

BUSINESS SKILLS SERIES

# BEYOND Beyond Bullet Points POINTS

3rd

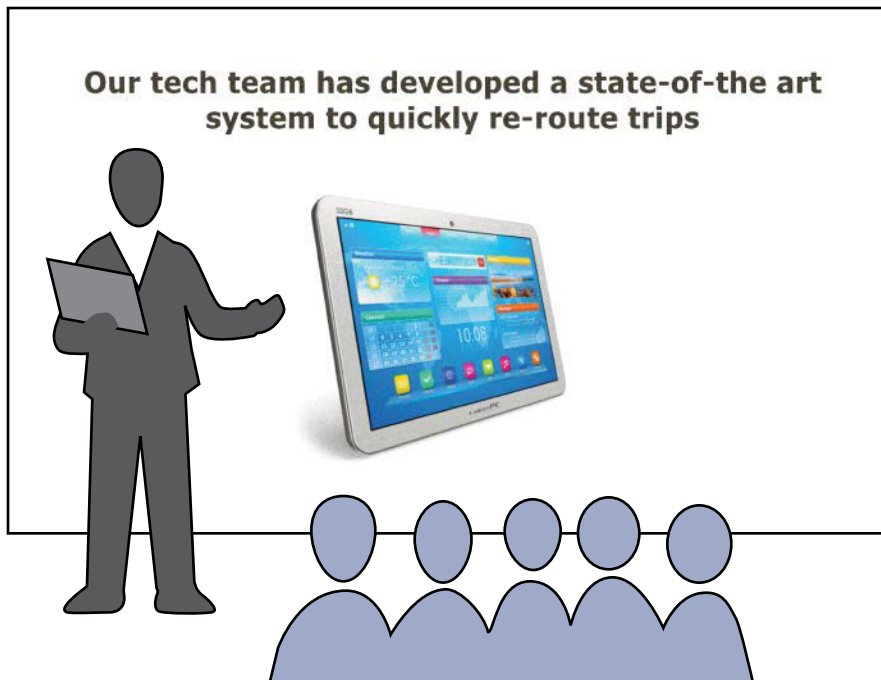
FOURTH EDITION

Using PowerPoint to tell a persuasive  
story that gets results

● CLIFF ATKINSON

# BEYOND BULLET POINTS

4TH EDITION

**FIGURE 3-20**

*Your visual story immerses the audience in the experience and ensures that the attention of the audience is not split between screen and speaker.*

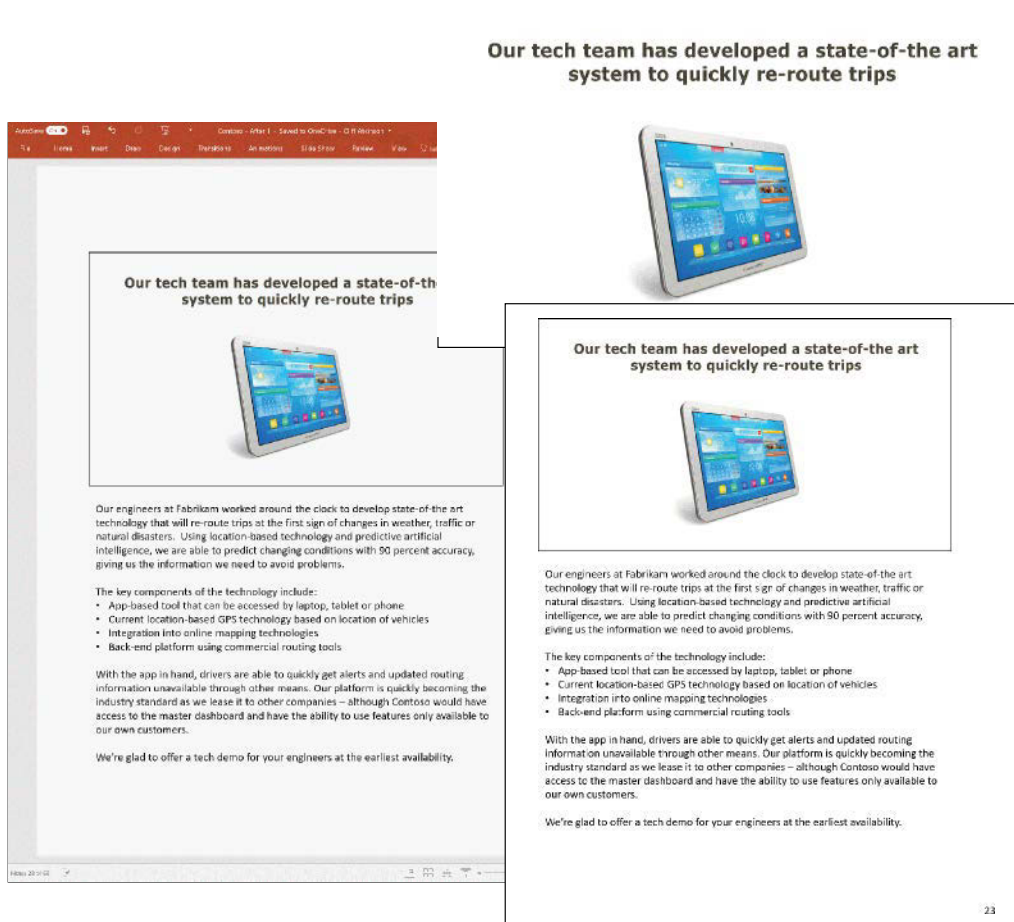
When you project your slides on a large screen, they work as visual prompts that increase your confidence as a speaker. You're no longer tied to the uncomfortable task of reading text off the screen and unintentionally ignoring your audience. Instead, the clear headline and graphic quickly prompt you to use your natural voice and authority as you explain them.

