

Slideware Tips & Tricks

Fundamentals

Read *The Neuroscience of PowerPoint* (Horvath, 2014)

This is perhaps the best summary of why effective speakers put considerable effort into making smart decisions about their slides. Students can find the article in the *Suggested Reading* folder under *Content* on Blackboard.

Horvath, J. C. (2014). The neuroscience of PowerPoint™. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 8(3), 137-143.

PowerPoint is only a tool to help you convey your message

PowerPoint is NOT meant to be a show; YOU are the show.

Simplicity works

Fancy slides won't fool anyone into thinking you are prepared when you're not.

Typos Kill

Slides need to be as perfect as your résumé because both speak to your level of professionalism.

Plan one slide per minute of speech

For a 5-7 minute speech, limit yourself to six slides (not including your title slide). If you need more than six slides you are covering too much information in too much detail for the audience to remember. The exception to the rule is pictures without text. Pictures alone can be processed quickly, without conscious thought.

5 x 5 Rule

No more than five lines of text (not counting the title line) and no more than five words per line. Think headlines, not sentences, because when audiences are reading they are not listening. Slides are only there to give the audience a visual reference of where you are within the speech. Even the slowest reader should be able to process your entire slide in less than three seconds. Boiling your points down to their barest essence requires tremendous effort on your part. But this is your job as the speaker. If you can't get beyond the compulsion to write sentences, don't waste our time. Instead, create a document, make copies for everyone in the audience, hand them out, and sit down.

Lists are death to a speech

Because you should have no more than three main points or three sub-points per main point, you shouldn't need a list. When audiences see a list that is too long to remember (typically three items) they instantly tune out. Why bother to pay attention if you can't possibly remember it all anyway? There are only two contexts where lists are acceptable. The first is when audience members are already prepared to take notes. But unless you are teaching a class, don't expect audiences to be prepared. The second situation is when the point of the list is to illustrate complexity. For example, in a speech about safe sex one of your main

points may be the potential for contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD). A screen filled with the names of all the different STDs could be an effective “OMG!” transition to the discussion of the two or three most common STDs (your sub-points). Just be sure to replace the overwhelming list with a slide containing only the name of the first disease you wish to discuss.

Design

Avoid PowerPoint’s standard background formats

If you use the same old backgrounds everyone uses, it will be hard to convince people your message is anything but the same old message. Different backgrounds can be made, purchased, or found online ([rgbstock](#) is a great source). Look for something simple and consistent with your message. If you are doing a lot of presentations, consider developing your own brand identity.

Use large fonts

Since the 5 x 5 Rule limits you to a maximum of 25 words, you might as well make them big enough to fill the screen. Factors such as the font you choose, the size of the room, and the visual impact you are after will affect the size you use. As a general rule, anything smaller than 32-point is too small.

Use no more than two fonts

Too many fonts looks amateurish. Some fonts, such as Bodoni, have a family of variations that allow you to be more creative without the chaos of dramatically different fonts.

Never use ALL CAPS:

We are not used to seeing words spelled this way and this can lead to confusion or inattention. Title Case is the Best Way to Present Your Information. This has been shown to increase retention by 12%. Don’t ask me who studies this stuff.

Contrast is more important than color

While you may be able to easily distinguish dark red text from a dark blue background, one in 12 people have some form of colorblindness. Try to imagine your slides as black & white photographs. Is there enough contrast between your text and background to process easily? Reds and blues are very similar shades of gray when seen in B&W. Projected images have MUCH less contrast than your computer screen. If you have even the slightest doubt looking at the image on your screen, you can bet the projected image will be unreadable.

Match your color choices to the tone of your speech

If you are giving a lively speech, the use of lively colors and illustrations will strengthen your message. Subdued tones and images will help create a more somber mood. In addition to enabling you to preview countless color schemes, websites such as [Adobe Kuler](#) can help you create a color theme based on a photo you upload.

Change colors for a reason

A dramatic change can help **drive home a point!** Overuse, or worse yet, **random** use, will overwhelm or confuse the audience.

