

Engage Your Audience When Presenting Your Research Online

Janet Salmons, PhD

We need to engage with our audience if we want people to benefit from our research and take action to make a difference. We have something important to say, so let's present it in a way that draws (and keeps) attention on our message!

When we present in person, we have visual cues from the audience. If they are drifting away, we can see them fidgeting and taking out their phones. We can see that it might be time to stop talking and take some questions. In a longer presentation, we can shift to a small group activity or take a coffee break.

Your research won't make an impact if your audience isn't paying attention.

If people want to withdraw from a live event, they have to actually stand up and leave the room. This might seem embarrassing or insulting, so they might stay in the seat but be inattentive. In an online event, all the bored attendee needs to do is click the little X at the corner of the screen to exit.

When we present online, we don't have visual cues, so we need to work harder to gain and keep the attention of our audience. How can we compete with social media, incoming emails or messages, shopping, and other ever-present distractions that try to pull our viewers away? Thoughtful planning and attentive presenting can improve our connections with attendees.

Offer a Purposeful Presentation

A purposeful presentation involves five inter-related elements:



1. **Clear Purpose:** What are you trying to achieve?
2. **Right Content:** What content is essential to accomplishing the purpose?
3. **Right Attendees:** Are the people who need to know about this content present?
4. **Right Process:** What presentation style and audience interaction will help accomplish the purpose?
5. **Right Technology:** What features of the presentation platform align with the purpose?

The ways we think about purpose, content, attendees, process, and technology will vary with each presentation. Sometimes we had a great deal of flexibility and can create just the kind of presentation we want to give, while other times, many decisions have already been made by the host organization or the fact that we are in a classroom setting. Choices we make in either situation, and the strategies we use to work within constraints, will shape attendees' the experiences.

Clear Purpose

If we aren't sure why we are presenting, how can we expect to engage the audience? A clear presentation purpose is key to success. Each type of presentation calls for a different mode of interaction with the audience.

To simplify the options, we will focus on three possibilities: lecturing, teaching, or meeting.

Lecture	Teach	Meet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose: To inform • Communication: One-to-many 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose: To provide information needed in order to learn and act • Communication: One-to-many and many-to-many 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose: To involve attendees in decision-making and collaboration • Communication: Many-to-many

- In the first instance, our purpose is to provide information or insights to an audience. For a lecture. The presenter is the primary communicator and interaction is minimal. Podcasts and posted videos are examples of this type: the presenter speaks, demonstrates how-to steps, or offers examples. Audience members listen or watch. We may or may not have an opportunity to ask questions.
- In the second instance, we might also have information or insights to share, but we are committed to making sure that attendees understand key concepts and are able to use them. This means we need to hear from attendees, and attendees benefit from hearing

from each other. Presentations with a teaching purpose can occur within formal academic settings, in professional associations or professional development, continuing or adult education, or other informal workshops or training.

- In the third instance, the purpose is to collaborate, make decisions and plans as necessary for some effort we are engaged in together. We might be asked to present important information or updates the group will need for their work on a project. Meetings may or may not have a designated presenter; sometimes all are expected to share information, participate, and communicate. While we are accustomed to meetings in the workplace, people gather for other kinds of shared undertakings.

If we want the audience to be engaged at a particular level, it is essential to communicate those expectations. When attendees anticipate an interactive experience, but find themselves in lecture, they will tune out. When attendees signed up to simply listen to a lecture, but are asked to participate, they might withdraw. When attendees expect a learning experience, but find themselves in a meeting where they must weigh in on decisions, they will feel that they were not authentically included in the process. Transparency and communication help to avoid a mismatch.

Similarly, when we are presenting at a conference or other online event, we need to understand the expectations of the host or organizer and plan accordingly. Once we understand whether we need to lecture, teach, or meet, we can move forward to plan, design, discuss, and carry out a successful presentation.

Right Content

The type and quantity of content should align to the purpose of the online event. You give a presentation to share ideas with an audience.

Lecture	Teach	Meet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When our presentation is the centerpiece of the event, we are responsible for making sure that content is clear and well-organized • Timing and quantity of content should be considered in order to avoid rushing through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to the points essential for successful lectures, when a presentation is intended for instructional purpose we need to keep the level and interest of the students in mind • Select or develop content that fits with other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When our presentation is one piece of a larger meeting, we need it to be succinct and focused on the points, the group will need to consider • In advance of the meeting, relevant information is provided in succinct form, so

<p>material or running out of time for questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If Q&A will be offered, we should determine the best placement for questions. We could build in Q&A at intervals in the presentation to keep attendees involved, rather than leave all of the interaction for the concluding section 	<p>educational experiences associated with the learning unit or lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create checkpoints along the way that allow you to make sure attendees understand the content 	<p>attendees come prepared to move forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share folders or other shared archives make it possible for participants to access records and files
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Do you usually use PowerPoint, Keynote, or other slides when you give presentations?

