PowerPointers for Visual Communication

Purpose

The use of good quality visuals can add interest to your presentation and increase retention of information. However, if not done properly, visuals and sound effects can distract and even annoy the audience.

What’s great about PowerPoint is that it can break down information into smaller, more manageable pieces. It can also clarify complex information with simple visuals like graphs, charts, tables, and images.

Organization

Use consistent organization so that your audience knows what to expect. Consider giving an overview after the title slide and a summary at the end of the presentation. Try to provide a heading/title for each slide and insert a title layout slide to

It’s important to keep in mind, though, that PowerPoint slides are not meant to take the place of content. They are meant to supplement and enrich the presentation. In any good presentation, the presenter does the presenting and the audio-visual aides do the aiding.

Consistency, preparation, and a narrow focus are key.
introduce subtopics. For best results, gather any research, and outline your ideas first; if there’s a corresponding paper that will be submitted, do that first as well. Break the information you will present into small chunks: at minimum, each chunk (main point) will be a separate slide.

Content

Keep it simple. The fewer words the better. Use several simple slides instead of one complex slide. Remember, it will take the same amount of time to speak the information no matter how many slides there are. Limit each slide to a maximum of 24 words, but try for much less overall. At most have no more than 6 lines of text with no more than 4 words in each line or 4 lines of text with no more than 6 words in each line.

Fonts

Design the presentation for the person in the last row. For an audience of about 30 people, headlines / titles should be at least 36 pt font size, first lines should be 34 pt font size, and sub lines should be 32pt font size. Avoid using the 3rd level or below. Sans serif fonts like Arial work better than serif fonts like Times New Roman. In any case, consistency is key, and using more than two different font types should be avoided.
Colors

Good contrast between background color and text color is important for readability. Good background colors are dark blue, green, and black. White and yellow provide excellent contrasting colors for the text. The reverse, using a light background with dark text, works well too.

Avoid certain color combinations because they are particularly hard to differentiate for some people. Brown/green, blue/black, blue/purple, and red/green should be avoided in charts, graphs, and background/text combinations.

Avoid overly bright, intense colors.

Maintain a consistent color scheme, using two main colors with other colors for emphasis sparingly.

Images and Sounds

Use images and pictures that are pertinent to the information. They should support the message and not distract from it. Try to use just one consistent type of image throughout: photos, drawings, or cartoons. Ensure images are large enough to see from the back row, and the quality is good. Try placing images in varying locations on the slides and at random intervals. Be sure that they do not interfere with text.

Use sound very sparingly and appropriately. Occasionally sounds can draw attention to an important point, but overuse can annoy the audience. Make sure the sound is loud enough to be heard but not so loud that it hurts.
Charts and Graphs

Keep data charts and graphs simple. Delete the grid lines and legend or key, for they are distracting. Make words horizontal and delete data points. Place the subject next to the appropriate piece of the chart and provide enough information identify what the chart represents, but keep the specifics for the speech and handouts.

Transitions and Animations

Don’t go crazy with movement. When they are used, try to use transitions and animations that cause text to appear already in place, such as dissolve, appear, box-in. Use transitions and builds that fly, move, or wipe sparingly. Your audience members will thank you for not making them dizzy.