

# Fifteen Secrets for Impeccable Presentations

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Making and listening to tons of presentations through the years, I have noticed that there are still many speakers that do not plan their delivery properly. As Cameron Francis says, *"If you fail to plan, then you are planning to fail."* I have taken note of the major mistakes I have seen people make (I have made a few myself in the past!) and share them with you in this very practical checklist to get you on your way to an impeccable delivery.

## 1. Screen Saver

What is a screen saver? It's a feature that is activated on many personal computers to turn off the display or display a user-defined picture/animation after a period of inactivity. This was important with early CRT displays and plasma screens in order to prevent phosphor burn-in, but is not really needed in current laptop screens. Still many people have the feature active on their laptops, sometimes without knowing it.

It's important to **turn off the screen saver** on the pc that will run the presentation. This will avoid the screen saver image/program from being projected to the audience when you don't touch the keyboard or move the mouse for a while, causing a distraction. I have seen speakers that continue their presentation even though the projected image has changed to a black screen or their screen saver image, not realizing this is happened.

How do you turn off the screen saver?

**Windows 7:** Windows menu / Control Panel / Screen / Change screen saver: select None, click Apply, click OK.

**Windows Vista:** right-click on the screen background and choose Customize / screen saver and select (None); click Apply, click OK.

**Windows XP:** right-click your desktop, and then click Properties. In the Display Properties dialog box, click the Screen Saver tab. Click the Screen saver drop-down box, and select (None); click on Apply, click OK.

**Mac:** Choose Apple menu > System Preferences and click on the Desktop & Screen Saver icon in the Personal section; Click the Screen Saver button, then adjust the "Start screen saver" slider on the bottom all the way to the right selecting "Never".

## 2. Background

Look at the background on your computer with fresh eyes. The audience looks at the screen as soon as you turn on the computer. What do they see? Look at your icons, wallpaper, and screensaver and make sure this is all information you want to share with your audience. A clean desktop background is always the best.

### 3. Instant Messaging

Exit from all instant messaging and VoIP applications (such as Skype and Facebook) on the pc that will run the presentation. You don't want to receive sudden messages or calls from friends and other contacts during your show.

### 4. Power

Identify the power outlet nearest to your laptop and make sure it draws power. Don't forget to pack your power cord /adapter. Plug-in your laptop and check that the Energy Savings settings on the pc don't activate standby/hibernate modes when the pc is powered (go to the Windows Control Panel to find them). If you are presenting on batteries, also make sure this does not happen.

### 5. Presentation Remote

Use a remote presentation control so you don't have to keep returning to your pc to advance to the next slide. Test the reach of the remote control walking around the room so you know how far you can go without losing the signal. A fresh battery in the remote will guarantee the best distance. Keep in mind that controlling a presentation using a remote control is not equivalent to moving the mouse or touching the keyboard, so you will still need to disable your screen saver. I use a [Kensington remote](#). Its small size has sometimes given the impression that the slides advance automatically, as people don't notice that I have it in the palm of my hand.

### 6. Laser pointer

Many presentation remotes also have a built-in laser pointer. If you wish to use it, your hand should not shake and it is better to limit the movement of the beam on the screen; just point to the item you wish to call out for a couple of seconds and then deactivate the laser beam. You don't want to use it to underline all the slide text nor aim the beam dangerously around the room.

### 7. Projector

Check the projector to make sure it is in focus, aligned, and at the right distance from the screen. If using a portable system, make sure the connecting cable does not get in the way. Ask in advance what is the best resolution it supports and how you should connect to it (VGA, HDMI, WiFi...). If it is low resolution, you may want to bring your own projector so that your slides will appear in the best way. Get familiar with the projector's remote control; you may need to use it to control the projection source, if the room is equipped with multiple sources. Ask a technician for support if you are unsure on anything. Do you know the keys to press on your laptop (or the one provided) to make the pc send the image to the projector? Know the laptop Fn-F# combination for cycling through display options (on my laptop it's Fn-F5).

## **8. Position equipment so you can avoid looking at the screen**

The audience wants to see your face, not the back or the side of your head. Looking at the screen while you're talking breaks eye contact, and makes the audience feel disconnected. "But wait," you say, "how else can I know what my audience is seeing unless I too look at the screen?" Position equipment in the following sequence: projection screen / you (the presenter) / laptop computer and projector / audience. Now, set your laptop for dual display, that is, with the slides showing on both the projection screen and the laptop screen (using the Fn-F# key combination). With this setup, you no longer need to look at the screen, because you will see the same slide displayed on your laptop.

