

Preparation to FWO interview

Turn your jury into cheering crowd.

If you have any question on the following slides, don't hesitate to contact me by email (fcontino@vub.ac.be) or connect with me on Twitter ([@f_contino](https://twitter.com/f_contino)). I am gathering a lot of resources associated, among other things, with effective presentations on ristretto.black.

Most of the slides below are directly extracted or adapted from Jean-Luc Doumont. To avoid cluttering the handout, I am not specifically citing this reference every time. I strongly advice anyone to follow the [trainings](#) of Jean-Luc and [buying](#) his book.

Interview magic 101:
turn your jury into
a cheering crowd



- 1 Message
- 2 Slides
- 3 You



Task: Your 1-min elevator pitch

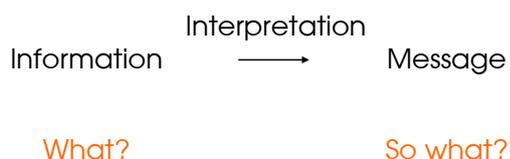
Groups of 4

Notes about what you liked

Learning outcome: [get message across](#)

This first exercise forces you to get your message across with a high time constraint. This gives a first feeling that we will work with to refine later on the opening of your presentation.

Effective communication is getting the message across



The primary objective to keep in mind when planning, designing, and delivering your presentations is to **get your message(s) across**.

A message is different from a piece of information. It provides your interpretation of the information and answer the question "so what?" (or what is so important about this piece of information) instead of "what" (what this piece of information is).

Effective communication is optimisation under constraints

Get your audience to
pay attention to
understand
be able to act upon
a maximum of messages given constraints

Given the constraints of your presentation (see later), you want that the audience does something with your message.

Task: Your 1-min elevator pitch

Groups of 4

Notes about what you liked

Learning outcome: get message across

Task: Your opening

Learning objectives:

Get a strong beginning

Observation-Feedback

Based on the first exercise we try to bring it to the next level with a strong opening. We also focus on the way to provide feedback. This not only helps the person receiving the feedback, it also give ideas to the observer.

Like presentations, feedback is better delivered when efficient

No judgement ~~The way you stand was not good~~
Consequences Your movements can be distracting

No interpretation ~~You did not prepare enough~~
Focus on facts I saw no connection between
your main points

No reproach ~~You should have~~
~~used another color than green~~

Suggestion Next time, you might try
another color than green.

Part of the important skills to continue learning on effective presentations after this training is the observation of others. By giving feedback to others your also organise these thoughts and develop your expertise.

Starting on the right foot sets you up for the rest

Use a short but effective attention getter so audience focuses on the **need**.

Make a link with what your audience is interested in.

Don't start with: "Hello. My name is..."
This is self-centered. Audience first.

During rehearsal take extra time to master the beginning of your presentation. This will kickstart your talk and help you go through the rush of stress that everybody gets at the beginning. Get an effective attention getter: short, centered on the public, and with the objective to lead your audience to the need.

The plan of your presentation focuses first on the audience

| | |
|----------|--|
| Audience | Attention getter Need |
| You | Task Main message |
| | Supporting messages (=slide titles) |
| | Review |
| Audience | Conclusion Close |

The main structure of an effective presentation follows these steps. After an effective **attention getter** providing some context, the **need** to be addressed is introduced. Then the **task** describes what you did to tackle this need. You can finish the first part of the presentation by stating your **main message**. Supporting messages explaining the main message or giving details form the **body** of your talk. Just before the **conclusion, review** the main points and then **close** efficiently trying to loop with the attention getter.

The plan of your presentation focuses first on the audience

| | |
|----------|--|
| Audience | Attention getter Need |
| You | Task Main message |
| | Supporting messages (=slide titles) |
| | Review |
| Audience | Conclusion Close |

This exercise focuses on getting to the main message, including the complete and strong opening.

Task: Your opening

- 15' Prepare your opening up to the **main message**
- 1 Test it on the group
- 2 Feedback:
Did you get the link with the message?
What would you suggest to improve?
- 3 Test the updated version

Task: 3-min presentation

Prepare a 3-min version of your presentation
without slides

Learning objective:

- Clarify the structure
- Focus on the message
- Finish with a strong closing

This exercise forces you to have a big part of your presentation, entirely without slides. This forces you to have a very clear structure, to focus on a memorable message, and to finish with a strong closing.

A strong closing gives you an edge for the interview

Indicate clearly that you have finished.

Avoid the traditional thank you make it elegant instead.

Prepare your audience for the end and loop back to your attention getter.

