10 Presentation Do's and Taboos

Do's

1. **Smile!** When audience members see a genuine and sincere smile, it makes them want to smile too. What could be better than looking out on an audience of happy, smiling people?

2. **Move.** Don't hide behind your podium. Presentations can be scary, but the audience won't eat you alive. This doesn't mean you should pace furiously from one end of the stage to the other, but a little movement will help keep your audience awake.

3. **Test your setup before the presentation.** Can you see your visual aids, slides or overheads clearly from the back of the room? Is everything working as you had expected?

4. **Present to the crowd.** Consider your audience before your presentation. If your audience is a group of university students, leave your suit at home and make your presentation less formal. If your audience requires more formality, perhaps it's best if you forget the animation. It's unlikely that swirling text and funny noises will impress this crowd.

5. **Don't try to impress with jargon.** Never speak above the crowd in hopes of impressing people. When you're speaking in a language that doesn't compute, they'll tune out. The audience may also see you trying too hard to impress and you may come across as false or insincere.

6. **Use a computer and multimedia projector.** Professional presenters use a computer and projector, so why shouldn't you? Overheads projectors are a little old-fashioned and printing those overhead slides is a nuisance. Get out of the comfort zone and try using new technology. If you're worried about its reliability, bring your overheads as back-up.

7. **Be yourself!** Be honest, open and sincere. You're best at being yourself, so let your true self show. People relate to honesty and expressiveness.

8. **Update your slides for each presentation.** Don't use the same slides again and again. In the world of visual aids, fresh is good.

9. **Place your company logo in the bottom right-hand corner of your slides**. The eye looks naturally to the bottom right corner, so if you want your company's name reinforced, place it there. While you're at it, why not use corporate colors for your slides? Not only is it a double-whammy but it's also a way to stay consistent with the use of color throughout the presentation.

10. **Use light colors on a dark background and vice-versa.** This seems obvious but it's important to keep in mind. The easiest combinations to read are white or yellow bold text on a dark background.

Bonus tip! Show a visual every one to three minutes. Using this guideline can help you stay on schedule during your presentation. In the planning stage, if you allocate a maximum of three minutes for each slide, it will help you stay on time during your actual presentation.

Taboos

1. **Forgetting to turn off your screen saver.** Your presentation is going smoothly, and you're taking a little extra time to explain each of your PowerPoint slides. You turn to look at the projection screen and, in horror, realize that the audience has been watching cute little tropical fish swim for the past five minutes. If you're using a laptop for your presentation, be sure to turn off your screen saver *before* you begin.

2. **Beeping laptop.** If you usually present using a laptop, you've probably experienced the low-battery warning. It screams for attention and successfully irritates any well-intentioned audience. Bring an extension cord if you're using a laptop and plug it in. This way you won't have to worry about low batteries interrupting the flow of your presentation.

3. **Speaking too quickly.** It's natural to speed up when feeling nervous. But when you speak at record speeds, not only is it difficult for the audience to understand what you're saying, but it's a dead giveaway that you're sweating bullets.

4. **Overusing animation.** Animation is great for capturing the audience's attention and adding interest to any presentation, if used in moderation. However, when things are whirling, whizzing and zooming across the screen, they direct the people's attention away from your message. They'll be too busy trying to figure out how you got your visuals to do those amazing tricks.

5. **Unexpected animation.** Be sure to rehearse your animated presentation before you give it. This ensures the animation you've used is working properly and is appropriate for the audience. Don't let any unexpected sights or sounds catch you off guard.

6. **Using too many bullets and fonts.** Keep it simple by using only a few bullets and a maximum of two fonts per slide. If you get too many fonts and bullets, the design becomes cluttered and the information more difficult to read.

7. **Forgetting to delete all guidelines.** If you're using PowerPoint, there's nothing worse than a slide that appears as "Click to add title." Of course the audience will forgive you, but it certainly won't help you look like a pro.

8. **Using a font that's too small.** The smaller the font, the more difficult it will be for the audience members at the back of the room to read your information.

9. **Placing too many words on a slide.** Keep the information in your presentation concise. The words that appear on the slide should spark the larger thought, not explain it. Follow the 7 x 7 rule, which limits the words on a visual to no more than seven words per line and a maximum of seven lines, for a total of 49 words or less per visual. Headings or titles should be kept to four words or less.

10. **Using red lettering on your slides.** Typically, red has negative connotations. It's almost always interpreted as a warning sign or danger, and in business it symbolizes failure or financial loss.

Bonus Tip! **Spelling is important.** Probably one of the most embarrassing blunders is overlooking spelling errors on your slides. Don't solely trust your spell-checker either. Your best bet is to review your slides and then ask someone else to look at them next.

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