WordPress Speaker Training Workbook

BRAINSTORM

Brainstorm as many topic ideas as you can in 15 minutes. We're not looking for "perfect" or even "good" ideas. The idea is just to get them out, good, bad or ugly. See if you can get 30 or 40 ideas. Seriously, anything that comes to mind.

While you're writing, drawing, mind-mapping, listing, summoning the writing gods, getting writers' block etc., we'll be prompting you with questions to generate more topics.

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REFINE, REFINE, REFINE

Okay, you've got some good, bad and ugly ideas. Now out of that list, pick the two topics from your list that you think best fits the following questions.

1. Pick 2 topics that you don't know a lot about but have had some success with. (e.g. I don't know much about making plugins, but I've made one for custom post types)
2. Pick 2 topics you may not know much about but that you would have good questions for.
3. Pick 2 topics that you are confident about and could lead a how-to presentation.
4. Pick 2 topics that you've successfully worked on that you feel you could do a case study about.
5. Pick 2 subjects in the topic list that are your favorite.

6. Pick 2 topics that you think you could teach to others in a hands-on manner.

PICK A SINGLE TOPIC

Of the topics on the previous page, is there one that you are especially passionate about? (Or maybe there are three?!) To further refine your topic, apply "Who, What, Why, How, When, Where" to your topic. For example: If you have a favorite plugin, you can try asking who is this plugin for? What does this plugin do? Why was this plugin created? How does it work? When would you use it? Where would you use it?

1. Who

2. What

3. Why

4. How

5. When

6. Where

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TALK OUTLINE

By now you've answered a few questions about your topic. With these ideas in mind create an outline for your talk. Don't worry. We'll talk you through the outline.

Introduction (can be used as part of your pitch)

- Clear what it's about
- Piques interest — what is your hook?
- Succinct
- Why it matters
- What the talk will cover
- Who it's aimed at

Body

- Refer to your answers from the previous page

Conclusion

- Remember to include your contact info — a Twitter handle is good enough
- Include any further resources that may be useful for your talk's attendees

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PROPOSAL NOTES

Whatever your motivations for speaking, you first need to get selected to speak, and for that you need to create a proposal or pitch, that gets your talk selected. Also, since your proposal defines the scope of your talk, it can be a good early step in the overall process of developing your talk.

Take a look at the outline you have just written. Generally, your talk proposal and the introduction of your outline will be quite similar.

A good introduction should have all the things a good pitch would have. However, in a pitch you might want to spice it up a bit.

For a pitch, you'll want to tailor the tone of your writing and vocabulary to the specific audience and event that you are applying to. This is very important!

- A business crowd may be formal. A meetup may be more casual. Customize the tone of your pitch to your specific audience.
- You might want to use different vocabulary depending on the audience.
- You may want to stress different "hooks" or "points of interest" depending on the audience or event.

There are also 6 important points to take note of when writing both your outline and your pitch. (The following is used, with permission from *We Are All Awesome* http://weareallaweso.me/for_speakers/how-to-write-a-compelling-proposal.html)

1. Direct the proposal to the attendees, not the curators

Many conferences use your talk proposal as the description of the talk in their program. With that in mind, your target reader is the conference attendee who is reading the program. Tell the reader why your talk will interest them, and what they will learn.

The curators want to put together a great conference with compelling talks for their attendees. Your talk will be part of the package they offer, so sell it!

Make sure you research the event. Are there different tracks? Who is the audience? Lots of devs? Mostly for users? Design-heavy? Different WordCamps have different personalities. Are they short on really technical presentations? Light on talks for beginners? Try to fill a need. (i.e podcasting)

2. Be specific about the focus your talk will have

Generally speaking, a shallow introduction to many things is not as interesting as an in-depth introduction to one thing. If you discuss the broader topic, do so only to set the context for what you will focus on.

3. One strategy: Pose the question your talk will answer

Often, talks answer questions that start with "how", "why", "when" and so on. An easy trick is to directly ask these questions in your proposal, leaving the reader wondering the answer.

4. Make your point as succinctly as you can

If your first draft requires more than two paragraphs to get to the point of your topic, edit to slim things down. Take out any words that can be removed without changing the meaning. You may have a lot of competition, so try to make a good impression quickly. If your proposal is too much work to read or understand, it might get skipped during the selection process.

