



## Learn more about designing aesthetically pleasing slides

If you want to learn more about aesthetic design, check out these two great books:

*Presentation Zen* by Garr Reynolds (New Riders, 2008), and *The Principles of Beautiful Web Design* by Jason Beard (SitePoint, 2007). Even though the latter has Web design in its title, much of the book has to do with the layout of a single screen, which applies to the design of slides.

### Takeaways

- \* People react to the aesthetics of a screen or slide.
- \* Using pictures of pastoral scenes on your slides will make people feel good.
- \* If you use slides, use an orderly and consistent layout.
- \* If you use slides, don't be afraid to use color and original design within the orderly layout.

# 69

## LISTENING TO MUSIC RELEASES DOPAMINE IN THE BRAIN

Have you ever listened to a piece of music and experienced intense pleasure, even chills? Valorie Salimpoor (2011) and her team conducted research that shows that listening to, or even anticipating, music can release the neurotransmitter dopamine.

The researchers used positron emission tomography (PET) scans, fMRI, and psychophysiological measures such as heart rate to measure reactions while people listened to music. The participants provided music that they said gave them intense pleasure and chills. The range of music included classical, folk, jazz, electronica, rock, pop, tango, and more.

### PLEASURE VS. ANTICIPATED PLEASURE

Salimpoor's team saw the same pattern of brain and body activity when people were listening to their music as they saw when people feel euphoria and craving when they get a reward. The experience of pleasure corresponded with dopamine release in one part of the brain (the striatal dopaminergic system). When people were anticipating a pleasurable part of the music, there was a dopamine release in a different part of the brain (the nucleus accumbens).

### Takeaways

- \* Music can be intensely pleasurable.
- \* Consider using music before your presentation and during breaks to get and keep people in a good mood.

## 70

PEOPLE WANT WHAT IS FAMILIAR  
WHEN THEY'RE SAD OR SCARED

It's Friday afternoon and your boss calls you in to say that he's not happy with your latest project report. This is the project that you repeatedly told him was in trouble and to which you asked that more staff be assigned. You feel all your warnings were ignored. Now he's telling you that this work will reflect badly on you and that you may even lose your job. On the way home you stop at the grocery store. You are sad and scared. Will you buy the cereal you always buy, or will you try something new?

THE DESIRE FOR THE FAMILIAR IS RELATED  
TO THE FEAR OF LOSS

According to research by Marieke de Vries (2010) of Radboud University Nijmegen, in the Netherlands, you will buy the familiar brand. Research shows that people want what is familiar when they are sad or scared. They are willing to try something new and different when they're in a happy mood and not as sensitive to what is familiar.

This craving for the familiar and preference for familiar brands is probably tied to the basic fear of loss. In my book *Neuro Web Design: What Makes Them Click?*, I talk about the fear of loss. When people are sad or scared, the old brain and the mid-brain (emotional) are on alert. They have to protect themselves. And a quick way to be safe is to go with what you know. A strong brand is familiar. A strong logo is familiar. So when people are sad or scared, they'll go for a brand and logo they know.

## Takeaways

- \* If your presentation has to do with change that is scary to people or that will make them feel sad, try as much as possible to reinforce what is familiar first. For example, have the presentation in the same room or facilities that people are used to, and use a slide format (if you have slides) that is familiar.
- \* If your presentation has to do with change that is not scary or sad to people, then use themes and ideas that are new. Have your presentation in a place that is new, use a new slide template, or do both.

## 71

THE MORE SCARCE SOMETHING  
IS, THE MORE VALUABLE PEOPLE  
WILL FEEL IT IS

Remember the introduction of the iPhone? When it first came out, there were long lines to get one. Same thing with the second model: long lines; long waits; you can order one, but who knows when you will get it. And Apple implied there might not be enough to go around.

If it's scarce, then people think it is more valuable and more desirable and will want it even more.

Scarcity works not just for products, but for information too. If people feel that the information you are providing in your presentation is hard to find, then they will value it more highly.

## WHICH COOKIES TASTE BETTER?

Worchel, Lee, and Adewole (1975) asked people to rate chocolate chip cookies. They put ten cookies in one jar and two of the same cookies in another jar. The cookies from the two-cookie jar received higher ratings, even though the cookies were exactly the same. Because they were scarce, they were believed to be more valuable. Adding to this is the assumption that possibly there are fewer cookies in the one jar because other people liked them better than the cookies in the other jar. That's a different principle of social validation—we look to other people to tell us what to do. Combining scarcity and social validation is even more powerful of an influence than either alone.

