

Can't Sleep? Try PowerPoint®

You've either seen it as an instructor, or experienced it as a student—boring PowerPoint (PPT) presentations that cause people to tune out after the first few slides. I've seen a couple of that were prescription strength—they worked better than pills! So what happened to your well intentioned effort to impart your nuggets of wisdom to your audience? Read on and I'll tell you.

First, the thrust of your presentation should not be to answer every question by showing slide after slide of graphs, charts, and complex data. Rather you should strive to cause questions to be asked from your audience by heightening their interest in your topic. Your information should be stimulating them and involving them. What are text-laden slides crammed with as much information as you can put on them? They are worthless and forgettable. Your statistics and graphs may very well back up what your subject matter is, but if you think that those numbers are that important, then put them all on a handout that is available later. It doesn't belong on a slide.

Your PPT should be full of visual elements; photos, videos, and as little text as possible. Humans are visual, we have better recall for information that we see rather than hear. Vision trumps all the other senses, using half of the brain's resources. Pictures beat text every time, doubling our recognition. When we hear a piece of information rather than see it, after three days we'll have retained only about ten percent of it. Add a picture to that and the percentage jumps up to sixty-five percent.

Another tip: after ten minutes audience attention drops, therefore as an instructor we need to do something at ten minute intervals to regain their attention. What might we do? A few suggestions may be to tell a story, show a video, or involve your class in some relevant activity. If it's a class about guns, let them disassemble part of the weapon. Anything that involves them is going to prevent them from drifting off course.



If you're an instructor you've probably heard of "The Rule of Six." Basically it states that a slide should contain no more than six bullets, no more than six words per bullet, and no more than six word slides in a row. Let's simplify that and change it to only one point per slide and make it visually appealing with a photo (no clipart), and few matching colors. You'll find that when you use less text and more imagery, your audience will be

more attentive and your point will be understood and remembered. Information overload is counterproductive; handouts afterward are the way to make that available.

So what are the elements that make for a bad PPT presentation?

- Lack of preparation
- Not knowing your audience
- Inappropriate visual aids
- Too much material
- Using a monotone and being glued to the podium
- Lack of focus

What are the most annoying elements of a PPT presentation?

- Presenter who reads the slide 62%
- Text that is too small on slide 46%
- Background color or font color makes text difficult to read 42%
- Having complete sentences instead of bullet points 39%
- Flying text 24%
- Complex charts and graphs 22%

PPT is here to stay; it's not going away anytime soon. It's said that there are 300 million PPT users in the world, 30 million PPTs are delivered each day. As you read this, there are one million presentations going on right now and probably half of them are putting people to sleep. Bill Gates and company are looking to increase those numbers. And every year it seems that there are new ways to build dynamic presentations that will hold an audience's attention.

But no matter what type of technology that we ultimately use to deliver our information to the class, one thing remains constant—you the speaker. You must be enthusiastic and passionate about your subject matter. Your audience has to feel that passion and excitement. If they feel that you are only going through the motions, you may as well just print out your presentation and hand it out at the beginning. You must be honest with them...cops can spot somebody faking it in a heartbeat. Be yourself, that's the only way that you will ever connect with them. If you steal material, or even worse, tell war stories and don't attribute them properly, you are in deep trouble. Anything that you say after the fact will fall on deaf ears.

Be able to move around the room. That means you will need a remote so that you're not glued to your laptop. Make eye contact with everyone, but especially with those that you think you are losing either through their inattentiveness or inability to control the group. Ask for feedback, "What do you think?" "Would you agree?" "How is it done in your department?" Anything that will involve them will hold them.

Don't turn off the lights! That's an invitation for the sandman to do his work. Not only that but you are more difficult to be seen. Remember, **YOU** are the star of this show not the PPT. The success or failure

of your presentation depends solely on you. Smile, be enthusiastic, and thank them for coming. One sure way of determining if you've succeeded or not is at the end of your class. If you have students hanging back eager to ask questions of you, then you know you did your job. It's when everyone is in a hurry to leave that you should be asking yourself, "What just happened here?"

Stay safe brothers and sisters!

Links:

Brain Rules, What all presenters need to know <http://www.slideshare.net/garr/brain-rules-for-presenters/>