When you use slides, think in terms of ways they complement your remarks. This means you do not want to create slides that serve as speakers' notes that you read. Use slides to structure the presentation into groups of key concepts. In this way, the slide set can help you to stay on topic while reinforcing the main points you hope attendees will remember

Avoid text-heavy slides. Keep in mind that attendees will find it difficult to read and digest a lot of information in small print -- especially since many people view presentations on mobile devices with small screens. If you have material that is essential for attendees to read, prepare a handout they can review during or after the presentation.

Focus groups welcomed diverse perspectives about youth employment

not

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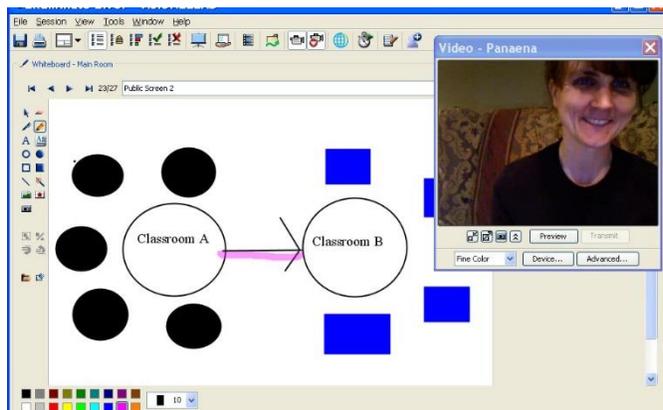
- Lots of bullet points are used to fit as much content as possible on each slide
- Every minute detail about participants is written in teeny tiny little print with long sentences that just go on and on with lots of (citations, citations, citations) and numbers, but I can't possibly find any real meaning without a more coherent explanation
- It just goes on and on with lots more bullet points and more fine print and more numbers and more (citations, citations, citations)
- Even more bullet points and more (citations, citations, citations)
- Still more bullet points that the presenter tries to explain with even more bullet points
- Hard to believe more bullet points could fit in one presentation
- Lots of statistics and numbers that don't make any sense
- Quotes and examples are squeezed in somehow
- More bullet points are included for some strange reason
- It is next to impossible to figure out why any of this is relevant to me and why I am wasting my time trying to read this slide when I actually have other work to do and emails waiting for response
- While I'm trying to read all of this microscopically small text about details, I can't really grasp in this format. I can't possibly listen to anything you are trying to say about this study and why the diverse perspectives of participants added value to the focus groups

Where possible, use visuals such as photographs, diagrams, or mind maps. Visuals can offer examples, illustrations, or show relationships between key concepts. Create clear visuals and make sure that any text or diagrammed labels are large enough to read.

Consider alternatives to slides in online presentations

Slides are not the only way to present information. In the online environment there are more dynamic ways to share ideas. Try new web conferencing features to build in the kinds of interactive experiences that help keep your audience members' attention.

Instead of a static slide, you can create movement and visual interest using features available in



the webinar or conferencing platform.

While speaking on a WebCam exclusively can make you appear as a “talking head,” alternating from slides or visuals to your live image conveys a sense of presence.

Many platforms offer a whiteboard option that let you draw or write during the presentation. The whiteboard is excellent when you want to record the group's

brainstorming inputs or diagram an example. Use the whiteboard as you would a flipchart in a physical setting.

You can begin with a blank whiteboard, or upload a framework to annotate during the discussion. Depending on the size of the group, ask attendees to write on a shared whiteboard in answer to your question or prompt.

Another option is to show a short media clip to illustrate key points, demonstrate ideas and action, or show how the ideas manifest in real life, in the setting, you are discussing. A two-minute video clip from field research can communicate the context of your research more powerfully than a 10- minute lecture about social and economic conditions in the communities studied.

What stage of research was most the most challenging ?

Designing the Study	Getting Proposal Approved	Collecting Data
Analyzing Data	Writing	Or?

Right Attendees

Why should I make time in my busy schedule to attend or participate in this event? A clear purpose and advance information will help to ensure that people who attend are interested in the topic and ready to interact as needed to make the event a success.

If we are presenting to a known group, to some degree we can anticipate level of prior knowledge. However, many online presentations are open to the public, or a broad group of conference attendees. This means we don't know whether attendees are at the right place to grasp the content we intend to present. In such cases, we can use polling features to quickly assess whether attendees have essential background or experience.

