

Praise for *Presentation Now*

'Andrew Lightheart is the kind of presentation coach that both beginners and very seasoned presenters can learn from, and *Presentation Now* represents how quickly and dramatically his broad experience and his intimate, down-to-earth, and even compassionate approach can help us all. Trust him. Do what he says. The rewards will be immediate.'

Alison Jean Lester, novelist and former presentation coach

'Andrew Lightheart's ideas and presentation tools materially improved my communication of complex technical and cultural concepts with our clients, leading to better engagement outcomes.'

Carl Coryell-Martin, Director, Pivotal Labs Seattle

'This is a great read for anyone who works in a technical function and finds delivering presentations a challenge. Lots of great practical advice that you can put into practice straight away. Andrew's humour is great too, and adds to the way he makes the topic accessible. I can see how to advise my technical managers on the very same.'

Sukhvinder Pabial, Head of Organisational Development, One Housing

'Everyone says "know your audience" but the after the process in *Presentation Now* you'll REALLY know them. I wish I'd read this book years ago. Every CIO should buy this for themselves and their team if they want to make an impact.'

Olive Huang, Research Director, Gartner

'*Presentation Now* strikes an amazing balance: helping you to improve your style without losing the quirks that define who you are. You'll love the recipes too – such a time-saver. From start to finish, this book is impactful and empowering for anyone who has to impart technical know-how.'

Patrick Hofmann, User Experience Designer, Google

‘Andrew is a miracle worker. He changed me from someone who avoided presentations to someone who seeks them out. If you can’t get the chance to work with Andrew personally, this book is the next best thing.’ *Jane Tyler, MD, RedBlack Software*

‘*Presentation Now* does a remarkable job of taking the focus off delivering “brilliant performances”, and instead breaks down in extremely practical terms how to deliver what an audience needs and expects. For anyone who struggles with public speaking, and most of us do, Andrew Lightheart’s encouraging style and very specific guidelines will make a huge, immediate difference.’ *Doug Kim, Software Industry Content Manager*

‘Great speakers are authentically themselves. In *Presentation Now*, Andrew helps you trust you don’t need to be anyone but you, and, more importantly, how to put that into practice when you’re speaking.’ *Imandeep Kaur, co-founder Impact Hub Birmingham*

‘Andrew’s chatty and engaging style makes you feel like he’s right there, challenging and supporting you all the way through the shockingly speedy presentation planning process. Thought-provoking and right-paced, if you like getting stuff done, you’re going to love *Presentation Now*.’ *Mike Brooman, CEO, Vanti*

‘A practical guide that demystifies the art of presenting, this book will show you how you can become a great speaker by untapping the potential within.’ *Justice Williams MBE, entrepreneur and public speaker*

‘This book is filled with down-to-earth guidance based on solid, useful questions every speaker should ask themselves. If you want to give a great presentation, start here.’ *Josh Klein, TED speaker, author of Reputation Economics, Nat Geo presenter*

Presentation Now

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Pearson Education Limited
Edinburgh Gate
Harlow CM20 2JE
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1279 623623
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*For my husband Stuart.
With all my love.*

About the author

Andrew Lightheart is a business communication specialist with extensive international experience in team dynamics, collaboration, conflict management, negotiation and leadership. Since the mid-1990s, he's been helping individuals and organisations radically optimise their spoken communication, including coaching 5,000 presentations by speakers hailing from 22 different countries.

He has assisted businesses from one-person micro-businesses, social enterprises and high-growth tech and law SMEs, through to HSBC (in UK, Hong Kong and China), GlaxoSmithKline, Siemens, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, and even 10 Downing Street.

After five years running a business in Asia, Andrew is proudly based at the Impact Hub in Birmingham, UK, a community of purpose-driven entrepreneurs, but travels globally to deliver talks, workshops and projects in English, Spanish, German and British Sign Language.

Andrew seeks out opportunities to support people from under-represented groups, particularly women and non-binary folk from BAME, LGBTQIA+ and Disabled communities. He believes that business (and life) is better when we can all stand up and speak up.

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Saying thanks on completing your first book is really saying thanks for the people who've made the life you have that means you can *write* that book.

I'd like to thank, in vaguely chronological order:

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Most of all, of course, I thank Stuart: my partner, witness, support, harbour, best friend, lobster and love of my life.

If this book has helped you, it's down to #teamlightheart.

