

Tips for Making Effective PowerPoint Presentations

DO NOT MENTION YOUR SCHOOL OR MENTORS IN YOUR POWERPOINT. POINTS WILL BE DEDUCTED IF YOU DO SO

- Use the slide master feature to create a consistent and simple design template. It is fine to vary the content presentation (i.e., bulleted list, 2-column text, text & image), but be consistent with other elements such as font, colors, and background.
- Simplify and limit the number of words on each screen. Use key phrases and include only essential information.
- Limit punctuation and avoid putting words in all capital letters. Empty space on the slide will enhance readability.
- Use contrasting colors for text and background. Light text on a dark background is best. Patterned backgrounds can reduce readability of text.
- Avoid the use of flashy transitions such as text fly-ins. These features may seem impressive at first, but are distracting and get old quickly.
- Overuse of special effects such as animation and sounds may make your presentation “cutesy” and could negatively impact your credibility.
- Use good quality images that reinforce and complement your message. Ensure that your image maintains its impact and resolution when projected on a larger screen.
- If you use builds (lines of text appearing each time you click the mouse), have content appear on the screen in a consistent, simple manner; from the top or left is best. Only “build” screens when necessary to make your point because builds can slow your presentation.
- Limit the number of slides. Presenters who constantly “flip” to the next slide are likely to lose their audience. **A good rule of thumb is one slide per minute.**
- Learn to navigate your presentation in a non-linear fashion. PowerPoint allows the presenter to jump ahead or back without having to page through all the interim slides.
- Know how to and practice moving forward AND backward within your presentation. Audiences often ask to see the previous screen again.
- If possible, view your slides on the screen you’ll be using for your presentation. Make sure slides are readable from the back row seats. Text and graphical images should be large enough to read, but not so large as to appear “loud.”
- Have a Plan B in the event of technical difficulties. Remember that transparencies and handouts will not show animation or other special effects.
- Do not read from your slides. The content of your slides is for the audience, not for the presenter.

- Do not speak to your slides. Many presenters face the direction of their presentation rather than their audience.
- Do not apologize for anything in your presentation. If you believe something will be hard to read or understand, don't use it.
- When possible, run your presentation from the hard disk rather than a floppy disk. Running from a floppy disk may slow your presentation.

The Deadly Sins of PowerPoint Presentations

By Joseph Sommerville

It's not surprising PowerPoint® slideshows have become the norm for visuals in most business presentations. Slideshows are quick to produce, easy to update and effective to inject visual interest into the presentation. However, slideshows can also spell disaster even for experienced presenters. The key to success is to make certain your slide show is a visual aid and not a visual distraction. For the best results, avoid these common "seven deadly sins" of PowerPoint® presentations.

1. **Text-Heavy Slides:** Projected slides are a good medium for depicting an idea graphically or providing an overview. Slides are a poor medium for detail and reading. Avoid paragraphs, quotations and even complete sentences. Limit your slides to five lines of text and use words and phrases to make your points. The audience will be able to digest and retain key points more easily. Don't use your slides as speaker's notes or to simply project an outline of your presentation.
2. **The "Me" Paradigm:** In a slideshow, aim for a minimum of 40 point font. Remember the audience and move the circle from "me" to "we." Make certain all elements of any particular slide are large enough to be seen easily. Size really does matter.
3. **Reading:** A verbal presentation should focus on interactive speaking and listening, not reading by the speaker or the audience. The demands of spoken and written language differ significantly. Spoken language is shorter, less formal and more direct. Reading text ruins a presentation. A related point has to do with handouts for the audience. One of your goals as a presenter is to capture and hold the audience's attention. If you distribute materials before your presentation, your audience will be reading the handouts rather than listening to you. Often, parts of an effective presentation depend on creating suspense to engage the audience. If the audience can read everything you're going to say, that element is lost.
4. **Faith in Technology:** You never know when an equipment malfunction or incompatible interfaces will force you to give your presentation on another computer. Be prepared by having a back-up of your presentation on a FLASH DRIVE.

Joseph Sommerville has earned the title "The Presentation Expert" for helping professionals design, develop and deliver more effective presentations. He is the principal of Peak Communication Performance, a Houston-based firm working worldwide to help professionals develop skills in strategic communication.

Tips for Effective PowerPoint Presentations

General Presentation

- Plan carefully.
- Do your research.
- Know your audience.
- Time your presentation.
- Speak comfortably and clearly.
- Check the spelling and grammar.
- **Do not read the presentation.** Practice the presentation so you can speak from bullet points. The text should be a cue for the presenter rather than a message for the viewer.
- Give a brief overview at the start. Then present the information. Finally review important points.
- It is often more effective to have bulleted points appear one at a time so the audience listens to the presenter rather than reading the screen.
- Use a wireless mouse or pick up the wired mouse so you can move around as you speak.
- If sound effects are used, wait until the sound has finished to speak.
- If the content is complex, print the slides so the audience can take notes.
- **Do not turn your back on the audience.** Try to position the monitor so you can speak from it.

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