Tools to help you create your presentation structure

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Structuring your presentation - Contents

This framework is intended to help you create effective presentations by exploring different approaches to the structure for your content.

Here is what we cover:

Structuring your presentation

Almost everyone has their own preferred way of structuring their presentation. None of them are automatically wrong (except for anyone making it up on the spot and rambling all over the place) but there are several principles to remember:

if the structure is right, it'll be easier for you to remember - that means if you're struggling to remember what comes next you probably haven't got it sorted out quite right

it's easier to understand if it's properly structured, so if you've given a presentation and people aren't following it, this might be why.

 Even though there's no one specifically right way to do it, pretty much every presentation and creativity expert is agreed on there being a wrong way to do it… and that's to sit down in front of your laptop/desktop computer and fire up PowerPoint etc. Doing that immediately and automatically restricts your thinking to the subset of approaches that PowerPoint facilitates.

Because PowerPoint is a technical, non-organic way of working, using it decreases the chances of you creating a presentation that's anything other than a traditional (and often pointless but always) boring sequential presentation.

What's more, because using PowerPoint requires a degree of concentration, part of your brain is given over to using it… and that's brain-space that can't be used for thinking about the content/structure of your presentation.
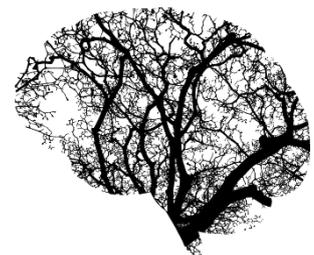
Because everyone is different you might need to experiment with a couple of these tools/systems but once you've got it, it's worth the time you spent checking things out.

Tool 1 – mind maps and spider diagrams

Almost everyone has seen a mind map at some point. There are dozens (at least) of tools for doing it electronically, but the easiest and best way is to do it using a pencil and paper. The key idea is to put your key issue in the middle of the page and branch outwards in every-more-thin "branches" which link ideas together that are sub-sets of each other.

I'm making it sound more complicated than it is. A simple image makes it self-evident!
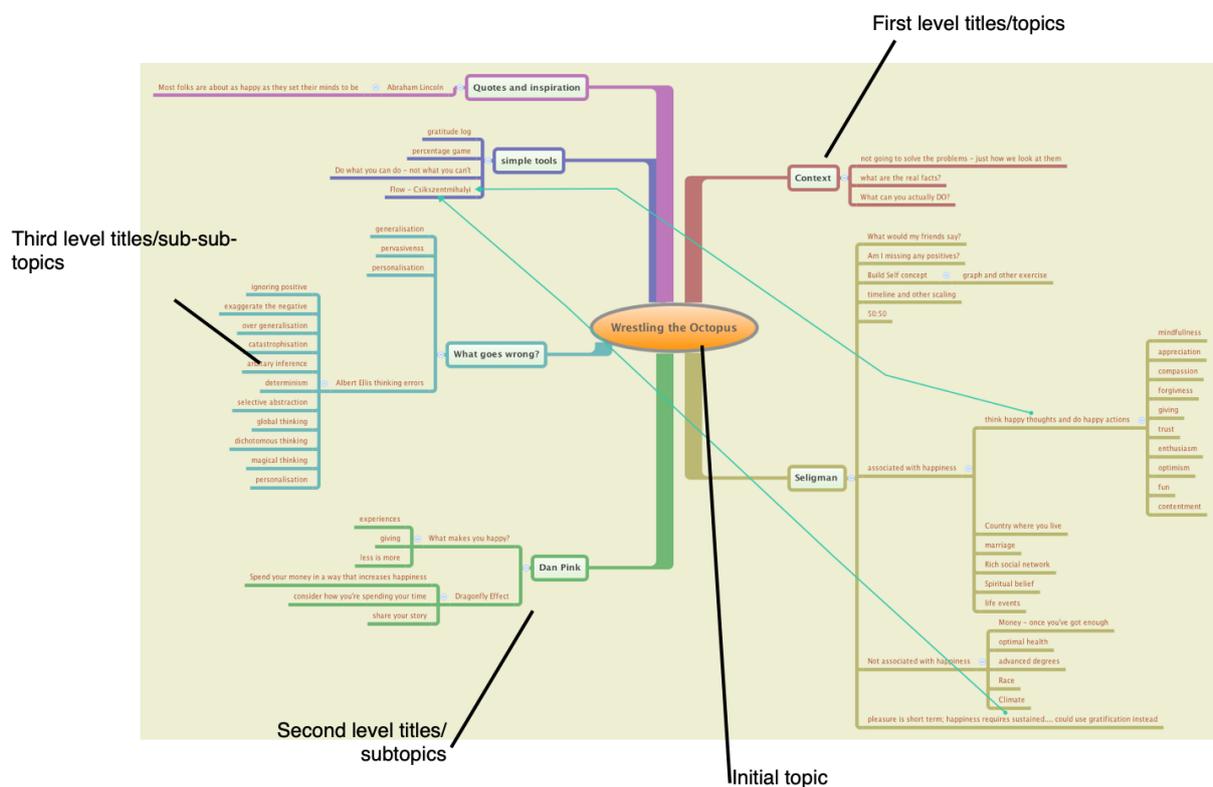
Ironically, despite having just said that pencil and paper are best, I drew this mind map using a computer package because I needed to share it and work on it collaboratively.