Know where you intend to stand relative to the screen

Bright backgrounds are blinding if you are standing near the screen; no one ever looks good when squinting. This is why all my slides have a black background. But dark backgrounds look washed out in large venues. Hopefully, if you are speaking in an auditorium or hotel conference room, the projected image should be well above you and you can use brighter backgrounds for better contrast.

Use pictures when relevant to your topic

Pictures have the power to communicate vast sums of information almost instantaneously. But the relevance to your topic needs to be equally easy to identify. Don't use a picture just because you like the look of it. Ask yourself, "What value does this photo add?" If you have to think of an answer, delete the picture.

Use images only with permission

Piracy is not a victimless crime. There are numerous places online that offer royalty free images, including: [Morgue File](#), [Creative Commons](#), [Free Images UK](#), [Free Digital Photos](#), and [Image After](#).

Place photos on right side of the slide

Because we read from left to right, pictures that illustrate your text should be to the right of the text. I've also heard it said that round photos are better because they vary from the expected, but this may just be a personal preference.

Use pictures as backgrounds with caution

Pictures are powerful and a slide that is nothing but a picture is fine. The text, however, tends to get lost when superimposed on a busy background photo. The background is a stage for the text and should not distract attention from the message contained in the text. If you have a good reason to use a photo as your background, choose one that has plenty of open space for text or create a background fill for the text box to clearly separate the text. Only use photos with obvious relevance to the topic.

Highlight Graphs

While charts and graphics can often convey reams of data quickly, only display the information that is necessary to make your point. If you are copying a graph that was used for another purpose, take the time to remove all unnecessary information that can overwhelm the audience and cause them to disengage. If your chart has numerous elements that you will discuss in turn, either hide each component until you're ready to discuss each (using the Animation feature) or dim all the portions of the graphic except the one you're speaking about at the moment.

Build Complex Illustrations

Few things scare away audiences more than the shock of being confronted with a complex diagram. Bad presenters attempt to get around this issue by using a laser pointer to draw attention to what is being discussed. The problem is, if you need a laser pointer you've already lost the attention of everyone but the cats in the room. Start with a simple background and the title of the illustration, and then add new elements as you walk the audience through each new element. While time consuming, this has the added benefit of enabling you to eliminate any components of the model that are not relevant to the presentation.

Embed videos

Stopping your presentation to exit PowerPoint, load a YouTube video, and then return to your slides not only looks unprofessional, it forces you to disengage from your audience. Besides, the YouTube page is loaded with extraneous distractions. You can use websites such as [Online Video Converter](#) to convert any YouTube video into an MP4 file to be saved to your computer. Using the Insert feature in PowerPoint, you can embed the video as one of your slides. When you embed the video, versus simply including a link to the video, it becomes part of the PowerPoint file and thus travels with you. This is essential when using someone else's laptop or when internet connectivity is not guaranteed. Keep the larger file size in mind though if you are emailing the file. PowerPoint even has a Trim Video feature that allows you to start and stop the video exactly where you want. If you are using someone else's laptop, ALWAYS check to ensure your video will play. Having a backup presentation without video is advisable, just in case.

Keep audio and video segments short

Keep clips under 30 seconds. Audio and visual aids are there to add clarity to your message, not deliver your message. Longer segments cause the audience to forget the point you were making. The audience is here to see you, not your video.

Use black slides

A blank slide with the background changed to solid black looks like the projector is turned off. When this happens during a presentation, the audience's automatic response is to look at you. Use this by strategically inserting black slides whenever you have a story, anecdote, or especially important point to make. This works even if you are using a bright background. Do not use a white slide or a blank version of your background because the audience's assumption will be that your slides are messed up.

Minimize animation

There are varying opinions about the use of animation. While it can look cool, most of PowerPoint's animations are slower than the human brain. Having words spelled out in typewriter form is the most irritating. But simply having text appear without animation is boring and misses an opportunity to catch the audience's attention. Research suggests that the best animation for text is to have it zoom in with a duration of 0.25 seconds. This adds an element of movement that is quick enough to catch our eye while being immediately readable.

