

FYS 100 First Year Seminar

Welcome to PowerPoint: Some Important Considerations

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The following essay is based upon the PowerPoint slides available on Dr. Petress' website § course material, §§ FYS 100. Note that this written essay could just as well be an oral presentation. This piece is offered to show students how PowerPoint slides should be used as message enhancers rather than as messages in their entirety [see slides 2].

PowerPoint slides **enhance** the message they accompany. Enhancing includes the following features [see slide 4]:

1. Effective slides can aid listeners to focus on the speaker's major theme and to pay attention to specific subpoints in the message. Such focusing is complementary to raised voice, pitch changes, and focusing gestures.
2. Slides act as an effective repetition of select parts of a message if used wisely. Not all points need repetition, only salient areas ought to be repeated.
3. Sometimes, idea sequencing can be best illustrated by PowerPoint slides. When concept or data sequencing is obvious, slides are trivial and ought not to be used.
4. When unfamiliar, complex, or numerous terms are employed in a presentation, it can be very helpful to present them as introduced via a slide. Educational research clearly shows that when data is input through multiple senses, it is more likely to be recalled later.¹
5. Relationships like cause-effect, co-cause, co-effect, stimuli-response, etc. can be effectively illustrated by PowerPoint slides. Such illustrations reduce ambiguity and can aid your audience in keeping on track with your ideas.
6. Visual examples of what is orally presented can often be helpful. Examples need to be direct, clear, unambiguous, simple, and composed of one concept as opposed to multi-concept complex examples.

There are other features of effective presenting that you want to work on; these include [see slides 5, 6, & 7]:

1. When showing slides, the presenter needs to remember to keep speaking as slides are employed. Periods of silence while slides are used does not enhance the presentation; it actually comes across as lacking coherence. Remember [from slide 2]

¹ There may seem to be a contradiction here: it is good to present material both auditorily and visually; but not to 'overdo' the visual portion. If too much one-to-one multiple sense presentation is employed, receivers tend to shutoff one sense and therefore, the benefit is lost.

that visuals are a tool to be used **with** speech, not as a **substitute** for speech.

2. When visual aids are effectively used, they aid in understanding, retention, and focusing. However, if visuals from one idea are left in view while other ideas are introduced or developed, audience confusion can increase. You need to remove from sight visuals no longer being used.
3. There is frequently an urge to overwhelm an audience with many visuals, to overkill. Resist this urge. Too many visuals, too complex visuals [ie: hard to follow or conveying too much] and too sophisticated [ie: fancy special effects] can spoil the basic presentation motive: to get and keep audience attention and focus.
4. Keep your visuals directly to the point of your presentation.
5. Too often presenters show visuals assuming the audience understands how they are related to the subject being discussed. Never assume audience understanding. It is the presenter's responsibility to explain and put in context all visuals used.
6. As mentioned earlier, do not make your slides an echo or a script for the oral portion of your presentation. Make the visuals add to what you say.
7. When employing visuals, do not hurry through them; also, do not rush the verbal message that complements the visuals. For messages to be optimally effective, your audience must absorb, organize, store, and connect your ideas before going on. Of particular note regarding Power Point slides is not to rush audience reading. Remember, not all of us is a fast reader.

I hope you can see how the slides provided on my website are not a script of my main message but are, in fact, enhancers of that message. If you have questions regarding either about PowerPoint or making a presentation, visit your professor during office hours.