## IF IT COSTS A LOT, IT MUST BE GOOD

A concept similar to scarcity is the idea that things that are more expensive (and therefore harder to get) are of higher quality. People unconsciously equate expensive with "better."

## SORRY, YOU CAN'T HAVE IT

And one last tactic involving scarcity: Ban something altogether. If something is totally inaccessible, then it is really scarce. If something is forbidden or banned, then people *really* want it.

## Takeaways

- \* If something is scarce or hard to get, it will seem more desirable and more valuable.
- \* If you can, point out the places where your content contains information or ideas that aren't easily available anywhere else.
- \* If you are deciding whether to charge money for your presentation, you might want to have people pay. They will value the information more highly if they have to pay.

**“All the great speakers were bad speakers at first.”**

**—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

# HOW PEOPLE REACT TO YOU

We've all experienced it. Someone gets up to speak, and before he or she says the first word, we've already decided, "He's going to be boring." Or, "She's an expert." Or, "He's not going to tell us the truth." You can't separate the message from the messenger; it's a package. If you want your message to have an impact, then you have to think about the way people are going to react to you—the messenger—not just about the way they are going to react to your message. In this chapter, you'll learn how people react to you and how to improve your impact and delivery.

In the early 1960s, Stanley Milgram (1963) performed experiments on the psychology of obedience. Participants in the study thought they were engaged in an experiment on learning and punishments. They were asked to administer shocks to someone in another room if that person answered questions incorrectly. In fact, the person in the other room was part of the experiment and wasn't receiving shocks at all.

Every time the "learner" answered a question incorrectly, the participants were asked to increase the level of shock voltage. The participants couldn't see the learner, but they could hear them making noise every time they received a shock. As the voltage was increased, the learner made more and more noise, eventually shouting things like "Stop! Please stop!" Eventually, at the highest voltage levels, the learner was silent, as though they had passed out or were unconscious. **Figure 72.1** is a photo of the shock machine used in the Milgram study.



**FIGURE 72.1** The Milgram experiment shock machine

Milgram was trying to understand how far people would go against their own moral code to inflict pain on another person if an authority figure told them they had to.

Before the experiments started, Milgram asked colleagues, grad students, and psychology majors at Yale (where the study was conducted) to estimate how many people would increase the voltage the maximum amount (30 steps greater than where it started) if an authority figure in a lab coat told them to do so. The estimate was 1 to 2 percent. In the experiment, however, two-thirds of the subjects went to the maximum, even with the (pretend) subject in the other room shouting "Please stop!"



### The ethics of psychology experiments

Milgram's experiments set off a firestorm about the ethics of working with research participants. Years later, some of the participants in the Milgram studies reported long-term psychological damage (what kind of person were they to administer shocks to people?). Since then, psychology experiments in most countries have had to adhere to guidelines to prevent damage to the participants.



### More information about the Milgram studies

For more information and to watch some video clips from the original Milgram studies, go to <http://www.mediasales.psu.edu/>

The Milgram study has been replicated. The BBC recorded a video of one of the updated studies, which you can watch on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/BcvSNgOHZwk>

## BEING THE PRESENTER GIVES YOU AUTOMATIC AUTHORITY

What you may not realize is that being the presenter gives you automatic authority. Through an inherent social reaction to a leader, as well as through learned behaviors, people have an automatic initial reaction to obey someone who is in authority. When you walk in front of the room, whether in a small meeting room or a large auditorium, the assumption is that you are the leader and you are in charge. That authority can be quickly diminished or lost, based on what you do, but it is yours at the very beginning. In the rest of this chapter you will learn what you might unconsciously do that diminishes your authority, as well as many things you can do to keep and enhance your natural authority.

### Takeaways

- \* Do everything that you can to keep the automatic authority that being the presenter gives you. If you can grab and maintain the leadership position of authority during your presentation, your audience will pay more attention and be more persuaded by what you are saying.
- \* Make a list of the things in this chapter that you can improve upon to earn and keep your authority when you are presenting.

The research in psychology over the last 15 years has revealed that people process information unconsciously and make very quick (1 second or less), unconscious decisions about people. When you start your presentation, and possibly before you say your first few words, your audience has already sized you up and decided what they think about you. Although it is possible that what you do after those first few seconds changes their mind, the tendency is for these first impressions to last throughout the presentation. Because people are making these quick assessments, you need to design and orchestrate the very beginning of your presentation carefully.

