

“HOW NOT TO GIVE A SCIENTIFIC PRESENTATION”

Some Problems and Solutions

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PRE-TALK PLANNING

Poorly designed graphics:

Too much text (Solution: Replace words with photos and/or illustrations whenever possible)

Too many bullet points (Solution: Limit lists to 5 bullet points)

Using “Times New Roman” (Solution: Use a “sans serif” font such as Arial rather than a “serif” font like “Times New Roman” because “sans serif” fonts are easier to read on the screen)

Complex graphics (Solution: Exclude/reduce use of non-essential information such as grid lines, tick marks, extraneous place names, etc.)

Including “keys” on graphs (Solution: Put labels directly on lines in a graph, on bars in a chart, etc.)

Using ALL CAPS (Solution: Main headings can be in caps but use Capital/Lower Case combinations for subheadings; only capitalize the first letter of the first word on bullet points, phrases, etc.)

Vertical lettering (Solution: Use only horizontal lettering on “Y” axes, column headings, etc.)

Boring titles on data graphics (Solution: Use a title that “reveals” the graph’s main point such as “Spawning Success is Up”)

Boring or clashing color schemes (Solution: Add colored backgrounds to black-and-white slides and have a colleague look at your slides to make sure colors match)

Text “merges” with background (Solution: Place dark text over light parts of a slide and light text over dark parts)

Edge-to-edge lettering/images (Solution: Provide some blank space called an “aesthetic margin” at the top, bottom, and sides of graphics)

No “accents” (Solution: Add arrows, circles, colors, etc. to draw attention to key components of graphics)

Distracting backgrounds (Solution: Use an uncluttered solid or “gradient” background)

No “signposting” (Solution: Use organizational graphics to break your show into parts)

Wrong type of graph (Solution: Use horizontal bar graphs for data collected at a point in time and vertical bar graphs for data collected over time; use pie charts only when data adds up to 100%)

Low resolution Internet images (Solution: If you must use Internet images, don’t fill the screen with them)

Misspelled words (Solution: Correct the spelling of any words PowerPoint underlined with a wavy red line)

Data “dump” (Solution: Use PowerPoint’s animation feature to “reveal” bullet points, items on graphs, etc. bit by bit or break complex concepts into pieces and present each piece as a separate slide)

Contact info up front (Solution: Place your address, phone, etc. at the end of the show, not at the start)

No safety backups of show (Solutions: 1- Save your PowerPoint show on several media such as a USB drive and a CD; 2- Save your show as both a “.pptx” and “.ppt” file...and perhaps as a 97-2003 “.pps” file... in case the computer you use to present the show is loaded with an earlier version of PowerPoint; and 3- Use PowerPoint’s “Package for CD” feature to lock in fonts and colors)

DAY OF THE TALK

Arriving “just on time” (Solution: Arrive early, get set up, and take a moment to relax)

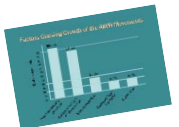
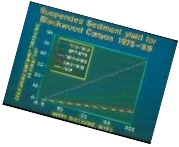
Dressing too casually (Solution: Dress at or slightly above the audience’s level and take your hat off!)

HOST’S INTRO

Title slide on screen throughout host’s introduction (Solution: Prior to the talk, tell your host to leave the projector off until you have finished your “lights on” introduction so the title slide isn’t a distraction)

Poor job of establishing speaker’s credibility (Solution: Prior to the talk, give your host a “bio” that explains why you are qualified to give this specific talk)

Being unfamiliar with the speaker’s bio (Solution: Prior to the talk, go over your bio with your host and suggest to your host that s/he rehearse his/her introduction of the speaker just like s/he would rehearse a normal speech)



SPEAKER'S INTRO

Jumping right into the slides (Solution: Give an intro with the room lights on so the audience “gets to know you”)

Poor quality intro (Solution: In your intro, *capture attention* by including motivators that explain your message’s relevancy to your audience, *establish rapport* by letting your audience know what you share in common, *enhance credibility* by discussing some additional qualifications beyond those already mentioned by your host, *orient your audience to your talk’s “theme”* or main message, “*signpost*” by describing the sections/parts of your talk, and *set ground rules* such as holding questions until the Q/A period)

Apologizing to the audience (Solution: Simply start talking about your topic rather than saying “Bear with me cuz I don’t give many talks”)

BODY OF TALK

Font and color shifts (Solution: Use the computer upon which the show was created to present the show rather than the meeting room’s computer or use PowerPoint’s “Package for CD” feature to lock in fonts and colors)

Being unfamiliar with the remote (Solution: Practice using the buttons on the remote before your talk begins)

Reading notes word for word (Solution: Prepare your notes as short phrases, not complete sentences, then rehearse, rehearse, rehearse)

Use of unfamiliar technical terms (Solution: Explain unfamiliar terms the first time they are used)

No explanation of X and Y axes (Solution: First explain your graph’s axes, table’s column and row headings, etc. then discuss the implications of the data)

Talking to the screen (Solution: Look at the screen to make sure the right image is up, then turn and face your audience)

Blocking the projected image (Solution: Stand to the side of the screen so you don’t block the view of people seated along the side of the room)

Laser pointer shake and “wander” (Solution: Turn the laser pointer on, circle the item on the screen, then turn the pointer off...don’t try to hold the laser pointer still on one point on the screen because it always shakes a bit)

Exceeding your time limit (Solutions: Have your host send you nonverbal time signals, place a count-down clock on the lectern, etc.)

CONCLUSION

No conclusion with the room lights on (Solution: Turn on the room lights, turn off your projector, then give your conclusion so you “reestablish” yourself with your audience)

No restatement of the talk’s “theme” (Solution: Restate the talk’s theme...its main message)

No “means of action” (Solution: Tell the audience where they can get more info about or how they can take action on the issue)

No summary by the host (Solution: In advance of the show, let your host know that at the end of your show, you’d like him/her to provide a quick restatement of the talk’s theme such as “Now we can see that when animals overpopulate an area...”)

Q/A PERIOD

Host doesn’t help control Q/A period (Solution: Ask your host to select who gets to ask questions, etc.)

Host doesn’t have a “seed” question (Solution: Provide your host with a question to “seed” the Q/A session in case there are initially no questions from the audience)

No repetition of questions (Solution: Repeat each question so everyone in the room hears it)

Question wasn’t really answered (Solution: Ask your questioner, “Did I answer your question?”)

POST-TALK

No evaluation conducted (Solution: Sit down after your talk and record what went well, what needed to be changed, what questions were hard to answer, etc.)