

Part II

What to Write on the Slides

The audience does not need to see, or hear about, all the data you have collected. The data needs editing so that you only present concise and relevant evidence to justify any point you make.

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Chapter 6

Titles

You will learn how to

- choose a title for your presentation
- decide what to include in your first slide
- be concise

Why is this important?

- The title of your presentation is like an advertisement—you want as many people as possible to be interested in it, so it should not be too technical or too generic.
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6.1 Decide what to include in the title slide

There is no standard way to construct a title slide, but most presenters prioritize information by using different font sizes. The two most important elements, which should be given the most space, are

1. the title
2. your name

Other things that some presenters sometimes include are

3. the name and date of the conference
4. co-authors
5. the name and/or logo of your institute/research unit
6. your supervisor
7. acknowledgments
8. sponsors
9. a photo
10. a background image

Some of the best presenters use their title slide to attract audience attention. They do this either by completely ignoring points 3–7 above, or by putting such details in a very small font. Points 3–7 generally contain no information that 99.9% of the audience need to know or that they can't find out from the conference program.

Point 3 has become a kind of standard way to show that the presentation is not simply a recycled version of a previous one—this goes to the extent of putting the conference name and date on every single slide. This seems totally unnecessary.

Points 4–7 tend to be included exclusively to satisfy colleagues, professors, supervisors, and those that have helped during your research. It probably makes more sense to thank these people personally away from the conference. If you are part of a research team, there is no need to list all the names of the people in your team. If you absolutely must give acknowledgments to such people, then it is probably a good idea to put their names in a small font and in a nonprominent position in your slide. Similarly, if you have participated in many projects, you don't need to write the names of these projects. This kind of information is very pertinent to you, but it is usually of no interest to the audience. You could simply say, "*There are 14 people in our team and we have already participated in 10 projects.*" That is all the audience needs to know.

You may have a contractual obligation to mention sponsors (Point 8).

Points 9 and 10 may help to make your title slide look more interesting. Typical photos and background images include elements of your research or photos (or maps) from your country of origin.

The more information you have on your title slide the more it will detract away from the most important things: your title and your name.

6.2 Remove all redundancy

When you have decided on your title, rewrite it removing redundant words (in square brackets in the examples below) and leaving in only key words.

- The ligno-cellulose biomass fuel chain [: a review]
- [A study on] producing bread [in Andalucia] with [the] acid moisture [technique]
- [Development of] a Portable Device for Work Analysis to Reduce Human Errors in Industrial Plants
- [Issues of] language rights and use in Canada

6.3 Make sure your title is not too technical for your audience

The title of your presentation is a like an advertisement for a product, so consider not using the title of your thesis or paper as the title of your presentation. An interesting title is more likely to attract people to your presentation, and titles of papers and theses are rarely designed to attract the attention of an audience.

Attendees sometimes watch presentations in fields that are not strictly their own, but perhaps where they feel they might be able to apply their findings or because they are looking for new areas of research. It may thus be useful to think of titles to your presentations that are likely to engage a wider audience, which is not all made up of experts in your precise field of research.

Here are some examples of alternative titles:

TECHNICAL	NONTECHNICAL
A Pervasive Solution for Risk Awareness in the context of Fall Prevention in the Elderly	Stop your grandmother from falling
An evaluation of the benefit of the application of usability and ergonomics principles to consumer goods	I hate this product! How the hell does it work?
Construction and validation of a carrier to shuttle nucleic acid-based drugs from biocompatible polymers to living cells	Q: How can we get nucleic acid-based drugs from biocompatible polymers to living cells? A: Use a shuttle
Contact Force Distribution in the Interference Fit between a Helical Spring and a Cylindrical Shaft	Will this fastener kill me?

Notice how in each case, the nontechnical titles contain verbs. Verbs give the idea of dynamism, nouns don't. You may think that the last title—Will this fastener kill me?—is too obscure. However you would probably be curious to see what it was about.

