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beyond bullet points

3rd edition



Using **Microsoft® PowerPoint®**
to create
presentations that
inform, motivate,
and inspire

CLIFF ATKINSON



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Beyond Bullet Points, 3rd Edition

Using Microsoft® PowerPoint® to
Create Presentations That Inform,
Motivate, and Inspire

CLIFF ATKINSON

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Dedication

To my partner, Andrew.

—Cliff Atkinson

About the Author

Cliff Atkinson is an acclaimed writer, popular keynote speaker, and an independent consultant to leading attorneys and Fortune 500 companies. He designed the presentations that helped persuade a jury to award a \$253 million verdict to the plaintiff in the nation's first Vioxx trial in 2005, which Fortune magazine called "frighteningly powerful."

Cliff's bestselling book *Beyond Bullet Points* was named a Best Book of 2007 by the editors of Amazon.com, and has been published in three editions and translated into a dozen languages including Chinese, Korean, and Russian. The book expands on a communications approach he has taught internationally at top law firms, government agencies, business schools and corporations, including Sony, Toyota, Del Monte, Nestlé, Nokia, Deloitte, BBDO, The NPD Group, Ipsos, Facebook, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Intel, GE, the American Bar Association, and the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal.

Cliff's work has been featured in the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times and the The Wall Street Journal.

Cliff received his B.A. in English and journalism from Baylor University in Texas and his M.B.A. from Richmond, The American International University in London. After serving as a captain in the U.S. Air Force, he held marketing and consulting positions for start-up companies in San Francisco during the dot-com boom. Cliff currently resides in Washington D.C.

Introduction

I ORIGINALLY WROTE *Beyond Bullet Points* in 2005 to offer a new way for people to create Microsoft PowerPoint presentations more effectively. I never imagined that shortly after the book's publication, the impact of the Beyond Bullet Points (BBP) approach would make headlines in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. Since then, interest in BBP has elevated the first edition of this book to bestseller status, at one point reaching the #4 sales rank out of all books at Amazon.com. It turns out that BBP is striking a chord with people who have a simple desire—to move beyond the bullet points that keep both presenters and audiences trapped, frustrated, and alienated from one another.

People are finding that BBP really works for them and that once they try this approach, they can't go back to the old way of using PowerPoint. Since the first edition of this book was published, BBP has been even more thoroughly road-tested and resoundingly audience-approved. Individuals report a process that is practical, orderly, focused, and disciplined, and organizations are finding a methodology that is attainable, effective, efficient, and scalable.

BBP is working today across an incredible range of professions and purposes. It will help you frame and facilitate a conversation with your audience, and it will guide you on how and where and why to use PowerPoint. Lately, questions about BBP have shifted from "How do I do this?" to "How does my organization do this?" which indicates that the approach is taking hold at a deeper level and setting the stage for a broader movement of people who support and use BBP every day.

The underlying system of BBP in this book is the same as in the first two editions, offering a way to turn general theories about communication into the practical things you do when you open a new PowerPoint presentation tomorrow morning.

How this Book Is Organized

As in the previous edition of this book, I take you step by step, chapter by chapter, through the BBP process. Chapters 1 through 3 provide an overview of the reasons why you should try BBP and how the process looks, and

Chapters 4 through 10 explain specifically the detailed steps of how to use BBP. A bonus Chapter 11, available at the companion content Web page for the book and at www.beyondbulletpoints.com, introduces a fun exercise called BBP Visual Improv. This book is designed to be a practical guide that you keep close at hand while you work on PowerPoint presentations, as well as a source of ongoing inspiration.

For many people, BBP turns the conventional thinking about PowerPoint presentations upside-down and unlocks the potential that has always been available in the software tool, as well as in the people who use it. The heart of this book is really about people communicating with people. By using a commonly available software tool to help you to do that, you can find focus, clarity, and engagement. I hope you'll find that and much more in this book, as you make and tell your own presentation stories *beyond bullet points*.

Where to Get the Companion Content

The companion content Web page for this book includes copies of key tools described in the book; a bonus chapter, Chapter 11, which introduces a fun exercise called BBP Visual Improv; and PDF versions of the BBP Ground Rules and BBP Checklists that you can use as a desktop reference. These files, as well as other information, can be downloaded from www.beyondbulletpoints.com or the following page:

<http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?Linkid=213936>

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CHAPTER 3

Building a Foundation with the BBP Story Template

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL:

- Learn how Beyond Bullet Points (BBP) addresses the limited capacity of your audience's working memory to process new information.
- Review step by step how the BBP Story Template creates the foundation for your presentation that you will build upon with your narration and graphics.
- Prepare the BBP Story Template, and review three ground rules for writing headlines.

PREPARING A PRESENTATION is complex and difficult from a couple of perspectives. From a presenter's point of view, you have many things you want to say and show during a presentation, and you would like your audience to integrate the new information into clear understanding in long-term memory, as shown in Figure 3-1.

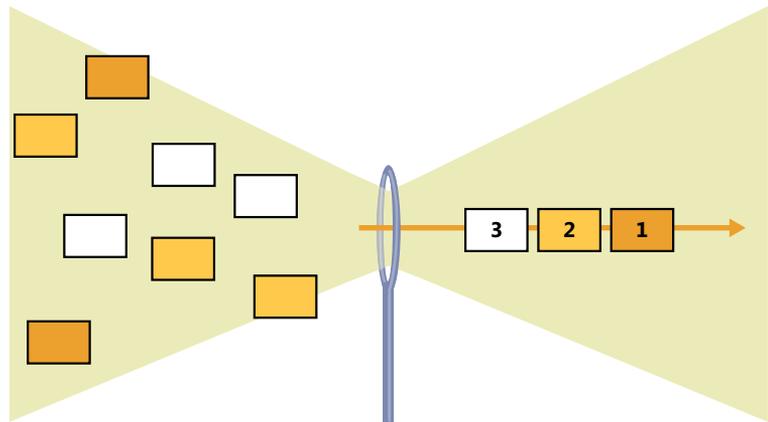


FIGURE 3-1 The formidable challenge every presenter faces—the limited capacity of working memory.

But as you saw in Chapter 2, you also know what is happening from the audience's point of view in terms of memory. *Sensory memory* can see and hear a potentially unlimited amount of verbal and visual information, but only for a fleeting second. *Long-term memory* can hold a potentially unlimited amount of information

from 30 seconds to up to a lifetime. Yet the capacity of *working memory* to handle new information, the eye of the needle, is relatively limited for the few seconds it pays attention to what you are showing and saying.

That means that effectively communicating a message is not as easy as creating a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation and assuming that you deliver it through an unobstructed pipeline to the passive minds of your audience. Instead, you have to set PowerPoint myths aside and engage the three research realities you learned about in Chapter 2—finding the right amount of new information to engage the limited capacity of working memory without overloading it, engaging both the visual and verbal channels, and guiding the working memory of your audience to help them integrate new information into their long-term memory.

