

Becoming a StageRebel

A beginner's guide to public speaking

Introduction

There comes a day in your life when you are asked to present something for the very first time. This can range from a simple explanation on a certain product, a story to tell your family or friends, and even a full blown 30-minute talk on a stage in front of an audience. My guess is that you are reading this book, because you just got a request like this, and you are searching for some guidance on where to get started. It might even be so, that you just went through a bad experience, and you want to make sure this doesn't happen again.

If the above sounds like you, this is the book for you! It will not teach you how to become a Ted Talker or Keynote speaker, but it will provide you with valuable information on how to prepare yourself, control your nerves, and teach you how to learn from this experience. The goal of this book is to simplify the ride, to get you on stage, and enjoy the feeling of accomplishment at the end!

Everything you will learn in this book is aimed at speaking on a stage in front of an audience, but you can use all of these learnings in other settings as well. For example, giving a presentation to coworkers about a new project that is launching soon, to pitch an idea to management or even for telling a story to family and friends. You will find that there is an increased focus on engaging your audience, and to make them see what you see, hear what you hear and above all... To make them feel what you feel.

This eBook is provided free of charge, and I invite you to share it among family, friends, and coworkers if you like it. I also invite you to follow me on social media and share your opinions. All of this will support me in my mission to reach as many people as possible and share this knowledge with them as well!

I will try to update this eBook at the end of each quarter, so make sure to check out my website (stagerebels.com) for the most up to date version and lots of additional information on this subject.

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Your very first invite to speak...

There comes a day in your life when you are asked to present something for the very first time. Chances are you will experience some nerves and you start to wonder where to start and what to do? You might even feel nervous as all these thoughts are racing through your mind!

When I got requested for the first time, I right away noticed that I got nervous and started making excuses to get out of the event I was supposed to speak at. I was thinking about taking holidays exactly on the date of the event or calling in sick in the morning. Off-course, I knew I wouldn't do any of that as this was part of the promotion I just got, and I respected my manager too much to leave him standing like that. I went on and started searching on how to prepare, but it went slow, and I had to redo my preparations constantly! I now know that I made a huge mistake. I ignored the nerves...

These nerves I was experiencing were taking my focus away. They made me aware of the fact that I was the new kid on the block in between all these trained speaking giants and they made me think I was going to fail no matter what! If only I had tackled these first jitters from the start, my preparations would have been so much easier...

Handling those first nerves

If you are experiencing these nerves as well, it is good to know that you are not alone. Research shows that over 75% of people are experiencing nerves, or even fears, when speaking in public. Even the most experienced and professional speakers admit they feel nervous before going on stage.

There are many reasons to feeling nervous and the best thing you can do at this stage, is to recognize these nerves. In fact, it is good that you are experiencing these. It means you are challenged into doing something you care about. It will put you on top of your game!

If the nerves are not that bad, you could decide to just skip this chapter, but there are a few things that you could do to minimize them. Don't worry, I won't go all brain doctor on you, it is simply the search on what it is you are nervous about and ask yourself if it is needed?

From the coaching sessions I have been doing so far, there is a clear top 3 of reasons why people get nervous or afraid of speaking in public.

1. What if I lose my text?
2. What if I fall?!
3. What if people find me boring?

There are many more reasons, but to keep this book a little bit shorter, lets stick to these three. I want to start with number 2, what if you fall? Well, the simple answer is "Get up!". Honestly though, how often have you seen a video gone viral about someone who fell on or off stage? I never have seen one of those and never heard about anyone in my surroundings fall on stage. I heard a story once about a more professional speaker who was looking at his slides, took a step back and fell off stage. Luckily it wasn't a high stage, so it was a rather soft landing, but what he did was insane. He slowly got back on his feet, climbed the stage again... Paused for a second and said, "I can see you better from up here..." and he went on with his story. The audience loved it and rated his performance with a 5 out of 5.

Now this is a great story but again, ask yourself, how often have you seen people falling on or off stage? If you are experiencing anything like items number 1 and 3, read this book and you will learn how to get control over these kinds of things! To give you a short answer though, having a great story and practicing a lot will help you in remembering your text, but also to captivate your audience! Take them into your experience...

In all honesty, I always forget my lines but because I build my stories in a logical order, it is easy and fast to get back on track. On top of this, I use my slides to build in some reminders for myself just in case I do forget. All of this is also included in this book.

The above is probably not going to take your nerves fully away, something with “easier said than done”, but it might help you in understanding where they come from, channel them into a positive thing, or accept the fact that they are part of the game.

The key to success is your audience.

I mentioned the audience before already and you will read that word many more times in this book and the reason for this is because your audience is the key to your success for multiple reasons.

Many presenters, especially newer ones, don't realize that they are on stage to entertain the audience in some form or another. You are there to inform them about something, teach them something, or to convince them to act on something, not to show how good you are at public speaking. Off-course, this changes when you are an actor or a comedian, but even they are there to entertain the audience.

Another thing to remember is that your audience took time out of their busy schedule to be there, sometimes flew across continents and staying over in hotels. The least that we can do as presenters is to make sure they get something in return.

If you can make sure that your audience gets what they expected or more, they will love you for it and that brings many rewards for you as well. First, all the praises and feedback you will receive afterwards simply work your ego in a positive way. Next, your network will grow. People will share your name and even better, your message. If you have the wish to grow in any industry, getting some stage time and mouth to mouth commercial will get you where you want to be much faster and easier.

The easiest way to really engage your audience is by making sure your story line is good, which can be done by storytelling, something we will cover in a later chapter. A good story can help your audience to feel what you felt, to visualize what you saw and even to smell and taste the same as you did while going through the experience. Just think about the best movies you ever saw, probably you liked it so much because you became part of the story. You might have even cried a bit when your favorite character died...

Again, we will dive deeper into storytelling in a later chapter, but going further in this book, you need to remember that you are doing all of this for your audience.

But it is you, who holds the key. (The number 1 tip!)

So, based on the previous text you should understand that I value the audience a lot! I truly believe that it is your audience that will decide whether your presentation was a success or not, but it is you who holds that key! No, I am not talking about you giving a perfect show here... I am not saying you need to remember every single line and be a performer on stage... Actually, quite the opposite...

There is 1 tip I received, which has proven to be the most valuable one over all these years. The one that often set me apart from others on the same stage, but also the one that is easiest to forget about... Both on stage as well as in real life...

You ready for it?

Be yourself...

That's it, nothing more, nothing less... Just be yourself. Don't try to be better, funnier or look more professional. Just be yourself. The best thing about this is that you don't need to try so damn hard to be someone else. This one comes natural... Audiences in general are humans and humans have a natural build in radar to detect bullshit. If you try to be someone else, they will know, and you will lose any and all credibility you might had. Goodbye audience engagement and welcome to the “mediocre class”. So, one more time.... Be yourself!

Getting the right tools for the job

Before starting to prepare for your presentation, you want to make sure you have the right tools for the job. Having these ready will simply take away headaches down the line and lower your stress levels.

Personally, I like to keep it as simple and flexible as possible, and I work both digital as well as old-school analogue. For now, I would suggest to just follow along with my way of doing things to avoid any struggles while trying to find your way. Leave those struggles for next time, when you are a bit more experienced.

The first thing I use is the “notes” app on my phone. In my case this is Apple Notes. What I like with Apple Notes is that it also synchronizes with my laptop and iPad, and this provides me with quick access to change things while on the road or behind my desk. Alternatives to Apple notes are off-course Evernote, and I am pretty sure that Google will also have some form of notes in their suite.

In some cases, I will go old school and use a simple pen and paper, but this is becoming less often.

The second tool I use a lot is off-course PowerPoint. This is simply the most used software for slideshows, so why not use it. In some cases, I will also use the Apple equivalent (Keynote), but in recent years I started liking PowerPoint better, and given nearly all venues support PowerPoint, it just makes live easier.

