Using PowerPoint Effectively

Many promising presentations have been harmed by ineffective PowerPoint slides. Although other presentation platforms exist, PowerPoint has become almost ubiquitous. The tips below, however, can also be applied to other presentation platforms, such as Prezi, Keynote, Haiku Deck, and SlideRocket. These tips will help ensure that your audience’s understanding and engagement is increased by your visual aids and that your audience does not experience “Death by PowerPoint.”

Things to Remember

- Recognize that not every presentation benefits from PowerPoint. As you prepare your talking points, ask yourself whether a visual explanation of your ideas would benefit audience members. Then, ask whether PowerPoint would be the best avenue for this visual explanation; if it is not, then use another platform or another sort of visual aid, such as a handout, chart, or graph.
- Adhere to the rule of one:
  - One idea per slide – don’t overwhelm your audience with text or information
  - One claim per slide – make a claim with your title that the rest of the slide supports
  - One chart or graph per slide – don’t overload your audience with data
  - One memorable image per slide – draw your audience in with vivid imagery as well as text
- Avoid the following common mistakes:
  - Treating your slide as a prompter – the presentation should primarily help your audience understand your material, not help you remember the material
  - Dumping far too much text or visuals on a slide – maintain readability by just adding another slide. Do not use slides as data dumps or as handouts
  - Inserting charts or graphs without supplemental text – introduce your visuals and have a summative comment explaining the takeaway point for each one
  - Forgetting to have a title for each slide – effective titles create a storyline that audiences can follow and remember
  - Placing a graph or chart on the slide that isn’t discussed – extraneous content can be confusing
  - Having too many colors or fonts – colors should complement the content, non-Roman font types should emphasize certain aspects of the content
Distracting your audience with flying fonts, sound effects, and other unnecessary flourishes

- Utilizing clipart – use photographs, as they are higher-quality/resolution images
- Relying on acronyms – acronyms often save time but can also confuse non-specialists
- Using jargon – define your terms at key points throughout your presentation

- Frame your presentation via a meaningful **structure**; doing so will help audiences understand your message and its import. Examples of effective structures include problem-methods-solution and problem-solution-rationale. These structures add **credibility** to your presentation and will make it **scalable** - just cut examples or add examples to reduce or increase your presentation time.

- Aid your audience with **logical transitions** between slides. Your audience should understand quickly how and why your slides correspond to one another. Effective transitions clarify your core message and help you to present memorably. Use transitional phrases to achieve this:
  - Example: *Now* that I’ve talked about transitions, let’s look at two key examples of effective ones
  - Example: **Effective structure** is important in its own right, **but it also allows us to think about transitions in new ways**. I’m going to spend the next few moments discussing these new ways.
  - Example: The idea of credibility **goes back to our core message** – **presenting memorably** – **while also introducing our next topic**, providing references to back up your **claim statements**.

- Provide your references and sources to your audience – doing so will demonstrate your credibility and show that you are an authority on the subject. If your presentation has piqued audience members’ interest, they might investigate this topic further or read one of the articles, case studies, or books you cite.