# Begin with a joke?

## *What John Oliver can teach us about communicating cost estimates*

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Photo credit: Rolling Stone Magazine

# Acknowledgements


- *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*images are the property of HBO
- Participants at the 2016 ICEAA Canada Workshop for sharing their challenges
- My husband for (unwittingly) inspiring this presentation

# We've heard a lot from *Jo Estimator** about *Joe Boss**

- Jo Estimator has developed a cost estimate for a major project
- She has followed the 12-step GAO process, documented her process, verified her results…
- **But Joe Boss won't accept her estimate**
- He wants the lower estimate that equates to a lower CI

** Two completely fictional people we are using to illustrate a completely non-fictional problem.*

# Meet Joe Boss

- **Joe Boss is busy**
- Joe Boss "doesn't have time" for the details
- Joe Boss doesn't like ranges, risks, or probabilities
- Joe Boss wants a point estimate
- Joe Boss doesn't like the point estimate
- And so on…

# Joe Boss and Jo Estimator have different expectations of a brief

## Joe Boss wants an *Elevator Pitch*

- Clear and concise summary of the findings of the analysis
- A single recommendation or conclusion
- 30 seconds, approximately 75 words in length

**30 seconds is not enough time to explain an estimate**

## Jo Estimator gives verbal *Briefing Notes*

- Clear and concise summary of the findings of your analysis
- A single recommendation or conclusions
- Briefing notes are at least 500 words, or 6 minutes in length

**Joe Boss does not have 6 minutes to listen**

Jo Estimator wants a 1200% increase in face time!

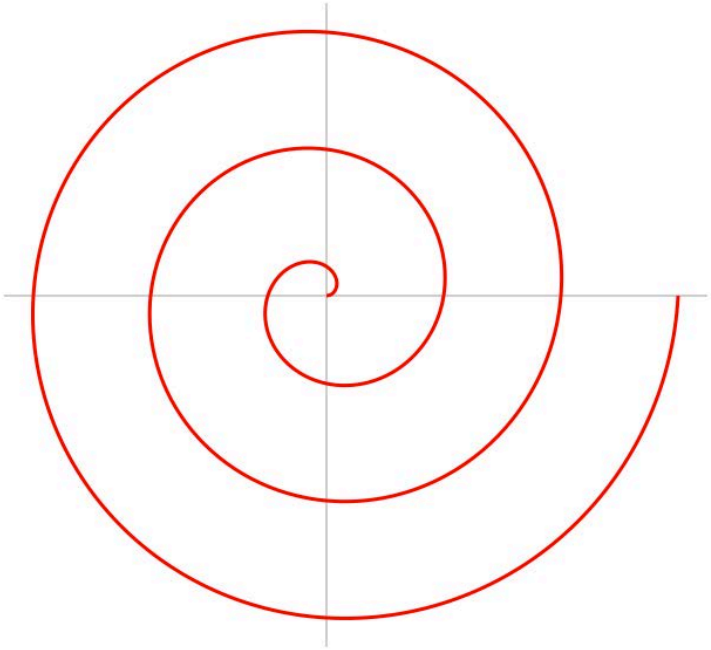
# FACT:
# John Oliver gets
# → **20 minutes** ←
# of Joe Boss' attention

# Why John Oliver?

- Average viewership of over 4 million per week
- *The Wall* segment received over 3.1 million views on YouTube (as of March 29, 2016)
  - 3.1 million people who clicked a link to watch a segment where key themes were project and lifecycle cost estimates!!!

