

Creating Presentations that Matter

We recommend the “Presentation Zen” approach for all presentations used in public oral communications: such as general presentations, lectures, briefings, and training. This involves a new mindset that we all have to learn. We find it is always helpful to pair up with someone more experienced in this process when designing such a presentation and even more so as you are learning the process. In fact, even experienced presenters find it helpful to have a “second set of eyes” to think about the presentation design.

[Matt Brandon](#), the Media Director for Knowledge Stewardship International, is an expert in the process and serves as the guide for our presentation development. Here is the process we follow.

Guidelines

Here are the general guidelines for this process.

- **Collaboration.** Every presenter should collaborate with a “design partner”, someone who understands the Presentation Zen style of design to design and improve their approach.
- **Every presentation has three parts:** the presenter, the PowerPoint slide deck (including speaker notes), and the handouts. Your design partner helps you think about the PowerPoint deck. You are responsible for the other two parts, following the usual processes.
- **Slides are not distributed.** PowerPoint slide decks designed in the Presentation Zen style are generally not useful by themselves and should not be distributed. This is especially important if you are using copyrighted images in the deck (such as images from iStock).
- **Grace.** This is a learning process, not a bureaucratic hurdle to be overcome. As we learn, we want to extend grace to each other.

Process

Here is the basic process we will follow.

1. **Prepare your thoughts:** What is the story you want to tell? Prepare your “elevator speech.” Outline the thoughts and key points. You can do this in Word or, if you must, PowerPoint but *do not spend any time making a pretty PowerPoint! At this stage, any work you do in PowerPoint will not survive.*
2. **Arrange a conversation with your design partner.** Walk through the outline. Help him see what their key messages are. What are the points that really require special kinds of images, videos, etc? In person is best but you could do this over Skype.
3. **Acquire images and create the slide deck.** Then the two of you collaborate on the finished product.
4. **Prepare your speaker notes and Handouts.** Even while working on the slide deck, you can create the other parts of your presentation: the notes and the handouts. Have an editor check the handouts.
5. **Practice.** Practice your talk so you don’t have to use notes.

For More Information

For more information on Presentations that Matter, see

- Reynolds, Garr. *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*. Berkeley, CA: New Rider, 2008.
- Heath, Chip & Dan Heath. *Made to Stick*. Random House, 2007.