

Chapter 6

Present, Don't Speak

6.1 SPEECHES VERSUS PRESENTATIONS

It seems that we're always in the middle of an election. And elections mean speeches: stump speeches, impromptu speeches, TV speeches, speeches after dinner, speeches in schools, and speeches in malls. With the prevalence of stand-up public speaking in the political arena, it would be easy for the new engineer to become confused and assume that the same mode is commonplace in business communication. The truth is that it is the rare businessperson today who gives a stand-up speech, at least for everyday business matters. With the advent of overhead projectors and transparencies, businesspeople stopped giving speeches and started making presentations: talks supported by projected visual material. The advent of laptop computers, LCD (liquid-crystal display) projectors, and powerful presentation software has advanced this trend.

In this chapter, we'll examine the reasons why you should join this mass movement and learn to prepare and deliver effective presentations. Specifically, we'll examine the reasons why you should present—not speechify—and we'll consider the elements and the process of presentation preparation. We'll also consider methods for preparing effective transparencies or PowerPoint presentation files and ways to sharpen your delivery skills.

6.2 WHY PRESENT?

After you have some experience giving transparency-based or PowerPoint presentations, the reasons for presenting rather than speaking will seem almost self-evident. That this knowledge is not genetically transmitted was brought home to me several years ago when I was a group advisor for a Senior Design Project at the University of Illinois. The design team—a talented group of motivated senior engineering students—had prepared their spiel and wanted to rehearse in front of me, so I could give them feedback. As soon as they began to talk, I realized—to my amazement and chagrin—that they were giving a speech. Sure, they had a transparency or two as window dressing, but it was a speech

they delivered, with one student working from notecards, one reading verbatim from a script, and one working from (a faulty) memory. After listening for a few minutes, I asked them why they were making their lives so difficult. Uniformly, they answered that they thought that this was what the big guys did and that this was what they were expected to do for their first shot at the big time. Fortunately, they were persuaded that they could be more relaxed—and more communicative—if they would present, not speak. They went on to give a solid presentation, but the experience left me with the impression that there is a wide gap between what students think a business presentation is and what such presentations really are.

Formal oral communication in business is now dominated by transparency-based or PowerPoint presentations for two good reasons:

1. Presenting is easier to do.
2. Presenting conveys more information to your audience.

One of the reasons I couldn't believe my students chose to make a speech was because I know how hard it is to make a good one. Consider the three ways you can give a formal speech. You can memorize the speech—but for most people it is too easy to forget portions and become flustered. You can read from a script—but, unless you are a good actor, it is very hard to read and not sound as though you are reading. Or you can work from notecards (and this is perhaps the most sensible way for the occasional speech maker to work)—but even then, because your audience is not visually occupied, they will focus more on you, your mistakes, and your use of notecards. The presenter needs no such extra attention; nor does he or she need the stress it can cause.

Contrast the difficulties of making a speech with the utter ease of giving a well-planned presentation. You walk up to your laptop and LCD projector, madly click your mouse, read the cues on each page of the presentation, and verbally fill in the blanks. And while you're doing your thing, your audience isn't minding you much. They are happily engaged with the material you are putting before their eyes, the same material that is providing you with cues to continue your talk. In this way, presenting is much more forgiving to the communicator, providing notes and props to help get through the talk.

Presenting is also advantageous to the audience. Well-planned transparencies or PowerPoint slides provide a second channel of information, augmenting the primary source—the speaker's voice. An audience member who misses a point from one source can often pick it up from the other. Moreover, in this video age it is not irrelevant that a transparency presentation is a visually engaging activity. An audience raised on television expects to have its visual field filled. A communicator who misses or misunderstands such an important audience expectation is simply asking for trouble.

Thus we are drawn to an interesting conclusion. When you have a choice, choose to present. You'll be more relaxed, the audience will be better engaged with the material, and more information will be conveyed.

6.3 PREPARATION MAKES THE PRESENTATION

That a presentation is easier to deliver than a speech certainly does suggest that we should choose to present whenever we have a choice, but ease of delivery does not imply that a presentation requires less preparation than a speech. In fact, because of the need for transparencies or Powerpoint slides, a good presentation usually requires more time for preparation than a comparable speech. Careful presentation preparation requires a number of key steps: audience analysis, subject selection, elements of a presentation, preparation process, and transparency design and preparation.

6.3.1 Audience Analysis

The best presentations come from serious consideration of *audience*. Experienced writers and speakers have a gut feel for their audiences and constantly adjust to audience needs, but the less experienced communicator has less of a feel and has to give more consideration to the approach chosen. To aid this process, it is helpful to prepare a short *audience brief* to help guide presentation planning for a particular audience.