Tool 2 - digital tools to make your life easier

Just talk. Don't try to write a script for your presentation - just talk. Pretend you're giving the presentation and just talk. As you do so you'll realise (gradually) that some parts go together and shouldn't be where you initially put them. The problem is recalling and capturing what you've said.

Digital tools such as rev.com, otter.ai and built-in voice transcription in Microsoft packages.

Enter things like rev.com and otter.ai - and even the built in transcription tools in your computer such as in Google's keep, Microsoft word and any number of apps built into your PC, Mac or iPhone, for example.

Rev.com is a human-based site that for (currently) a dollar+ per minute will intelligently transcribe a recording of your draft presentation for you. Because it's done by a person there's some common sense involved in the transcriptions and your errrrrrs won't be included (usually).

The price isn't a lot, but if it's a big presentation or you want to do it over and over and over it can build up. To be honest, for this kind work, free versions are probably good enough and this is where otter.ai scores. It's similar to rev.com but it's based on a clever bit of computer stuff. My experience is that it's only about 90% accurate, but that's fine for this.

Tool 3 - specially designed tools

Obviously, the best way to design the structure of your presentation is to use a specially designed tool that is intended to do the job. Here is what we recommend

Presentation Design Pack (https://design.presentationgenius.info) - The Presentation Design Pack is designed for newer presenters, particularly those who are less experienced.

These tools help you structure, plan and prepare your presentation while giving you a framework that is tried and tested. This approach helps you take the guesswork out of planning your structure.

Tool 4 – conversations

The downside of this approach is that involves someone else in the embarrassingly rubbish early stages of your creation process… but its great strength lies in its simplicity.

All you need to do is find someone to work with who:

you know well and can trust not to be offended by your "ugly first draft" stuff

has a lot in common with your audience

doesn't know anything at all about your topic.

When you've found such a wiling victim/collaborator, just start a conversation and try to explain what you're getting at in your presentation. The key thing is to record what you say in some way so that you can go back and analyse it later. A recording is the obvious way to do it but it's hard to edit/exam later. If your collaborator is okay with it, having them make notes (perhaps in a mind map!) gives you something you can look at later.

Importantly, you should find the questions they asked. Then simply make sure that you put those questions in the order you wish you'd answered them in. Design your presentation to answer those questions.

Tool 5 - telephones

This is a similar approach to having a conversation, but this time you should use a phone instead of a person. You simply imagine that you're explaining something (the content) of your presentation to a colleague over the phone. In an ideal world you do it with a real person.

Imagine that your presentation from the stage, whatever that stage happens to be, is your end of the conversation.


One of the big advantages of this approach is that you become acutely aware of when a diagram or visual would be helpful, because on a phone call you don't have that option. (Look for when you get frustrated and/or when you start to wave your arms around!)

