***Presentation Guidelines***

Before working on your presentation, read the document “Project Report Guidelines” in the Canvas Course Documents module. It will answer many questions that may arise.

***Planning the Presentation***

1. Outline the areas to be covered.

Your presentation includes all the elements of the written report, although these elements are presented in less detail. It should include the following:

• a brief presentation of the problem and the research objectives of your study; be very specific when describing the objectives; it is not necessary to provide a list of research questions when you present the objectives

• a description of the methods (data collection method, questionnaire, sample size, response rate, sample demographic characteristics--use bar graphs to show sample demographics)

• description of key results, including graphs for each research question covered

• description of less important results if time allows

• limitations

• recommendations

This outline is for ***planning*** your presentation; you don’t need to include this outline in the presentation itself.

2. Don't cover too much in a single presentation; don’t cover too little.

You may not have time to cover all the research questions you studied. Identify the most important and most interesting parts of your project and plan to cover those. Use your rehearsals to determine if you're including too much or too little for the time allowed. There will a penalty for exceeding the time limit or for having a presentation shorter than the minimum required time.

3. Make sure your presentation stresses and clarifies important points.

The audience needs to be able to separate important information in your presentation from the details or supporting material. This can be accomplished several ways. PowerPoint slides should list the important points and omit the details. The speaker can use vocal emphasis to draw attention to the most important information. The introduction and summary can emphasize major points.

4. Use PowerPoint effectively.

Graphic elements and images in your PowerPoint slides can increase audience interest. A catchy visual at the beginning of your part of the presentation is an effective way to direct the audience's attention away from yourself to the visual aid, which can have a calming effect if you’re nervous.

Make sure the font on your slides is large enough. Default fonts usually are too small. Do a practice run-through in the same room using the same equipment that will be used during the presentation. People sitting in the back of the room should be able to read every word and every number on every visual. This includes labels and legends on graphs. There will be an automatic point deductions from your presentation grade if any part of a visual is illegible from the back of the room.

Do not put your questionnaire on a visual because the print will be too small to read.

A unified typeface, layout, and graphics style on all visuals gives a professional appearance. Keep the slides simple and uncluttered so they are easy for the audience to interpret.

A presentation containing only bar charts may seem boring to the preparer of the presentation but often are preferred by the audience. In a presentation, the audience only has a moment to grasp the meaning of a graph, and bar charts are the easiest to grasp quickly. A consistent graph format throughout the presentation also makes the material easier to understand. Do not use pie charts unless you have specific permission from the instructor. Put only one chart on a slide.

Turn the sound off on the computer for your presentation unless you specifically plan to have audio elements of your presentation. This will prevent unintended sounds from interrupting your presentation.

See the document in the course packet titled “Effective Visual Aids” for additional suggestions.

5. Make your presentation memorable.

Business people witness dozens of presentations. To be effective, a presentation must be memorable. Be creative in finding something that will make your presentation stand out in a positive way from the rest. This is a chance to use your creativity to do something special or unique.

End your presentation with a question for the audience. This will stimulate audience participation in the Q&A session following your presentation.

6. Dividing the presentation among team members.

Each team member should be responsible for a cohesive subset of the material to be presented. For instance, one speaker may cover the intro and research questions, another the methodology, another the results. It's usually best if a single speaker appears only once (e.g., don't have the same person give the intro, then come back and do the summary). When each speaker finishes with his/her part of the presentation, he/she should briefly introduce the next speaker. (For instance, "Now Susan Williams will discuss the methods we used to collect our data.")

7. Practice the presentation using the classroom computer and projection equipment.

Check out the presentation equipment in the classroom to make sure your files are compatible with the installed software and to familiarize yourself with the equipment. You are responsible for making sure your presentation goes smoothly. If your presentation will include audio or video components, you should check in advance that these work properly on the classroom equipment. When practicing your presentation, do not use a copy stored online. Instead, bring a copy on a flash drive to closely mimic the conditions of your actual presentation.

***Executing the Presentation***

1. Dress professionally.

This is a business presentation, so professional dress is required. An exception may be granted in some cases where attire is related to creativity aspects of the presentation; consult the instructor in advance.

