

# 10 “Unforgivable” Presentation Sins

We’ve all been there: innocently suffering through a nightmare presentation. We’ve been wounded prey of the cruel, sadistic presenter who intentionally makes a bad presentation, but these are the minority. Most presenters actually try hard to deliver excellent presentations, but to our detriment, they devastatingly miss the mark. It’s to those repentant presenters that we’d like to address, and you know who you are.

Again, almost no one wants to make a bad presentation; it just happens. The problem is, none of this happens by accident. No, these presenters look out into the audience and see the glossed-over eyes, the cell phone checking, and the rest of their audience counting ceiling tiles or checking out their seatmates.

Don’t let this happen to you! Repent! Change your ways! But how, you ask? Well, I’m here to help you. If you are genuinely desirous of turning over a new leaf, so to speak, as your role of presenter, you must read on. I will describe for you the xx Commandments of Good Presentations and their associated sins.

## 1. Commandment Number One: Thou Shalt Know Thy Topic

You’ve been asked to give a presentation on a subject you don’t know. You figured you’d do a little research and memorize the content. You assumed – falsely – that no one would notice. You give your presentation by rote, mechanically churning out the content. A listener raises his hand and asks a question. Oh no, you start to panic; you didn’t prepare for questions! Everything you know about the subject has already been presented. You have just broken the first commandment of good presentations.

**Your penance:** Know your material well enough, so you can answer any reasonable questions that might come up. Keep your credibility intact by studying the material thoroughly. Use only essential information, along with the essential words and relevant phrases, to keep your audience focused and interested. Lastly, be ready for questions.

## 2. Commandment Number Two: Thou Shalt Prepare and Rehearse for Thy Presentations

You’ve decided you want to use a projector since you know that’s all they have. The audience is all settled and ready for your presentation. You turn the projector on and...guess what? The projector isn’t working! You didn’t bother checking the equipment out earlier. You stand there with the proverbial egg on your face because the presentation is entirely dependent on that projector.

**Your penance:** Check and recheck all equipment, as well as rehearse using your equipment long before show time. Come prepared with backup devices, and at least, in the case of your projector, an extra projector bulb. Ahead of time, if you can, check out the presentation room. Know where the dimmer switch is, and rehearse the presentation with the equipment you plan to use.

### **3. Commandment Number Three: Thou Shalt Not Give T. M. I. (Too Much Information)**

Lucky you: you've been asked to give a presentation on whose subject you are very familiar. In fact, you try to squeeze so much information into that presentation; your audience is experiencing a meltdown. It's simply been too hard to follow.

Your penance: In designing content for your presentation, use the K.I.S.S principle – Keep It Simple, Silly! Try to only use three or four major points about the topic and expound on them a bit. Your audience will thank you, and they'll retain the information better.

### **4. Commandment Number Four: And the 4th is like unto the 3rd commandment: Thou Shalt Show Relevancy**

You've been assigned a topic for your presentation. You recall several previous presentations with the same subject. In fact, you've dug up the notes you kept for several of these events and used them to work out your own presentation. In the middle of presenting, several of the audience suddenly walk out. This is confusing to you, as you think you're giving an impressive speech.

**Your penance:** You missed the opportunity to give an impressive presentation! You had all the right tools but didn't take advantage of them. First, you should work out what your audience expects. Your old notes would have helped you see what has already been addressed and to avoid redundancy, spend a couple of minutes in review at the start. Then, dovetail some new material with the right level of detail for your audience. Tailoring case studies or examples, and citing them by name will help to move the topic forward. Refer to the previous material often and cite examples known to your audience. Your presentation will add relevance to the overall topic.

### **5. Commandment Number Five: Thou Shalt Not Kill by Design**

So, you didn't get to do much research because last night's game was so important. You figured nobody would notice if you added lots of pictures and complicated looking charts and diagrams. The more, the merrier! You've also heard that the best color to use is blue, so you grabbed your favorite design theme. It's a lovely beach scene, which has lots of blue tones. You're a little

confused during the Woodcrafter's Convention presentation when you see how unimpressed they are with your design choice.

