The steps required to prepare an effective presentation parallel the steps you follow to write a document. As with writing a document, determine your purpose (Tab 1) and analyze your audience (Tab 1). Then gather the facts that will support your point of view (Tab 1) or proposal (Tab 4) and logically organize that information. Presentations do, however, differ from written documents in a number of important ways. They are intended for listeners, not readers. Because you are speaking, your manner of delivery, the way you organize the material, and your supporting visuals (Tab 6) require as much attention as your content.

Determining Your Purpose

Every presentation is given for a purpose, even if it is only to share information. To determine the primary purpose of your presentation, use the following question as a guide: What do I want the audience to know, to believe, or to do when I have finished the presentation? Based on the answer to that question, write a purpose statement that answers the *what?* and *why?* questions.

- The purpose of my presentation is to convince my company's chief information officer of the need to improve the appearance, content, and customer use of our company's Web site [*what*] so that she will be persuaded to allocate additional funds for site-development work in the next fiscal year [*why*].

Analyzing Your Audience

Once you have determined the desired end result of the presentation, analyze your audience so that you can tailor your presentation to their needs. Ask yourself these questions about your audience:

- What is your audience's level of experience or knowledge about your topic?
- What is the general educational level and age of your audience?
- What is your audience's attitude toward the topic you are speaking about, and—based on that attitude—what concerns, fears, or objections might your audience have?
- Do any subgroups in the audience have different concerns or needs?
- What questions might your audience ask about this topic?

Gathering Information

Once you have focused the presentation, you need to find the facts and arguments that support your point of view or the action you propose. As you gather information, keep in mind that you should give the audience only what will accomplish your goals; too much detail will overwhelm your audience, and too little will not adequately inform your

listeners or support your recommendations. For detailed guidance about gathering information, see research (Tab 3).

Structuring the Presentation

When structuring the presentation, focus on your audience. Listeners are freshest at the outset and refocus their attention near the end. Take advantage of that pattern. Begin with a brief overview of your presentation, use the body to develop your ideas, and end with a summary of what you covered and, if appropriate, a call to action. See also organization (Tab 1).

The Introduction.   Include in the introduction (Tab 1) an opening that focuses your audience's attention, as in the following examples:

- [*Definition of a problem*] "You have to write an important report, but you'd like to incorporate lengthy handwritten notes from several meetings you attended. Your scanner will not read these notes, and you will have to type many pages. You groan because that seems an incredible waste of time. Have I got a solution for you!"

- [*An attention-getting statement*] "As many as 50 million Americans have high blood pressure."

- [*A rhetorical question*] "Would you be interested in a full-sized computer keyboard that is waterproof and noiseless and can be rolled up like a rubber mat?"

- [*A personal experience*] "As I sat at my computer one morning, deleting my eighth spam message of the day, I decided that it was time to take action to eliminate this time-waster."

- [*An appropriate quotation*] "According to researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 'Garlic and its cousin, the onion, confer major health benefits—including fighting cancer, infections, and heart disease.'"

Following your opening, use the introduction to set the stage for your audience by providing an overview of the presentation, which can include general or background information that will be needed to understand the detailed information in the body of your presentation. It can also show how you have organized the material.

- This presentation analyzes three high-volume, on-demand printers for us to consider purchasing. Based on a comparison of all three, I will recommend the one I believe best meets our needs. To do so, I'll discuss the following five points:

  1. Why we need a high-volume printer [*the problem*]
  2. The basics of on-demand technology [*general information*]

3. The criteria I used to compare the three printer models
[*comparison*]
4. The printer models I compared and why [*possible solutions*]
5. The printer I propose we buy [*proposed solution*]

The Body.   If your goal is <u>persuasion</u> (Tab 1), present the evidence that will persuade the audience to agree with your conclusions and act on them. If you are discussing a problem, demonstrate that it exists and offer a solution or range of possible solutions. For example, if your introduction stated that the problem is low profits, high costs, outdated technology, or high employee absenteeism, you could use the following approach.

1. Prove your point.
   • Strategically organize the facts and data you need.
   • Present the information using easy-to-understand visuals.
2. Offer solutions.
   • Increase profits by lowering production costs.
   • Cut overhead to reduce costs, or abolish specific programs or product lines.
   • Replace outdated technology, or upgrade existing technology.
   • Offer employees more flexibility in their work schedules, or offer them other incentives.
3. Anticipate questions ("How much will it cost?") and objections ("We're too busy now—when would we have time to learn the new software?") and incorporate the answers into your presentation.

