

Absolute PowerPoint: Tips for Creating Effective Visual Presentations

1. Principles

1.1. *Visual aids should complement, not replace, your oral presentation.*

- 1.1.1. Do not use your slides as notes — use the notes section as notes.
- 1.1.2. Do not duplicate text from your speech on your slides.
- 1.1.3. Use slides for mnemonic devices and details to highlight your points.
- 1.1.4. If you must use large amounts of text, consider highlighting key passages.
- 1.1.5. Add a blank slide if you have an extended period in your talk where you don't need visual aids.

1.2. *A slide is not a unit of thought.*

- 1.2.1. Everything related to a single topic does not need to fit on one slide.
- 1.2.2. Repeat or omit headings on subsequent slides about the same topic.
- 1.2.3. Do not use “cont'd”.
- 1.2.4. Repeat whole slides if necessary; do not go backwards in your deck.

1.3. *Consider your purposes: presenting vs. archiving.*

- 1.3.1. Archival PowerPoint decks are meant to stand on their own, without the presenter or presentation; they are self-contained reports.
 - 1.3.1.1. If you are preparing a deck for archiving, then the rules about the repetition of text (1.1.2), amount of text (2.4), clutter (4.2), and slides as units of thought (1.2) do not apply.
- 1.3.2. Presentation PowerPoint decks are visual aids; they are part of a performance and cannot stand on their own.
 - 1.3.2.1. If you are preparing a deck for presentation, then all of these rules apply.
 - 1.3.2.2. If you would like to provide more information than you can on your presentation deck, distribute a paper handout, but be aware of 1.1.2 above.
- 1.3.3. It is entirely possible that at some point you will be asked to prepare a presentation for archiving and present on it; prepare two decks!

1.4. *Design is everything.*

- 1.4.1. Select a theme and font(s) appropriate to your subject matter and use throughout.
- 1.4.2. Experiment with different visual elements.
- 1.4.3. Pay attention to design trends in popular culture.
- 1.4.4. Learn to use graphics editing tools like Photoshop.
- 1.4.5. The Digital Learning Lab (<http://www.cgu.edu/digitalllearning>) offers tutorials and workshops on the technical aspects of different software tools.

2. Typography

2.1. *Serif vs. Sans Serif Fonts*

- 2.1.1. Fonts with serifs are more legible for body text.
- 2.1.2. Fonts without serifs are more legible for title text.

2.2. *Fonts make arguments, so choose appropriately.*

2.3. *Stick with standard fonts for cross-platform compatibility.*

2.4. *No more than six words per line, no more than six lines per slide*

2.4.1. Eliminate articles (“a,” “an,” “the”) where possible.

2.4.2. Avoid complete sentences that wrap around to the next line.

2.5. *Double-check your spelling on all slides.*

3. Visual Elements

3.1. *Templates*

3.1.1. Do not use white slides; choose a theme from the PowerPoint gallery and stick with it.

3.1.2. Additional themes are available from third-party vendors online.

3.1.3. Always include a title slide with your name and school affiliation on it.

3.1.4. Always include a final slide that is either blank or contains your contact information.

3.2. *Color*

3.2.1. Use standard colors. Avoid excessively bright or gaudy colors.

3.2.2. Pay attention to the contrast between text and background colors (see Bill Doll’s color wheel in *Speak*).

3.2.3. Pay attention to the contrast between text and background images. Use semi-transparent grey boxes for text that would be rendered illegible by an image in the background.

3.3. *Images*

3.3.1. Do not use cheesy or standard clipart.

3.3.2. Check image resolution for scale.

3.3.3. Homogenize colors with your design palette where appropriate.

3.3.4. Soften edges or adjust backgrounds to reduce superimposition effects.

3.3.5. Avoid pointless representations of pseudo-concepts.

3.3.6. Provide citations or source information for your images either on the relevant slide or at the end of the deck.

3.4. *Data*

3.4.1. Graphs and figures are preferable to tables.

3.4.2. Enlarge details or highlighted information on subsequent slides.

3.4.3. Avoid pseudo-graphs that do not actually represent data.

3.4.4. Look for interesting ways to present your data.

3.4.5. Provide citations or source information for any data or graphics from outside sources either on the relevant slide or at the end of the deck.

3.5. *Composition*

3.5.1. Fill the space available to you on the slide. Enlarge type as necessary.

3.5.2. Do not put too much on one slide.

3.5.3. Pay attention to the vectors and geometry of the slide so that your slide is visually organized and the viewer’s eye is directed to important information.

4. Motion

4.1. *Transitions*

4.1.1. Use transition animations between slides sparingly and for deliberate purposes.

- 4.1.2. Fades are useful for gentle, professional-looking transitions.
- 4.1.3. Wipes are useful to illustrate transformation, e.g. before and after.
- 4.1.4. Pushes are useful to illustrate sequence or continuity.
- 4.1.5. Uncovers are useful to illustrate revelation, e.g. outcomes or answers.
- 4.1.6. Covers are useful to illustrate succession.
- 4.1.7. In Office365, PowerPoint has introduced “Morph,” a transition effect which takes elements from a slide and moves them onto the next slide. This can be useful for illustrating a persistent theme or continuity of a concept or image.

4.2. Builds (Animations)

- 4.2.1. Use builds/animations within slides sparingly and for deliberate purposes.
- 4.2.2. Fades and wipes are acceptable.
- 4.2.3. Avoid fancy and distracting animations.

5. Preparation

5.1. Become familiar with Presenter View.

- 5.1.1. Use the notes section for your talking points (see 1.1.1).
- 5.1.2. Print out a deck of your slides with your notes.

5.2. For prepared talks, place notes into your manuscript for slides and clicks.

5.3. Have your slides and talk available on multiple platforms.

- 5.3.1. Have your deck on your laptop and on a removable flash drive.
- 5.3.2. Have your deck on a cloud backup service (OneDrive) and test it on PowerPoint online.

5.4. Embed movie files in your presentation.

- 5.4.1. Download clips from YouTube as .mp4 or .m4v files.
- 5.4.2. Do not link to external sites such that you would need to leave your presentation and open up a browser window.

5.5. Avoid links to external sites on your slides.

- 5.5.1. Incorporate material from external sites on your slides.
- 5.5.2. Make demonstration videos to illustrate processes.

5.6. Practice your speech with your slides!