

Title of Module: Effective Visual Presentations

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Video 1: Why give Visual Presentations?

Getting Started

As a student or in the work place, you will often be called upon to present your ideas, your research, or your product. There are many presentation tools available that you can use during your presentation. Some popular ones are PowerPoint, Prezi, and Keynote. Of these, PowerPoint, an easily available tool on most computers, is for many people, the tool of choice when making a presentation

PowerPoint is slide presentation software that is commonly used to convey or share information in classrooms and in the work place. It is a visual tool that, if used effectively, can engage your audience and convey your ideas efficiently. PowerPoint.

Before we talk about using PowerPoint effectively, however, we should be aware that there has been some resistance to the widespread use of PowerPoint. Researchers like, Edward Tufte, for example, believe that PowerPoint is not always the best tool for presentations because, according to them, the style of the software tends to dominate how content is presented and “trivializes” the content. Other commentators believe that “PowerPoint is killing critical thought”. That said, PowerPoint is still very popular today. By some estimates, some 30 million PowerPoint presentations are made every day. If you choose PowerPoint as the format for your presentation,

it is important to talk about how you can make your PowerPoint presentation effective. Let's begin with talking about how you can prepare for your presentation.

Before your Presentation

Before you put together your presentation, you need to consider the purpose of the presentation, its topic, the audience for the presentation, and the time you have available to make the presentation.

Let's look at each of these aspects:

Purpose: Is the purpose of your presentation to inform or is it to persuade? Think carefully about what you hope to achieve by making the presentation. Based on the purpose of your presentation you will design your presentation accordingly.

Topic: Consider the topic of your presentation. Note down the main points you need to cover related to the topic. If the topic is too broad, look for ways in which you can make your topic more focused. A presentation that focuses on one or two topics is far more effective than a general presentation that tries to cover too many topics in the time available.

Audience: Who is the audience for your presentation? Which aspects of your presentation will appeal to your specific audience? Choose the points you will make in the presentation carefully based on your knowledge of your audience. If the purpose of your presentation is to present your ideas or arguments to an academic audience, for example, make sure that your presentation is formal and professional.

Time: The length of time you have available to present is very important. Design your presentation so that you finish it in the time you have available. Time constraints will determine how many slides you can have in a presentation and how much information you can cover. As a general rule, if you have to make a 10-minute presentation, you should probably not have more than 8-10 slides. Never go over the time allotted for your presentation.

It is essential to remember that a poorly designed presentation will not convey your information effectively to your audience. A well-designed presentation, on the other hand, can be a valuable presentation tool that engages your audience and communicates your message. It is necessary, therefore, to pay attention to the design aspects that go into an effective presentation. Our next module will look at how to design an effective PowerPoint.

Video 2: Designing the PowerPoint

The Main Points

The design of your PowerPoint is an important aspect of your presentation. A well-designed PowerPoint can illustrate your points and provide support for your oral presentation. There are a few points that you need to keep in mind while designing your PowerPoint.

When you first start designing your PowerPoint try not to put all your information on your slides. Do not overwhelm your audience with too much information. Remember that PowerPoint is a visual aid for your presentation. Use your PowerPoint presentation to emphasize or highlight the important points that you will be conveying in more detail orally.

Just put your main ideas on the slides. It should be very difficult for a viewer to look at your slides and understand what you are trying to convey without your oral presentation accompanying the slide presentation. Three of the main elements on a PowerPoint are the writing, the visuals, and the design elements. Let's look at each of these three elements.

Writing for PowerPoint

Start the PowerPoint with an Introduction slide that includes your name, the presentation title, and any other important contextual information, like the name of your university, the name of the conference you are presenting at, the course you are presenting for etc.

Depending on your audience for the presentation, it is also very useful to forecast the points you will be covering during the presentation. A slide giving your readers an overview of your presentation that includes information about your topic and the subtopics that you will be covering during the presentation is a good idea.

Remember that writing for a PowerPoint is very different from writing an essay. Avoid essay-like sentences on your slides. Use bullet-point like sentences, but also make sure that your bullet points are short and concise. Try and keep your bullet points to one line each. Bullet points that are more than two lines long are very avoidable. Remember that the more your audience has to read from your slides, the less they will be listening to you.

Make sure you cite all ideas, words, and images that are not your own, even if they are in the public domain.

Design Elements

PowerPoint is a visual tool, so the overall look of your presentation is very important. Use consistent elements on each slide so that all the individual slides on your presentation seamlessly fit into the larger presentation. In other words, keep the stylistic elements on your slides, like color and font, consistent.

