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### Winning! 5 Key Strategies for an Effective Conference Presentation

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# Winning! 5 Key Strategies for an Effective Conference

## Presentation

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With all of the hard work and thoughtfulness devoted to planning for conference presentations, it is safe to say, everyone wants a winning presentation! The five key strategies for developing an effective presentation are (1) proper planning, (2) work backwards when designing your presentation, (3) diversify your delivery methods, (4) engage your audience, and (5) provide takeaways.

#### 1. Proper planning

Planning a winning presentation is synonymous to planning an effective class. First, it is imperative as a presenter that you view your presentation attendees as students. Most conference attendees select workshops and presentations they feel they can learn from and hope

to gather tools and strategies that can be used when they return to their home school. It is common practice for conference hosts to post in advance of a conference, abbreviated presenter bios and summaries of each presentation so that attendees have the opportunity *before* arrival to select the presentations that best suits their interests and needs. This advance publishing of presentation titles and summaries, creates an inherent expectation that the presenter is going to deliver on the inferred promises in their presentation title and the deliverables outlined in their presentation summary. With that in mind, thinking of attendees as students *and* thinking of yourself as the teacher, requires the presenter to have a well-developed plan from the very beginning. Failing to do so, could result in your presentation falling flat.

#### 2. Work backwards when designing your presentation

Common mistakes of presenters are often rooted in the very same mistakes we make as teachers. Far too

often, teachers fall into the *bad* habit of developing a course by starting with the selection of a text and then building the course around the textbook. Instead, effective course planning begins with clearly identifying the goals for the course and then developing objectives to accomplish the desired goals. Wiggins and McTighe proposed a comprehensive framework for designing courses in their book, *Understanding by Design*. In the book, the authors stressed a strategy called, “The Backward Design Process.” This process has three main stages: (1) start by identifying your desired course goals and results, (2) determine assessment evidence, or in other words, how will you know if the desired results have been met, and (3) plan learning assignments, assign reading, and topic sequencing that are best suited to help students accomplish the stated course goals. Putting the *Backward Design Process* in the context of presentations, consider the following strategies for planning an effective presentation. First, start by identifying the goals for your presentation. For example, our

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goal for readers of this article is to take away practical, yet effective strategies for developing their presentations. Next, be sure to build-in activities designed to determine if in fact, your audience is consistently engaged during the presentation. Finally, create your actual presentation with the above steps in mind. For example, if you decide to do a visual presentation like Prezi, make sure each presentation slide ties directly to the goals of your presentation.

A major component of the aforementioned planning involves the identification of goals for your presentation. Is the goal of your presentation to share a work in progress and solicit feedback from the audience, or is your goal to educate the audience about a particular experience, or a practice or strategy you have utilized in your classroom? Depending on your desired result, how you organize your presentation can differ. It is also imperative when developing goals that you are specific about what you want attendees to gain from the presentation. It is often said that it is impossible to hit a target you cannot see, and even more difficult to hit a target you do not have. The goals for your presentation represent the target, and failing to clearly define your

goals will result in you missing the target.

Once the goals have been identified, it will be time well-spent to jot down objectives to accomplish your goals. Objectives are the bridge between concept development and successful execution. The objectives will also serve as the framework for your presentation outline. The next step is to develop your presentation outline and research your topic. Even the most accomplished individuals in their field of study conduct research, especially before presentations. It is the process of engaging in research that often brings your presentation to life. Research helps you to turn abstract concepts and ideas, into a well-round presentation, by combining relevant trends and issues, with sound studies, theory and practice. Working backwards in this manner, can be the vehicle for moving your ideas forward.



### 3. Engage your audience

The same rules that govern your classroom will help you give an effective presentation that engages your audience from start to finish. Like your students, your colleagues attending your presentation will have many things vying for their attention. Like you, they left work, scholarship, and family behind to attend the conference. Like your students, they will have laptops, tablets, and cell phones in front of them. Knowing this, you will have less than *ten* minutes to grab and keep their attention. Regardless of your topic, consider making your presentation interactive. Methods for creating an interactive presentation vary and you should choose the activity that best suits your topic. When presenting about

a topic that is novel or new to your field, you might start your presentation with a quiz where you survey the audience about their experience with your topic and then tailor your discussion based on their responses. When presenting a lesson in a box, you might ask the audience to complete an exercise you give to students in your classroom, then use your presentation time to deconstruct the exercise, noting the positive experiences and challenges you experienced when administering the exercise to students. Collaborative activities that require the audience to first work independently and then collaborate with others forces the audience to engage with your scholarship and each other. If you have time, collaboration works well if you require the audience to move around in the room and interact with people they may not already know. If you require the audience to use the devices in front of them to engage in an online poll, you can combat distractions by converting their devices into learning tools. Consider using Poll Everywhere which allows attendees to participate in a poll, discussion, reflection, or quiz by simply sending a text message. It also allows you to display audience responses in real-time, encouraging further discussion and engagement.