2. Don't speak too rapidly. Speak loudly enough. Look at your audience.

For most people it's natural to speak rapidly when nervous. Make conscious efforts to slow down your speech if you think you're going too fast: use deliberate pauses, deep breaths between sentences, etc. Pause every once in a while to look at your audience and get nonverbal feedback from them. Is anyone nodding his/her head in agreement, looking especially interested, smiling at your jokes? Choose a couple of friendly faces and talk to them. If you're too nervous to look people in the eye, look at their throat.

3. Don't read your presentation.

You may wish to refer to notes, but do not read them.

4. Practice, Practice, Practice!

Do several run-throughs of your presentation alone and in the presence of a small, friendly audience. Get feedback on your speaking style, your visuals, and the clarity of your presentation. Check the timing and adjust the content accordingly. Get used to working with your visual aids. Run through your presentation in an empty classroom and use the equipment to become familiar with it. For a team presentation, the team needs to rehearse together at least once. Each team member should know what other members are covering. The transition in speakers from one team member to another should be practiced and handled smoothly.

***Effective Presentations[[1]](#footnote-1)***

In a presentation, you are the most important feature. No matter what the content or structure of your talk, your delivery will determine how successfully you reach your audience's attention. It can either enhance your message, focusing your audience's attention and giving you credibility, or it can detract from your message, distracting the audience from your points and undercutting your credibility. The following elements all contribute to effective delivery.

***Eye Contact***

In presentations, as in normal conversation, eye contact is an indicator of sincerity. Your audience will respond much more favorably to you if you maintain good eye contact with them. Moreover, by talking **with** rather than **to** individuals, you will be able to see whether they understand and are interested in your presentation. If necessary, you can modify your talk in response to this direct feedback. If the audience is relatively small, less than 25 people, you should establish eye contact with each person during the talk. If the audience is large, you should establish eye contact with a few individuals in all parts of the room.

***Movement***

Movement, including use of space and gestures, gives your presentation energy, punctuates your message, and lets you use some of your nervous energy productively. Unless you are seated or stuck behind a podium (a situation you should try to avoid), you will want to move around periodically rather than becoming rooted to the floor. Be sure that your movement is purposeful use of space rather than nervous pacing, however. Move to indicate a transition, to punctuate an important point, to point to a visual aid, or to establish closer contact with the audience.

Gestures also add dynamism and emphasis to your talk. Use your hands to describe objects, to indicate logical connections, and to emphasize points. While you may occasionally want to put one hand in your pocket, avoid putting both hands in your pockets, leaving one there for any period of time, or playing with keys or change. The best resting place for your hands is in a comfortable position at about waist level, where they are ready for use at any time.

***Voice***

Your voice can underscore your message or it can put your audience to sleep. Variety is the key to keeping your audience interested. Speak with conversational ups and downs, not in a monotone. Use purposeful pauses for emphasis. Learn the power of silence; don't fill pauses with "uhs". While you should maintain a conversational tone, you will need to increase your volume, to project your voice, in order to reach your entire audience.

Most important, try to convey your enthusiasm through your voice. If you sound bored with your subject, your audience will become bored as well. If you sound enthusiastic or interested, that attitude will spread to the audience.

***Pace***

Your pace needs to be fast enough to keep your audience interested, but slow enough to allow them to absorb your points. Slow down on important points that you want to be sure your audience hears and understands, but speed up as you fill in some of the details. Adjust your pace as you go, in response to your audience's needs.

***Presence***

Presence is the hardest to define but perhaps the most important of the elements of successful delivery. It is essentially how you come across to your audience -- the image of yourself that you convey. Some of the more specific elements mentioned above, such as eye contact and movement, contribute to it. It also includes your posture (do you stand erect and look energetic, or do you slouch?), your clothing (are you dressed appropriately for the occasion and for the image you want to project?), your composure (do you look relaxed or nervous?), and your control of the material and the situation (do you seem competent and credible, or unsure of yourself?). Watch your audience for signs of how you are coming across.