In preparing the brief, there are three audience characteristics to keep in mind:

1. Motivation
2. Patience level
3. Educational and technical background

By far the most important of these characteristics is audience motivation. Why is your audience bothering to sit there and listen to you? Are they simply scratching an intellectual itch, or do they need to learn something fairly specific? Are most audience members there for the same reasons, or are different audience members there for different reasons? It is important to address both the motives and the variance in motives as you contemplate your target audience. Of course, the main reason that you contemplate the audience is to connect your material to their motives. This permits you to establish the appropriate angle from which to present your subject matter. Any subject can be presented from various perspectives. For a relatively homogeneous audience you may select one particular point of view; for a more mixed audience it may be necessary to present multiple viewpoints to connect with differently motivated individuals. Only by understanding motives, and by focusing your subject material toward those motives, can you hope to reach your audience—and thereby accomplish your goals as a presenter.

Patience may be a virtue, but in business, time is money; many of your audience members will have severe limitations on how long they can sit still for your message. Therefore it is important to tailor the length of your talk to the level of patience (or, more often, impatience) of your audience. For example, a CEO (chief executive office) with nine appointments before lunch and a plane

to catch has one patience level, and a project engineer with only his or her workstation on hold has another. If you're faced with a situation in which both high-level managers and project engineers compose your audience, it may make sense to split your talk into distinct management and technical briefings, and this is often done. On the other hand, there will be times when you can expect fairly uniform patience levels in your audience—at technical society conferences, for example. Even then, audience patience can become an issue, especially if your talk exceeds the allotted time.

Just as levels of patience and length of talk must be matched, so must audience background and the intellectual level of a presentation. Waxing eloquent about a set of differential equations in front of an audience of Realtors is likely to evoke thoughts of cost variation among leases (differ-rental equations). Of course, spending time explaining elementary differential equations to a group of Ph.D. physicists is equally nonsensical. Therefore, assessing your audience's technical and educational background is vital. Once again, the trickiest audiences are those with mixed backgrounds. In the worst cases, it may be best to divide if one wants to conquer the heterogeneous audience.

Considering these aspects of your audience will help you design your presentation appropriately. Table 6.1 summarizes the connections between audience characteristics and presentation consequences. Although this section has been fairly clinical in dissecting the components of audience analysis, the more appropriate mechanism for considering a particular audience is the holistic preparation of an audience brief.

The following exploration exercise asks you to prepare an audience brief for a presentation regarding your goals and aspirations. If this exercise is to be performed in class, you may want to do an analysis of that target audience; if you are doing the exercise on your own, choose an imaginary audience (e.g., parents, colleagues, or potential employers) and stick to that imagined audience.

Exploration Exercise

You will prepare a seven-transparency presentation on the topic "What Are My Goals and Aspirations for the Next Five Years?" (You may change the title if you like.) For this exercise, write a one- to two-page, double-spaced, typewritten audience brief that identifies the motivations, patience level, and background of your target audience.

Table 6.1 Audience Characteristics and Presentation Consequences

Audience characteristic	Presentation consequence
Motivation	Angle
Patience level	Length
Educational-technical background	Intellectual level

6.3.2 Subject Selection

Subject selection will, for us, be something of a short subject. Often a business presentation arises out of a particular organizational need, making subject selection something of a moot point; however, there is some room even within the confines of a predetermined subject to choose among various aspects to be included in your presentation. There will also be times when you are in greater control and can choose your subject fairly freely—for example, when you choose to make a presentation at a technical conference or before a civic or church group. In any event, the prime directive of subject selection may be stated quite simply:

Within the constraints of organizational need and audience characteristics, choose a subject about which you are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic.

Perhaps this seems like simply stating the obvious, but how many times have you seen presenters choose to speak when they knew little about a topic for which they had not very much enthusiasm? Audiences can see through an amateur in a New York minute—if not during a talk, then certainly during the question-and-answer period. Audiences are also fairly savvy at detecting whether a speaker has enthusiasm for his or her topic. The best reason to choose a topic is your passion for that topic. Good presentations don't grow on trees, and your enthusiasm will carry you through as you plan, prepare, and deliver your talk.

6.3.3 Elements of a Presentation

A good presentation sets the stage in the listener's mind, presents the core material, and sums up and spells out the consequences of what was said.

