenting.

## Don't Rely on Web Connections

Slow traffic on a network, server disruptions, firewalls and a host of other glitches can disrupt an Internet connection. And that's assuming a clean phone line with adequate bandwidth is available (let alone affordable) in the presentation room. If you need Web-based visuals, simulate the effect by loading them in advance.

# USING THE TOOLS

## Do Position a Monitor

One of the cardinal mistakes of presenters (and most-common irritants to an audience) is turning your back on your listeners to look at your visuals. It breaks eye contact, ruins rapport and gives the impression you're not confident about your AV. In small settings, use your computer screen to verify what your audience is seeing. In larger venues, have a large-screen monitor positioned discreetly in your line of sight.

## Don't Read Your Visuals

One of the by-products of putting too much material on a slide is the compulsion to read it, word for word, to an increasingly restive audience. People can read four to five times faster than you can speak. They can quick-scan your visuals for clues to what's important while following your line of spoken thought. And they may feel lectured to, even condescended to, if you seem to doubt their ability to read.

## Do Keep an Eye on Time

Whether you're presenting for 20 minutes or three hours, the clock is an important part of your program. Know how much material you have and approximately how long it will take you to reach certain points in your presentation. If there's a clock in the room, use it to keep yourself on track. If not, bring a small clock with a large face or digital readout, and position it where you can see it. If you need a specific amount of time for your closing, ask someone in the audience to give you a discreet time cue a few minutes earlier so you can wrap up effectively.

## Don't Mismanage Time

Programs that drone on well past their scheduled ending time are not only hard on the audience, they're very disruptive to the event's schedule (and the disposition of presenters who might have to follow you). Programs that end 20 minutes short leave the audience feeling cheated (or wondering what to do in the unexpected empty time). A rough rule of thumb is two minutes per visual: For a 60-minute program, you can expect to work effectively through 25 to 30 visuals – less if you plan an open and/or close for which visuals are not necessary.

## Do Play with All the Controls

Can you find the buttons on the remote by touch rather than by looking for them in the heat of the moment? Can you adjust room lighting, projector focus, audio levels and other settings to create a better environment for your audience – and yourself? Give yourself time (and permission) to touch things, try things, take the worry out of their unfamiliarity.

## Don't Assume that Things Work

Even the most efficient onsite staff can miss little things that will come back to trip you up the moment they leave. Cue up your visuals, and supporting elements like videotape feeds or segments prerecorded to a CD, to make certain they're properly set for you. Test the microphone, the remote, your laser pointer or mouse. Just knowing they work can help drain away pre-session jitters.

## Do Support Visuals with Print

Not every point you want to make needs to be projected. Give your audience something tactile as well as visual: Handouts are a form of tangible value that people can take with them and refer to after your presentation. Keep them concise. Use them to orient listeners to your presentation flow, explain technical terms, offer fine-focus illustrations. Provide a few fill-in-the-blank areas to concentrate attention and promote involvement.

## Don't Overwork Your Visuals

Use your visuals to support your main points, not to carry them. Remember: The most important "visual" in the room is you. Your AV is there to help you reinforce key points, keep your program on track, and offer different forms of visual stimulation to keep attention and interest from flagging over time. Any time you hear yourself saying, "You probably can't see this very well, but..." eliminate that visual. It's clearly too weak to help you.

## Do Incorporate Multimedia

Pictures that move stimulate interest. As long as they're appropriate to your program, integrate them: Today's video projectors are fully capable of rendering full-motion video and streaming live feeds. Be wary of too many animations on your still visuals, however. How the words arrive on the screen is less important than what they say, and can actually distract your audience instead of refocusing its attention.

## Don't Fear Recording

Many presenters are reluctant to allow their programs to be videotaped or audiotaped. Sometimes, they fear they are creating competition for their live work. (And sometimes they're more afraid of what they, or someone else, might see or hear.) Audio and videotapes can be powerful resources in critiquing and improving your presentation skills. They may also serve as supporting materials for your audiences – even products that can be resold.

# MAKING YOUR VISUALS WORK

## Do Minimize to Prioritize

When projecting words to a screen, less is more. Your visuals need not be complete, extensive or grammatically correct. Their role is to reinforce what you say, not to duplicate it. The fewer words you project, the more importance those words achieve. The fewer non-germane images, the more impactful the images you use.

