



# **Ideas on how to create powerful presentations**

A guide for Project Managers  
by Ciprian Rusen  
[corporategeek.info](http://corporategeek.info)



In today's corporate world we increasingly use presentations as means of communication.

yet since 1990 we create...

**boring bad** presentations filled with  
**meaningless bullet-points**



Even if PowerPoint for Windows has been around since 1990 we still create boring bad presentations filled with meaningless bullet-points.

Instead of...  
**simple, legible & engaging** presentations



Instead of... **simple, legible & engaging** presentations which our audiences can understand and enjoy.



Since I've become a project manager almost two years ago, I have often asked myself & others:

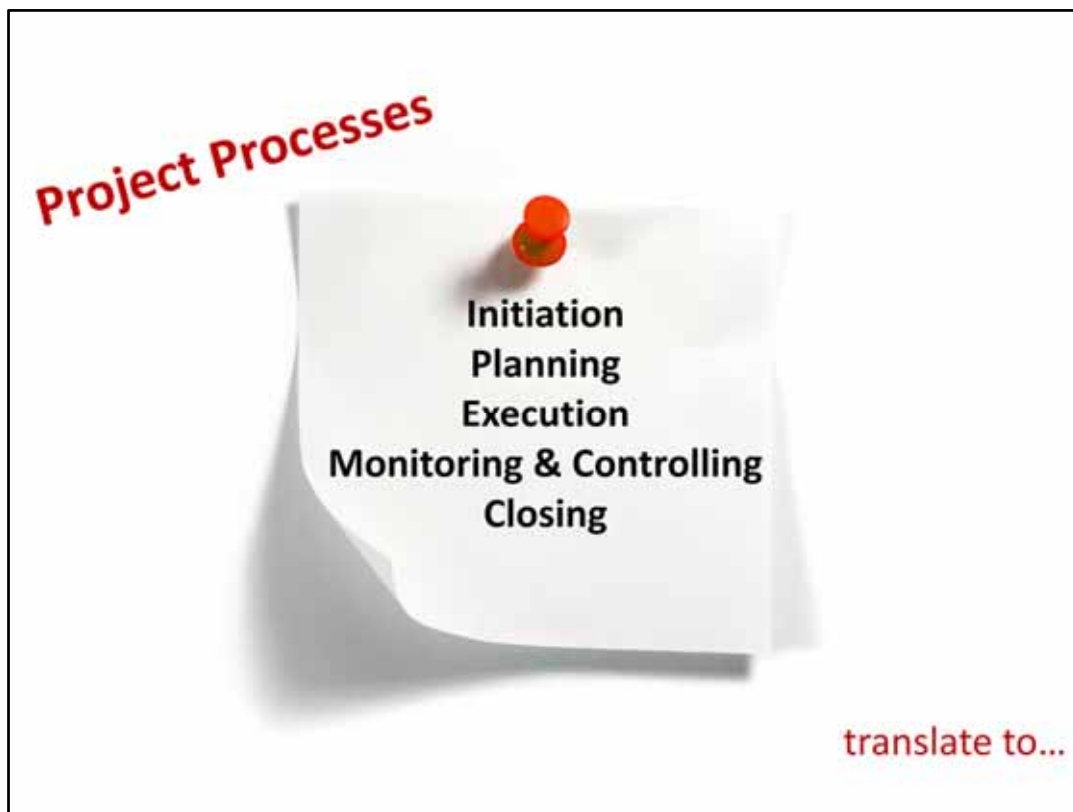
"How do we make those simple, legible & engaging presentations?"

After reading several books & blogs on this topic, viewing great presentations and experimenting with my own, I've come up with a concept that works for me and might help you out as well.



