



# 154 CONSULTING

## PRESENTATION RESOURCES

154 Consulting is built on the idea that every presentation can get better, but we know that our services aren't the right fit for everyone. Maybe your presentation is in a few days, or maybe you would just like to go it alone. Either way, if we can't help, maybe one of these resources can.

If you search the Internet for presentation resources, you'll find much of what's listed below. As a matter of fact, many of the resources on this list include their own lists of recommended resources, and there is significant overlap among them. Rather than offering yet another list, we've attempted to make these resources more useful by grouping and annotating the list, creating a syllabus of sorts.

If you have one day or less to create your presentation, follow the one day course. If you have a week or more, or simply a passing interest in presentations, follow the short course. If presentations are becoming a significant portion of your job, consider doing the readings from the long course.

### The One-day Course

If you have twenty-four hours or less to create your presentation, do not waste any time trying to learn new techniques. Dance, as the saying goes, with who you came to the dance with. Your time will be best spent making the best presentation you can using the methods you know. Once you're done, you should practice. If there's still time before your presentation once you've practiced, **practice again.**

There are tips on practicing, and some good advice on writing presentations (among other things), at [Rands In Repose, in a post titled "Out Loud."](#)

### The Short Course

Whether you have a few days or a few weeks to prepare your presentation, the best way to spend the time you've budgeted towards learning new techniques is on *Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes*, by Andrew Goodman/Cause communications. This short book is possibly the best one-stop presentation resource available. *When Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes* itself exhibits all of the characteristics of a good presentation. It's data driven, well structured, accessible, and informative. Available online through [Cause Communications](#) and [Goodman's site](#).

## Thinking about Presentations

The remainder of this short course focuses on short reads that you can read on your computer in those few minutes between phone calls or before a meeting. It starts with resources to reframe your thinking about presentations, then turns to tools and examples.

First, investigate to [www.missinglink.co.za](http://www.missinglink.co.za). Missing Link is a South African design firm specializing in presentations. Their irreverent attitude and heavy design focus probably aren't for everyone, but their very short master class on [presentations](#) and their "[attention spam](#)" [briefing](#) are quick reads with strong points.

Next, navigate to Garr Reynolds' [Presentation Zen](#), which rounds up presentation resources and provides useful advice to presenters, especially regarding design. Presentation Zen is the most popular presentation blog on the internet, and its traffic is richly deserved. Start with two links - one is from Presentation Zen proper, the other from Reynolds' personal presentation site.

- [“What is Good PowerPoint Design”](#)
- [Presentation Tips](#)

Finally, steer yourself to [43Folders](#), where Merlin Mann weighs in on all aspects of making work productive. His path towards better presentations is outlined in a post titled [“Better Presentations.”](#)

## Tools

As you assemble your presentation, you may find the [story template](#) from Cliff Atkinson's *Beyond Bullet Points* useful. The template helps you identify your key points and supporting details and helps you build a structure for your presentation from them.

Perhaps the most useful presentation tools on the Internet are images. There is a broad consensus amongst presentation experts that image-based presentations are more effective, but that doesn't mean you can just slap any image you find with Google Image Search onto a slide. Make sure that you have the proper rights for the images you show.

If you're willing to pay a small fee for the images you use, [www.istockphoto.com](http://www.istockphoto.com) is a popular recommendation, and [www.everystockphoto.com](http://www.everystockphoto.com) provides many images that are free for certain kinds of uses. The Library of Congress has recently made photos with no known copyright restrictions available on a [dedicated Flickr page](#).

## Role Models

Besides practicing and delivering your own presentations, the best way to improve your presentations is to see others present well. Fortunately, the [TED](#) conference (which challenges speakers to give "the talk of their lives") makes videos of excellent presentations available online. Perhaps the best, is [Lawrence Lessig's "Three Stories, One Argument" talk](#). Lessig's

presentation is visually strong, but his argument and logic, not his slides, are the meat of the presentation.

Over at [43Folders](#), Merlin Mann has a video of his "[Inbox Zero](#)" talk at Google. It's worth a look if only as a reminder that a smart, funny guy with a point of view and a good presentation can make an impact without being a Churchillian orator.

Back at [Presentation Zen](#), Garr Reynolds offers up [sample slides](#) for review. They're useful examples of the Presentation Zen approach.

## The Long Course

If you know or suspect that you will be creating and delivering a significant number of presentations over the coming years, then sitting down and doing some reading about the subject is worth your time. Run through the short course above, and then tear into these books.

Garr Reynolds has (as of this writing in early 2008) just published a [Presentation Zen book](#), which should be considered the fundamental textbook on what presentations are for and how they should be done. If you're serious about presentations, the Presentation Zen book is required reading.

Cliff Atkinson's [Beyond Bullet Points](#) was published by Microsoft Press, and it reads like a software manual in some sections. At the same time, Atkinson provides the best step-by-step guide to structuring a presentation on the market. The template (listed above) that frames his book is useful even without the book, and *Beyond Bullet Points* includes tips and tricks for working with Microsoft PowerPoint that don't appear elsewhere.

Too many marketing consultants have set up shop in order to exhort you to tell stories, to employ "story marketing," and there is something to learn from their all-caps praise of the power of narrative, but I fear they too often suggest building a story around what you want to put across, rather than finding the most compelling way to tell the story that's already there. [This American Life](#) finds stories and tells them in compelling ways every day, and they've written a comic book about how they do so. You can skip the parts about mixing sound, but the rest of the comic is entirely relevant to building presentations. Order it at their [store](#) (and while you're there, consider picking up the "Lost Buildings" DVD - a great presentation in itself).

There are thousands of books on public speaking; listing even a handful of them here would take us far beyond the boundary of presentation resources. However, there are two worth mention for particular elements.

[Speak Up With Confidence](#), by Jack Valenti, is of note for Valenti's admonition to practice. As he describes his own practice routine (in chapters two and four), the lesson is clear: if Jack Valenti, renowned as a public speaker, practiced that much, then the rest of us have no hope of getting by on less.

[On Speaking Well](#), by Peggy Noonan, is a well-written and broad ranging book on public speaking that delivers both conventional wisdom and practical suggestions in a warmly readable form.