5. Use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation

If you submit a sloppily written proposal, you appear careless and as if you are not taking the opportunity seriously. You risk being rejected on those grounds outright. Speaking requires a lot of thoughtful preparation, and curators can only assume you will be as careless when preparing the talk itself.

6. Have your proposal reviewed by someone with experience

Just as you might ask a friend to critique a draft of your CV, an essay, or the talk itself, ask someone (ideally a writer, speaker, or curator) to review your talk proposal. They will catch typos, as well as verify whether your proposal explains the scope of your talk and explains its benefit to your audience.

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TALK PROPOSAL

Talk proposal

- Take a look at the outline you have just written. Generally, your talk proposal and the introduction of your outline will be very similar.

- Tailor for the specific audience and event that you are pitching to.

Talk title

- Try to think of something catchy but explanatory

- Title should stand on its own without a blurb (for example don't use something like *CSS and Elephants*)

Your bio

- Should be written in third person

- Be succinct but descriptive (shouldn't be longer than three sentences)

- Mention what your position or job is and any credentials that might be relevant.

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NOTES FOR BECOMING
A BETTER SPEAKER

Practicing Speaking

The most important thing you can do to become a better speaker is to practice! The more you speak — in front of a mirror, in front of friends or in front of a room full of people — the more comfortable and the better you will become. You can even give your talk to a friend over Skype.

When you practice, time yourself. You might be surprised by how long or short your talk is when you are speaking out loud, and it is important to know how long your talk is going to take.

If you're looking for opportunities to practice speaking, see if there is a Toastmasters in your area. They will provide you with many opportunities to speak in front of a supportive group of people, and give you tips and tools for improvement.

You can also practice at smaller meetups. WordPress meetups are good for practicing for WordCamps. If you want to practice for WordPress meetups, you could find smaller related meetups who would be interested in hearing about your WordPress topic.

Do's and Don'ts

No matter how much public speaking experience you have, there is always room for improvement. Here are some do's and don'ts to help you improve.
Do:

- Speak slowly. Many speakers speak too fast, but audiences almost never complain that someone went too slowly. Take pauses in between sentences.
It may feel very strange to you, but will seem very natural to the audience.

- Have water available and drink it. Most events will provide water for the speaker, but make sure you have water on hand just in case. When you find yourself going too fast, taking a drink of water is a great way to slow yourself down. It might feel like it takes forever to take a drink, but the audience doesn't mind.

- Vary your voice. This gets easier with practice. You don't want to speak in a monotone, so make sure you have some inflection in your tone.

- Look at your whole audience. Make eye contact with people if you can, but make sure you scan the whole room and don't just look at one part of the audience.

- Make sure the audience can hear you. If you aren't sure whether the mic or your voice is loud enough, ask the audience if they can hear you. Ask the people in the back to raise their hands if you get too quiet.

- Keep your hands above your waist. If you do this, you will find yourself gesturing naturally.

- Remember to breathe.

Don't:

- Drink too much coffee. You're already jittery from nerves, so you don't need a coffee buzz on top of it!

- Turn away from the audience. If you need to point something out in your slides, make sure that you keep your face pointed toward the audience as you point.

- Use filler words like "um." You might not even notice you are doing this so ask a friend to point it out in rehearsal.

- Read your slides or notes directly. Make sure you look up from your notes, and ad lib at least a little bit.

Handling Nerves

Everyone gets nervous about public speaking. It is a part of being human. In fact, it's hard-wired! For our cavemen ancestors, any time more than 5 pairs of eyes were looking at them at once, that meant that in all likelihood they were about to die. We still react that way when we get up in front of a group of people and see them all watching us.

Keep in mind that your audience is on your side — they want to see you succeed, and all of them would be nervous if they were in your shoes. In fact, it's okay to admit that you are nervous — people will be sympathetic.

Here are some things you can do to help soothe your nerves:

- Practice! It really does get easier with practice. The more you practice the better you will know your material and the more confident you will be.

- Sleep. If you are well-rested, you will do a better job. Resist the urge to network or socialize too much the night before.

- Exercise. The best way to get rid of nervous energy is to burn it off. Physiologically, the reason you get nervous is so that you will have the energy and adrenaline to fight or flee from your predator. Running or getting some other form of exercise is a great way to burn off that nervous energy and convince your body that the danger is over.

- Breathe. When we get nervous, we tend to take shallow breaths into our chest. This is a part of the body's preparation for fight or flight, and it actually deprives the brain of some of its important oxygen. Take long slow breaths into your belly, and this will help calm you and clear your mind.