\* \* \*

Your method of prompting yourself on the contents of the talk will affect your delivery. Memorizing is not wise unless you are a seasoned actor, since a memory lapse, likely when you are under a great deal of strain, can be disastrous. Reading from a script seriously hampers delivery because it restricts your eye contact and your movement. Moreover, few readers (or memorizers, for that matter) can avoid speaking in a monotone.

Using some combination of notes and visual aids as prompters is generally most successful. Notes may be on index cards or on sheets of paper. Index cards can be held in the hand to allow you maximum use of space, but they tend to hamper your gestures and may distract your audience. Notes on paper can be placed on podium or table, but require you to look down to read them. Whichever form of notes you use, keep them relatively brief and practice your talk enough so that you can minimize references to them. Ideally, you should be able to move away from them periodically. Don't let the notes interfere with your delivery.

**PRESENTATION PITFALLS**

Below is a list of the presentation problems most commonly noticed by MU business professors. You can’t tackle this list all at once, but for each presentation, choose one or two areas that you know may be a problem for you and focus on improving those one or two things. Eventually, you’ll work your way through this list and be a great speaker!

Eye contact

Looking at notes too much

Looking at the floor

Looking at the computer too much

Looking back at screen

Looking at the professor too much

Looking at only part of the audience

Posture

Slouching

Leaning on lectern

Leaning on one hip

Keeping one or both hands in pocket(s)

Crossing legs while standing

Swaying side to side or forward and back

Voice, speaking style

Speaking too loudly

Speaking too softly

Speaking in monotone

Mumbling

Um, uh, "you know," "like," etc.

Choppy speaking style

Lack of enthusiasm

Speaking too fast

Speaking too slowly

Speeding up or slowing down at the end

Long pauses

Too many pauses

Distracting mannerisms

Preparation

Insufficient familiarity with material

Obtrusive notes

Distracting or poorly planned transitions

between speakers

Unfamiliarity with equipment or software

***Effective Visuals*[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Visuals can add interest and impact to your presentation at the same time that they serve as memory jogs for the speaker. While the latter use is convenient, visual aids should be designed and used primarily with the former in mind. Providing your audience with visual reinforcement of what you are saying will increase their retention of the material presented.

Visual aids can be prepared in advance or constructed during a presentation. Some types of visual aids, such as a whiteboard, are traditionally used to construct aids during the presentation. Others, such as PowerPoint visuals, can only be prepared ahead of time. Still others, such as flip charts and document projection, can be used in either or both ways. Most of the discussion that follows focuses on PowerPoint visuals prepared in advance of a presentation, although many of the principles are similar for aids created during the presentation.

***Functions of Visual Aids***

Visual aids can be composed of words or of pictorial or graphical elements. They serve three primary functions in a presentation:

**•** *Clarify the structure of the talk*. This paragraph does not apply when a presentations is short (15 minutes or less) or follows a standard format (e.g., a marketing research project results presentation), but is applicable to other types of presentations. To keep your audience with you during longer presentations, you need to make your structure clear at the beginning and provide reminders at intervals throughout the talk. A text visual (i.e., a visual aid composed primarily of words) at the beginning of a talk can reveal the major segments of the talk, but keep the list short. Such text visuals can also be used within the talk to reveal the structure of its segments. However, too many text visuals can bore the audience.

**•** *Emphasize Important Ideas*. Any ideas that you reinforce visually in a presentation, whether with words or with pictorial elements, will receive more attention and will be better remembered than those that you simply say. Thus visual aids provide a method of highlighting key concepts or facts. A visual may contain only a single word or phrase, for example, that you want to emphasize.

**•** *Illustrate Relationships or Objects Visually*. Usually, the most effective visual aids are those that illustrate relationships or objects visually, rather than verbally. Pictures, diagrams, graphs, and physical objects appeal to the spatial, in addition to or instead of the verbal half of the brain. When the two halves of the brain work together, as they do when you show a diagram and explain it in words, the listener understands and retains the material more readily.