Keep slide animation consistent

If you choose to use animation, be predictable. If you have one set of words fly in from the left, have all your words fly in from the left. If you have one set come in from the left, the next from the right, and the next appear like a typewriter, your audience will use all its attention trying to guess what will happen next instead of listening to your message. An exception can be made for your final point. If all your other words have flown in from the left, having your take home message fly in from the right can attract an extra bit of attention.

Never use sound effects

If you really need an explosion when your words appear, it is far more effective coming from you rather than the small speakers on your computer.

Use the Duplicate Slide function liberally

Once you have your background, font, and layout the way you want it, you can right-click on the slide in the side bar and choose Duplicate Slide. Not only will this eliminate the need to format each slide, it ensures that things don't jump around from slide to slide. This is critical if you have subsequent slides build on previous ones.

Use the Slide Sorter function under the View toolbar

Seeing all your slides at once gives you a better sense of the overall feel of a presentation than viewing the slides one at a time. Are all the slides balanced or are some too text heavy? Do all the photos seem to flow the same direction?

Presentation

Follow the 1 of 3 Rule

Every time you hit the clicker, one of three things should happen:

1. One line of text with five or fewer words should appear
If you have more than five words or one line, you've violated the 5 x 5 Rule
2. A single picture or simple illustration should appear
Any photo should be immediately recognizable as relevant to the point you're making and diagrams should start simple and become more detailed as each new element is added. Similarly, the audience's eyes should be immediately drawn to the element in a chart that you intend to speak about next.
3. The screen should go black from a black slide
The audience will immediately turn their attention to you, so use this rare moment of focus to emphasize an important point or tell an illustrative story.

Do not talk to the screen!

It is not listening to you and, because you are talking to the screen, neither is the audience. Stand with your shoulders parallel to the screen, otherwise the temptation to turn your head to the screen may be too strong to resist.

Do not read your slides!

First, you should have fewer than 25 words on any one slide so there should be nothing to read. Second, adults don't like being read to as if they are children. Third, the average person can read 275 words-per-minute while the average speaker can read text at just 125. If you are so ill prepared that you feel the need to read, just sit down because you have lost all credibility and no one is listening to you anyway.

Do not begin with your first point showing

Your first slide should just be your name and the title or topic of your speech.

Do not end your speech with the default PowerPoint screen

PowerPoint automatically adds a blank slide after your final slide that says "End of slide show, click to exit" across the top. We have seen this so many times at the end of presentations that we have become conditioned to stop listening when it appears. If a Q&A session is planned, your final slide should say "Questions?" Otherwise, your final slide should be a black slide or simple "Thank You."

Never skip a slide

Skipping slides will catch the audience's attention because it is an obvious change in the status quo. Unfortunately, the message perceived will be that you are ill prepared and thus not worth listening to. Everything you covered previously becomes justifiably forgotten.

Control what the audience can see at all times

If you are talking about a series of points, do not list them all at once. Use the animation function to reveal each point individually when you click. This prevents the audience from jumping ahead and losing track of what you are saying. If your second point does not build on your first point, have the second point replace your first on the screen. This keeps the audience focused on exactly what you are talking about. If each point builds on the previous point, have the previously discussed points fade slightly but remain on the screen.

Talk about what is on the screen

This may seem obvious, but it is surprising how many speakers will include a quote or cartoon on a slide with the expectation that the audience will absorb them and the speaker's words at the same time. While the brain processes visual stimuli and spoken language using different pathways (we can process pictures without interfering with the listening process), written language is processed using the spoken language pathway. When we are reading, we are not listening! Hide quotes and cartoons until the moment you want us to read them, and then pause long enough for everyone to finish (see point above about not reading to your audience). Keep this principle in mind when choosing photographs. For example, if there are signs in the background of the photo, we will read them.

