

Presentation tips by Tom Sligting

Tom and I first met in Paris (May 2019) when we were keynoting the European Speakers Summit. He was amazing both as a speaker and in his use of comedy. We became friends and started sharing ideas. He was a value-added part of our Speakers Roundtable this April which was our pivot from a live 2-day event planned for Barcelona, Spain. Thanks for graciously sharing this material.

The audience

This is really an important subject which is often underestimated. That's because people are so focused on 'WHAT' they're going to say, that they almost forget for whom it is, the audience. You have to do this during the preparation. Find out who's in the room, then make an estimation of what they know about the subject you're going to be talking about. That will determine how deeply you can go into things.

If you have a technical speech and your audience knows little or nothing about the subject, you will have to make general statements. It's probably just about arousing interest, making people enthusiastic about something. If there are professionals, you need to tell them something they don't know yet. That way you keep your audience sharp and attentive and then you can add something.

This seems simple, yet this goes wrong on a regular basis. You notice it right away, people get restless, start moving and look at their phones. Purely because you haven't delved into your audience. Don't just think, what am I going to say on stage, but think what my audience wants to hear. What is the reason they are here?

GOAL

A simple question, what is the goal for your presentation? It's smart to ask yourself that question. If there is no clear answer within 1 second, you will have to work on it. Write down your answer and check with everything you want to say to make sure you stay close to your goal.

You often see this go wrong when people already have 28 sheets for the PowerPoint before they write a speech. This suddenly makes your story suffer. By clarifying WHAT the goal is, maybe 20 slides can be removed, that will make it a lot clearer for you and the audience.

THEME

Each event often has a different theme. Check what last year's theme was. Your title should not refer to last year's theme. You as a speaker have a goal with your presentation, but so does the event organizer. Please keep that in mind.

If you are speaking at a big event, check if there is a theme. Suppose you speak at a conference with the theme: **The Change of Thought-leaders in 2025**. In that case, your speech has to be connected to that. The audience knows that you did this especially for them. You gain respect this way.

Writing

Once you know who your audience is and what the meeting goal is, you can link your presentation to that. Although each speaker is different and prepares in his or her way, several rules apply to write presentation texts.

Start by gathering information. This is how you get the creative process going. Then bring structure to your story. Otherwise, the audience (just like you) will lose the plot. Once that is done, you are ready to write the texts. Think about the essential point you want to make. What should the emphasis be on? After all, your audience will forget most of your presentation. It's up to you to decide what they need to remember! Humor and other (literary) stylistic tools are to be explored.

Gathering information

The writing process starts with obtaining relevant information on the subject. In the world of speakers, you call this content. Question your client and supplement your knowledge through other channels, such as the internet. Don't forget to double check your facts!

Facts

Use the facts in your story as arguments to convince. Do this in moderation. Figures are only to support; they don't tell your story. Limit the number of facts you 'push' into the room. If you have a lot of numerical information, indicate where the audience can find it, or send the information by e-mail. You can attach a value judgment to the figures. Use this value judgment to make a challenging statement. The audience will be more willing to go through the information. Be specific with such a challenging statement. Not like: 'Let's work hard to increase turnover,' but: 'If everyone who sits here this afternoon has two extra customer contacts per day, turnover will increase by 6%'.

When a follow-up or evaluation takes place after the presentation, such a specific objective is useful. Simply refer to it. An email with 'Have we worked hard this week?' won't deliver much, but a particular question, such as: "Who made the two extra contacts per day and what was the result?" This will, of course, be more efficient.

If you use a handout, it's wise to hand it out after your presentation or have it done. If you put them on the chairs before your presentation, people will not take it with them, or (even worse) people are reading it while you are about to start your story.

Creative process

No matter how crazy it may sound, I advise you to close your laptop when building the structure. The actual text of your presentation or that polished PowerPoint you have in mind will only come up for discussion much later. This phase is mainly a creative process.

Grab a large sheet of paper or stand in front of a whiteboard. You can also use Post-its in different colors: you can easily change them for place to place. Use the colors to create a hierarchy. Write your goal in the middle, then write down the facts, ideas about stories, metaphors, personal examples, and anecdotes - everything you can use for your presentation. Give them a number.

Make a general layout. Draw lines and cross things out, if necessary, to gain insight into what it's ultimately going to be. The beauty of a creative process is that you don't know in advance where it will go or where it will end. Precisely by streaking, delineating and giving numbers to what absolutely needs to be put in, you achieve a storyline that you could never have written all at once.

You complete this process when you have an overall layout of all the information you have chosen on your sheet of paper or on your whiteboard. Think of it as a funnel. At the top comes all the info below that the creative process begins. The points, facts, and stories that remain after you have crossed out, you put in a clear structure that gives your presentation its final form and content.

Building a structure

A simple example of the structure of your story:

Beginning – Who are you?

Statement - What's your goal? What do you want to make clear?

Story - What are your arguments for this statement? How do you convince your audience?

Conclusion - Summary of the speech. What does the audience have to remember?

End - Is it clear to everyone?

The ending - Repeat your message!

This is a basic model. If you get a little more experience in speaking, it's fun to play with it and change things. That's an excellent way to be distinctive and stand out when several speakers come in a row. Open once with the goal. Confront the audience with a sharp statement and then take your audience into your story. Or start interacting immediately, ask the audience a question to which you then have the answers. This way, it is not only exciting for your audience but also for yourself. Of course, this requires a little more experience.

The actual writing

The approach to the actual writing differs from speaker to speaker. Some people want to write down the text word for word, to be able to practice and have the certainty that they are not missing anything. The others need a few keywords that serve as a basis for their story. This is not about right or wrong. Choose the method that works best for you.

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