The Closing.   Fulfill the goals of your presentation in the closing. If your purpose is to motivate the listeners to take action, ask them to do what you want them to do; if your purpose is to get your audience to think about something, summarize what you want them to think about. Many presenters make the mistake of not actually closing—they simply quit talking, shuffle papers, and then walk away.

Because your closing is what your audience is most likely to remember, use that time to be strong and persuasive. Consider the following typical closing:

• Based on all the data, I believe that the Worthington TechLine 5510 Production Printer best suits our needs. It produces 40 pages per minute more than its closest competitor and provides modular systems that can be upgraded to support new applications. The Worthington is also compatible with our current computer network, and staff training at our site is included with our purchase. Although the initial cost is higher than that for the

other two models, the additional capabilities, compatibility with most standard environments, lower maintenance costs, and strong customer support services make it a better value.

I recommend we allocate the funds necessary for this printer by the fifteenth of this month in order to be well prepared for the production of next quarter's customer publications.

This closing brings the presentation full circle and asks the audience to fulfill the purpose of the presentation—exactly what a <u>conclusion</u> (Tab 1) should do.

Transitions.   Planned <u>transitions</u> (Tab 10) should appear between the introduction and the body, between major points in the body, and between the body and the closing. Transitions are simply a sentence or two to let the audience know that you are moving from one topic to the next. They also prevent a choppy presentation and provide the audience with assurance that you know where you are going and how to get there.

• Before getting into the specifics of each printer I compared, I'd like to present the benefits of networked, on-demand printers in general. That information will provide you with the background you'll need to compare the differences among the printers and their capabilities discussed in this presentation.

It is also a good idea to pause for a moment after you have delivered a transition between topics to let your listeners shift gears with you. Remember, they do not know your plan.

Using Visuals

Well-planned visuals not only add interest and emphasis to your presentation but also clarify and simplify your message because they communicate clearly, quickly, and vividly. Charts, graphs, and illustrations can greatly increase audience understanding and retention of information, especially for complex issues and technical information that could otherwise be misunderstood or overlooked.

⚡ ETHICS NOTE Be sure to provide credit for any visual taken from a print or an online source. You can include a citation either on an individual visual (such as a slide) or in a list of references or works cited that you distribute to your audience. For information on citing visuals from print or Web sources, see <u>documenting sources</u> (Tab 3). ✦

You can create and present the visual components of your presentation by using a variety of media—flip charts, whiteboard or chalkboard, overhead transparencies, slides, or computer presentation software. See also <u>layout and design</u> (Tab 6).

Flip Charts. Flip charts are ideal for smaller groups in a conference room or classroom and are also ideal for brainstorming with your audience.

Whiteboard or Chalkboard. The whiteboard or chalkboard common to classrooms is convenient for creating sketches and for jotting notes during your presentation. If your presentation requires extensive notes or complex drawings, however, prepare handouts on which the audience can jot notes and which they can keep for future reference.

Overhead Transparencies. With transparencies you can create a series of overlays to explain a complex device or system, adding (or removing) the overlays one at a time. You can also lay a sheet of paper over a list of items on a transparency, uncovering one item at a time as you discuss it, to focus audience attention on each point in the sequence.

Presentation Software. Presentation software, such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Corel Presentations, and OpenOffice.org Impress, lets you create your presentation on your computer. You can develop charts and graphs with data from spreadsheet software or locate visuals on the Web and then import those files into your presentation. This software also offers standard templates and other features that help you design effective visuals and integrated text. Enhancements include a selection of typefaces, highlighting devices, background textures and colors, and clip-art images. Images can also be printed out for use as overhead transparencies or handouts. However, avoid using too many enhancements, which may distract viewers from your message. Figure 9–4 shows well-balanced slides for a presentation based on the sample formal report in Figure 5–2 on pages 137–152.