As a side note, we've found that doing this using a headset is particularly effective, as you can gesticulate more easily and you're generally less inhibited.

It sounds messy but the result is often very effective.

Your reflections and actions

Make your notes here on what you intend to do to improve your own presentations.
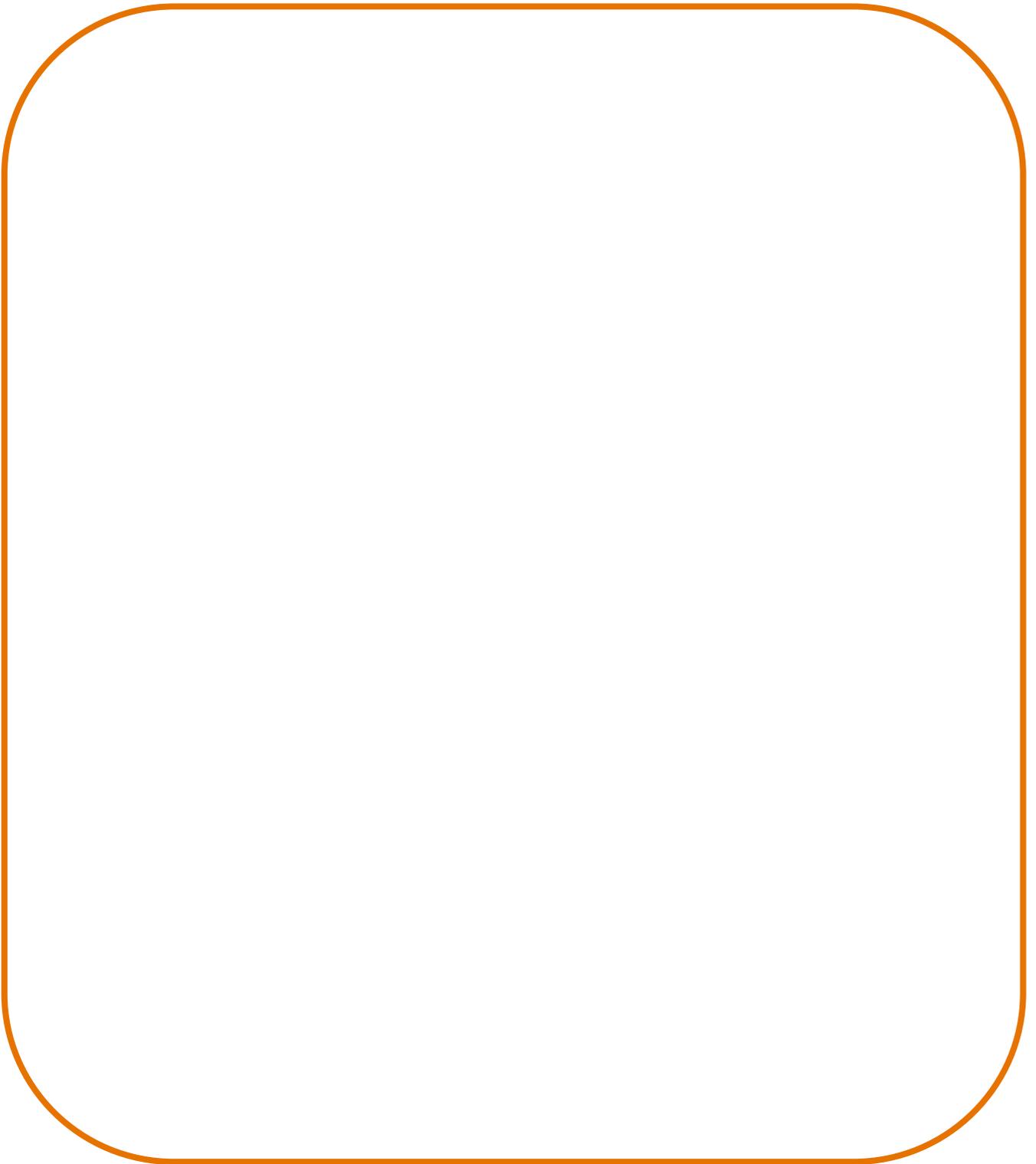
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