

Presenting Slides with Power & Polish

There's no escaping it...either you'll be called upon to simply design a PowerPoint presentation or you'll be called upon to design AND deliver one. Whatever the case, use these hard-core rules to ensure you create successful slides every time! You'll soon be freed from the bondage of Power(less)Point presentations.

1. Use good color schemes.

Color is critical to legibility and visibility of a slide presentation. I suggest you use either a dark background with light text and graphics or a light background with dark text and graphics. Because there are a slew of great color schemes to use, I'll focus on the color combinations to avoid.

Red & Green - these two colors clash with each other and are very hard to read. Also, people who are red-green color blind will not be able to figure out what you are trying to say on the slide.

Orange & Blue - This is another pair that causes a disturbing effect on readers, as the colors seem to vibrate against one another.

Red & Blue - (Don't shoot the messenger, patriots!) These two colors just don't have enough contrast to be seen well when used together. This combination also seems to suffer an additional loss of contrast when projected on a screen.

2. Choose your fonts wisely.

Friends aren't the only things you should choose wisely. Without a doubt, some fonts are better for slides than others. It's best to use fonts that have bold weight (to enable high levels of visibility) and condensed proportion (to obtain the maximum number of words in the smallest space). Good fonts to use are Helvetica Bold, Arial Narrow, Arial Bold, Tahoma, Verdana, or Trebuchet. Never use fonts that are decorative, and never, never use script fonts. They're too hard to read.

3. Keep lines short.

Keep your slides short and simple to read. Limit headlines to four to five words. Bullet-point copy should be five to seven words in length. The words in slides should punctuate what the presenter says, not echo it.

Presentation graphics should be an accompaniment to the presenter—not the other way around. Graphics highlight the speaker's important points and help the audience remember them.

4. Eliminate clutter.

Get rid of the busyness! Complicated or illustrative background textures, fancy bullets, multiple rules, and large graphic shapes generally do nothing to help the communication process.

If bullets begin to look too dominant, tone down their size or color. Use single hairline rules instead of the bold or double variety. Avoid italics with underlines and bold type with drop shadows. These items make presentation graphics look more like circus posters than solid instruments for communication.

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