# How Can I Create a More Successful PowerPoint Presentation?

## Overview

In a lot of ways, creating a PowerPoint presentation is similar to writing a paper. The main difference is that with PowerPoint you have the opportunity to visually convey ideas to your audience. The following is a checklist of ways to make your PowerPoint presentation more successful. This handout begins by addressing textual concerns and then deals with design elements. A PowerPoint is more than just flashy images. The content of your presentation should never be overshadowed by your design; the two should work in harmony. Also, be sure to recognize that *you* are the focus of your presentation, not your PowerPoint slides. The slides are merely an aid which can allow you to present your information more smoothly and efficiently.

## General Considerations

This handout was made to accompany two videos that are available as supplementary links on the Resources page of the Sweetland Center for Writing website. It is most helpful to view parts one and two of this "How do I Make a More Successful PowerPoint?" video before reading the checklist.

## In Practice

Pay attention to these **rhetorical elements** when choosing what information to include in your presentation. The information on the slides should visually and textually support a clear main idea or argument.

**Content and Clarity**
- I am clear about what my presentation will argue both verbally and visually.
- I guide my readers directly through the presentation by using outlines, defining key terms, and providing concrete evidence that all support my main idea.
- My presentation comes to a clear conclusion or a discernable ending. I don't have loose ends in my presentation that I need to tie up.
- I respect that there is a limit to the amount of information people can digest.

**Organization**
- My slides are organized in a logical way that can be easily followed by an audience.
- I don't bounce back and forth between ideas.
- There is a clear trajectory to the presentation including an identifiable beginning, middle, and end.

**Tone**
- My tone is appropriate and accessible. I don't speak over the heads of my audience or talk down to them.
- I use appropriate pictures, clip art, and fonts. Pictures, clip art, and fonts all carry a certain tone. Example: **The Death Penalty and Capital Punishment** vs. **The Death Penalty and Capital Punishment**. Here, the font in the first example gives a mood of playfulness to a serious issue while the second example matches the tone of the presentation.
- I avoid unnecessary gimmicks such as hackneyed transitions, flying or spinning clip art, or distracting animation of any kind.

In addition to the rhetoric of your content, the choices you make about your presentation's design can have a huge effect on how your ideas are received by an audience. This part of the checklist addresses specific concerns of PowerPoint presentations with respect to **visual appeal**. Templates can help you address visual appeal, but you should always critically examine their effectiveness in terms of design. As illustrated in the video supplements, some templates don't adhere to the following design principles.

**Alignment**
- Each item on the slide has some sort of visual alignment with another item on the slide.
- My alignment does not confuse the order in which my elements should be read.

**Contrast**
- If I use elements such as color or images to indicate difference, I make sure they are clearly distinguishable.
- I avoid highlighting so many things that the highlighting becomes ineffectual.
- I use contrast to create a focal point by creating one prominent element with supporting elements.

**Repetition**
- I use repetition to create similarities throughout my PowerPoint, including fonts, bullet points, and colors.
- I use similar types of photos or background images.
- I use similar slide layouts to make my PowerPoint simple and clear.

**Proximity**
- If some combination of text and images has a relationship, it is clearly grouped together.
- Blank space improves readability and doesn't overload the senses. I use blank space appropriately.

**Colors**
- I use colors that are compatible with my subject matter. Example: **The Death Penalty and Capital Punishment** vs. **The Death Penalty and Capital Punishment**
- The most important elements on my slide are displayed in the most prominent colors.
- I use color to group similar elements such as titles, body information, or graphs.
- I use color to emphasize important points.

**Text**
- My text appears in a readable font and color. If I've used special fonts or colors, I've made sure they are appropriate and don't detract from my overall message.
- I use color or weight (bold, italic, or underlined format) only to emphasize a point.

**Backgrounds**
- My background doesn't overpower my text.
- If I use an image for a background it has a clear connection to the rest of my presentation. For an example, see the question mark referenced in part two of the video: "How Do I Create a More Successful PowerPoint?"

**Clip Art and Images**
- I use images to convey essential information in place of lengthy bulleted lists.
- I have replaced clip art with photographic images from free sites such as Morguefile.com, Flickr.com/creativecommons, Imageafter.com, and Everystockphoto.com.
- I properly credit any images I use.

**Graphs**
- My graphs can be easily read.
- My graph's formatting doesn't overshadow or obscure my data's connection to the argument.

**Transitions and Animation**
- My animation directs my audience's attention to specific elements. (For example, the effect of highlighting one listed point at a time while fading the rest out.)
- I do not require viewers to read moving words.

**Sounds**
- If I use sounds, they are contextually appropriate.
- I have made sure the place I will be presenting is equipped with hardware that will allow the entire audience to hear necessary sounds.

**Resources:**

Kosslyn, Stephen Michael. *Clear and to the Point: 8 Psychological Principles for Compelling PowerPoint Presentations*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

Reynolds, Garr. *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders Pub., 2008. Print.
Williams, Robin, and John Tollett. *The Non-designer's Web Book: an Easy Guide to Creating, Designing, and Posting Your Own Web Site*. Berkeley, Calif.: Peachpit, 1998. Print.

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