A simple structure that accomplishes these things contains the following elements:

1. Title
2. Foreword
3. Overview
4. Body
5. Summary and conclusions

Each of these must be considered in some detail.

Title

It may be somewhat unusual to think of the title of a presentation as a separate element, but a good title can be critical to the success of a presentation. It is the first element that the audience sees or hears; it is important both for creating a positive first impression and for building in your audience the desire to hear more. To do these things, a good title should be *informative*, reflecting

the material contained in the presentation, and *interest provoking*, creating desire and anticipation.

Selecting titles is a somewhat mysterious art, and rather than be too analytical about it, let's examine a sampler of actual presentation titles, ranging from the fairly straightforward to the more purely provocative:

1. A Comparative Analysis of Selection Methods Used in Genetic Algorithms
2. Genetic Algorithms, Noise, and the Sizing of Populations
3. A Gentle Introduction to Genetic Algorithms
4. Six Ways to GA Happiness
5. Don't Worry, Be Messy

By the way, genetic algorithms (GAs) are search procedures based on the mechanics of natural selection and natural genetics (Goldberg, 1989). From an engineering perspective they may be used as optimization procedures, and they also have something to say about an engineering theory of design, innovation, and invention (Goldberg, 2002). From a title–design point of view, these five titles run the gamut from fully informative to fully provocative.

The first specimen is about as straightforward and descriptive a title as one could have. Although it is a little long, it does convey a compact version of the talk's contents. Moreover, there is little in the title to offend anyone; a title of this sort is useful when a “Joe Friday” approach is called for (“just the facts, ma'am”).

“Genetic Algorithms, Noise, and the Sizing of Populations” is another fairly descriptive title; notice, however, how the use of a *triple of topics* conveys the breadth of the presentation at the same time that it creates wonder in the reader's mind about how the three topics interrelate. Triples can be overused, but they are an effective device if the juxtaposition is both informative and interest provoking without being too exotic.

The third specimen illustrates how a straightforward title can be made more interest provoking by the injection of a single word. “An Introduction to Genetic Algorithms” would be a fairly informative, if pedestrian, title. The addition of the single offbeat (and alliterative) word “Gentle” is enough to make the title more inviting. Engineers need to approach the offbeat with caution, however. Your employers may be more comfortable thinking of you as a serious engineer, and it is possible to be too cute. Such matters are tricky, and all I can recommend is that you develop your own good judgment.

The fourth example, with its “six ways,” leans even more toward provocation while still being reasonably informative. The actual presentation for which this served as a title is about the use of six elements of practical GA theory to make genetic algorithms work better in applications, and this title does hint at that, creating interest by shrouding the six ways in mystery. (If you're interested in drawing an audience to a presentation of theory, some mystery in one's title is essential.)

The last title, “Don't Worry, Be Messy,” goes almost all the way toward provocative at the expense of being informative. The presentation for which I actually used this title combines the material from two separate presentations that were more conventionally named: “Messy Genetic Algorithms: Motivation, Analysis, and First Results” and “Messy Genetic Algorithms: Studies in Mixed Size and Scale.” I dared to use such an uninformative title because my audience at the International Conference on Genetic Algorithms was familiar with my work in this area, and I thought that the offbeat title might draw attention to what was essentially a review of material originally presented elsewhere.

As you can see, there is quite a bit of latitude that can be taken in designing an informative, interest-provoking title. These same principles can be helpful in choosing headlines, section titles, and other short, pithy descriptions that are used in presentations and written work as landmarks to inform or keep your reader interested. As you make more presentations, you will become more proficient picking effective titles and headlines. As with all elements of presentation design, if you start from knowledge of your audience, you will not go far wrong.

Foreword: A Word at the Fore

The foreword is an oft-neglected element of a presentation. I use *foreword* (not *forward*) to mean an element that sets the stage for a presentation on the larger scheme of things. The term *motivation* is sometimes used to characterize this important presentation element. Specifically, a foreword (or motivation) should contain two elements: background and rhetorical purpose.

Background creates context for a talk. What were the critical events or factors that led to this presentation? In what key ways is this talk necessary? After providing background, it is time to blow the trumpets and give the rhetorical purpose of the presentation. Phrases such as “The goal of this talk is . . .” or “The purpose of this presentation is . . .” announce the coming of the rhetorical purpose; the presenter should not be afraid to state what that purpose is. It is important, however, to separate the rhetorical purpose of the presentation from the goals or objectives of the project or the underlying work—they are not the same. For example, a long-term design project may have the project goal of designing a particular gizmo, whereas a project progress presentation might have the rhetorical purpose of examining specific accomplishments since the last report so that team members depending on the design can adjust or adapt their plans accordingly. Thus the rhetorical purpose has more to do with the expected consequences of the presentation than the expected consequences of the underlying work or project.

