

4.1 Presentation Tools: PowerPoint

Introduction and Do's and Don'ts

Structure of the PowerPoint Module of GovTalk

4. Presentation Tools: PowerPoint

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Quick Reference: Basic Deck

4.3 Quick Reference: Do's * Don'ts

4.4 Quick Reference: Briefing Deck

4.5 Quick Reference: Public Presentation Deck

4.6 Cabinet Submission: Good and Bad

The use of PowerPoint presentations in government is pervasive. What follows is a series of guides about how to use PowerPoint effectively in the government context. As will be seen, many misuses of PowerPoint can create problems for the presenter. However, when used properly, they are very useful in conveying information, summarizing key messages, and guiding the discussion towards decision. They also serve as a form of summary briefing on issues, something that a busy decision-maker can use to get the gist of an argument. In government, they are also a form of record subject to all the rules of records retention, access, and preservation. As such, they need to be written with this in mind. In the government context, within government decision making, PowerPoints must be used professionally, avoiding excesses of graphics, cuteness or humour. Graphics, however, play a key role in effectively summarizing and highlighting data and complex information.

In the case where PowerPoints are used for public presentations, the same rule of professionalism applies. An important point here is that individuals doing public presentations are seldom doing them as individuals but as representatives of their organization. Therefore, the PowerPoint should reflect the organization, use its symbols, including if it exists, its own PowerPoint formats and be presented professionally.

Using PowerPoints has some great advantages:

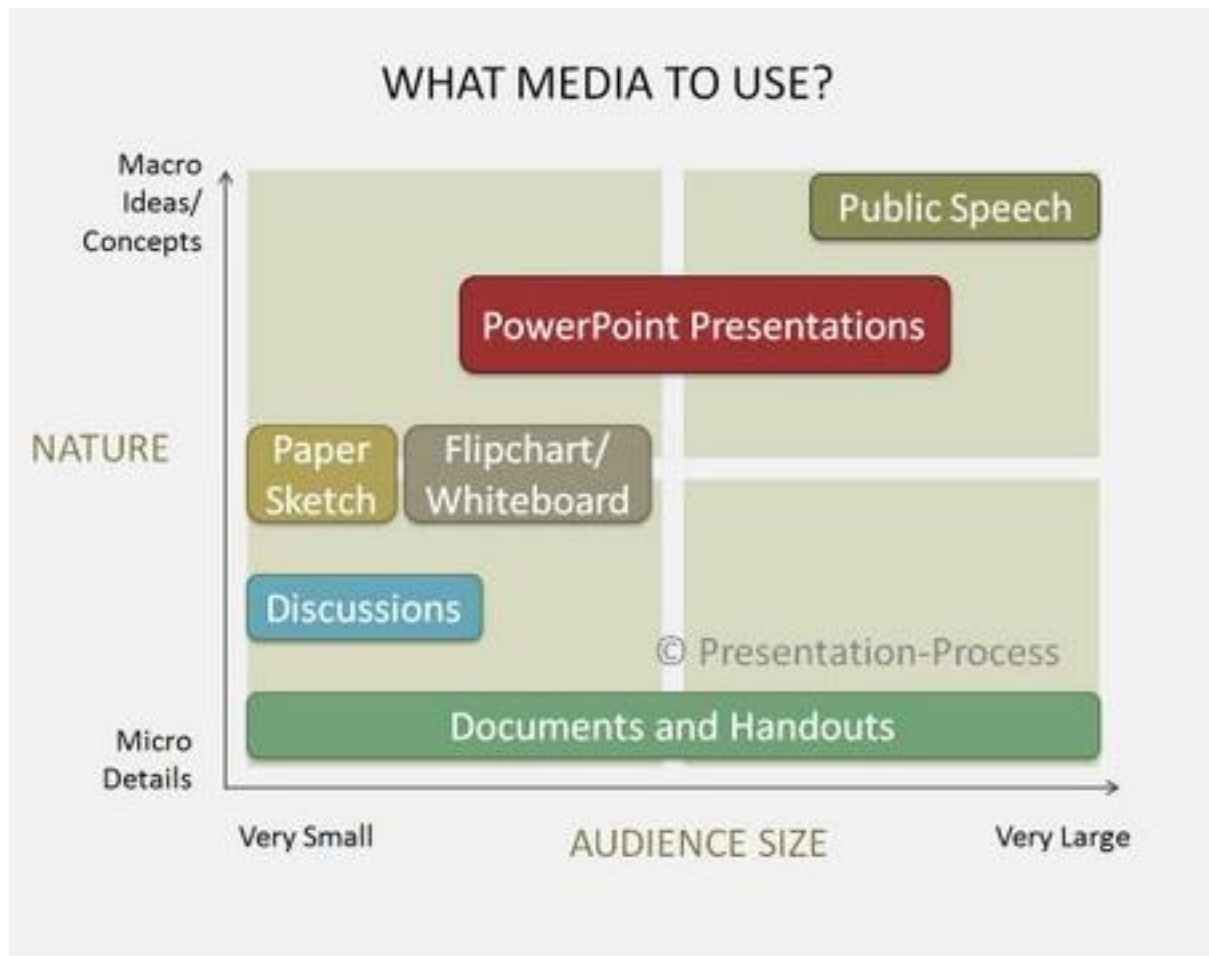
- Information is summarized.
- Graphics can support understanding, providing they are relevant, useful, and not distracting.
- The right information is presented.

