

Presenting with PowerPoint: 10 dos and don'ts

1. Hold up your end with compelling material.

In a way, PowerPoint's ease of use may be its own worst enemy. However simple and engaging it can be to build eye catching slides and graphics. The audience has come to hear you, not merely to stare at images tossed onto a screen. Build a strong PowerPoint program, but make sure that your spoken remarks are no less compelling. "PowerPoint doesn't give presentations — PowerPoint makes slides"

2. Keep it simple.

We've all likely seen PowerPoint and other presentations where the speaker seemed ready to propose to the program. After all, it was clear that he fell in love with every wrinkle, special effect and other bit of gadgetry available. But the most effective PowerPoint presentations are simple — charts that are easy to understand, and graphics that reflect what the speaker is saying. Some authorities suggest no more than five words per line and no more than five lines per individual slide. "Don't gum up the works with too many words and graphics", "Do you really need to have everything up on the screen?"

3. Minimize numbers in slides.

PowerPoint's lure is the capacity to convey ideas and support a speaker's remarks in a concise manner. For the most part, most effective PowerPoint displays don't overwhelm viewers with too many figures and numbers. Instead, leave those for a later, more thorough digestion in handouts distributed at presentation's end. If you want to emphasize a statistic in PowerPoint, consider using a graphic or image to convey the point.

4. Don't parrot PowerPoint.

One of the most prevalent and damaging habits of PowerPoint users is to simply read the visual presentation to the audience. Not only is that redundant — short of using the clicker, why are you even there? "Even with PowerPoint, you've got to make eye contact with your audience", "People didn't come to see the back of your head."

5. Time your remarks.

A well-orchestrated PowerPoint program brings up a new slide, gives the audience a chance to read and digest it, then follows up with remarks that broaden and amplify what's on the screen. "It's an issue of timing," "Never talk on top of your slides."

6. Give it a rest.

Again, PowerPoint is most effective as a visual accompaniment to the spoken word. Experienced PowerPoint users aren't bashful about letting the screen go blank on occasion. Not only can that give your audience a visual break, it's also effective to focus attention on more verbally-focused give and take, such as a group discussion or question and answer session.

7. Use vibrant colors.

A striking contrast between words, graphics and the background can be very effective in conveying both a message and emotion.

8. Import other images and graphics.

Don't limit your presentation to what PowerPoint offers. Use outside images and graphics for variety and visual appeal, including video.

9. Distribute handouts at the end — not during the presentation.

Some people may disagree with me here. But no speaker wants to be chatting to a crowd that's busy reading a summation of her remarks. Unless it is imperative that people follow a handout while you're presenting, wait until you're done to distribute them.

10. Edit ruthlessly before presenting.

Never lose the perspective of the audience. Once you're finished drafting your PowerPoint slides, assume you're just one of the folks listening to your remarks as you review them. If something is unappealing, distracting or confusing, edit it. Chances are good your overall presentation will be the better for it.

PowerPoint Do's & Don'ts

Do's

1. **Use legible type size.** Titles should be at least 36 to 40 points, bulleted text or body copy at least 24 points.
2. **Be brief.** A good rule of thumb is to cut paragraphs down to sentences, sentences into phrases, and phrases into keywords.
3. **Use key words** to help audience focus on your message.
4. **Enhance readability.** Don't crowd your slides. Use normal case (not all caps) and punctuate sparingly.
5. **Make every word and image count.** Each one should help convey your message in the strongest possible way.
6. **Limit the number of slides.** A good rule of thumb is one slide per minute.

Don'ts

1. **Don't overuse special effects.** Use sound, animation, and other effects to emphasize major points, but don't let them become distracting.
2. **Don't use more than eight words per line or eight lines per slide.**
3. **Don't use too many words** or include non-essential information.
4. **Avoid hard-to-read color combinations** such as red/green, brown/green, blue/black, blue/purple. Aim for high contrast between background and text.

After you've created your slides, go back and edit. Take out sentences and replace them with key words and phrases. Take out slides you can live without. Take out clip art, if you have used more than you really need. Take off punctuation. Cut your presentation by as much as half so that your slides are streamlined.

Giving Effective PowerPoint Presentations

You should be concerned only with one thing when presenting to an audience. That is "**Has the audience come away from this with information that was in-line with the original point of the presentation?**" If people leave your PowerPoint presentation armed with confusion and wonder, your presentation has failed.

Presentations do not have a problem with lack of information. Most of the time there is too much. What happens when you cloud your PowerPoint presentation with visuals like pictures that are taken right out of the generic clip art. You send the message that your PowerPoint presentation will be of the generic kind, so sit back and relax, you've seen it before.

Then there is the flipside: overdoing it. The overuse of technological bells and whistles in PowerPoint presentations is an under-rated. There is nothing better than a PowerPoint presentation that is done professionally with only limited effects.

A common mistake is the overuse of PowerPoint animations and transitions during a slideshow. I'm sure you've seen what I'm talking about; the presenter that animates each sentence so it flies in, drops down, and explodes on the screen with an accompanying sound effect. What happens after that? Do you lose track of what the presenter is saying? Most people forget within three seconds what the point was because they focused on the effects and missed the content!

While the thought process behind these special effects is, "This highlights my point and emphasizes the importance," the outcome is often the opposite. People tend to get distracted by the effects, especially with sounds, where the presenter can hear the whooshing noise, along with the few in the front of the room. The people in the middle think they heard something, but couldn't make it out and the people at the back are wondering why there is a fly somewhere in the meeting room.

Want to emphasize a main point? Put it on the screen by itself and let people read it. A good rule for effective PowerPoint presentations is to put up only your main points and use the screen as a reference. If you run through your PowerPoint presentation (which you must do many times) and you see a slide with more than five points, start a new slide.

Your slideshow is not the presentation, it is an aid!!

If what you say when you expand the bullet points is useful for the audience to take away, put it in the handout. Then let them know at the beginning of your PowerPoint presentation that you will give out copies of the slides. Make sure you give the handouts at the end as well, unless it's crucial they follow along with them, or again you will distract your audience.

If you have a quote or a long statement that cannot be chopped up into bullet points, put it up either on the screen and allow people to read it, or read it out loud from your notes, but not both.

As much as people like to think the opposite, we can only do one thing at a time. If someone is reading the screen, they are not listening to you, and vice-versa.

If only the main points are on the screen, the audience will realize their importance. Don't overwhelm your audience with techno-fluff. The power of technology is neither the point of your PowerPoint presentation, nor the strength of it. The technology should be used only sparingly or to reinforce the information you have to share. After all, your goal is to make sure they leave the room with the right information.