Lecture	Teach	Meet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecture style presentations can be open to the public, or available only to members or conference registrants A clear purpose and specific information about the content will help ensure that those who attend have an interest in the topic Use polling features to quickly assess whether attendees have relevant background on your topic An introduction to important concepts or terminology will help less knowledgeable attendees connect with new content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructional presentations can be focused for students in a particular class or seminar, or open to participants in online conferences events A clear purpose and specific information about the content will help attendees come prepared to participate Depending on the size of the audience, a moderator can help to organize interactive components of the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose and desired outcomes of the meeting should be communicated in advance People needed to achieve the meeting purpose should be invited, with enough time to prepare When attendees are expected to help keep time or facilitate, roles should be clearly defined

When planning a presentation for a general audience, we need to avoid jargon and allow enough time for additional checkpoints or Q&A to ensure that we are reaching the audience. If we think some or all attendees are new to the topic, we can define terminology and add

explanations for important concepts as we move through the presentation. It would be valuable to try out the presentation with friends or colleagues to see whether you are framing your remarks in a way that will be beneficial to attendees who are new to the field, as well as those who are experienced.

Right Process

Process questions are woven throughout all phases of presentation planning. Different processes are appropriate depending on whether we are lecturing, teaching, or meeting. As noted in the previous sections, lecture-style presentations depend on interesting and insightful content. Presentations designed for instructional purposes allow for interactive exercises, questions, discussion, and learning checkpoints. Presentations designed for a meeting concisely provide the background information participants will need to make decisions or plans.

Lecture	Teach	Meet
Process focuses on high-quality, visually interesting, clear presentation of content.	Process focuses on creating a milieu that invites learning	Process focuses on creating a milieu that invites participation

Right Technology

Online presentations typically use a web meeting or web conferencing platform. Features available on the platform, and the way we use them, can differentiate an excellent presentation from one that cures insomnia. We want to use the unique capabilities of electronic tools and online settings to bridge distances and barriers so we can learn from and work with each other.

Sometimes we select the presentation platform appropriate to a specific event we want to offer; other times we have to use the one selected by the host organization or conference. Given that platforms vary widely, this means we need to be familiar with the type that is available and prepared to either make use of an expansive set of features or make do with a restricted set. If we have the flexibility to select a platform, we need to research the features, try demo versions, and look for the one that best corresponds to our purpose.

Whether you are using the host organization's selected platform or choosing your own, you need to be aware of the features so you can plan your presentation accordingly. Here is a checklist you can use when looking at a Webconferencing platform:

Options for Content

- ✓ Upload slides, images, and other content to the platform
- ✓ Handouts, drafts, or other resources can be downloaded by attendees
- ✓ Share content on your desktop
- ✓ Use browser within platform to share websites, media, and other online resources

Options for Live Notes or Diagrams

- ✓ Whiteboard presenter can use on the platform
- ✓ Shared whiteboard attendees can use
- ✓ Annotation features for visual facilitation or notetaking
- ✓ Shared applications

Options for Video

- ✓ Presenter can use webcam for live video feed
- ✓ Attendees can use webcam when commenting or asking questions

Options for Audio

- ✓ Audio using VOIP
- ✓ Audio over the telephone
- ✓ Presenter can use audio
- ✓ Attendees can use audio when commenting or asking questions

Additional options for Interaction and Q & A

- ✓ Attendees use a "hand-raising" feature and ask questions or comment verbally when called upon by the presenter or moderator
- ✓ Attendees use text chat to comment or pose questions
 - Only the presenter or moderator can see questions
 - Attendees can see text chat, and can chat or message with each other
- ✓ Polling or quiz features
- ✓ Ability to break into small groups
- ✓ Ability for private chat between presenters, or presenter and moderator

Options for Access

- ✓ Software is downloaded to the user's computer or device
- ✓ Platform is accessed through the browser
- ✓ Platform works for PC, Mac, Android, iOS
- ✓ Security options available for private meetings

Options for Sharing Presentation

- ✓ Webinar or meeting can be recorded and shared

Lecture	Teach	Meet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology features should include options for using webcams and other visuals as needed to present content in interesting and varied ways • The ability to record and archive for future viewing is essential • A system for submitting written or verbal questions is needed when Q&A is included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to presentation features used for lectures, platform should include interactive and participatory features. These can include polling, shared whiteboards, ability to view participants' webcams, or break into small groups. • Technology features should include should include options for verbal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features are needed for sharing drafts or materials • Technology features should include should include options for verbal communication

Presentation Resources

Death by PowerPoint: TED talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwpi1Lm6dFo> and slides <https://www.slideshare.net/thecroaker/death-by-powerpoint>

Duarte, N. (2010). *Resonate: Present visual stories that transform audiences*. New York: Wiley.

Author's TED talk:

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

Grove Consultants: Books and templates for visual presentations and facilitation

https://www.grove.com/vf_Books.php

Reynolds, G. (2011). *Presentation Zen: Simple ideas on presentation design and delivery* (2nd ed.). Berkeley: New Riders. Author's website: www.presentationzen.com