

The 10 Most Common Presentation Mistakes

Avoid These Predictable Presentation Mistakes

By Wendy Russell, About.com Guide

What presentation mistakes are sure-fire ways to put your audience to sleep or send them running for the doors? Even the best presentation can be destroyed by a bad presenter -- from the person who mumbles, to the one who talks too fast, to the one who just wasn't prepared. But perhaps nothing is as irritating as the person who misuses and abuses presentation software. Read on to learn about the 10 most common presentation mistakes.

1. Presentation Mistake #1 - You Don't Know Your Topic!

You memorized the content (and it shows, by the way). Someone has a question. Panic sets in. You never prepared for questions and all you know about this topic is what is written on the slides.

A better scenario

Know your material so well, that you could easily do the presentation without an electronic enhancement such as PowerPoint. Nothing will ruin your credibility as a presenter faster, than not knowing everything about your topic. Use key words and phrases and include only essential information to keep the audience focused and interested. Be prepared for questions and know the answers.

2. Presentation Mistake #2 - The Slides Are NOT Your Presentation

An audience member says that she can't read the slides. You graciously tell her you will be reading them and proceed to do so, while looking up at the screen. Each of your slides is filled with the text of your speech. Why do they need you?

A better scenario

Always remember that you are the presentation. The slide show should only be used as an accompaniment to your talk. Simplify the content, by using bullet

points² for key information. Keep the most important points near the top of the slide for easy reading in the back rows. Focus on a single topic area for this presentation and use no more than four bullets per slide. Speak to the audience, not to the screen.

3. Presentation Mistake #3 - T. M. I. (Too Much Information)

You know so much about the topic, that you jump from here to there and back again talking about everything there is to know about your brand new widget, and no one can follow the thread of the presentation.

A better scenario

Use the K.I.S.S. principle (Keep It Silly Simple) when designing a presentation. Stick to three, or at the most, four points about your topic and expound on them. The audience will be more likely to retain the information.

4. Presentation Mistake #4 - Poorly Chosen Design Template or Design Theme

You heard blue was a good color for a design template⁴ or design theme⁵. You found a really cool template/theme on the internet, with a beach scene. Water is blue, right? Unfortunately, your presentation is about some nifty new tools to show at a Woodcarvers' convention.

A better scenario

Choose a design that is appropriate for the audience. A clean, straightforward layout is best for business presentations. Young children respond to presentations that are full of color and contain a variety of shapes.

5. Presentation Mistake #5 - Electrifying Color Choices

Audiences don't like unusual color combinations. Some are unsettling and red and green combos can't be differentiated by those with color blindness.

A better scenario

Good contrast with the background is essential to make your text easy to read.

- Dark text on a light background is best. Off white or light beige is easier on the eyes than the typical white. Dark backgrounds are very effective, if the text is light for easy reading.
- Patterned or textured backgrounds make text hard to read.
- Keep the color scheme consistent.

6. Presentation Mistake #6 - Poor Font Choices

Small, script type fonts might look great when you are sitting 18 inches away from the monitor. You didn't consider the lady sitting 200 feet away from the screen who can't read them.

A better scenario

Stick to easy to read fonts¹¹ such as Arial or Times New Roman. Avoid script type fonts which are hard to read on screen. Use no more than two different fonts – one for headings, another for content and no less than a 30 pt font so that people at the back of the room can read them easily.

7. Presentation Mistake #7 - Extraneous Photos and Graphs

You figured no one will notice that you didn't do much research on your topic if you add lots of photos and complicated looking graphs.

A better scenario

“Time is Money” is really true in today's world. No one wants to waste their time sitting through a presentation with no substance. Use photos, charts¹³ and diagrams only to emphasize key points of your presentation. They add a nice break to the material, and when used correctly, can only enhance your oral presentation. Illustrate, don't decorate.

8. Presentation Mistake #8 - W-A-Y Too Many Slides

Your vacation cruise was so fantastic that you took 500 photos, and put them all in a digital photo album¹⁶ to impress your friends. After the first 100 slides, snores were heard in the room.

A better scenario

Ensure your audience stays focused by keeping the number of slides to a minimum 10 to 12 is plenty [for a short presentation]. Some concessions can be made for a photo album, since most pictures will be on screen for only a short time. Be kind though. Think how much you enjoy everyone else's vacation pictures!

9. Presentation Mistake #9 - Different Animations on Every Slide

You found all the really cool animations and sounds and used 85% of them in your presentation, to impress everyone with your flair. Except -- the audience doesn't know where to look, and have totally lost the message of your presentation.

A better scenario

Animations and sounds¹⁸, used well, can heighten interest, but don't distract the audience with too much of a good thing. Design your presentation with the "less is more" philosophy. Don't let your audience suffer from animation overload.

10. Presentation Mistake #10 - Hardware Malfunctions

The audience is settled. You are all set to start your presentation and - guess what? The projector doesn't work. You didn't bother to check it out earlier.

A better scenario

Check all the equipment and rehearse your presentation, using this projector long before your time to present. Carry an extra projector bulb. If possible, check the lighting in the room you will be presenting in, prior to your time in the limelight. Make sure you know how to dim the lights if the room is too bright.

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