**People could tune-out, but they continue to watch because they are provoked, interested, and entertained.**

# John Oliver technique is: lather, rinse, repeat

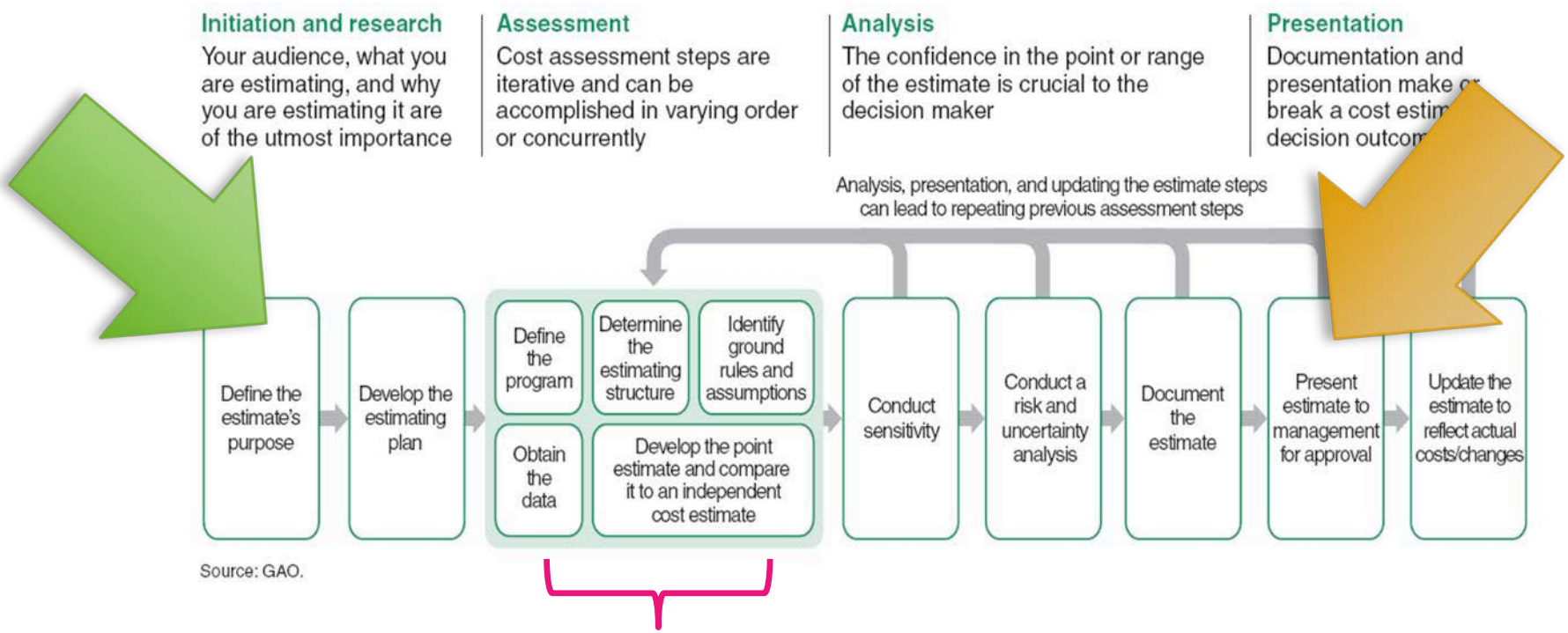


- Begin with the general
- Get ‘em hooked
- Take it a level deeper
- **Result: he gets his viewers into the proverbial weeds without resistance**

# Comedic techniques, adapted for cost estimators

1. The Hook
2. Punch Line (or Anchor)
3. Props
4. Timing

# The Hook:
# So a guy walks into a bar




Not in the weeds!

