

Presentation Best Practices

There are no defined rules that you must follow when creating presentations, but there are some best practices that you can follow to ensure that your presentation is engaging and effective.

Content best practices

The heart of any presentation is the content. You can use the following best practices to make sure that the content that you include in your slides is appropriate and useful for your audience.

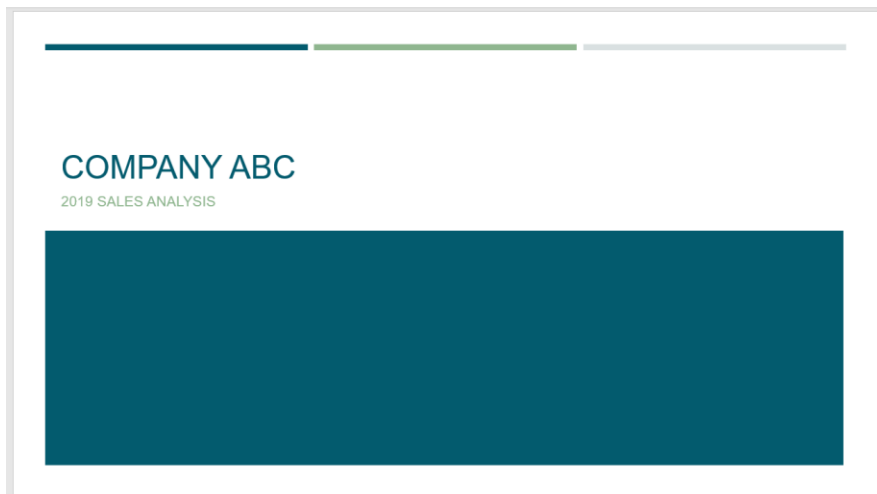
Include background context

Keep in mind that your audience is probably not as familiar as you are with the topic that you're presenting. So, it's important to provide some context at the start of your presentation. Here are some ways to provide context:

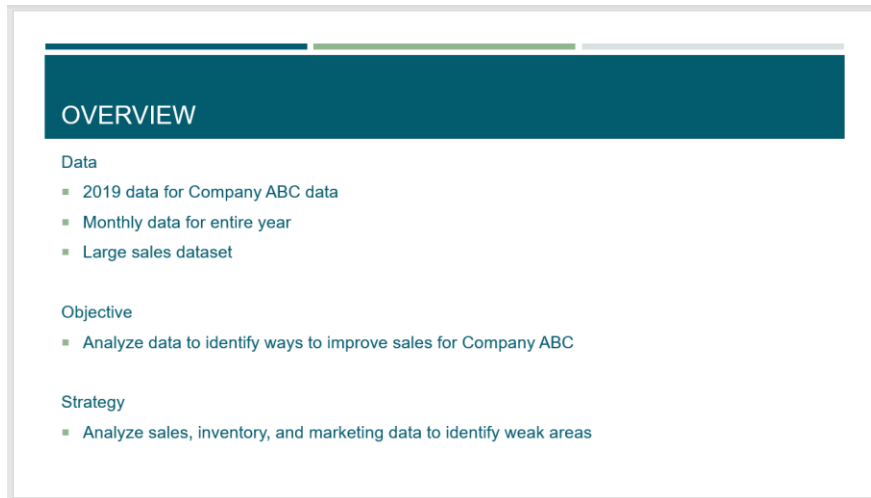
- Include a summary of the data that you used for your analysis or visualizations.
- Share the problem or objective of your analysis so that your audience understands the goal of your work.
- Outline your strategy, or the steps that you took, to solve the problem. This way, your audience can follow along with your thought process.

Example slides

To see what this looks like, compare the two slides below. The first slide shows a title, but it doesn't provide any background context. It introduces the topic but doesn't share anything beyond that.



In contrast, the following slide provides an overview that gets the audience up to speed with the project.

The slide is titled "OVERVIEW" in white text on a dark teal background. Below the title, there are three sections: "Data", "Objective", and "Strategy". Each section has a list of bullet points. The "Data" section lists "2019 data for Company ABC data", "Monthly data for entire year", and "Large sales dataset". The "Objective" section lists "Analyze data to identify ways to improve sales for Company ABC". The "Strategy" section lists "Analyze sales, inventory, and marketing data to identify weak areas".

