

PowerPoint Pointers

Recommendations for more effective and professional presentations

It is extremely easy (and entertaining) to criticise a poor presentation. Yet when the time comes for us to compile our own, we make many of the same mistakes. Why? Possibly because it's easy to lose sight of the purpose of the presentation and hide behind the detail of a subject that we know well.

Presentations overloaded with words and lacking in creative thinking, humour or pace will always run the risk of alienating the audience and wasting precious time and money. The most effective presentation structure remains: "Tell them what you are going to say – say it clearly – then tell them what you said".

With that in mind, these guidelines may be helpful...

PowerPoint™ should be used as an aid

The slides should provide visual support and not be relied upon to carry the presentation.

Audiences can only retain a very small amount of information per presentation

Maximum seven topics as a guide (not seven per slide! Discover your seven (or ideally less) most important pieces of information and focus on those. If you have more to say then consider an alternative medium of communication for best retention.

Keep file size small for email

When you crop a photo or reduce its size, PowerPoint keeps lots of unnecessary data, resulting in bloated files too big to send by email. To reduce file size in PowerPoint (pre 2007), right click on any photo, select 'format picture', press the 'compress' button and then select 'all pictures' and 'web/screen' and then apply.

In PowerPoint 2007 select the photo and then select 'picture tools' from the top tab and then select 'compress pictures'. Reducing file size will also make your presentation run more smoothly.

Keep text to an absolute minimum

Reduce all sentences or bullet points to as few words as you can - one word if possible! Use pictures instead of text where possible to improve retention of your message. Keep the bulk of detail in your verbal presentation and the slide as a simple summary of a point. People will generally read a slide before listening to the presenter. Keep it simple.

Screen Safe - Guidelines

Presentations are often rear projected onto a screen. There is usually an overlap at the edges of the screen to ensure that the screen is filled. Ensure that no logos, text or images go within a finger's width (on your computer monitor!) of any of the edges of the slide.



Fonts - Headlines

Headlines should be in a clear bold font (Arial Black for example) and no smaller than size 36pt

Normal text or bullets

Normal text or bullets should be no smaller than size 24pt font. What may be easy to read on your computer will be barely legible in a large conference room. If it is too small they will not see it and frustration will lead to distraction.

Font colour

The preferred font colour is for the text to be a strong contrast to the background colour i.e. Black text on white background. White or yellow text on black or blue backgrounds.



Bullet Points Guidelines

Try not to use more than five bullet points on one slide. It is unlikely that your audience will attempt to read a slide with too much information. Alternatively they won't really start listening until they've finished reading the information. Space the bullet points out and never allow them to wrap around to more than 2 lines.

Line Spacing

Line spacing should be used to ensure that the bullet points fit evenly onto the page. It shouldn't be spread out too much as this would look odd so we would recommend not to increase the 'After Paragraph' spacing more than about 25 points.

Transitions

Avoid the temptation to use flashy changes between slides – they quickly become predictable and off-putting. Simple 'cut' changes or a fast dissolve are more conducive to audience comfort.

PowerPoint 2007

The industry is still in a transition period between PowerPoint 2003 and PowerPoint 2007. This can cause formatting issues that are difficult to resolve at the last minute. We would recommend that presentations are saved as PowerPoint 2003 compatible files if you are creating presentations in PowerPoint 2007.

Embedded Video

Inserting video data files into presentations

If quality and stability are essential it may be preferable to use digital videotape or even DVD for playback. If the video is embedded, remember to bring the source file along with the main presentation and ensure that the AV company is aware that you will need to play back audio from the computer.

Bullet Points

- Maximum of 5 bullets
- Never allow bullet points to wrap around to more than 2 lines
- Space the bullet points out evenly