

Preparing Effective Presentation Slides

Slide Templates & Colour Schemes

- Keep it simple. As a guideline, pick a single background colour for your whole presentation for continuity and consistency and use around three additional colours of text for maximum impact, and to avoid overwhelming the audience. You could separate broad sections of a presentation by changing background colours, but keep these changes to a minimum.
- Consider both colour and texture for backgrounds. Sometimes a neutral background with a texture will work better than a solid colour.
- Use colour combinations for background and text that provide high contrast for ease of reading. As a general rule, use a dark background and light text and images. For example, a white background and black text makes the screen glare and makes it difficult to view for long periods. According to various sources, around 5% of men have some degree of colour blindness, red-green being the most common. For this reason, it's a good idea to limit the use of red and green to high contrast colour combinations.
- Colour combinations may look different when projected (as opposed to viewed on a computer monitor). If possible, test your presentation on a projector to verify that the colours work well together.
- Many presentation software packages have a set of templates which are ready to use, to save time. Make sure you choose one that applies to the guidelines above.

Text & Graphics

- Think Big! When presenting to a large audience it is very important that the text size you use on your slides is large enough to be read clearly. If it looks large enough viewed on your computer screen it is probably too small. As a rule of thumb, view your presentation on your computer screen whilst sitting around 6-8ft away. The text you can read easily from that distance is about the right size. Remember, if the audience is straining to read your visual, then they are not entirely listening to what you say, and you are on the way to losing the attention of the audience or confusing them.
- Be Clear! Include only the most pertinent information on each slide. Don't just include everything you are going to say, condense it to a few points per slide to summarise and compliment your presentation. Likewise, don't include anything not directly related to what you are going to say – any such supporting information should be held in reserve for the discussion period at the end of your presentation, if needed. Limiting the number of points per slide will mean that your audience can quickly become familiar with each slide as it appears. In fact, it is useful to actually pause for a few seconds after changing over each slide in order to give the audience the chance to familiarize themselves with the information on the slide before you talk, and this has the added bonus of allowing you to gather your thoughts and compose yourself before proceeding!
- Choose a single font, and stick with it throughout your presentation. Your computer package will give you access to many interesting fonts, but using them all at one time will mean that your presentation ends up looking cluttered and unprofessional. Use bold, underline, italics and colour to emphasise a point rather than using different fonts.

Graphics & Animation

- In the same way that small text and complicated colour-schemes detract from the quality of your presentation, graphics which cannot be clearly seen add confusion and cause distraction. During your presentation, if you feel the need to say "I'm not sure if you can see this...", it is probably safe to say that the audience probably can't. Either make the image clearer or leave it out completely.
- Presentation software packages offer tempting picture clips, animation and sound effects to enhance your slides. Moderation here is key! Use the effects to emphasise a point, but don't overuse the effects to the extent that they distract the audience. Any image or effect that does not have a specific purpose or relate directly to what you are saying should not be included, in order that slides are clear and uncluttered. For example, incorporate your logo onto the introductory and conclusion page of your presentation, but not necessarily onto each slide.
- If graphs are required to support your presentation, they should be large and should not include too much detail: Clear axis labels along with a few large, widely spaced values on the axes will almost certainly be sufficient detail to convey the message for the purpose of the slide. Likewise, avoid inserting comprehensive data tables which have been designed for a different media and which are more suited to in-depth analysis. The audience will get very little from complex data in the short time it is on the screen.

And finally, it may seem obvious but ...

... don't leave your preparation until the last minute! If you know you have to make a presentation, start planning it straight away. The more organised you are the better your presentation will be. Spell-check your presentation very carefully. Rehearse and run through your talk on the screen to make sure you have covered everything you wanted to and that it is in the correct order.