Look at the title below from a Bangladeshi researcher at a congress in Italy:

Preparation, characterization, and degradability of low environmental impact polymer composites containing natural fibers

It describes some work on composites based on natural fibers, which are materials with a much lower environmental impact. He began by quoting an article from *The Record*:

Getting ordinary plastic bags to rot away like banana peels would be an environmental dream come true. After all, we produce five hundred billion a year worldwide. And they take up to one thousand years to decompose. They take up space in landfills. They litter our streets and parks. They pollute the oceans. And they kill the animals that eat them.

He had a quick series of slides (with no titles or text) with photos to illustrate his concepts: plastic bags, banana peels, landfills, litter, and polluted oceans. Notice also how he used very short sentences—these were easy for him to say and were dynamic for the audience.

And at the end of his presentation he returned to his original statistic. He asked a few people in the audience how many bags they thought they used a month, and on the basis of that number, he told them how many years it would take to cover the whole of Italy (where the congress was being held) if everyone in the country used the same number of bags per month.

He certainly managed to attract the audience's attention with this interesting information, but he might have had a bigger audience if he had called his presentation:

Can natural fibers save the planet?

Can natural fibers save Italy?

Italy is slowly disappearing under polyethylene bags

Bags, bags and more bags

Will we all be suffocated by plastic bags?

By giving his presentation a very academic title, those people at the congress not specifically interested in polymer composites might have been discouraged from attending his talk.

6.4 Use a two-part title to attract both a general and a technical audience

If the Bangladeshi researcher mentioned above was worried about being too informal, he could have used a two-part title, in which one is technical and the other is more appealing to a generic audience. On the next page are some examples:

ONE-PART TITLE	TWO-PART TITLE
Preparation, characterization, and degradability of low environmental impact polymer composites containing natural fibers	How can we stop Italy disappearing under polyethylene bags? Using low environmental impact polymer composites containing natural fibers
Anti-tumor activity of bacterial proteins: study of the p53-azzurine interaction	Azzurine binds to p53. Towards a nontoxic alternative to chemotherapy?
The discorsal construction of audience identity in undergraduate assignments	Who or what is the students' audience? The discorsal construction of audience identity in undergraduate assignments

Another alternative is to have both titles in the conference program, and just the fun/more informal title on your title slide.

6.5 Don't be too concise in titles—use verbs and prepositions not just nouns and adjectives

What is the problem with this title?

An innovative first-year PhD student scientific English didactic methodology

When you start reading it, it seems to have one meaning. But when you finish, it seems to have another meaning. The problem is that this title is a string of adjectives + nouns + nouns that act as adjectives.

A much easier title to understand would be

An innovative methodology for teaching scientific English to first-year PhD students

Good titles put

- the adjective next to the noun it refers to (*innovative* refers to *methodology* not to *students*)
- have a verb (*teaching*)
- use prepositions (*for, to*)

Some more examples showing the use of verbs are given below:

NO VERBS	WITH VERBS
The implementation of sustainable strategies in multinational companies	<u>Implementing</u> sustainable strategies in multinational companies
TOF-SIMS: an innovative technique for the study of ancient ceramics	TOF-SIMS: an innovative technique for <u>studying</u> ancient ceramics
Fault <u>detection</u> of a Five-Phase Permanent-Magnet Motor - a four-part solution	Four ways <u>to detect</u> faults in a Five-Phase Permanent-Magnet Motor
<u>Effect of crop rotation diversity and nitrogen fertilization on weed management in a maize-based cropping system</u>	How does crop rotation diversity and nitrogen fertilization <u>affect</u> the way weeds are <u>managed</u> in a maize-based cropping system?

6.6 Check your grammar

The rules of grammar, particularly the use of articles (*a, an, the*) also apply in titles. Can you find the grammatical mistakes in the ungrammatical titles below?

UNGRAMMATICAL	GRAMMATICAL
Multimodality in the context of Brain-Computer Interface	Multimodality in the context of <u>a</u> Brain-Computer Interface/of Brain Computer Interfaces
Importance of role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships in health care sector	<u>The</u> importance of <u>the</u> role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships in <u>the</u> health care sector
Iran Foreign Policy	Iran's Foreign Policy

6.7 Check your spelling

Titles of presentations often contain spelling mistakes. This is particularly true if the title of the presentation is also the title of your thesis. You have seen that title so often that when you look at it on your slide you don't actually read it because it is so familiar to you. Can you find the spelling mistakes in these titles?