The last set of tools are the old school sharpie and post-it notes. A lot of post-it notes, different colors and sizes, each with a purpose. I have tried out many digital versions as well, but when it comes to the creative process, the analogue stuff simply is unbeatable for me.

Step 1: Gathering the right information

Whenever you will give a presentation, there are certain things you simply need to know and by making sure you know them early in the process, you can eliminate some of those pesky nerves. These things do depend on what type of presentation you will be giving, but for the sake of simplicity, let's assume that you were requested to give a presentation to an external audience at an event.

If your circumstances are different, then use the text below as an example to decide on what you need to know for your presentation.

The information below is most often provided to you together with the request, but if not, speak to the person that asked you to present in the first place or if there is a host for the event, talk to them.

THE TOOLS I USE FOR THIS PART

Notes app (or pen and paper) to write down whatever you learn.

For this part of my preparation, I create a paper note where I scribble down everything I learn. I try to keep it short (1-liners or buzzwords) and to the point, but also try not to miss any important detail.

What is the event about?

Make sure you understand what the event is about. This information will help in shaping your story. If you need to decide on the topic of your presentation yourself, make sure it aligns with the event. With this information, you can also get some first insights into the type of audience you will be facing, but more on that later.

Theme for the event

Many events have themes which are in addition to what the event is about. The year of writing this book the event of the company I work for has the theme of its 30-year anniversary, while the event itself is still about our company giving an update from all sides of the business to our members, combined with some mingling among each other. This means that this year, I will change the company logos on the slides with an anniversary version and probably I will look back at what I was doing 30 years ago, when the organization started. In short, the theme is something you can add into your story or visuals to score some additional points.

Type of audience

This is something you want to check for sure. What type of people will there be in the audience? Are they from the same line of business as you are, or do they have different roles? Can you use jargon, or do you need to talk in simplified terms? If you want your audience to understand anything you are saying, you will need to make sure you speak their language. You can simply ask this information from anyone who attended the event before, but most often the event website will have this information as well and you can always ask the host.

Size of the audience

Not to scare you, but there is a difference between an audience of 10 people or 1000 people. One setting is a more intimate and gives you an opportunity to become close with your audience, while a larger setting lends itself better to do some nice polling questions... You know the ones where you ask questions and start with: "By a show of hands...". Funny enough, I have more nerves with the 10 people audiences than with larger audiences, while most people I speak to have it the other way around.

Good to remember here is that you should ask 2 questions on this one. The first one being the number of registered visitors for the event and the second question should be about the amount of expected people sitting in on your presentation. This number can differ by a lot!

Topic or subject

Pretty important to know what you are going to talk about. It might be that you were already given a topic by the host or someone else, but in case you need to decide this yourself, make sure it aligns with the event. Quick tip here, make sure you feel comfortable with the topic itself. If you don't know anything about the topic, decline the invite!

Timeframes

One of the major pieces of the puzzle, how much time are you expected to be on stage? Is this including possible questions or excluding? And many more of these kind of questions... There is nothing worse than preparing for a 20-minute presentation and being rushed after 10 minutes because you are out of time. Trust me on this one... Been there, done that...

You need to have these answers and you need to have them before you start. So, ask them clearly how much time is allocated to presenting and how much time do you have for possible questions. By asking these two questions, you will receive the information you are looking for and all will be happy.

When & Where

I would say another piece of important information. What day and time are you expected to present and at which location? Additionally, ask at what time you are expected to arrive at the event and if it is an interesting event, ask for a ticket to spend all day. Nothing beats networking before going on stage, or just after.

Technology & Venue

Starting with a very important question when it comes to technology, can you use PowerPoint, Keynote, or any other presentation software? Sometimes your slides need to be delivered as a PDF. Better know this in advance and adjust if needed. In general, you will see that PowerPoint is the go-to tool, while PDF is very often accepted as well, but be sure to ask.

Another thing you could ask is about the venue and what kind of technology they are using. Will you get a microphone or not, if so, what type of microphone? Will you get one of those fancy little presentation clickers with a laser light inside or will someone click the slides forward? Will there be a beamer or a TV screen, where will it be located and more of these kinds of questions. A very important question to ask as well is if you need to bring your own laptop or will the slides be projected for you? If you need to bring your own, make sure you have the connection to the onsite beamer or TV Screen, which mostly is a HDMI connection, but in some cases, it can be USB-C. If they will project it for you, ask by when they need you to deliver your slides and where you need to send them to.

As you can see, these are some very basic questions to ask and simply knowing the answer to these questions will take away so many unknowns, that it will automatically lower your stress levels. I have had many conversations with people that work for these types of events, and you do not want to know how often things go wrong, just because people didn't know the basics and never bothered to ask.

Step 2: Creating your story

As already mentioned before, it is your story that will help you in captivating your audience and if your story is properly done, it can help you in staying on track and remembering your lines. Storytelling has been around for centuries and for good reasons! Storytelling is all about involving various elements and making them come together to create a compelling narrative. For example, you can present on the most boring topic in the world but by making it a story and including certain elements of storytelling, you can make your audience relate or live through the events you are describing and make this boring topic very interesting. Some of the elements that are often used are relatable characters or events, emotional connections, relevance to current news items, conflict and resolution, clear message or purpose and vivid imagery, and even flat-out fantasy, like a Disney movie. In a Disney story, they will first introduce you with the main character who somehow always falls in love with someone she can't have, a lot of things happen while trying to get the attention from a handsome prince and against all odds, they fall in love and live happily ever after. At the start of the movie, you pretty much know how it is going to end and yet, you are on the tip of your chair to hear about the middle part.

No worries, you don't need to know all of this right now and what you do need to know is explained over the next few pages, just realize that there is a lot to learn on this subject and personally it is a subject that I became very interested in.

In this chapter we will write our story and try to include some first elements of storytelling. Given the quality of the average presentation out there, I am pretty sure that this will already set you apart from many of the other presenters. At a later stage we will dive into voice control and body language, which will add a completely new dimension to your story, making it even better.

For now, let's focus on writing the story for your presentation, with storytelling in mind! We will do this in small steps to make sure you focus on one thing at a time. This will limit the chances of making mistakes due to multitasking and I noticed it increases creativity as well. Another good thing about doing it one step at a time, is that you can take breaks in between to clear your mind and be fresh before starting the next step. Also, don't be scared to change things while working through your steps. The first item we will tackle is the "about" and while you go through the other steps, you might find that your "about" needs changing. My presentations generally evolve throughout the entire process and go through many changes, which is good. It means you are continuously improving your story with new thoughts.

THE TOOLS I USE FOR THIS PART

Notes app (or Pen and Paper), Sharpie & Post-It notes.
For each item below I will tell you what I do as this changes per item.

What is it about?

In the previous chapter we found out what the event is about and now it is time to figure out what your presentation will be about. You probably already have a good idea of what it will be, but if in case you do not know yet, take a few minutes to think about this one. Make sure to keep in mind what the event is about, what the audience might be interested in and how you could incorporate the theme of the event in it as well. Once you have it, try to translate it into a just a few lines as sort of an introduction to what you will talk about, but make sure you don't give away too much. The first reason to do this is to make sure you have a guideline to follow in case you get stuck, while leaving out details will still give you the flexibility of playing around a bit. At the same time, this text can be used by the host of the event, who sometimes likes to add some information about your presentation to their website, agenda or share it on their social media accounts. If they don't do it, you might want to do this yourself to boost up your rankings a bit ;)

Write this down in your notes, so you can revisit it at a later stage if needed.

The key to defining your goal(s)!

One of the things I miss in many presentations (including my own, until recently), is a goal. What is the reason the audience should spend their time listening to you? Do you have a message or information to share, or do they need to take certain actions like deciding or buying something? Whatever it is, there must be a reason for your audience to stay seated and not fall asleep. These are your goals, also called “key-takeaways” or “key points” and are the items that you can use to keep you on track while writing your story and keep your audience engaged while you are on stage. They also add meaning to your presentation, which increases your credibility and make it more memorable.