The foreword can be as simple as a brief statement made while the title slide is on the projector, or it can be a more involved statement accompanied by a more detailed sequence of slides.

Overview

Have you ever listened to a speaker who didn't tell you where the talk was going? More often than not, when the speaker finished you didn't know where

he or she had been. One of the most important elements of a talk is the overview. It should provide a fairly clear road map for the talk: where it starts, where it twists and turns, and where it will end up. Often a single slide will suffice, yet the inclusion of that one slide will do more to help your audience than almost any other. A simple rhetorical device that works well (if it is not overused) is to repeat the overview slide between each major segment of the talk, highlighting the topic you are about to begin. This technique works best in talks where the subtopics are fairly independent. Whether or not you choose to update the route map in this fashion, you should always have an overview slide somewhere early in the presentation; not including it is an invitation to disaster.

Body

The body is, of course, the meat of the presentation, but it is difficult to say much about it in general, other than that the process of generating a good presentation body is almost identical to the process of developing good writing. One key to writing a good body is to divide it into elements and to give intermediate overview slides for each element of the body. A key to giving an effective presentation is to successively build mental models for your listeners of what is coming and then to fulfill the expectations that you have created. Good presenters are sympathetic to their listeners' plight. They know the average listener is always on the verge of being lost, and with that in mind they provide ample road maps and intellectual landmarks along the way so the listener can stay with the presentation.

Summaries and Conclusions

After you tell them what you're going to say and say it, you do need to tell them what you said. Specifically, you should do two things. You must *summarize* the key points of your talk and draw *conclusions* from the work. I have found that there is much confusion among my students regarding the difference between summaries and sets of conclusions. A summary is a simple recapitulation of the key points made during the presentation. Conclusions are those *consequences* for, or changes to, the state of knowledge or the state of the world that are a result of the work presented. In a practical sense, summaries are memory refreshers and conclusions are calls to action (at least calls to changing one's mind). Both are necessary, and both should be presented at the end of the typical presentation.

With the basic elements of a presentation on the table, it is important to examine the overall process of presentation preparation.

6.3.4 Preparation Process

Presentation preparation is so closely tied to the writing process that you'll find it is much easier to prepare a good presentation after you've written something on your intended subject. (It is also easier to write after you have made a presentation

on a topic, but we must climb on this merry-go-round somewhere.) Writing before presenting does two things. First, it forces you to come to grips with the order of presentation and the transitions between topics. Second, the act of writing programs your tongue for talking. After you've turned a phrase or two on a piece of paper, standing up and giving a talk becomes much easier. Therefore, I usually recommend that my students write *something* before they present.

What you write will depend on whether the presentation is derivative or independent. By a *derivative* presentation, I mean a presentation derived from a piece of writing. Many of my presentations come after I have written fairly extensively on my subject. In such cases, the need for additional writing is limited to the compilation of a list of the topics chosen for inclusion in the presentation and the composition of a paragraph or two on any new topics not previously explored in writing.

By an *independent* presentation, I mean a presentation on a topic that you have not previously written about (or presented). In that case, it can be important to go through the mental processes of writing and revision by working up a piece the length of an extended abstract (two to six pages). By doing this as part of the presentation preparation process, you work through questions of topic selection and ordering fairly fully, and you do enough phrase turning to get some useful tongue programming.

Some may find it sufficient to work up an outline as an alternative to writing an extended abstract. Detailed outlines can inhibit creativity and idea exploration; however, once the subject matter is fairly fixed in mind, outlining a presentation should not be too risky. Nonetheless, should you find that the ideas are not as fully developed as you thought they were (as evidenced, e.g., by repeated periods of writer's block), return to a fuller exploration of the presentation's flow by writing more on your intended subject.

6.3.5 Transparency Design and Preparation

Once you have a feel for the flow of a presentation, you are in a position to prepare the presentation copy and to actually produce the slide file. We consider both of these topics after first considering the somewhat peculiar language of transparency copy.

Transparency-Speak

Preparing slides or transparencies may be thought of as an exercise in writing headlines. In other words, the designer of transparencies, like telegraphers of old, must make every word count, sometimes at the expense of complete sentences and other conventions of grammar and usage.

