

PowerPoint Guidelines

PowerPoint slides are not a necessary component of a successful presentation. In fact, if a speaker uses PowerPoint at all, ideally she or he would use just one or two slides--perhaps a graph or chart--when a point is better shown than told. But, if a speaker feels compelled to use a full array of PowerPoint slides, then professional speech writers and presentation consultants agree that he or she should:

- use as few slides as possible
- be concise and use as few words as possible (say them; but don't put them all on the slide)
- use keywords rather than complete sentences
- use bulleted points
- use parallel construction for bulleted points (in other words, a list that is all verbs or all nouns or all noun phrases, etc. The bullets I've written here, for example, all start with verbs, are verb-object constructions, are fragments)
- start all bullets at the left margin
- use no end punctuation unless the bullet is a (short) sentence or question
- avoid using all caps and do not capitalize the first word in a bullet unless it begins a sentence or is a proper noun
- use 14 pt. or larger type
- use a semi-dark background, but not black and not the ubiquitous blue
- be consistent from slide to slide in layout, color, font, type size, and style
- avoid clipart, fade-ins, fade-outs, tumbling slides, sound effects, etc.
- omit clutter
- leave lots of white space

Finally, Powerpoint can trivialize a speech when the slides are the presentation rather than support for the presentation, and PowerPoint can trivialize the speaker who simply reads text from the slides to the audience.