Effective Presentations

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Preparation

- Plan your presentation carefully around the basic "take-home" message

- What is the purpose of your presentation?
  - Is the purpose to motivate?
  - Is the purpose to persuade?
  - Is the purpose to simply convey information?

- Know your audience

  - Who is your audience?
    - Are the members of your audience your peers?
    - Are they students?
    - Are they your superiors?

  - What is their level of expertise?
    - Are the members of your audience familiar with the topic?
    - Are they familiar with the jargon, but not the details?
    - Is this the first time they’ve even heard of this subject matter?

  - What does the audience expect to get out of your presentation?
    - Does the audience expect a general overview?
    - Does they expect to learn the intricate details of an elaborate subject matter?

- Practice your presentation

  - Practice often, both alone and in front of people.
  - Remember that you are teaching, not impressing people with your knowledge.
  - Watch the use of jargon or highly technical terms.

- Speak comfortably and clearly

  - Speak a bit more slowly than your normal pace.

- Talk to your audience, don’t read to them

  - You can best keep the audience interest by explaining the content using related wording to what is depicted.

- Enjoy your presentation

  - If you enjoy the presentation, your audience will enjoy it.
  - If your audience enjoys the presentation, they will better remember the message.
Effective Slides

- **Include only necessary information**
  - Chose your "bullet" points carefully.
    - With each "bullet" point ask yourself:
      - *Is this an important point?*
      - *Is this really something that needs to be highlighted?*

- **Slide contents should be self evident**
  - Your slides/overheads should highlight important points.
  - Do not duplicate your entire presentation.

- **Avoid "mega data" slides**
  - If you put too much on a slide, you will lose your audience.
  - Use numbers with only a few significant digits, round up if necessary.

- **Seven words per line, seven lines per slide**

Graphics

- **Present information graphically**
  - Is there a graphical way to present the information?
  - If presented graphically, the audience will be more likely to understand information in the short period of time that it is on the screen.

- **Clip art or scanned art can be useful in illustrating a point**
  - Do not use art for the sake of art.
  - Art should serve a direct purpose or function.

- **Graphic devises are helpful in separating elements or directing attention**
  - Borders, boxes, shadows, lines, arrows, symbols, and blank spaces are helpful in separating elements or directing attention.

- **Graphics need to be fairly big and bold to stand out and to be seen**
  - Thin lines and small graphics may be more distracting than helpful.
Graphs, Diagrams, and Tables

- Graphs, diagrams, and tables show relationships, comparisons, and changes
- Graphs should not contain much detail and should be concise
  - Graphs should be used only to portray concepts.
- Different graphs serve different purposes
  - A pie graph divides a whole into component parts.
  - Bar graphs show relationships between two or more things.
  - Line graphs show trends.
    - *Remember, lines need to be bold!*
- Diagrams are used to demonstrate
  - Diagrams demonstrate ideas, facts, plans, concepts, processes, and sequences.
  - Examples include:
    - Organizational charts
    - Flow charts
    - Gantt charts
    - Critical path networks
    - Time lines
- No more than two graphics or diagrams per slide
  - More than two per slide would be WAY too much information and inundate your audience.
- When using graphs and diagrams, remember the basics
  - Select appropriate type.
  - Illustrate abstract concepts rather than detailed facts.
  - If possible, read from left to right label directly to avoid a legend.
  - Use scale values in rounded elements.
  - In bar graphs place time scales on the horizontal line and other information on the left.
General Slide Layout Hints and Tips

Arrangement

- The English language is read left to right,
  - The arrangement should generally read left to right.

- Eyes tend to land in the optical center of the screen
  - When a visual is first shown, the eyes tend to land in the optical center of the screen.
  - The optical center is a spot slightly above and to the left of center.

- Create a visual balance between all the text and graphic components
  - Without this visual balance, the text and graphic components may run together and make it difficult for the audience to comprehend the point you are trying to make.