Some of the techniques you will use to accomplish this are new, some you already know, and some are old methods used in new ways. If you're completely new to using PowerPoint, you won't have to unlearn old habits; instead, you'll find here a better way to use PowerPoint from the start.

■ What Does the Road Ahead Look Like?

This book shows you step by step how BBP is applied in depth to one specific example presentation on a topic most people can relate to—introducing a new idea—and shows how BBP handles a situation where you need to both inform and persuade an audience. The example is intended to be delivered as a 45-minute presentation, so you get a sense of what it takes to produce a presentation that long. You adapt the same BBP process to a wide range of presentation timeframes, topics, contexts, and purposes—Chapter 9 gives you a tour of more examples to review for inspiration.

WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED FOR BBP?

This book includes most of what you need to get started with BBP. Of course, you'll also need a computer with both Microsoft Office Word and PowerPoint installed. As you begin or continue to work with BBP, the companion Web site to this book at www.beyondbulletpoints.com offers additional resources, courses, and a community to help you create BBP presentations smarter, faster, and easier from start to finish.

If you work for yourself or by yourself, you have no choice but to apply BBP on your own, and you'll do just fine. But you'll get the most out of the process if you unlock the

benefits it produces for teams. BBP offers organizations a process where they might not have had one before and often aligns PowerPoint with the group's communications strategy for the first time.

You should get as many people involved in the BBP process as possible, especially team leaders, marketers, graphic designers, and even some of your potential audience members. When BBP brings together these separate groups, the efficient process of producing presentations increases the speed of decision making, reduces revisions, and improves the quality and impact of PowerPoint communications for both presenters and audiences.

BBP will also reveal that people on your team have unexpected talents that will surprise you—perhaps computer engineers will turn out to be good at graphic design, graphic designers will be good at wordsmithing a logical argument, and statisticians will be good at facilitating the social process.

■ Sewing Up Understanding with BBP

When you face the limited capacity of the working memory of your audience to process new information, a core challenge is not creating the visuals and narration, but rather determining the underlying structure that will shape those elements in the first place. A structure focuses your ideas and helps you figure out what you want to say and how you want to say it. That's where an incredibly powerful structural tool you will use comes into play—the BBP Story Template.

The Heart and Brain of BBP: The Story Template

With the lessons of the dual-channels theory from Chapter 2 in mind, you see that filmmaking is an appropriate model for designing multimedia presentations because it plans and manages both visual and verbal information simultaneously.

Filmmakers know that the best way to start planning a film is with the written word, in the form of a script. A script is much shorter and less detailed than a novel because it assumes that the visuals and dialog will play a major role in telling the story. The best scripts distill stories to their bare essence and strip away anything that does not contribute to a story's singular focus.

When a writer completes a script, the document then becomes a powerful organizing tool that literally puts everyone on the same page. The script is the starting point for planning and producing visuals and dialog, and it serves as a way for everyone involved in the project to be clear on what everyone else is saying and doing. If you were a

filmmaker and you started filming before you had a script—similar to working on a PowerPoint presentation without a written structure—you would probably waste time and resources while you changed your focus and figured out the story along the way.

Although putting your thoughts in writing adds a new step to your usual PowerPoint process, doing so will save you time and effort later. When you begin writing your PowerPoint script in Chapter 4, you won't have to start with an empty page, because you'll use the story template shown in Figure 3-2 to guide you every step of the way.

Title and byline		
Act I		
Setting		
Role		
Point A	Call to Action	Point B
Act II		
Key Point	Explanation	Detail
1		
2		
3		
Act III		

FIGURE 3-2 The BBP Story Template, which you will complete in Word.

The story template serves as a central organizing tool for the entire presentation. It is a visual interface for the structure of your presentation, helping you see the big picture on a single page or two before you commit to adding a visual and verbal track to individual slides.

The Built-in Story Structure

To understand the story template, you have to go back in time a few years. The Greek philosopher Aristotle recorded the classical elements of storytelling 2400 years ago, including the concept that a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. When you adapt this timeless idea to your PowerPoint presentations, you'll ground your communications in a powerful technique that works.

throughout history. A story structure frames the context for communication and focuses attention by making information specific and relevant to an audience. Story literally ties together scattered pieces of information. By incorporating these fundamental ideas in your current PowerPoint story, you'll be building on a solid foundation that ensures your presentation is focused, clear, and engaging.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the long-term memory of your audience already contains existing structures that can help working memory organize and integrate new information. One of the most well-known configurations is this three-act structure that forms the foundation for countless stories, novels, theatrical productions, films, and television shows. When you tap into this familiar structure that already exists in your audience's long-term memory and apply it to the structure of the new information you present, as shown in Figure 3-4, you are well on your way to creating a clear pathway through the limited capacity of working memory.

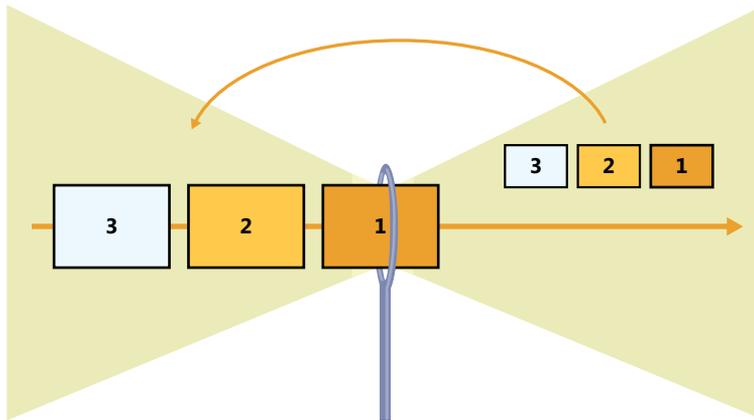


FIGURE 3-4 Introducing the familiar three-act structure to new information as you present it to working memory.

The research principles described in Chapter 2 have been around as long as 50 years, and the idea of a story structure thousands of years longer. These are proven ideas and techniques that work—the present challenge is how to make the concepts practical as you work on your next presentation. To help get your job done quickly and efficiently, these fundamentals of classical story structure and the screenwriting process have already been adapted to your PowerPoint needs and incorporated into the story template.

In addition to a classical story structure, your story template also incorporates persuasive techniques that are useful for many types of presentations in different contexts. These include using Aristotle's concept that to persuade, you must appeal to emotion, reason,

and personal credibility. Even if your intent is to simply *inform* an audience about something, you still have to *persuade* them to pay attention. Why should they listen? What's in it for them? Act I of your story template will make sure that you persuade your audience to focus on your message, and Act II will make sure that you provide the logical reasoning they need to make a decision. You will infuse the entire presentation with personal credibility in terms of verbal clarity and conciseness and add visual credibility by matching your graphics and aesthetics with your audience.