**Think** of...  
a **presentation** as a **project**  
and  
of **presentation processes** as **project processes**

Think of a presentation as a project and of **presentation processes as project processes**



I'm sure you all know the five processes of each project:

**Initiation**

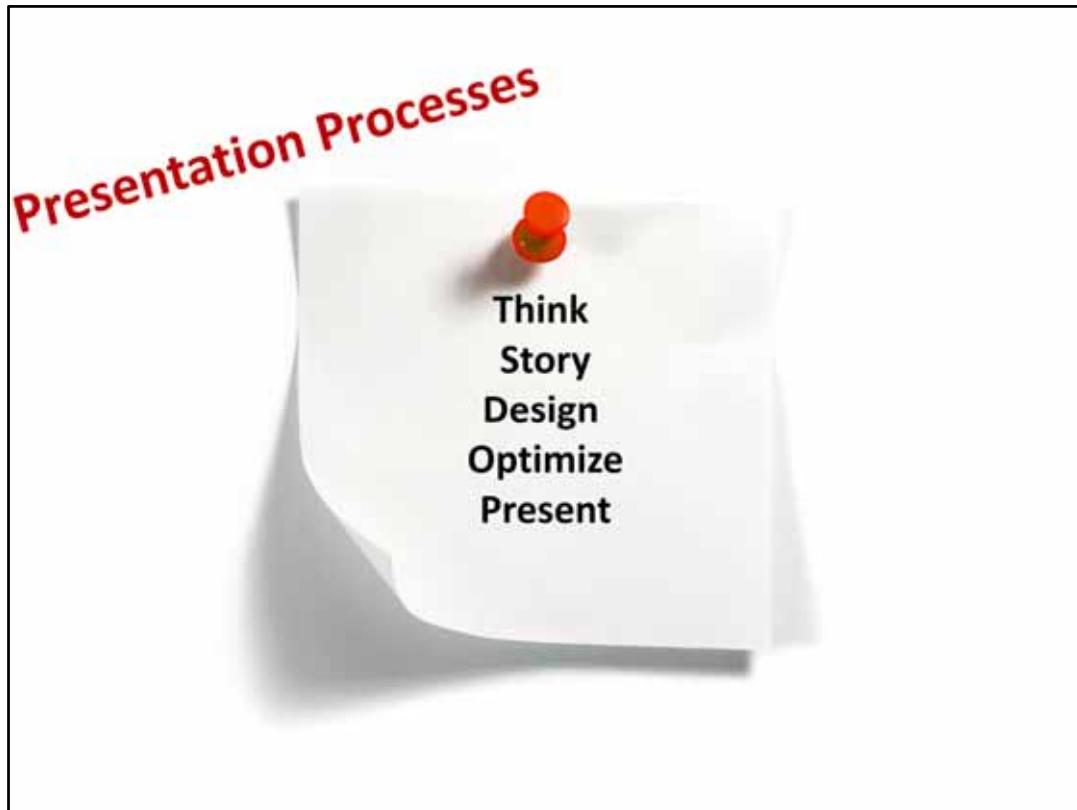
**Planning**

**Execution**

**Monitoring & Controlling**

**Closing**

They translate to...