## DOCUMENTING THE EXPERIENCE

As described in Chapter 2, aligning your approach with the dual-channels theory allows you to use PowerPoint in a way that produces both an effective presentation and an effective printed handout, as shown in Figure 3-21. Looking at Notes Page view on the left, the on-screen slide area contains a headline and a simple graphic, while the off-screen notes area captures what is spoken aloud by the presenter. Keeping the narration off the screen creates effective slides (upper right), along with effective handouts (lower right).

When you distribute the PowerPoint file to people who were not present for the live presentation of visuals and narration, you send the notes pages, not the slides. Print out the notes pages to create a physical copy, or create a PDF version that you distribute electronically.

Using Notes Page view taps into the unique value PowerPoint offers you as a communications tool because no other tool can produce a single file that works effectively like this on a screen, on a piece of paper, and even online.



**FIGURE 3-21**

*Notes Page view, showing a well-designed slide and a well-designed handout with the complete verbal explanation of the slide.*

## GETTING STARTED WITH THE BBP STORY TEMPLATE

To get started, download a copy of the BBP Story Template from [www.beyondbulletpoints.com](http://www.beyondbulletpoints.com), and save it on your local computer.

## WRITING HEADLINES USING THREE GROUND RULES

Everything you do in your presentation from this point forward will build on the headlines you write in your story template. To make your headlines as effective as possible, review the three important ground rules that apply to every statement you write.

### GUIDELINE 1: WRITE CONCISE, COMPLETE SENTENCES WITH A SUBJECT AND A VERB IN ACTIVE VOICE

To effectively communicate your message consistently and clearly through your entire story, your headlines must be complete sentences with a subject and a verb. Write the sentences in active voice—for example, “Our top competitors launched five new products last quarter” rather than in the passive voice, “Five new products were launched by our top competitors last quarter.” Keep your language dynamic and direct; the same principles, techniques, and rules that define good writing also define good headlines in your template.

**MORE ON WRITING CLEARLY** For an excellent reference guide to writing the headlines of your story template clearly and concisely, see William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White’s *The Elements of Style* (Longman, 2000).

Writing headlines in the form of complete sentences imposes discipline on your ideas by forcing you to turn them into coherent thoughts and removes any ambiguity. Later, when you import your headlines into the title area of your slides, your audience will not doubt what you want to communicate because they can read it for themselves at the top of each slide. Write your headlines using sentence case, with the initial word capitalized and the rest in lowercase.

When you write your headlines for Act I, constrain them to only one line that fills the width of the cell without extending to a second line. The columns in your template for Act II are narrower, so you can extend those headlines to a maximum of about two and a half lines. Constraining your headlines to these limits keeps you from being

wordy and ensures that your headlines will fill a maximum of two lines when you send them to the title area of your PowerPoint slides.

## GETTING CLEAR ON YOUR HEADLINES

If you're looking for practical examples of how to write concisely, look no further than the headlines used in social media or online publications. When writing a headline, a writer has limited time and space to communicate an idea clearly, so the language needs to be clear, direct, and engaging.

It might be a challenge to keep your headlines brief, but that's part of the process of boiling down your complicated ideas to their essence. This distillation will help you get right to the point in your presentations.

### GUIDELINE 2: BE CLEAR, DIRECT, SPECIFIC, AND CONVERSATIONAL

Each statement in your story template will speak directly to your audience when it fills the title area of a slide, so use a conversational tone that is simple, clear, and direct. Say what you mean in plain language. When you make your point, include the details that give it specificity, color, and impact. Tailor your words to the level of understanding of everyone in the audience and place nothing in the headline that is not in the audience's vocabulary.

The point of the headline is to help your audience understand your point as efficiently as possible—if you use words unfamiliar to them, you create obstacles to understanding, and they will wonder what the individual words mean instead of attending to the overall message. If everyone in your audience has a clear prior understanding of the technical language you are using, you can use more complex language.

When you write your headlines, imagine that you are addressing a few members of your audience sitting in chairs next to your desk. Because you're simply having a conversation, your voice should be relaxed and casual—not tense and formal. This conversational tone will help you keep your headlines from getting wordy. Later, when your audience reads your headlines in the title area of your slides, the conversational tone will help them feel more relaxed and open to your ideas. Although presenters might assume formal language gives them more authority, research shows people learn better when information is presented in a conversational style rather than a formal style.

## THREE GUIDELINES FOR WRITING HEADLINES

Your story template depends on a special writing style that boils down your story to its essence. Follow these three guidelines to keep your writing on point:

1. Write concise, complete sentences with a subject and a verb in active voice.
2. Be clear, direct, specific, and conversational.
3. Guideline 3: Link your ideas across cells.

### GUIDELINE 3: LINK YOUR IDEAS ACROSS CELLS

As you'll see later, you'll be breaking up complicated ideas into smaller pieces as you write your thoughts in the cells of the story template. As you do that, make sure that you link your ideas so that they flow to one another as you read them across the cells. By choosing a consistent tense across all headlines, you'll create a more dynamic, in-the-moment feeling to your story. Also, link your ideas by using a parallel sentence structure across cells, which keeps everything sounding clear and coherent.

## THE WRITING ON THE WALL

When your story template is projected onto a wall as you work with your team, it becomes a tool for a group of people to see, create, discuss, debate, and agree on the structure of any presentation. Organizations have found the story template tool to be a breakthrough innovation because it guides a collaborative process, gives people ownership, taps into collective brainpower, and gets everyone on the same page.

Now that you've prepared your story template and reviewed the ground rules, it's time to get specific and start with the beginning—the first and most important slides of your presentation.