To get in the mood to "speak transparency," I find it useful to grab *The Wall Street Journal* and skim articles by reading only the headlines, both the article and section headlines. If you do this, you will notice the elimination of many

adverbs, the suppression of all but the most necessary adjectives, and the use of high-impact nouns and simple verb forms.

Preparing Presentation Copy

We are ready to tackle the actual preparation of presentation copy. Usually this involves the writing of a headline and from two to six bulleted topics per slide.

Rather than becoming overly analytical, why don't we do as we did with titles and look at some copy from a presentation entitled "A Gentle Introduction to Genetic Algorithms"?

Let's start with the overview slide copy:

- h: Overview
- b: Motivation
- b: GA basics
- b: GAs in search and optimization
- b: Advanced operators
- b: GAs in machine learning

Here I've used the shorthand h: to denote a headline and b: to denote a bullet. Overview slides are usually fairly easy to assemble, as they are simple lists of the main topics of the talk.

Since this is an introductory presentation, most audiences that hear it are unfamiliar with genetic algorithms, and the term itself must be defined. The copy for this defining slide is as follows:

- h: What Is a Genetic Algorithm (GA)?
- b: A genetic algorithm is an adaptation procedure based on the mechanics of natural genetics and natural selection.
- b: GAs have 2 key components:
- b: Survival of the fittest
- b: Recombination

Note that only essential information is included and that only a modest amount of information is presented on a single slide.

Further along in the presentation it is important to explain how GAs work. This how-it-works section is preceded by an intermediate overview slide:

- h: GA Basics
- b: Differences—In what ways are GAs different from other search techniques?
- b: Mechanics—How do they work?
- b: Power—Why do they work?

Keeping the listener updated on the progress of a presentation is important, especially in longer presentations. It is also useful as a means to keep yourself on the straight and narrow.

In this same section, another slide gives a laundry list of four ways in which GAs are different from other search techniques. One of those ways is that they are a blind-search technique. The blindness slide copy is presented below:

h: Blind Search

b: Canonical search must reject problem specifics.

b: Treat problem as black box:

g: [*black-box graphic*]

The g: is used to denote a graphic element (we'll discuss graphics briefly in a moment). Note that because of the inclusion of a graphic element, the text has been kept to a minimum. Too much text on a graphical slide (or vice versa) can be fairly distracting, but you do need some text to help tweak necessary associations that allow the audience to think the right thoughts as they listen and read (and allow you to say the right words as you speak).

Producing the Presentation

The technology of presentation production has changed dramatically in a short time. In the 30 years that I've been making presentations, I've used pen-stencil sets, pen-lettering devices, pressed lettering, strip-lettering machines, and computers. Of course, computer technology is the most flexible of the lot and is with us to stay. Therefore I recommend that you use some sort of word processor, graphic-arts package, or specialized presentation software. The PowerPoint program has become a de facto standard and has been used in the preparation of the slides shown here.

Again, rather than becoming overly analytical, let's just look at some sample slides created for the presentation discussed earlier. The first is the title slide (Figure 6.1). As you will notice, it contains the talk title, speaker name, address, and electronic address. Too many speakers begin their talks without mentioning who they are, where they are from, or what they will be talking about. It is a simple matter to ensure that your audience knows you, the title of your talk, and your affiliation.

Scanning this and the other transparencies (Figures 6.2 through 6.5), you'll see that a fairly Spartan PowerPoint style file has been used. Notice the clean design, simple graphic, and minimal use of different fonts. One of the unfortunate and unintended side effects of the explosion of computer graphics software has been to encourage a lot of junky graphics. The best policy for those who are not artists is to keep slide layout and graphics simple. The old acronym KISS (keep it simple, stupid) is appropriate here. The average presentation should be clean and clear; going overboard on graphics will probably have the unintended effect of persuading your boss that you've spent too much time on presenting and not enough time on solving the problem. Of course, if your line of work is computer graphics or visualization, then you will be expected to live up to standards of excellence established in your field. Otherwise, you overdo graphics at your peril.

Now it's time for the rubber—the PowerPoint—to meet the road and try some transparency preparation in the next practice exercise.