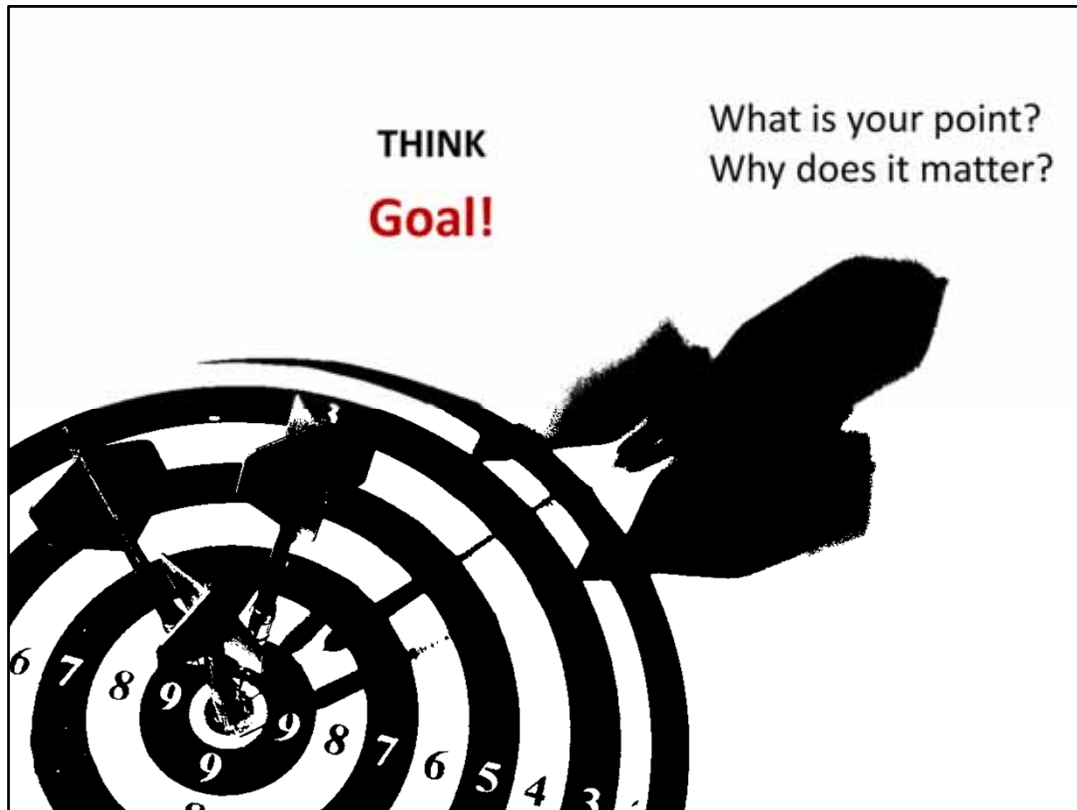
The five processes of each presentation:

**Think**  
**Story**  
**Design**  
**Optimize**  
**Present**

Let's see into more details what I mean by this.



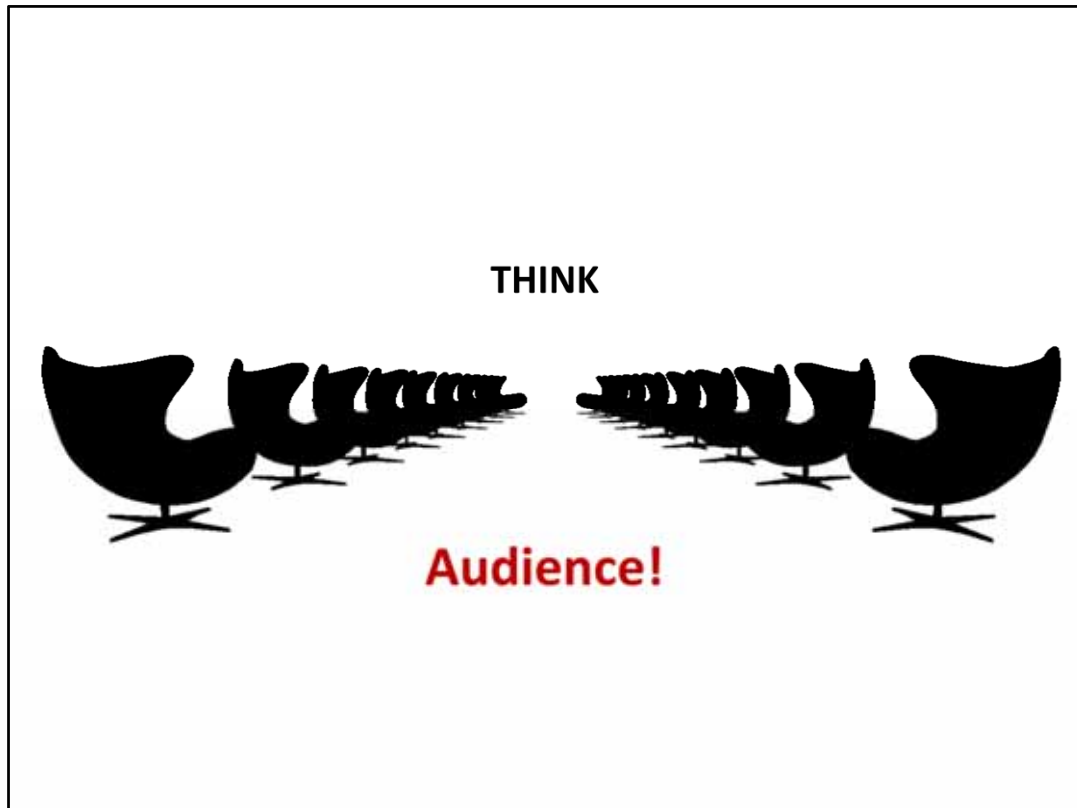
Initiation is to think about what you want to achieve, which are your goals, your scope of work, your restrictions, etc.



