Tips for Creating Presentation Slides

Presentations are becoming increasingly common forms of assessments for undergraduate and graduate students, alike, and slides are an excellent way to augment your presentation's content. The following tips were developed with conference presentations in mind; however, most are broadly applicable to all presentations.

Presentation Design
- Strive for similar line lengths for text (visually appealing).
- Don't overload your slides with too much text or data.
- Let the picture or graphics tell the story - minimize the use of text.
- FOCUS. In general, using a few powerful slides is the aim.
- Type key words in the PowerPoint Notes area listing what to say when displaying the slide. The notes are printable.
- Prepare an Agenda or Table of Contents slide. You can reuse the same slide at the end of the presentation by changing the title to Summary.
- Proofread everything, including visuals and numbers.
- Keep "like" topics together.

Visual Elements
- A font size of 28 to 34 with a bold font for subtitles. The title default size is 44.
- Use clear, simple visuals. Don't confuse the audience.
- Use contrast: light on dark or dark on light.
- Graphics should make a key concept clearer.
- Place your graphics in a similar location within each screen.

Text
- Font size must be large enough to be easily read.
- It is distracting if you use too wide a variety of fonts.
- Overuse of text is a common mistake.
  - Too much text makes the slide unreadable. You may just as well show a blank slide.
  - If your audience is reading the slides they are not paying attention to you. If possible, make your point with graphics instead of text.
  - You can use Word Art, or a clip art image of a sign, to convey text in a more interesting way.

Numbers

    Numbers are usually confusing to the audience. Use as few as possible and allow extra time for the audience to do the math.

    Numbers should never be ultra precise:

        "Anticipated Revenues of $660,101.83" looks silly. Just say $660 thousand.

        "The Break Even Point is 1048.17 units. Are you selling fractions of a unit?

    If you have more than 12 numbers on a slide, that's probably too many.

    Using only one number per sentence helps the audience absorb the data.

Statistics

    Use the same scale for numbers on a slide. Don't compare thousands to millions.

    Cite your source on the same slide as the statistic, using a smaller size font.

Charts

    Charts need to be clearly labeled. You can make more interesting charts by adding elements from the drawing toolbar.

    Numbers in tables are both hard to see and to understand. There is usually a better way to present your numerical data than with columns and rows of numbers. Get creative!

Backgrounds

    Backgrounds should never distract from the presentation.

    Using the default white background is hard on the viewer's eyes.

    A dark background with white font reduces glare.

    Colors appear lighter when projected. Pale colors often appear as white.

    Consistent backgrounds add to a professional appearance.

    For a long presentation, change background designs when shifting to a new topic.

Excitement

    Slides for academic presentations should be "dull"!

    Sounds and transition effects can be annoying. Use sparingly.

    Animation effects can be interesting when used in moderation.

    You can insert video and audio clips and hyperlinks when appropriate.

Adapted from:

    http://www.swss.ws/NewWebDesign/Students/presentation_tips.pdf

    http://getalifephd.blogspot.com/2011/04/how-to-give-fabulous-academic.html

    http://maadmob.net/donna/blog/2008/10-tips-conference-presentations

    http://www.accuconference.com/resources/effective-presentations.aspx

    http://ocw.nd.edu/political-science/introduction-to-international-relations/handouts/advice-for-graduate-students-and-others-on-attending-academic-conferences