Theory Becomes Practical

The innovation of the BBP Story Template is that it brings together theory and a process into a practical tool you open up and use to structure and start every presentation. Everything you do here in the story template shapes the visuals and narration to come and sets up your ideas in a way that preconfigures and aligns information to best prepare it for its passage through the working memory of your audience. The story template ensures that every presentation accomplishes what you intend—by understanding your audience members, tailoring your material to them, getting to the point, and establishing a priority and sequence for your ideas.

You don't have to be an expert storyteller or an expert in cognitive theory; the template makes structuring your story as easy as filling in the blanks. In the cells of the story template, you'll write out a complete sentence that describes what is happening at each point in your story, similar to writing a newspaper headline. As you fill in the blanks, you'll be writing the actual story that you'll present. When you've finished, you'll have a completed one-page or two-page script. This process ensures that you stay focused on your ideas and include all the elements that make up a good story.

ALTERNATIVE STORY TEMPLATE TOOLS

This book shows you how to use a Word document as your BBP Story Template, but it's not the only tool you use. BBP readers have found innovative alternatives by re-creating the story template structure with Microsoft Excel, Post-It Notes, a flipchart, and a whiteboard. Figure 3-5 shows a BBP Story Template created using mind-mapping software called MindJet MindManager—an especially flexible and scalable tool for creating presentations that extend beyond 45 minutes into multiple-hour, daylong, and multiday timeframes. For more resources related to these alternative tools, visit www.beyondbulletpoints.com.

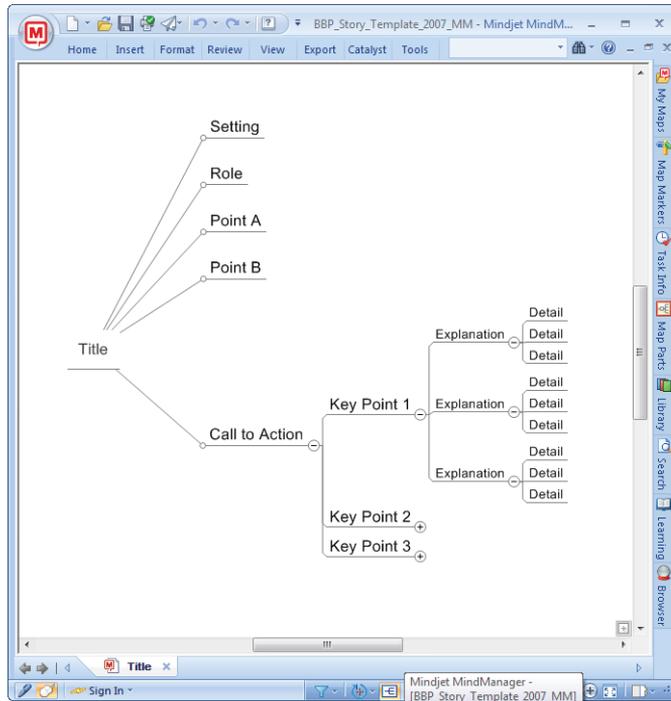


FIGURE 3-5 An alternative version of the story template created with a mind-mapping tool gives you the ability to create presentations that extend across multiple hours and days.

When you write your script using the story template, you focus on your ideas first rather than your graphics. After you complete the template in Word, you'll import the headlines into PowerPoint, where each complete sentence you wrote will become the headline of a slide, as shown in Figure 3-6. This ensures that before you start working in PowerPoint, you already know the main point you intend to make on each slide.

This pivotal technique of turning your story template into a set of PowerPoint slides will help you to transform your written words into the foundation of a visual story. This will make your job of finding visuals easier by establishing exactly what you need to illustrate on every slide, and it will help your audience to understand your new information much faster by indicating clearly in the title area the meaning of every slide.

You'll begin applying BBP step by step in Chapter 4; the following is a preview of how the three steps of BBP will unfold as you apply BBP to the specific presentation example

in this book. Here you see how each slide finds its context in the bigger presentation picture by following the three steps of BBP that help you, and your audience, sew up effective understanding.

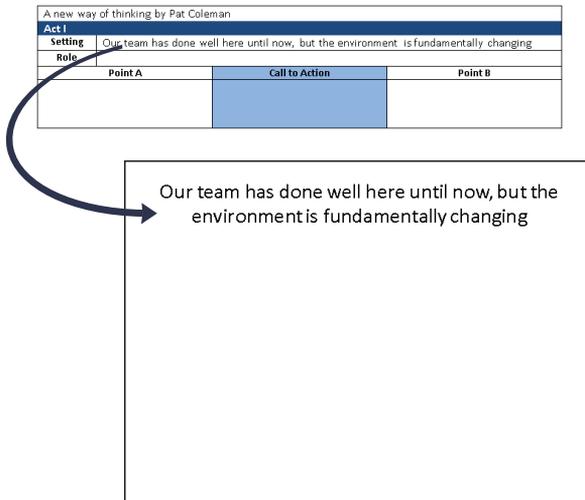


FIGURE 3-6 Each headline you write in the story template becomes a headline on a slide.

Step 1: Choose a Story Thread and a Pattern to Follow

You need to quickly make an emotional connection with an audience to motivate them, and you see the specific words that do that in Act I, where you write out the classical elements of a strong story beginning. The first five headlines you write in Act I of the story template will connect emotionally with an audience, define a problem they face, and explain how they can solve it. This forms the story thread that will carry attention through the entire presentation. You will reinforce the strength of the thread to carry new information through the working memory of your audience by applying a familiar pattern in the form of a verbal and visual *motif*, or recurring theme.

After you complete Act I and the rest of the story template, you'll import these five headlines into PowerPoint, where each statement becomes the headline of a PowerPoint slide, as shown in Figure 3-7.

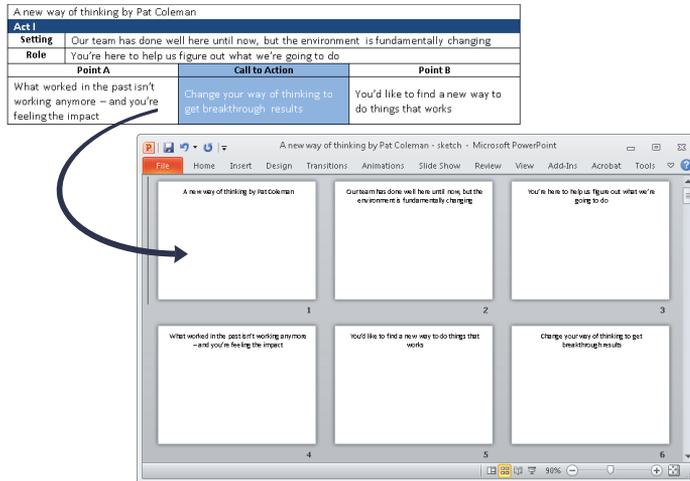


FIGURE 3-7 The five sentences you write in the story template become the headlines of your first five slides.

