

# Presenting with PowerPoint

We can all relate to this scenario: You're sitting in a classroom, watching the fourth in a series of five presentations. For the fourth time, the speaker stands up, walks to the computer, and opens her PowerPoint presentation. 2000 words (font size 10 in a frilly script) suddenly fill the first screen and you wonder if you'll be able to wade through all of the information.

PowerPoint, as we all know, is a fast and effective way to provide a professional looking visual aid to your presentation. When you use visual aids, audiences are more likely to follow along during the presentation and more likely to remember your message after they leave the room. Unfortunately, too many people make mistakes when they prepare and use their PowerPoint presentations. Keep the following tips in mind as you prepare your slide show:

## **Ask yourself: Do I need PowerPoint?**

- You can often make an effective presentation without adding unnecessary visuals. Make sure that the slide show will add something to your presentation before you make the decision to use it.

## **Use a limited amount of information on each slide.**

- Are there ways to cut back on words without losing the message? It will be much easier for the audience to read the slide.
- Try to keep the slides easy to read by reducing the amount of information on each slide and sticking to keywords when possible.
- Don't overuse clip art and other images. These can add to the slide, but they can also make it more difficult to read.

## **Make it clear enough to see in the back of the room.**

- Use large and readable fonts, contrasting colors, and clear images.
- As a check, practice with the presentation and walk to the back of the room to see if you can read it.

## **Choose the right colors and backgrounds.**

- You should be concerned about the audience's ability to read the material first and foremost; creativity can come after that.
- Try not to overuse contrasting colors.
- Keep in mind that when the slide show is projected, the colors will become much more muted. The projected slideshow rarely looks the same as what you see on your computer screen.
- Use warm colors (yellow, orange, red) to highlight text or objects. For backgrounds, blues, greens, and neutral colors work best.
- Make sure the background is not too "busy." Some templates are too distracting.

**Avoid excessive animation and sound effects.**

- Both can become distracting.
- On the other hand, it does work well to reveal information slowly. Make sure that you don't spend the entire speech clicking, however.

**Practice your presentation with PowerPoint.**

- You need to be comfortable with the equipment and the software. You also need to keep in mind that PowerPoint adds time to your presentation. Plan to practice with the equipment at least a day before the presentation.
- Your presentation might also look different on other computers. Try to check the presentation in the room where you will speak a day ahead of time when possible.

**During the presentation, talk to your audience—not the screen.**

- Check the slide on the computer monitor and then maintain eye contact with the audience.
- Try to move away from the computer when you have a few minutes before you click to the next slide.
- Remember—it's a speech, not a slide show. Make sure that you are still focused on speaking to the audience.

**Always have a backup plan.**

- You should plan on technological failure. You never know when the computer will crash, the LCD projector will go out, the computer won't read your thumb drive, etc.
- Make sure that you have clear notes that you can use for your presentation.
- You might also consider printing the slides in case you need to do last minute copies for the audience.

For more information, check *A Speaker's Guidebook*, by O'Hair, Stewart, and Rubenstein (located in the Speaking Center). Come to the Speaking Center to work on PowerPoint with one of the consultants.

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