OVERVIEW

Data

- 2019 data for Company ABC data
- Monthly data for entire year
- Large sales dataset

Objective

- Analyze data to identify ways to improve sales for Company ABC

Strategy

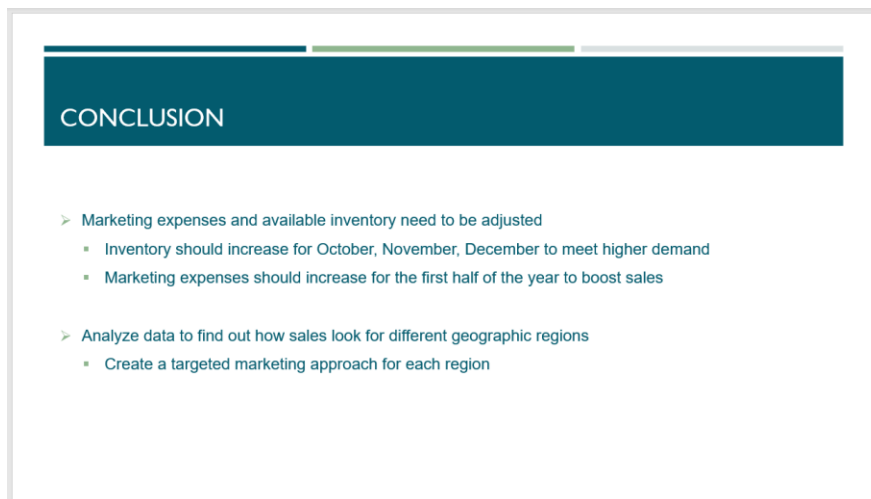
- Analyze sales, inventory, and marketing data to identify weak areas

Present a solution to the data problem

Just as you should share your strategy with your audience, it's equally important to share your data-driven solution. The solution may be an answer to a question, or it may be confirmation of a theory or idea. It could also be evidence that you found to support additional analysis. Whatever your solution is, share it with your audience so that they see how your work leads to helpful information and next steps.

Example slide

The conclusion slide below provides suggestions for next steps, based on the analysis performed.

The slide is titled "CONCLUSION" in white text on a dark teal background. Below the title, there are two main bullet points, each with a sub-bullet. The first main bullet point is "Marketing expenses and available inventory need to be adjusted", with sub-bullets "Inventory should increase for October, November, December to meet higher demand" and "Marketing expenses should increase for the first half of the year to boost sales". The second main bullet point is "Analyze data to find out how sales look for different geographic regions", with a sub-bullet "Create a targeted marketing approach for each region".

CONCLUSION

- Marketing expenses and available inventory need to be adjusted
 - Inventory should increase for October, November, December to meet higher demand
 - Marketing expenses should increase for the first half of the year to boost sales
- Analyze data to find out how sales look for different geographic regions
 - Create a targeted marketing approach for each region

Tailor slide content to your audience

When you create a slide presentation, it's because you want to share it with someone. So, good presentations should benefit the listener.

When creating a slide presentation, ask yourself these questions:

- Who is my audience?
- How much does my audience already know about this topic?
- What does my audience want to know or learn?

Use these questions to ensure that your content is appropriate for your audience. You don't want the information to be so complex that no one understands what you're talking about. At the same time, you don't want it to be so simplified that your audience doesn't learn anything new. You also want to ensure that your content meets the level of formality that your audience expects.

Make sure to consider what your audience expects from your presentation. Do they want you to provide a simple status update on a metric? Or do they want you to provide an actual recommendation to solve a problematic metric?

Say that your audience expects you to provide a recommendation to solve a problem, such as consistently low inventory. You could include one slide showing a data visualization of how this metric has been trending over time. Then you could add a second slide that outlines your recommendations, such as reordering items once there are only 50 of a particular item left in stock.

Anticipate audience questions

Similarly, consider what questions your audience might ask you. Try to respond to these questions in the content of your slides. You can even go one step further and think about follow-up questions your audience might ask; that way, you'll be prepared to answer those questions or at least have an educated discussion about them.

