Presenting with PowerPoint

PowerPoint is a fast and effective way to provide a professional-looking visual aid for your presentation. When you use visual aids, like PowerPoint, audiences are more likely to follow along during your presentation and are 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.

General Guidelines

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. Generally, the best time to use PowerPoint is when you need to show graphs (make sure they are easy to understand!) or show something that would be difficult to explain without a visual.

Use a limited amount of information on each slide
- Try to limit the number of words on each slide. Are there ways to cut back on the number of words without losing the message? The less text on a slide, the easier it will be for the audience to read and understand.
- Try to keep slides easy to read by reducing the amount of information on each slide and sticking to key-words when possible. Don’t use too many graphs, visuals, or blocks of text on any one slide.
- Don’t overuse clip art or other images. These can add to the slide when used sparingly, but too many images can make the text more difficult to read.
- To determine what is essential to your slide show, ask yourself: what is the most important thing for my audience to know? You should limit your slides to only what is most essential. In general, try to use, at most, 1 slide per minute.

Make your presentation clear enough to see in the back of the room
- Use large, readable fonts and clear images
- Don’t use the same color for the text and background
- 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
- First and foremost, you should be concerned with the audience’s ability to read the material; creativity can come after that.
- Try not to overuse contrasting colors; they can make it difficult for your audience to read the text.
- Don’t use extremely bold colors like neon colors because they can be too bright for the audience.
- However, 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 (red, orange, yellow) to highlight text or objects. For backgrounds, blues, greens, and neutral colors work best.
Avoid excessive animation and sound effects
- If you use animation or sound effects too much, it can take away from your presentation.
- Use these sparingly and where they are most effective.

Practice your presentation with PowerPoint
- It is essential that you are familiar with the equipment and software you will be using to give your speech. This will help avoid technical difficulties you could experience giving your presentation.
- PowerPoint will add time to your presentation. Practicing with PowerPoint will give you a better estimate of your total presentation time.
- It is also possible that your presentation will look different on other computers. Try to check the setup in the room where you will be speaking at least a day ahead of time whenever possible.

During the presentation, talk to your audience—not the screen
- Check the slide on the computer monitor and then maintain eye contact with your 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 for technical failure. You never know when the computer will crash, the projector will go out, the computer won’t read your thumb drive, etc.
- Make sure you have clear notes you can use for your presentation.
- You might also consider printing the slides in case you need to make last-minute copies for the audience.

Tips for Formal PowerPoint Presentations

Dress appropriately
- Always try to look your best when giving your presentation.
- Dressing nicely will let your audience know that you want to be taken seriously.

Use appropriate language/visuals for the occasion
- Do not use informal language on your slides.
- Only use visuals that are absolutely necessary to your presentation. Don’t use “cutesy” images or language.
- Don’t use any unnecessary sound clips or animation.

Print out copies of your presentation when necessary
- Some formal presentations require you to have copies of your presentation for your audience.
- Check to see if this is necessary before you give your speech.

Stay within your time limits
- While this is essential for every speech or presentation, it is even more important when you are in a formal environment.

If you need help preparing your PowerPoint presentation, feel free to come to the Speaking and Writing Center, and one of our tutors will be happy to help you.