## Don't Overwrite or Overcreate

Rather than create dozens upon dozens of visuals, each packed solid with words and pictures, consolidate your images into fewer transitions that can have more staying power. And remember that your visuals should be self-explanatory: If you have to tell people what they're looking at, rethink that image. Visuals show. Speakers tell.

## Do Build Up

A series of bulleted points is best projected in a "build-up" sequence rather than a single image. Points in a long list all appear to have similar weight. And the length of the list can distract from understanding the individual components. As each new point arrives, it can be explained in proper order and context, while previous points remain visible in the background. The discipline of the sequence also helps you explain things in the best order.

## Don't Overwhelm with Detail

Part of connecting with an audience is understanding what it knows, what it needs to know, and where the gaps between the two need to be bridged. The more insignificant or already familiar information your visuals contain, the less impact new material will have for the audience. People will come to assume that nothing important is going to be projected, and their attention will wander accordingly. Make every visual count.

## Do Make Use of Icon Visuals

The mind thinks in terms of pictures; words are actually an alien form of information. If you can give your audience both "word pictures" and appropriate visual images through which they can relate your ideas to something known and understood, comprehension goes up, retention improves, and you improve the odds that people will actually be able to use what you're telling them. Sometimes, a picture really is worth a thousand words. Use graphics as well as words to make your points.

## Don't Overuse Canned Images

The electronic line art ("clip art") in many common software programs is so simplistic and generic as to be counter-productive. Your tools may be high-tech, but your visual imagery may look like it was created in the 1960s. When choosing graphic images for your presentations, avoid choosing those that are so common as to be punchless. Watch out as well for cultural sensitivities: Race, gender, hierarchical and other land mines lie in wait for the unwary presenter.

## Do Double-Check Cues

Make sure your visuals are in the proper order, that video and streaming digital sequences are cued up to the correct starting points, that graphics load smoothly and in a relatively short amount of time. For an audience, waiting is waste: Anything that disrupts or delays your program erodes their energy and attention. If a sequence will take a few moments to come online, decide in advance how you will hold people's attention without making the wait obvious.

## Don't Fall Into a Rut

If you must deliver the same presentation over and over again, it's easy to fall into a predictable pattern. To an audience, that becomes visible in lower energy levels and reduced enthusiasm for your material. Some presenters make a point of adding something new and different each time they present. If the material is a given, vary the content flow on occasion to stimulate yourself as well as the audience. You may find the new sequence actually works better.

## Do Emphasize with Eye Contact

If the eyes are the windows to the soul, make sure your shades are up and the lights are on. When making

key points, lock in on specific audience members rather than scanning the room like a metronome. Personalizing your delivery by focusing on separate individuals one by one will tend to make you both more conversational and more convincing. Regulate your eye movements in keeping with your content: Make contact, make your point, then make a new contact. Go back to wide-scanning mode for transitions to new points or modules.

### Don't Become Mesmerized

Some presenters have difficulty with making and holding eye contact, feeling almost mesmerized by the reactions of the individual on whom they are momentarily focused. You can avoid this peril by focusing not on the eyes, but on the bridge of the nose instead (to the individual you are "looking at," there's no apparent difference). Also, be aware of cultural issues around staring: Norms vary widely in our global economy. Generally speaking, holding eye contact for a long count of five and then moving on will not be considered confrontive or offensive.

## PROJECTING WITH POWER

### Do Employ Consistent Styles

Just as you learn your way through presentation material and projection systems, the audience has to learn your style of doing things to become comfortable with the information you are presenting. You can shorten their learning curve if you do things consistently: Using the same style for your visuals, following a few readily understandable guidelines in the way you develop bulleted lists and build-up sequences, handling questions and interruptions in a consistent fashion. Warm the audience up a little before diving right into complex concepts. The quicker they warm to you, the easier they'll follow you.

### Don't Make Ransom Notes

Today's presentation software programs offer all manner of type styles, sizes, colours and customizable templates. Since design feels so deceptively easy, you may be tempted to introduce a great deal of visual variety into your program. Resist that urge. To your audience, too many typefaces, sizes and styles can make your visuals look more like a ransom note than a professional presentation. Such variety can be distracting: People may spend so much time trying to deduce the relative importance of your ever-changing visuals that they aren't paying proper attention to your actual content points.

### Do Make Transitions Work

Your visual impact involves not only what you project to the screen, but when and how you make changes. Use some stagecraft in the way you integrate AV. Instead of timing visual changes with thought changes, lead one and follow with the other on occasion. Cover preliminary material before introducing key concepts to preserve their impact. Use a teaser slide or visual if appropriate. Pause before a key transition to create a sense of suspense. And be sure to finish your current point before starting a transition to the next visual.