When you view the first five slides in Slide Sorter view, you see by reading the headlines of the slides the story thread that will carry your specific sequence of ideas through the eye of the needle of working memory of your audience, as shown in Figure 3-8; this sequence will also provide the framework for your visuals and narration.

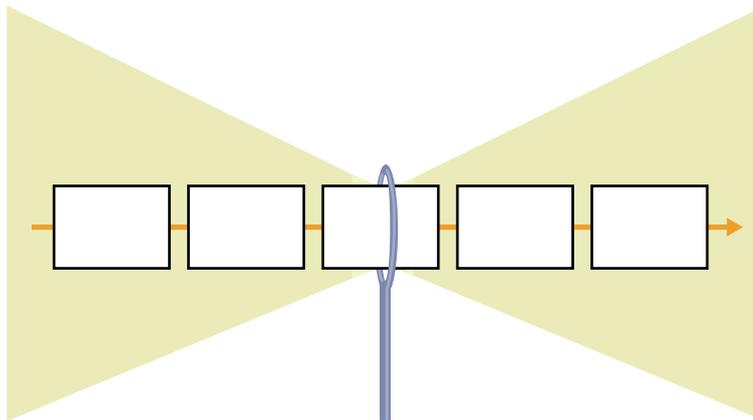


FIGURE 3-8 Act I defines what you'll show to working memory in the first five slides.

■ Step 2: Pull Through What's Most Important First

You set in motion a number of powerful processes in Act I of the story template that continue to play out as you create the rest of the slides in your presentation. Just as in Act I, you'll break up your ideas in Act II into digestible pieces by writing out complete-sentence headlines in the story template. Later, each sentence will become the headline of a slide, as shown in Figure 3-9.

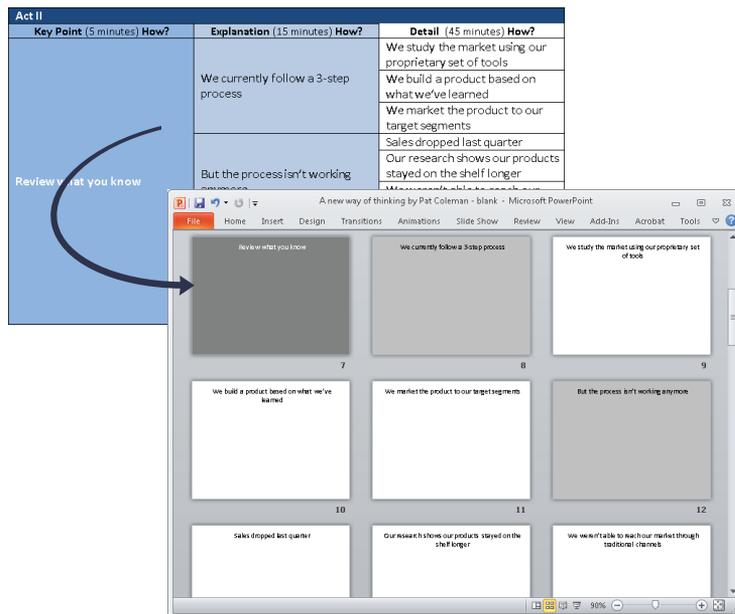


FIGURE 3-9 The headlines you write in Act II of the story template become the headlines of the rest of your Act II slides.

The challenge of any presentation is not to show *all* the information you have but, instead, to select the *appropriate* information to present. The story template guides you through the important process of selecting only the ideas your audience needs to know and breaking them into digestible chunks that are easier for your audience to understand.

A logic-tree structure is built into Act II of the story template, as shown in Figure 3-10; this structure helps you put the most important information at the top level of attention, to increase memorability and application. A presentation should have three or four key points, and you literally can see them in Act II, where you clarify and identify these top-level points, create a logical and clear structure, and perhaps most important, leave out nonessential information.

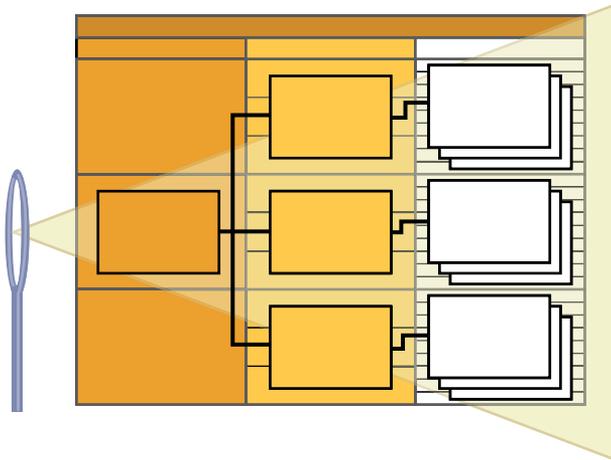


FIGURE 3-10 A built-in logic-tree structure prioritizes your ideas from most important to least.

Completing Act II of the story template can be the hardest thing you do in BBP if you're new to this way of thinking. But the investment in learning will sharpen your critical-thinking skills and ensure that the new information in your presentation appears in the order and sequence needed to prevent overloading the working memory of your audience, as shown in Figure 3-11.

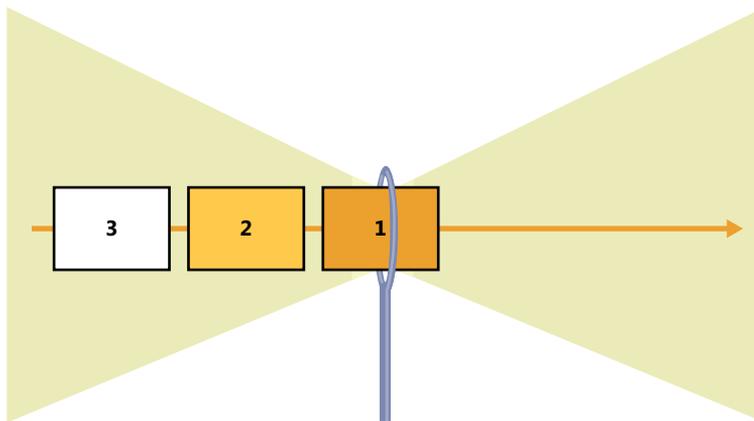


FIGURE 3-11 Act II makes sure that you present the correct priority and sequence of slides to working memory.

Step 3: Guide the Visual and Verbal Strands with Your Storyboard

With the click of a mouse, you'll transform your Word story template into a PowerPoint storyboard. You'll work with your storyboard in Slide Sorter view to review your story structure and sequence, check your pacing and flow, and use visuals to tie together the various parts of your story. This planning ensures that you continually build on and improve your strong story foundation with a single unified set of visuals and words.