# Comedy and Human Factors

## Comic Techniques

- The "beat" before delivering the punch line
- The pregnant pause
- The hook

## Human Factors

- Primacy and recency
- Anchoring
- Optimism bias

# Work towards your punch line(s)

# Choose your props well

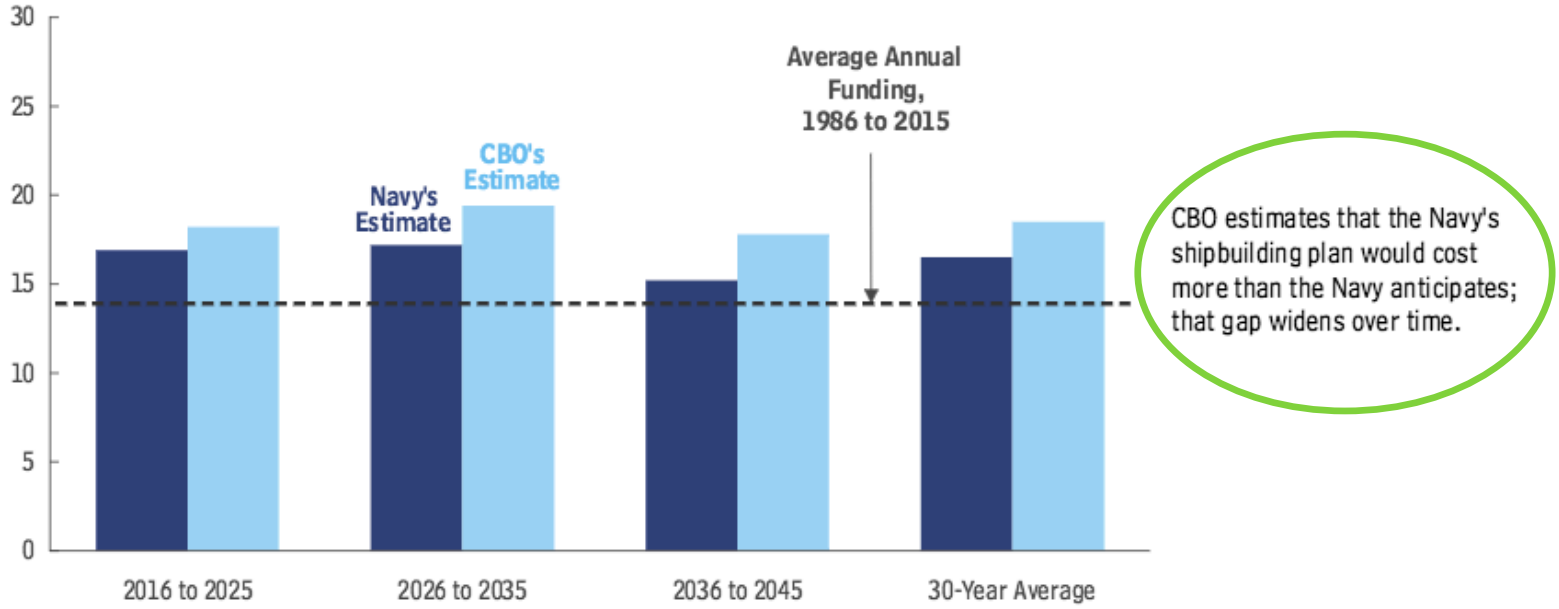
- Visual aides are essential to communication
- Select only those charts and graphs that clearly demonstrate the point you are trying to make
- Non-technical people can get lost in the weeds or fixate on the wrong information if your visual aides are too busy
- Sometimes this means “cleaning” your graphics

