Building Better Presentations

Information compiled by Todd Reubold, Director of Communications
University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment
reub0002@umn.edu | 612.624.6140 | www.slideshare.net/reubold | Twitter: @reubold

DESIGN TIPS:

• **The opening act** – Start with a great intro slide to really grab the audience’s attention.
• **Wow, now I understand** – The most effective slides reinforce or highlight the presenter’s message.
• **One main point per slide** – Break complex information into multiple slides or prepare a handout that can be left behind.
• **Can you see me now** – Use a font style that is simple and large enough to be read at a distance. If you’re not sure, stand at the back of the room and click through your slides to get an idea of what the audience will see. Also, limit the number of fonts in your presentation to 1-2 max (and when in doubt – go with Helvetica).
• **Put your slide titles to work** – Titles on slides should help deliver the message not merely give a name to the slide.
• **If a slide contains more than 75 words, it’s likely a document** – Either try to reduce the amount of content on the slide, break the information into multiple slides or prepare a handout to accompany your presentation.
• **If a slide contains around 50 words, it’s likely a teleprompter** – Remember, the audience often reads ahead and thus has to wait for the presenter to catch up.
• **Remember the 3-second rule for text** – Can the message on your slide be processed effectively within three seconds? Presentations are a “glance media” – more closely related to billboards than any other media.
• **Keep it simple** – Plain white, gray or black backgrounds work best.
  o Backgrounds should never compete with content.
  o Don’t mix backgrounds from different presentations.
  o Dark backgrounds are generally considered to be more formal, dramatic and work better for large venues.
  o Light backgrounds are typically more informal, have a bright feeling and work better for small venues and conference rooms. White backgrounds are generally better when using cut-out images that are already on a white background.
  o If you must have a logo (although generally not recommended), place it in the lower right corner.
• **Consistency is king** – Use a consistent background, color palette (3-4 harmonious colors max), text and images throughout your presentation to enhance professionalism.
• **Placement of elements creates meaning** – Consider contrast, flow, hierarchy, proximity, repetition, alignment and whitespace when developing your presentation.
  o Contrast – Lettering and graphics stand out from the background.
  o Flow – The audience knows the order in which to process the information.
• **Make a connection** — Start with a story, impressive fact or something to engage the audience right away at the start of your talk. Presenters typically have only 30-60 seconds to grab the audience’s attention, so make use of this time.

• **Slides are not a Teleprompters** — Avoid reading your slides or overheads to your audience.

• **Get a remote** — A remote will allow you to move away from the podium and build a connection with the audience.

• **Use a clip-on microphone** — Being heard clearly is important, and you don’t want people straining to hear or understand you during the course of your presentation or they’ll tune out. If possible, a wrap-around microphone that you wear on your head is even better than a clip on.

• **Don’t hide** — Get out from behind the podium to connect with the audience.

• **Leave the lights on** — Both the presenter and the slides should be visible.

• **Don’t go long** — Stay within your allotted time. Related to this, never skip or apologize for slides.

• **Whenever possible, keep it short** — Twenty to twenty-five minutes, that’s generally all you need. Spending the rest of the time answering questions and creating discussion is typically more effective than a longer presentation.

• **Break it up** — Studies have show that attention span drops after the first ten minutes of a talk, so plan on doing something (ask questions, short group exercises, video clips, etc.) to regain the audience’s attention.

• **Be inspiring** — Both you and your slides should be provocative enough that people pay full attention to you.

• **Have a S.T.A.R. moment** — Something They’ll Always Remember.

• **Re-claim the spotlight** — After the Q&A, briefly restate your main point one more time to leave a lasting impression with the audience.

• **Finally, great presentations take time and practice to create.**

**RESOURCES:**

**Books and Articles:**

• *Presentation Zen, Presentation Zen: Design* and *The Naked Presenter* by Garr Reynolds: [http://www.presentationzen.com/](http://www.presentationzen.com/)

• *Slide:ology* and *Resonate* by Nancy Duarte: [http://www.duarte.com/books/](http://www.duarte.com/books/)


• *Beautiful Evidence* by Edward Tufte: [http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/books_be](http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/books_be)

**Photo Resources:**

• Kuler.adobe.com — select color palettes from your photos

• iStockphoto.com — stock photography

• Shutterstock.com — stock photography
Building Better Presentations - Checklist

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Preparing the Talk:

___ Can I summarize the talk in one sentence? What’s the main takeaway message?

___ Do I need slides for this presentation or would a talk without visuals have more impact?
___ Do I know the audience? Who are they?

___ What does the audience know about my topic? What are their biases? Why should they care about the presentation?

___ Does the talk have an overall structure (chronological, problem-solution, sequential, climatic, etc.)?
___ Have I sketched out the talk based on this structure?
___ Does the talk explain why I care about this topic?
___ Does the talk help people understand “what is” and “what could be”?

Designing the Talk:

___ Does each of my slides convey a single, strong message
___ Have I removed all the non-essential information (background images, logos, etc.) from my slides?
___ Do my slides have bullet points?
___ Can I present the same information without bullet points?
___ Do I have a good mix of photo, text, illustration and data slides?
___ Am I only using one or two fonts?
___ Are the fonts visible from the back of the room where I’m presenting?
___ Did I use a remote and move away from the podium / engage with the audience?
___ Was my voice audible throughout the room/hall?
___ Did I avoid skipping or apologizing for slides?
___ Did I include soundbytes and tweetable information or comments?
___ Did I pace/sway/move too much during my talk?
___ Was I too still or motionless during my talk?
___ Did I vary the tone, tempo and volume of my voice?
___ Did I include a bit of humor (if applicable)?
___ Did I feel “authentic” while presenting?
___ Did I feel “present” in the moment?
___ Was my talk inspiring/motivating/engaging/surprising/etc.?
___ Did I restate my main point at the end of the Q&A?
___ Did I ask my audience to take an action or change a behavior?