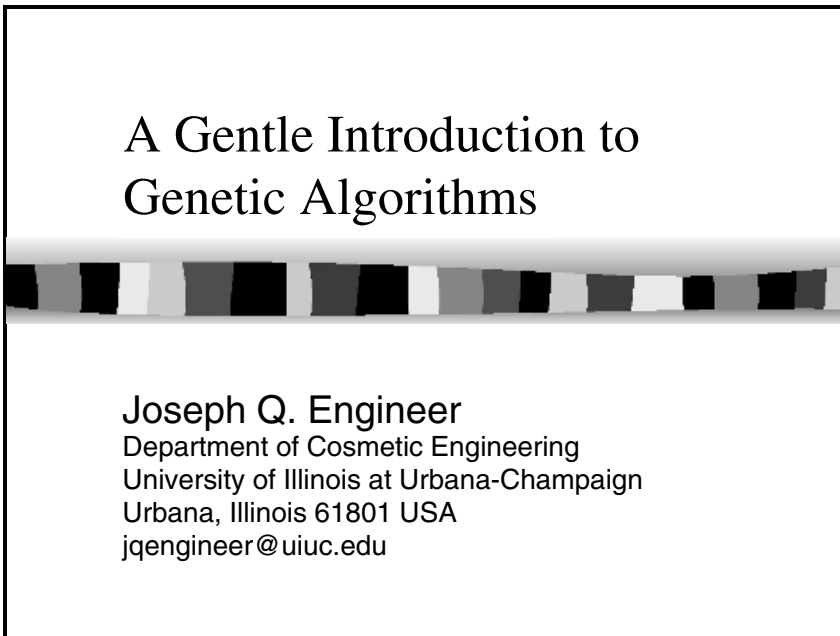


Figure 6.1 Title slide should contain the presentation title, the presenter's name, and the presenter's affiliation.

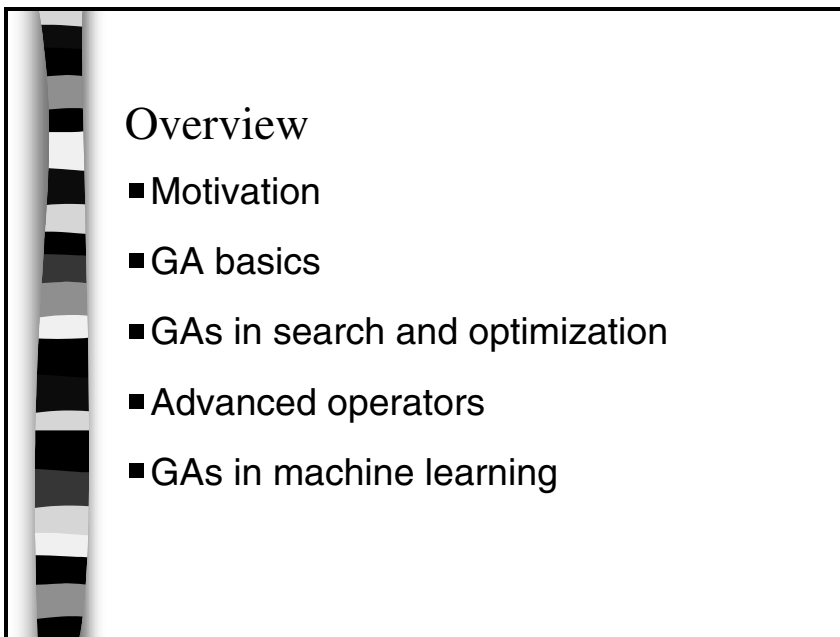


Figure 6.2 Overview slide contains a road map to coming attractions. Road maps are needed at the beginning of presentations and at the beginning of major sections and subsections.

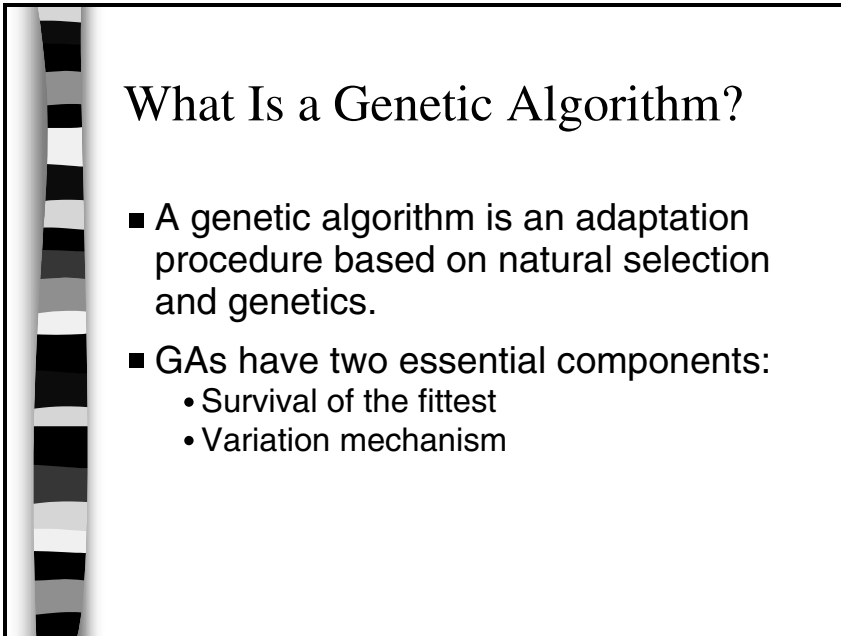


Figure 6.3 Definition slide gives a definition of a key term. Other body elements provide the primary information to be conveyed by the presentation.