## **9. Solve Projection issues**

Sometimes when you connect a laptop to a projector it changes the appearance on the laptop screen to larger, stretched images. When projected, the bottom of the slide visible on the laptop is missing in the image projected on the screen. How can this problem be solved?

Depending on your laptop/Windows/graphics card versions, right click on your desktop, choose Graphic Properties and change the settings for the secondary monitor (perhaps changing it to 1024X768) or Properties and choose from the monitors tab.

If the projected image has the standard 4:3 aspect ratio but your laptop is widescreen, you may want to do this to keep things from distorting on your laptop display: in your video card control panel, find 'change Flat Panel Scaling' and set to 'use fixed-aspect scaling' (names may vary depending on your graphics hardware).

This operation will force your laptop to stay in proportion to the projected image. The left/right will be black to keep the image from stretching. All of this depends on a number of things, such as the operating system, the video card, the projector, etc.

## **10. Audio**

If you need audio support, maybe because you are showing a video clip, check how the AV system works, which cables to plug into which jacks on the laptop, and how to adjust the volume in the room. If you will use a microphone, make sure you test it in advance. A wireless lapel microphone is always the best as it leaves your hands free and the sound is good even if you turn your head.

## **11. Video**

If you plan to use video during a presentation or training session it is more professional if it plays within a PowerPoint slide than if you have to drop out of PowerPoint temporarily in order to show the movie. Inserted movies should be located in the same folder as the presentation. If the movie shows fine on the laptop but not on the projection screen, make the projector the primary display or disable the display on the laptop. Also check that the projector is set to the same resolution as your laptop. Test all movies on site.

## 12. Internet

If you need internet access during your presentation, ask in advance to make sure it can be provided, either through an Ethernet cable or a wireless connection. Some locations require static IP addresses to be assigned in advance, others require internet Proxy server addresses/ports, and in some cases certain websites and internet applications could be blocked by a firewall. Test all websites you need to access on site to make sure they can be reached. Have a backup plan in case Internet access fails or some sites fail to load. A possible solution is to do a screen recording and play it back in case of internet failure (to make a screen recording up to 5 minutes in length you can use the [Techsmith Jing free software](#), available both for Windows and Mac).

## 13. Readability

Check the font sizes and colors used in your slides for readability. Setup your pc and connect it to the projector. Adjust the lights and window shades/curtains the way you want them during your performance. Then go to the last row of chairs and advance the slides in presentation mode, to check the readability (and the spelling!). Sometimes things look great on a pc screen but this may not be the case with all projectors and lighting conditions.

You may wish to follow the **8H rule** which says that the maximum viewing distance shouldn't be more than 8 times the height (H) of the screen; if that condition is met then as long as your text is at least 1/50th the height of the screen, then it will be legible at the maximum viewing distance.

## 14. Don't do software updates

Don't upgrade your OS, drivers, or anything else on the pc you need to use on stage, **after you have tested it in the presentation room**. Things that worked the day before, including connection to a projector, may surprisingly not work after you make these types of changes. Wait a day, it may make the difference. I know a university student who was about to give his thesis presentation with a laptop. The day before the event, he tried the projection system with his pc and everything worked fine. That evening he updated some drivers in the operating system. The day after, when he was ready to present to the university commission, the pc would not link to the projection system. He had to delay the presentation, copy the files to a USB drive and ask another student to connect his pc to the projector.

## 15. Have a backup plan

What if the projection system dies? What if your pc crashes?

Always bring a hard-copy backup of your slides.

Transport presentation and resources on two types of portable media (USB drive and CD) and make sure they are readable (if you are a Mac user, will your presentation work on a

Windows pc?) Don't run a presentation from an external drive, copy the files to a local drive on the pc connected to the projector.

If you need to borrow a computer, make sure you have all these with you:

Presentation files

Movies

Unusual fonts

Linked files

Bring platform-specific installers for non-standard applications:

QuickTime

Windows Media Player

RealPlayer

PowerPoint viewer

Specialized scientific applications

You can also prepare a special USB flash drive for presentation emergencies. [Read this article](#) to find out how.

## How to use this checklist

Print this checklist and carry a copy in your laptop case. When you get to the presentation venue, preferably some time before you are due to present, take it out and go through all the items.

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