

## PowerPoint Pitfalls and Practices

PowerPoint slideshows should enhance your presentation, not detract from it. Here are a few simple tips to start you on the right track.

1. **Make an Entrance:** Rely on your presentation and ingenuity to craft an opener to reel in your audience. Pique their interest with something surprising or intriguing. A powerful hook may appeal to their emotions either by making something dramatic happen or by preventing something bad.
2. **Make it Absorbable.** It's easy to place a large amount of information onto a slide, but avoid it. Displaying whole paragraphs is a sure way to lose your audience, be it with the slide or their focus on you. Keeping statistics to a minimum falls in the same category. If you want to convey certain facts, consider supplementing your presentation with handouts.
3. **Let Them Absorb.** Pace your audience. Take pause. Allow them to catch up after displaying each slide. They won't be listening until they've had time to do that.
4. **Let Them Absorb You.** Your slides are the illustrations, not the presentation itself. The main source of information should be you, not your visual aid.
5. **Don't Get Absorbed.** Your audience is your focus, not the screen. What's on your slides should be your "cues," not your script. So do your best to keep your attention on the people giving you theirs. By reading your slides, all of the factors that make a speech dynamic are lost.
6. **Design and Effects Matter.** It's easy to get carried away with all the fades, swipes, twirls and other [potential] annoyances. Over-using images is another pitfall. Like most anything, moderation can serve you well. Use such tools to drive home key messages. Sans serif fonts, like Arial, Helvetica and Calibri, tend to be the easiest to read on screen. So reserve special fonts for headers only, and only when they add value. Using dark text on a light background is another safe guideline to ensure viewing ease. Others tout the benefit of using light text on dark backgrounds.
7. **Use Fewer Slides-** You should spend no more than 3 to 4 minutes per slide. If you are doing a 30-minute presentation, that's 10 slides, max. Find other ways to drive your message home than making an unnecessary number of slides.
8. **Mix it Up.** Keep them engaged. Use your presentation to foster interaction, such as using a slide to pose a question for the audience to consider. In addition to stimulating dialogue, it's a good way to keep them on their toes, not certain what to expect next. It's always nice when *you're* the one asking the questions. Another approach may be to post a blank slide to bring their full attention on you to drive a point home.
9. **Break Up Monotony.** Some other ways to liven up your flow is to inject video and/or whole images that "Tell the 1,000 words" you won't have to as a result. Some experienced presenters actually prefer to do whole presentations using only imagery and keeping the near full focus on themselves. Consider that.
10. **Remember the Details:** Mistakes in spelling, grammar, formatting, positioning and the like are all [literally] magnified on screen. Overlooking these details may lead some to take "points" off your performance. Darn those nit-pickers! It's always best for you to do that part before anyone else can.