

Undergraduate Research Symposium

Making an Oral Presentation

PowerPoint or Keynote are the media for formal presentations in most technical and business settings. Using PowerPoint for your oral presentation is not strictly required. It is your likely choice, and the rooms for the oral presentations will be PC-equipped. Bring PC-compatible and PC-tested presentations on flash memory sticks for delivery from classroom installed PCs. If you bring a Mac-please be sure to have the connector.

The Script

Before discussing presentation dos and don'ts, step back and reread your submitted abstract. The abstract contains all significant points and is the blueprint of your talk. Develop an oral script and keep it. Your scripted talk should be strong enough to stand alone in the face of multimedia snafus. The script is not part of the visual presentation. Do not begin with an outline of what you will cover. The audience will have read the abstract before deciding to attend. The abstract framed your question, presented data or information to support your study, and discussed the significance of the results.

The Presentation Slides

Each presenter will have 13 minutes, of which 10 are for presentation and 3 are for questions. How many slides can you use in a 10-minute presentation? Counting your title slide, never have more slides than you have minutes. Timings are tight and time limits are firm. The next presenter will have 2 minutes to set up.

The First Slide

The standard form of your first slide is project title, co-authors (if any), and relevant departmental information. This can be projected as you begin but should not be read to the audience. If you read it to them, they will stop listening to your presentation.

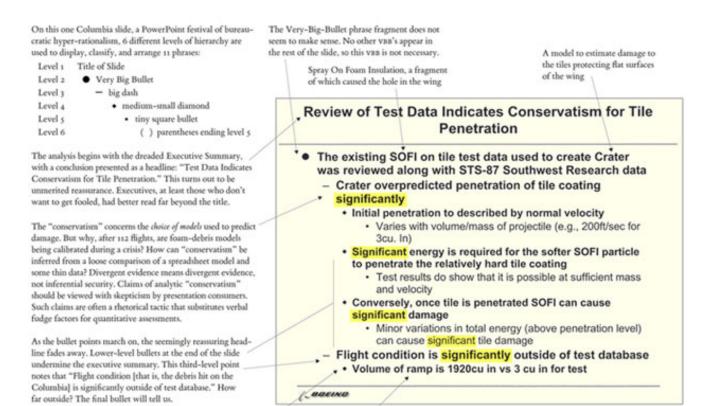
Simplicity

- Slide design and layout should be consistent and simple. Beware of fancy colors, backgrounds, and animation schemes as these false steps detract from the presentation.
- Choose a font size and color that can be read easily by the audience (minimum of 18 to 20 pt or look at the slide at 66% magnification to see if you can read it).
- Avoid bullets if possible, and never use more than one caliber. If your slide is so
 full of words that the audience must stop to read it, they will stop listening to you.
- When presenting graphical or pictorial data, it is the graph or picture that is
 important. Squeezing a graph or photo onto half the slide and explaining the data
 in bullet points on the other half of the slide distracts attention from the data and
 makes the data hard to see. The bulleted information should be in your script
 and the graph in your presentation.

Some Examples

As people from different fields will be making oral presentations, there is no exact formula for a good PowerPoint presentation but we all recognize one when we see one. However, many more presentations are made worse through inappropriate reliance on the mechanics of PowerPoint. A simple Google search for "bad PowerPoint presentations" returns numerous examples. The example below is a single PowerPoint

slide rife with misuses of bullets and other bad practices common in PowerPoint presentations. This one comes from a NASA presentation after the destruction of the Shuttle Columbia during reentry. The slide is within the box with appropriate commentary outside of the box:



This fourth-level bullet concluding the slide reports that the debris hitting the Columbia is estimated to be 1920/3 = 640 times larger than data used in the tests of the model! The correct headline should be "Roview of Test Data Indicates Irrelevance of Two Models." This is a powerful conclusion, indicating that pre-launch safety standards no longer hold. The original optimistic headline has been eviscerated by the lower-level bullets.

Note how close readings can help consumers of presentations evaluate the presenter's reasoning and credibility.

Here "ramp" refers to foam debris (from the bipod ramp) that hit Columbia. Instead of the cryptic "Volume of ramp," say "estimated volume of foam debris that hit the wing." Such clarifying phrases, which may help upper level executives understand what is going on, are too long to fit on low-resolution bullet outline formats. PP demands the shorthand of acronyms, phrase fragments, and clipped jargon in order to get at least some information into the tight format.

Slide Reference:

<u>Edward Tufte – PowerPoint Does Rocket Science – and Better Techniques for Technical Reports</u>

Other Resources:

- Tips for creating and delivering an effective presentation
- <u>Top Ten Slide Tips</u>
- Top Tips for Effective Presentations