

Present Ideas People Can Use

Let's give your audience a clear message and a useful next step.

You do not have to perform expertise by filling every slide. Your job is to help people understand an idea and know what to do with it. Let's build the message before we polish the slides.

What you will take away: You will leave with a presentation outline, a stronger slide message, and a rehearsal plan.

1. Start with the audience's task

Before opening your slide software, complete this sentence: "After this presentation, the audience should understand, consider, decide, or do ____." A class explanation, job-interview presentation, team update, and board briefing may need different outcomes. Choose the one that matters for this session.

Now ask what the audience already knows, what needs explanation, and what questions will affect their response. A technical specialist may need the method; an institutional leader may need the implication, cost, uncertainty, and next decision. Explain necessary terms without treating unfamiliarity as a lack of ability. Your knowledge becomes useful when someone else can follow it.

Your turn: Name the audience, their main question, and the action or understanding you want them to leave with.

2. Build the argument before the slides

Outline your message in plain language. A useful starting sequence is context, problem, evidence, options, and proposed next action. Adapt it to your purpose. A research explanation may need more method; a decision briefing may need a comparison of tradeoffs. Make the connection between the evidence and your conclusion explicit.

Write the central message in one sentence. If you need several unrelated sentences, choose the main thread and move supporting material to a handout or appendix. Label hypothetical examples and distinguish a proposed improvement from a demonstrated result. A persuasive sequence should help the audience assess your reasoning, not conceal uncertainty.

Your turn: Draft a short outline using statements that connect, rather than a list of topics such as "background" and "results."

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3. Let's turn a topic into a useful proposal

A worked example · illustrative

Starting point: A slide titled "Student Resources" with a list of offices and links.

Clearer message: "A shared referral page could make next steps easier to find."

Evidence to show: In this hypothetical example, a review found inconsistent referral instructions across current pages. Show the differences and explain the limits of that review.

Proposal: Test one shared page with named content owners.

Decision requested: Confirm a pilot owner and the feedback to review.

Why it works: The audience can see the problem, examine the evidence, and respond to a specific proposal. The title describes a possibility, not an outcome that has already been proved.

4. Use examples that fit your audience and stage

Make it fit your situation

Starting out: In a class or internship update, explain the project question, your contribution, and what the result suggests. Be clear about which work you performed.

Changing careers: Explain an unfamiliar process through something your audience recognizes, then name the differences. Do not assume specialist terms mean the same thing in both settings.

Leading others: State the decision, compare realistic alternatives, explain the tradeoff, and identify the next owner.

Use stories when they help explain the point accurately. Remove identifying details when confidentiality requires it. One person's experience can illustrate a question; it does not establish that everyone has the same experience.

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5. Let the slides support your explanation

Give each slide a discernible purpose. "Survey Results" names a topic. A supported title such as "Respondents requested clearer next-step instructions" tells the audience which finding to examine. Use enough evidence to support the message and make its source and limits visible.

Choose readable type and strong contrast. Label charts, explain comparisons, and avoid using color alone to separate categories. Describe important visuals aloud and provide accessible materials as needed. Speaker notes can hold your examples, transitions, and reminders; the audience does not need your entire script on screen. For virtual or hybrid delivery, check the shared window, audio, captions, links, and how remote participants will ask questions. Keep private notes out of the audience view.

6. Rehearse for understanding, not memorization

Practice the opening, evidence, transitions, and close aloud. Ask a listener: "What was the main message? What did I ask you to do?" If the answer is unclear, revise the structure before adding decoration. Practice explaining the idea without the slides so a technical problem does not take away your message.

For questions, listen, clarify when needed, and answer what the evidence supports. Say what you would need to check when you do not know. Close with the decision, application, or question the audience should carry forward. Confirm an owner when action has been agreed, and share resources you promised.

Check your progress: Can someone summarize your point and the next step without reading your notes?

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE / PRESENTATION SKILLS

Your practice worksheet

Use a notebook or a copy of this page. Work with one real situation, then keep your answers for the next time you need them.

Audience and purpose: My audience is _____. They need to understand or decide _____.

Main message: The central idea I want them to remember is _____.

Evidence and limits: I can support it with _____. The uncertainty I need to name is _____.

Sequence and next step: My outline is _____. I will close by asking _____.

Rehearsal feedback: My listener understood _____. I need to clarify _____.

Before you put it to use

- I named the audience's task.
- The outline follows a clear line of reasoning.
- Each slide supports one useful message.
- Evidence, sources, and uncertainty are visible.
- Materials and participation support access needs.
- The close identifies an application, decision, or next action.

Selected references

MIT EECS Communication Lab: Slide Presentation

MIT Teaching + Learning Lab: Presentation Tips

Make your next move clearer.

For more practical guides and tools, come back to eriii.com. Want feedback on your own situation? [Let us work through it together.](#)