Avoid overly graphic images

Disturbing visual material can be so powerful that it overwhelms your message. Visual images can cause your audience to feel for your topic, but overly shocking material will ensure that they only remember the shock, not the message. Because this is a real and serious

possibility, using graphic images for shock value often backfires. Thus, use them only if you have a very good reason.

Warn audience about graphic images

It is insensitive to expose audiences to graphic images without giving them the opportunity to look away. DO NOT leave the image up while you continue your speech. Show the image only long enough for your point to be made. Any longer and the audience will disengage from you and your message as a form of self-protection.

Be careful using auto-timing

PowerPoint can be programmed to change slides at set times. This can be a great way to ensure your speech fits within the allotted timeframe. It also requires precise preparation and timing on your part. If the slide advances before you are finished, or you have to wait for the slide to change, you will instantly lose credibility. If you use this feature, program the series to stop at least twice during the speech. This will give you opportunities to get back in sync with the slides.

Take advantage of auto-timing

Instead of using this feature for your entire speech, you can use it to reinforce your message with a series of images. For example, a series of photographs of starving children flashing behind you as you introduce the topic, or bring it to a conclusion, can be very powerful. Images are great because it will not attract a high degree of attention if you interrupt the current image to move to your next point if you were speaking too fast or it remains on the last image if you were speaking slower than you expected.

Practice aloud

Your internal voice speaks at a much different rate than your actual voice. The only way to know that your presentation will flow at the right speed, not too fast and not too slow, is to practice while speaking aloud.

Know your equipment

A laptop will generally require you to press a sequence of keys for the image to project onto the screen. Each manufacturer uses a different set of keys so be sure you know what to do BEFORE you get in front of your audience. Know in advance whether the projector you will be using requires a VGA or HDMI cable. Verify that your computer has the correct port or bring an appropriate adapter.

VGA port



HDMI port



Practice with the equipment before you start speaking

Are you sure how to advance the slides? Will the remote work from where you intend to speak? To answer these questions decisively you must actually try it. If you are going to be speaking with unfamiliar hardware, place two benign slides before your title slide. For example, the first slide may be solid green and the second solid blue. This way you can practice advancing the slides without giving away your presentation. Just make sure you are

on the title slide when you start. ALWAYS check the volume of the speakers before beginning any speech with an audio component.

Know how to use the software

F5 will begin a PowerPoint slide show. Hit this key as soon as your file is opened. It just looks so much more professional than trying to find the slide show icon with the cursor. Hitting the B key during a presentation will replace your presentation with a black screen. This is a great way to pause your presentation if, for example, you want to address an audience question. The blank screen directs all attention to you. Hitting the B key again will return your presentation to where you left off. If you are using my remote, you can use the bottom button instead of the B key.

Make sure everyone can see the screen

If the audience is circled around you there will be no place to stand that does not block someone's view of the screen. Stepping back and standing beside the screen can help, but it lessens your personal connection with the audience. A better alternative is to slowly walk around the room as you are speaking. You will block someone's view for a moment, but if you adhere to the one slide per minute rule, everyone will have plenty of time to view the screen.

Sometimes there are good reasons to stand in front of the screen

Standing in front of the screen can help the audience connect the image with you. For example, during the introduction to a speech on binge drinking among college students I might choose to have a series of photographs showing college people partying scrolling on the screen. Assuming my audience is college-aged, they will identify with the photographs and, because I am in their line of sight, begin to identify me as one of them. Conversely, if I were giving a speech on "The Man," I would show photos of gray haired men in business suits while I wear typical college student clothes. Because of the contrast, they will not associate me as strongly with "The Man" despite my demographics.

Copyright

If you are giving a business presentation, including a copyright notice at the bottom of your title slide adds a touch of professionalism. The presentation is protected under copyright law regardless of whether you include either "Copyright 2017 KZ Enterprises" or "© 2017 KZ Enterprises". As such, be aware that using someone else's slides without permission is both plagiarism and a copyright violation.