2.4 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 idea 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 you 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:
  o Introducing yourself to people in the room, ideally by shaking hands
  o Making eye contact and looking at the people you are talking to
  o Remind people why you are there.
  o Never read the slide, look at it or turn away from audience
  o 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
  o Check grammar! A presentation is the worst time to see misspellings.
  o 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 really 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.