As all project managers do when initiating a project, you first start with your goal. Take the time and think about it!

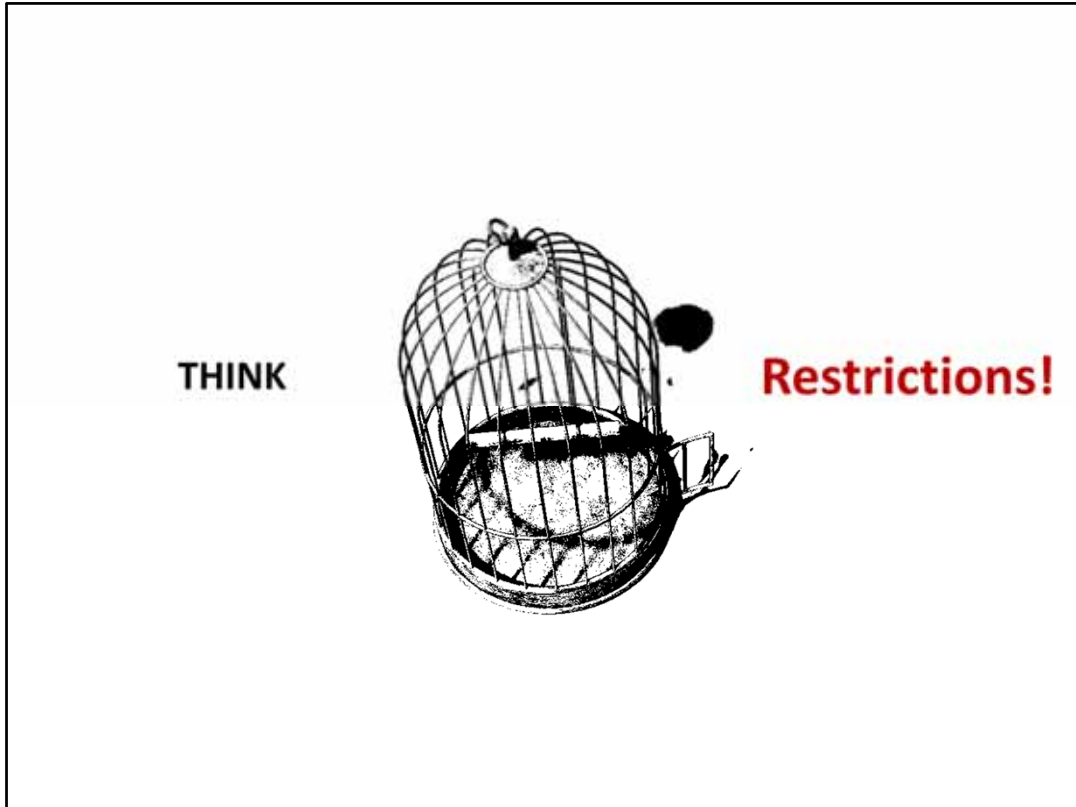
What is the point you want to make? Why does it matter? If the audience could remember only one thing, what do you want it to be and why is it important?

Answering these questions will help you get closer to the audience and explain the reasons why they should listen and care about what you are about to say.



Next, think about your audience. You can consider the audience as your project board. You must be convincing in front of your board, you must keep the board satisfied about your project, keep them involved, etc. They are the ones who can shut down your project.