■ PROFESSIONALISM NOTE Rehearse your presentation using your electronic slides, and practice your transitions from slide to slide. Also practice loading your presentation and anticipate any technical difficulties that might arise. Should you encounter a technical snag during the presentation, stay calm and give yourself time to solve the problem. If you cannot solve the problem, move on without the technology. As a backup, carry a printout of your electronic presentation as well as an extra electronic copy on a storage medium. ✦

🌀 **WEB LINK PREPARING PRESENTATION SLIDES**

For a helpful tutorial on creating effective slides, see *bedfordstmartins.com/ alred*, and select *Tutorials*, "Preparing Presentation Slides." For links to additional information and tutorials for using presentation software, select *Links Library*.
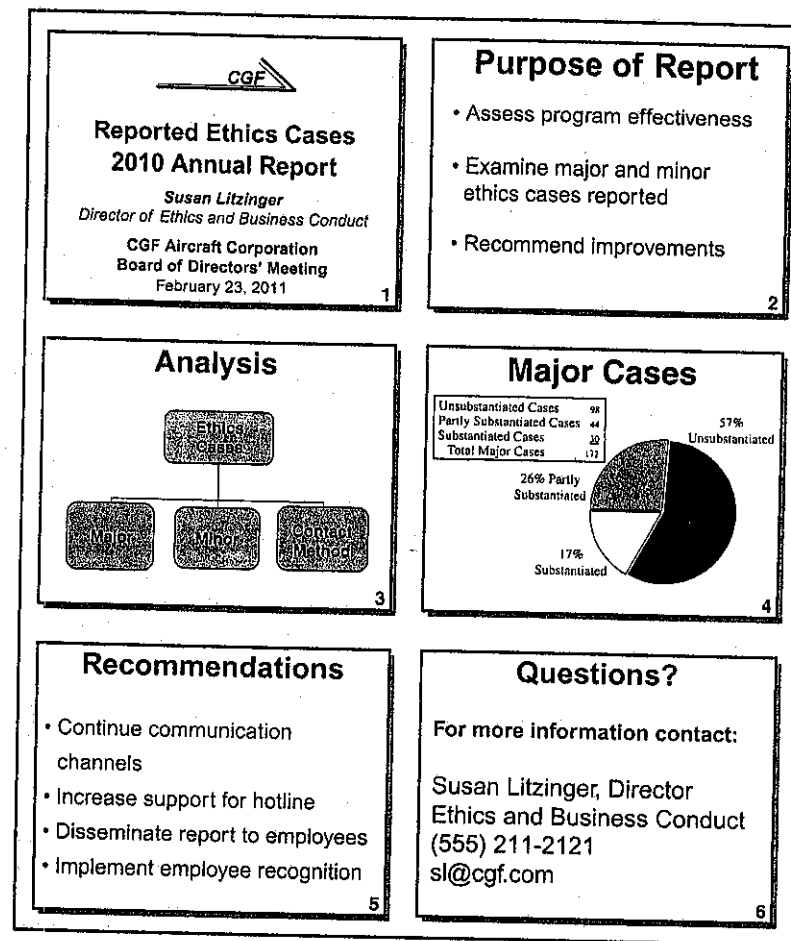

FIGURE 9–4. Slides for a Presentation

Writer's Checklist: Using Visuals in a Presentation

☑ Use text sparingly in visuals. Use bulleted or numbered lists (Tab 6), keeping them in parallel structure (Tab 10) and with balanced content. Use numbers if the sequence is important and bullets if it is not.

☑ Limit the number of bulleted or numbered items to no more than five or six per visual.

☑ Limit each visual to no more than 40 to 45 words. Any more will clutter the visual and force you to use a smaller font, which could impair the audience's ability to read it.

☑ Make your visuals consistent in type style, size, and spacing.

Writer's Checklist: Using Visuals in a Presentation (continued)

☑ Use a type size visible to members of the audience at the back of the room. Type should be boldface and no smaller than 30 points. For headings, 45- or 50-point type works even better.

☑ Use graphs and charts to show data trends. Use only one or two illustrations per visual to avoid clutter and confusion.

☑ Make the contrast between your text and the background sharp. Use light backgrounds with dark lettering and avoid textured or decorated backgrounds.

☑ Use no more than 12 visuals per presentation. Any more will tax the audience's concentration.

☑ Match your delivery of the content to your visuals. Do not put one set of words or images on the screen and talk about the previous visual or, even worse, the next one.

☑ Do not read the text on your visual word for word. Your audience can read the visuals; they look to you to provide the key points in detail.

Delivering a Presentation

Once you have outlined and drafted your presentation and prepared your visuals, you are ready to practice your presentation and delivery techniques.