Next week's big presentation

The way you've learned to prepare for presentations is traumatic and time-consuming. This book shows you how to plan efficiently, calmly and in your own style.

I'm assuming that:

- You've got a big presentation coming up.
- You're not a professional speaker.
- Presentations aren't your favourite thing.
- You want to do more than survive the experience.
- You have other priorities and don't want the planning to take over your life.
- You'd like to come across as calm, credible and engaging.

This book is the distillation of more than a decade's worth of my experience in helping technically-minded people become confident and compelling presenters.

I'll take you through a process which will get you from zero to a tailored, do-able presentation in less than three hours.

If you have additional time, you can work through a programme of quick wins and next steps designed to systematically lower your nerves, improve your delivery skills and help you create useful interaction after your presentation. Online chapters are available to take each skill further.

There are also tips for presenting in conference calls and speaking to international groups, plus a pep talk to read just before and just after your presentation.

A perfect presentation isn't a flawless 'performance'. A perfect presentation is one where you feel like you've done your best to achieve your aims. This book will help you do that in the most efficient and natural way possible.

How to use this book

This book is organised into three parts.

Part 1: PLAN takes you through a process to plan a specific presentation.

Part 2: SPEAK helps you with five aspects of how to deliver that presentation better.

You'll get significantly more benefit if you work through Part 1 before moving to Part 2.

Success is not guaranteed, but if you move systematically through these steps you'll know how to be much more in control of your situation.

Part 3: EXTEND takes your skills further into conference calls, international situations and ends with pep talks to give you confidence just before and just after doing any presentation.

You do not need a personality overhaul to be a significantly better presenter. This process is not going to break what's already working for you, but will build on your current skills and knowledge. All you have to do is relax and follow instructions. Presentations are about to get a whole lot easier.

PART 1

PLAN

Practical things

First off, we need to talk about practical things. You're going to need to get yourself in the right headspace. We'll be giving you a huge amount of traction on planning in just half an hour, but before that you need to get your kit ready and your head together.

Getting your kit ready

Let's start with the easiest part – your kit. Using the planning questions is a cyclical process: we'll do our first pass now, then later you might do a second and a third.

Decide how to record your ideas, so you can keep them clear for when you come back to them. Here are four options:

1. Worksheet people – if you like the idea of going through worksheets, head to andrewlightheart.com/presentationnow and print out the planning worksheets for this chapter. You'll be able to use them now, and then later in the planning process when you'll want to return to them.
2. Typing people – if you're more of a typing person, open five text documents. Save them as:
 - Who
 - Action
 - Past and present
 - Important
 - Plan.
3. Big paper people – if you prefer a bigger canvas to work on, grab an A3 pad and make a sheet for each of the five topics

above. If you're a mind mapper, use them as the central hubs for separate mind maps for each topic.

4. Other – if you prefer doing something else – for example, tiny notebooks, notes, walking and recording audio, whatever you like – get yourself sorted. I like the big paper option, Blu-tacked to the wall. I've been a flipchart-using facilitator for 20 years, so I think best on vertical spaces!



WARNING!

It can be tempting to use the pre-preparation phase to avoid actual preparation. If you find yourself putting off the planning until you've gone to the stationery store, or find it really important to search online for exact instructions for mind maps on the internet, buy a book, obsess over specific pen colours or even suddenly think that it would be good to tidy and vacuum first . . . you're procrastinating!

Print out the worksheets, or just get five sheets of paper out of the printer tray and start.

Timer – You'll need a timer: the clock app on your smartphone is perfect, or if push comes to shove, a clock. Following the time limits given is really important at this phase in the planning.

Getting your head together

Nothing you're about to learn is necessarily earth-shatteringly new, but this may be the first time that you have gone through these questions in this order (unless you're returning to this session for a subsequent time – in which case, welcome back!)

As with any new skill, allow the process to be clunky at first. Lower your expectations of how detailed your answers 'should' be, or how easily they 'should' flow. The idea is to get some forward motion.

Prepare yourself: make sure you've drunk enough water, had your usual amount of caffeine and eaten enough. Make sure you're in an

environment that, if not perfect, at least doesn't totally wreck your concentration. For example, I like a bit of noise around me, so I work in a cafe, but my husband needs complete silence and solitude. Everyone is different. If you're a hermit, be a hermit. If you need surroundings that help your brain feel like it isn't missing out, head to the local cafe.

Ready? Okay – let's go!