I always try to stick with a single major key point, maybe 1 or 2 side points, but that’s it. Don’t overdo it, as your audience will need time to process. In case your presentation will span over multiple, unconnected subjects, you could decide to have a goal for each subject, but you need to make sure your audience understands that you are talking about something else. Each subject needs to be opened and closed and have a mini pause build in between them. Again, you want to give your audience time to process, something they normally do when presenters swap the stage.

Write down your goal(s) as one-liners for yourself in your notes.

Drafting your outline

You now know what your story will be about and what your key point(s) are that you want to bring to your audience, which means you are ready to work on your story. The first step that works best for me is to simply think about my story as “chapters” or “stages”. What are the stages the story needs to go through and what is the best order for these stages? This order is also the first step in making your story flow, like the Disney movie we spoke about earlier, but let’s tackle that later. First, we need to define these stages.

To give an example, let’s say you are presenting about the opening of your pizzeria in Amsterdam, which is a spin-off from a very successful pizzeria in Italy. You could start-off with saying something about the move to Amsterdam followed by the ingredients and menu. Then talk about the rich Italian history and finally, invite people to come by, showing them the address and website. Notice how this last topic is probably the goal of this presentation?

With this example in mind, you can create short and catchy headlines, which in this case will be something like “Moving to Amsterdam”, “Ingredients”, “Italian History” and “Try it yourself!”.

Don’t overthink them too much yet, as they will change, all you want for now are some guidelines to work that help you stay focused on what information you are trying to relay.

Write these down in your notes as bullet points, with bold text or in a different color.

Make it flow!

Knowing that things will still change, the next step will be about adding in details, and I always catch myself trying to practice the story already. This means that I will also start memorizing parts of it in the order I practiced them, so for me it’s best to think about the flow of the story, before adding in the details.

Sticking to the pizzeria example, the items we wrote down might seem right, but if you really look at it, the order is not logical. The history is currently the third in line, while it is the first thing that happened. This one simply must move to the beginning. On top of this, there is another thing to play with here, which might be a bit out of scope for this book, but I want to make you aware about this due to the power it can give to your presentation. The goal of the pizzeria presentation is to get the audience to eat the pizzas from the pizzeria in Amsterdam and one way to do this is to work on their emotions.

Have you ever had that feeling you wanted something so badly, but you couldn’t? It was either too expensive or simply not available in your region... Did this make you want it even more? I bet it did and this emotion is very easy to mimic with a topic like food.

In case of the pizzeria, we can mimic this by not saying anything about the Amsterdam pizzeria until the very end. We will just talk about the Italian pizzeria and its history, followed by the fresh ingredients that are used to make these nice pizzas and only when all that information is presented, the information about moving to Amsterdam will be shown. We will add more juicy details later, but you can already see that we will make the audience imagine some delicious pizzas, which will make them hungry, and since you are talking about the Italian pizzeria, it is out of reach, making them want it even more! Imagine what happens when you tell them, that as of today, it is available in their region... They will want to run and get it! Imagine what would happen when you add the juicy details to your story.

Based on the above, I would change the order of the headlines a bit to something like this: “Italian History”, “Fresh, Local Ingredients”, “Authentic wood burning oven”, “Menu from the chef”, “Moving to Amsterdam”.

I added some more details to the headlines, making them catchier and more descriptive, but still short. You can already start to see we are trying to make the audience in love with the idea of this fresh pizza, making them so hungry for something far away, and then bring it within reach!

Don’t forget to change your notes with any updates you made.

Adding the details

Once you are satisfied with your topics and the order they are in, it is time to write the details of the story. For each topic you have in your notes, start thinking about what you want to say about that topic. Make sure not to go into too much detail, we are looking for “medium level” details here. Sticking to medium level details will give you some flexibility in the next topic and on this level can be used as a guide in case you will create slides or when you start practicing.

Sticking with the pizzeria example, I wrote down some details that I think will add value to the presentation in some way and this made it look like the below in my notes.

- **Italian History**
 - 150 years old
 - Located in a little village called ...
 - 5 generations of chefs
 - 1 family
- **Fresh Local Ingredients**
 - Seasonal recipes
 - Buffalo mozzarella from local farmers
 - 100% locally produced ingredients
 - Fresh from the land
- **Authentic wood burning oven**
 - Authentic, hand build oven
 - As old as the restaurant
 - 100% natural oak wood
 - Has been burning since day 1
- **Menu from the chef**
 - ...
- **Moving to Amsterdam**
 - ...

As you can see, I keep it with one-liners. The story is starting to take shape now and it becomes clear what we want to say. Generally speaking, I will take a few days to let my mind come up with items to add or delete, but if I am in a squeeze for time, I will simply block an hour and find a quiet place to do this.

Breathe life into your story!

Once you divided your topics with multiple details, it is time to make it come to life! The first step is to again get some flow into your storyline by looking at the details and see if they are in the right order. The focus this time is to make sure your details flow among each other, but probably more important, that the order between the main topics also make sense. For example, the last detail within the “Italian History” topic, should smoothly flow with the first detail within the “Fresh Local Ingredients” topic. The goal here is to make it a single story from beginning to end, taking away the feeling that you are talking about different chapters. This might mean that you will need to reorder your topics again.

You can still use your notes for this, especially if you are on the move a lot, but I try to block some time in my agenda and find a suitable place where I can sit in peace and use a part of the wall for longer periods of time, preferably multiple days. I then write down each of my topics on a post-it and put them horizontally next to each other with a few centimeters of space in between. Once I did that, I write down each detail on a different color post-it and put them vertically underneath the topic they belong to as shown in *Figure 1* below.

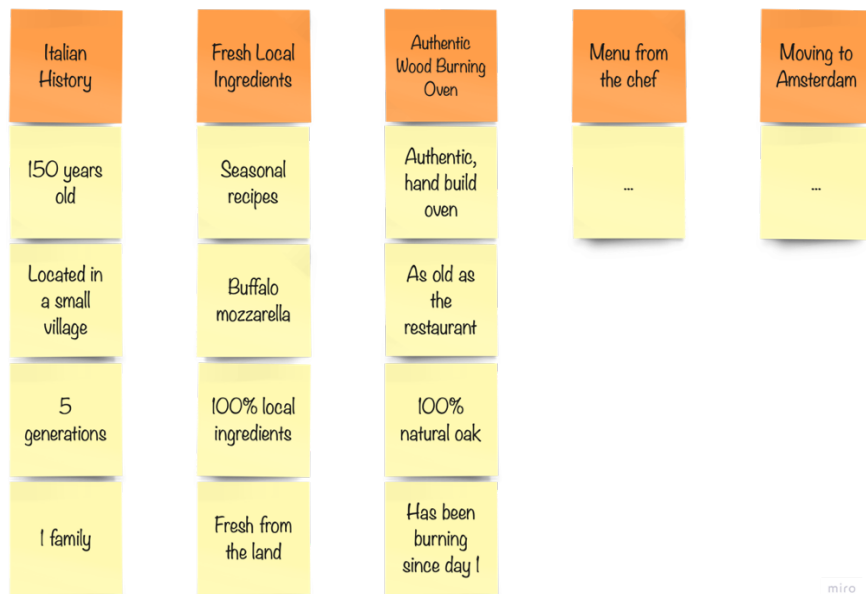


Figure 1: Example of post-it notes (in Miro)

The reason for using post-it notes at this stage is due to the flexibility they give when you want to change the order. You simply swap them around as you please, until it feels right.

Once I have everything written down, I start with reading the details in order out loud and see how it feels and sounds. Most often, I will find new topics that are important enough to add to the list, while I will also call out many things that I will not write down. We are still working on a “medium” level of the story, so the really small details I will leave out for now. We will catch those later.