They are not, however, despite this happening too often in government, the base document itself, especially when there is a decision track. Some of the fault lines in the use of PowerPoint are:

- The presentation tries to be the base document, with too much text, hard to read and poorly organized.
- Key risks and points of decision are not emphasized creating potentially serious gaps in the decision chain.

Above all, the PowerPoint is an aid to a presentation. How it is designed and how it is used will affect its usefulness. In the public sector context, it is also another accessible record in the public domain.

PowerPoint does not fit all occasions, although many government departments require them as a matter of course for internal decision-making. In thinking about what is best in terms of the use of PowerPoint, this chart is a useful guide:



Source: Presentation Process at <https://www.presentation-process.com/use-powerpoint.html>

Times to use a PowerPoint productively are:

- When you have not choice as it is required for a meeting, conference, etc.
- To organize your presentation and structure your messages.
- To create a professional and consistent format.
- To provide an illustrative backdrop for the content of your presentation.
- To summarize complex information with high-level bullet headlines and useful graphics.
- When the audience size or occasion makes sense. In other words, the larger the audience, the better use you can make of a PowerPoint. However, for formal presentations to senior officials, even though there are not a lot in the room, the PowerPoint, either in overhead or printed form, serves as a discussion guide.
- To present higher level ideas, processes, or recommendations. Excessively detailed PowerPoints are hard to read and do not add value when the process you are

involved in requires a step-by-step review of detailed information. In this instance, the PowerPoint might provide a discussion guide or outline the steps to be taken.

Aside from the uses above that suggest when not to use PowerPoint, here are some other ones:

- When it's personal: As a leader, you may want to bring staff on board to a change process, a new project or to face bad news. PowerPoints here divide the audience's attention and your job is to focus them on your leadership direction.
- When it's open ended: PowerPoints, for the most part, are complete stories. When the objective is to consult, actively engage or find new solutions, PowerPoints are not that useful as they structure the flow of information and ideas.
- When you are the fifth PowerPoint in a row: Aside from occasions which require it, a steady flow of PowerPoints induce PowerPoint fatigue, lagging interest and just plain boredom. Similarly, and linked, when the time is limited, the technical aspects of just setting up a PowerPoint, may lose the audience. That's when talking and interacting really work better.

Design and Presentation Do's and Don'ts

Context is everything and what follows is a distillation of ideas that will help generate PowerPoints suitable to the government context. As the context changes so much in government, there are times that a lot of detail is just what is needed, if the PowerPoint is more for the record than for the presentation. Here it is wise, if there is a presentational component, to have a summary presentation with key messages.

There are a lot of ideas here for both design and presentation, but they boil down to two main messages:

- Design to the government context in a professional manner to support the purpose of the presentation, and
- When presenting, the PowerPoint is a visual aid not the presentation itself: that is your job.

Design Do's and Don'ts

- Avoid excessive transitions, crowded pages, images that are obviously stock and of questionable relevance.
- Avoid complicated videos and sound effects that can go wrong.
- Use images that the department or agency uses – usually available from the communications unit.
- Plan carefully: Define your desired outcome

- Do your research.
- Know your audience.
- Time your presentation.
- Check the spelling and grammar.
- Select a single sans-serif fonts such as Arial or Helvetica. Avoid serif fonts such as Times New Roman or Palatino because these fonts are sometimes more difficult to read.
 - Use no font size smaller than 24 point.
 - Use the same font for all your headlines.
 - Select a font for body copy and another for headlines.
 - Use bold and different sizes of those fonts for captions and subheadings.
 - Add a fourth font for page numbers or as a secondary body font for sidebars.
 - Don't use more than four fonts in any one publication.
 - Clearly label each screen. Use a larger font (35-45 points) or different color for the title.
 - Use larger fonts to indicate importance.
 - Use different colors, sizes and styles (e.g., bold) for impact.
 - Avoid italicized fonts as these are difficult to read quickly.
 - Avoid long sentences.
 - Avoid abbreviations and acronyms.
 - Limit punctuation marks.
 - No more than 6-8 words per line
 - For bullet points, use the 6 x 6 Rule. One thought per line with no more than 6 words per line and no more than 6 lines per slide
 - Use dark text on light background or light text on dark background. However, dark backgrounds sometimes make it difficult for some people to read the text.
 - Do not use all caps except for titles.
 - Put repeating elements (like page numbers) in the same location on each page of a multi-page document.
 - To test the font, stand six feet from the monitor and see if you can read the slide.