Design best practices

The design and layout of your slides can help convey your ideas and keep your audience interested. Think of your slides as visual aids that communicate concepts.

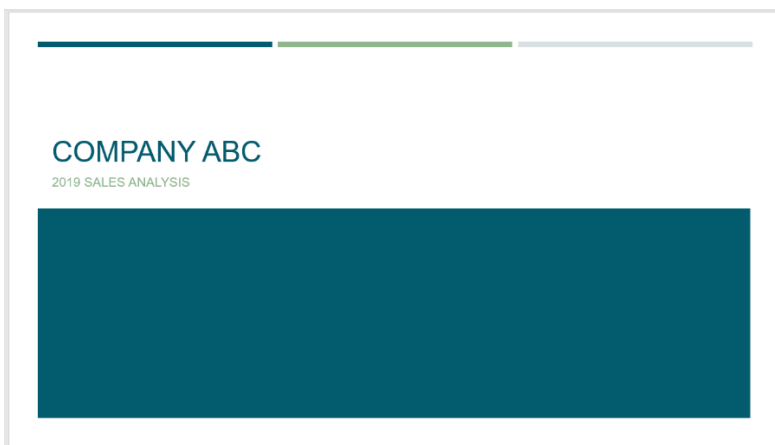
Tailor slide design to your audience

Like content, when it comes to design, you first want to identify your audience. Is your audience your boss, your company's executives, a group of high schoolers, or your colleague? Different audiences benefit from different presentations, both in style and tone. And if you want your message to be well received, communicate in a way that your audience can understand.

For example, if you're presenting to a group of high schoolers, you might pick a fun background, include GIFs in your slides, and use casual language. But if you're presenting to your boss, you might use more professional language and pick a background and typeface that match your company's branding.

Example slides

The first slide below uses a design that isn't appropriate for a financial analytics team because it doesn't align with the topic or mood. The second slide uses a design that's more appropriate. Use your judgment when selecting a design, based on the topic, mood, audience, and brand.



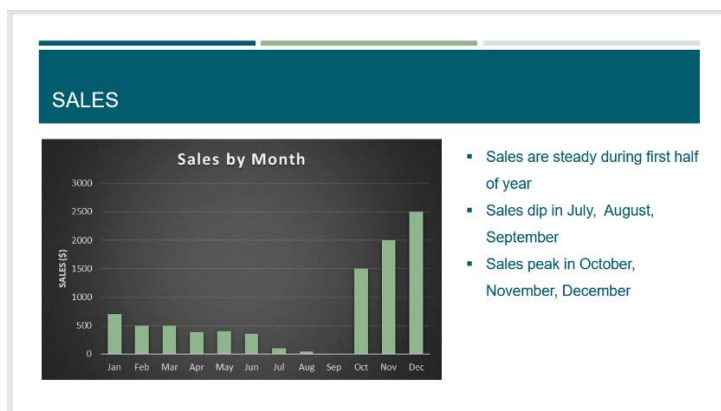
Avoid clutter

Remember that slides are meant to be a summary of key information, not a speech. Because slides should be used as visual aids, avoid having too many words or full sentences on them. There are several reasons for this: to avoid overcrowding, to avoid reading off slides word for word while presenting, and so that your audience stays engaged with what you're saying rather than trying to read what's on the slide themselves.

Minimize distractions like this by including only key points on the slides. Save any other commentary for your speaker notes (discussed below). You may also want to include links in your notes or slides so that your audience can get more information about a topic if they want to.

Example slides

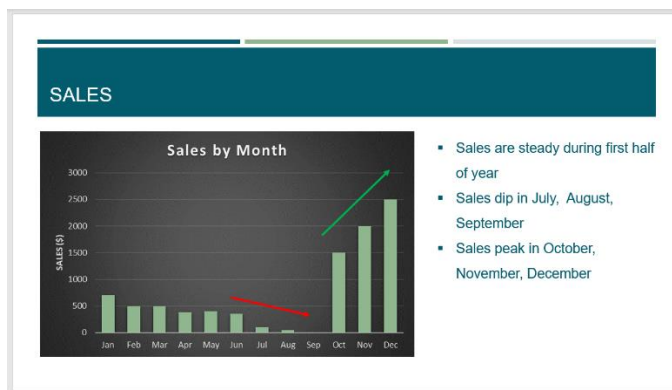
The first slide below shows useful information but contains too many words and full sentences. This makes it hard for the viewer to quickly look at the slide and extract meaningful information. The second image shows the same information but uses concise bullet points to share the information.