While reading out the details on the post-it’s, I listen for the flow of the story. Does it make sense? Can I flawlessly go from one topic to the next or is it missing something? As said before, don’t worry about reorganizing it all if that makes your story better.

In the case above, I see 2 details that align so nicely, being the “Italian History / 150 years old” and the “Authentic Oven / As old as the restaurant”. These two basically say the same thing and can be used as a nice bridge between the two topics. This means that we need to reorder those topics and details.

I would also change the order of the “Italian History” to start with the location and the information that it has been in the same family for 5 generations, after which we can mention how old it is before flowing to

the wood burning oven being just as old. From there we can go to saying something about it being hand build and burning since day 1 on 100% locally cut, natural oak wood. Since we are already talking about local wood, you can make an easy bridge towards the local ingredients, but then I get into a bit of a jiffy. There is a nice flow from the “fresh of the land” and the “seasonal recipes”, which can flow well into the menu from the chef, but we also have the “mozzarella”, which I think really adds value. We don’t want to lose value but at first glance I don’t see an easy way to fit it in, so it’s time to stir things up a little. We want to say the mozzarella is produced by local farmers, which we can combine with the local ingredients. Next, we change the post-it for the “fresh from the land” to “fresh from the land or farmer!” resulting in very tasty “seasonal recipes”.

By now, I think you get the idea. The goal is simply to make sure everything flows nicely together, creating a solid and smooth story. I will leave you to think about the last two topics in the pizzeria example, but after all the above changes are made, the new order is show below in *Figure 2*.



Figure 2: Final version of pizzeria (in Miro)

Once you are completely happy with the result, make sure to update your notes again.

Openings & Endings

Not covered before yet, but aside from a great story, there are two more things that can make or break your presentation. These are your opening and ending. The opening is all about getting your audience’s attention from the start, while your ending has the focus on delivering the punchline, making it memorable!

You can argue if you should already think about openings and endings at this stage. Some say that your story will dictate your opening or ending, while other, including myself, believe that this goes both ways. It is my believe that having a medium level story gives you enough information to create your opening, while also providing you with some flexibility. At this stage, you are not stuck yet to the story you created, you can still easily adjust it to suite your needs.

Let’s start with the opening. By default, people seem to open with an introduction of themselves. Something like “Hi, my name is Tim, and I will talk about a pizzeria today”. Sounds like this makes perfect sense, but believe it or not, your audience will probably fall asleep or check out at minimum. Instead of using an opening like this, think about those great presentations you see on tv or on Ted talks. These people never start with an introduction of themselves. They generally start with some kind of relatable

story or witty anecdote, which make you laugh or get you interested in what else they have to say. In some cases, you can relate so much with the story, that you feel like the presentation is about you or someone you know. Whatever it is, it makes you sit on the tip of your chair, and you want to hear more. You become captivated!

This is the sole purpose of the opening, getting your audience captivated and wanting to know more about what you will share with them!

In case of the pizzeria, we can even combine this with the goal of making the audience run for the pizza's by planting a mental image of a delicious pizza. This presentation can be started with a very short, but impacting story...

"Have you ever had one of those perfectly baked, fresh out of the stone oven pizza's, with a nice, lightly burned, crunchy crust? With the tastiest sauce and toppings and off-course that melted cheese oozing down the sides as you lift your slice towards your mount. You know which one I mean right? The ones you can only get in those authentic little Italian pizzerias. The ones that make your mouth wet by just thinking about it. Today, I will introduce you to one of these authentic little pizzerias, that makes the best pizza's..."

Just writing this makes me hungry for pizza already! What did this do to you?

You can see that the intention of an opening like this is all about making the audience want a pizza and it even ends with a bridge towards the first subject. The end of this opening can be adjusted to introduce yourself with something like *"My name is Tim and today, I will introduce you to one of these authentic pizzerias..."* or you can simply continue with your story right away and leave your name for the very end or just skip it.

Where the opening is about captivating your audience and prepare them for the story to come, the ending is to get them moving, or at the minimum, to make them remember your message. It is focused on one thing, and one thing only. Your goal!

You can have a great opening and a great story, but chances are that if you don't repeat your goal, your audience will forget about it before the applause has finished and therefor you want to repeat it one last time. You can use catchy or witty comments here, but the best is to keep it short and memorable. If you haven't done so before, you have the option to add your name in your ending as well.

For the pizza place, I would probably go for something like *"My name is Tim, and I am off to get myself one of these delicious authentic pizzas! Who's joining me?"* or without the name *"Man... I am hungry now! Who is joining me for one of these pizza's right here in Amsterdam!"*

As you can see, the goal of the pizzeria presentation was to get them to the Amsterdam pizzeria, and this is exactly what you are telling the audience to do with an ending like this.

Other great ways to end you presentation are by closing with a brainteaser, something your audience can think about during their trip home or to discuss with others over coffee. Something like *"What is it that makes these authentic pizzas so delicious? Is it the crust? The ingredients? All the above? Let me know your thoughts during the next coffee break!"*

Off-course, each presentation is different and in case of the pizzeria it was pretty easy to find some nice lines, but what really helps with your openings and endings is to have an extremely clear goal written down for yourself and especially with the opening, to have a clue on where your story will start so you can make a bridge.

Write down the opening and ending in full sentences, exactly as you wish to say them once you are on stage. The opening goes above your list of topics and details and the ending goes below, so you have them in order of occurrence right away.

Timing it all

This one is all about timing yourself, just to make sure you will stay within your given timeframe once you stand on stage. You already know how much time you have to present your story from your preparations and in this chapter, we will start practicing and shaping the final pieces of the puzzle to make sure you stay within this timeframe.

Be aware, it might very well be that you are faster or slower once you are on stage. This is completely normal as most people will start to talk faster once they are nervous. Chances are, during your practice rounds you will be less nervous compared to when you are on stage. For now, don't worry about this. As experience grows you will learn to compensate, but I do want to make you aware of this deviation.

Going back to the subject at hand. We need a new tool, a stopwatch. You will most likely have one on your phone, so use that one, otherwise, you can use websites like [online-stopwatch.com](https://www.online-stopwatch.com)

Next you want to take out your notes with your opening, details, and your closing text and all you are going to do is simply time yourself while you read these out loud. Don't try to add any new details yet, just read these out as they are. Start with your opening, then read out the items you have written down so far, but make sure you skip the topics in bold, and finish with your ending. Try to read in a normal pace, time yourself as you repeat this 3 times.

Try to calculate the average time of these 3 attempts and compare that to the amount of time you have on stage.

Let's start with the worst-case scenario, your current text is already longer or equal to the amount of time you are allowed to take on stage. This gives you two options; the easiest one is to ask for more time, which sometimes is no issue but in most cases, the host is on a tight schedule. Another option is to shorten either your story, opening or ending. You can even decide to skip your opening all together, but whatever you do, leave your story with the ending in place. These are the most important and thus you don't want to lose those. If you decide to shorten your story, simply cut out the pieces that add the least amount of value to your goal and make sure the rest of the story still flows. Basically, you go back to the chapter "Making it flow".

If you still have time left, you are in a better position, and we can proceed with the next step. Adding in the actual story, which is rather simple to do. For each of the details we have written down so far, you simply write underneath it what you want to say once you are on stage. Depending on how much time we still had left, we might make these one or two sentences. This will make your notes look something like this

- **Opening**
 - *"Have you ever had one of those perfect stone oven pizza's, with a nice, lightly burned, crunchy crust? With the tastiest sauce and toppings and off-course that melted cheese oozing down the sides as you lift your slice towards your mount. You know which one I mean right? The ones you can only get in those authentic little Italian pizzerias and make your mouth wet by just thinking about it. Today, I will introduce you to one of those authentic pizzerias..."*
- **Italian History**
 - Located in a little village called ...
 - *"Located in a little village called San Sigismondo, in the northern regions of Italy"*
 - 1 family
 - *"a single family decided to start their own pizzeria"*
 - 5 generations of chefs
 - *"5 generations later, it is still owned by the same family"*
 - 150 years old
 - *"making this little, authentic pizzeria 150 years old!"*
- **Authentic wood burning oven**
 - As old as the restaurant
 - *"What makes this pizzeria extra special, is the oven, which is just as old as the pizzeria itself!"*
 - Authentic, hand build oven
 - *"This authentic oven was hand build by the original founder himself....."*

As you can see, I try to keep the actual text short and aligned with the next piece of text. While writing these out, you need to make sure they flow from one line to the next and from one topic to the next, like an actual story or movie does as well.

