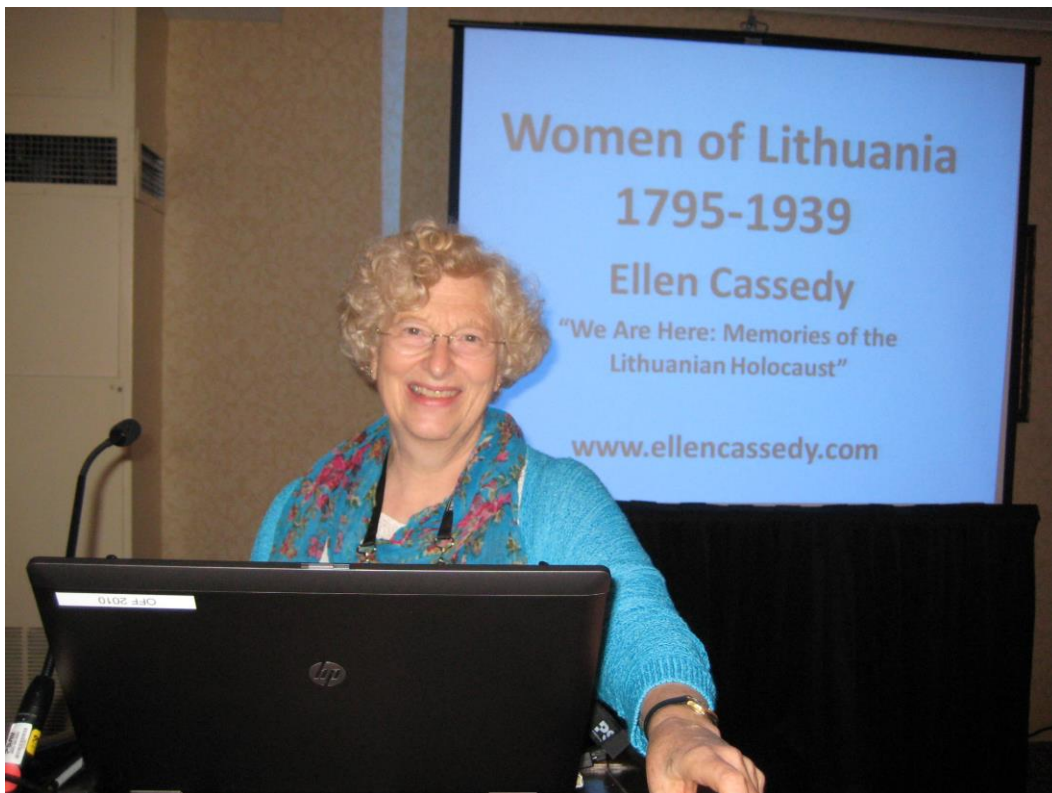


# Writing Tips from Ellen Cassedy

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## Turn your book talk into a multi-media presentation



Speaking about my book is among my favorite activities as an author. Being in contact with audiences feeds me – as a writer, a thinker, and a person. And the talks are an important source of sales.

By showing slides as I speak, I've turned my talks into multi-media presentations. For me and many other authors of memoirs and other non-

fiction books, adding images to the mix can be a key way to keep listeners' attention and speak compellingly about our work.

With evocative images, giving your talk can feel like telling a story – even like reading a picture book aloud.

In the old days, presenting a slide show meant using a slide projector to present a series of photographs on a screen. Today, you design the show on your computer, bring the file to your speaking venue (on either a laptop or flashdrive), and plug in to a digital projector (usually supplied by the venue). You can choose to present only still slides or add animation and sound.

I use PowerPoint, the leading slide show software, but many other low-cost or no-cost options exist for PC's and Mac's alike.

The technical skills you need for adding images to your book talk are minimal. That said, though, you must be careful to avoid the fearsome dangers of “PowerPoint hell,” “PowerPoint poisoning,” “death by PowerPoint,” or “infinite bullet point syndrome.”

Here's how:

**1) Think pictures.** Don't think of slides as a way to add *words* to your talk. Your talk is already full of words – that's what your mouth is for.

Instead, carefully select a series of images uniquely suited to your talk – rich, colorful pictures that illustrate and enhance your words.

During my standard 40-minute talk, I show several dozen images that fill the screen – family photos, historical photos, photos I took myself. I stay away from stock photos, cartoons, decorative touches, cats.

**2) Make every slide count.** Not too many, not too few. Create a constantly changing background, as if pages are turning as you speak. Think carefully about which slide goes with which words. When you move on to a new point, the image should change accordingly.

**3) Use text sparingly.** A rule of thumb is no more than 15 words per slide. I use far fewer. I don't use bullet points or try to express complex ideas on the screen. I use text for only three reasons:

- To highlight the *structure* of the talk. Title slide to begin, chapter heading slides as I go along.
- To *spell out names* that may be difficult for the audience to grasp by ear alone. I add name tags to slides showing these people's faces.
- With a *final* slide, to tell people how to *contact* me and find my book.

**4) Hammer out logistics** with your host. Do you need to bring a laptop or simply a flashdrive? Will a tech-savvy person be on hand to hook everything up? Can you control the slides as you speak with a remote control clicker, or will the laptop be placed on the podium? (If not, give a copy of your talk, with slide changes marked, to a helper who sits near the projector. You may need to signal to your helper, too, but keep the signals subtle.) Can the light in the room be controlled? (Not so dark that people won't be able to see your face or find it tempting to nap; not so light that the slides will fade out.)

**5) Rehearse.** Using slides effectively takes practice. Indicate in the margins of your speaking script (yes, I always use a script, printed in large font) when to click to the next slide. Before every speaking appearance, review your script to familiarize yourself with the rhythm of your sentences and make sure you know exactly when to cue the next slide.

Never turn your back to the audience. If you must look at the screen, take only a quick peek.

In my talks, for the most part, I don't make explicit reference to the slides. Instead, as the images roll along, I concentrate on maintaining eye contact with the audience and telling my story – an illustrated story.

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. And a picture *plus* words? Priceless.

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Ellen Cassedy is the author of [\*We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust\*](#) (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2012). To see all of her Writing Tips, visit her website at [www.ellencassedy.com](http://www.ellencassedy.com).