Start With the Audience in Mind

- Design your presentation based on what the audience needs to know (not what you want them to know).
- Ask yourself:
  - Who are they?
  - What are their concerns?
  - What do they need to do when they get back home?
  - How can I help them with their challenges?
- Remember: our audience tends to have a life-, task-, or problem-centered orientation to learning.
- Adults’ readiness to learn is driven by their need to know or do something.

Use Backward Design

- Start with the defined learning objectives for your session: what does the audience need to know, believe, and do?
- Next select your content:
  - Ask yourself: What do I need to provide for participants to achieve the desired outcome?
  - Prioritize and select only content that directly supports your goals.
  - Determine what is “need to know” versus “nice to know.”
- Finally, support the learners with thoughtful design and engagement strategies.
  - Ask yourself: What tools and experiences do I need to provide for my learners so that they have the ability to act when they return home?

Keep It Interactive

Learning is a three-step process:

- First, participants need to acquire information, either through presentation or discovery.
- Next, they need to interpret information to determine how it applies to their life or work.
  - Provide opportunities for participants to reflect and write down how the information they have acquired applies to them.
- The third step in the process is to apply new information.
  - A written action plan allows participants to think about and plan how they could apply what they have heard when they get home.
  - Peer sharing and collaboration are also very helpful in applying new concepts.

Provide Take-Aways

- Give participants handouts, tools, resources, thoughts, and ideas.
- If you are providing materials, know how you will be posting them after the session is over and be prepared to tell the participants where to get them.
Designing a Strong Presentation

**Keep It Short**
- The magic number of *retainable main points is somewhere between three and five.*
- A concise presentation allows the learner to focus on the key elements and mentally organize them in a way that makes sense.
- In general, **do not talk for more than 20 minutes.**
- **Practice** your presentation to make sure you can deliver it within the defined time limit.
- Design your presentation to have some sort of **break**, interaction, time for integration, or assimilation of material every 15–20 minutes.
- If you are not the only presenter, work with the session lead to make sure you understand the **overall goal** of the session and how your presentation helps reach that goal.

**Don’t Download—Synthesize**
- Pick your three to five main points, illustrate them, and repeat them.
- Reinforce your essential points with
  - Data
  - Visuals
  - Stories
  - Examples and/or case studies
- **Put aside** anything that does not directly reinforce your key points.

**Have a Strong Open and Close**

**Open**
Take advantage where attention is highest. In the beginning, you have a very short window of opportunity to get the audience interested before they attend to other distractions and tune you out.
- Dive right in—tell a story, ask questions, throw out a compelling statistic, show a picture. Captivate audience attention first.
- Establish credibility and do **brief introductions second**. Remember, the audience will have access to your full bio and are most interested in what you bring to the topic and why you are excited about it.

**Close**
What you say here is important because it’s what participants tend to remember. The close informs their perception of the session.
- Take 1–2 minutes for a summary of your session’s key points.
- If you have a question-and-answer session, coach the audience about how to **ask good questions**. They should be
  - Relevant to others in attendance (if they aren’t, save until after the presentation or ask via email) Brief and succinct, and only one per person (limit to one follow-up).
  - A question, not a comment (if rambling on, the questioner should headline the question).
- Leave the audience inspired!
  - Have a prepared closing. Tell the audience what you hope they will do with the information they have received—either as a call to action or a big idea for the future.
## Presentation Design Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you identified what your audience needs to know, believe, and do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you identified the desired outcome for audience members attending your session?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you limited the content you are presenting to between three and five key points?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you identified tools and experiences to support what your audience is going to learn in your session?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you designed a strong opening to captivate the audience right away?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you planned time for participants to reflect on and interpret information?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you planned time for participants to apply the new information through action planning or activities?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you prepared to coach the audience about their questions and effectively manage Q&amp;A?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you provided take-away tools and resources for the audience?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your close include a short summary and a call to action and/or a big idea?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:**


Imel S. Guidelines for working with adult learners. ERIC Digest No. 154.