Once you did this for all your details, it is time for another round of timing yourself. Same principle as before, but now you will read your opening, the text you just created and the ending. Again, time yourself as you repeat this 3 times to get a nice average again and keep repeating adding or removing the lines until you reach the amount of time you are allowed to take for your presentation.

In case you find yourself stuck and not having enough text to fill up your timeslot, see if you can add in another topic to talk about, just make sure it always aligns with your story and preferably also adds value to your goal. If you still can't make it long enough, think about some fun facts to add somewhere in between or maybe some interaction with your audience. You can also decide to make your opening or ending a bit longer.

One of the benefits I noticed with the approach described here is that it makes you practice your text already and you will for sure start remembering parts of it. On top of this, you will constantly find better ways of saying things as you are trying to make it smoother and I strongly believe this forces you to use your own words as well, helping you memorize it even better.

Make sure to keep updating your notes as you go so you always have the latest version at hand. Nothing worse than doing all this work and losing it in the process.

Once you reach this point, your story is ready and it is time to look at the next step, slides...

Step 3: To slide, or not to slide...

This is honestly a good question... Far too often, people seem to think that a presentation is always accompanied by a slide deck, while this is far from the truth. As you might understand from reading this book so far, it is all about bringing your story to inform your audience or getting them to perform a certain action. A slide deck, or any other visual aid for that matter, should be seen as an optional tool to help your audience in better understanding your message. It is only there to support you in bringing more life to your story, not to tell the story for you. Don't get me wrong, I encourage the use of visual aids if they help you bring your story more powerful, but don't get set on making a slide deck, while there are so many, far more powerful tools that can be used!

Visual aids

Visual aids can have an insanely positive effect on you and your audience and therefore I strongly recommend the use of them, but it is important to know which tool to use, when to use them and how to use them. Below I made a short list of items that you could use, but please use your imagination and always keep in mind what goal your visual aid has.

- **Slides**
PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Keynote presentation can help you show lots of information in many different ways. Text, images, charts, and graphs can be visualized to make information far more understandable and therefore it is widely used, but there is a pitfall which too many presenters fall into and therefore I made a separate section for this below.
- **Whiteboard / Flipchart**
Nothing beats drawing on stage! It gives you freedom to touch any topic you want and create your visual aid on the spot! Nice side effect, if you can draw clearly, people will see you as the expert.
- **Models & Demonstrations**
Talking about a new product? Make sure you have one in your hand while presenting, or better yet, give your audience the opportunity to touch it! Showing a brand-new product from images is one thing, but actually being able to touch the product as one of the first people in the world is a completely different level of engaging your audience!
- **Props**
Physical objects that will help your audience to visualize what you are talking about. An example would be to have a mock-up of an authentic pizza oven on stage, just to set the mood!

These are just the top 4 that I can think of quickly, but if you use your imagination, I am sure you can think of other things as well. My advice here would be to always prioritize any other visual aid above that of a slide deck, if possible.

Death by PowerPoint (Or any other slides)

Nope, I will not teach you everything there is to know about making slides in PowerPoint or Keynote, this is not within the scope of this book. If you need help with creating slides, simply google for "beginners tutorial PowerPoint" or put the same search in YouTube and you will find a million tutorials. Instead, I will focus here on what you should or should not do when creating slides. As said, the use of slide decks can be very powerful, but it does come with a lot of warnings which most often get ignored. I can strongly recommend watching the Ted talk from David JP Phillips called "Death by PowerPoint" as he made an amazing presentation, illustrating what you should and should not do. What you will find in this part of the book is basically a shorter version of his Ted talk and with a bit of a twist of my own.

Let's start with some guidelines to use when you create slides, so we can finish with the cool stuff, the tips and tricks on how I create my slides to power up my presentations.

- Limit the use of objects on your slides
Never fill your slide up with a lot of text, images or whatever. Especially not mixed!

There is this theory about keeping a maximum of 6 objects per slide to keep them clean and tidy. The reason for this is pretty simple. Each time you change slide, your audience will first scan your slide before listening to you again. Having too many objects on your slides, will make them lose their focus. In case you are using sophisticated objects, like graphs, keep the number of objects even lower, as your audience will take time to understand what they are seeing.

- Limit the amount of text to the bare minimum
Seriously, try not to use any text. Remember what I said about your audience scanning your slide before listening to you again? Guess what, they will also start reading before going back to listening. I always try to limit the amount of text to single words and in worst cases, have a maximum of 6 bullet points with a maximum of 6 words per bullet point. Anything more than that and I will either delete it or break it up over multiple slides. If you really need more, think about using the spotlight effect, where you highlight 1 bullet point at a time.
- Limit the use of effects
In general I would say, stick to a fade transition or what they call the “Morph” transition. Just make sure they are fast and clean. Otherwise, try to limit any effects on your slide to the bare minimum, preferably none at all. However cool these things look, they are distracting for both you and your audience. So, rule of thumb, only use effects when they are effective and make them fast (0,5s).

This to me is the top 3 of most important things to keep in mind, and this will probably limit you enough already if this is the first time you will create slides. There are a few more items to consider, like slide numbers, clashing colors and more of those things, but for this book, the top 3 is enough. Maybe one day I will write an article about this and post it on my website, or you can just go to YouTube and check out that Ted talk by David JP Phillips I mentioned earlier, “Death by PowerPoint”.

Creating your slides

Time to get some visuals added to your story! As said in the introduction of this chapter, I will not be teaching you how to use PowerPoint, Keynote, or any of the other tools you could use. That is out of scope of this book. What I will show you is how I build my slides.

Let me start again with mentioning something very important. Slides are there to power up your story, they are not there to tell the story for you! I really cannot say this often enough. Next to this, it is important to check with the host of the event if there is a template or if there are guidelines set out on how slide decks should be made. Often, companies have a template they would like you to use.

When you reach this point, you have your story ready, and you have practiced a couple of times as well. Chances are that you started to envision what your slides should look like. If not, no worries, we will get there as we walk through the steps.

In many cases, your slides will start with a title slide. A simple slide with the title of your presentation and your name on it. If it is for work, you might want to add your job title here as well, but this is optional. Some people also like to include the name and date of the event where they are presenting or some catchy sub-title or catch phrase on this same slide. Personally, I believe people know what date it is and I can only hope they know which event they are at... So, I like to keep it simple.. Title and name is all that is needed. Less information on your slides equals less chances for mistakes 😊

In general, the moment you go on stage this title slide is the one that will be shown on the screen. If you have a catchy opening, this is probably the moment you want to bring your opening, with your title slide on the background. Another option is when your opening involves a catchy one-liner or-so, to add one more slide after this one with just this one-liner in the middle of this bright white slide. Nothing else on the slides, just 1 or 2 lines of text.

The next slide that you often see is some sort of an agenda on what you are going to present, but be aware that this again is an optional slide. If you are talking about a single subject, it is ok to skip this one. In fact,

if you can do without, skip this one! It will only give your audience a reason to start reading instead of listening to you or worse, fall asleep. I believe some people will now start screaming at me as in school they were told to ALWAYS include an agenda... Sorry, I strongly disagree, but the choice is yours.

Now it is time for the fun stuff... Your actual presentation!

