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## Presenting to Win--A Book Review

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## Presenting to Win--A Book Review

### Abstract

*Presenting to Win: The Art of Telling Your Story*, by Jerry Weissman, provides invaluable information on how to create compelling and effective presentations. In contrast to other books that hint at the use of PowerPoint as a visual aid, Weissman explains specifically how to create effective visual aids and discusses why some approaches work and others don't. *Presenting to Win* should be in the library of every Extension educator interested in enhancing the educational value and impact of his or her presentations.

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After reading Jerry Weissman's *Presenting to Win: The Art of Telling Your Story*, I faced the stark reality that most of my prior presentations probably left the audience feeling lost, confused, insulted, bored, or disinterested. Weissman's background is impressive: graduate of the Speech and Drama Department at Stanford University, long-time public affairs producer for CBS Television, and, now, corporate presentations coach for executives at companies like Yahoo!, Compaq, Intel, Cisco Systems, and Microsoft. Weissman used that diverse background and experience to write *Presenting to Win*, a book that provides unique and invaluable advice on the creation and delivery of effective presentations.

## The Problem

Weissman begins his discussion of how to do things right by pointing out how most presenters do things wrong. The vast majority of presentations, he claims, fall prey to the five cardinal sins of presentations:

1. No clear point
2. No clear flow
3. No audience benefit
4. Too detailed
5. Too long

One danger of reading this book becomes apparent at professional meetings and conferences. I now find myself mentally checking off Weissman's list of cardinal sins as I sit and listened to presentation after presentation. Unfortunately, I must confirm the book's opening thesis: most presentations are done poorly.

## The Solution

*Presenting to Win* contains 12 chapters that systematically introduce Weissman's philosophy about presentations and offer solutions to the 5 cardinal sins. The chapters cover all the important topics relating to presentation development, such as understanding and connecting with your audience, brainstorming ideas, organizing material, using visual aids, developing charts and figures, and

customization. Weissman gives readers tools in each of these categories that they can immediately use to improve their presentations. Some interesting examples include:

1. **Mind mapping:** explains an effective approach to create and discover material for new presentations
2. **Flow structures to organize your presentation:** provides a number of ways that speakers can organize material within a presentation so that the audience can easily and quickly follow, understand, and assimilate the material
3. **Internal linkages:** discusses techniques to tie together sections within presentations
4. **Opening gambits:** illustrates ways to immediately grab the attention of any audience
5. **Bringing your story to life:** describes the importance of verbalization and phraseology in developing and practicing presentations

## A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Although the information presented in the initial chapters and described above is useful and necessary, it is not dissimilar from that found in a variety of other books on presenting and public speaking. What makes Weissman's book unique and particularly valuable, though, is his inclusion of advice on the use of Microsoft PowerPoint as a visual aid to presentations. Weissman estimates that *30 million presentations using PowerPoint are made every day*, but further claims that few are truly effective.

Why are most PowerPoint presentations ineffective? Weissman cites the "Presentation-as-Document Syndrome" as the most common underlying problem that plagues presentations. In short, people are taught and spend countless hours learning how to produce documents: reports, papers, manuscripts, briefings, proposals, dissertations, and the like. In contrast, people seldom are taught or learn the skills necessary to produce truly effective visual aids, which are vastly different than those necessary for creation of an effective document. Thus, speakers often create PowerPoint presentations using the same skills and with the same approach as for documents. As a result, many slides are ineffective and detract from, rather than enhance, the overall presentation.

To help speakers combat the Presentation-as-Document Syndrome, Weissman discusses several aspects of perception psychology and illustrates ways to use that knowledge in the creation of effective PowerPoint slides. In the process, Weissman discusses the form and function of bullet statements, the use of visual style and consistency, creation of charts and figures, and the use of animations within PowerPoint. This is not a treatise on how to use PowerPoint from a technical perspective, but rather on how to effectively design and incorporate PowerPoint slides as a visual aid to presentations.

## The Payoff

I discovered *Presenting to Win* while conducting a review of potential texts for an undergraduate seminar class and found no other book that offered similar information. Although other books discussed the importance of good PowerPoint presentations, none illustrated exactly how to do it and explained why. In this regard, Weissman's book should be required reading for anyone who routinely delivers presentations.

The most apparent shortcoming of *Presenting to Win* is that it is written exclusively from a business perspective, with all the stories, anecdotes, and illustrations coming from Weissman's background as a corporate presentations coach. As a result, my impression is that the book is relatively unknown outside of the business world. A revised version of the book, in which examples are provided from a number of fields, would likely stimulate the interest of a much broader readership. Regardless, perceptive readers will find an abundance of concepts and tools they can immediately use to improve their presentations. In particular, *Presenting to Win* offers much to Extension educators interested in enhancing the value and impact of their educational programs.

## References

Weissman, J. (2003). *Presenting to win: The art of telling your story*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Financial Times Prentice Hall.

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