Use visual aids because they serve one of these functions, not just because you feel that you must use visual aids. Sometimes speakers overdo the visual aids because they feel a mistaken obligation to have them for all parts of a talk. Use visual aids to enhance your talk, not to substitute for it or to serve a crutch for you.

***Design of Visual Aids***

To be effective, visual aids should not require concentrated study on the part of the audience. Occasionally, complex visual aids requiring extensive study are used effectively in very technical presentations to groups highly involved in the subject at issue. In most cases, however, visuals should make their impact immediately and forcefully. No matter what type of visual aids you use, they should share certain design characteristics. They should be:

**•** *Uncluttered*. Tables, charts, and text that are quite effective in print form are generally too cluttered to be used as visual aids. All the details simply distract the audience from the main point. Redesign graphs, for example, to remove grids, excess scale numbers, and explanatory detail. Keep the text on any one slide brief. With occasional exceptions, text visuals should be limited to no more than 25-30 words total, and often, fewer than that is better. Strip away excess details to produce clean, uncluttered visuals.

**•** *Readable*. Be sure that your pictures and all your words are readable by everyone in your audience. This includes labels and numbers on graphs. Test your visuals in a room that’s approximately the same size as the presentation room to make sure they will be legible to everyone.

**•** *Focused*. A visuals should generally attempt to convey one specific point, and everything in the visual should be designed to make that point. Once you've stripped away the excess clutter, you may also want to provide a title that states the point of the visual explicitly. For example, a graph might be labeled, "Sales Are Increasing," rather than "Sales, 2010-2013." A title can be particularly important if members of the audience haven't been listening carefully and miss your statement of a visual's point.

**•** *Beware of animation*. PowerPoint animation can be fun, but it can quickly become distracting or annoying to the audience. It is usually best to avoid all animation except for the simple "appear" command. Also, you probably want to avoid things like purple cartoon dogs that trot across the screen, sit down in the corner, and give an audible "Yip!"

For major presentations, you may be able to have your visual aids made up by professionals in a design group in your workplace. In that case, they will do their best to take what you give them and make it uncluttered and readable. Still, you have an obligation to have thought through the design issues before you give them rough materials. Moreover, since they don't know your focus, it is up to you to assure that your visuals are focused in the way you want them to be.

***Use of Visual Aids***

While the details of using visual aids differ significantly, depending on which medium you choose, here are a few general guidelines that hold for most of them:

**•** **Don't turn your back on the audience**, either to read or to write on your visual. It is especially important not to turn your back when you are talking. You will lose important eye contact, and your audience will not be able to understand what you are saying. If you are using a whiteboard and must turn your back at least partially to write on it, don't talk while your back is turned.

**•** **Don't block your audience's view of the visual**. With some types of visual aids or some types of projection setups, you must move to avoid blocking someone's view. During a talk, you should monitor your audience to make sure everyone has a clear view of each visual. If you see people craning their necks to see, move out of their way. This movement, if done purposefully, can add to the dynamism of your talk.

**•** **Point to relevant parts of a visual to reinforce your words**. Once you've displayed the visual to the audience, don't just ignore it. Point to it periodically to connect what you are saying with what they are seeing. A laser pointer often is helpful for this purpose.

**•** **Don't rush through the visual**. Especially if it is a graph or other complex material, give the audience time to interpret the visual and absorb its meaning. It's okay to pause a few seconds while the audience looks at the graph. If the graph can't be understood at first glance, describe the graph for the audience, explaining what's on the x and y axes and what the bars or lines on the graphs represent. You may have looked at that graph two dozen times, but it's the audiences first glimpse so you need to give everyone a chance to absorb what the graph means.

Finally, remember that the visuals are there to reinforce you, not to replace you. Use blank slides in a PowerPoint presentation when you want the audience to focus on you, not a visual. On occasions, don't be afraid to walk away from your flipchart or whiteboard to address the audience more directly. ***You*** should be the primary visual aid in a presentation.

1. Adapted from Joanne Yates, "Effective Delivery of Presentations" [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from Joanne Yates, "Effective Visual Aids" [↑](#footnote-ref-2)