



# DON'T PANIC! HOW TO QUICKLY CREATE A CONVINCING PRESENTATION

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There are few people who relish the opportunity to step out on stage and present, whether that's in a room packed full of industry experts or an online meeting with senior management. And there are even fewer people who are happy to do this at a moment's notice. But we've all been there...

The catalyst might have been a seemingly innocent email from the boss, the "oh, didn't I mention it" remark made in passing by a colleague or an invitation out of the blue from a customer. The cause may come in many shapes and sizes but the end result is something we've all experienced - Last Minute Presentation Panic.

So what to do? In our experience, there are typically three responses to such a request:

1. Run around like a headless chicken, expending huge amounts of energy and time telling everyone about the presentation you have to prepare with ABSOLUTELY NO TIME to spare.
2. Jumping straight onto PowerPoint and creating a presentation that, at least on the surface, fits the brief (typically this starts off with a series of bullet points...and gets progressively worse as time marches on and the sense of panic increases).
3. Send out an 'All Staff' pleading email requesting slides that have even a passing resemblance to the presentation topic. The net result is an inbox full of confusing, contradictory content that you then spend the next 24 hours attempting to knit together ultimately resulting in what we call [Presentationstein](#) (and, in all likelihood, a serious caffeine addiction).

It will come as no surprise that none of the above options are going to help you meet the deadline and nail the presentation (although Option 1 might make you feel better about it for a while). Nope - in the end, the success of your emergency presentation will depend on how well you quell the rising sense of panic and buckle down to the hard work of creating a presentation that is worthy of your audience's time (and yours...and your boss's).

So snap yourself out of it, stop moaning about the lack of time and let's get to work...

Before you dive into developing the presentation, you need to get your head straight. It may not feel like it as you battle the rising tide of panic, **but every presentation needs to be thought of as a huge privilege.** It's a wonderful opportunity for you to share your message with an audience that, at least at the start of the session, are willing to listen and engage with you. The key is to make the most of this opportunity and keep the audience onside by sharing relevant, powerful and engaging content that really resonates with them.

Simple, right? Given sufficient time, focus and a band of willing helpers, maybe...but when the clock is ticking and the pressure is on, it tends to be a slightly different story.

So let's paint the following scenario. You've just received a call from your boss who wants you to deliver an update on the big project you've been working on to the board of directors. The next meeting is tomorrow afternoon and you have a 30 minute slot...you have 24 hours to pull together a presentation that demonstrates the wonderful work you and team have been doing and why the project deserves continued support from the entire board.

24 hours to go. Assuming you have other things pulling on your time (other work commitments, family, the need for sleep), let's work on the basis of having a **maximum of 3 hours** to prepare for the presentation. Where to start?

In priority order, we'd recommend you approach the task by breaking down the key elements of every successful presentation. Ensure you go through this initial pondering stage away from your PC - **great ideas don't come from playing with PowerPoint, they are merely shared by using it properly.** Grab scraps of paper, sticky notes, old envelopes (it really doesn't matter!) just start scribbling down the key points around the following elements:

# 1. AUDIENCE - TIME ALLOCATION: 15 MINS

What do you know about them? Why have they asked you (or the person you're developing the presentation for) to present? Do you have any history with them (good, bad, indifferent)? Why have they agreed to give up a sizable chunk of their busy diary to listen to you?

All simple questions but getting 'under the skin' of the audience and getting a good grip on the answers will make a huge difference to the way you approach the development of your presentation. Making your presentation relevant to your audience is absolutely key – if the [audience](#) isn't engaged, you've wasted everybody's time (and a lot of nervous energy) – so ensure you have them in mind each and every step of the way.

# 2. MESSAGE - TIME ALLOCATION: 30 MINS

Now you've got your head around the audience, think about what you want to share with them. Great presentations form the basis of a transaction between presenter and audience – information is imparted to prompt an action from the audience. This can be internal presentations sharing ideas or updates but with the objective of getting the audience to buy into the new information and give it their support or understanding. It could be a pitch presentation where you are looking to get the prospect to choose your solution over the competition's...

Whatever the flavour, every presentation should have a purpose - **what do you want the audience to do as a result of the information you've just shared with them?** Your message should be crystal clear before you embark on [creating the presentation](#) as it is this that will prompt the action from the audience. Delivering a presentation without a clear message is akin to jumping in the car and driving with no destination in mind – eventually you'll get bored and run out of fuel without achieving anything.

# 3. CONTENT - TIME ALLOCATION: 1 HOUR

It's a funny thing but content is the source of most presentation problems but is also the easiest thing to fix. Presentations created in a panic tend to be choc-a-block with content for the simple reason that editing takes time and it's a lot easier to keep information in 'just in case'. The net result is a wordy waffly presentation that meanders along, never really engaging an audience – a monumental waste of everyone's time.

**Now for the good news** – armed with a clear **message**, the **content** you need to share with your audience to deliver this picks itself. You can quickly [identify content](#) that is helping you reinforce or demonstrate your message (this stays in) and the content that is the waffle that bogs down many presentations (typically vanity slides about company size and a picture of the founder – this can be dropped). The end result is a shorter presentation (never a bad thing) with content that has been handpicked to engage your audience and support your message (an extremely good thing).



## 4. VISUALS - TIME ALLOCATION: 45 MINS

This may look a little scary – only spending three quarters of an hour on prepping your PowerPoint slides? Sorry but this is tough love...spending any more than 45 mins on your slides in a 3 hour window is akin to rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic. It will have little to no effect other than burning up time in other more important areas.

So quell that sense of panic. You're now building your slides on a much firmer foundation than previously so each click of the mouse and keyboard will be adding greater value and impact than ever before. Also limiting your time to design means that you're not going to get pulled into finessing the details that most of your audience won't even notice. Once you have the luxury of time, feel free to 'fill your boots' and spend more time adding visuals, [creating powerful graphics](#) and worrying about the PowerPoint template...but with just 3 working hours available on the clock, these are dalliances we can do without.

## 5. DELIVERY - TIME ALLOCATION: 30 MINS

We've been really mean in this scenario by only giving you 3 hours but it is vital to always squeeze some time to run through the presentation before you deliver it. It can be to a willing colleague, the bathroom mirror or pet hamster – it doesn't really matter as long as you get a chance to run through it. You wouldn't jump on an aeroplane that hadn't been through a few rudimentary tests so why would you stand in front of an audience and deliver important information without having taken the time to [put it through its paces](#) at least once?



**Truth be told, 30 minutes is no time at all BUT taking a few moments out to run through the presentation and test how it all hangs together will pay huge dividends before you step up in front of your audience and speak.**

So there you go – when faced with the almost impossible task of creating a presentation from scratch in 3 hours, step away from your PC and start thinking, doodling and planning. The time spent away from the lure of PowerPoint, Keynote or Prezi will ensure that when you get to share your message with

your audience, there's a much higher probability of them staying awake, engaging with what you have to share and responding accordingly. And in the end, isn't that what presentations are all about?

P.S. – Oh, and be sure to ask your boss, colleague or customer never to put you in this position again. **Good presentations take time, great presentations take even longer** so if they want it to be a valuable session, make sure they understand that they need to give you sufficient notice.