1.

Get traction on planning (30 minutes): Step 1

The whole process of presentation planning can be so overwhelming, partially because we start by asking ourselves the wrong first question (more about that in a minute). Follow the instructions in this chapter and you'll make a significant dent in your planning in just 30 minutes.

Over the past 10 years, working with speakers all over the world, I have come up with four questions. These four questions are where you start your planning process. They're also what you keep coming back to while you're planning, and where you turn when you get stuck. If you ever have coaching with me, we move through the planning process in the same way.

So many concerns you might have about presentation planning – such as how many slides you should use, whether you should move around or stand still, whether it's best to allow people to ask questions all the way through your talk, or get them to keep them until the end – are made much easier when you think properly about the situation you're going into. Essentially, the planning questions you're about to become familiar with will help you to be your own presentation coach.

Using these questions to think things through is going to make you a smarter and sexier presenter. It won't be a radical or difficult type of thinking; just pointing your brain in the right direction.

It hurts my heart when I see people who are super-smart in conversation become weird when they stand up in front of a group. Using these planning questions will help you not to be weird when you present, and will remove a whole lot of uncertainty about your presentation. What to say and how to say it will become, if not obvious, then at least more straightforward.

First, let's set the context for the questions you're going to answer by thinking about where *not* to start.



WARNING!

Don't start with this question

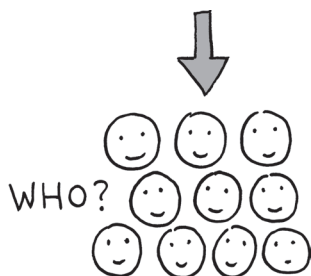
The wrong question to start planning your presentation with is: 'What will I say?'

It may seem the obvious place to start, what with you about to go and stand in front of people and say things, but it's the starting point of every poor presentation. There are no boundaries or scope to the answer, just the huge, amorphous field of Everything You Know. Speakers do strange things, speak in weird patterns and at the wrong level of detail because they haven't thought about the situation in which they find themselves.

We need to make sure that you prepare at the right level of detail, with a clear focus, so that you can plan rapidly, and that what you come up with is interesting, persuasive and do-able.

Here are the four questions to think about before you even begin to think about what to say.

Planning Question 1: what do I know about the people I'm talking to? (5 minutes)



This is the best first question. By 'what do I know' I don't mean their preferences and inner life, but:

- their occupations
- their national culture
- their ages
- the basics.

EXERCISE

Here's a quick list. Start your timer and whizz through it (maximum 5 minutes):

- Occupation
- Seniority
- Age/generation
- Level of education
- National culture
- Fluent languages
- Areas of expertise
- Work history

You will find that some subgroups pop out. People often say, 'But my group is really mixed.' Without getting philosophical – not yet anyway, wait until we come around to these questions for the second and third time – every group is a mixed group. Hell, every individual is a mixed individual. The perennial problem of 'the mixed group' will be dealt with in detail later (see Chapter 2). For now, notice that there are certain ways in which people in your group differ from each other, and certain things that they have in common.

There are deeper benefits (for you) of thinking about the people you're going to be talking to, but all we're doing right now is getting some initial traction on the planning process.

IF YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHO YOU'LL BE TALKING TO

Sometimes you have no idea who's going to be in the room – or rather it feels like you don't. When someone gets me in to speak at an event, the whole room is full of strangers: it could be intimidating.

However, I can make a good guess at who will be there. For example, if a law firm wants me to speak to its staff, I can



guess that they are probably going to be lawyers or support staff who work in the firm. Therefore, they are likely to be between 18 and 70, with the majority between 25 and 55. If the firm is in the United Kingdom, they are likely to speak fluent English and, if they practise UK law, they are likely to have been in the United Kingdom for a while.

In the same way, what can you guess about the people you will be talking to? Think about the possibilities. Rather than 'What do I know ...?', perhaps a better question is: 'What can I guess about the people I'm going to be talking to?' At this point in your planning process, the most general of generalities is fine. Two or three subgroups, with a bit of detail, is totally okay.

Planning Question 2: what do I want these people to be able and motivated to do after my presentation? (5 minutes)

PAST & PRESENT ?



When I ask people something like 'Tell me about your presentation', after a great deal of backstory they start talking about 'key messages', or 'What they need to know is ...'.

