# Stop Reading Your Slides

## Idea In Short

Never read slides aloud: audiences read faster than you talk, it insults them and it broadcasts nerves. Reverse-engineer the audience and venue, know your story, cut half the pages, structure answer-first, design clean slides, scenario-plan hostile questions, get brutal feedback and practice aloud.

## The Kick to the Shins

Sitting through an hour-long meeting where the presenter reads every slide aloud is painful, each page landing like a kick to the shins, and the discomfort carries a professional warning: this is exactly what clients see and feel when consultants read their decks. The fix begins with a role correction. The human is the main event, and the PowerPoint is only supporting cast.1 Slides exist to give structure to the narrative, remind the speaker what to say and provide the visual element of the story, and of course they must also be logically structured, neatly assembled, relevant and legible. The deck should be good. It should never be the speech.

## Why Reading Fails

The case against reading slides runs seven counts deep. People read faster than anyone can talk, so the audience finishes each slide before the speaker does. Reading is insulting, implying the room cannot be trusted to read for itself. It signals lack of preparation, nerves or both. It turns the presenter's back to the audience, producing an awkward human carousel. It implies the words on screen are everything, with nothing more behind them. It is habit-forming, because reading one slide predicts reading them all. And it replaces what audiences actually came for, since presenters should tell stories, not recite scripts.

## Prepare Before You Design

The first tips happen before any slide is built. Reverse-engineer the purpose, audience and venue: how informed is the audience, is the meeting for information, decision or workshop, is the slot twenty minutes or two hours, is the setting a table conversation or a stand-up before a large group, and if the session runs on video conferencing, what breakout, survey or chat mechanics are needed? Then know your story and sell it: what story do you want to tell, where are the gaps needing evidence, how should the audience feel afterward and what is the call to action?2 A presenter who can answer those questions without slides has already stopped needing to read them.

## Cut, Structure, Design

The middle tips shape the deck itself. Cut the fluff, because executives are notoriously busy, distracted and impatient, and this is not high-school math where all work must be shown; cut the page count in half and move the evidence of diligence to an appendix. Structure the content logically, answering first with an executive summary up front, providing an overarching framework so the audience can follow the thinking and the presenter cannot get lost, answering questions before they are asked and collecting early head-nods of agreement. Design clean, direct slides: titles that say something, since they are the page's most valuable real estate, one or two points per page, graphs that make the point visually obvious, presentation-English phrases rather than full sentences and numbers that drive the point home.

## Rehearse Like a Professional

The final tips are pure preparation. Scenario-plan the questions by listing the five trickiest ones you could face, reframing the presentation to get ahead of them and building the smart, lazy appendix slide that defends against each criticism with data. Get brutal feedback by asking a colleague to pick the deck apart like a grumpy senior manager, keeping the good suggestions and discarding the rest. Then practice, because executive presence rides on preparation: record yourself and hear what you actually sound like, aggressively kill the filler words, um, kind of, you know, like and so, rehearse as if explaining to a cousin who knows nothing about the topic and hold eye contact when delivering the real thing.3

## Breaking the Habit in Practice

Slide-readers rarely know they read, so the cure starts with evidence: watch one recording

of yourself presenting and count the seconds spent facing the screen. Then re-engineer the deck to make reading impossible, converting sentence bullets into three-word prompts that force you to supply the connective story from memory. Rehearse from the printed titles alone, since a presenter who can deliver the narrative from titles has internalized the argument rather than memorized the paragraphs. In the room, stand where seeing the screen requires deliberate turning, use the confidence-monitor glance rather than the wall stare and treat each slide transition as a cue to face a different section of the audience. Relapse happens under pressure, usually at the hardest slide, which is precisely the one to over-rehearse. The habit breaks in weeks once the deck stops enabling it.

## The Standard the Rate Implies

The closing test is occupational honesty. A consultant billing 250 to 500 dollars an hour is a professional, and the client expects professional delivery. What would anyone think of an actor reading his script on camera, a chef repeatedly consulting the recipe mid-service or a pharmacist looking up every answer online while the customer waits? The ten thousand hours of craft are the price of the rate, and the presentation room is where they show. Know your story, trust your preparation and let the slides support you. Do not read them.

- 1Presentation
- 2Storytelling
- 3Public Speaking

## Summary

Reading slides turns a professional into an awkward human carousel. The deck exists to structure the narrative, prompt the speaker and add visuals, while the human sells the story. Prepare like the professional your rate claims: rehearse, cut fluff, anticipate questions and keep eye contact.