When you rehearse, take time to try different closing. Usually, circling back to the attention getter is very effective. To make sure you have a strong closing, your audience should be able to know you are done without you saying the usual "thank you" at the end.

When finishing the presentation focus again on your audience

| | |
|----------|--|
| Audience | Attention getter |
| | Need |
| You | Task |
| | Main message |
| | Supporting messages (=slide titles) |
| | Review |
| Audience | Conclusion |
| | Close |

The end of your presentation, like the opening, should focus on the audience.

Task: 3-min presentation

- 60' Prepare your 3-min presentation
without slides
- 1 Test it on the group
 - 2 Feedback:
Did you get the structure/messages?
What are your advices for the closing?
 - 3 Test the updated version

Interview magic 101:
turn your jury into
a cheering crowd



- 1 Message
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The laws of communication should always drive your choices

Adapt to your audience

Ask the organiser and
check who presents in your session

Maximize signal to noise ratio

Remove anything that is not the message

Use effective redundancy

You could understand without looking
or without listening

If something is unclear, or you are un-
sure about what you should do, always
come back to the fundamental laws
of communication. This will drive your
decision.

Find your message and the supporting elements

Develop the storyboard of
your presentation

Focus on the messages
not the design

Sketch with paper and pen
(or anything else than ppt)

Organise

Try filling in the structure seen before (**template** from principiaae). At this stage use one piece of paper (or one post-it), per message . Then it is easy to organise your talk. Don't go on your computer yet.

Design your slides right or don't do them at all

Dedicate time primarily on
message and rehearsal

Slides are not handout
make them light

Slides should stand on their own
for effective redundancy

Under constraint, you better focus on rehearsal than having slides. Keeping this in mind, and knowing that we always wrestle with our agenda, plan enough time for rehearsal. As a rule of thumb, to prepare an interview and get a natural feeling, you should rehearse between 6 and 10 times (in front of an audience or recording yourself).

One message per slide if difficult, turn the tables

Take the sub-messages as titles

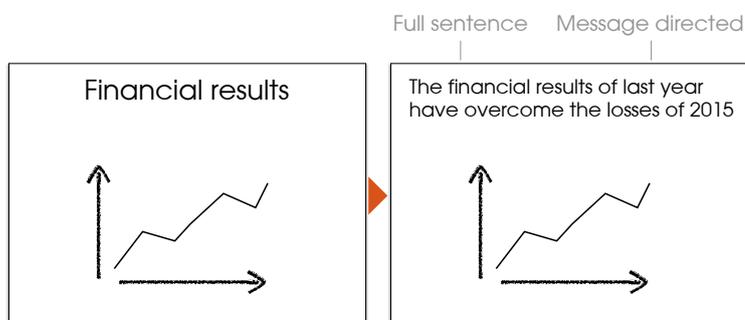
Only one message per slide

Create the slides after thinking
about the structure

If difficult, think about the main message,
and discard non useful slide ideas

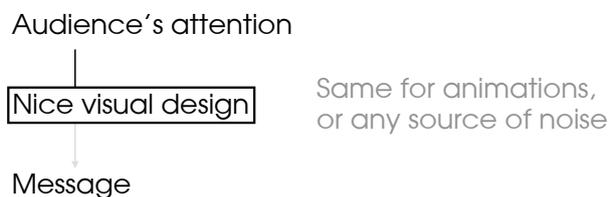
When designing your slides, following the previous step, you should have a list of supporting messages. These will be the titles of your slides, which means that a slide only receives one message. Resist the habit to start with your slides and concentrate on the messages help having effective presentations.

Break the habit of “what” title and replace by “so what”



This is an illustration of the fundamental difference between the “what” and the “so what”. How many slides like the one on the left have you seen? The one on the right interprets the information so that your audience knows what your message is.

Non message oriented designs distract from the content



Sometimes we want to keep the audience's attention by introducing visual effects. In practice, these are noises and people might remember you for the animation but not so much for what your message was.