To be convincing in front of your audience, ask questions such as:  
Who are the people that will listen to you? What's their background? What do they expect of you? What do you want them to do?



Another very important thing to think about is the restrictions you have. Any project manager thinks about the factors that could restrict or influence in any way his or her project.

Why shouldn't you do the same when creating a presentation? Ask yourself things such as:

How much time do I have? What are the available tools? Do I need to use any specific templates?



Once you have done all this, think again about your goal and make sure it is crystal clear for you.



To recap: initiation is to think about what you are going to do next. Think about: your goal, the audience, your restrictions.



Now it is time to do the planning or, in other words, creating the story of your presentation.  
Your project plan tells the story of your project. Right?

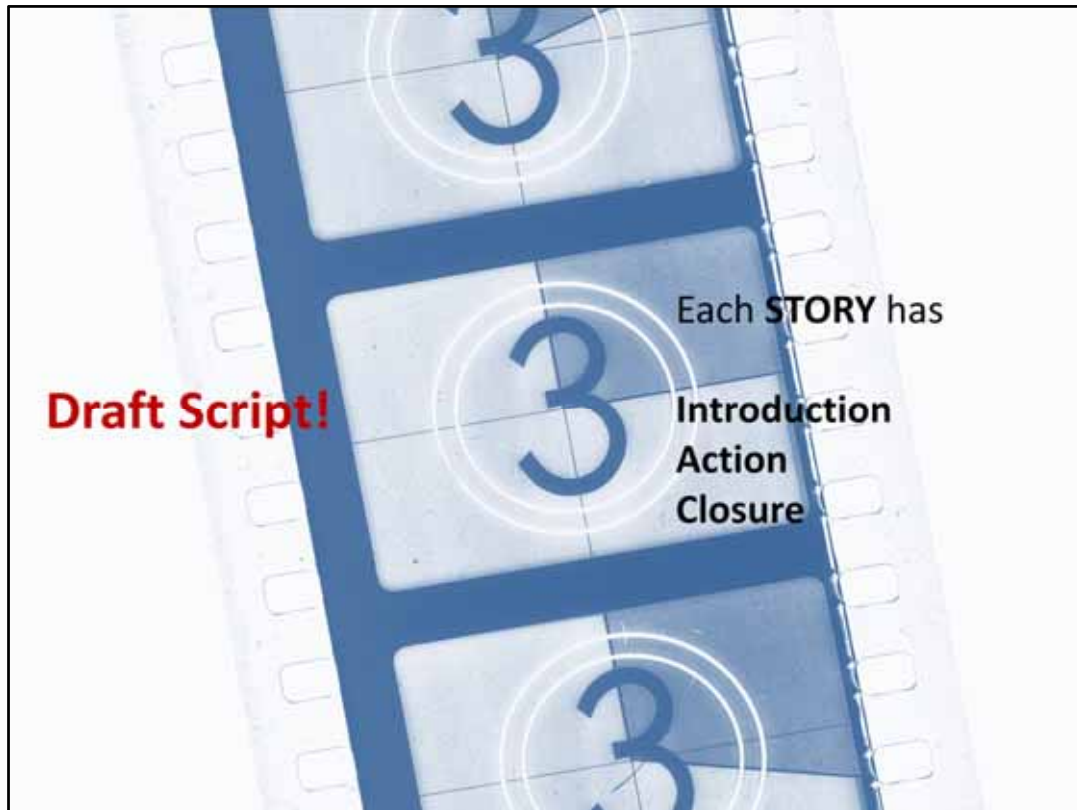


First, start with being alone. Make sure that, at least for a while, you are far away from distractions. It will help you concentrate and remain focused on your presentation.