- Don’t crowd your information too close to the edges
  - Information too close to the edge is a sure sign of too much information on a slide.
  - Some overhead systems may not show information too close to the edge of a slide.

- Leave space between lines of type
  - Space between the lines of type ensures legibility.
Templates

- **Use a template for your slides**
  - Templates create a theme or sense of unity throughout your presentation.
  - The audience will "learn" the template, and thus not be distracted by a changing environment.

- **Templates include a background design and color scheme**
  - The background design may vary throughout the presentation.
    - *Only vary it to the extent of showing different concepts or for graphics readability.*
  - The color scheme should stay consistent throughout the presentation.

- **Standardize positions, colors, and styles for common elements**
  - Throughout the presentation, titles and subtitles should appear in the:
    - same location;
    - same color; and
    - same font.

- **A logo or other identifying information may be incorporated into the template.**
  - The template is a good place to advertise:
    - your institution;
    - your department; or
    - the conference at which you are presenting.

- **The bottom right corner is the best place for the logo**
  - The eye travels to the bottom right corner as a visual is being changed. This spot may be a good place for the logo or information.
Colors

• **Limit the use of color**

  Unless you are using a full-color photograph or picture, you should use no more than three or four contrasting colors.

• **Use colors that contrast**

  Optimal color choices should complement the human vision and perception physiology rather than just being your own favorite.
  Stick with contrasting combinations of red, green, blue, yellow, black, and white whenever possible.

• **Beware of certain combinations**

  Red letters on a blue background causes "stereopsis."
  Red and green combinations don’t work because many people are red/green colorblind.

• **Dark background with light text and images is best**

  Good background colors include dark blues and greens.
  Good text colors are white and pale yellows.
Font Basics

- **The font size should communicate the relative importance of the text content on the slide.**
  - Heading should be larger than main body text entries
  - Main body text entries should be larger than any sub-entries
  - Footers and graphics captions should be the smallest text of all

- **Font sizes should range between 18 and 48 points**
  - Main body text should generally be 24-32 pt.
  - When in doubt, use a bigger font size.

- **Illegible fonts detract from the message**
  - While a legible font does nothing to add to the presentation’s message, an illegible font detracts from the message by requiring the observer to expend energy merely reading the text.
  - Legibility of font face is determined by two factors: the thickness of the strokes which make up the characters and the "openness" of the characters.
  - The best fonts have strokes of equal width. A variety of widths within the strokes of characters may be artistically pleasing, but make the characters more difficult to recognize.

- **If using a computer for the presentation, use "system" fonts**
  - If using a computer to prepare and "show" the presentation, it is best to use fonts that are "system" fonts.
    - This is especially important if the presentation is being prepared on one computer but will be "shown" on another. The "show" computer may not have the same fonts available as the computer used to prepare the presentation.
  - Times New Roman and Arial for Windows-PCs and Times and Helvetica for Macintosh are good choices.
Type Basics

- **ALL CAPITAL LETTERS are hard to read.**
  - Capital letters lack ascenders and descenders making them less distinctive.
  - Over 95% of all printed material is lowercase letters.
  - Because of this, people tend to be slower readers when words are in uppercase or capital letters.

- **Use uppercase letters for the first letter of all main words**
  - Use capital letters (uppercase) for the first letter of all the main words (all but prepositions and conjunctions).

- **Avoid abbreviations**
  - Abbreviations should be avoided unless you are sure that the audience will be familiar with the material.

- **Punctuation marks can usually be omitted**
  - Usually punctuation marks (especially commas and periods) serve no function and can be omitted.

Laser Basics

- **Use laser pointers sparingly**
  - Highlight only what your talk is focused on and be sure to move the pointer slowly.
  - Once you have drawn the attention to the given point, turn the pointer off to remove the distraction.

- **Guide the audience with verbal instructions**
  - For example, "As you see in the lower left panel of the slide. . ."

- **Avoid laser light shows**
  - The laser detracts from the important matter -- your presentation.