Brains perceive differences keep them where it matters

Avoid non useful differences between slides

Keeping your slides simple helps spotting differences

Replace the necessary animations by multiple slides with differences

Keep your lists with max 5 items and ideally 3

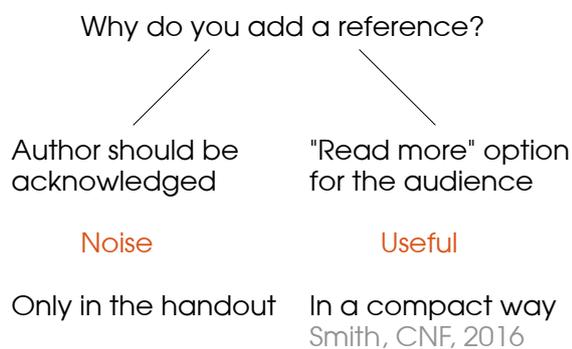
Brains have difficulties capturing more than 5 elements

It is most comfortable when limiting to 3

When more items, group them

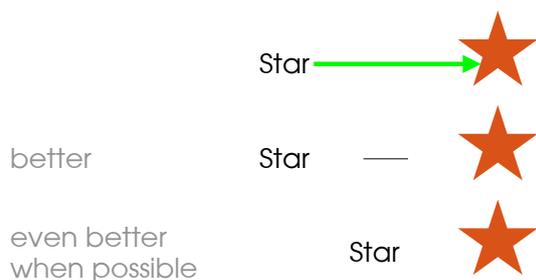
To be convinced, try to show a list of more than 5 items to an audience, you will see their face changing.

References can be useful but can also be noise



Presentations are not articles. If you need to acknowledge the work of someone, of course do it, but in the handout.

Take advantage of space and let it enter your slide



Don't hesitate to leave space on your slide. As silence will be to your speech, space is a powerful tool.

Fonts are important but don't overthink them

Avoid the common issues:

no serif

should be readable

not overrated

Keep the same font for all the slides

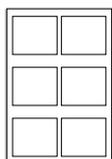
Careful with equations

Once you have settled for a font, use them throughout your presentation. Avoid the common pitfall by using a clear font without serif. Pay attention to the use of equations.

Size often matters

Too big and it uses too much space

Too small is difficult to read

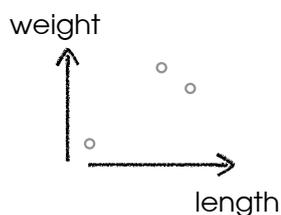


Tips: print your slides 6 per A4
it should still be readable

Use table for overview, graphs for connections and trends

Same data, two different messages

| | weight (kg) | length (m) |
|----|----------------|---------------|
| P1 | 21 | 10 |
| P2 | 18 | 12 |
| P3 | 10 | 5 |



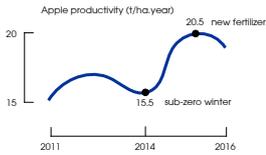
There is an intrinsic difference between a table and a graph. The table will provide an overview of some data without direct link. The graph is used to emphasise a trend.

To make your graphs effective reveal what they have to say

Average number of apples a month

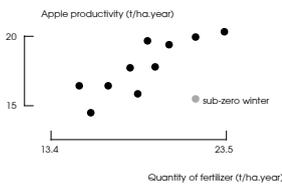


Bar charts reveal comparison (use horizontal for clarity)



Lines reveal evolution

To make your graphs effective reveal what they have to say



Points displayed on two scale to explore correlation

Present equations as a block diagram

Only include equations to support the message

No need to be exhaustive

injection velocity

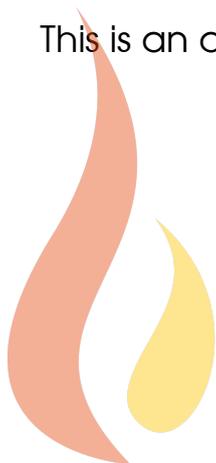
mass \rightarrow | \leftarrow injection diameter

Weber number at injection $We_{inj} = \frac{m v_0 d_0}{V_s}$

volume \rightarrow | \leftarrow surface tension

When using equations in your presentations, think of the last time someone placed a very long set of mathematical relations. I guess your brain wasn't enjoying the experience. Help your audience by placing the information where they need to see it.

This is an amazing template



It is

- beautiful
- noiseless
- effective
- like my colleagues are doing

Francesco Contino
Training SB Interview
Vrije Universiteit Brussel



41/62

This is an amazing template

It is

beautiful
noiseless
effective

Only when absolutely necessary
indicate page and structure

Black region to extract it
from slide content

(optional) can be used
to convey the structure

No mention of total
number of slides

When the structure and/or the page
number needs to be provided (I sug-
gest you try without most of the time),
you can apply this trick.

Convey the structure when needed and only when it makes sense

Where is structure added?
When the public knows why it matters
to listen to you.

What is needed in this structure?
Only what is not obvious.
Forget intro and conclusion.

Structure needed in all slides?
Generally no.

