Designing presentations – some common elements

The visual design of your presentations matters because it can help you to make communication clearer for the audience. The resource, Visual Design Principles, by Ian Bell, outlines five major visual design principles: simplification, contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity. This resource will highlight additional advice regarding some of the most common elements of presentations.

Typography

Using the same font set throughout your entire slide presentation is a good idea, and using no more than two complementary fonts (e.g., Arial and Arial Bold) also helps to have a clean design. *Sans serif* fonts, such as Arial, Calibri and Verdana for example, are generally best for readability reasons. Regardless of what font you choose, make sure the text can be read from the back of the room or, if presenting online, from phones or pads. As a general rule, use a font size 18p or greater.

Images

People usually remember images better than bullet points, so it is good to ask yourself how you could use images, including quantitative displays, to enhance your narrative. But remember: All images should have a purpose. They are most commonly used to explain assertions, show relationships, and combine content, to mention a few.

If using photos, make sure they have good resolution. You can use your own high-quality photos or use the plethora of high-quality images available online, but be aware of copyright issues. If you need to use a low-resolution photo, remember to not stretch it to make it fit your layout, as doing so will degrade the resolution even further.

It is also important to note that files have the potential to become extremely large when they contain lots of images. This has implications for how long it takes to upload to a web conferencing system (if presenting online) or even the ability to share the file with colleagues and learners. To keep files at a manageable size make sure that you **compress all images** and also **delete cropped areas of pictures**. Setting images to screen quality 220ppi will be ok for slides. Most applications (like PowerPoint, for example) will have ways to edit images settings, so that you can keep the size of your slides' file relatively small.

Animations

Animations and builds (building up content) can aid cognitive processing, but they can also cause unwanted distractions. As general advice, avoid using text flying onto

a screen or animated bullets appearing in every slide. Some animation is a good thing for emphasis, but stick to the most subtle.

Similarly to the use of images, using animations with purpose offers the best results. For example, building up information, like creating a chart or graph stage by stage, can help cognitive processing of complex images. Animations are also a good aid to show relationships and sequences.

Video and Audio

Video and audio clips can be directly embedded in your slides when their size is not overly large, or they can reside on external sites and be linked to if necessary. Using video or audio clips (like interviews, for example) can help to illustrate your point and serve as a change of pace during the presentation, thereby increasing the interest of your audience. On the other hand, the use of superfluous sound effects attached to animations is something you may want to avoid.

Colour

You do not need to be an expert in colour theory, but it's good to know at least a bit on the subject. Colours can be divided into two general categories: Cool (such as blue and green) and Warm (such as orange and red). Most designers agree with the principle that cool colours work best for backgrounds, while warm colours generally suit foreground objects best. Most importantly, to make your message clearly visible, you need a high level of contrast between your text and the background.

Additionally, dark text on a light background will maintain its visual intensity no matter if the room you are presenting is dark or light, so keep this in mind when choosing the colour scheme for your presentation. Using dark coloured text on a light, but not white, background works very well. It is also best to avoid green and red/pink as these are difficult for colour-blind users. For more information, see the article Combining colors in Powerpoint—Mistakes to avoid [1]

Empty space is important

A full screen or page can be overwhelming, so don't be tempted to fill all the space. Empty space can give your page greater organization and clarity. It helps to guide the eyes of your audience when they read the information.

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[1] Article available at https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Combining-colors-in-PowerPoint---Mistakes-to-avoid-555e1689-85a7-4b2e-aa89-db5270528852

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