

Presentations using PowerPoint slides

Presentations are a common assessment task at university, and Microsoft PowerPoint™ can be a powerful aid for a presentation. It can provide a structure for a talk as well as a means to be creative and incorporate visuals and audio files to help communicate your meaning to your audience. However, PowerPoint can also become a distraction for your audience if designed or used poorly. Below are some tips to keep in mind when developing your PowerPoint presentations and some problems to avoid.

1. General principles for use
2. Things to avoid
3. Examples

General principles for use

Templates and design

- Keep the layout of your presentation consistent (i.e., choose only one design format).
- Before your presentation, 'proofread' your slideshow on a projector/large screen if possible. This can help you identify elements that may not translate well from your computer screen to the final presentation.

Font

- Use font size ranging from 24 to 40 point.
- Choose an easy-to-read font, e.g., Arial, Calibri, Helvetica.



Colour

- Contrast text with background, e.g., dark text on light background.

Text

- Use dot points rather than complete sentences.
- Use no more than 5–7 points per slide.
- Indicate relationships between ideas, e.g., larger font indicates main points, smaller font, indented, indicates sub-points.
- Limit information to one message per slide.
- Enhance what you want to say, i.e., provide an outline, not a script.
- Keep the presentation logically structured.
- Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Use parallel structure in your text.



Graphics

- Graphs, pictures, and other visuals are a good aid for visual learners.
- Make sure images are of appropriate size/resolution.
- Make sure visuals have a purpose.
- Be sparing in the use of clips/sound/video.



Presentation tips

- Maintain eye contact with the audience, not the slides.
- Don't turn your back on the audience to look at/talk to the screen.
- Elaborate on the points, don't just read the slides.

Things to avoid

- ✗ Too much text; use a concise summary instead. The purpose of the slideshow is to reinforce the lecture/oral component.
- ✗ Text that is too small
- ✗ Colours that are hard to see
- ✗ Templates that are too busy or brightly coloured
- ✗ Moving text or graphics; these can be distracting
- ✗ Annoying sounds
- ✗ Complex diagrams or charts
- ✗ Long blocks of text; it is easier for your audience to absorb information in dot-point form.
- ✗ Words written in upper case; use upper-case and lower-case letters consistently.
- ✗ Excessively elaborate fonts or layouts; presentation needs to be easy to read.
- ✗ Slides that do too much at once; cover only one theme/component of your talk per slide.
- ✗ Too many or too few slides (depend on assignment purpose); aim for 5–6 slides per 10 minutes.



Examples



POOR SLIDES

- ✗ Dark font on dark background makes this difficult to read
- ✗ Heading (COVID-19 pandemic) does not match text (description of different Corona viruses)
- ✗ Font is inconsistent and cursive font is difficult to read
- ✗ Image leaves little room for the text
- ✗ Slide is too busy – there is too much for the audience to take in. Keep it simple!



- ✗ No heading to indicate the topic or purpose of the slide
- ✗ Information in the graphic is too small and difficult to read

ASSESS your SLIDES

What works & what doesn't work



- ✓ Heading matches the information
- ✓ Good amount of information is presented on the slide
- ✗ Contrasting bright colours in the title are difficult to read
- ✗ Relationship between points is not indicated: "Take the following precautions" is at a higher level than all the points below it
- ✗ Indent to indicate the sub-points
- ✗ Points are not in parallel structure; use the same pattern, e.g., in point form starting with a verb:
 - Avoid crowds and large gatherings
 - Wear cloth face masks in public
 - Practise social distancing
 - Wash hands often with soap and water.

DON'T LOSE YOUR AUDIENCE / PRACTISE YOUR PRESENTATION

If the presentation has a problem (e.g., unintended font, a broken link, unreadable text, a video that won't open), then you'll probably lose your audience along with your marks!