### Don't Dull Attention with Pace

If you fall into a predictable pattern (talk, new visual, talk, new visual, talk, new ...), your audience can be lulled into inattention. Don't be entirely predictable: A little variety, even the occasional surprise change of pace, can stimulate attention and re-focus energy – especially when transitioning into new or crucial content where you want to make sure people are involved and ready to engage the material. What's more, making yourself conscious of using variation can heighten your own energy and enthusiasm, keeping you "up" as the program proceeds.

### Do "Go Dark" Periodically

Just because you are using a projector doesn't mean you have to use it from the moment you start to the moment you conclude. AV is a support tool, not the primary presentation medium. Would your audience be more receptive if you warmed people up first, before turning on the visuals? Would your conclusion have

more impact if all eyes were on you alone? Do Q&A periods or interactive exercises require visuals, or could you go to a blank screen or generic title slide? Many projection manufacturers are acutely aware of this need and have designed their projectors with features such as video and audio mute, 'no-show' screens or permit you to show a personalized logo or message at the touch of a button – when you wish to pause the on-screen content.

## Don't Present Pointless Visuals

Listen to yourself when time is of the essence. "We can skip over these slides." "I guess we've already covered this." "You probably don't need to know this, but ..." If it's a nice to have, but not a *need to have*, maybe you could edit it out – and end up with a stronger, more focused and deliverable program as a result. The attention span of an audience is a fragile thing. The more preliminary material you make them wade through, the less energy they may have when you get to the main event.

## Do Move with Purpose

If you're a visual element to the audience, it follows that changes you make can have the same potential impact as changing the visuals you project. Match your movements to your content. Move closer to the audience to emphasize key points. Move away to provide a break during transitions. Close the distance with someone who asks a question as a way to build rapport. Downstage center is the strongest place from which to deliver key points. Downstage right (the audience's left) has more warmth and intimacy; downstage left works better for humor and lighter content.

## Don't Walk Into the Visual Path

A cardinal mistake for presenters is moving into, and in the process obscuring, the path of their visuals. Invariably, visual material looks better projected on a screen rather than on your jacket. A simple way to avoid moving into your visuals is to stand well away from the projector, usually to your right (the audience's left – most people read left to right). You also can place small pieces of tape on the floor to create "limit stops" – points past which you shouldn't go. With a little practice, you'll learn to pick them up with your peripheral vision, but they'll be generally invisible to your audience.

## Do Break Out of Linear Mode

Can you skip past a section to more important material if time becomes an issue? If you notice your audience already is familiar with a concept on which you were prepared to spend time, can you jump ahead smoothly? Will indulging questions now mean you won't reach your concluding visuals later? If you organize your visuals into modules, and then embed hyperlinks (most presentation software offers the capability) to build multiple access points, you can give any presentation the interactivity of a webpage. Some presenters now create and deliver their presentations in everything from webpage builders to online learning software because of the enhanced flexibility they offer.

## Don't "Carousel" a Computer

For all their potential presentation power and sophistication, too many computer-driven programs might just as easily be delivered with that old standby, the 35mm slide projector. Your computer's software is capable of much more than simply allowing you to click from one static slide to the next. Yet most presenters – even those with years of experience – settle into comfortable patterns that use only a fraction of the power available to them. Move beyond familiarity with the basics to harness the full capabilities of your system. But practice first – the worst place to try out something new and unfamiliar is in front of a live audience that expects professional polish from you.

## PROVEN AUDIENCE PLEASERS

### Do Practice Your Open & Close

The most lasting impact you will have as a presenter will come from your audience's first experiences with you and the way you wrap up your program. Give some careful thought to what you can and should achieve in those moments, then work to develop a smooth open and close that support those goals. A hidden advantage of starting and ending with very proven, comfortable material is the way it reduces stresses and nervousness: When you're on familiar ground, you'll find it easier to start and end with confidence.

### Don't Recite from Memory

In classic formal speechcraft, with its emphasis on oratorical principles, committing an entire program to memory was normal. Today, audiences want spontaneity. You may indeed be covering familiar material, but it will feel much more interesting to your audience if you can make it sound like you're speaking directly to them rather than delivering a "stock" presentation that would be exactly the same, no matter who was in the room. (And unless circumstances absolutely dictate otherwise, never read from a prepared text.)

