

“Congratulations! You have a presentation to make!”

There is a library of research detailing just how stressful making a presentation can be.

Mark and Mary-Jane Barnes explain that by following a few simple steps to success, you can make credible, high impact presentations that hit the mark, every time!

- 1 Set yourself for success** – a well-prepared presentation is already 90% given - so, thorough planning, preparation and practice are vital. Using the Four Cornerstones will get you on track.

Always be clear in your own mind:

- **Why** am I making this presentation?
- **Who** am I making this presentation to?
- **What** is the relevant content?
- **How** am I going to say it?

- 2 Develop great content** – brainstorm your content, one idea per yellow sticky. Cluster the stickies together into themes and give each a heading. Transfer these as columns onto a ‘holding sheet’ (we call ours the X-Ray sheet, because it will hold the bare bones of the presentation!), colour coding as you go.

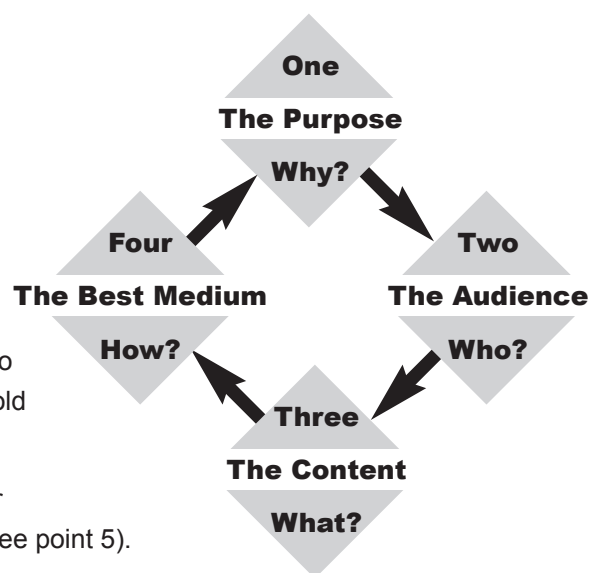
Use black ink for headings; red for ‘must have’ content; green for ‘nice to have’ content and blue for highlighting your messages (see point 5).

Decide on a logical order for the columns and allocate a proportion of your planned delivery time to each, as well as to the opening and closing sections, and to question time.

- 3 Prepare fully, so that you can edit as you present** – once you know how much cumulative elapsed time should have passed after delivering each chunk of content, you can check your progress against the clock and edit ‘live’. If you are behind schedule at the end of a chunk, simply cut green content out of the next chunk and catch time up. Conversely, if you have time to spare, simply add in more green content, until you are back on track.

Unless you do this, you will finish early, over-run, or more likely, be forced to rush whatever happens to be at the end of your presentation – your summary, or the culmination of your presentation – far too important to be lost through poor time management!

- 4 Practise out loud** – always have a ‘real time run through’. This will help you to manage your pace and give you a sense of rhythm and flow. It will help you to see where you need to add some ‘magic’ to raise audience interest and will enable you to really master your content – an essential step in managing nerves. If nothing else, make sure that your introduction and close are both strong - find an opening and closing grab that will interest your listeners and leave your message ringing in their ears.



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- 5 Look for a variety of ways to make your key messages memorable** – most audiences will only retain 5-10% of any new information - it is imperative that they remember the right parts, for the right reasons!

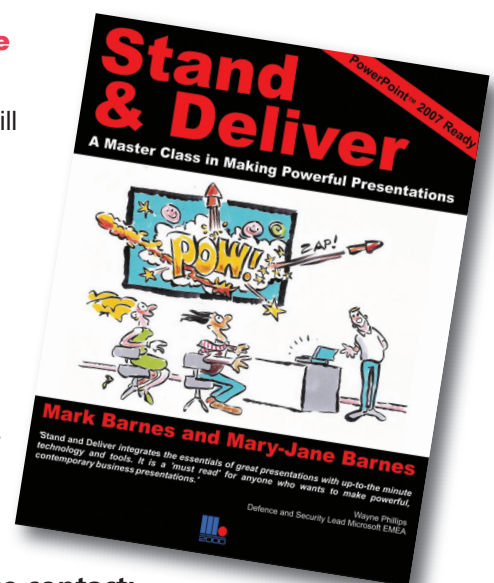
Highlighting will help you to add emphasis and, by adding diagrams, case studies, stories, analogies, props, humour and hand outs (to name but a few) your message will be increasingly accessible to the audience, helping you to establish and keep rapport.
- 6 Understand that PowerPoint will not help you to be either creative or interesting** – PowerPoint may be a good tool to support some parts of your message, but it is not always the best visual aid – add variety by introducing other media, such as flip chart or DVD, as well.
- 7 Decide on your questions policy** – would you like to take questions as you go, or at the end? Don't be afraid of question time – assume that if people ask questions, it is because they are interested and want clarification. If you are worried about being asked a particular 'killer question', assume that you will be asked it – so think through and practice your answer, before you are asked!
- 8 Change your 'mindset' and learn to see opportunities to present in a positive light** – the competition would give a lot to be in your shoes – just being asked to present puts you ahead of the field! You know you have prepared well, so visualise the event positively – picture an enthusiastic audience, who are enjoying your presentation. Tell yourself: “I am well-prepared... they will be positive...”
- 9 Deal with any negative signals or outward signs of nervousness** – work on your body language, your ability to portray a positive image, your voice and delivery. Dress to suit the audience and the environment, but always wear clothes that make you feel good about yourself.
- 10 Before you start, take a few deep breaths, make eye contact with your audience and smile** – prepare to enjoy your presentation - if you enjoy it, there is a good chance that the audience will as well!



Mark and Mary-Jane Barnes are the principals at the Step System International training and coaching consultancy. They deliver interventions in all areas of team and personal effectiveness.

Their book: **Stand & Deliver** – a master class in making powerful presentations, is published by Management Books 2000, priced at £18.99

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