

# The best presentations - ever?

Many presentation skills training courses focus on the 'Ten golden rules of giving effective presentations'. However, many excellent presenters at TED conferences break the rules! So, just what makes for a great presentation?

**1** Think of an excellent presentation you have attended. Why was it so good? Discuss your answer with a partner. Use some of the phrases in the box.

PowerPoint	visuals	rhetoric	voice
humour	memorable	signposting	engaging

**FACT BOX: TED Talks**  
 Ideas worth spreading on Technology, Education and Design. [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)

**2** Scan the article from a business journal. Match the sub-headings (a-h) to the posts (1-8).

- |                    |                  |                  |                            |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| (a) Signposting    | (b) Storytelling | (c) Great finish | (d) Play with the language |
| (e) Being positive | (f) Visuals      | (g) Humour       | (h) Cartoons               |

**Breaking the rules** Last week, I watched another great TED talk and once again noticed: the presenter failed to give an overview. She didn't use any signposting language. In fact, the lady didn't even use PowerPoint. But the talk was great. It got me thinking about all the stuff we do on Presentation skills courses about 'stating aims' and 'summing up', and why great speakers often don't do any of this! So I used my blog to ask industry colleagues to tell me about something in a presentation that really impressed them. In this article, I'm going to share their responses. Some of their replies really made me think. Here are my favourite posts:

**1** [...] Listen to 'Apple-speak', talks from Apple presenters and check out the number of times they use the words 'incredible', 'great', 'amazing'. They really enthuse the audience, and Steve Jobs himself has a great 'sense of theatre'.

**2** [...] I saw a presentation where the presenter showed us one cartoon after another while he continued speaking. We processed them, laughed and followed everything he said. I still cannot understand how we did that.

**3** [...] This Japanese guy hissed - menacingly - at the end of his presentation: "If you have any questions - please, HESITATE to ask." We all burst out laughing. It was so clever to change the original phrase like that.

**4** [...] The presenter was speaking about supermarkets and organic foods. He picks up this grape and looks at it, saying: "This may be sprayed with pesticide". (Eats it) "I may die in two minutes. If you any questions, better make them quick!".

**5** [...] I was at a talk and the speaker was blind. Of course, he didn't use any visuals, but I followed everything - that was because he repeated key phrases and guided us through his talk. Amazing.

**6** [...] The presenter obviously worked in graphic design, Anyway, he stripped away all his bullet-points and just showed pictures and one or two key-words. But what pictures! Sensational. His spoken words just echoed his text.

**7** [...] I just cannot understand why some things are funny and some aren't. My jokes fall flat! Humour, when you see it, always makes a good presentation into a great one.

**8** [...] Don't present. Build the content into a succession of stories. Powerful magic.

So, what did I learn from this exercise? There doesn't seem to be one thing that makes a presentation great. Good presenters do what they do well by employing all sorts of tips and tricks. I think you have to know and respect the rules first and after that, breaking the rules is possible. After all, Martin Luther King did it through rhetoric, not PPT!

**3** Read the complete article. Which example do you like best? What conclusions does the writer draw?

**4** Decide which word (a-e) does not form a strong word partnership with the word at the end of each line.

<b>4.1</b>	(a) captivating	(b) dramatic	(c) memorable	(d) tip	(e) forceful	<b>PRESENTATION</b>
<b>4.2</b>	(a) sales	(b) formal	(c) impressed	(d) company	(e) engaging	

**5** Prepare a short presentation for your group on a suitable topic. Consciously decide to break one or more rules!