While creating your PowerPoint, make decisions about what font size and style and what colors you will use. Once you have decided on fonts and colors, stick to those fonts and colors on every slide. Every slide in your presentation should look stylistically the same.

Fonts: As a general rule, use sans serif fonts like Verdana, Ariel, Helvetica rather than serif fonts like Times New Roman and Courier. Sans serif fonts are more clearly visible when seen at a distance so they are better suited for slide presentations.

Popular Serif and Sans Serif fonts include the following:

Serif Fonts	Sans Serif Fonts
Times New Roman	Helvetica
Cambria	Arial
Rockwell	Futura
Bodoni	Verdana

Notice that Serif Fonts have serifs (small extra lines) at the edges of the letters. Sans Serif Fonts, on the other hand, have cleaner, well-defined lines.

Colors: Choose colors that have high contrast. For example, black script on a white background has the highest contrast. Green script on a blue background, on the other hand might not be legible to your audience. In general, colors on the opposite sides of the color wheel have the highest contrast. Choose a color scheme and stick with it on all your slides.

Layout: The layout of your slides is important. Pay attention to the arrangement of the elements on your slides and aim for consistency. It is also important not to fill up the space on each slide with too much information. Leave enough blank or “white space” on each slide so that your slides do not look cluttered. Aim for a good balance of text and visual elements on your slides.

Visuals:

The visuals that accompany the written content are very important and often are the focus of your presentation. It is a good idea to have a visual on each of your slides as far as possible. Use high-quality images that do not get blurry or pixelated when projected. At the same time, make

sure that you do not have visuals that are unnecessary or distracting. Use your visuals to illustrate and explain your points. Avoid generic clipart! It is also a good idea to limit the use of animations, such as flying text etc., unless the use of animations is crucial to your topic and is suitable for your audience.

If video is appropriate for your topic, embedding video clips into your PowerPoint can be very effective. On average, the videos should not take up more than five percent of the total time of your presentation. It is important to not let a video do the work of making the argument or of conveying the information for you. Frame the video within your larger argument. Make sure you introduce the relevance of the video, pause the video, if necessary, to comment on what you have shown, and also make brief comments related to the video after you have shown it. Use the video as a way to support and illustrate your points.

Remember to only use images that are taken by you or created by you as far as possible. Do not use copyrighted images downloaded from the web. If images are taken from outside sources, be sure to cite them appropriately, even if they are in the public domain.

Video 3: Presenting your PowerPoint

Focus on the Oral Presentation:

Now that you have created your PowerPoint, it is time to concentrate on the most important element of your presentation: you. Remember that you, not your media, are the presentation. A good presentation can be made even if your slides are not perfect, but a perfectly created PowerPoint will be useless unless it is well presented.

While it is important to create a clear, effective PowerPoint, it is even more important to prepare for your oral presentation. You should spend more time rehearsing your oral presentation than preparing the presentation. Practice, practice, practice. If you have timed your presentation and practiced it several times before the actual presentation, you are more likely to deliver a flawless, confident presentation.

The way you dress, the way you talk, and the way you relate to your audience have an impact on your presentation. When you present, focus on two important elements: your body language and your voice.

Body Language and Voice:

Nonverbal communication is a large part of communication. Your body language that includes how you use gaze and how you use your hands is also a crucial part of your presentation. Remember to make eye contact with your audience. One way of making sure that you look at everyone in the room, is to not read from your slides. Use the information on your slides as

reference points for your audience. Try not to look too much at your slides when you present. Avoid looking at the floor or the ceiling or even at only one person in the room. Face your audience, look at everyone in the room, and include everyone in your presentation.

Also, don't forget to use your hands! Don't put your hands in your pockets or behind your back. Use your hands to emphasize your points and to index the information on your slides.

Pay attention to your pace and volume of delivery. Are you talking too fast or too slow? Vary your pace of delivery. Go slow when you want to emphasize certain points. Go faster when you just need to mention not-so-crucial items. Also, remember that you need to be heard by, hopefully, everyone in the room. If there is no microphone, make sure you are projecting your voice based on the size of the room.

Finishing up:

Now that you have made your main points, it's time to summarize. Avoid ending your presentation too abruptly. Recap your presentation quickly for your audience and talk about the relevance and value of your arguments. Leave your audience with something to think about. It is also a good idea to end your presentation with a request for questions.

By keeping in mind some of the points outlined in this module, you will be in a great position to make insightful and persuasive presentations.

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