PowerPoint Presentations

Writing Centre Learning Guide

Microsoft PowerPoint™ is a common audio-visual aid for oral presentations, but it can detract from your presentation if not used properly. Remember that PowerPoint is an instrument to get your message across to your audience, and you need to focus on the message to ensure that PowerPoint does not distract the audience. Your audience did not come to see your PowerPoint, they came to listen to you.

When should I use *PowerPoint?*

During your time at university, you may be called upon to make a presentation. This may be as an individual or as part of a group. Visual aids can easily reinforce and enhance your approach. Research suggests that presentations of 15 minutes or over which incorporate visual elements are more interesting, persuasive and professional.

One of the most common ways to incorporate visuals is through the use of *Microsoft PowerPoint*. If you have the option and access to a data projector in the room you are presenting, you should consider using this useful tool..

To be successful when using *PowerPoint* for your presentation, consider these three important points:

1. **Keep It Simple** - With university *PowerPoint* presentations, it is best to keep them simple and avoid clutter. Two fonts are sufficient, and basic graphics should relate to the theme of your presentation (unless it is a recurrent logo). You should adopt the '666' Rule:
    o no more than 6 words per bullet
    o no more than 6 bullets per slide
    o no more than 6 wordy slides in a row.

2. **Match Design to Purpose** - You need to decide whether your university presentation is meant to inform or persuade. You should think about keeping the background template, colours, clipart, sound effects and other techniques in line with your main objective.

3. **Be Consistent** - It is important to use the same fonts and colours throughout the entire presentation and maintain a consistent approach. A *PowerPoint* template can assist you with this. Choose your template carefully so that it matches the theme, allows the information to be readable, and enhances your overall presentation.

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How do I make the text more readable in a *PowerPoint* presentation?

Here are some important things to consider to help make your *PowerPoint* more readable:

- Keep the wording clear and simple. Try to reduce your main ideas down to keywords that you can expand on in speech.

- Your title font should be at least 36-40 point size. The text body font should be a minimum of 24 point size.

- Avoid using too many fonts styles in one slide: it is common to have one style for titles and one style for text body, with some contrast between them.

- Capital letters can be hard to read – make sure you use upper and lower case lettering. All capital letters is often seen as 'SHOUTING'.

- Use bold or italic typeface for emphasis rather than underline which can cause clutter.

- Avoid using more than three colours: one for the background, one for titles, and one for the body of the text. Keep the colour design consistent between slides, and select a text colour that contrasts well with the background.

- Do not centre bulleted lists or informative text.

- Run a spell check on your *PowerPoint* presentation when you have finished.

What kind of background should I choose for my *PowerPoint*?

Here are some important things to consider when selecting *PowerPoint* background templates:

- Choose a background template that is simple and clear, because your presentation should focus on the message (your ideas) rather than the medium (*PowerPoint*).

- Choose colours with a good contrast between the background and the foreground, using dark and light shades so that text stands out. Dark on light is usually the most readable design. If, however, the venue of your presentation is not adequately lit, select a dark coloured background and use a light colour for your text.

- As always, run through a test of your presentation in your venue as the effect of colours may be reduced by some projectors. Your audience needs to be able to read your text clearly.

- Always account for colour-blindness in your audience, so use lots of contrast and avoid combinations of reds, greens, browns, oranges, and yellows.

- Maintain consistency in your background, using simple designs and light textures to enhance readability.

- Minimise the use of flying words, moving graphics and sound effects with multiple transitions.

- Avoid the colour red for fonts or backgrounds, as it can be emotionally overwhelming and difficult to view and read.

