

How to Create Effective PowerPoints

Steps to Take

- 1. Plan**—This should be the first step you take. Don't just sit down at the computer and randomly begin a presentation. Write an outline for the presentation so that the beginning slide tells your reader where you are going and your last slide summarizes your points.

- 2. One Point at a Time**—Your audience will almost instantly read every slide as soon as it's displayed; if you have the next four points you plan to make up there, they'll be three steps ahead of you, waiting for you to catch up rather than listening with interest to the point you're making. Plan your presentation so just one new point is displayed at any given moment. Bullet points can be revealed one at a time as you reach them.

- 3. No Paragraphs**—Follow the 7x7 rule. Use only 7 lines of text per slide with only 7 words of text per line. Your slides are the *illustrations* for your presentation, *not* the presentation itself. They should underline and reinforce what you're saying as you give your presentation.

- 4. Simple is Best**— Avoid the temptation to dress up your pages with cheesy effects and focus instead on simple design basics:
 - a. Use a sans serif font for body text.** Sans serifs like Arial, Helvetica, or Calibri tend to be the easiest to read on screens.
 - b. Use decorative fonts *only* for slide headers, and then *only* if they're easy to read.** Decorative fonts –calligraphy, German blackface, futuristic, psychotic handwriting, flowers, art nouveau, etc. – are hard to read and should be reserved only for large headlines at the top of the page. Better yet, stick to a classy serif font like Georgia or Baskerville.
 - c. Put dark text on a light background.** Again, this is easiest to read
 - d. Align text left or right.** Centered text is harder to read and looks amateurish. Line up all your text to a right-hand or left-hand baseline – it will look better and be easier to follow.
 - e. Avoid clutter.** A headline, a few bullet points, maybe an image – anything more than that and you risk losing your audience as they sort it all out.

- 5. Use Images Sparingly**—Use images only when they add important information or make an abstract point more concrete.

- 6. Have a Hook**— Like the best writing, the best presentations should hook their audiences early and then reel them in. Open with something surprising or intriguing, something that will get your audience to sit up and take notice.

Mistakes to Avoid

1. One of the biggest mistake people often make when creating a PowerPoint presentation is that they make the slides the focus. Attention should be on the presenter and on the compelling information that he or she has to share.
2. **The worst thing a presenter can do is to turn around and read from the PowerPoint.**
3. Putting too much on the screen defeats the purpose. If all of the information is already on the screen, then there's no need for the person speaking to ramble on about it.
4. Not having notes to refer to ruins the presentation. You should be prepared for your presentation. That includes notes that will guide you through the presentation. These should be NOTES not full paragraphs so that you can speak to your audience rather than read to them.