Next you will quickly apply layouts with slide backgrounds that indicate the three hierarchical levels of Act II slides, as shown in Figure 3-12, to set up preliminary visual cues that designate which slides are more important than others and how those slides fit into a sequence. After you do this, you'll be able to easily see the three most important slides in your presentation—the dark gray ones. You'll also be able to see your second-most important slides—the light gray ones—and your third-most important slides—the white ones—to easily locate and hide them if you need to quickly scale down the presentation to a shorter amount of time. These slides are the foundation for the fully designed layouts and backgrounds you use to cue working memory when you add graphics in Chapter 8.

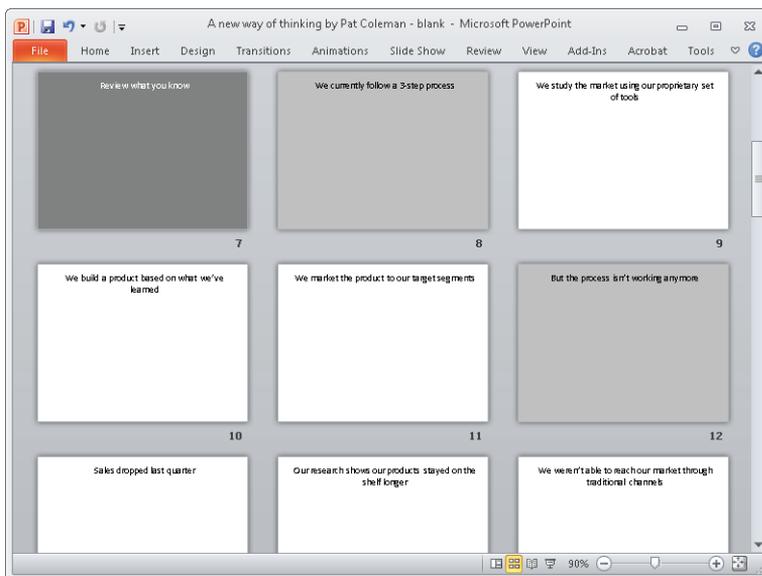


FIGURE 3-12 Next you'll cue working memory by applying layouts with preliminary slide backgrounds to the three hierarchical levels of Act II slides.

Next you'll plan the narrated soundtrack of the presentation by writing out the verbal explanation for each headline in the off-screen text box in Notes Page view, as shown in Figure 3-13. If you don't have time to write out your full narration, just take a few notes here. In line with the dual-channels theory described in Chapter 2, this helps you seamlessly integrate each visual with its verbal explanation. After capturing in the notes area a record of the rich verbal explanation that will accompany the slide, you then will choose the simplest possible visual to illustrate the headline of each slide.

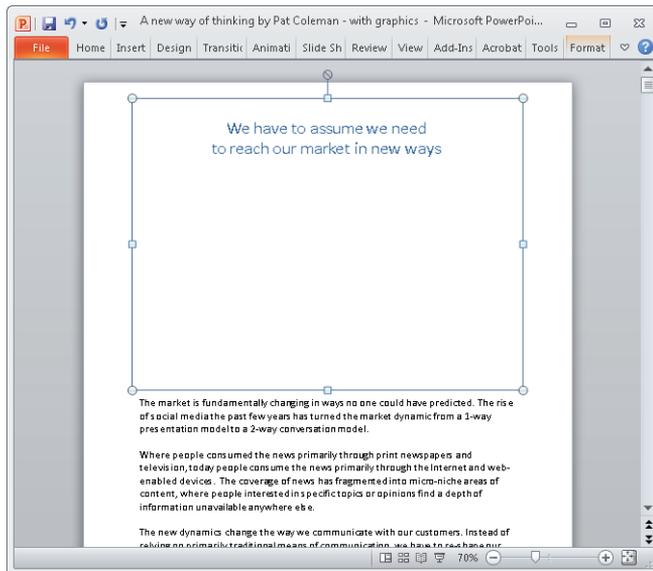


FIGURE 3-13 First you write out what you'll say for each headline in the off-screen notes area (bottom). After you have recorded the information that you'll convey with your voice, you next add a simple graphic to the on-screen slide area (top).

Sketching the First Five Slides

With your clear and concise story line in place in your slide headlines and with your narration written out in the off-screen notes area, your next step is to brainstorm an illustration for each headline of each of the Act I slides of your storyboard. You'll do that by sketching a visual idea on each of the five slides in Chapter 7, as shown in Figure 3-14, either using printouts of the slides or a Tablet PC.

When you do this, your focus is on making full use of the powerful visual channel of your audience members by sketching out a crisp and compelling visual story that complements your clear and concise headlines. Just as your headlines tell a story with only words, your sketches now should complement, enhance, and intensify that story on individual slides, as well as across slides. Here you'll also plan for both on-screen and off-screen media such as physical props, demonstrations, video, dialog, or other types of media or interactive techniques.

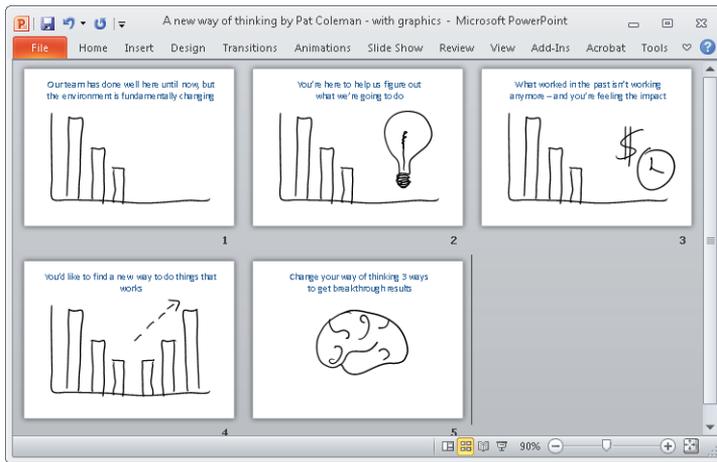


FIGURE 3-14 Once you have a storyboard, sketch a graphic on each of the five slides.

Sketching the Rest of the Slides

As with Act I, completing the story template for Act II creates a solid foundation that will help you choose exactly what you'll show and say as you present the working memory of your audience with new information. With this infrastructure in place, you'll have endless creative options to make the crisp and clear underlying story even more powerful. Here on the Act II slides, as shown in Figure 3-15, you'll visually carry through the motif you establish in Act I to help working memory better select and organize the large amount of new information.