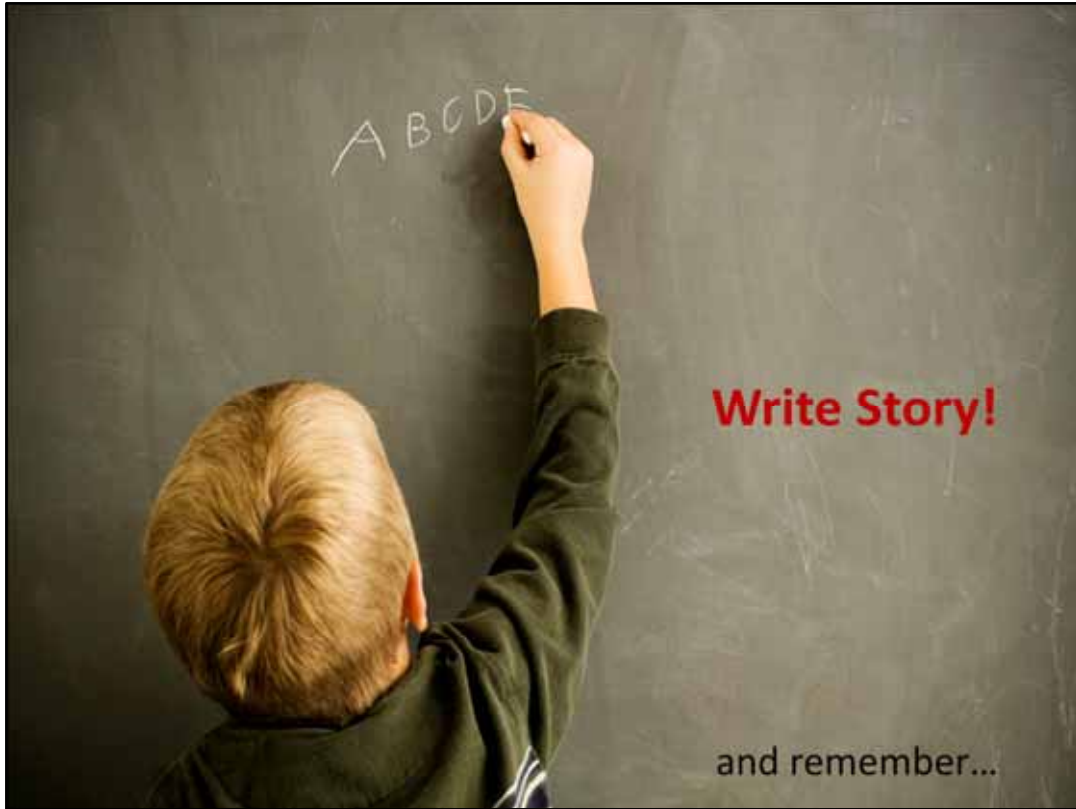
Don't be afraid to Go Analog and write your plan/story on a piece of paper, whiteboard, post it, etc.

Depending on the person, staying in front of your computer might not help you remain focused. You can always get interrupted by yet another chat message or e-mail. Your phone might start ringing again. Taking the time to be alone and write your thoughts on a piece of paper will always help.



Think about your projects: you always sketch the high-level processes your project will go through. The same must be done with the script of your story.

Start with sketching the introduction then go to the main action of your story and don't forget to think a bit about how you want to close.



Now that you have a rough sketch ready, you can detail each stage of your story. Start writing and remember a these simple concepts...



Good stories are simple. Make sure your point is obvious to your audience. Make the effort to simplify and strip down your message to its core. Nobody likes very long stories filled with unnecessary details.



Good stories are concrete. Keep in mind that abstract concepts are hard to understand & follow. There is no need to overcomplicate your story. Even though most people don't admit this in public, everyone hates long corporate speeches which use a mix of abbreviations and meaningless business expressions. For example, why say "overall accountability" instead of "responsibility"? Do your best to be natural and use real-life examples and concepts, not abstractions.



Build your credibility in front of the audience. How can you do that?  
Investigate more about the topic you are talking about, prepare some hard data to backup your statements and use that data in your presentations.  
Present that data in terms that people can visualize and strip it to the bare essentials so that you won't end up boring your audience in your quest for being credible.