'Message thinking' is dangerous, and you'll find it all over the place. 'Decide on your key message', they say, 'What are the major takeaways?' If you're overly detailed or go off on a tangent easily, it's good to be focused and precise.

However, message thinking is still focused on *you* – and the point of your presentation has nothing to do with you.

The point of the presentation is all about them.

This question is your compass. It will help you filter your information so you can pitch it in simple terms and at the right level.

Let's look at the component parts of the question.

These people

Your presentation is specifically for the people you're talking to. If you ever do a roadshow where you take the same presentation from place to place, you *must* rethink it each time for the people who are going to be there on that occasion. The major mistake reported back to me from people attending this kind of presentation is that they felt processed on a conveyor belt, talked at with irrelevant content, and that it would have made no difference if they were physically there listening or not.

The more you can make your presentation tailored to the specific people you're talking to, the easier everything else falls into place.

Do

What action do you want these people to take:

- during the presentation
- immediately afterwards
- that day
- the next day
- next week
- next month?

Be as specific as you can, but don't get hung up on details right now. We need to be keeping things moving.

Be wary of words such as 'understand' and 'buy-in'. Think: if your presentation is successful, what would these people be doing differently?

One way of moving from a concept to an action is to add: 'so that they ...' to the end of the sentence. For example, 'I want people to buy in ...':

'I want people to buy in *so that they...*' – sign off, discuss positively, agree to another meeting?

'I want people to understand these concepts *so that they...*' – stop doing something, start doing something, change the way they do something?

Able

There are two aspects to people taking any recommended action. First, check that your recommendation is an action that these people are able to take. What resources might they need in order to follow your suggestion? (Hint: time, money, ability, knowledge, skills.)

If they are lacking any of these resources sufficiently, then they can't take your recommended action.

Motivated

Secondly, do they want to take that action? Or, if they are unlikely to *want* to, are they required to do it by something else in their environment? Are they motivated to take that action? Can you motivate them more?

ABLE AND MOTIVATED: TWO ASPECTS

I arrived in my hotel room in Hong Kong a few months ago. I often work in Hong Kong and the client gets a special deal at this hotel – so much so that we get a club room, which means that we can use the club lounge. We could never afford this ourselves, so it's a really nice perk. After we'd been in the room a couple of minutes, the phone rang. It was the club lounge, asking if we wanted to upgrade to a suite.

The poor chap on the phone launched into his spiel about all the benefits of a suite (that he was reading off a list) and, yes, it sounded lovely. I genuinely wanted to upgrade. Sure! Why not?

So I *wanted* it – but I wasn't *able* to. Why? We don't book our accommodation – the client does. So no matter how enticing he made his recommendation, no matter how wonderful it was or how badly I wanted to take him up on the offer, I wasn't *able* to.

So, two parts: able and motivated.

If your listeners are clearly *not able* to follow your recommendation or request, it's good to know that now. Also, if they're going to need a lot of motivating, it helps to see that from the beginning of your planning too.

EXERCISE

Set your timer for 5 minutes. Stare into the distance and write some ideas for possible actions that you might want these people to take during, just after, a little bit after and a lot after your presentation.

If you find yourself thinking in abstract terms about 'understanding' or 'buy-in', ask yourself: 'What would I see or hear if that was happening?' When the timer goes, stop.

Planning Question 3: what can I guess about their past and present? (10 minutes)



In your mind, choose a member of the group you're talking to: imagine walking up to them cold and asking them to take the action you're recommending.

Straight away, what questions would they have? What objections, concerns, thoughts, feelings, attitudes or prejudices would move them towards or away from doing it right away?

You know that phrase 'the elephant in the room'? The huge thing that for some reason remains unspoken? I was working with an IT leader for a multinational bank that was in the middle of a huge round of unwanted redundancies. He was



presenting at a roadshow about the department's plan for the next six months.

You know what the elephant in the room would be? The 'redundancy elephant'. It's as if there were an enormous, hairy elephant in the room with 'Redundancy' sprayed on its side, with the speaker not mentioning it.

Everyone in the room would be turning to their neighbour, saying, 'Er . . . you see that elephant, right?' – and while doing that, they wouldn't be able to concentrate on anything else.

I advised that guy to phone the human resources director, find out what he could say and what he couldn't, and start the presentation with that information. Then, as he started talking about the rest of his plan, people could settle down because at least they knew he had told them everything he was able to about the redundancies.