- Dress comfortably. Being body-conscious never helps, so make sure you are comfortable in whatever you are wearing.

- Take time before you speak for yourself. This helps you compose yourself and get mentally prepared. Go for a walk, listen to some favorite music, go over your notes, or just take some really deep breaths.

- Know the stage. Try to find a time before you give your talk to see the room where you will be speaking.

- Use your own devices. If you have your own laptop, clicker, or whatever you need, you will be more comfortable with your equipment.

- If you can't use your own devices, come early to ensure you're able to get your notes onto the system and that you can use the system with ease.

- Adopt a persona. This doesn't mean don't be yourself, it just means be the Speaker version of yourself. For instance, if you tend to talk with your hands when you are nervous, embrace that and make it a part of your speaker persona. You will behave differently when you are in front of a big group of people, go with that and don't fight it.

Handling Q&A

Timing

Many talks have an audience question and answer session at the end. Ask the organizers in advance what the expectations are. Try timing your talk when you rehearse it and make sure you've left room for an adequate amount of Q&A time, if that's something you'll be expected to do.

How much time should you allow for Q&A? If the organizers haven't specified this for you, it usually depends on length of your whole session. In general, 10–20 minutes is adequate. For example, if your whole presentation takes up a 45-minute slot you might want to allow 35 minutes for the presentation and 10 minutes for questions.

Interspersing Q&A

Some people prefer to take questions throughout their talk rather than holding them until the end. Let your audience know up front what you prefer, bearing in mind that if your audience will be using a

microphone due to the size of the room or the fact that your talk is being recorded, you'll need to give the room technician a heads-up about your Q&A plans so they're ready with the audience microphone as needed.

Don't Forget to Ask for Questions!

If you're saving Q&A until the end, don't forget to do it once you finish your talk! To remind yourself, you can add slide at the end of your talk saying thanks and asking for questions.

Repeat the Question Back to the Audience

Unless the audience is mic'ed, repeat each question before answering. Your audience and anyone later watching the video (if your talk is being recorded) will thank you.

Tricky Questions

Often speakers who are brand new to public speaking, and even ones that aren't, are nervous about getting asked a question that they feel they don't know the answer to or has a tricky answer. There are a few ways to handle that situation:

- Remember to repeat the question back to the audience. This buys you a little bit of time to think about how to handle the question.

- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know. The audience will have far more respect for you for admitting than you don't know than if you try to fudge it and fail.

- You can say something like: "That's a good question. I'm not sure about the answer, but let me look into that for you. Could you send me a tweet or email after the session and we'll stay in touch?"

- You can throw it to the audience with something like: "Good question! I'm actually not sure, does anyone here have any ideas?"

- Throw the question to a friend or colleague in the audience: "Good question! My colleague Jane actually knows a lot about that. Hey Jane, do you have any ideas on this one?" You can also talk to your colleagues/friends beforehand and make sure they're okay with being put on the spot like this.

The Smarty-Pants

Handling the "smarty-pants" in the audience who thinks they know better than you and goes on and on and on is a big fear. It doesn't happen often, but if it does, one thing to keep in mind is that in these sorts of situations, other people in the audience are thinking about how much of an idiot the know-it-

all is, not about how you're handling it. Don't be afraid to cut someone off if they're monopolizing the Q&A or derailing it. It's possible to do this politely but firmly: "I think we're going to have to move on now, because time is running out and I really want to get a few more questions in."

Unrelated Questions

Sometimes people will ask questions that have little or nothing to do with your talk and answering the question will derail the conversation. One way of handling this is to say, "That's a good question, but it's outside of the scope of what we're talking about. I'd be happy to answer it for you privately after."

Silence

What if you finish your talk, throw open the floor to the audience and there are no questions? That's totally okay! There aren't always questions.

You can also have one or two people you know in the audience ready to ask a question, or even chime in with a different angle. For example, if you're a developer, have a designer read with an observation on your topic from that point of view.

You can also ask and answer your own questions. For example: "Something I didn't go into in depth in the talk, but that you might be wondering about, is…… " or "A question I've had come up before is…."

Errors

Don't be afraid to correct errors after your talk. If someone points out an error — either during the Q&A or later — go ahead and update your presentation online and include the correction if you give the same talk again. Be sure to verify that the "correction" is actually accurate before doing this!