The Rethoric of Evil in German Literature

Governance choice in railways: applying empirical transaction costs economics to the the railways of Easter Europe and the former USSR

Hearth attack! Cardiac arrest in the middle aged

In the first example *rethoric* seems correct because it looks as if it reflects the pronunciation (correct: *rhetic*). In the second and third examples it should be *Eastern* and *Heart* respectively—unfortunately no spell check system would have found the mistakes because *Easter* and *Hearth* are also correct spellings (but with entirely different meanings). Also, there is the repetition (*the the*) which you may not notice: although they are in sequence they appear on different lines.

ADVANCED TIPS

6.8 Use slide titles to help explain a process

When the main purpose of your presentation is to explain a process or how a piece of equipment works, it is a good idea to use your slide titles to explain each step in the process. Here are titles of the first six slides from an engineering presentation. Each slide simply has a title and then a diagram or picture, which the presenter then explains.

- Slide 1: Title slide: 3D Laser milling modeling: the effect of the plasma plume
- Slide 2: Laser Milling: a process well suited for mold manufacturing
- Slide 3: Laser Milling Centers consist of various sub-systems
- Slide 4: The laser beam is controlled by a Laser Beam Deflection Unit
- Slide 5: A valid estimation of the Material Removal Rate is required
- Slide 6: Many parameters affect the Material Removal Rate

Notice that there is no “Outline” slide. The presenter used slide 1 to introduce himself and his research area. Then slides 2 and 3 provided some background information. And then the later slides described how the laser worked. The audience was guided step by step and even a nonengineer like myself was able to follow.

6.9 Think of alternative titles for your slides

When thinking of titles for your slides, bear in mind the quantity of slides that an audience will see over a typical two-day congress. Ask yourself how much audience attention you are likely to attract by a series of titles such as, Introduction - Methodology - Discussion - Conclusion and Future Work - Thank you for your attention - Any questions?

If your slot is near the end of the morning or afternoon (particularly on the last day of the conference), you need to think of alternative titles. Avoid words that give no real information and which the audience has probably seen a hundred times since the beginning of the conference such as, *activity*, *investigation*, *overview*.

Here are some possible alternative titles to the typical sections of a presentation:

Outline:	Why?	Why should you be excited?
Methodology:	How?	Don't try this at home
Results:	What did we find?	Not what we were expecting
Discussion:	So what?	Why should you care?
Future work:	What next?	Men at work
Thank you:	That's all folks	See you in <i>name of location of next conference</i>

Chapter 7

Writing and Editing the Text of the Slides

You will learn how to

- decide when, and when not, to use full sentences
- reduce the amount of duplication between what the audience read and what you say

Why is this important?

Over a three-day conference the average attendee will see between 300 and 500 slides. That's a lot of slides and a lot of effort on the audience's eyes. Your aim should be for the audience to quickly assimilate the information on your slides and then focus on you. The less text there is, the quicker the audience will focus on what you are saying. You will also be less tempted to "read" your slides.

7.1 Be aware of the dangers of PowerPoint

If you buy 20 tubes of paint you don't automatically have a painting. Likewise, if you create a set of PowerPoint or keynote slides you don't automatically have a presentation. You just have a set of slides.

A presentation is slides plus a lot of practice.

Try practicing your presentation without using any slides. If you find it difficult, it means you are relying too much on your slides.

Presentation software templates encourage you to

1. create a series of similar-looking slides
2. use bullets on every slide
3. have the same background, which may include your institute's logo
4. have a title for each slide

The first three can lead to a very tedious and repetitively visual presentation. There are a limited number of standard backgrounds, and most audiences will have already seen most of them. Try to invent your own background, or if not use a very simple background color.

But the fourth, titles, is very useful. Titles are like a map for the audience guiding them through the presentation.

Having similar looking titles (i.e., same color, font, and font size) throughout the presentation should be enough to give it a sense of cohesion and consistency. This means that you can vary the other three—the look, the use or not of bullets, and have a changing background where appropriate.

7.2 Print as handout then edit

You can generally print up to nine slides on a page—this is called “print as handout.” When you see all your slides together like this, it gives you a clearer picture of the amount of text you have used throughout your presentation.

