



# Center for Writing and Speaking

**P NO. 9 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES**

## **Presenting with Presentation Software**

*PowerPoint (or other presentation software) can be a fast and effective way to help your audience follow along during the presentation and remember your message after they leave the room. Unfortunately, there are many common mistakes that can be made when using presentation software. Keep the following tips in mind as you prepare your slide show:*

### **Do I even need slide software?**

- You can often present most effectively without any visuals at all. Make sure that the slide show will add something to your presentation before you make the decision to use it.

### **Use a limited amount of information on each slide.**

- The audience will either read your slide or listen to you, but not both. Having walls of text on each slide is the number one mistake that causes a visual aid to hurt instead of help a presentation.
- Wherever possible, reduce slides to bullet points with phrases, or better yet single keywords, so your audience can follow your argument without losing focus on your speech.
- Clip art or other icons can sometimes add to the slide, but they can also make it more difficult to read or too casual depending on the type of presentation you're giving.
- If you want to use images, use high-resolution graphics and make them as large as possible on the slide so the audience isn't squinting to see a tiny, grainy, or distorted image. A powerful image is often much more effective than a slide of text.

### **Make it clear enough to see in the back of the room.**

- Use large and readable fonts, contrasting colors, and clear images.
- To check for clarity, practice with the presentation and walk to the back of the room to see if you can read it.

### **Choose readable colors and backgrounds.**

- You should be concerned about the audience's ability to understand the material first and foremost; creativity should serve this purpose.
- Keep in mind that when the slide show is projected, the colors will become much more muted. The projected slideshow rarely looks the same as what you see on your computer screen.
- Use warm colors (yellow, orange, red) to highlight text or objects. For backgrounds, blues, greens, and neutral colors work best.
- Be cautious about the use of loud colors, and make sure the background is not too "busy." Some templates are too distracting, or can be inappropriate depending on how formal the presentation is.

(continued on reverse)

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## **Presenting with Presentation Software, Continued**

### **Avoid excessive animation and sound effects.**

- Both are often distracting or inappropriate. However, animation that reveals text slowly can be effective in guiding the audience's focus--just make sure that you don't spend the entire speech clicking.

### **Practice your presentation beforehand.**

- You need to be comfortable with the equipment and the software and keep in mind that visual aids add time to your presentation as opposed to just speaking. Plan to have timed practice with the equipment at least a day before the presentation.
- Your presentation might also look different on other computers. Try to check the presentation in the room where you will speak a day ahead of time when possible.

### **During the presentation, talk to your audience—not the screen.**

- State the idea which the visual support is to illustrate before displaying and explaining it to the audience.
- Check the slide on the computer monitor and then maintain eye contact with the audience--you should never read straight from the slide.
- Try to move away from the computer when you have a few minutes before you click to the next slide.

### **Always have a backup plan.**

- Plan on technological difficulties. You never know when the WiFi will suddenly stop working, the computer won't connect to the projector, or other common problems arise.
- Make sure that you have clear notes that you can use for your presentation.
- In situations where visual aids are essential to the presentation (for example, a map or graph that displays key data), you might consider printing a copy for you to reference in case of technological failure.

You can also come to the Center for Writing and Speaking to work on your presentation with one of the tutors; we can provide both technical and content help!

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