

# VIRTUAL PRESENTATION MASTERY

TIPS FROM THE COACH TO  
SOME OF THE WORLD'S  
BEST SPEAKERS—AND ME



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## Structuring Your Virtual Presentation

We know that people retain structured information up to forty percent more reliably and accurately than information that is presented in a free-form manner.

When working with clients on TED talks and keynotes, I would say that at least sixty percent of my efforts are spent helping them create structure. Giving the talk shape, flow, and narrative.

So, get this bit right, and even if it's not that exciting, delivered as though you're reading out a telephone directory, it will make sense to the audience and take them on a meaningful journey.

I'm going to take you through a number of different ways you can structure your presentation. Please see these suggestions as time savers. If you get PISA right and then give your presentation a simple, easy-to-remember structure, your presentation will have a clear story arc. It will make sense to you, which makes it so much easier to explain to your audience.

A frequent presenter dilemma I hear is “not enough preparation versus too much preparation.” Presenters feel if they over-prepare, they will be stilted, yet they know that if they don't prepare enough, their talk will be a disaster.

If you can structure your presentation simply and effectively, then this should massively cut down on your preparation time. Because, you know the journey you want to go on, how to get there, and what you want to say.

### *The ABCDs of structuring a talk.*

The following acronym is a cracker I learned from top speaker coach Mary Tillson. Great for introductions. Simple to apply and ensure you get the information in your presentation in the right order.

A – Attention grabber/ Kapow

B – Benefits

C – Credentials

D – Direction

**Attention grabber—Kapow.** It's so important we get this bit right. The old adage “the first nine seconds is the most important ninety percent of your presentation” has a lot of truth to it. Screw up the beginning of your virtual presentation, and the rest of it is going to be so hard. The attention grabber, or Kapow, could be dramatic (some major numbers), a story, or something interactive, or a video. I list ten of them in the chapter on Kapows.

**Benefits.** What's the benefit of your presentation for your audience? What are they going to get? Why should they listen? You need to make this so clear and explicit. Get this right, and you'll have them hanging on your every word.

**Credentials.** These have to be relevant to your audience. Telling them how amazing you are, unless this is relevant, isn't going to excite your audience. It'll probably just annoy them. So, many virtual speakers will start off by saying, "I'm an international, global expert. I've had three books published, and I'm a living saint." Unless these things make a difference to your audience, they're of limited value.

Better to say. "I'm going to talk about how X changes lives and inspires the most extraordinary creativity and share my learnings from twenty years as a Y on how you can use that creativity and X to increase your bottom line."

Even better is if you can add a twist or a sense of anticipation.

**Direction.** Where are we going next? What are you going to cover? This is the beginning of your journey, and just as on a long car trip, knowing where you're going and why will ensure that your audience won't start complaining ten minutes in, "Are we there yet?"

For instance, if you were an ad agency creative, your presentation might go like this:

ATTENTION GRABBER. "Hi, I'm Jenni. I'm your lead creative, and in a previous life, I came up with the Debbie's Donuts campaign. Their sales increased by twelve percent on the back of that. And we want to do something similar for you."

BENEFITS. "What I'm about is making your brand much, much, more successful and recognised. At the moment, it's for the elite... and that's fine... but a bit like Burberry, what we want to do is make it elite, but for everyone. Aspirational, but achievable."

CREDENTIALS. "As I said, I did this for Debbie's Donuts... And also with another of your sister brands, Yummies Yoghurts. I worked on that. And as you know, it went from a little artisan brand to global."

DIRECTION. "So, we're going to take you through our big ideas. And normally, we tend to have a favourite and try and nudge clients towards this. But we are genuinely excited by all three of our ideas. And your amazing brief has helped us with that. So here they are."

*The 3 Tells, or The Burger, presentation structure. Or "Tell them, Tell them, Tell them."*

The 3 Tells, or burger structure, works particularly well for virtual presentations in which the audience finds it hard to give you one hundred percent focus. By repeating your presentation three times over, you ensure that at least everyone has heard the basics.

#### **First tell**

- Synopsis or anchor
- Opening grab/Kapow
- The purpose

- The main points

### **Second tell: Main section**

- Most important message
- Least important message
- Second most important message

### **Third tell**

- Summary of the purpose and messages
- Kapow
- Call to action

### **The first tell: The top of a burger bun.**

This is where you give your audience a map of your virtual presentation. What's going to be happening, why they're listening, what's in it for them.