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### 4. Diversify your delivery methods

When planning your presentation, think about ways you can harness your expertise. Keep in mind that your job while presenting is to educate. Being prepared will help you do so effectively. You do not want to appear robotic, so you should not memorize a script. However, you should be able to discuss content on your slides and handouts without constantly referring to your notes. Doing so requires practicing alone and with colleagues before your presentation. You should also anticipate questions that your audience may ask and be prepared to answer them.

Like your students, your audience will have varied learning styles. Consider multifaceted methods of educating your audience. We talked about interactive activities above. In addition to activities that engage your audience in active learning, you want to be sure that you provide multiple methods for your audience to receive information. This can be done by embedding relevant audio and YouTube video clips in your Prezi or PowerPoint presentation. While your primary method of delivery will depend on the presentation format of your conference, if you are not using a slide presentation,

you should provide a handout to aid your audience in following along.

With decreasing travel budgets, conference organizers are seemingly trying to accept more proposals as the presenters primarily make up the audience, and most schools are more likely to pay for travel where faculty members are presenting. This means you may be asked to co-present by combining your presentation with others, sharing a presentation time slot, or participating on a panel. You may also choose to co-present. When done well, co-presenting adds depth and dimension to presentations. For example, when co-presenters come from different academic backgrounds or teach at schools with different student profiles, they bring diverse perspectives to a single area of scholarship. When co-presenting, think about ways you can tie your related expertise together. This might be done by connecting the presentations with an activity that capitalizes on shared themes. If co-presenting reduces your presentation time, provide your audience with a method for contacting you about your scholarship like a Twitter account, blog, or email address.

### 5. Provide Takeaways

Providing your audience with tangible, yet easy to

remember takeaways, can leave your audience feeling both equipped and empowered. Your takeaways do not have to be handouts or materials attendees leave your presentation with. Yet, takeaways should benefit your attendees while helping you ensure that you met your planned learning goals and objectives. It may be helpful to provide a handout or website where attendees can further review your scholarship. Remember presentations are great tools for your professional development and recognition. To that end, takeaways create an opportunity for ongoing dialogue between you and your audience that extends beyond your presentation.

In conclusion, failing to plan means planning to fail. Yet, being thoughtful about your presentation will result in effective communication of your ideas, further your professional development, and reflect positively on your institution. Incorporating these strategies while planning will result in a winning presentation.

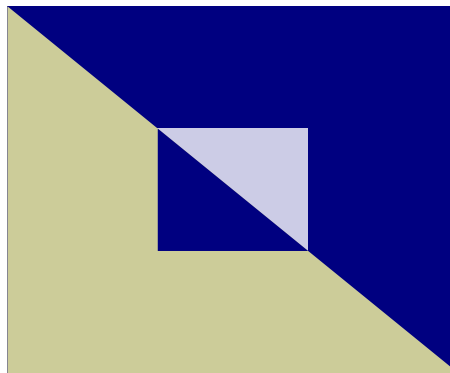
#### Resources:

GRANT WIGGINS & JAY MCTIGHE, *UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN* (2d ed. 2005).

Kevin Daum, *1 Tips for Giving a Really Amazing Presentation*,

INC. (Jul. 2, 2013), <https://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/5-tips-for-giving-really-amazing-presentations.html>.

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Berman, *Say It in Your Own Words* (continued from page 11)

[5] See PAUL BERGMAN & SARA J. BERMAN, *REPRESENT YOURSELF IN COURT: HOW TO PREPARE AND TRY A WINNING CASE* (9th Ed. 2016) and PAUL BERGMAN & SARA J. BERMAN, *THE CRIMINAL LAW HANDBOOK: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS, SURVIVE THE SYSTEM* (14th Ed. 2015) (inspiring this exercise from texts authored for lay people).

[6] See, Jason Song, *Higher Learning: Students Put Expertise into Plain English*, LA TIMES (Apr. 8, 2015), <http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-ucla-talks-20150408-story.html>.

[7] See, Alison Hewitt, *UCLA Grad Students Learn the Art of Plain-Speaking*, UCLA (Mar. 5 2016), <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/ucla-grad-students-learn-art-plain-speaking>.

[8] See Song, *supra* at o.

[9] See Hewitt, *supra* at 1.