You have to name the elephants that you know are going to be in people's minds: if you can't get them out of the room, at least move them to one side so people can hear what you're saying.

It's more than elephants

So, you need to name, acknowledge and deal with the elephants – but really 'elephants' is understating it. If you could look inside the heads of your listeners, you wouldn't find just elephants. It's a freaking circus in there. There are trapeze artists, and clowns, and acrobats, and tightrope walkers, and a brass band. Lions and tigers and bears, oh my.

During all the time that you'll be speaking to them, your listeners are full of thoughts, feelings and silent questions – and not just about you and your topic, but their whole life. The idea that they're just sitting there, blank and ready to hear your message, is a ridiculous fantasy. It's also important not to think they are totally focused on you and hate you with all of their might (there is more about the horror movies we create in Chapter 7: Calm).

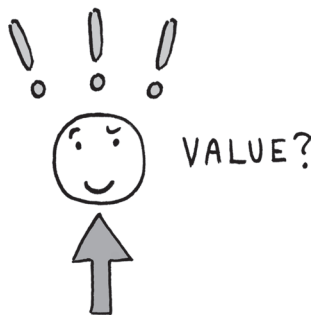
EXERCISE

Set your timer for 10 minutes. Make a big list of everything that might be on their minds (okay, 'everything' is probably intimidatingly unrealistic – perhaps *some* things that are *probably* going through their minds). For example:

- What previous experience have they had of you, your department, company, profession?
- What in their past and present will affect how they hear your recommendation or request?
- What silent questions will they have? (The more you answer their silent questions *before* they ask them out loud, the more appropriate and relevant you become in their eyes, and the more they will trust you.)
- What kind of day will they be having?

Come up with the obvious things, then the less obvious things. See how much the answers are different for each subgroup you identified earlier. In truth, you can't really explore the inner world of your listeners too much, but this will serve you for now.

Planning Question 4: what is important to them? (5 minutes)



What do your listeners need and want? What do they need and want urgently? What do they value?

I see technical people fall down most when they don't frame things in terms that are important and understandable to their listeners. The feedback I get from the non-technical side of an organisation is that the technical side 'doesn't speak our language'.

It's partially what is called the 'problem of knowledge': you know so much about your topic that it's difficult to climb inside the mind of someone who, by comparison, knows nothing or next to nothing about it.

When you talk about things purely from your point of view, you become boring. People get restless and interrupt, or give a bland response and you never hear from them again.

This is a vitally important question for fairly high-level philosophical reasons; however, right now we're going to look at it for nitty-gritty purposes.

In connection to your topic, what do these people need and want? What are their preferences?

How does your suggestion or request help them to move closer to achieving their priorities?

Here's a thought experiment: think about phone apps. If you're at all literate in how things are coded, think about how much work, how many thousands of hours have gone into putting that app onto the market. I've sat next to my friend Carl as he put together an app. It's intense work, every step to get a click on a button to lead onto the next screen, then save the data in the background: it's a full-on task. To put together an app that people will pay for and rely on is a major undertaking, often needing a huge team.

On your smartphone (or just the Internet), go to an app store. Look at a big, popular, paid app: a business one. Look at something like an accounting app, or something that backs up notes.

Read the description of the app.

How much technical detail is there? How much description is there about the language it's written in, the database architecture it rests on, the iterations it went through to get to be at all reliable? None, right? So, let's think this through.

What is important to the users of an app that is going to back up and hold all their notes:

- Is it reliable?
- No, really. Is it reliable?

- Can I edit the notes easily?
- Can I find my notes easily?
- Is there a word limit?
- Can I access them on any device?
- Can I type in my own language?
- Can I send email to it?
- Oh, and how much does it cost?

These are all functional concerns that must be addressed. Does anyone care or even think about what language it's built in, where the headquarters are, how long it was in development or how much it is staying up-to-date with current standards? No.

I worked with a big pharmaceutical company in Switzerland. It was doing a launch of a drug trial where it wanted to get doctors to sign up specific patients in a particular timescale. The company brought me in to help with its presentations.

I was working with the lead scientist. She got out her slides and started talking. 'Five years ago . . . Then we . . . Then we . . .' She wanted to tell the whole story: it was important to her – it was five years of her life! But would the doctors care? Would knowing all the details of the iterations of the testing and the progress of the project move the doctors closer to signing up or further away?