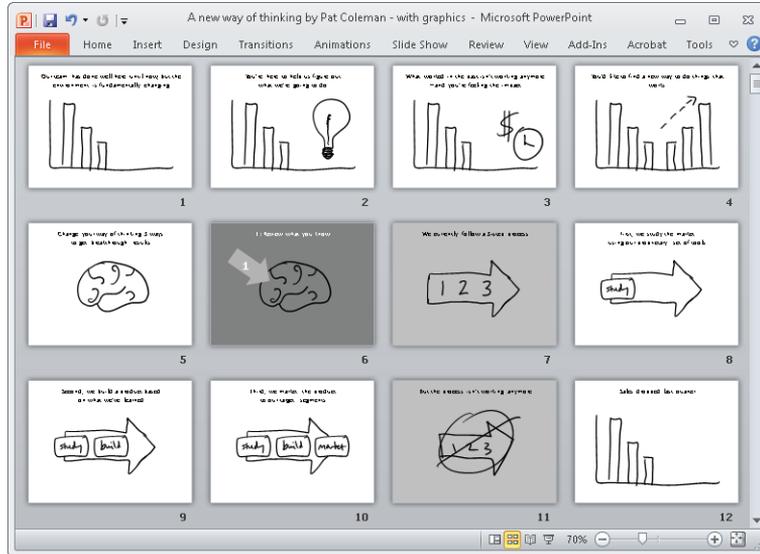


FIGURE 3-15 You'll continue sketching graphics on each of the remaining slides.

Applying Custom Layouts

After your team has agreed to and signed off on the sketches, the last step is to find and add a specific photograph, chart, or other graphic to each of the slides. But before you do that, you'll apply custom layouts to each of the different sections of your storyboard, according to the way you sketched the layout of each slide. As shown in Figure 3-16, this creates a visual foundation for the slides based on the hierarchy from the story template.

By applying layouts and backgrounds, you use graphical indicators that cue working memory to the relative importance of each slide, as shown in Figure 3-17. In this example, the striking solid background indicates the most important slides; the slides with the horizontal graphic are the second-most important, and the slides with the footer graphic are the third-most important.

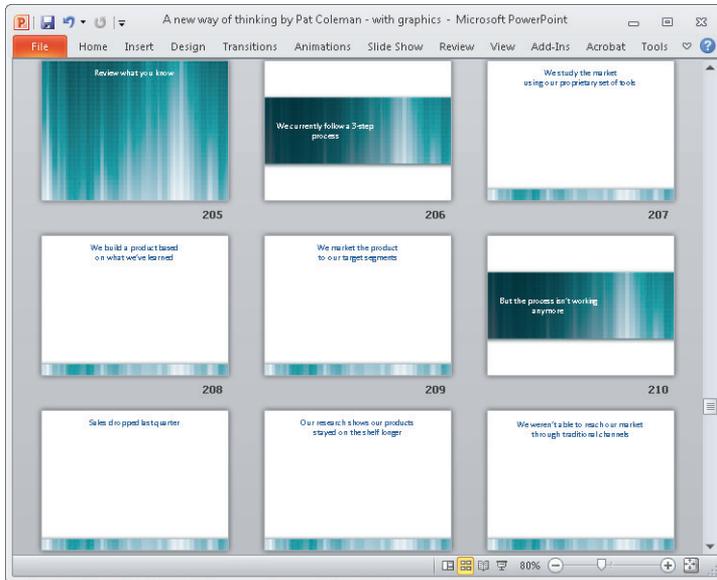


FIGURE 3-16 Storyboard with custom layouts applied.

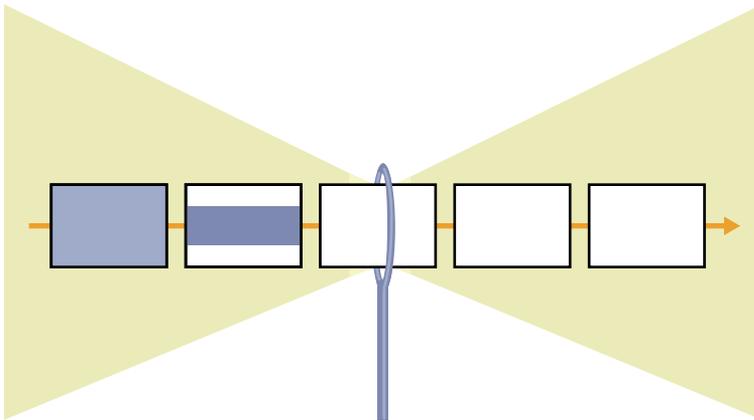


FIGURE 3-17 The slide layouts and backgrounds cue working memory to each slide's relative importance within the big picture.

Adding Graphics to the First Five Slides

The last step is to find and add graphics to each of the slides using your sketches as a guide. Here is where you savor the fruits of the labor of writing Act I in the story template, because you know you've got the specific PowerPoint slides that will ensure that you start strong in your presentation, as shown in Figure 3-18. The visual and verbal clarity you achieve is possible through using the story template, which has established the foundation for everything you have done.

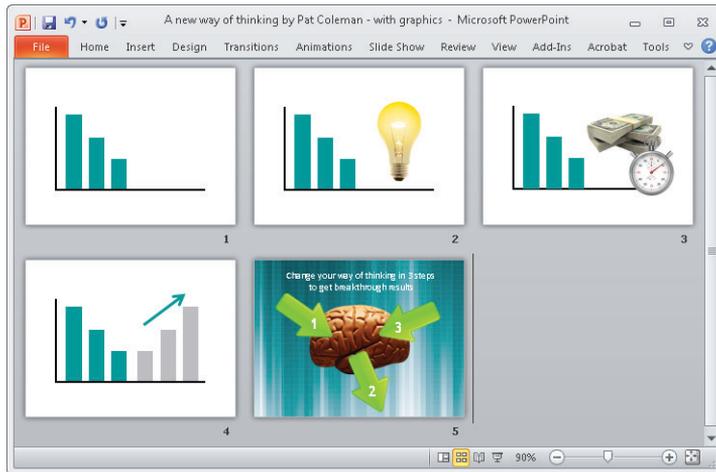


FIGURE 3-18 Adding graphics to the first five slides of Act I.

Adding Graphics to the Rest of the Slides

After you add graphics to the Act I slides, you continue by adding graphics to the rest of your slides, as shown in Figure 3-19. Here you might use photographs, screen captures, logos, charts, and other illustrations.