Emphasize important points

Pictures are often more interesting to look at than words; they can illustrate complex ideas in a straightforward way (hence, data visualization). Using this concept, you can emphasize important points in your slides by including something interesting to look at. You can do this by applying color, bolding font, or underlining to make something stand out. Similarly, you can apply shapes, such as circles, arrows, or stars, to call attention to important metrics.

Example slides



Aim for consistency

Maintain one style throughout your presentation so that all your slides look uniform and polished. To achieve this, you can use the following techniques:

- Use one typeface throughout your presentation.
- Use a consistent font size and capitalization style throughout your presentation.
- Use one color palette throughout your presentation.
- Use consistent layouts and object placement throughout your presentation. For example, when showing graphs along with text, you may choose to keep graphs on the left side of the slide and the text on the right.

Example slides

The first slide below uses inconsistent formatting and typefaces, which makes it feel less cohesive and more distracting. The second slide has consistent formatting and typeface, making it visually easier to read and digest.

OVERVIEW

Data

- 2019 data for Company ABC data
- Monthly data for entire year
- Large sales dataset

Objective

- Analyze data to identify ways to improve sales for Company ABC

Strategy

- Analyze sales, inventory, and marketing data to identify weak areas

This slide features a dark teal header with the word 'OVERVIEW' in white. Below the header, the content is organized into three sections: 'Data', 'Objective', and 'Strategy'. Each section has a small teal square bullet point. The text is in a mix of bold and regular weights, and the font appears to be a sans-serif typeface. The overall layout is clean but lacks visual consistency in its formatting.

OVERVIEW

Data

- 2019 data for Company ABC data
- Monthly data for entire year
- Large sales dataset

Objective

- Analyze data to identify ways to improve sales for Company ABC

Strategy

- Analyze sales, inventory, and marketing data to identify weak areas

This slide is identical in content to the first slide but uses a more consistent and professional formatting. The header is dark teal with 'OVERVIEW' in white. The section headers 'Data', 'Objective', and 'Strategy' are in a smaller, regular font. The bullet points are small teal squares. The overall design is more cohesive and easier to read than the first slide.

Delivery best practices

Remember that your slide deck is only one part of your presentation. It's meant to be a visual aid for you and your audience. How you present your slides can affect how your audience receives and digests the information you're sharing with them, as well as how they perceive you. The following tips can help you present in a natural, engaging, and professional way.

Avoid reading off slides

Think back to a presentation that you enjoyed and actively listened to (a TED Talk, maybe). Now, think back to a presentation where you had to try not to doze off while listening. The best presentations are the ones that keep the audience interested and that sound natural, like a great conversation. To achieve this, avoid reading your slides or presenter notes word for word. Instead, try to make eye contact with your audience and speak from memory, only glancing at your slides or notes occasionally to help you keep your place or refer to something specific.

To do this well, you need to read through your slides and presenter notes and practice giving your presentation before you present in front of an audience. You will likely need to do this a few times.

Look at your audience

When you're having a conversation with someone and they keep looking away or down at their phone, it can feel like they aren't present in the conversation. Lack of eye contact while speaking can make a conversation—or a presentation—less engaging. While you present, try to look at your audience. If that makes you uncomfortable, just sweep your eyes over the audience or look at the tops of their heads to create the illusion of eye contact.

Speak slowly and clearly

Some people are uncomfortable when they present in front of people. This can make them speak unnaturally fast or rush through the content to get it over with. This can be frustrating for the audience because they genuinely want to get something out of the presentation too! So, remind yourself to slow down and speak clearly. This is another good reason to practice your presentation ahead of time, alone or in front of friends. It helps you calm your nerves and feel more confident about your talking points.