What do you think was important to the doctors:

- Is the drug safe?
- Who specifically is it good for?
- Will being part of this study build my professional reputation?
- What's in the goody bag?
- What's for lunch?

(Unfortunately, young coach that I was, I didn't manage to wrest her History Of The Project slides away from her. Things would be different these days, believe me.)

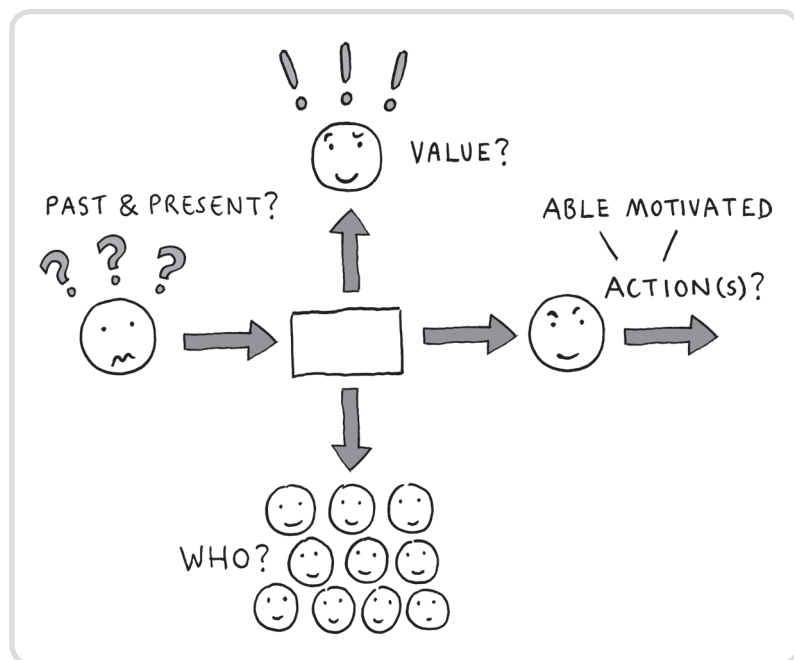
What does this mean? Think through the lives of your listeners. In those subgroups, what is important to them in their jobs? In their daily lives, what are their priorities? If you don't know, go and do five minutes of searching online.

In Step 2 we're going to think this through, but for now, some general ideas will help you begin to filter your content.

HINT: WHAT TO DO IF RIGHT NOW YOU ARE FROZEN IN PANIC

If you can't get moving at all on this, then go back to Question 1 and halve all the timings. Do it on a piece of paper, try not to judge or edit as you're going along. You're going to come back to your notes and it's all likely to change anyway. This is just serving the purpose of getting you unstuck. You'll get you through this, I promise. Just relax and follow instructions.

Planning Question 5: what is immediately apparent to you now? (5 minutes)



Get your notes together and look through them again:

1. **What do I know about the people I'm talking to?** Look at what you know about the people you're going to be talking to. Even having spent five minutes thinking about this question has already put you head and shoulders above the 'what will I talk about?' crowd.
2. **What do I want these people to be able and motivated to do after my presentation?** Review your outcomes. Are they still reasonable and probable, bearing in mind the answers to the other planning questions? The responses you would like them to have become your compass and filter for your content. You'll keep coming back to them (and refine them as you go).
3. **What can I guess about their past and present?** Go over again what silent questions they have, and what could be going on in their internal circus. These are the things you're going to have to deal with, if you want them to begin moving towards your outcome.
4. **What is important to them?** Finally, get a feel for what's really important to them. How can you show them that following your request is going to get them more of what they want, need and value?


What is immediately obvious? What do you absolutely have to include in your presentation? What, more importantly, do you need to leave out?

Make brief notes.

Seriously, well done! You've taken better steps towards an effective presentation in the past half an hour than most speakers ever take. This will take a good 10 per cent edge off your overwhelm. Now you have a place to start: feels better, right?

Okay, time to let that settle. Take a break, do something different for a bit. Go for a walk, look out the window, do some star jumps or something. Eat, drink, breathe in and out.

The next step is to return to the questions and refine your answers.



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STEP 1: GET TRACTION	30 MINS
NEXT STEP 2: REFINE ANSWERS	20 MINS
STEP 3: CHOOSE RECIPE	60 MINS
STEP 4: NOTES & TIMINGS	45 MINS
STEP 5: PLAN SLIDES	15 MINS
STEP 6: REALITY CHECK	10 MINS