

## **Book Review: 100 Things Every Presenter Needs to Know about People (2nd edition) by Susan Weinschenk (2018)**

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**H**ow to grab the attention of this new generation of students? How to balance group and individual learning activities? How to motivate students to actually do what is taught in class? Many instructional librarians have asked these questions, and more, and look for answers in books focused on the education field. Yet, books on public speaking & presentations can be perhaps more applicable to librarians, due to the nature of many of our interactions with students (e.g., one-shot instructional sessions, reference consultations) and the need to present at conferences to advance in our careers. Susan Weinschenk's *100 Things Every Presenter Needs to Know about People* (2018) is therefore one such book that librarians can use to improve instruction through strengthening presentation skills.

### **Book Overview and Targeted Audience**

The book—true to its title—lists 100 things that the author, who has a Ph.D. in Psychology, thinks are important for a good presenter to understand about human behavior, cognitive science, and psychology. With over 30 years of experience as a behavioral psychologist, rich experience consulting with all sizes of companies and educational institutions, and as a regular presenter herself, Weinschenk integrates neuroscience throughout this book. It has hundreds of evidence-based, actionable tips on how to improve presentation materials, delivery, and message. The core of the book is divided into nine sections, all of which have several short (two to four pages) chapters into which each of the 100 things are arranged:

- 1) How People See, Read and Listen;
- 2) How People Think and Learn;
- 3) How to Grab and Hold Attention;
- 4) The Power of Stories;
- 5) How to Motivate People to Take Action;
- 6) How People Decide to Take Action;
- 7) How People React to the Environment;
- 8) How People React Emotionally;
- 9) How People React to You

In the book's introduction, Weinschenk states that the book is not for those who usually think their presentations are already quite successful (whether that is actually true or not) because they "might not be motivated enough to learn ... to be a better presenter" (p. 11). So that means the book is not just for beginners or those who currently struggle noticeably—it is for anyone who is motivated to

get better, even in subtle ways. With both common best practices and non-obvious tips based on the latest research, while this book is most useful for librarians who are fairly new to instruction, it has sections for anyone actively looking for easy-to-understand and practical strategies for everyday teaching.

### **Overall Takeaways for Library Instruction**

#### ***Examine Taken-for-Granted Practices***

Once a semester has started, it can be easy for librarians to get caught up in the (often) day-to-day schedule, as they scramble to keep up with increasing demands on their time. Thus, instructors may not be currently using some of the theories and practices discussed in the book due to lack of time, experience, or simply awareness. This book therefore provides great opportunity for librarians to examine everyday practices.

For example, with more learners finding, using, and creating information digitally in and beyond classrooms, it is not uncommon that instructional librarians use digital tools to engage learners, such as online polling or gaming platforms and various digital devices to demonstrate search in online databases. While that overall can be a good thing (e.g., online polling can allow more students to participate in class discussion and the nearly instant feedback can permit a more target instruction session), Weinschenk discusses in the chapter of "How People Decide to Take Action" that we should remember to consider where it might be appropriate to use writing, rather than typing on a keyboard, to maximize memory retention and commitment to take action (pp 176-177). The cognitive science theories underlying this recommendation could inspire librarians who heavily rely on emerging technologies to thoughtfully also incorporate handwritten activities into instructional sessions and thus to maximize the learning outcomes of these sessions.

An additional example can be found in the chapter, "How People Think and Learn," which focuses on how people take in and process the information that is being conveyed by the presenter. We all know it is important to keep the listener engaged, but beyond general rules of thumb like "don't just be a sage on the stage" and "include some active learning," we may need some help on how to do so. So while discussing the cognitive concept of "memory disruption" (e.g., people tend to naturally remember beginnings and endings of a presentation and zone out in the middle), Weinschenk recommends

essentially creating multiple short presentations within a single presentation by breaking it up with activities and exercises; that way, people will have more chances to not only apply the information they've learned, but have less "middle" time where the material tends to be less memorable (pp. 75-76). Hopefully, this can inspire presenters to go beyond the (good advice) to not to drone on and/or just leave questions to the end, but thoughtfully create a session divided into sections that will make the material more memorable.

### ***Tell a Good Story***

Librarians often have just a relatively limited amount of time to instruct students. Thus, we have to balance the need to go into detail (e.g., how to use a particular field in a particular tool) with ensuring we don't get lost in the weeds so that students understand larger concepts (e.g., what is a primary source?) while *also* making sure students have enough active, hands-on time—particularly if that time is to work on their assignment, the reason they may be having a "library session" in the first place. That can be a lot! Still, the section "The Power of Stories" reminds us that it can greatly help an instructor to make sure they take a few minutes to tell a story, as that ancient, pre-literate form of communication is uniquely powerful in grabbing a listener's attention, stimulating their brain, and creating a more long-lasting effect with a lesson.