This means that if you ever get lost in your presentation, or a client takes you off track, you can return to your synopsis slide and explain where you are in the story. In fact, in a longer virtual presentation, it's worth doing this as a matter of course.

To simplify this first tell, you can just use your ABCD.

### **Second tell: The meat (or Quorn) of the burger.**

This is the body of your presentation and probably makes up sixty to seventy percent of the content. In effect, this is the presentation. Except now we know why we're listening, what it's about, and you've given us a synopsis and anchor—all in the first tell.

This section of your presentation might combine with one of the other presentation structures, for example, the three-act structure or the Aristotle. Or it might simply be a "Three things."

For example, "These are the three pillars of our strategy over the next twelve months:"

- This
- That
- The other thing

### **Third tell: The bottom bun.**

The bottom bun is your summary. You might do it in the form of takeaways or just by simply saying, "This is what I covered during the presentation."

Look to finish with a Kapow, or grab, so that you make your presentation memorable.

The great advantage of this structure is that it is simple to apply and does the job. You won't confuse your audience, and you won't confuse yourself. If you're doing a twenty-minute presentation to your team, this is going to work. The first tell, the intro, will take around three to four minutes; then the body of the presentation will take twelve to fourteen minutes; the final tell and summary will last another three to four minutes. The structure feels tight and punchy. And tight and punchy is what we want for virtual presenting; it forces you into just

sharing the essentials.

### *These Three Things.*

Another structure for an audience that finds it a struggle to focus is These Three Things, which breaks your presentation into threes. Put simply: People tend to easily remember things in threes.

Remember as a kid when your mum sent you down to the shop to buy a number of things, but when you got there, all you could remember were three things? This is the rule of three. Next time your other half asks you to get four things, and you only remember three, you can give this ready excuse.

These Three Things works because the audience is likely to remember only three things from your presentation. So, before you start writing your presentation, plan your three key messages. Once you have these messages, structure the main part of your presentation around these three key themes, and look at how they could be better illustrated.

*Get into the habit of breaking answers, topics, and themes into three.*

For instance:

“You’ve asked me my thoughts on next year’s strategy. Well, I think you can break it down to three key elements.” (There may well be more elements, but three is enough in the moment.)

“There are three reasons why you should buy our product...”

“I’m going to leave you with these three thoughts....”

*Use lists of three wherever you can in your presentation.*

Lists of three have been used from early times up to the present day. They are particularly well-used by politicians and advertisers who know the value of using the rule of three to sell their ideas.

“Veni, Vidi, Vici.” (I came, I saw, I conquered) – Julius Caesar

“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears” – William Shakespeare

“A Mars a day helps you to work, rest, and play” – Advertising slogan

“Snap, Crackle and Pop” – Advertising slogan

“Hands, Face, Space” – COVID-19 public safety announcement, October 2020

*The Aristotle or Steve Jobs structure.*

My favourite presentation structure, and one I find works for most presentations, is the Aristotle, or Steve Jobs, (depending on who you feel came first) structure. Because it has a natural story arc, this is great for sales presentations, speeches, or keynotes.

Aristotle identified six story structures, and these are the basis of most Hollywood films today.

**Rags to riches.** A steady rise from bad to good fortune. “The Pursuit of Happiness”

**Riches to rags.** A fall from good to bad, a tragedy. “King Lear”

**A rise then a fall in fortune.** Most gangster movies. “Icarus”

**A fall, a rise, then a fall again.** A classic independent movie structure. “Oedipus”

**A rise, fall, rise.** Pretty much every Disney movie. “Cinderella”

**Fall, rise.** “Rocketman” and “Man in a Hole”

What we’re going to focus on is “rags to riches”—an inspirational journey.

### **Your Aristotle presentation journey**

Step 1. A **Kapow** to grab attention

Step 2. The **problem** or challenge

Step 3. The **solution** or insight

Step 4. The **benefits** of that solution

Step 5. A **call to action**. What you want to happen next

### **Kapow/ Grab them.**

This is where you reveal your idea. But when you do it, grab them, and the best way to grab them is to use a Kapow. Remember to see the Kapow chapter.

You’ll see this structure used in the first thirty minutes of loads of action movies. In an action movie, it might be a knife fight in an out-of-control helicopter.

### **Problem (or Challenge).**

There is a problem to be overcome in almost every story. This might be the client’s problem, it might be yours, but to make the story compelling, we need a problem.

