

# HOW TO BE BETTER AT POWERPOINT

## “18 RULES TO CONSIDER”

- 1. 10-20-30 Rule:** Best practice, a presentation should have ten slides, last no more than twenty minutes, and contain no font smaller than thirty points.
- 2. Presenters still cram several ideas into one pitch deck:** Some presenters still cram multiple ideas into one pitch deck. They don't even bother to filter out the unnecessary stuff and keep only the crucial points. Avoid overwhelming your audience with a barrage of ideas. If a slide isn't necessary, do away with it.
- 3. People's attention span is getting shorter:** We're in the age of social media, where the best content is short and fast, and people appreciate things that don't take much of their time. Always be considerate of your audience's time and level of interest. Even if you're given an hour to present, make it no longer than twenty minutes. Use the extra time for setting up your equipment or holding a Q&A session.
- 4. Readability is a crucial factor:** The number one rule of presentations is simple: The audience is the boss. People at the back should clearly see the presentation the same as those in the front. Optimize the font size of your text to accommodate all of your viewers. The thirty-point-font rule should encourage you to limit the number of words you put in each slide. Don't overload your slides with information.
- 5. Reveal one bullet at a time:** The trick when presenting text, like a short list of bullets, is to make your point without losing the audience. If you show all the bullets and text at one time, the audience has a tendency of trying to read it all rather than listen to you.
- 6. Fade to black when speaking:** Your slides are not the point—you are. When you fade to black you regain your audience's attention. For example, after presenting one solution (that's also shown on the screen), fade to black while you expound on how to apply the solution.
- 7. When in doubt, dump it:** Slides can be essential – they can also be a distraction. If you're struggling, trying to decide if you need a slide, or not, ask yourself: *“Will it make my speech better?”* If not, I dump it! Remember, nobody will miss what isn't there.
- 8. The 1-6-6 Rule:** Quite simply, each PowerPoint slide should have **one** main idea, a maximum of **six** bullet points, and a maximum of **six** words per bullet point.
- 9. Sketch out the story:** Simple, but crucial. Before you open up PowerPoint, know exactly what you want to say, then break up that story into slides. Each slide should be a minute or two talking point.

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**10. Illustrate, don't repeat:** Basic but critical tip. Your audience isn't going to remember every word you say or unlikely to write down the contents of your slides. You want them to get the gist of your argument, and remember the main points. So don't repeat or read verbatim the words on your slides. Use each slide to illustrate the point you are making. The key thing with the visuals is to capture and keep the audience's attention. Use few words as possible on each slide and sum up your points. Remember that a graph, pie chart or image tells a thousand words.

**11. Keep it simple:** Similar to the previous point but relates to the number of slides as well as the complexity of information contained on each. Best way to tell a story is with the fewest number of words. Make each slide a memorable sign post for where your argument is going, but keep it to as few slides as possible with which you can tell the whole story.

**12. Theme sections:** Make any PowerPoint presentation look professional by utilizing a consistent theme. Making sure the core elements are on the same place on each slide and use similar fonts and colors. Break up your presentation into sections, and then subtly theme each section.

**13. Use images and transitions, but use them well:** A subtle transition here and there can add pace and sheen to your talk, but forcing every slide to dissolve into the next quickly becomes laughable. Never, ever use a crazy transition without irony. And be careful to avoid over using clip art. Illustrating a point is good, forcing your audience to view myriad shots of models pulling quirky poses is not so good.

**14. Practice makes perfect:** Use all of the time available to practice and get it right. That means standing up, flicking through slides, speaking out loud, timing yourself. It's perfectly feasible to present without practice, and if you are used to the task it may be that practice will blunt your edge. But if you have the time to get familiar with the pose, the timings and the message, why wouldn't you?

**15. Introduce yourself:** The most important part of any presentation is the beginning. Hold up your head and introduce yourself. Who you are, what you do, and why you are standing in front of them. Tell the audience where you came from and what you are going to address. Set an agenda, and set the terms; if you want questions throughout tell them. If you want silence and then questions at the end - let them know. The most important thing is to break the ice between you and the audience.

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**16. As many notes as you need:** The fact is that being able to talk with or without notes is not a key competency test. If you can do it, great, but the important thing is to have with you the level of notes with which you are comfortable. With one exception...not a good idea to write out your presentation verbatim, and read it. If you do this you will naturally keep your eyes glued to the page and fail to react to or interact with the audience. Put down bullet points for each slide, and then refer to them as you go. You may realize you've not used the notes at all, but gives you confidence knowing they were there.

**17. Avoid paragraphs:** Paragraphs can become too difficult to read. Excessive use of paragraphs in a presentation can become boring for the viewer. Paragraphs can make it too difficult to keep a person properly engaged. Stick to easy-to-read bullet points and great graphics. Reserve the use of paragraphs for the presenter's script.

**18. Brevity matters:** If you communicate a concept in one slide clearly, do so. If you can condense the content into a slide without losing the meaning of the point being made, condense it into one slide. Keep in mind the average attention span of a person. Shorter presentations may have more of an impact on the audience.