Weinschenk points out that not only is the brain more active when listening to a story (meaning anything conveyed is more likely to be memorable) but that stories impact the audience in all sorts of way. If you're not naturally a good storyteller, don't worry—she gives useful tips about how to construct a good story arc and how to maintain the appropriate amount of tension in the narrative in order to get an audience's attention. What might be a good topic for a story for, say, an FYE intro to library session? The book, of course, doesn't get that specific, but does point out that it's the students and their self-stories, which are "who they are and what's important to them" (p.118), that can guide us. And if we are only meeting with students once, perhaps get some general information from the class instructor or take an educated guess by relying on your past history with similar classes.

### ***Ensure the Diverse Needs of Students/Attendees are Met***

The book includes some actionable tips that work well to accommodate individual learners, whether you are utilizing a framework like Universal Design for Learning or doing so on a more ad hoc basis.

A very straightforward example can be found in the first chapter, "How People See, Read and Listen" section. While we librarians all know it is important to speak "loudly and clearly enough", we don't necessarily "ask for a microphone", or "ask (a sound technician or a friend) to walk around... the room to make sure... [we] can be heard everywhere" (pp. 51-52) when we are in rooms bigger than a regular classroom. The seemingly very common, if not obvious tips Weinschenk offers in the book are good reminders and actionable suggestions of the little but important things we tend to take for granted and thus ignore. Another example is the tip regarding the importance of font size and type in terms of fluency—don't just use the default setting on your computer, but thoughtfully decide what will work best; of particular help for presentations is a chart (p. 43) with exact font size and screen width to check against our everyday practice.

In addition, for example, in one chapter on the prevalence of color blindness (9% of men have some form of it), she discusses the importance of "redundant coding scheme" (p. 31) if you are using colors like red, green or blue to signify something (e.g., "areas in red also have a box around them"). But beyond how the brain sometimes has a faulty interpretation of color, she also discusses how different cultures can ascribe different meaning to different colors and care should be taken when selecting a palette. Also mentioned are the importance of room temperature (what works for the presenter might not be best for the audience, and not everyone in the audience is the same), lighting, and room setup. It's a useful reminder it's not just your content that has to be prepared to work for everyone, but so does the presentation format and its physical setting.

### **Reading Strategies for the Book**

While librarians might benefit from the tips—and understanding their underlying cognitive science and learning science theories—that are found in all the sections, what might be most applicable to library instruction are the following ones:

- How People See, Read and Listen;
- How People Think and Learn;
- How to Grab and Hold Attention;
- How to Motivate People to Take Action

Additionally, take advantage of the practicality and the shortness of chapters of the book; this, along with its wide-ranging scope, makes it quite useful as a reference book. It is unnecessary to read the whole book from start

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choose. For example, you could create a personal reading list, or use it to track instruction statistics. As with “Outlines,” you have the option of starting from a template or you can configure your list from scratch (using the orange “+ ADD LIST” button). After creating and naming your list, your first step (unless you are happy with a selected template) will be to “Edit Columns” (aka add fields). When you opt to create a new column, you will be prompted to give it a name and select a data type (e.g., date, text, rating, checkbox, integer). You can also delete, edit, and/or reorder existing columns. Once your list design is configured the way you want, you can start adding items and related data either by typing directly into the column fields or by importing content via a CSV file.

After populating your list with information, you can use the sort functionality to reorder items and filters to show or hide list items. As with Outlines, users of the free version can only add 30 items to each list and share with one collaborator, although there is no limit on the number of lists that can be created.

### Habits

<https://habits.toodledo.com/>

The stated purpose of Toodledo “Habits” is help you “turn good behaviors into permanent habits.” Basically, it

is a goal setting and tracking tool. Example “Habits” might include tracking time spent on a particular activity (e.g., research, preparing to teach) or setting a goal to regularly engage in a particular activity (e.g. a goal to make one new faculty contact each week). When you add a habit, you can choose how you want to log it (i.e., checkbox, number, or rating), select a start date, designate a schedule (e.g., daily, once a week), and/or set a reminder. Users of the basic, free version of Toodledo can create up to five habits.

### Conclusion

Instruction librarians are busy people. In order to stay on top of our various duties and resultant tasks, organization is essential. To that end, Toodledo is an option that provides users with a robust set of task management features within a relatively easy-to-use interface. It is highly adaptable to individual user preferences with the ability to configure fields and settings to fit a variety of work styles and organizational systems. Overall, Toodledo is a solid option for those seeking to bring order to their digital “to-dos”, manage their daily responsibilities, and track progress.

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to end because of recurring theories throughout the book. It is also impossible to implement over 300 tips (each chapter has more than one suggestion) all at once. As such, it is most efficient and useful to read one chapter at a time and commit to testing out the few tips you read.

### Conclusion

*100 Things Every Presenter Needs to Know about People* is an easy-to-read book with practical tips supported by scientific theories. Librarians can use this book as a reference to improve instruction on a daily basis. By showcasing the possibility of achieving maximum impact through presentations in a variety of ways, this book can empower librarians to tweak their current methods and develop systematic style and practices for both teaching and presenting. Whether presenting in classrooms, at conferences, outreach events or even virtually (including through digital learning objects), librarians can use the book to make sure they are being the best instructor or presenter they can be.

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