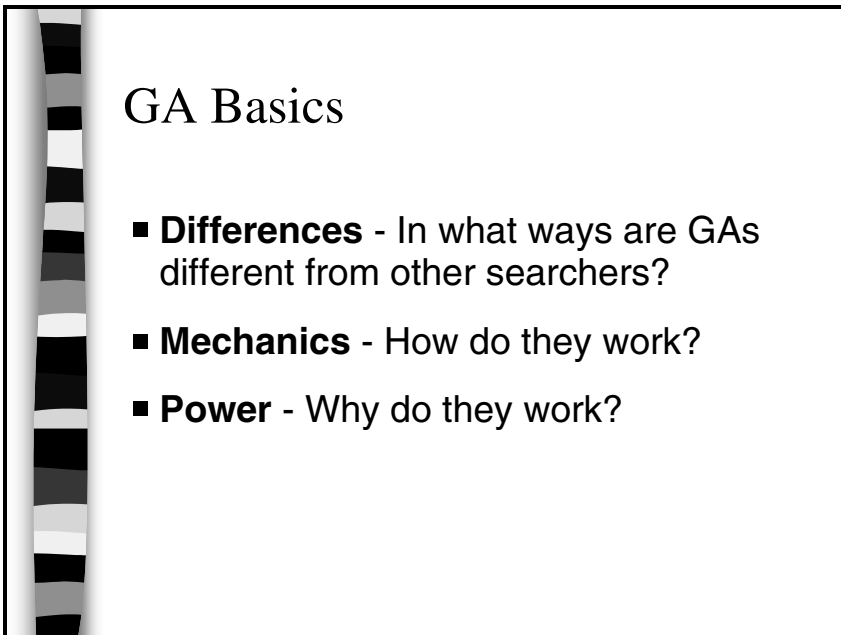


Figure 6.4 Intermediate overview slide gives a list of topics for a section. It is especially important in long presentations to update the route map.

Blind Search

- Canonical search must reject problem specifics.
- Treat problem as a black box:

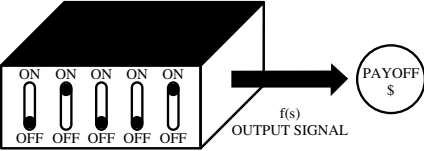


Figure 6.5 Sample topic slide with a graphic element shows text and graphics working together. Too much text on a slide or too busy of a graphic element can interfere with overall visual effect.

Exploration Exercise

Prepare a seven-transparency presentation on your goals and aspirations over the next 5 years. Choose a title and material appropriate to you and to your real or imagined audience.

6.4 DELIVERY

One of the primary advantages of presenting over giving a traditional speech is the relative ease of delivery. Presenting lets you work with transparencies or a laptop, either of which lets you examine a full set of notes in disguise; moreover, the setting is less formal and is thus emotionally less demanding on the speaker. Nonetheless, the ability to deliver a presentation effectively is not an inborn trait, and here we consider some key aspects of presentation delivery.

Good delivery requires attention to a number of important details:

1. Voice projection
2. Pace

3. Modulation
4. Eye contact
5. Prop manipulation

The first requirement is that you be heard. Electronic amplification is useful in a large hall, but when using a microphone, you should remember that a normal voice is sufficient to reach the farthest audience member. I once got hoarse while working with the aid of electronic amplification because I forgot I was wearing a mike. In trying to project to the back of the room, I gave myself a sore throat and my audience an earache. Don't make the same mistake; speak at a natural volume when using amplification.

Without electronic amplification, you need to project your voice to the audience members in the last row. The key to projection is to speak deliberately and to enunciate each word separately and clearly, generating a sufficient volume of air from your diaphragm. The amplitude you can achieve approaches that of shouting, but it can be sustained for a longer time.