Look at each slide and ask yourself if the text is crucial. If it is not crucial, cut it.

If it is crucial then ask yourself—can I express it in a more succinct way? Could I use a picture rather than text? Do I really need a slide to express this point or could I just say it verbally?

7.3 Only use a slide if it is essential, never read your slides

Next time you watch someone doing a presentation, decide if their slides were

- a) specifically designed to help the audience understand the topic
- b) simply prompts for the presenter so that he/she wouldn't forget what to say next

The main task of your slides should be to fulfill point (a), and at the same time fulfill point (b).

Try to reduce any overlap between what you say and what your slides “say.” The slides do not need to contain everything that you will say—you should never read your slides. You just need a slide for your most important points. And it is your job to draw the audience’s attention to why the information on your slide is important.

A slide should only come alive when you actually start commenting on it. Slides should support the talk, not reproduce the talk itself in a written/graphical format.

7.4 Only write what you are 100% sure is correct

If you make mistakes in your English when you talk, the majority of your audience will probably not care or even notice. However, they may notice written mistakes. Don’t be creative with your English. Only write what you know is correct. Generally speaking, the shorter the sentence, the less likely you are to make a mistake.

However, the less text you have, the more evident any grammar or spelling mistakes are. These final slides from three different presentations (all real) did not make a good final impression:

End
Thank!
Any question?

The presenters should have written “The end,” “Thanks,” and “Any questions?”

7.5 One idea per slide

It is very important not to have more than one main idea or result in each slide. Thus any bullets, data, or graphics on the slide should be in support of this main idea. You can check how many ideas there are in your slide by trying to give it a title. If a title doesn’t come quickly to mind, it may mean you have covered too many points and thus that you need to divide up these points into further slides.

The moment to give detail is when you are talking through the slide. There shouldn’t be too much text/detail within the slide itself.

7.6 Generally speaking, avoid complete sentences

Which is it easier for an audience to do—read or listen? The answer is probably read—it requires much less effort. If you fill your slides with text, you are encouraging your audience simply to read and not to listen to what you say. This habit will

then continue throughout your presentation. At this point you could simply email the audience your paper.

By simplifying and cutting you will have much cleaner slides. The audience will then spend more time listening to you, and less time reading your slides.

Assuming your audience all understand English quite well, if you write complete sentences in your slides

- your audience will read the text on the slide rather than focus on you
- when you comment on the slide it will be difficult for you to avoid repeating word for word what is on your slide. Alternatively, you will be forced to paraphrase, which may lead to unnecessarily long sentences
- your slide will be full of text and to accommodate this text the font may be too small for the audience to read clearly

Moreover, if you have a lot of text on your slides but you say something very different from the text, then the audience has to take in two different sets of information—one written, the other verbal—at the same time. The human brain is not equipped to simultaneously read some information and to listen to something different.

So the solution is to do one of the following:

- cut the slide completely and simply talk
- reduce the text to three or four short bullet points which the audience can absorb immediately. Then expand on one or more of these bullets
- give the audience a few seconds to absorb the text (for example, an important definition or a quotation from an expert), and then blank the screen and start talking

Otherwise there will be two presenters—you and your text—and you will both be competing for the audience's attention.

7.7 Only use complete sentences for a specific purpose

Some audiences, however, appreciate complete sentences. They enable attendees with a low level of English to

- follow your slides, even if they can't follow what you say
- better understand your pronunciation if they can also see the written forms of the key words that you are using
- take notes
- memorize what you have said if they have a better visual memory than auditory memory

Three possible solutions for dealing with an audience with mixed levels of English are

1. have slides with complete sentences but keep them as short as possible, removing all redundancy and removing articles (*the, a/an*). Ways to do this are explained in this chapter. When you show these slides, give the audience up to five to six seconds to read them. Then, make general comments without reading the text. This allows the audience to absorb the information on the slide and then they can concentrate on what you are saying
2. have short bulleted sentences. In addition, prepare photocopies of the same slides but with full text. You can then distribute these to the audience before you begin and the people in the audience with poor English can then refer to them during the presentation
3. give the audience a handout after you have finished, where you can write more complete sentences, and add extra details, e.g., extracts from your paper, your contact details

Even if the audience has a high level of English, complete sentences can occasionally be used to emphasize a particular point, explain a difficult point, or give a quotation.