Design and Graphical Images

- Use design templates.
- Standardize position, colors, and styles.
- Include only necessary information.
- Limit the information to essentials.
- Content should be self-evident
- Too many slides can lose your audience, but you may want them for the record – do not use all slides, just the highlights.

- Keep the background consistent and subtle.
- Limit the number of transitions used. It is often better to use only one so the audience knows what to expect.
- Use a single style of dingbat for bullets throughout the page.
- Use the same graphical rule at the top of all pages in a multi-page document.
- Use one or two large images rather than several small images.
- Prioritize images instead of a barrage of images for competing attention.
- Make images all the same size.
- Use the same border.
- Use only enough text when using charts or graphical images to explain the chart or graph and clearly label the image.
- Keep the design clean and uncluttered. Leave empty space around the text and graphical images.
- Use quality clipart and use it sparingly. A graphical image should relate to and enhance the topic of the slide. No stick people!
- Try to use the same style graphical image throughout the presentation (e.g., cartoon, photographs)
- Repetition of an image reinforces the message. Tie the number of copies of an image to the numbers in your text.
- Make a single image stand out with dramatic contrast. Use color to make a dramatic change to a single copy of your clip art.
- Check all images on a projection screen before the actual presentation.
- Avoid flashy images and noisy animation effects unless it relates directly to the slide.

Color

- Limit the number of colors on a single screen.
- Bright colors make small objects and thin lines stand out. However, some vibrant colors are difficult to read when projected.
- Use no more than four colors on one chart.
- Check all colors on a projection screen before the actual presentation. Colors may project differently than what appears on the monitor.

Presentation Do's & Don'ts

Overview

- Presentation is about you talking to people, not presenting a PowerPoint slide: it is just a tool. Key to make contact in a professional way by:
 - Introducing yourself to people in the room, ideally by shaking hands
 - Making eye contact and looking at the people you are talking to
 - Remind people why you are there.

- Never read the slide, look at it or turn away from audience
- Link to comments of your introducer, especially if it is your boss. “As Dora just said, we are seeking direction today based on some recommendations that I will be presenting in summary form and found in our submission in detail.”
- Do’s & Don’ts
 - Check grammar! A presentation is the worst time to see misspellings.
 - Don’t make too many slides...avoid the “slide rush” (trying to rush through the last 20 slides because you ran out of time).
 - Avoid getting hung up on the first few slides, spending too much time on them and rushing to the end – looks unprofessional.
 - Cite your sources on each slide or at the end of your presentation.
 - Remember: KEEP IT SIMPLE! It’s just a tool!
 - Avoid the use of capitalization as an emphasis and the use of exclamation marks
 - No emojis
 - No “You guys” or “You people.”
 - Something WILL go wrong- test your presentation before you show it.
 - Always have a backup of your presentation on hand.
 - Be prepared to do the presentation without the PowerPoint...professionals always print handouts for the audience. Use the three-slide notes print option.
- Talk to your audience, not the slides - face them!
- Don’t just read what’s on the board...the audience can read that. Use a visual presentation as a starting point. Leave material off the slide so you have something to say
- Avoid apologizing for a presentation
- Leave time for Q & A. Be prepared to be interrupted.
- Speak comfortably and clearly. Avoid cliché or overfamiliar sayings like “You guys...” or “Like,..’ and nothing here is awesome.
- Do not read the presentation. Practice the presentation so you can speak from bullet points. The text should be a cue for the presenter rather than a message for the viewer.
- BLUF: Bottom Line Up Front: Give a brief overview at the start. Then present the information. Finally review important points.
- It is often more effective to have bulleted points appear one at a time, so the audience listens to the presenter rather than reading the screen. But avoid too much transition.
- Use a wireless mouse or pick up the wired mouse so you can move around as you speak.

- If sound effects are used, wait until the sound has finished to speak.
- If the content is complex, print the slides so the audience can take notes.
- Do not turn your back on the audience. Try to position the monitor so you can speak from it.