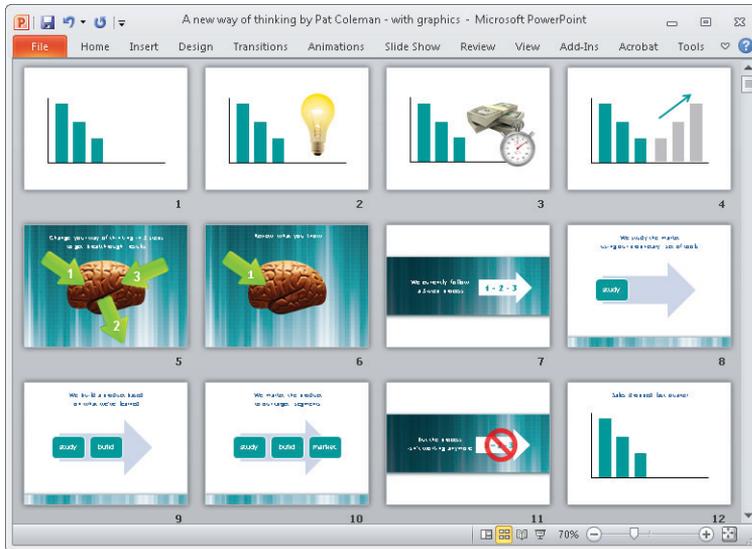


FIGURE 3-19 Adding graphics to the remaining slides.

Stepping into the Screen

Using the approach described in this book, you'll be well-equipped to produce a media experience that will get you the results you want anytime you give a presentation. Focusing and distilling your ideas using a story template and clarifying them using a storyboard blends your message with your media and significantly expands your ability to enhance your presentation with sophisticated media tools and techniques.

Now the large screen directly behind you, as shown in Figure 3-20, completely integrates your voice and body into a media experience greater than the sum of its parts. This approach brings together a range of media techniques—including those from stage, screen, theater, and television—and blends them together with your body and your clear message into a seamless presentation experience.



FIGURE 3-20 BBP immerses the audience in the experience and ensures that the attention of the audience is not split between screen and speaker.

When you project your slides on a large screen, they work as visual triggers that increase your confidence as a speaker. You're no longer tied to the uncomfortable task of reading text off the screen and unintentionally ignoring your audience. Instead, the clear headline and graphic quickly prompt you to use your natural voice and authority as you explain them.

Presenting in Multiple Views

Making use of Notes Page view to write out your narration in advance increases your ability to present confidently during a live PowerPoint presentation. While your audience sees the simple slide on the screen shown on the upper left in Figure 3-21, your Presenter view in PowerPoint on your own computer displays a speaker notes pane on the right that shows what you wrote in the off-screen text box in Notes Page view. Zoom in on the notes to enlarge the size of the font so that the text is easy to see.

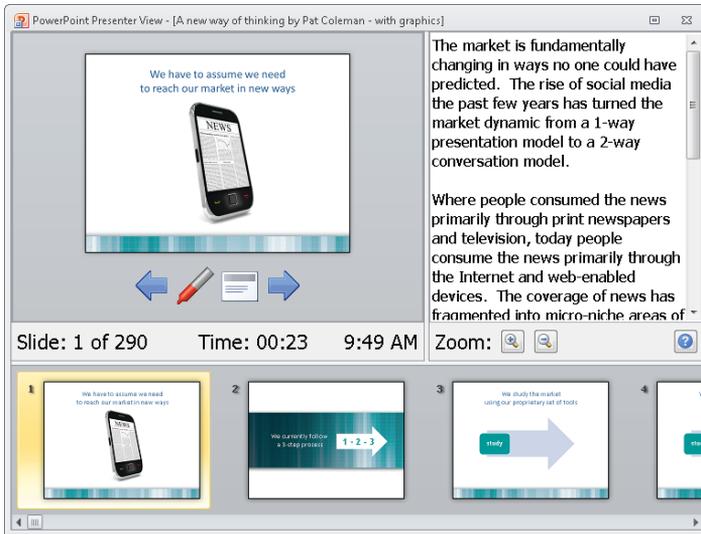


FIGURE 3-21 Presenter view allows you to see the clear and focused on-screen slide that the audience sees, alongside the text you wrote in the off-screen notes area in Notes Page view.

Presenting with a Tablet PC

With BBP, you make maximum use of a Tablet PC by writing directly on the screen to increase engagement and dialog, as shown in Figure 3-22. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 will show you a range of ways to sketch and use graphics to prompt interaction using a Tablet PC.



FIGURE 3-22 Presenting a BBP slide using a Tablet PC.

Presenting Online

Your visually engaging BBP slides are a great fit with online meeting tools, as shown in Figure 3-23. Because the slides are designed to be visually simple, they increase the need for people to pay attention to your voice on the other end of the telephone or computer speakers.

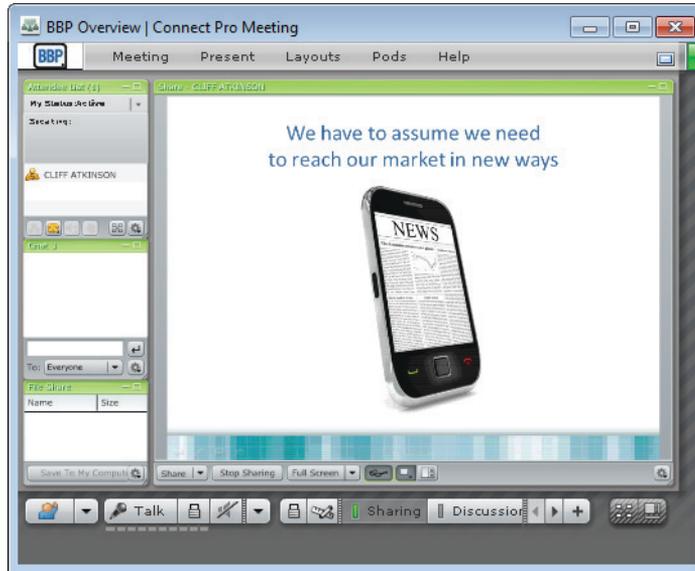


FIGURE 3-23 Presenting online using an online meeting tool.

Documenting the Experience

As described in Chapter 2, aligning your approach with the dual-channels theory allows you to use PowerPoint in a way that produces both an effective presentation and an effective printed handout, as shown in Figure 3-24. Looking at Notes Page view on the left, the on-screen slide area contains a headline and a simple graphic, while the off-screen notes area captures what is spoken aloud by the presenter. Keeping the narration off the screen creates effective slides (upper right), along with effective handouts (lower right).

When you distribute the PowerPoint file to people who were not present for the live presentation of visuals and narration, you send the notes pages, not the slides. Print out the notes pages to create a physical copy, or create a PDF version that you distribute electronically.

Using Notes Page view taps into the unique value PowerPoint offers you as a communications tool, because no other tool can produce a single file that works effectively like this on a screen, on a piece of paper, and even online.

