

Helpful Hints for PowerPoint Slide Presentations

The following was originally put together by Rachel Fontana for the 2007 Summer REU students. We've expanded on a few thoughts and added others with the hope that this will be helpful as you continue to communicate your research to the BML community and beyond!

I. Oh the beautiful possibilities....

a. **TAKE HOME MESSAGE:** Keep your presentation simple and consistent throughout! Simple text and formatting go a long way; using the same background, font sizes, color schemes and so forth throughout the entire presentation is key!!!

b. Backgrounds

i. Clean, simple, polished

1. **DO NOT:** use busy backgrounds with bright, obnoxious colors or complicated pictures behind text. We want to see your data and absorb your story, not be distracted or annoyed before you make it to your third slide.
2. **DO:** consider solid colors, subtle patterns or artwork, or a small detail on periphery to make your efforts look polished. Also, keep in mind that members of your audience may be color blind so the contrast between background and text is important.

c. Fonts (NOTE: all examples below are in 12pt)

i. Style

1. **DO NOT:** use cursives, calligraphy or childish fonts. These are both difficult to read and unprofessional looking (EX: *Mistral*, *Chiller*, *Firaldi*, *Gigi*, *Bradley Hand*, **Snap ITC**...).
 - a. Also avoid fonts that are either tightly condensed or require excessive space to become legible (EX: *Blue Highway Condensed*, *Niagra Engraved*, **GOUDY STOUT**, **COPPERPLATE GOTHIC LIGHT**...).
2. **DO:** use simple clean-lined texts that are still easy to read when put into bold or italics (EX: *Arial*, *Times New Roman*, *Gill Sans MT*, *Tw Century MT*, *Perpetua*...).

- a. If you want to use something more artistic for titles, that's fine but make sure it flows well with your body text (EX: Tempus Sans ITC, **BIONDI**, Neuropol, Palatino Linotype).

ii. Sizing

1. **DO NOT:** forget that what is easy for you to read on the screen is not necessarily easy for the audience to read on the projection. Besides having less time to absorb visuals, they will want to focus on what you are saying so keep things clear and legible.
2. **DO:** make sure you can read everything from the back of the lecture hall. Also, the size should change from the header/major points to each of the bullet levels where subsequent bullets are increasingly smaller. This ensures you get your **MAJOR** points across first and foremost.
 - a. Depending on your font style and the screen size, this will become obvious when you practice...

iii. Colors

1. **DO NOT:** change color schemes from slide to slide... it detracts from the content of your work.
2. **DO:** make sure you can read your text from the back of the lecture hall. Some lighter colors become distorted on the projector screen and if you use multiple darker colors (EX: black and dark blue), they can become homogenized.

d. Animations

- i. **DO NOT:** get overzealous with the cartoons, flying graphics, etc. Overuse will cause the audience to ignore it from thereon and potentially miss a point you really did want to emphasize!
- ii. **DO:** use slide transitions that are clean, subtle, and relatively quick (EX: 'Fade all' set to 'fast' is generally a good pace).

NOTE: formatting can be largely controlled by setting the Master Slide to your default choices. To do this in PowerPoint, go to View > Master > Slide Master and setup your backgrounds, color schemes, font styles & sizes, bullet patterns, etc.

II. With all these beautiful possibilities, what do I do now???

a. **TAKE HOME MESSAGE:** Plan for ~1 minute per slide. For a 15 minute talk, you should have no more than about 20 slides **MAXIMUM!!!!** Your layout and format should be consistent across slides and figures should clearly communicate the content of your point.

b. How many slides?

I. Estimate ~1 minute per slide with your **MAXIMUM** slide allowance including both the title and acknowledgements slides.

c. What do I really need?

- i. Title Slide – what, who, when, affiliation
- ii. Intro Slides – background, setup, questions and hypotheses
- iii. Methods Slides – how, data sources, field & lab techniques
- iv. Results Slides – the numbers, plots, etc... should be the **BULK** of your presentation; the equivalent of a written discussion will be what you are saying as you go through your results verbally, noting interesting observations, anomalies, patterns, etc. as well as what you think might explain these (with substantiation)
- v. Concluding Slides – acceptance/rejection of hypotheses, new questions & future work
- vi. Acknowledgements – field help, interpretive help, advisors, reviewers, funding sources, etc. **DO NOT** forget this!!!

d. What do I put on my beautifully simple slides?

i. Words

I. **KEEP THEM TO A MINIMUM!!!**

a. **DO NOT:** use complete sentences or paragraphs.

i. The only exception is writing out clear hypotheses and/or the goals of the study.

2. DO: use bullets and/or numbered points that succinctly summarize the content you are communicating. These should be little more than a prompt for what you are verbally saying.

ii. Pictures

1. DO NOT: throw up content just to fill a page or crowd excessive content into a single slide without good reason.
2. DO: use pictures if they facilitate your explanation of a point or provide a more efficient means of communicating a complicated idea. Pictures are often good for setting the stage of your talk and explaining methods.

iii. Tables

1. If you need to include a table, only include the most relevant information and highlight the most important info for discussion.

iv. Figures

1. DO NOT: complicate figures with jargon or unnecessary text.
2. DO: be consistent with formatting and when using multiple graphs for a particular theme; ideally, things should be intuitive for your audience so you may want to walk them through the first of a series of slides a little more slowly and then proceed through the remainder more efficiently (EX: sites coded by shape, parameters coded by color, etc.)

III. Uh oh, do I really have to say something?

a. TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Attempt as best you can to memorize your talk!!!
Speak loudly and clearly → take your time rather than rushing through.

b. Practice, practice, and then practice again.... and if possible memorize.

1. If you need note cards, take them up there with you. However, you should know your talk as it helps the audience follow your flow, pace, and appreciate your authenticity.

c. Speak clearly and with volume; establish eye contact with your audience.

d. TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Responding to questions by saying 'I do not know' is fine but be courteous and take time to consider the viewer's comments or suggestions.