Again, it is important to remember that you

- should never read your slides, there is absolutely no advantage for either you or the audience, particularly as people read at different speeds and most will not be synchronized with your speech
- don't have to explain everything on your slides—if you have a series of four bullets, you may only need to comment on the first bullet, leaving the audience to interpret the other three
- need to have a variety of slide types. You cannot do what I have suggested in the first solution above (show slide, wait five seconds) throughout the whole presentation, as this will be very tedious for the audience. So try to have some slides with more text, some with less text, and as some with no text at all

7.8 Don't put text in your slides to say what you will do or have done during your presentation

In an outline there is no need to write “*I will discuss the following . . .*” Likewise on the Conclusions slide do not write “*We have presented a strategy for. . .*” In such cases, you simply need to say those phrases.

Imagine you are participating in a project to get more people in your country and surrounding countries to use the Internet. You are at a conference on the Internet, and you are reporting on what you have done so far. Below is the text contained in your first slide:

INTERNET DIFFUSION PROJECT

- Several research and technological projects have been activated. I am going to describe the results of the Internet diffusion project.
- The main goal of the project is to analyze Internet diffusion among households, companies, nonprofit organizations through the use of domain names.

Ask yourself

- does the audience need to see this information?
- what am I going to say when I show this slide?

The problem is that if you do not practice your presentation, you will not be prepared for the fact that in reality there will be nothing that you can say when you show this slide, apart from repeating what is on it. There is nothing complicated on the slide, no tables, no strange words, no pictures, in fact nothing that the audience would not be able to understand if you simply stood in front of them and told them.

This is the kind of slide that should be cut completely. Instead, when you show your title slide you could say something like this:

Hi, I am here today to tell you about a completely new project—the first in Eastern Europe in fact. The idea is to find out how much the Internet is being used among various categories of users: households, companies, nonprofit organizations [*you can count on your fingers to highlight each category*]. To do this we are looking at the numbers of Internet domain names by type. My idea is to tell you where we are at the moment. Then it would be great if I could set up contacts with those of you here who represent other Eastern European countries. You might be interested to know that we estimate that there are around 25 million domain names registered in our part of the world and this represents . . .

7.9 Avoid repeating the title of the slide within the main part of the slide

If the title of your slide is *How to free up space on your disk* don't have a series of bullets introduced by *The following are ways to free up space on your disk*:

7.10 Use only well-known acronyms, abbreviations, contractions, and symbols

In the following examples the shorter versions are in brackets: as soon as possible (asap); to be confirmed (tbc); for example (e.g., or eg), that is to say (i.e., or ie); information (info); against (vs); research and development (R&D); and, also, in addition etc., (& or +); this leads to, consequently (> or =); 10,000 (10 K); 10,000,000 (10 M).

However, don't use abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols unless they are well known. If you explain a new acronym in Slide 2, by Slide 3 the audience will already have forgotten what it means. It is much easier for them to see the full words.

7.11 Choose the shortest forms possible

Use the shortest words and shortest phrases possible. Here are some examples:

regarding = on; however = but; furthermore = also; consequently = so; necessary = needed

We needed to make a comparison of x and y. = We needed to compare x and y.

There is a possibility that X will fail. = X may fail.

Evaluating the component = Evaluating components

The user decides his/her settings = Users decide their settings

The activity of testing is a laborious process = Testing is laborious

No need for the following: = No need for

Various methods can be used to solve this problem such as = Methods:

7.12 Cut brackets containing text

Brackets tend to contain examples, definitions, or statistics.

Natural fibers (wool, cotton etc.,)

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) approval

In the examples above, it is generally not necessary for the audience to see the information in brackets, you can simply say

We analyzed some natural fibers such as wool and cotton.

Our device has been approved by the International Organization for Standardization.

By deleting the parts in brackets, you will thus have extra information to add when you comment on your slide.