Practice. Familiarize yourself with the sequence of the material — major topics, notes, and visuals — in your outline. Once you feel comfortable with the content, you are ready to practice the presentation (in front of others if possible).

PRACTICE ON YOUR FEET AND OUT LOUD. Try to practice in the room where you will give the presentation. Practicing on-site helps you get the feel of the room: the lighting, the arrangement of the chairs, the position of electrical outlets and switches, and so forth. Practice out loud to gauge the length of your presentation, to uncover problems such as awkward transitions, and to eliminate verbal tics (such as "um," "you know," and "like").

PRACTICE WITH YOUR VISUALS AND TEXT. Integrate your visuals into your practice sessions to help your presentation go more smoothly. Operate the equipment (computer, slide projector, or overhead projector) until you are comfortable with it. Decide if you want to use a remote control or wireless mouse or if you want to have someone else advance your slides. Even if things go wrong, being prepared and practiced will give you the confidence and poise to continue.

Delivery Techniques That Work. Your delivery is both audible and visual. In addition to your words and message, your nonverbal communication affects your audience. Be animated — your words have impact and staying power when they are delivered with physical and vocal animation. If you want listeners to share your point of view, show enthusiasm for your topic. The most common delivery techniques include making eye contact; using movement and gestures; and varying voice inflection, projection, and pace.

EYE CONTACT. The best way to establish rapport with your audience is through eye contact. In a large audience, directly address those people who seem most responsive to you in different parts of the room. Doing that helps you establish rapport with your listeners by holding their attention and gives you important visual cues that let you know how your message is being received. Do the listeners seem engaged and actively listening? Based on your observations, you may need to adjust the pace of your presentation.

MOVEMENT. Animate the presentation with physical movement. Take a step or two to one side after you have been talking for a minute or so. That type of movement is most effective at transitional points in your presentation between major topics or after pauses or emphases. Too much movement, however, can be distracting, so try not to pace.

Another way to integrate movement into your presentation is to walk to the screen and point to the visual as you discuss it. Touch the screen with the pointer and then turn back to the audience before beginning to speak (remember the three *t*'s: touch, turn, and talk).

GESTURES. Gestures both animate your presentation and help communicate your message. Most people gesture naturally when they talk; nervousness, however, can inhibit gesturing during a presentation. Keep one hand free and use that hand to gesture.

VOICE. Your voice can be an effective tool in communicating your sincerity, enthusiasm, and command of your topic. Use it to your advantage to project your credibility. *Vocal inflection* is the rise and fall of your voice at different times, such as the way your voice naturally rises at the end of a question. ("You want it *when?*") A conversational delivery and eye contact promote the feeling among members of the audience that you are addressing them directly. Use vocal inflection to highlight differences between key and subordinate points in your presentation.

PROJECTION. Most presenters think they are speaking louder than they are. Remember that your presentation is ineffective for anyone in the audience who cannot hear you. If listeners must strain to hear you, they may give up trying to listen. Correct projection problems by practicing out loud with someone listening from the back of the room.

PACE. Be aware of the speed at which you deliver your presentation. If you speak too fast, your words will run together, making it difficult for your audience to follow. If you speak too slowly, your listeners will become impatient and distracted.

Presentation Anxiety. Everyone experiences nervousness before a presentation. Survey after survey reveals that for most people dread of public speaking ranks among their top five fears. Instead of letting fear inhibit you, focus on channeling your nervous energy into a helpful stimulant. Practice will help you, but the best way to master anxiety is to know your topic thoroughly—knowing what you are going to say and how you are going to say it will help you gain confidence and reduce anxiety as you become immersed in your subject.

Writer's Checklist: *Preparing for and Delivering a Presentation*

☑ Prepare a set of notes that will trigger your memory during the presentation.

☑ Make as much eye contact as possible with your audience to establish rapport and maximize opportunities for audience feedback.

☑ Animate your delivery by integrating movement, gestures, and vocal inflection into your presentation. However, keep your movements and speech patterns natural.

☑ Speak loudly and slowly enough to be heard and understood.

☑ Review the earlier checklist on using visuals as well as the advice on delivery in this entry.

For information and tips on communicating with cross-cultural audiences, see global communication (Tab 1), global graphics (Tab 6), and international correspondence (Tab 7).