Using PowerPoint in a Presentation – A few suggestions

PowerPoint presentations can support your presentation and help to visualize focus your audience's attention, and serve as an outline as you progress through your talk. Consider the following suggestions:

1.   Create a simple design template.

Use the slide master feature or a provided template to create consistency in your design. The method of content presentation (list, image, text) depends on the content, but consistency with other elements such as font, colors, background, throughout the presentation is essential. Establish consistent contrasting colors (dark/light) for text and background.

2.   Use appropriate font and size.

Choose your font and size carefully. Use sans serif fonts (such as Arial Rounded MT Bold) and 32 point font size for text. Anything smaller is difficult to read. Avoid all caps. Use color to highlight. Limit punctuation. **Use the 6x6 rule:** No more than 6 lines of text per slide and no more than 6 words in each line of text.

3.   Use good quality images.

Images should reinforce and complement your message. They should be impactful, not space-fillers. Empty space on the slide will actually enhance readability. Don't clutter the slide with images unless they add value. Also, test your images to make sure they retain quality when projected on a larger screen. Take advantage of SNIPPING TOOL software to capture images from Websites. No more than two images per slide.

4.   Avoid too many special effects.

These features seem impressive at first, but they tend to distract from your message and get old quickly. Transitions, text fly-ins, animations and sounds may reduce the professionalism you desire to portray. Special effects are similar to graphics, they should add impact the presentation not serve as a detraction.

5.   Limit the number of slides.

Limit the number of slides according to the time you have available for the presentation. Flipping to the next slide constantly and rushing through the presentation not only upsets the audience. **A good guideline is one slide per minute**.

6.   Learn to navigate your presentation in a non-linear fashion.

PowerPoint allows the presenter to move forward and backwards without paging through every slide. Practice moving forward and backward within your presentation. Your audience may want to see a previous slide or you may want to skip ahead to something of immediate relevance. Know these shortcuts:

If you are using a "remote clicker" to advance your slides, practice using the remote before your presentation. Its use should appear natural, and should not appear to be an obstacle to your talk.

7.   Do not read from your slides or speak to them.

Don't face the screen and read your slides. The bulleted information on your slides should be supplementary to what you are saying. Use the slides to trigger your comments or to pace yourself, but do not read them. The audience can read. Remember that your slides are only there to support, not to replace your talk!

Additional Thoughts:

Preparing a talk always takes far longer than you anticipate. Start early!

- Write a clear statement of the topic and its importance.
- Research. Collect material which may relate to the topic.
- Tell a story in a logical sequence.
- Stick to the key concepts. Avoid description of specifics and unnecessary details.
- If you are making a series of points, organize them from the most to the least important. The less important points can be skipped if you run short of time.
- Keep your sentences short, about 10-20 words each is ideal. This is the way people usually talk.
- Strive for clarity. Are these the best words for making your point? Are they unambiguous? Are you using unfamiliar jargon or acronyms?

Hints for Efficient Practice:
- Make a list of key words/concepts for each slide
- Read through the list before you begin.
- Don't attempt to memorize your text;
- Your words will probably be different each time you practice.
- Think about the ideas, and your words will follow naturally.

Delivering Your Talk:
Pre-Talk Preparation
- Plan to get there a few minutes early to set up and test the equipment.
- Turn off your cell phone.

Opening:
- Jump right in and get to the point.
- Give your rehearsed opening statement; don't improvise at the last moment.
- Use the opening to catch the interest and attention of the audience.
- Briefly state the topic you will be discussing.
- Briefly summarize your main theme.

Speaking
- Talk at a natural, moderate rate of speech
- Project your voice.
- Speak clearly and distinctly.
- Repeat critical information.
- Pause briefly to give your audience time to digest the information on each new slide.
- Don't read the slides aloud. Your audience can read them far faster than you can talk.

Body Language
- Keep your eyes on the audience
- Use natural gestures.
- Don't turn your back to the audience.
- Don't hide behind the lectern.
- Avoid looking at your notes. Only use them as reference points to keep you on track. Talk, don't read.

Questions
- Leave time for a few questions at the end of the talk.
- If you allow questions during the talk, the presentation time will be about 25% more than the practice time.
- You can jump directly to a slide by typing its number or by right-clicking during the presentation and choosing from the slide titles.
- Relax. If you've done the research you can easily answer most questions.
- Some questions are too specific or personal. Politely refuse to answer.
- If you can't answer a question, say so. Don't apologize. "I don't have that information. I'll try to find out for you."

Length:
- To end on time, you must PRACTICE!
- When practicing, try to end early. You need to allow time for audience interruptions and questions.

Demeanor:
- Show some enthusiasm
- Involve your audience. Ask questions, make eye contact, and use humor.
- Don't get distracted by audience noises or movements.
- You'll forget a minor point or two. Everybody does.
- If you temporarily lose your train of thought you can gain time to recover by asking if the audience has any questions.

Conclusion:
- Concisely summarize your key concepts and the main ideas of your presentation.
- Resist the temptation to add a few last impromptu words.
- End your talk with the summary statement you have prepared. What do you want them to remember?