

Slide Design Guidelines

Audience members can't read your slides and listen to you speak at the same time. This checklist will help you design a slidedeck that supports your audience's desire to learn from your presentation. Thus, it will encourage you to use few words and engaging graphics to reinforce the message you deliver.

Graphics

Pictures/graphic elements are present

Multimode learning increases long-term memory retention. Visual content is necessary. Choose pictures or graphics related to your topic. Graphics include data displays.



YOU SAID IT

“AN ENGAGING AND POTENT PRESENTATION IS ONE THAT INCLUDES A GOOD USE OF VISUALS (HIGH-QUALITY PICTURES, NO CLIP ART PLEASE) AND A MINIMAL USE OF TEXT.”
– AEA MEMBER

Images are high-quality

Purchase, take, or make high-quality images. Blurry or watermarked images decrease presentation quality. Consider drawing graphics. Stick figures are okay. Clip art is not okay. Review the quality of scanned or pasted images; often quality is low and print is too small to see on screen. If needed, recreate your graphs and diagrams in your slide software, making them as big as possible.

Graphics are free of clutter

Eliminate gradation, textures, or images as backgrounds.

Graphics are large

Expand images to touch slide border or edge.

Images direct toward text

Eyes in a photo, for example, should look inward at text. Even everyday objects have a directionality implied in their positioning that should be used to guide the reader's attention from the image toward the text.

Some elements are repeated

Repetition of some graphic elements adds unity to the piece and makes work more memorable. Careful not to overdo it – too many elements can add clutter or complication.

Font

Text, if any, is reserved only for key words

Details and explanation are delivered verbally and/or on a handout. Ideas like 4 bullet points per slide and six words per bullet point are outdated. Generally, you shouldn't have so much text that it warrants a bullet.

Font is at least size 24 point

View your slides in slidesorter mode. If you can't read the words, neither will your back row audience members.

Fonts are easily read on screen

Use sans serif fonts (like Calibri, Century Gothic, or Trebuchet). Look for a font with thick, even lines. Thin lines, like in many serif fonts (Times New Roman, Georgia, or Baskerville), disappear when projected – but they are good for reading on handouts.

If you truly need somewhat extensive text on a slide...

No more than 2 fonts are used

One for the header and one for the content text. In some cases, one font can fit both purposes.

Bullets, if any, are smaller than text size

Reduce the size of your bullets so that they are smaller than the default (70-80%), which tends to be too distracting. Consider deleting bullets altogether and just using space between items.

Alignment is consistent

Content text aligns with header. Text aligns with graphics. Avoid using centered text justification.

Empty area is allocated on each slide

Color

Text contrasts with background

Ideally, use dark text on a light background. Light text on a dark background is suitable if text is short. Other combinations impair legibility and comprehension.

One or two emphasis colors are used

Subdued colors that still contrast with background should be used. When used, it should be to actually emphasize important information, like key data in a graph. Projectors tend to make yellows too light to be legible and darker colors, like some greens or blues, appear black.

Attention

Complex graphics and diagrams are segmented into smaller chunks

Use the “Appear” animation tool to more [slowly reveal](#) parts of your slide if lots of text or a complicated diagram is shown. Revealing content in stages guides audience attention.



PRO TIP

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE NUMBER OF SLIDES YOU HAVE. SLIDES ARE FREE. DON'T USE OLD THINKING THAT PRESENTATIONS SHOULD BE 2 MINUTES PER SLIDE. THAT IS OFTEN TOO SLOW TO KEEP INTEREST. HERE IS ONE [DEMONSTRATION OF SLIDE DEVELOPMENT](#) THAT FOLLOWS THIS GUIDELINE.

Slides do not contain any other animation

Avoid any swooping, swiping, or cartwheeling text and graphics. If using Prezi, limit the degree of zoom in and out to minimize distraction from your content.

Logo & organizational information is reserved for opening and closing slides

If at all possible, remove your logo and other footer information from slides with content. They tend to add clutter to the slide when the audience's focus should be just on your content. Good content plus clean delivery will do a better job of making your organization's work memorable, not the logo.

Other emphasis tools guide attention

[Use arrows or circles](#) or other graphic elements to draw attention to the parts of the display you are referring to, as you refer to them in your talk.

Each slide presents just one idea

Consider that any remaining bullets might need to be separated into their own slides.

More

- Jennifer Sulewski's [Coffee Break Webinar on Universal Design](#)
- Johanna Morariu & Veena Pankaj's [Coffee Break Webinar on Data Visualization](#)
- John Nash's [Coffee Break Webinar on Beyond Bullet Points](#)

Based on Stephanie Evergreen's [Evaluation Report Layout Checklist](#).