Take your story and read the first topic a few times and while reading, think about how to visualise what you are saying. If it is about numbers, you could include some nice graphs to show what you are talking about. (Excel is your friend here). Sometimes you might be able to show an image or an icon to make it more understandable and in some cases you will need some text or bullet points. (Remember, minimise your text!). Whatever you think of adding to your slides, the rule stays the same. Keep it simple and clean.

Since I am mostly doing technical drawings in the field of networking, I often talk about connections and changes within the network topology. This means that I often have the need to use multiple slides to show a change in the network. There are two ways of doing this, which depend on the size of what I am trying to show. In some cases the drawings I show are small and I can get away with putting them side by side and use two slides. The first one will only show the old drawing on the left and the second slide will show both the old and the new drawing to compare. This does mean that my story should be done in a way that I first speak about the old version and I click to the next slide as my talk progresses to the new situation. In case my drawings are larger, taking the whole screen, I first show the old drawing and then use a second slide with the new drawing. A simple "fade" effect will then show the difference between the two and again, as my talk progresses, I will click to the next slide to follow my story.

Looking at our pizzeria example, I really think the "less is more" principle is the most powerful in this case and I would probably skip a title slide all together or be save and create a title slide with only a black background, nothing else, followed by a single slide with a full frame picture of the little pizzeria in the mountains, smoking chimney and multiple generations of chefs in front of it. Just picture that image in your mind while reading through that first topic. Wouldn't that just be the perfect combination?

The above sounds quite simple and in all honesty, it should be. Creating clean and simple slides should not be to much work. The only reason for slides to take a lot of your time is because you either have to much stuff to put on a single slide and you don't know where to put it, which is not clean and simple, or because you are trying to do all these cool effects, which you shouldn't unless you really know what you are doing. Given you are reading this book, you probably don't know what you are doing, so stay away from using to many effects!

I think this is the moment in the book where I need to warn you for a very dangerous person. It is the person with the good advice. An advice I hear very often is about how many slides per minute of story you should have. The last one I heard is that each slide should be combined with a minimum of 1,5 minute of talking, otherwise it would be to chaotic! Please, do yourself and the rest of the world a favour and ignore this advice. Sure, they are right when they say it becomes to chaotic, but this is exactly why we are keeping our slides clean and simple with minimum effects. To take out the chaos. When it comes to deciding how many slides you need, there is only one person who can judge this and that is you! If you look at the above examples, there is a large difference between the network drawings and the pizzeria. One used multiple slides to show a single detail, while the other uses a single slide to show a full topic. In fact, one of my last presentations was a total of 8 minutes and had 12 slides in the deck, while my very last presentation was a total of 15 minutes and only had 4 slides. What I am trying to say here is that you are in control on how many slides you need, but remember that the majority of people prefer multiple slides with fewer objects compared to fewer slides with many objects each.

I got a bit lengthy there with the examples and additional information, but it is important to understand that there is no set rule to the amount of slides you need. It all depends on how best to power-up your story to give your audience and yourself a better experience.

As I said in the beginning, the way I do this is simply by reading my story and visualise in my head on what could help to bring my story over. Sometimes it can be a single slide that represents a full topic, other times it is multiple slides for a single detail. You are in charge here and only you can decide on this.

Additionally, once you created a slide for a part of your story, what I advise you to do is copy the part of the story in the presenter notes. This helps you again when you are practicing later on and often you will have access to your presenter notes while you are on stage. Handy for when you lose your story 😊

After this, it is simply a matter of repeating the above for your complete story, until you end up with the deck as you feel most comfortable with.

Step 4: Practice, Practice, Practice

With your story in hand and probably some slides created or other visual aids that you selected it is time for the final step in your preparations, practicing. Don't underestimate the power of this step as it really can help you in bringing your story together and limit the nerves you will experience once you are on stage! Know your story to the bone and you will recover from any memory loss within seconds!

Staged practice

I always practice my presentation in stages, starting with reading the full story out loud, where my focus goes towards to main topics. I do this to memorize the order of the topics and the first set of details that come with each of the topics. In general, I do this while sitting behind my computer or using my phone as a guide and I quickly try to put the notes away to see if I can do it from memory already. In case I have slides, I will use these as my guide with the presenter notes on my screen as well (In PowerPoint, use the "Presenter View").

Once I notice that I am starting to get the hang of it, I go into more details where I will practice each topic separately in full detail and push myself to know 80% of my story by heart. I repeat this for each of my topics. This is also the moment where I will start to take away my notes.

I go for memorizing 80% of my story as I know from experience that you will never reach a full 100% once you are on stage. Most of the time I tend to say things that were not in my notes and forget about things that were. By aiming for 80%, I leave myself some flexibility to improvise on stage as well.

I do always try to memorize the first few lines, basically my opening, as I know that this first minute is the hardest when it comes to controlling the nerves. By memorizing my opening by heart, I basically make sure that I don't have to worry about these nerves, and it helps me get in the flow. Once this beginning is done, the nerves settle and the rest pretty much flows easier.

As soon as I reach this stage for any of the topics, I will start with what I call the "offline practicing", which means that I will pretty much start telling my story to myself. I do this per topic and at the strangest locations and time. My commute is about an hour, so in the car is a nice place where I have peace and can talk out loud. My daughters often hear me practice in the shower as well or I simply go for a walk in the forest with the dog, where people will look weird at me. I honestly think these little "offline" sessions are the ones that help me the most. It is during these sessions where I will also start to focus on how I tell my story, for which I wrote the next section in this chapter, called "Voice and Body".

Last but not least, I will start to practice without any notes while standing up straight as if I am on stage already. If I have slides to show, I will beam these on the television and connect a presentation clicker to my laptop to help me click through my slides. My wife will often act as my audience, which she loves doing as this gives her a chance to give me some raw feedback, which I can use again to improve. Here to, the voice and body get a lot of focus and is probably the thing that gets trained the most!

Minor side note, practicing in front of your better half (or friends and family) will give you more nerves than anything else, so if you have the opportunity to do so... Use it! It will help you feeling more confident on stage.

Voice and Body

Your story can be insanely good and memorized to the bone, maybe even accompanied by the best visual aids in the world, but it is nothing if you do not bring it the right way. This is where your voice and body come into play. I have been in doubt on where to place this subject in the book as it is insanely important but given this is the moment I start paying attention to this part of storytelling, I think this is the best place to start talking about it as well.

In this book I will not go into full detail, mainly because I am still learning this part myself as well, but we will touch upon some of the basics as these can make or break your story.

Voices...

Let's start with using your voice. Most people, when nervous, tend to talk faster than normal and they start to sound like a robot. The majority of audiences will simply checkout in the first 10 seconds if you talk like this, so let's make sure we fix that before it happens. By using your voice in the proper way, you can make yourself relive that moment you are talking about. You can make it sound sad or happy, add a bit of excitement or madness, anything that fits the stuff you are talking about. The funny thing is that this also transmits to your audience, and they start feeling the same thing, making them feel the story as you tell it to them. There are many things you can control with your voice, but for this book I will stick to the top 3, which are Pitch, Pace and Volume.

Starting with pitch, which is the tone of your voice. You want to make sure you do not get the robot voice and the pitch is the one that can help you the most with this. Play with your pitch a bit to make sure you bring some feeling into your story. The majority of your story, you will stay within a limited range of pitch, but try to pick some moments in your story where you want to make it extra happy and increase the tone of your voice. Maybe there are some moments in your story where you want to make it more dramatic or scary and lower the tone of your voice. At these moments you want to go outside of your default limits. Exaggerate a bit to make it extra powerful.

