

Effective Use of Software in Scientific Presentations

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Many communication experts agree that there is a right and a wrong way to use presentation software like PowerPoint or Keynote. If used correctly, the software can greatly enhance your presentation. Here are some technical tips to assist you in developing an appropriate presentation.

1. Learn to use the software. Use the software's templates, accepting its defaults for point size, margins, and placement.
2. Keep the layout and style as consistent as possible.
3. Choose colors with care. The text and background colors should contrast, dark letters on a light background for small rooms, light letters on a dark background for large rooms. The background should be a solid color, no fading, photos, etc. Avoid red-green combinations because a significant fraction of the human population is red-green colorblind.
4. Use animated features in moderation. Overuse of these effects, such as slide transitions and custom animations, can be distracting. Focus should be on the content.
5. Strive for simplicity and visibility. Eliminate any words, lines, and diagrams that do not add essential information to the slide.
6. Display data using diagrams and figures instead of tables; they are easier for the audience to comprehend.
7. Keep tables simple. There should only be one table per slide. The font size for the data should not be smaller than 22 point. If you need to decrease the font size to have the table fit on the slide, eliminate some of the data or do not use the table.
8. Use fonts at least 36 point in size for titles, 28 point for main bullets, and 24 point for sub-bullets. If it can't be, read it's a waste.
9. Limit text blocks to no more than two lines each. Do not have large text blocks containing paragraphs; the audience will spend time reading the text and ignore what you are saying.
10. Use a heading on every slide.



11. Limit the number of items on each slide. Each slide should make just one or two points using 7-9 lines maximum.
12. Avoid using too many words in bold, italics, or capital letters.
13. Use the same font throughout to avoid distraction. Sans serif fonts (e.g., Arial) are easier to read and more attractive than fonts with serifs (e.g., Times New Roman).
14. Using “builds” in diagrams and text slides can be very useful. Text builds can be made even more effective if you darken previous text as new material is added.
15. Control the number of slides. Budget 2-3 minutes per slide (e.g. 30 minute talk = 10-15 slides).
16. Practice with feedback and then practice some more.

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