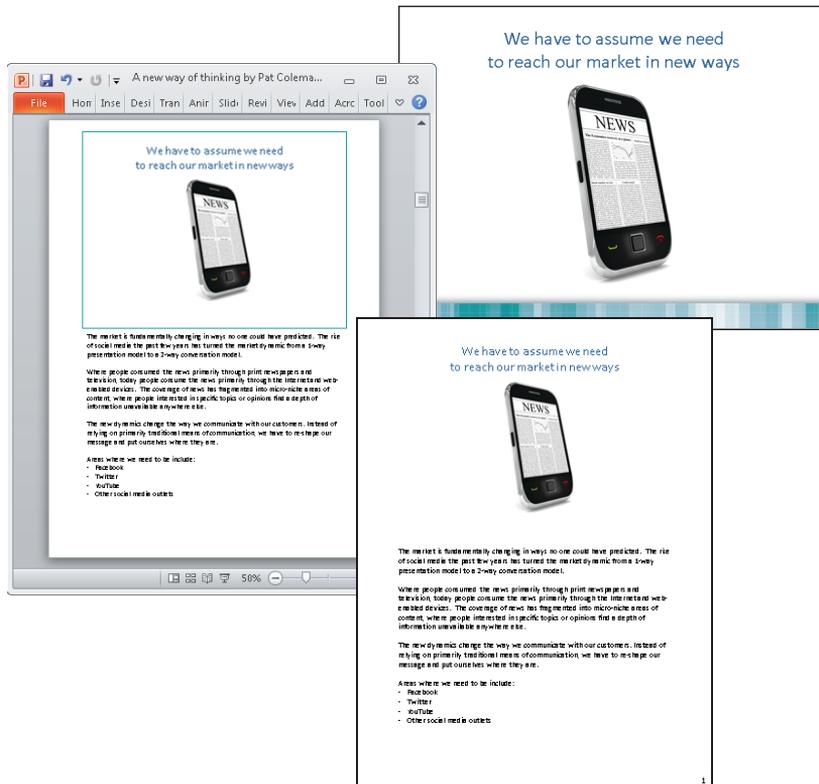


FIGURE 3-24 Notes Page view, showing a well-designed slide and a well-designed handout with the complete verbal explanation of the slide.

Getting Started with the BBP Story Template

To get started, download a copy of the BBP Story Template from www.beyondbulletpoints.com, and save it on your local computer.

THE BBP GROUND RULES AND CHECKLISTS

As you follow the steps in upcoming chapters, you'll find sets of BBP Ground Rules for writing your story template, sketching your storyboard, adding graphics, and producing the presentation experience. You'll also find at the end of key chapters a checklist of items to make sure that you've covered them. Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of the ground rules and checklists to print and keep handy as you work with BBP.

■ Writing Headlines Using Three Ground Rules

Everything you do in your presentation from this point forward will build on the headlines you write in your story template. To make your headlines as effective as possible, review the three important ground rules that apply to every statement you write.

Rule 1: Write Concise, Complete Sentences with a Subject and a Verb in Active Voice

To effectively communicate your message consistently and clearly through your entire story, your headlines must be complete sentences with a subject and a verb. Write the sentences in active voice—for example, "Our top competitors launched five new products last quarter" rather than in the passive voice, "Five new products were launched by our top competitors last quarter." Keep your language dynamic and direct; the same principles, techniques, and rules that define good writing also define good headlines in your template.

See Also

For an excellent reference guide to writing the headlines of your story template clearly and concisely, see William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White's, *The Elements of Style* (Longman, 2000).

Writing headlines in the form of complete sentences imposes a discipline on your ideas by forcing you to turn them into coherent thoughts and remove any ambiguity. Later, when you import your headlines into the title area of your PowerPoint slides, your audience will have no doubt about what you want to communicate because they can read it for themselves at the top of each slide. Write your headlines using sentence case, with the initial word capitalized and the rest in lowercase.

When you write your headlines for Act I, constrain them to only one line that fills the width of the cell without extending to a second line. The columns in your template for Act II are narrower, so you are able to extend those headlines to a maximum of about two and a half lines. Constraining your headlines to these limits keeps you from being wordy and ensures that your headlines will fill a maximum of two lines when you send them to the title area of your PowerPoint slides.

Tip

If you're looking for practical examples of how to write concisely, look no further than the headlines of a newspaper. When writing a headline, an editor has limited space to communicate an idea clearly, so the language needs to be clear, direct, and engaging.

It might be a challenge to keep your headlines brief, but that's part of the process of boiling down your complicated ideas to their essence. This distillation will help you to get right to the point in your presentations.

Rule 2: Be Clear, Direct, Specific, and Conversational

Each statement in your story template will speak directly to your audience when it fills the title area of a slide, so use a conversational tone that is simple, clear, and direct. Say what you mean in plain language. When you make your point, include the details that give it specificity, color, and impact. Tailor your words to the level of understanding of everyone in the audience and place nothing in the headline that is not in the audience's vocabulary.

The point of the headline is to help your audience understand your point as efficiently as possible—if you use words unfamiliar to them, you create obstacles to understanding, and they will wonder what the individual words mean instead of attending to the overall message. The exception to using simple words is if everyone in the audience has prior understanding of the technical language you are using.

When you write your headlines, imagine that you are addressing a few members of your audience sitting in chairs next to your desk. Because you're simply having a conversation, your voice should be relaxed and casual—not tense and formal. This conversational tone will help you keep your headlines from getting wordy. Later, when your audience reads your headlines in the title area of your slides, the conversational tone will help them to feel more relaxed and open to your ideas. Although presenters might assume formal language gives them more authority, research shows people learn better when information is presented in a conversational style rather than a formal style.

THREE GROUND RULES FOR WRITING HEADLINES

Your story template depends on a special writing style that boils down your story to its essence. Follow these three ground rules to keep your writing on point:

- **Rule 1:** Write concise, complete sentences with a subject and a verb in active voice.
- **Rule 2:** Be clear, direct, specific, and conversational.
- **Rule 3:** Link your ideas across cells.

Rule 3: Link Your Ideas Across Cells

As you'll see in Chapters 4 and 5, you'll be breaking up your ideas into smaller pieces as you write your thoughts in the cells of the story template. As you do that, you want to make sure that you link your ideas so that they flow to one another as you read them across the cells. You make sure you do this by choosing a consistent tense across all headlines—you'll generally create a more dynamic, in-the-moment feeling to your story if you use the present tense. You should also link your ideas by using a parallel sentence structure across cells, which keeps everything sounding clear and coherent. Linking your cells verbally in the story template becomes important when you sketch and add graphics to your storyboard visually, as you'll see in Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

Although writing is usually considered a solitary experience, don't write your PowerPoint script alone. Invite the members of your team to join you in a conference room. To get started, attach a projector to your laptop computer and display your story template as a Word document on the screen. When the story template is projected onto a wall, it becomes a tool for a group of people to see, create, discuss, debate, and agree on the structure of any presentation. Organizations have found the story template tool to be a breakthrough innovation because it guides a collaborative process, gives people ownership, taps into collective brainpower, and literally gets everyone on the same sheet of paper.

Now that you've prepared your story template and reviewed the ground rules, it's time to get specific and start with the beginning—the first five slides of your presentation.

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