

## My Point Is, Your Presentation Must Be Powerful

Create and deliver compelling PowerPoint presentations

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You rarely see a presentation that isn't accompanied by a PowerPoint slide show. Audiences have become accustomed to them, but all too often, they are poorly done. This article will outline the steps needed to create and deliver an effective PowerPoint presentation.

### Getting Started

Do you already create PowerPoint presentations? Chances are the first thing you do is open PowerPoint and just start making slides. Stop! PowerPoint is a presentation aid; it is not meant to be the presentation. Before you even think of launching PowerPoint, define your presentation goals and the messages that you want your audience to take away. Next, create an outline, or even a script. An outline makes it easier to include only the pertinent information, avoiding unnecessary slides and information overload.

### Creating Slides

Now that you've established the basic structure of your PowerPoint presentation, it's time to start creating it. Select a design template to maintain consistency throughout your presentation. The template should be appropriate for the audience and the topic. For example, use a logo or other relevant image. Don't simply choose a "pretty" background or one based on your personal preference. Graphics and text must fit the presentation and be clear to the audience.

If you have several related PowerPoints, consider using the same design template for all the presentations. Reinventing the spiel,

so to speak, is difficult and time consuming. Develop templates for a cover slide, section intro slide, and general content slide. This will create consistency throughout all of your PowerPoint presentations and make it easier the next time you want to create one.

The first slide of your presentation should include the title, presenter's name, date, and location of presentation. This is what you show when you make your verbal introduction, which should include who you are, why you're here, and what you are going to talk about. Remind your audience how long you will be speaking, and, if there is a question period, when it will be. If you are speaking long enough, you may want to include a table of contents on the second slide so the audience sees in a little more detail what will be happening.

Many people are skeptical of PowerPoint presentations, and for good reason. So start off on an upbeat note by opening with something interesting to hook the audience. This might be a real-life example of what you are going to talk about, or a personal reference that ties in with the talk. You might offer a startling statistic.

End with a summary of what you presented. Recapping what you've just talked about will reinforce the main points that you want your audience to remember.

### Formatting Slides

It is tempting to take advantage of all of PowerPoint's bells and whistles. Don't be seduced. These embellishments are almost always inappropriate and distracting.

Keep it simple. For example, use sound and animation only when necessary. Here are some other dos and don'ts.

**Dos:**

- Keep each slide's text brief—as a general rule, no more than six bullets per slide and no more than six words per bullet point.
- Use sans serif fonts, such as Arial or Helvetica. They are much easier to read on a large screen and at a distance.
- Use type sizes of 30 points or larger for headings, gradually getting smaller for subtext. Remember the people in the back row.
- Use numbers for lists with priority or specific sequences.
- Use bullet points for lists without sequence, priority, or hierarchy.
- Use contrasting colors for legibility (light background with dark type or vice versa).
- Use pictures/charts/graphs, if you have relevant images that convey the message. They are often much more interesting to look at than text. That said, be sure that the images match the presentation's design structure.
- Check to make sure all slides contribute to the message you want your audience to leave with.
- Use white space. Giving the content breathing room makes it easier to read.
- Check spelling and grammar.
- PROOFREAD and then proofread again. Get a second set of eyes to review the presentation.

**Don'ts:**

- Don't use fancy fonts. They may be pretty, but they are often difficult to read, and may inadvertently introduce a personality that's out of keeping with the presentation.
- Don't use ALL CAPS or italics—they can be difficult to read. Use bold or colored words for emphasis.
- Don't use type smaller than 20 points.
- Don't include entire paragraphs of type—that is too much information on a slide. It is the presenter's job (rather than the

slides' job) to convey the full information.

- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.
- Don't put up slides/pictures/charts that the audience cannot read or understand quickly, no matter how relevant you think they are.
- Don't use too much color or unusual color combinations. Stick to the basics, it is easier on the eyes.
- Don't over-animate. You want your audience to remember the point and not how cool it was when the information spiraled onto the page.
- Don't use poor quality pictures. They don't look good on a large screen.
- Don't stretch images to fit the screen. This looks awkward and amateurish.
- Don't "tile" an image to use as the background, i.e. don't copy it multiple times to fill the page.
- Don't use clip art. It is unoriginal. Use only images that pertain to your topic.

Remember, it is your job to wow the audience; PowerPoint can't do that for you.

### Preparing Yourself for the Presentation

Perhaps the most important step to presenting in an interesting and engaging manner is to know your material well—very well. Understanding your topic inside and out will make it easier to determine what to include, and what to leave out. You will feel more prepared and be more confident. Also, there's no quicker way to ruin a good presentation (and your credibility) than to be unprepared to answer questions.

Rehearse your presentation multiple times, including in front of a sample audience if possible. Make sure that the presentation flows well, that you can make smooth transitions from slide to slide, and that what you are talking about makes sense. Don't introduce information that doesn't relate to the slides. Create the presentation so that bullet points show up individually as you are talking about them. If you are linking to files outside of PowerPoint, be sure prior to the presentation that all links work.

Don't regurgitate a memorized speech. Talk about your topic with passion. If you don't seem interested, the audience certainly won't be.

Create a handout to go along with the presentation. It can be a printout of the slides for the audience to follow and take notes on. Even better, spare your audience from taking notes by telling them that you will pass out a summary at the end. This allows them to focus more on the presentation and not on making sure they write down every word.

### **Before You Give the Presentation**

Know your presentation space. Ask your hosts about it, or visit it in advance. You should arrive with enough time to set up and prepare yourself. You'll want to get familiar with the room, find the best place to stand, which direction to face, and how loud to speak.

It is also a good idea to check the audio and visual equipment to avoid any unpleasant surprises. Technical issues can happen even in the face of prior planning, so come prepared. We go to all presentations with our own projector and all possible connectors, even if the host says they have equipment. We also arrive with three versions of our PowerPoint: on the laptop, on a thumb drive, and on a CD.

### **Presenting**

Speak slowly, calmly, and loudly. Too often people rush through the material, not allowing the audience to fully absorb it. But don't linger

too long on one slide either; your audience will lose interest. Be aware of time constraints and pace yourself. You don't want the end of your presentation to get cut off.

It is a good idea to use a remote control rather than standing by a computer clicking the mouse for each new slide. Don't turn your back to the audience or face the screen as if you were reading from it. If you need to, print out a copy of the slides for reference. Feel free to take advantage of the "notes" tool in PowerPoint to supplement the information on the slides. Your slides should support you, and not get in between you and your audience. Remember, as the presenter, you are the focus.

### *References*

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