

# 10 Slide Design Tips for Effective Presentations

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## #1: Keep it simple

The slides themselves were never meant to be the star of the show. (The star, of course, is your audience.) People came to hear you and be moved or informed (or both) by you and your message. Don't let your message and your ability to tell a story get derailed by slides that are unnecessarily complicated, busy, or full of "chart junk." Nothing in your slide should be superfluous, ever.

Your slides should have plenty of white space, or negative space. Do not feel compelled to fill empty areas on your slide with your logo or other unnecessary graphics or text boxes that do not contribute to better understanding. The less clutter you have on your slide, the more powerful your visual message will become.

## #2 Limit bullet points and text

Your presentation is for the benefit of the audience. But boring an audience with bullet point after bullet point is of little benefit to them, which brings us to the issue of text. The best slides may have no text at all. This may sound insane given the dependency of text slides today, but the best PowerPoint slides will be virtually meaningless without the narration (that is you). Remember, the slides are meant to *support* the narration of the speaker, not make the speaker superfluous.

Many people often say something like this: "Sorry I missed your presentation. I hear it was great. Can you just send me your PowerPoint slides?" But if they are good slides, they will be of little use without you. Instead of a copy of your PowerPoint slides, it is far better to prepare a written document that highlights your content from the presentation and expands on that content. Audiences are much better served receiving a detailed, written handout as a takeaway from the presentation, rather than a mere copy of your PowerPoint slides.

## #3: Limit transitions and builds (animation)

Use object builds and slide transitions judiciously. Object builds (also called animations), such as bullet points, should not be animated on every slide. Some animation is a good thing, but stick to the most subtle and professional (similar to what you might see on the evening TV news broadcast). A simple Wipe Left-to-Right (from the Animations menu) is good for a bullet point, but a Move or Fly, for example, is too tedious and slow (and yet, is used in many presentations today). Listeners will get bored quickly if they are asked to endure slide after slide of animation. For transitions between slides, use no more than two or three types of transition effects and do not place transition effects between all slides.

## #4: Use high quality graphics

Use high quality graphics, including photographs. You can take your own high quality photographs with your digital camera, purchase professional stock photography, or use high quality images available online. Never simply stretch a small, low-resolution photo to make it fit your layout--doing so will degrade the resolution even further. Avoid using PowerPoint Clip Art or other cartoonish line art. Again, if it is included in the software, your audience has seen it a million times before.



## #5: Have a visual theme but avoid using PowerPoint templates

You clearly need a consistent visual theme throughout your presentation, but most templates included in PowerPoint have been seen by your audience countless times. You can make your own background templates, which will be more tailored to your needs. You can then save the PowerPoint file as a Design Template (.pot) and the new template will appear among your standard Microsoft templates for your future use. You can also purchase professional templates online.

## #6: Use appropriate charts

Always be asking yourself, "How much detail do I need?" Presenters are usually guilty of including too much data in their onscreen charts. There are several ways to display your data in graphic form; here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Pie charts.** Used to show percentages. Limit the slices to 4-6 and contrast the most important slice either with color or by exploding the slice.
- **Vertical bar charts.** Used to show changes in quantity over time. Best if you limit the bars to 4-8.
- **Horizontal bar charts.** Used to compare quantities. For example, comparing sales figures among the four regions of the company.
- **Line charts.** Used to demonstrate trends.
- **Tables.** In general, tables are well suited for side-by-side comparisons of quantitative data; however, tables can lack impact on a visceral level. If you want to show how your contributions are significantly higher than two other parties, for example, it would be best to show that in the form of a bar chart. But, if you're trying to *downplay* the fact that your contributions are lower than others, a table will display that information in a less dramatic or emotional way.

## #7: Use color well

Color evokes feelings. Color is emotional. The right color can help persuade and motivate. Studies show that color usage can increase interest and improve learning comprehension and retention.

You do not need to be an expert in color theory, but it's good for business professionals to know at least a bit on the subject. Colors can be divided into two general categories: cool (such as blue and green) and warm (such as orange and red). Cool colors work best for backgrounds, as they appear to recede away from us into the background. Warm colors generally work best for objects in the foreground (such as text) because they appear to be coming at us. It is no surprise, then, that the most ubiquitous PowerPoint slide color scheme includes a blue background with yellow text. You do not need to feel compelled to use this color scheme, although you may choose to use a variation of those colors.

If you will be presenting in a dark room (such as a large hall), a dark background (dark blue, gray, etc.) with white or light text will work fine. But if you plan to keep most of the lights on (which is highly advisable), a white background with black or dark text works much better. In rooms with a good deal of ambient light, a screen image with a dark background and light text tends to washout, but dark text on a light background will maintain its visual intensity a bit better.

## **#8: Choose your fonts well**

Fonts communicate subtle messages in and of themselves, which is why you should choose fonts deliberately. Use the same font set throughout your entire slide presentation and use no more than two complementary fonts (e.g., Arial and Arial Bold). Make sure you know the difference between a serif font (e.g., Times New Roman) and a sans-serif font (e.g., Helvetica or Arial).

Serif fonts were designed to be used in documents filled with lots of text. They're said to be easier to read at small point sizes, but for onscreen presentations, the serifs tend to get lost due to the relatively low resolution of projectors. Sans-serif fonts are generally best for PowerPoint presentations. Regardless of what font you choose, make sure the text can be read from the back of the room.

## **#9: Use video or audio**

Use video and audio when appropriate. Using video clips to show concrete examples promotes active cognitive processing, which is the natural way people learn. You can use video clips within PowerPoint without ever leaving the application or tuning on a VCR. Using a video clip not only will illustrate your point better, it will also serve as a change of pace, thereby increasing the interest of your audience.

You can use audio clips (such as interviews) as well. But avoid using the sound effects that are included in PowerPoint (such as the sound of a horn or applause when transitioning slides).

## **#10: Spend time in the slider sorter**

According to the Segmentation Principle of multimedia learning theory, people comprehend better when information is presented in small chunks or segments. By getting out of the Slide view and into the Slide Sorter view, you can see how the logical flow of your presentation is progressing. In this view, you may decide to break up one slide into, say, two or three slides so that your presentation has a more natural and logical flow or process. You will be able to notice more extraneous pieces of visual data that can be removed to increase visual clarity and improve communication.