The pace, or speed of your voice, is another aspect you can control and can have major impact on your story and your audience. The first thing to do is quiet obvious, slow down. Being nervous makes you talk faster and lose your audience. Next to talking in a pleasant pace, you can also play with it to add more depth to your story. For example, when you want to make something extra clear, slow down a bit. It gives a sense of drama and importance when you slow down for certain parts of your sentences. It makes your audience remember those parts of your story more easily, but also feel what you are trying to convey. The same counts the other way around, speed up a bit when you are talking about something that makes you excited. This excitement will transmit to your audience, making them more captivated and engaged. Closely connected to your pace, are your pauses. Do not keep on going from one subject to the next, take some pauses to breath and think about the next part. These pauses are good for you and your audience as they need time to process what was just said. Another benefit of timing your pauses is that they will also eliminate your filler words (uhhs, ahhs, so, like, etc...), and as we will soon practice, pauses enhance the drama effect as well.

Last in this list is your volume and I expect that you can already guess where this is going. Exactly, you can play with this one as well. First of all, think about your standard volume, especially when you are not wearing a microphone. Your voice should be loud enough so the people in the back of the audience can hear you as well. Next to your default volume, you can also play around with it a bit to emphasis certain words or sentences. For example, if you are talking about something precious, try lowering your volume just a bit, as if you are trying to whisper. The opposite counts as well, when you are trying to make a statement, increase your volume just a bit to make sure it pops out!

Actions speak louder than words, so lets do a little practice on this.

Take the following sentence and say it out loud in a normal voice.

"Two men were walking down a path in the forest and as the night fell, they realised... They were all alone..."

Now we will do it again, but instead of just reading it out loud, try to lower the pitch, and speed of your voice just a little bit for the first part. Then take a small pause, lower your pitch and volume a bit more for the last bit and take some nano pauses between each word. Make it sound scary and exciting...

Decrease pitch and pace:

“Two men were walking down a path in the forest and as the night fell, they realised...”

Decrease pitch and volume a bit more, take a small pause between each word..

“ They were all alone...”

Did it work? Are you feeling the fear of what might happen next???

Let's do it one more time, but now we do the opposite, just for the fun of it...

Increase pitch and pace:

“Two men were walking down a path in the forest and as the night fell, they realised...”

Increase pitch and volume a bit more and don't take pauses, make it sound happy..

“ They were all alone...”

With this knowledge in your hand, try listening to yourself for the next few days when you speak to other people and pay close attention to your pitch, pace, and volume. If you are up to it, try playing around with it a bit as well and you will be surprised how people act different on what you say.

Bodies...

As mentioned, next to your voice, there is also your body language which can have a massive impact on your story and the reason for this is already mentioned in a previous chapter, where I mentioned that people will first scan your slides (visual) before listening to you again (auditory). Whenever someone talks, but keep their body in a standstill, it somehow distracts from the story. This does not mean that you need to start running around the stage while waving your arms, as this will have the same effect and make you look like a fool, instead try to use something that is called “functional movement” or “functional gestures”.

If you are one of the many people that are wondering what to do with your hands when you are on stage, pay special attention to the next part, as this is where that question will get answered.

The best way to explain what functional movement is, it is by given the example of talking about something small, while showing something big with your arms. Doing this makes it very confusing for your audience as they hear you say one thing, but the visual cue they are receiving says something different. And this is all it is. Use your hands and arms to visualize what you are saying. Something small can be shown with your thumb and index finger nearly squeezed together, while something big means stretching your arms apart with as much space between your hands as possible. To show an increasing line, you make a diagonal motion with your hand from your right bottom to your left top (this makes it look increasing for your audience). If you are talking about “hearing” something, put your hand at your ear as if you are listening and more of these kinds of motions. Using your hands and arms like this, will emphasize what you are saying, helping your audience to better understand, and feel your story.

When it comes to your feet, you can pretty much do the same. A bad example in this one would be to welcome everyone in the audience, while taking a step back. The words you use say they are welcome to step in your circle, while you are stepping out of it... Not really a welcoming feeling. Instead, try taking a step forward when welcoming people and open your arms as if you are going to hug them! Make them feel like you mean it. Another thing not to do is walk around the stage from left to right, this shows you are nervous, and the audience will feel it as well. Instead, try to stand firm with your feet about a shoulder's width apart. Turn your body a little bit to the left and look at the audience on the left side of the stage and do the same on the right side. Take a step forward when you are trying to make a point and slowly step back to your default position again. When you are talking about something small, you might consider

bending through your knees and lean a bit forward. Especially if you are going to whisper with it. Sometimes your story would benefit from putting one leg forward or one leg back. The trick is to align your movements with your story and see what works best.

Another good practice, also in your daily live, is to turn your body towards the person that you are speaking to. On stage this can be done by actually walking towards someone when they ask a question or when you speak to someone in your audience directly. Off-course, you stay on the stage, but stand on the edge as close as possible to the person. This will connect you to them and make it more personal.

Personally, I can't stand still. My legs need to move, so I will walk around a little and I try to combine this with looking at different parts of the audience. Unfortunately for me, this still makes me look like a nervous wreck, which is my downfall every time I stand on stage. I am in peace with this now, but I did make it my personal improvement project.

Step 5: Doomsday!

After all this practicing, the day is finally there. The day that you can take the stage and share your story with the world!!! Well... A part the world of it at least...

Chances are that your mind will start to play tricks on you and make you doubt everything you did so far and bring fears you thought you had under control. No worries, this is normal. As said before, over 75% of people are nervous of speaking in public and the other 25% is probably lying about it, but again, this doesn't help you. This chapter will first go into these last-minute jitters, followed by some additional tips to help you get the most out of this experience! Trust me... An experience it will be!

Prepare for the day

In the morning, just before you head out to the location where you will be giving your presentation, there are a few things to remember. Most of these things I take care of a day in advance already, just in case something is missing or not working, making sure I have time to fix things before they add any stress to my already nerve-racking day.

First of all, dress the part. Get your clothing ready, ironed and all. The events I speak at are not black-tie events, so I can wear pretty much my everyday clothing. I will make sure I wear clean clothing and I always brush up my shoes a bit. Most likely there will be pictures, so at least make yourself presentable.

Tech Check is another thing that I do a day in advance. I make sure my laptop is working, fully charged and that I have a charger with me in my bag. If I have slides, I will make sure I have the correct version on my desktop for quick access and close all other apps, including turning off my notification. The same counts for my presentation clicker. I always have it with me, just in case, together with a set of spare batteries to be sure. Another very important thing is to make sure you have all the needed connections available and since I have a MacBook with USB-C connections only, this means taking a USB dongle with me as well.

Controlling your jitters

Again, being nervous is absolutely normal and there are several ways of keeping these under control.

The first thing that really helps me is by being early to the event. There is nothing more stressful than being rushed, so try to eliminate this by being early. This gives you time to do a few things that will help, and it also helps the host or organizer to not get stressed. Good to know is that events are often scheduled to the minute and for an organizer to know that their speakers are in time, will really help them in keeping their cortisol levels down. Being early is also good to enable you to do something that always seems to help me, go on stage before there is an audience. Get familiar with the stage and audience setup. Check where the audience is sitting, how the technology is organized and where you should be standing. Better to have this figured out ahead of time, compared to being surprised once you get on stage to present. In case it is a bigger event, there is a good chance that there will be supporting staff, like sound people and photographers. If you want to have a nice picture of yourself on stage, talk to the photographer and ask if he can share a nice one with you. In general, they will love to do so when you are new to speaking. Just make sure you tag them if you share the picture on social media and give them the credit they deserve. When it comes to the people of the sound, they have a lot of experience with speakers, so talk to them. They might surprise you with some tips and tricks that helped other presenters as well.

I strongly advise against practicing your full slides again on the day itself unless you have a few hours to spent. Instead, focus on getting your opening and your goal into your head. You probably recognize that beginning something is pretty hard to do but soon after you will be flying through it? This happens with presenting as well. If you can get yourself started and you practiced your story well enough, you will just fly through it, so having your opening stuck in your head, will smoothen your startup and the rest will follow. If possible, practice your opening on stage without audience. Don't worry about the people that work at the event, they are used to this.