Action movie: Hero discovers a nuclear bomb has been stolen by some scary psychos.

**Solution.**

Your idea again, but explained in a more concrete, credible fashion. This might be where you emphasise your company's strengths and USP.

Hero has to put on her gun-belt and find the bomb.

**Benefits.** ...of your big idea, and the benefits of the solution.

If hero finds the bomb and defeats the baddies, we can sleep easy.

**Call to action.**

The let's-do-it moment. Remind them of the big idea and how it solves their needs. It's where your presentation is given a life beyond the room.

There usually comes a moment in the film where the star puts a clip of bullets into her handgun and grim-faced walks towards the camera saying, "Let's do this thing."

*The Fishing Line.*

At the outset of the presentation, you simply state your insight, and it will be as if you've cast out a fishing line from that insight, and the rest of your presentation hangs on that line. So, where is this useful?

Have you ever been in a position where you're about to begin your presentation, and the event organiser says, "Sorry, we're running a bit behind. We know we said thirty minutes. Can you do it in twenty?" Or where you realise that although no one has said anything, you actually don't have time to deliver your presentation in the slot allotted, so you must cut it in half on the hoof?

In virtual meetings, presentations are more time constrained than ever. One useful technique to help you make your presentation as succinct as possible and deal with the problem of having your presentation cut in half, is The Fishing Line.

First, you aim to sum up the key insight, or throw-line, of your presentation in fifteen words. Those fifteen words must also hook your audience.

This is the task set for TED speakers. They need to be able to sum up the throw line of their talk *and* include a hook, within fifteen words. It forces the speaker to break their presentation down to its essence. To really think about what he's trying to say, and to make that essence sound interesting, engaging—something you would like to hear.

An example of this is Shonda Rhimes' TED talk, "My Year of Saying Yes to Everything." Her fifteen words go like this, "Saying yes to playing with my daughter likely saved my career." It sums up her talk, and at the same time, hooks you into wanting to listen to the rest of her talk. Or Susan Cain's, "Let's bring on the quiet revolution—a world designed for

introverts.”

### *How to do The Fishing Line.*

Can you get the throw line of your presentation down to fifteen words? It’s hard. I mean, really hard. Start with forty words, then get it down to thirty words, before editing to twenty, and finish with fifteen. And then make sure you’ve got your hook in there as well.

Put the fifteen words near the beginning of your presentation and then repeat at the end. Once you’ve done this, you’ve also created a pretty cool soundbite.

### *Signposting.*

It’s terribly easy for your audience to get lost in a virtual presentation. This is an issue in all presentations, but particularly acute in virtual communication, when they’re less focused and haven’t got the advantage of your hand gestures to help signpost the route.

So, what is signposting? When you are travelling down the M40 from Birmingham to London, there are signs on the road that give you information. Some signs state the number of miles between you and London. Some warn you that there is road work ahead. Even though we all have satnavs, the signing is still really useful.

It’s the same with presentations. You need enough to help people understand where they are and, if needed, where they are going. Not too much and not too little.

For example:

“My talk’s about key issues affecting sales in the Midlands. My presentation is divided into three sections.”

“The presentation will last ten minutes.”

This is signposting language. Signposting gives the audience a sense of control. It knows what to expect. Furthermore, it easier for them to absorb and retain what you are saying.

### *Signposting language you might use.*

#### **In the introduction.**

Good morning, my name’s Jack. I am going to talk about ...My presentation is divided into three parts... First, we will look at .... Second, we will look at... Third, we will look at ... The presentation will last for ten minutes. After the presentation, we will have ten minutes for Q&A.

#### **Middle.**

First... Second... Third... Moving to the second point... An example of this is...

Now, let’s look at...

When we look at the graph on the slide, we can see that...

**End.**

To summarise... In conclusion... The most important point is...

**HERMAN'S ACTION PLAN**

- Structure gives your presentation a framework to ensure an easy-to-follow narrative. Decide which structure suits your presentation best. If it's a report, then use the Burger structure; if it's inspirational, then maybe the Aristotle. If you decide to combine both, make sure it's clear.
- If you feel your presentation already has a clear story line, then leave it alone. Don't just add a structure for the sake of it.
- Make sure your presentation is clearly signposted. What's it about, where are you going, and where have you been? In virtual land, it's better to be too clear than not clear enough.
- Look through your presentation. Is it clearly sign-posted?
- Is the audience clear where we've been, where we are, and where we are going?