The following day, during your second presentation assignment, you try out something different. You love unusual color combinations together and decide to rework your presentation's design into a bold orange and blue combination. That went over like a ton of bricks.

**Your penance:** Here's where the saying, "Time is Money" comes into play. Nobody, yes, nobody enjoys wasting their precious time, slogging through all that material. A little goes a long way in enhancing your oral presentation. And about your beach design, keep the main topic in mind which will help in choosing an appropriate design template.

Using a good contrast with background makes text easier to read, with dark text on light background best. Avoid pure white; go for beige or another shade. Keep away from patterned or textured backgrounds. Keep your color scheme consistent throughout the presentation. Business presentations should have clean, straightforward layouts, while children's themes should contain lots of different shapes and colors.

## **6. Commandment Number Six: Thou Shalt Not Flood Your Audience**

You're excited to show everyone all your research. In fact, you can't decide which slides to leave in or take out, so you show all 500 photos to impress everyone. By about slide number 32, most of your audience is beginning to snore. You have flooded your audience.

**Your penance:** Show compassion and kindness! Keep your audience focused and awake by only keeping the best slides. A good minimum is about 10 or 20 slides in total. If you struggle with this, bear in mind how much fun you had looking at your friends' vacation pictures.

## **7. Commandment Number Seven: Thou Shalt Exercise Moderation In All Things**

They say you're a bit of a geek. You found a bunch of really cool animations and sounds and used them all in your presentation, to impress everyone with your flair for technology. As the performance begins, you see a palpably anxious expression come over most of the audience. You notice everyone's eyes darting from one thing to the next, and you realize you've lost their attention.

**Your penance:** It's called animation overload. While these aids can be helpful in heightening interest, too much of a good thing will be too distracting. Go with a "less is more" approach. Exercising "moderation in all things" is a great philosophy, overall.

## **8. Commandment Number Eight: Thou Shalt Give Oratory and Not Read**

Your audience is settled, and you begin by presenting your first slide when someone complains that she can't read it. No problem, you say, as you'll be reading them out loud. Your slides are filled with lots of text.

**Your penance:** Are you actually presenting or simply reading? Keep the audience's attention and interest by simplifying your content. Focus on the most important points, and emphasize those points in writing. Use no more than four bullet points on each slide and keep the font large so those at the back of the room can see. Most importantly, don't turn your back on the audience. Speak to them, not to the screen.

## **9. Commandment Number Nine: Thou Shalt Not Ramble On**

Want people to run from your presentations? Then, ramble on and go over the time limit set for your presentation. This is one surefire way to gain disrespect. The only exception to this commandment is when the audience is on the edge of their seats, encouraging you to go on.

**Your penance:** Practice, practice, and more practice out loud with a timer. When you practice ahead of time, you'll be able to refine your presentation so that it hits every major point - and here's the key - within your time limit. Your audience will love you for it. In fact, practice every aspect: walking up to the podium, saying your first line, and everything to the end. You may want to get feedback from a trusted friend during these practice sessions.

## **10. Commandment Number Ten: Thou Shalt See and Be Seen**

You love fonts and have a great collection. You've chosen to use a beautiful script type font on your first slide while using a variety of fonts in different sizes on the others. Gazing at your monitor, they all look great and show off your artistic side - you think! During the presentation, you notice people squinting to see the text and shake their heads in frustration.

**Your penance:** the audience is suffering from poor font choice syndrome. The lady who is sitting nearly 200 feet away cannot read the screen, no matter how hard she tries. Always use easy to read fonts, such as Times New Roman or Arial, and keep them at a minimum of 30 pts size for excellent readability. Use only two fonts, one for headers and another for content. Avoid script type fonts; they are too hard to read on a screen.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE**

To be an excellent presenter, know your topic. Engage with your audience in an engaging manner. Be concise in your presentation, only giving relevant information. Using PowerPoint

and other tools to reinforce your main points is good, but don't use these tools as a crutch for poor preparation. Always remember that YOU are the presentation, not your slides.