Top 10 Presentation Mistakes

Even the best presentation can be derailed by the presenter. The mumbler, the speed-talker, the underprepared – and the worst – the person who misuses or overuses the software.

10. **Being underprepared** – signified by the panic that sets in when someone asks a question about something that’s not written on a slide.

   **Avoidance tactic:** Know your material well enough to do the presentation without the use of PowerPoint. Use key words and phrases and include only essential information to keep the audience focused and interested. Anticipate questions and have the answers ready. Get a few different sets of eyes to proofread your slides.

9. **The slides become the presenter and presented, not you** – when someone says they can’t read the slides and you graciously explain, “That’s ok, I’ll be reading them,” and you proceed to do so while looking up at the screen. Your slides have all the text of your speech. Why do they need you?

   **Avoidance tactic:** Remember YOU are the presentation. The slideshow is a tool. It strengthens your message. Simplify the content. Minimize information on the slides. Speak to the audience, not the screen.

8. **T.M.I. (too much information)** – You know so much about the topic and proceed to pontificate upon it that the audience can’t follow the thread of the presentation. Message lost.

   **Avoidance tactic:** Use K.I.S.S. (keep it simple silly) when designing a presentation. Stick to three, or at the most, four points about your topic and exposing on them. Audience more likely to retain the message. Eliminate any information that’s not directly a part of the main three points, even if you really like it.

7. **Devine design** – You find a really cool template online with a beautiful beach scene and your favorite color combinations. It makes you feel really peaceful and happy. Unfortunately, your presentation is to plumbers about the risks of the S1N1 virus.

   **Avoidance tactic:** Choose a design appropriate for the audience. A clean, straightforward layout is best for academia. Full-on color and shapes would be better for children.

6. **Electrifying, ever-changing color choices** – red and green combos can be unsettling, not to mention undifferentiated by those with color blindness. Certain groups and individuals attach meaning to certain colors. Patterns are hard on the eyes as are color schemes that change from slide to slide.

   **Avoidance tactic:** Contrast between font color and background is essential to make the text readable.

   ✓ Dark text on light background is best. Off white or light beige is easier on the eyes than white white. Dark backgrounds are very effective, if the text is very light.
Patterned or textured backgrounds make text hard to read.
Keep the color scheme consistent. The message comes before the glam.

5. **Poor font choices** – small, fancy fonts are just hard to read on a screen. Message will be lost because they can’t tell what the words say.

*Avoidance tactic:* Consider what the guy sitting farthest away sees on your projected slide. Stick to 2 fonts: one for titles/one for sub-headings and bullets. Use sans-serif fonts (Ariel/Ariel Narrow, Tahoma, Calibri) for titles and serif fonts (Times, Times New Roman, Cambria) for text. Make sure the people at the back of the room can read every slide. Otherwise, why have that information there?

4. **Extraneous photos and graphics** – if I wow them with graphics, they won’t notice I didn’t do much research. I really like this graphic, and I always use the same clip art. Now the audience has given you their time; they deserve a meaningful, purposeful experience. Nothing gratuitous or without substance.

*Avoidance tactic:* Use photos, charts and diagrams only if they can see them and to emphasize key points of the message. They can add much to the material when used effectively. Illustrate, don’t decorate.

3. **W-A-Y too many slides** – After the first 25 slides, people get lost. Minimize as much as possible. If a slide does not directly forward your message, remove it even if you really like it. You control what the audience takes away from your presentation. Too many slides asks the audience to weed out or figure out for themselves what’s important and what to take away. They may take away something you didn’t intend.

*Avoidance tactic:* Ensure your audience stays focused by keeping the number of slides to a minimum. 10 – 12 is plenty to process. Some concessions can be made for photo albums and the like since they’ll only be on the screen for a short time. But be kind.

2. **Different animations on every slide** – you found all the really nifty animations and sounds and used 85% of them in your presentation, hoping to impress with your flair and clever use of the software. Except, the audience doesn’t know where to look and have totally lost the message of your presentation. Focus on your message, not the technology.

*Avoidance tactic:* Check all equipment and rehearse your presentation, using the projector long before your time to present. Carry an extra projector bulb or the cell phone number for the media services expert. If possible, check the lighting in the room prior to your time in the limelight. Make sure you know how to dim the lights if it’s too bright. Practice with the remote control. Fumbling with the remote control = unprofessional and detracts from the message.

1. **Hardware malfunctions** – The audience is settled. You are all set to start your presentation and guess what? The projector doesn’t work.

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