It is also important to speak at a modest pace. I learned much about the pace of oral presentation in my 6 years at the University of Alabama. The Southern oral tradition is widely admired, but until you've settled in to listen to some good ol' tales told in the traditional manner, you can't appreciate how the unhurried pace of the storyteller contributes to the success of the tale. This lesson transfers to average presenting. In general, the presenter is in too much of a rush to get through the material. The audience will understand more when the presenter's pace is in step with the audience's listening speed. Sustaining the vowels in key words seems to help, and liquid consonants (l, m, n, ng, and v) at word endings can be held somewhat longer to create emphasis or dramatic effect.

In spoken English, neither monotones nor singsong voices are much admired. A skilled presenter modulates both the pitch and amplitude of his or her voice to help make the talk easier to listen to; at the same time modulation helps accentuate or emphasize the most important material.

Eye contact is important in building a bridge to your audience, but eye contact can pose difficulties for the novice because the nonverbal messages received from the audience can cause the presenter to forget what he or she was going to say. Compared to speech making, presenting is fairly forgiving in this regard; you are busy with your props, and the transparencies remind you of the points you are making should you be distracted by eye contact. As you gain confidence in your presenting, you will be freer to look around the room at your audience members; doing so will give you important feedback about their level of understanding and contentment. Eye contact also gives them a further opportunity to judge your feeling and sincerity. If actual eye contact still causes trouble, you can fake it by looking in between audience members. In this way, you give the appearance of making eye contact without the interruption of your thought processes. Over time, you will gain confidence in your speaking and material to the point where real eye contact will come naturally.

Learning to work with transparencies, projectors, pens, and pointers is not difficult, but the use of such props creates opportunities for the development of

annoying habits. To avoid these, it is best to remember a number of do's and don'ts of prop usage:

- Don't block the projected image with your body. A good setup can help: Place the projector relatively high, or project the image onto an elevated screen.
- Don't fidget with transparencies or laptops while you speak.
- Don't use notecards with presentations. One of the nice things about presentations is that they provide cues to you and information to your audience. Trying to manipulate both notes and a presentation gracefully is next to impossible, so put all important cues on your slides and eliminate the need for additional notes.
- Avoid multiple sources of presentation material. Stick with one medium, if possible. With modern computer graphics, you can capture your PowerPoint, your video and audio clips, and other material in the presentation file. This is the way to go. If you must switch back and forth between different devices, order the material to minimize such switching.
- To point at an image, use a laser pointer or mouse-controlled pointer. Should you choose to point at the screen itself, be sure not to block the image.

This may sound like a lot to keep in mind, but good prop usage is mainly a matter of the common sense that comes from trying to visualize your presentation from the standpoint of a typical audience member.

Having reviewed all this, the only way to get better at presenting is to present.

Exploration Exercise

Deliver a presentation on your goals and aspirations over the next 5 years, taking no more than 10 minutes from start to finish.

SUMMARY

This chapter has examined key aspects of making effective business presentations. The key notion is to present—to give a talk supported by visual aids—not speak. Busy businesspeople make a presentation more often than they give a speech, and you should do likewise. We've also considered the importance of audience analysis and subject selection and have enumerated some of the important elements of a typical presentation.

This has led to a consideration of the process of presentation development itself, together with a more detailed examination of some of the aspects of transparency preparation, including copy writing and PowerPoint slide production. Finally, we've considered key aspects of presentation delivery, including the importance of vocal projection, pace, and modulation. While there is a lot to master, by choosing to present (not speechify) you are already well on your way to becoming effective on your feet in front of a business audience.

EXERCISES

1. Prepare and deliver a brief presentation using a current topic involving engineering, engineers, or technology.
2. Prepare and deliver a brief autobiographical presentation.
3. Prepare and deliver a brief biographical presentation on an interesting family member or an acquaintance.
4. Prepare and deliver a brief sales presentation for a product or service with which you are familiar.
5. Prepare and deliver a brief sales presentation that pitches your potential as an employee to a potential employer.
6. Prepare and deliver a technically accurate presentation (for a lay audience) on a technical topic of your choosing.
7. Prepare and deliver a technical presentation (for an engineering audience) on a topic of your choosing.
8. Prepare and deliver a brief how-to presentation on some aspect of a favorite sport or hobby.
9. Form a team of five members and choose one of the topics of the previous exercises. In a brief planning session, divide the topic into subtopics for a group presentation. Prepare and deliver the presentation.
10. Have an audience select a topic of common knowledge. After taking a 10-minute period to organize your thoughts and prepare a short presentation file or handwritten transparencies, deliver a brief presentation on the selected topic.