



PowerPoint Made Easy: Building a Presentation That Works

Microsoft PowerPoint has been around for decades, but the basic purpose of the program hasn't changed: **helping a speaker communicate an idea to an audience**. Whether you use PowerPoint on a Windows PC or a Mac, the principles of a good presentation are essentially the same.

The biggest mistake beginners make is thinking that the PowerPoint presentation *is* the presentation. It isn't. **You are the presentation**. The slides are there to help you tell the story, illustrate important points, and give the audience something useful to look at while they listen.

Start With the Story, Not the Slides

Before worrying about colors, fonts, pictures, or animations, decide what you want to say. Most presentations benefit from a simple three-part structure: **introduction, body, and conclusion**.

The introduction tells the audience what you're going to talk about and why it matters. The body develops the subject, preferably around three to five major points. The conclusion reminds the audience of the most important ideas and, when appropriate, tells them what you would like them to do next.

Think of PowerPoint as a visual outline of that story.

Don't Turn Slides Into Pages

One of the surest ways to lose an audience is to fill a slide with a paragraph of text and then read it aloud. If the audience is reading, they aren't paying much attention to you. If they're listening to you, they probably aren't reading everything on the screen.

An old PowerPoint guideline called the "**Rule of 6**" suggests no more than six lines on a slide and about six words per line. Don't treat that as an absolute rule. The better rule is simpler: **use as few words as you need to make the point.**

Use short phrases, keywords, and brief bullet points. Put the explanation in your spoken presentation rather than on the screen.

Let Pictures Do Some of the Work

PowerPoint is a visual medium. Photographs, illustrations, diagrams, charts, and graphs can often communicate an idea more effectively than another list of bullet points.

Use good-quality images that remain sharp when enlarged. A picture should also have a purpose. Don't add five pictures when one good one makes the point. Charts should be easy to understand without forcing the audience to study a maze of numbers and labels.

Keep the Design Consistent

You don't need to be a graphic designer to create attractive slides. In fact, simplicity usually works best. Choose an uncluttered background and use it consistently throughout the presentation.

Limit yourself to one or two readable fonts. Body text generally should be at least **24 points**, and headings should be considerably larger. Maintain good contrast between the words and the background. Dark text on a light background and light text on a dark background can both work well—as long as the words are easy to read from across the room.

Consistency matters more than decoration. If every slide suddenly introduces a new font, color, or layout, the design begins competing with your message.

Easy on the Special Effects

PowerPoint offers an impressive collection of transitions and animations. Text can fly, spin, bounce, fade, zoom, and perform tricks that would make a circus acrobat jealous. That doesn't mean it should.

Simple transitions can make a presentation feel polished, and animations can occasionally help explain a process or reveal information one step at a time. But excessive effects quickly become distracting. Choose a simple style and use it consistently.

Practice Before Showtime

Run through the complete presentation before you give it. Rehearsing helps you discover awkward slides, unnecessary information, and places where you may be talking too long. PowerPoint also includes presentation and rehearsal tools that can help with timing and delivery.

Whenever possible, test the presentation on the equipment you will actually use. Check the projector or display, make sure videos and sound work, and verify that your fonts and graphics appear correctly. Keep a backup copy of the presentation available as well.

Remember Your Audience

Good presentations should be accessible to as many people as possible. Use large type, strong contrast, clear language, and meaningful descriptions or alt text for important images when the presentation will be distributed electronically.

Most importantly, don't spend the presentation staring at the screen and reading your slides. Look at your audience. Talk to them.

The One Rule Worth Remembering

If you remember only one piece of advice, make it this: **Less is more.**

A good PowerPoint slide supports what you're saying without competing with you. Your audience didn't come to watch PowerPoint. They came to hear what **you** have to say.