# Before

**Figure 1.** Return to Reference

## Average Annual Costs of New-Ship Construction Under the Navy's 2016 Plan

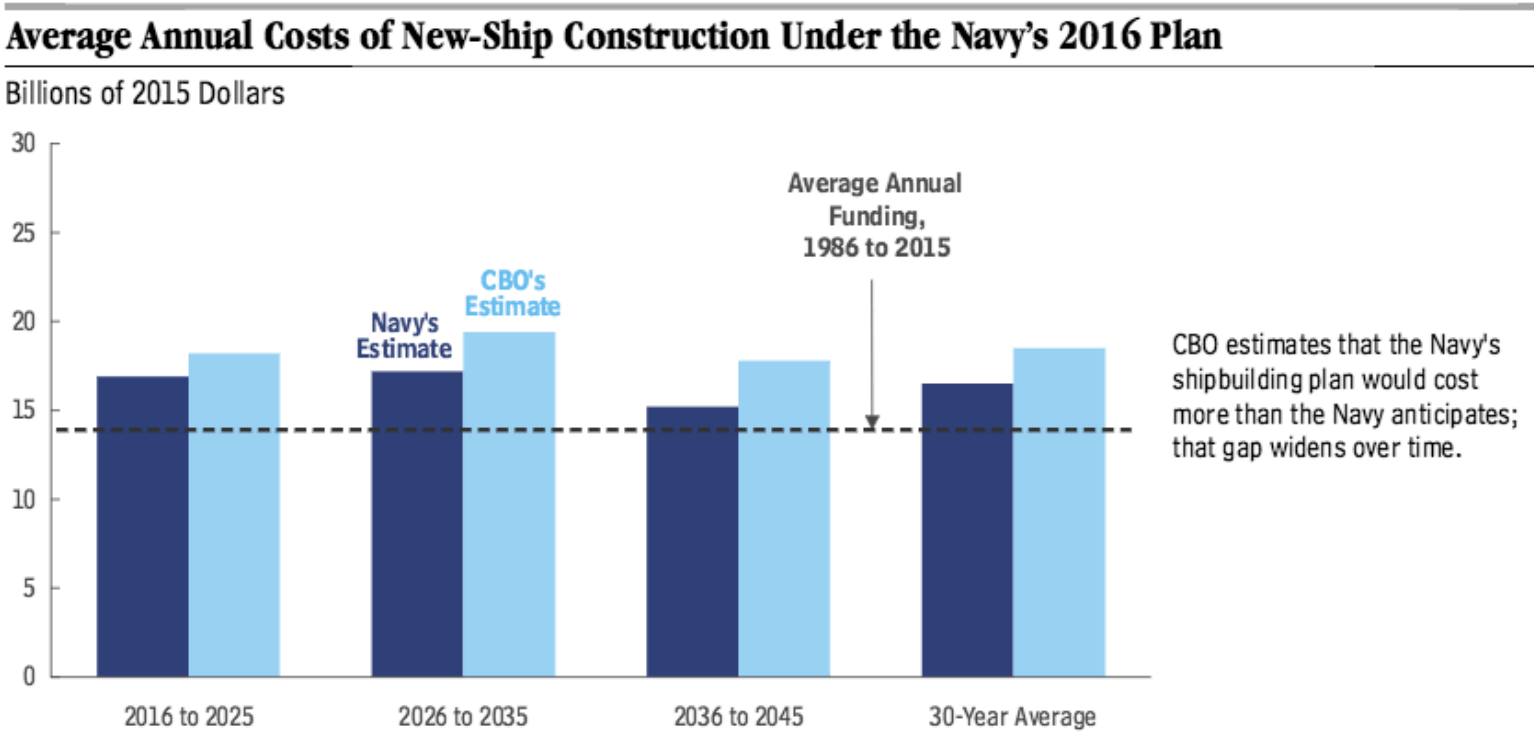
Billions of 2015 Dollars




Source: Congressional Budget Office based on data from the Department of the Navy.

Note: Costs exclude funds for refueling nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and for ship conversions, construction of ships that are not part of the Navy's battle force (such as oceanographic survey ships) and training ships, outfitting and postdelivery (including the purchase of smaller tools and pieces of equipment that are needed to operate a ship but not necessarily provided by the manufacturing shipyard as part of ship construction), and smaller items. Costs for the mission packages for littoral combat ships, which are not funded in the Navy's shipbuilding accounts, also are excluded.

# After


Average Annual Costs of New-Ship Construction Under the Navy's 2016 Plan
Billions of 2015 Dollars
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Average Annual Funding, 1986 to 2015
Navy's Estimate
CBO's Estimate
2016 to 2025
2026 to 2035
2036 to 2045
30-Year Average
CBO estimates that the Navy's shipbuilding plan would cost more than the Navy anticipates; that gap widens over time.

# Illustrating differences in scale

# More Comedy and Human Factors

## Comic Techniques

- The "beat" before delivering the punch line
- The pregnant pause
- The hook

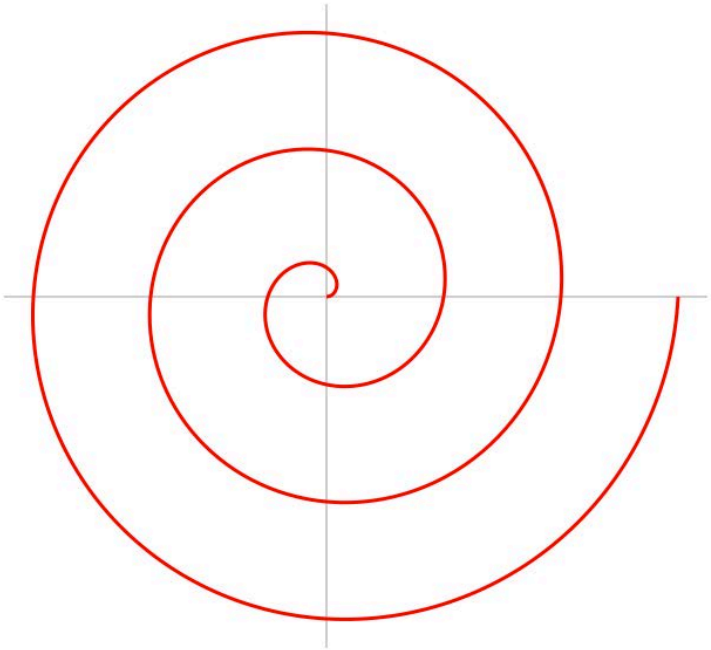
## Human Factors

- Primacy and recency
- Anchoring
- Optimism bias

# Comedic Timing (or how not to blow the punch line)

- {Video will go here}

# Lather, rinse, repeat



- Begin with the general
- Get ‘em hooked
- Take it a level deeper
- **Be patient!**

# Questions?

# Again, many thanks to my husband

- Seb believes in work-life balance
- Seb encourages his wife to leave work at work
- Seb makes his wife watch John Oliver rants without realizing they are about cost estimating
- Seb occasionally appreciates the irony