

7 Simple Rules for Creating Presentation Slides that Make Sense

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Brain Science

Learning and recall:

Picture Superiority Effect: people remember pictures better than words. Concepts learned with pictures are recalled more easily than concepts learned via written word alone.

The largest part of the brain is the cortex, which is the control and information processing center. Fifty percent (50%) of the cortex is devoted to visual processing. That means 50% of the largest part of the brain is devoted to processing what it sees.

When we use effective visuals in our presentations, we put that 50% to work for us by helping learners process what they see. This optimizes the brain's energy and puts that energy to use to help learners learn better.



Memory and retention:

Images speed up processing because the brain processes images faster than words (up to 60,000 times faster!).

Words are processed by short-term memory, but images go straight into long-term memory. So when you use both words AND visuals, you're actively working both working memory and long-term memory, making your message literally more memorable. ~Lynell Burmark

The Rules

Rule #1: Declutter your slide space

We often feel compelled to fill every bit of slide space with tons of text, charts, tables, and images. For slides, less is more: less content on a slide is more easily processed by your audience. Focus learners' attention on you and your message by removing all unnecessary content from your slides.

For each object on a slide, ask yourself: "Does this absolutely have to be here for learners to get it?" If the answer is "No", then get rid of it!

Rule #2: Use big words and pictures

The right visuals can add impact to our message in a way that words just can't. But learners have to be able to easily see the visual for it to be impactful. Make images and visuals as big as possible on the slide while maintaining image quality.

Apply the same approach with text: use a few meaningful words on slides instead of full sentences. Aim to use a minimum of 30-point font in the slide body and 40-point font in slide titles. This will reduce the number of words on a slide and make sure that the audience can see them.

The Rules

Rule #3: Unify text and images

We often think that words and images on a slide are not allowed to touch. Unify the words and visuals on a slide to show the audience that they are related.

Layer text on top of images and use PowerPoint's transparency tool to make the text clearly visible and readable. If the visual behind the text is dark, lighten up the text holder. If the visual behind it is light, darken the text holder.

Rule #4: Use slide titles to give them a clue

Slide titles are a great opportunity to give learners a heads up for what they're about to hear. Use slide titles to lead the audience to the conclusion you want them to draw.

Think of slide titles like blog or article headlines. For example, if you're presenting results, are they expected or unexpected? Are they good or bad? Are they on target, above, or below quota?

Rule #5: Don't dump the data

When presenting data, don't present it all at once. Too much data is overwhelming! Design data slides to visually focus learners' attention on the point you're discussing. Hide what you can until it's time to discuss it. When it's time to discuss a specific data point, use PowerPoint's shapes and arrows to focus your audience's attention on it.

Rule #6: Let's date!

When presenting dates during a presentation, the audience tries to envision a calendar. Make it easy for them! Provide a screenshot of a calendar on the slide with the relevant dates highlighted.

In this folder is a Microsoft Excel calendar template you can download and use for your screenshots. URL for folder: <http://ow.ly/9kQA30bUJvc>

Rule #7: Lose the logo

Logos (and copyright and slide numbers...) on every slide are distracting and detract from your message. Logos add unnecessary clutter without adding value, especially if you're presenting to an internal audience!

If you can, keep your logo on the first and last slides and lose it on all slides in between. Ask your marketing department for a version of the corporate PowerPoint template that has your company logo on the title and ending slides.

Let's Connect!

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