

PowerPointers: Using PowerPoint to Your Advantage

- **Put the VISUAL back into visual aid.**

As ubiquitous as PowerPoint has become, not all presentations need PowerPoint. Instead of turning to PowerPoint as a default, consider first the central idea, main points, and key examples of your presentation. Where might your listeners benefit from a visual explanation of your material? (In some cases, the answer may be: “I’m just fine without a PowerPoint presentation, and have better visual ways to get my point across.”) DO use PowerPoint to illustrate key concepts with images, graphs, charts, or videos. BUT, avoid text-heavy slides that replicate the content of your speech. *You*, not your slides, should be the focal point of your presentation.

- **Eschew obfuscation. (Translation: Be clear and simple.)**

Use large (size 24+) sans serif fonts like Ariel or Helvetica and choose a color scheme with sufficient contrast (black font on white, yellow font on navy blue). Avoid flying fonts, sound effects, and other distractions. When you present data, only include figures or studies that you will discuss. Extraneous information can confuse or distract your listeners.

- **One slide, one idea.**

PowerPoint slides are cheap. Instead of cramming multiple graphs, charts, or ideas onto one slide, give each concept its own real estate. Not only will this enable you to enlarge your fonts and images, but it will also help you avoid overwhelming your audience.

- **Know your transitions.**

How do your slides relate to one another? Why are you presenting them in this order? Understand the order of your slides, and use verbal transitions between slides to highlight the overall reasoning and structure of your presentation. Try using transitional phrases that use internal previews and summaries. (“Now that we’ve looked at the history of home-schooling, I’d like to look at two key case studies.”).

- **Speak to your audience, not to your PowerPoint.**

Your effectiveness as a speaker depends on your connection with the audience. Resist the temptation to break this connection by turning to read from your PowerPoint slides! Instead, face the audience and make eye contact with as many people as you can. You might gesture briefly to your slides when you need to draw the audience’s attention to a certain feature, but in general, it’s important to maintain a physical orientation toward your audience. If you’re concerned about losing your place, try speaking with a brief set of notes in front of you.

- **Can you PD the TLAs in your AOP?**

It’s important to define your key terms throughout your presentation, especially when using acronyms or technical jargon that is specific to your discipline. If your language is particularly complex or unfamiliar to your audience, consider including brief definitions of key terms in your slides. (Use text sparingly, though!)

- **Carry a second parachute.**

Projector bulbs burn out. Computers crash. Cable adaptors disappear. Have a back-up plan (overhead slides or handouts) in case your PowerPoint takes an unexpected vacation.