### Do Emphasize Action Outcomes

In and of itself, information is seldom interesting. It's the prospect of doing something with it that engages an audience's attention. You may not be able to hear it, but the people to whom you are speaking are constantly asking one question over and over again: "What's in it for me?" Show them how to apply a new technique or idea to a problem that's causing them pain or an opportunity that promises them gain, and they'll follow you through the most intricate analysis. Fail to give them an outlet and they'll spend their time looking fondly at the clock and the door.

### Don't Drown with Words

If you designed an environment that would work against learning, it would look a lot like the typical classroom: Lots of people sitting inactive and listening to one person drone on and on about something. No interaction. No physical motion or relief. No visual or emotional stimulation. No end in sight. Provide enough information to bring people to a level of competence, then offer ample illustrations so they see how they can apply it themselves. According to one simple formula: Make a point. Tell a story. Make a point. Tell a story. Make a point. Tell a story ...

### Do Seed or Prompt Questions

A raised hand or querulous look is the sign of an involved listener. Respond to it – the quicker, the better. The deadliest moment in many presentations is when the presenter asks, "Are there any questions?" The laws of inertia predict that the first question is the hardest to ask. So help it along: If you want to stimulate interaction, plant a couple of questions with people in the audience. Once a colleague breaks the ice, it's then safe for others to get involved. Or begin your presentation by asking people to write down one question they'd like you to answer in the session. Now you know they have a question – and you know where to find it. (To prepare for the next time you present, collect the questions at the end of your session.)

### Don't Assume You Know

Much as you may be a master of the material you're about to present, it's not a given that you know how members of your audience will receive it or apply it. If you can find out who will be attending your presentation, speak to several representative members of your audience in advance. Ask them what they're facing and what they hope to learn from you. Find out what priorities will affect how they use or don't use your ideas. Use the moments before your presentation starts to take the temper of the room. Encourage questions and interaction through which audience members can better align your knowledge with their needs. Even the most inadvertent comment may give you a way to better slant your material to your listeners.

## Do Fine-Tune Your Visuals

Once you've developed the visuals for a presentation, the tendency is to leave them untouched. In the "old days," when slides had to be produced in advance (sometimes at considerable expense), that made sense. With today's presentation tools, it doesn't. Re-examine – and, if appropriate, revise – your visuals all the way up to the time you need to lock them up to get ready to present. If you're presenting to a multilingual audience with the assistance of an interpreter, translate your visuals in advance so key points are reinforced in the native languages represented.

## Don't Neglect Backups

Computer hard drives crash. Software corrupts. Viruses attack. High-tech presentation tools are attractive targets for thieves. If the only copy of your presentation is suddenly unavailable or unusable, how will you recover? Carry a backup disk with your presentation visuals – and make sure it's not in the same case as your computer. Or use an Internet storage service as a place to "park" a copy of your presentation for immediate access. And make sure your handout can serve as a substitute if your AV is unexpectedly rendered inoperable.

## Do Learn, Unlearn, Relearn

No matter how good you are, no matter how much you know, there's always something new to learn. Introducing new ideas and stretching yourself into new presentation techniques is a great way to stay fresh. Take a moment after your presentation to review what worked and what didn't. Watch other presenters – and ask them how and why they do the things you see them do. Talk shop with the AV staff at a meeting site: They see countless presenters, good and bad, and have a eye for what works well and what doesn't quite connect. Be prepared to change even a trademark practice if doing so can build more value for your audience.

## Don't Live in the Past

Even a poor presentation can be a valuable learning experience. If you're open to it. When things don't go as well as you might wish, don't dwell on them. Look for ways to build on them so things will go better the next time. With that in mind, actively encourage feedback. If an evaluation form is to be used, encourage audience members to spend a moment filling it out. If no evaluation is planned, consider supplying your own feedback form if appropriate. Don't be content with subjective numerical ratings – look for constructive critiques and suggestions. Then use what you learn to continue to grow and improve.

## ABOUT CHRISTIE

Christie is a leader in visual solutions for business, entertainment and industry for world-class organizations for diverse applications. Christie's broad range of display technologies include LCD and DLP™ projectors, networking solutions, rear screen projection modules and cubes, wall display controllers, digital cinema projectors, 35mm projectors, and cutting edge projection technologies for 3D, virtual reality and simulation. With expertise in professional projection dating back to 1929, Christie has over 50,000 high performance projectors installed in over 50 countries around the world. For more information regarding Christie's complete display applications, visit [www.christiedigital.com](http://www.christiedigital.com).