Best Practices for Slideware

Including PowerPoint, Google Slides, Visme, Keynote, and more

Developed by Rachel McKenny, past instructor in business speech communication, Academic Success Center at ISU, utilizing resources from Purdue OWL, Presentation Zen, and others

Context, Audience, and Purpose Checklist:

- If appropriate to the presentation, is there clear context of presentation date, purpose, and presenter on the title slide?
- Does the slideware include needless definitions or arbitrary information which may not relate to their target audience?
- Are all reference materials cited in an appropriate style for the context (i.e., APA captions and citations for scientific presentations, MLA for humanities?)
    - See resources for APA Style Guide, MLA Style Guide for figures, tables, and images for examples
    - See general Purdue OWL resources for formatting a reference slide, if needed for the context
- Consider special considerations for certain presentation contexts
    - Persuasive/pitch speeches: consider not beginning with a title slide to add impact to your attention-getter and maintain interest
    - Long presentations (over fifteen minutes): add a clear agenda slide at the beginning, with titles which coincide with later slides to aid in audience focus and comprehension
    - Toasts/Roasts/Inspirational Speeches: focus on images for slide design. Avoid excess text, as takeaways from speech are primarily emotional, not written
    - Slideware as Professor Lecture Visual Aid: if the purpose of the slides is for student notetaking and retention, consider the following:
        - Limit long sentences on slides and focus on keywords
        - Limit small text, which may limit student accessibility in the classroom
        - If able, provide the slides for download for student use, especially if key information and phrasing is important/cannot be found through other materials like textbooks

Design Checklist:

- Consider for *each* block of text:
  - Does it follow the 6x6 rule? (i.e., no more than six lines of text on a page, with fewer than six words in each line) If not, could it?
  - Do you use text in the same way on every slide (i.e., Header, Content with the same format)? Could alternative slide design choices create audience interest?
  - Is all text *absolutely* necessary for the audience? (Remember that the **speaker** is the focus, and the visual aid should help the *audience* remember the presentation, not to help the *speaker* remember the presentation. If slides look like speaker notes, this does not help the audience.)
  - Is text large enough to read?
  - Is there too much text or content on one slide? If so, break up into multiple, more focused slides.
  - Could your audience reasonably follow this part of the presentation without text? If so, omit and add a blank slide. Audience members appreciate a visual break when text is not necessary.

- Check your CARP
  - Contrast
    - Does the background/text selection allow the audience to read everything clearly?
    - Does each slide have a clear focal point?
    - Does each slide have white space?
  - Alignment
    - Consider relation of images, captions, and text to the whole of the slide
    - Use tools within the software to align/center/justify elements clearly
  - Repetition
    - Select three to four key colors to utilize in your presentation
    - Select two key fonts to utilize for your presentation

            - Sans Serif fonts (like Arial, Helvetica, Calibri, and Futura) are best for headers
            - Serif fonts (like Times New Roman, Garamond, Cambria, and Georgia) are best for body text
        - Avoid every slide having the same format or template, or it may feel rushed or cookie-cutter
    - Proximity
        - Ensure captions are in close relation with image materials
        - Group important items together

- Visuals
    - When at all possible, prioritize the visuals over text
    - Limit branding icons to title-slides and concluding slides, as can lose impact quickly
    - Avoid clipart
    - Limit number of charts and graphs per slide, or cut if not needed or referred to in the presentation
    - Emphasize photographs (consider websites like Pexels or ISU Photo Repository for stock photographs) and consider utilizing a diverse representation of people in images, including racial, age range, and other traits
    - Keep charts and graphs 2-D and avoid "chart-junk"
    - Avoid images as backgrounds, unless able to adjust transparency for legibility of text
- Include blank slides when not slideware is not in use. Only utilize slideware when needed. *Do not feel the need to create a slide for every point or subpoint of a presentation*.
- Run a spell/grammar check on your slides before use

Delivery Checklist:

- Before a presentation
    - Practice with slideware ahead of time
    - Add blank slides when slideware is not needed

    - Create speaker notes either inside your slides, on notecards, or on paper using meaningful keywords, phrases, and ideas which you need to present your speech, but your audience doesn't need to see on a presentation
    - Check that you don't have too many slides (a common rule of thumb is no more than one slide per minute, but possibly far fewer than that could be needed)
- During a presentation
    - Speak toward the audience rather than toward your slides
    - If you need to create a blank slide on the go, hit the B key to create a black slide or the W key to create a white slide. Any key will bring you back to the spot you left off