Example 1

- title is too broad and topic is vague
- excessive information for one slide
- template does not suit a university audience
- three different fonts and main body font is too small
- bottom curly font is difficult to read

Example 2

- title and information do not correlate, because information relates specifically to 'Australia'
- excessive information for one slide
- Japanese design on the right side does not suit the theme of 'Global Warming' or 'Australia'
- informal fancy coloured bullet points
- over five colours on one slide

Example 3

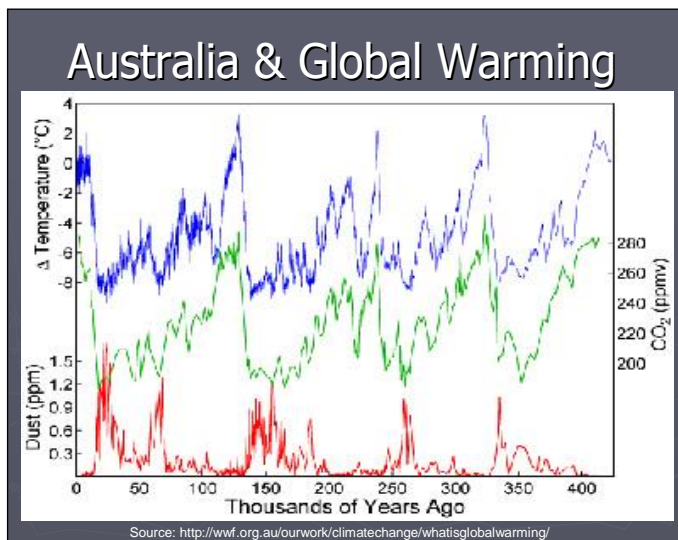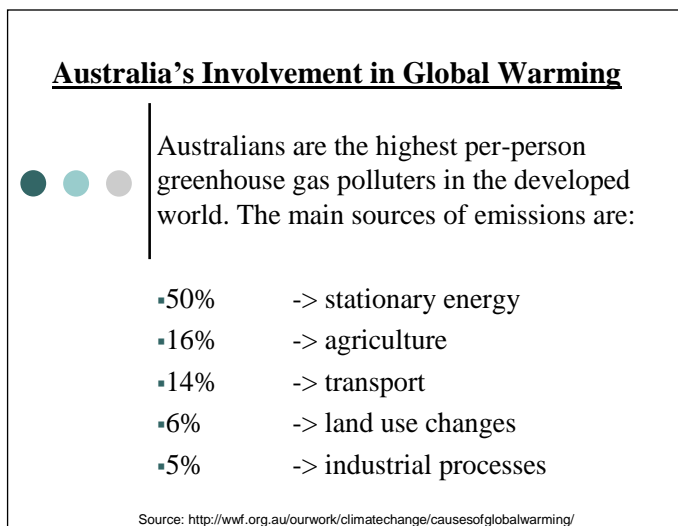- connection between Australia and global warming unclear
- four different fonts
- excessive information for one slide
- percentages font light blue on a dark blue background i.e. no contrast
- bullet points missing and arrows are distracting
- template theme suits the topic, but slide is too busy

Example 4

Australia & Global Warming

Source: http://wwf.org.au/ourwork/climatechange/whatisglobalwarming/

- connection between Australia and global warming unclear
- no information
- graphic stretched to fit the slide and overwhelmingly large/distorted
- colours on the graphic do not have labels that make them readable

Example 5

Australia's Involvement in Global Warming

Australians are the highest per-person greenhouse gas polluters in the developed world. The main sources of emissions are:

- 50%   -> stationary energy
- 16%   -> agriculture
- 14%   -> transport
- 6%   -> land use changes
- 5%   -> industrial processes

Source: http://wwf.org.au/ourwork/climatechange/causesofglobalwarming/

- title more indicative of the topic and information
- ample information on one slide and phrasing that the audience can understand
- simple bullet points
- one font (Times New Roman) in readable point sizes
- contrasting font and background colour (black and white)
- basic template with no other visual distractions

Other useful resources

The *Effective PowerPoint Design* resource provides an overview of the issues to consider when preparing *PowerPoint* slides. It can be found in the 'Presentation Skills' section on this Web page:
http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/stud_resources/

Websites

http://www.adelaide.edu.au/technology/training/online/office2010/
http://office.microsoft.com/en-au/powerpoint-help/create-your-first-presentation-RZ001129842.aspx
http://office.microsoft.com/en-au/powerpoint-help/beyond-bullet-points-ii-using-storyboards-to-plan-your-presentation-HA001188671.aspx
http://pptheaven.mvps.org/ (*PowerPoint* Tutorials & Animation)