Make sure you go to the toilet about 30 minutes before going on stage, even if you think you don't have to. Nothing is worse than having to worry about that part of life if you are about to go on stage. Something I have never heard in any training or from any coach, if you are afraid of leakage, take some sanitary papers with you. For the guys among us, try them out a few times before to get used to the feeling and put your pride aside. Women know where to get them, probably have them in their purse, but for you guys, just go to the drugstore and get some.

I always experience restless legs just before going on stage and to cope with these, I will stand up a few minutes before I need to go on stage. This also helps me with my biggest fear, which is falling over due to legs that stop working while going on stage. I often combine this with getting my bottle of water and taking one last zip to water down my throat. If you have a bottle of water, don't fear taking it with you on stage. It is really normal to get a dry mouth while talking, so good to have your throat moist with you. Just put it on the floor in front of you or on the table if there is one.

The last thing I would like to share is a little breathing exercise. No worries, it is not one of those woozy exercises. I hate those myself. Instead, it is very simple and very fast. For me it works best if I look up a bit, but other say they rather put their head down and close their eyes. Try it for yourself and see what works for you. What I do is simple. Take a normal breath, nothing special here. Follow it up with another, slightly slower breath and repeat that one more time, again a bit slower. Repeat as often as needed. What this does is simply make you focus on your breathing and in the process, take your focus away from your nerves.

Just do it!

This is all that I can share with you to make it as smooth as possible, but now it is time to get on stage and just do it.

Try not to worry too much about stuttering, filler words and even forgetting your lines. It is your first time, so you are allowed to make mistakes. You didn't walk at birth either, you learned by falling and getting up again. Your audience will understand, and from experience I can say that they will respect you for taking on this challenge for the very first time.

For now, try to focus on the main items. Nail your opening, your story will follow on its own. Try to address your goals and try not to talk too fast. Anything else from this book that you are able to mix in are extra points but can be added next time as well.

Also, try to enjoy. Especially the applause at the end, you deserved it!

But don't do this!

Making mistakes is not bad, just learn from them so you can do better next time, but there are a few things I want to point out to protect you from annoying your audience.

First of all, you are talking to your audience, so look at them. In general, if you have slides, these will be projected on a screen behind you, and you will get the urge to look at them. Try to ignore these urges. Doing it once or twice is ok, but keep it as short as possible. If you do not look at your audience, chances are good that they will not look at you either anymore. In short, you will lose them!

Another item to simply not do, and I mean NEVER DO THIS. Is using the laser pointer on your presentation clicker. Seriously, don't do this unless you have a very nasty audience, and you want to irritate the [*beep*] out of them. Next to being irritating, to aim your laser at the right spot on your slides, you will need to look away from your audience, which we just discussed, is not a good thing. On top of this, if you need a laser light to point out some detail on your slide, maybe your slide wasn't clear enough, which simply means you need to clean that stuff up. If there is a detail so important to point it out with a laser light, maybe it deserves a slide on its own or a larger space on the slide it is on now.

Step 6: After the show!

You did it! You went on stage, and you got off again as well... Congratulations! Do you feel relieved, proud, and satisfied? Can you even remember the experience? Somehow, I only remember bits and pieces of being on stage, but not the whole experience. This is something I had since my first presentation. Anyway, if you thought this was it, you are wrong. I strongly advise you to take a look at these last pieces as well. Everything you learned so far will not only help you on stage, but also in your daily live, where you communicate with people on a daily basis!

Learning starts here...

You learned a great deal already about preparing and giving a speech in public, but this is not where it stops. If this was one of the first times being on stage, you have learned a lot about yourself! You can now check back on what things you find important to improve on, but you also have the opportunity to ask your audience what they thought... Trust me on this one, their perspective is different than yours and might be very valuable!

Receiving & requesting feedback

Immediately after getting off that stage, you are going to get feedback. This could be from the host, your coworkers, or people in your audience. Listen to them, make note of what they say. I am not saying you need to improve on everything they say but learn from it. If you get the same feedback from different people, positive or negative, you should have a serious look into this. If there is feedback that only one person gave, then it is safe to ignore it. This is probably a personal opinion which doesn't align with the opinions of others anyway. In short, accept all the feedback you can get, but be picky when you are going to act based on this feedback. If for some reason you do not receive any feedback automatically, which I honestly doubt, you can always ask for it yourself.

Check out that video!

Another great way of learning is by watching back a video if one was made. Some of the events I spoke at, made videos, and uploaded these to YouTube. I always hate watching myself, but somehow, this is where I learn the most. When you have the option to watch a video of yourself, I really advice you to do so multiple times. The first time, just watch it. Look at it, see how you feel about it. Then watch it again but listen to what you say, and the filler words you use. Listen to your voice, the pitch, the pace, the volume and maybe even some nerves that are reflected in your voice? Watch it again and look at the body language, does it align with the story or is it confusing? Keep doing this until you can't find anything new which you would like to improve on.

Slow & Steady improvements

I am a strong believer in small and continuous improvements, which means that I have a big list of things I could improve on, and I only take the top few to work on for next time. These I practice even without a presentation coming up. Remember what I said before, you didn't walk at birth, you learned it along the way by taking small steps every day. In short, don't try to improve on all the items you find, just pick the ones you find most important and focus only on those... The rest will come later.

About StageRebels.com

Who am I?

My name is Tim Vriend, I am from the Netherlands where I live with my wife, our 2 daughters and the dog. I love going out to take pictures or float around in a kayak and sometimes we combine this with some good for nature by fishing up the plastic waste from the canals!

Over the years I have been working at many different companies in many different roles, but in each of these roles I had the pleasure to coach the people around me. Since 2014 I am part of the technical team at the Amsterdam Internet Exchange (AMS-IX) where I started my journey into public speaking and, after getting past those first fears, I came to love this as well. In recent years, I have been able to coach some of my coworkers into public speaking and this became the golden combination for me.

What is StageRebels all about?

In the shortest explanation possible, StageRebels.com is all about teaching people to share their story to the world... But it doesn't stop there... The reason behind StageRebels goes a lot deeper...

First of all, StageRebels seems to focus on Public Speaking, but everything you will learn here can be used in any type of communication. For example, if you have a wonderful story to tell your friends or if you want to pitch a new idea at work! It is my believe that with some proper knowledge and tools, anyone can excel in sharing a story, but... And this is where part 2 of StageRebels comes to play...

I never had higher education. We didn't have the money to pay for it, but I also simply never had the motivation to go through so many extra years of school... Or paying attention at the schools I did go to... In short, I have a rather low degree of education.

One thing I noticed in my years of going to school, but also later in more recent years, is that specifically the lower educational systems do not pay much attention to the art of speaking or story telling. Which is strange, as this is what makes or brakes society. I also believe that having good skills in these fields will open doors and provide opportunities for those that need or want it. If we take it even further and look around the globe, we see a high number of people that never got any education to begin with, definitely not into the skills that are addressed here on StageRebels.com.

In all honesty, it is these people that more often than not have the experiences and stories that are worth sharing... They just don't have the knowledge or the guts to translate these experiences into stories and share them with the world...

So part 2 is simply to bring the most valuable skill of relaying any experience into a story, and bringing the confidence to do so... Especially for those that never had the means to get this type of knowledge in their younger years.

Can we book you for some coaching?

So far, I only provided coaching at my day job, local schools, and universities, but depending on what is needed, I might be able to help. Reach out via any of the social channels or www.stagerebels.com.

Other topics on StageRebels.com

Let me throw in some commercial here as well to give you more reasons for a trip to stagerebels.com and find all this cool additional content like:

- Crash Course | Basically an extremely short version of this book
- Start to Finish | The only version of this book, but then in short articles...
- Power-Ups | Make yourself ready for the next level with articles that go more in depth.
- Blogs & Stories | My monthly blog, keeping you updated on how StageRebels.com is developing
- StageRebels Workshop | Start your own workshop and learn together with like-minded people!