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PowerPoint presentation tips from the experts

John Stokdyk discovers a treasure trove of expert advice on making successful presentations with PowerPoint from the TrainingZone.co.uk community.

Top 10 presentation tips

1. Know your subject/material
2. Know your audience
3. Practice, then practice again
4. Imagine yourself giving the speech
5. Know the room layout
6. Relax (breath)
7. Don't forget the audience want you to succeed
8. Do not apologise.
9. Concentrate on the message, not the medium
10. Get as much experience as possible.

Source: [Laura Gaillard](#) [1], Ontrackinternational.com As well as drawing on conventional suggestions (see right), the excerpts and comments put forward in [Are they listening at the back?](#) [2] provide a wide spectrum of advice that would benefit anyone who has to present their ideas to a room full of people.

Here is a short summary of the article's key points. For more detailed instructions and to see the full debate, visit the full article on [TrainingZone.co.uk](#) [3]

1. Make the presenter the focus of the presentation rather than the slides

Blogger Seth Godin set out a manifesto for presenters in a 2007 post entitled [Really bad PowerPoint](#) [4]. "PowerPoint could be the most powerful tool on your computer," he argues. But it's not, because too many people use PowerPoint the way Microsoft wants them to rather than the right way. His advice is to make slides that reinforce your words, not repeat them. They should "demonstrate, with emotional proof, that what you're saying is true not just accurate", he writes.

Trainer Abi Manifold made a similar point, that any presentation system you use should be a support tool only. "Memorable delivery comes from your ability to captivate and engage. So even if your slides could win international design awards - it's up to you to add the real spark!"

2. Preparation - avoid death by PowerPoint

"The problem a lot of people have stems right from the start of their preparation - they are not clear with themselves at the outset what the point is they want to put across," says [Jack Downton](#) [5] in a recent AccountingWEB.co.uk article. Before firing up PowerPoint, try mapping out the talk's structure on paper first, suggested Manifold.

3. Make sure your slides are visible and legible

Keep the font size generous and favour text towards the top of your slides - bulleted text items should be no smaller than 22 points and the title should be no smaller than 28 points, advises Donald Clark [6].

4. Be succinct - keep it simple, stupid (KISS)

"Don't put any more information on the slide than you would print on the front of a T-shirt. Presumably most of the audience can read so don't read it at them..." - Jonathan Senior, Sharp End Training

5. Use PowerPoint masters and templates - with care

PowerPoint includes a set of layout guides to help you create slides quickly and keep the format consistent throughout the presentation. If you want an object to repeat on every slide such as a logo or other graphic, place it on the master. If you develop your own design, apply the same colour scheme to your whole presentation by choosing Format, then Apply Design Template. Also keep in mind how you use slide transitions; choose Dissolve over flashier effects.

6. Give them a written "leave behind"

"When you start your presentation, tell the audience that you're going to give them all the details of your presentation after it's over, and they don't have to write down everything you say... The document is the proof that helps the intellectuals in your audience accept the idea that you've sold them on emotionally. Don't hand out the written stuff at the beginning! If you do, people will read the memo while you're talking and ignore you. Instead, your goal is to get them to sit back, trust you and take in the emotional and intellectual points of your presentation." - Seth Godin

7. Using graphics effectively

"Graphics should be relevant to the slide, otherwise you risk changing the audience's focus away from your point. Be wary of standard clipart. Some images have been around for a long time, and your audience may have grown weary of seeing them. If you introduce a slide containing detailed or unusual graphics, allow the audience sufficient time to take in the visuals prior to commencing your narrative." - Nici Aldridge

8. Make your graphics move!

AccountingWEB.co.uk contributor Simon Hurst is a fan of animation. Used in the right setting, it can do a lot to grab the audience's attention. PowerPoint 2007 includes some great new diagrams in the Insert, SmartArt section. The SmartArt animation tab can let you animate each element of the diagram separately so they can fly into place and build up the diagram an a element at a time. But be careful, Hurst warned. If there are lots of elements and you choose too slow an animation, "your coup de PowerPoint could meet with synchronised snoring."

Also remember to use flashy graphics and transitions with care. If you emphasise everything, you emphasise nothing. It's a presentation, not a three-ring circus.

9. Know your way around the presentation tools you use

Knowing PowerPoint's keyboard shortcuts are an essential piece of knowledge for any presenter. "For example if you suddenly notice the appearance of the slide of recently-departed senior management pension figures which should have been hidden, 'B' to go

immediately to a blank screen can be vital," advised Simon Hurst. You can also set PowerPoint not to use the right click for the pop-up menu, so you can navigate backwards and forwards with a remote mouse.

If you're demonstrating some other application, the Windows Alt+Tab keyboard shortcut will swap between PowerPoint and other live programs on your computer. If you do leave your presentation entirely, the F5 keyboard shortcut restarts the show from the beginning. But Shift+F5 will start from the current slide, he advised.

10. Pacing and dramatics

Jack Downton [7] goes against the common suggestion to slow down your delivery: "The right pace to speak is at your usual pace with your head held up as normal (not buried into your chest reading your notes, as this kills your voice projection). What is really important is where you pause. There is only one person in the room who doesn't like silence during a presentation and that is the presenter. Pause to add emphasis, hold eye contact with the audience to show you mean what you say and allow people to think about what you have said. You almost cannot pause for too long!" Recording a rehearsal of your presentation and listening back should convince you of this point, he added.

As noted, these are the main points to bear in mind, but there is much more useful advice on the subject on TrainingZone. In one recent **Any Answers thread** [8], Nichola Smith of Oddball Training suggested getting the audience to stand and pat their arms and head three times. Why? "This draws awareness away from mind as well improving blood circulation," she advised. The audience back-brush was another way to establish a connection quickly, she added.

In the same thread, Alun Barrett urged trainers to make more use of props to capture the imaginations of kinaesthetic learners. He once carried a bag of footballs on stage with him for a 10 minute presentation. "Though I never referred to the bag or the contents in the presentation everyone in the room hung on every word I said because they all wanted to know what was in the bag," he wrote.

Rather than adopting the traditional visualisation technique, where you imagine yourself giving the talk successfully, Michael Heath thinks about all the things that can go wrong. Then he tells himself, "You have the chance to put it right!" It may be perverse, he admitted, but it gets results for him.

There are common points on which expert presenters all agree, but as the TrainingZone contributors demonstrate, there is still a lot of room for manoeuvre. Graham O'Connell advised: "As with all visual aids, there is no one right answer. It is about making the best choices for the purpose and circumstance - and then how well you use that tool... To which Ray Loftus added: "Horses for courses, as ever. Just don't shoot the horse when the jockey is the weak point! PowerPoint is still a great medium for training and learning when used correctly and well."