



Jerry's top ten PowerPoint tips

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PowerPoint presentations: Some ideas to consider...

After all the work that some people put into their research and analysis, it sometimes defies belief that they make a complete hash of their moment to impress, their moment to shine as an intellectual. After months of slaving over a hot keyboard many people use the opportunity presented to them by a briefing or conference to confuse the audience, contradict themselves and generally annoy the whole room. They do this by having a lousy presentation. Now I'm well aware that some people reading this will have seen my presentations, so I'm not claiming to be a great presenter. But I would like to think that my audience at least can see and understand my slides, have time to read the words, and understand what I'm on about (most of the time!). You don't have to use this stuff, but I hope you find this helpful.

Ten tips for a powerful presentation!

Tip 1: Dark background - light text

Right at the beginning, try and get the presentation off to a good start. PowerPoint presentations look best with a dark background and light text as these are the easiest to read and most gentle on the eye. Dark blue backgrounds are popular and are effective because the wavelength of blue means that it tends to fade into the background emphasising the text on top (the bit you want your audience to concentrate on). The only downside to dark blue backgrounds is that they are often the default style and everyone uses them. Try experimenting with other dark shades (but stay clear of red as a background).

If you are stuck using an overhead projector then use dark text and a light background. If you use a white background for PowerPoint, the people at the back of the room will start to see swimming text in front of their eyes and the people near the front, stuck immediately in front of a huge, bright, glaring screen will feel like they are being interrogated. Be gentle on the audience and they will appreciate your message all the more.

Tip 2: Simple titles & points

Long titles that go on for more than about 10 words do not work well for slides. Keep titles and bullet points short and relevant. You must remember that you are the presentation and the slides are merely there as an additional stimulus and not as a replacement. You are the message, not your slides, so don't overcomplicate them. If you are a more accomplished speaker and use the slides as a prompt (always better than reading a script) try a few quirky bullet points. They will act as a

more memorable prompt for you and will have the audience intrigued and therefore more interested.

Tip 3: Font size and type

Absolute minimum should be font size 16, but bear in mind that with some fonts (such as Garamond) 16 is much smaller than in another font (like Arial). Flowery, airy-fairy fonts do not work well as they are difficult to read. Simple San Serif-type fonts such as Arial are simplest to read, but always go to the back of the room prior to the presentation to check the legibility. If you can not fit your text onto the screen using a font size of 16 or more, don't reduce the font size – reduce the number of words.

If you are taking your presentation somewhere else and using another machine, do not use some unique font you downloaded from the net, such as *Ratcliffe's Bizarre Font Bold!* The host presentation machine is unlikely to have the font. Unless you have embedded the font in the presentation, PowerPoint will default to a standard font and this might disrupt your layout. Stick with the basic fonts unless really sure.

Tip 4: Number of bullet points

No more than 7 per slide and about 5 is best. A presentation should be a summary of your work, not the whole damn thing - so summarise. If you really want to put in more bullet points then break your list into a number of slides with other stuff in between. Listening to a presenter reading a list that can be read faster on the screen is many people's idea of hell. Instead of boring people with a long list, give them a handout.

Tip 5: Builds & dimming

'Builds' is the term given to those fancy swirly ways to introduce text or other items to the screen. I'm sure you've seen them: text flies in from the left, then one letter is added at a time from the right, etc. If you need to use fancy builds to impress your audience then you really are struggling... Whizzy builds tend to annoy audiences, especially the slow builds accompanied by applause sounds or camera clicks. Regular conference attendees have seen them all and are not impressed. They also distract from what you are saying and your message. Slow builds can also be a presenter's nightmare because if you have to hurry through your last slides, they hold you up. Avoid slow or complicated builds and transitions between slides. Use only the simple stuff.

Dimming is the term given to the dulling, or worse the disappearance of text or objects once the next item has been introduced. Legislation should be in place to prevent presenters showing you a bullet point and then hiding that point when the next point arrives. Many conference attendees have a modest attention span so it is annoying for them to look up after a few seconds mental time-out and find they have missed the first points. **Never** dim segments of a chart as chart segments are only valuable if seen in proportion to the other elements.

Tip 6: Don't rely on the spel chequer

This should be an obvious one, but I've seen one academic talk to a room full of 600 law enforcement personnel with slides that said *pubic order* instead of *public order*. *Form* instead of *from*, *policy* instead of *police* – there are lots of common mistakes. The importance of maintaining public order is still a favourite of mine though...

Tip 7: How to bore – include technical detail

Yes, there is nothing more soporific than large equations on a PowerPoint presentation. Complex, illegible flow diagrams with too little time spent explaining them can also do it. Again the presentation should be a short, impressive summary of your work. Don't impress them with

how much you have done, just impress them with **what** you have done. If you must include technical detail, give them a handout afterwards, or better still, point them to your most recent book/article/publication.

Tip 8: Maps and graphs

To help with maps look at *Jerry's top ten crime mapping tips* and I suggest you look at this for charts as well. Maps are great for PowerPoint presentations as a picture really does say a thousand words. Never assume that your audience will know where you are talking about (for example, entertainment can be had asking Americans to name the capital of Australia). Charts and graphs should be simple and never have more than about 5 pieces or components. Line and bars are good for showing time periods, pies must show parts of a whole (i.e. 100%) and surface charts can show general trends. Don't cram too much in, and don't dim any part of a chart (see tip 5).

Tip 9: Continuity across slides

If you really want to annoy your audience, change the builds, fonts, colours and styles regularly throughout your presentation. That will really hack them off, and it looks really amateur. Good presentations are slick, professional and maintain a style throughout. Your organisation may already have a corporate style, but don't feel you have to throw away the tips here if they do. Decide on a colour scheme, set of one or two fonts (Title, heading, text for example) and stick to them.

Tip 10: Finish on your title slide or a black screen

You just finished your presentation, it has gone superbly well, and then you give away all the magic and let the audience see the trap door underneath the stage. When you finish talking let them either see your title slide with your contact details or end on a black screen so that they can concentrate on your message and how good you are. Don't let them see the slide layout view at the end. Doesn't look good and will distract the audience just when you had won them over!