Contact and Slides

Once the Q&A is over, let people know how to connect with you once you're done and where to find your slides. Give out your Twitter handle and/or email, whatever avenues you're comfortable with. You can also include this information on your final slide so that it's up on the screen behind you while you take questions.

Getting Post-Talk Feedback

We often forget this part of the process, but getting feedback after your talk is really important if you want to get better at public speaking.

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You want to get feedback about both your content and your speaking style. You want feedback about whether your content was interesting, well-organized, easy to follow, etc. This is true whether you plan to ever give this same talk again or not because a lot of the knowledge gained can be generalized. You also want to know about your speaking technique: How was the pace, volume, approachability, etc.?

Where can you get feedback? Ask conference organizers if they send out a survey, and whether you can see your own feedback. Ask people you know who were there for feedback: The more specific your questions the better the feedback you will get. (Don't ask "what did you think" ask "was there something you thought could have been better? Could you hear me? Did I speak too quickly or too slowly? etc.)

Keep in mind that asking people for feedback directly will be different than asking organizers for the feedback that was sent to them. People tend to be softer and kinder when speaking to you, as opposed to when they think that their feedback is only going to organizers.

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NOTES FOR CREATING GREAT SLIDES

Let's first start with a Public Service Announcement. You do not need slides with every talk. Some talks can stand on their own.

Slides can be your friend or your enemy, so don't rely on them completely. Something to ask yourself: If the slide projector were to break down, could you give your talk without it?

That said, when used correctly, slides are amazing and can bring a lot to your talk.

Used in the right way, slides emphasize and help you get your points across. Let's look at some tips for creating good slide decks.

- Give your slides a theme. It could be you illustrate all your points with lolcats, or that you they all use the same background and typography. Whatever it is, having a visually unified deck makes all the difference.

- Many speakers end up with a look to their slides that they stick with from presentation to presentation. This makes their talks stand out and feel part of a cohesive set. It may not be the route you want to go, but it's something to consider.

- Don't use a default slideshow theme, like the templates that come with Keynote or Powerpoint. We've all seen them a thousand times, and they look generic.

- Don't write out what you are going to be saying. This can be a flexible rule for useful, important quotes but nobody likes someone reading lines from a slide.

- Make your text size readable. Think of the granny sitting at the back of the room.

- Use code sparingly. Nobody likes pages and pages of code on a screen. Not even developers can stay awake through that!

- Include a slide at the end of your deck to thank your audience. You can also use a closing slide to remind you to do your Q&A.

- Enhance the mood of your talk with slides. Use them to add humour and to help get your point across.

- Check the copyright on your images. If you're using a Creative Commons graphic, remember to give proper attribution to its creator.

- Consider sketching something original, creating your own images, or using your own photography. Make it personal and unique.

- Slides don't need images. You can just have words.

- Check your contrast on a range of screens to make sure it'll be legible.

- Also consider your choice of color. You can check color contrast using an online tool to be sure it'll be easily readable.

- Take care when selecting fonts. Don't use a fancy font that's cute but unreadable. Don't use too many different fonts together. Select one or two with different weights.

- Make sure you're creating your slides for the right screen size. Try to find out in advance what aspect ratio the projector will have. Stay away from edges of the screen to be safe, keep key information out of those areas.

- You'll find a collection of more tips on creating great slides and other resources at getspeak.in. There are links to contrast calculators and examples of inspirational slide decks that you can explore at your leisure.

More Tips

- What software should you use to create your slides? You can use a dedicated presentation software like Keynote or PowerPoint, or try Google Apps' Slides tool. Some people prefer a HTML/JavaScript slideshow like reveal.js, which you can upload to the web. Going this route can make your slides more easily indexed by search engines.

- Practice going through your deck using an external monitor, using a presentation mode which lets you see your notes. Think about bringing your notes printed out on paper in case the presentation setup doesn't end up allowing you to see your internal notes.

- Bring a backup of your slides with you on a thumb drive, including any special fonts you've used. Save the presentation in a few different formats, including PDF. If for some reason there's any issue with your computer, you'll be able to easily borrow someone else's and ensure that your type looks as you intended.

- Upload your slides before your talk if possible, and include a link to them at the end of your slides. SlideShare and SpeakerDeck are two good services where you can upload slides. Remember to tweet out the link afterwards and send it to the event organizers so they can post it.

If you start to do more speaking, invest in a presentation clicker to advance your slides without having to use a keyboard or mouse. It'll let you stand away from your laptop and keep your hands in a more natural position while you speak.