Good stories are **Emotional!**



Good stories are always emotional. It is not enough to present some cold data. You must make people feel something. One way to do it, is to use images to help make your point.



To recap, planning is to create your story. The steps to create one are: be alone, go analog, draft the script & write your story.



Next stage in project management is Project Execution. In the presentation world this is called the Design Phase of your Presentation.



Don't be afraid to be visual and use images, suggestive clip-art, comics, etc. If you use bullet points that doesn't make you a professional.  
On the other hand, images will help you make a point.

**Design & Use Empty Space!**

Don't be afraid of empty space. Try to control your tendency to fill in every available white space on your slides. Empty space means clarity, means purpose. People will never have the time nor the patience to read all your bullet points but will be able to understand & remember one very simple idea.

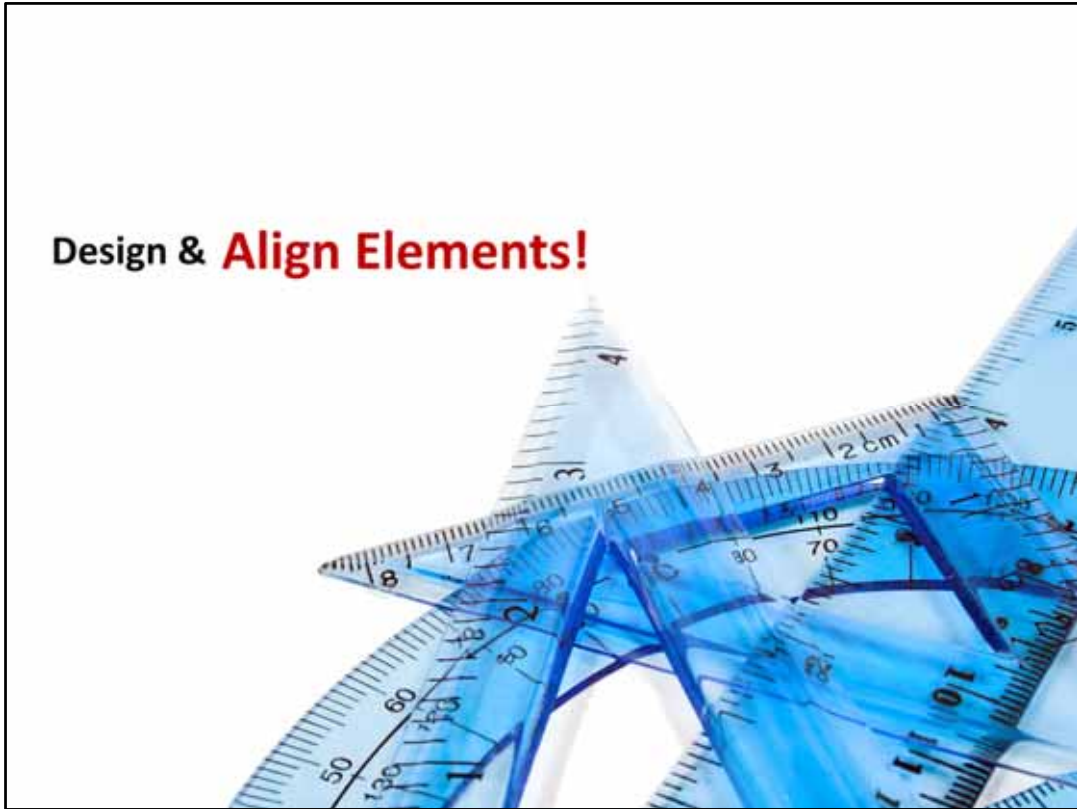


Contrast is a very powerful tool. If used properly, will help the audience get your point very quickly. Contrast can be achieved through the color choices you make, the text you use, positioning, etc.



This means reusing elements of design and or key ideas of your presentations. Reusing elements of design will bring a sense of consistency and cohesiveness while repeating the key ideas of your presentation can help the audience to remember it. However, be careful not to overdo it as your presentation will become tiring and people will stop caring about what you have to say.

## Design & **Align Elements!**



Executing your project plan means that all tasks are done in a certain order. Nothing is executed randomly.

