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Declutter Your Presentation

A cluttered home or office can overwhelm you and make it difficult for you to find anything. Likewise, a cluttered presentation can overwhelm your audience and make it difficult for them to find your message. Here's how to cut out the clutter in your presentation so your message is easy to find and understand:

1. Cut Out the Extra Material

Before you deliver a presentation, be clear about your message - the one thing that you want your audience to walk away with from your presentation. Look at every example, detail and story you'd like to include in your presentation and decide whether they relate directly to your message. Sort them into three groups: keep, not sure and throw out. Focus on the keepers, resort the "not sure" group and throw out the rest. You want to make it easy for your audience to find your message rather than forcing them to sift through all the clutter to uncover it.

2. Cut Out Your Filler Words

Filler words include "um," "ah," and words such as "like," "so," and "ok," which are used as a verbal bridge to the next word. These words just fill in space while you remember or think of something to say next. They are the verbal clutter that distract the audience and give the impression that you lack confidence or knowledge about your subject. Instead of using a filler word, pause silently and breathe, then move on to your next word.

3. Cut Out the Extra Text on Your Slides

If you have to use slides, cut out any extra words or graphics. Slides are not a substitute for you, the presenter, so they should only contain supporting material rather than a script of all your words. If your slides contain countless bullet points in tiny print and impossible-to-read charts, then you are forcing your audience to dig through all that clutter to get to the point. Whenever I see those types of slides and hear a presenter say, "I know you can't read this," I want to shout back, "Then why are you showing it to us?!"

The next time you have to give a presentation, spend time decluttering it. A neat and organized presentation will allow you to focus on your message, which means it will be easier for the audience to follow and understand.

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