### YOUR “INTRODUCER” IS CRITICAL

If someone will be introducing you before you start your presentation, then you need to have some influence over what they say. Most professional presenters send the text of the introduction to the host beforehand. The person doing the introduction can use it as is, or they can modify it. Most people who are asked to do an introduction for a speaker are thrilled to have what to say sent to them. The introduction is really the first part of your talk, so don't leave this to chance. It's a great opportunity to have someone say wonderful things about you. Experiment with what your introduction should say, based on the impression you want to make. Establish your experience and credibility. Consider including a small piece of personal information so people can connect with you. Make the introduction short and easy to read and say.

### YOUR INITIAL BODY LANGUAGE IS CRITICAL

Recently I saw a presenter come to the front of the room with shoulders hunched and eyes looking down. When she got to the lectern, she glanced up briefly at the audience, then looked at the laptop in front of her, crossed her arms, and started her presentation. The message she sent was either “I'm bored to be here” or “I'm very nervous.” It did not inspire interest and confidence in the audience.

People respond to your body language before you start talking. The way you walk and stand, your facial expressions, and your eye contact (or lack of it) communicate whether you are nervous, confident, excited, and more. Decide what impression you want to convey, and then think about how your body language is conveying it. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind.

Make sure that your walk to the front of the room shows confidence: Stand up tall with good posture, take your time, don't rush, don't fidget with anything while you walk. Plant your feet firmly on each step. If you are the presenter, then you are the leader. Your audience wants a strong leader. If you walk confidently, your audience will be inspired to “follow you” into the presentation.

Before you begin to talk, “set” your body. Stop, face the audience, stand firmly with even weight on both feet, look at the audience, smile a little bit, take a deep breath, and then begin. It will seem like too much time has passed without talking, but it will not appear that way to the audience.



### Learning more about unconscious or instantaneous decisions

For more information about the unconscious or instantaneous decisions people make, read *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell (2007) or *Strangers to Ourselves: The Adaptive Unconscious* by Timothy Wilson (2004).

### Takeaways

- \* People are sizing you up instantly. You need to give the impression of being a strong leader right away.
- \* Take your time before you start speaking. Make sure you are standing straight and tall. If it's an informal session and you are sitting, then make sure you are sitting straight in your chair. Make eye contact with your audience before you begin.
- \* Have someone make a video recording of you presenting so you can see what you look like to others at the beginning of your presentation.

## 74 BE HONEST AND AUTHENTIC

In the previous section I stressed how important a first impression is. But what if you blow it? What if you trip on a cord as you go to the front of the room? What if you plug in your computer and the image doesn't show up on the projector?

This—and much worse—happens to every presenter at some point. In my career as a presenter and speaker I've had the following things occur:

- ★ No one brought a projector yet my entire presentation consisted of slides.
- ★ No one picked up the handouts from the printer as they said they would.
- ★ The electricity went out in the building just as I started my presentation.
- ★ I looked down to realize I was wearing two completely different shoes (long story).
- ★ My luggage didn't arrive with me on the plane, and I had dressed *very* casually that day.
- ★ My plane was late, so I arrived an hour late and everyone was waiting for me. I didn't have any time to test out the microphone, set the room up the way I wanted it to be, and so on.
- ★ I walked up to the front of the stage not knowing that I had toilet paper stuck to my shoe.

When things like this happen, undermining your impression of being a leader in control, you have a few choices:

1. Ignore it and hope that no one else sees it/realizes it.
2. Acknowledge whatever is going on and ask for understanding.
3. Acknowledge whatever is going on and make a joke and/or self-effacing comment.

### Takeaways

- \* Try to anticipate what might go wrong and plan and prepare to minimize problems.
- \* Stuff always happens. Something is likely to go wrong. The true test of your leadership is how you handle it.
- \* If you establish confidence in others early on, they will be on your side and forgiving.
- \* Use humor, be authentic and honest, and consider mild self-effacement as a way to get out of a potentially authority-demeaning situation.

## 75 PEOPLE ASSIGN MEANING TO YOUR BODY POSITIONS AND MOVEMENT

In addition to the initial first impression discussed previously, people continue to unconsciously interpret and react to your body positions throughout your whole presentation. Assuming that you want to convey confidence, leadership, authority, passion, and openness, there are certain body positions that you should use and some that you should avoid.

### DIRECTION AND ORIENTATION

Face people directly to convey authority and confidence (**Figure 75.1**). Standing at an angle (**Figure 75.2**) says that you and the audience are collaborating.



**FIGURE 75.1** Facing full front conveys authority and confidence.



**FIGURE 75.2** A 45-degree angle says you are collaborating.