7.13 Make good use of the phrase that introduces the bullets

To save space, don't repeat the first words in a series of bullets—either incorporate them into the introductory phrase or simply say them when you make your commentary.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The advantages of using this system are	Advantages for researchers:
➤ <i>it will enable researchers to</i> limit the time needed in the laboratory	➤ limits lab time
➤ <i>it will help researchers to</i> find the data they need	➤ finds relevant data
➤ <i>it will permit researchers to</i> produce more accurate results	➤ produces more accurate results
	The system enables researchers to
	➤ limit lab time
	➤ find relevant data
	➤ produce more accurate results

In the original example above, the first three words on each bullet (*enable*, *help*, and *permit*) mean the same in this context.

See [Chapter 8](#) Using bullets

7.14 Avoid references

References to other authors' works, legislation (e.g., EU directives, dates of laws), and manufacturer's instructions are generally not necessary on slides. You may think they give authority to what you are saying, but in most cases they are just distracting and add unnecessary text to your slides.

You might be worried that in the Q&A session someone might ask you for such details, for example if there is some contention about which author made a certain finding. If so, you can create a separate slide showing these details and only show the slide if someone asks the question.

7.15 Keep quotations short

Imagine that you are doing a presentation on Human Rights and you wish to quote what was said by a judge. There is no need to quote the full text. If you do you will force the audience to read it all and probably also force the audience to hear you reading it all. Your choices are either to paraphrase it using your own words; or you can cut the parts (i.e., the parts in *italics* in the original version below) that are not fundamental to an understanding of it, and replace them with three dots (...). More drastically, you may decide not to use three dots but tell the audience that you have removed a few words for the sake of space (the full quote could be given in a handout)—this leads to the revised version below, which takes a lot less time for the audience to read and absorb.

ORIGINAL

I also concede that the Convention organs have in this way, on occasion, reached the limits of what can be regarded as treaty interpretation in the legal sense. At times they have perhaps even crossed the boundary and entered territory which is no longer that of treaty interpretation but is actually legal policy making. But this, as I understand it, is not for a court to do; on the contrary, policy making is a task for the legislature or the Contracting States themselves, as the case may be.

REVISED

The Convention organs have, on occasion, reached the limits of treaty interpretation in the legal sense. They have perhaps even crossed the boundary and entered territory which is no longer that of treaty interpretation but is actually legal policy making. But policy making is a task for the legislature or the Contracting State.

7.16 Deciding what not to cut

If you think that a particular slide, photo, story, or statistic is likely to help you achieve your objective of getting people interested in your work and in you, and of generally making your presentation more entertaining, interesting, and memorable, then don't cut it. But don't keep it just because you personally think it is fun. Try it out on colleagues to test its utility. A presentation with interesting parts, even if less essential than other parts, will be far more digestible than a presentation with only essential parts and nothing interesting.

7.17 When you've finished creating your slides, always check your spelling

When you become very familiar with your slides it becomes almost impossible for you to notice spelling mistakes. It is also possible to unintentionally misspell words and sentences. So this means you may not see the mistakes.

Presentation software does not always manage to highlight incorrect spellings. To check the spelling of your presentation you need to convert the text into your word processing program (e.g., Word, NeoOffice). Before you begin checking or writing, ensure that

- the automatic spell checker is off, otherwise Word (or equivalent) will automatically change the spellings of words that may in fact be correct.
- the language is set only to English (US, UK etc.) and not to English + your language. Otherwise the program might alter the spellings of English words to conform to how a similar word is spelt in your language

Microsoft Word highlights words that it thinks are not spelled correctly with a red underline. However, given that you probably use a lot of technical words, these too may appear with a red underline because they are not in Word's internal dictionary. It is easy just to ignore these words hoping (or presuming) that you have spelt them correctly. But there is a good chance that at least one of these words will not be spelt correctly. It is a good idea to check on Google or Wikipedia if the spelling is correct or not.

Some of your misspellings of normal words may not be highlighted because they are words that really exist. Some examples are as follows:

chose vs choice, fell vs felt, form vs from, found vs founded vs funded, led vs leaded, lose vs loose, than vs then, through vs trough, with vs wit, which vs witch

You can find a more complete list of such words, plus a list of US and UK spellings in another book in this series *English Usage, Style, and Grammar for Science*.

Make sure your spelling is consistently British or American.