Then why not do the same for your presentations? Spend a bit of time to align all elements in your presentation, make it look polished. If you did not care enough about your presentation to align the images & text boxes, to use the same font, then why should the audience care? Why should they listen to you? It surely means that you have nothing important to say. Take the time to align & connect all elements and you will gain more credibility.



To recap: Execution is to design. The tips for good design are: be visual, use empty space, use repetition and align elements.



For a project manager, Monitoring & Controlling is about observing the execution of the project to identify problems and fix them. In the presentation world, this stage is the optimization stage. You basically review and improve your presentation. This is how to do it...



First, stand back! Take a break and clear your mind.



**Check!**

**Scope  
Plan  
Execution**

Then go back and review your initial scope, the plan you created and your execution.



Based on your observations, improve your plan and execution. Meaning, improve your Story and Design.



Once you have done this, don't be afraid to share your work and ask for feedback. Share the presentation with people who will be part of your audience or people who are familiar with your audience. Get their feedback and then go back and improve your story and design. I mean... your plan and execution.



To recap, monitoring and controlling means to optimize your presentation. The steps to do it are:

Stand back

Check your scope, plan & execution

Improve your plan & execution

Share and get feedback



Last but not least, we all have to officially close our projects. The same with presentations. Now that we have our presentation ready we must also present it.



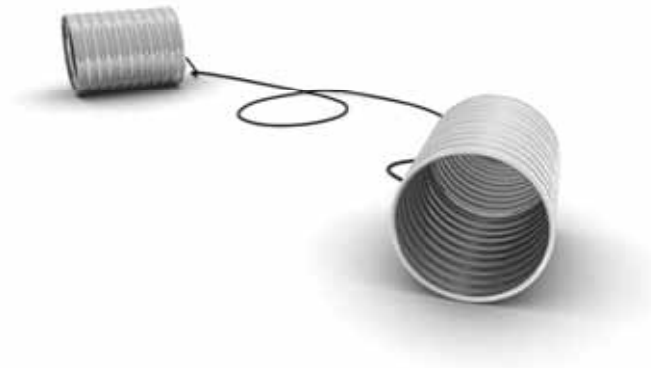
When presenting, the first thing you should do is to remove barriers separating you from the audience. The sooner you do this, the better. For example, make sure the lighting is appropriate, check that there are no cables on which you can trip, verify that your NetMeeting/LiveMeeting is working properly, etc.



Do your best to be completely present. Take a break before the presentation to clear your mind from worries and things that distract from the presentation you are about to give.

You must be completely there, not concerned with the past or the future. You must clear your mind and be in one place: right here!

**Connect with the audience!**



If you manage to be completely present than it will be easier to connect with the audience. One idea would be to start with a joke and move on from there to telling your story. Here one rule you should not forget is to use 90-95 percent of your allotted time. It is better to leave the audience yearning for more than to say that it was too much.



Quick Recap: Closing is to Present. Tips worth remembering when presenting are:  
Remove barriers  
Be present  
Connect with the audience



Let's get back to our initial question: Can we create simple, legible & engaging presentations?

**YES!**

The Answer is YES!

**REMEMBER!**

Initiation		Think
Planning		Story
Execution	<b>is to...</b>	Design
Monitoring & Controlling		Optimize
Closing		Present

All you need to do is to remember that the five processes of each project translate into the phases of a presentation. The logic behind them is pretty much the same.

**Created by...**



## **Credits & Recommendations**

**“Beyond Bullet Points” by Cliff Atkinson**

**“presentation zen” by Garr Reynolds**

**“slide:ology” by Nancy Duarte**

## **Stock Photos taken from:**

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**“Beyond Bullet Points” by Cliff Atkinson – teaches you how to structure your story and how to use PowerPoint to bring your stories to life**

**“presentation zen” by Garr Reynolds – share simple & very effective ideas on presentation design and delivery**

**“slide:ology” by Nancy Duarte – teaches you how to be a visual thinker and create great presentations**