A table of content is better displayed when your audience understands why it is important that they pay attention. As a presentation is different from a book, don't use a table of content the same way. Wait until after the main message (or together with it) and try to be concise. No need to add points like "introduction" or "conclusion", most of the presentations have these parts and always at the beginning and end, respectively.

Delivering the best presentation starts with a **lot of rehearsal**

Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse

Ask colleagues or
record yourself

Use physical feedback

Pay attention and learn transitions

A physical feedback is best used only for rehearsal and can be a chair placed next to you to feel when you move.

Ideally, you should be able to know by heart what will be the next slide.

Timing is everything

Timing: 1 slide = 1minute (first approx.)

Generally faster in front of the audience

It should feel slow during rehearsal
to be at the right speed for the public

With time, less is always better

When complexity is needed deal with it effectively

When a long piece of text is included
read it with the public

Complicated words:
know by heart or simplify

Avoid jargon and acronyms,
be precise but not too narrow

To identify if it is jargon, try it on your
dedicated jury. Specifically ask them if
they have found you have been using
jargon or unknown acronyms. When
possible avoid altogether.

Check your panel keywords to see the level of expertise

[http://www.fwo.be/nl/mandaten-financiering/
predocorale-mandaten/doctoraatsbeurs-strategisch-
basisonderzoek-\(sb\)/lijst-onderzoeksthemas/](http://www.fwo.be/nl/mandaten-financiering/predocorale-mandaten/doctoraatsbeurs-strategisch-basisonderzoek-(sb)/lijst-onderzoeksthemas/)

During rehearsal focus on your position
and take the time to look in the eyes
of your audience.

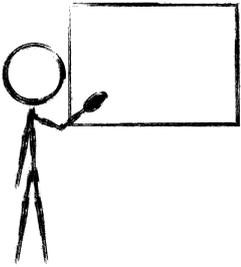
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Nervous is less trustworthy, a confident stance helps a lot



Ski boots to avoid nervous legs

Look at your public and
convey emotions with your face

Use hands deliberately
without noise

Be sincere

That is probably a good reason to record yourself. You will see the verbal noises or gesture you introduce while you talk. Pay attention to reduce them as much as possible. Once you know them, it will be much easier to remove them.

Remove all verbal noise and keep voice variation as a signal

You did it for your slides,
do it for your speech

Aim for effective redundancy

Adjust voice to situation and content

Take questions as opportunities to get time to talk again

Listen wait until the end and
make sure you understood

Repeat/rephrase if needed
and address directly the person

Think to make a short and
well constructed answer

Answer with a positive "yes and ..."
instead of a defensive "no but ..."

Acknowledge when you don't know and concisely segue to what you do

"That's a nice point, my supervisor and I
didn't think about this.
I will surely include this in my research plan.
This make me think that ..."

Acknowledge when you don't know and concisely segue to what you do

acknowledge expertise ↙

↘ divert the blow

"That's a nice point, my supervisor and I
didn't think about this.
I will surely include this in my research plan.
This make me think that ..."

|
show you're
knowledgeable

|
flexibility and
researcher attitude

Use this strategy wisely

Don't overdo it,
jury has a b*** detector

You still need to know very well
your topic and around it

When you go back to something you know
be concise and make sure it is relevant

Sometimes you will encounter aggressive questions. In these cases, stay calm and play the "surprised card". Respectfully avoid entering a debate in front of everybody else (most probably not interested).

Deal with **aggressive questions** as an expert in Ju-jitsu

Stay calm and wait a little
to produce a "loud silence"

Be surprised when you feel the attack
is not justified

Understand the concern but if based
on assumption, question it back

When not understanding,
suggest to discuss it later

Interview try-out to fine tune your presentation and Q&R

You should already be
very well prepared

Think about the most difficult questions
you think you could have

All other candidates play
the jury and ask questions

Prepare for D-Day: avoid any surprise

Presentation should be sent in advance.
Send also pdf and have it on USB stick.

Careful with compatibility of powerpoint
equations, videos, images, ...

Bring your own laptop as backup plan

Prepare for D-Day: avoid any surprise

Read read read
Get a lot of knowledge in your domain

Anticipate the questions
practice with your colleagues

Check the evaluation criteria
http://www.fwo.be/media/728001/sb2017-scorerooster_en.pdf

D-Day: some details to feel more comfortable

5-6 experts + 1 FWO representative
from academia and industry

12-16 candidates per panel
2 experts read your application

5 minutes presentation
15 minutes *interactive* discussion

You are evaluated on three criteria: you, project, and potential

You Competence as researcher
project insight, critical mindset

Project Scientific quality (relevance, challenge)
Research approach and feasibility

Potential Impact and intended application