

## Creating Effective Slideshows

Throughout your college career, you will probably be asked to give oral presentations. Often, these presentations are accompanied by a slideshow. As with any visual aid, slideshows can vastly affect the overall success of a presentation. This resource aims to provide you some tips for creating effective, memorable slideshows that enhance—rather than detract from—your presentations. However, keep in mind that what makes a “good” presentation is often context-specific, and this resource simply provides general guidelines that apply in most cases. Always follow your instructor’s preferences.

A good rule of thumb for **delivery**, or oral presentation, is that you don’t want to give your audience anything “extra” to look at or think about. Anything “extra” is anything that is irrelevant to the purpose of your presentation, such as things that are off topic, pointless, or distracting. The same goes with slideshows. The phrase “less is more” applies to most slideshows; in other words, your slideshow should be a vehicle for assisting your oral delivery, not a crutch or replacement for it.

### Visual Appeal

A good slideshow starts with its physical layout. When creating your slides, keep in mind the four principles of visual design: proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast.

- **Proximity:** things that belong together should appear physically near each other. For example, images should appear next to the words that describe them.
- **Alignment:** things should line up neatly. For example, bullet points should all be flush against the same margin so that you could draw a vertical line straight through them.
- **Repetition:** things should be consistent. Use the same font size and type for all of your headings, use the same font size and type for all of your bullet points, etc. Make things predictable for your audience. Unpredictable things create distractions.
- **Contrast:** different things should be visually distinct from each other. For example, slide titles should be in an obviously different font size than bullet points. Additionally, the colors of your slides should contrast well so that the text is highly visible. White text on black background is good contrast; green text on yellow background is not.

Here are some other tips to keep in mind when creating your slides:

- Keep bullet points short. Avoid writing entire sentences as bullet points. Remember that your bullet points are meant to be starting points for you to elaborate upon orally. You want the audience paying most of their attention to you and your voice, not your slides.
- Avoid obnoxious, unnecessary visual effects such as transitions between slides, bullet points “flying in,” or fade in/out (unless your instructor asks for them). Again, these give the audience extra things to pay attention to.
- Make sure all of your texts and images are highly visible to ALL members of the audience, even those in the back of the room. If possible, visit the location of your presentation in advance so you can get an idea of how large to make everything.
- When using material from sources, remember to include citations, just as you would in an essay. Follow quoted or paraphrased material with a parenthetical citation or footnote, and include a bibliographic slide at the end.
- Be mindful about the visuals you include. Clip art and random pictures that do not add anything to your purpose are only creating a distraction for your audience.

### Organizing a Slideshow

Your instructor may have specific guidelines for how to organize your slideshow, but in general, most slideshows will follow a structure similar to this:

- Title slide: include the title of your presentation, your name, your class’s name, and any other relevant details.
- Outline slide: preview the main sections of your presentation.

- Body slides: the bulk of your presentation.
- “Any questions?” slide: most presentations conclude with a question/answer (Q/A) session where the audience can ask the presenter questions. It is a good idea to have a slide that signals you have entered this portion of the presentation.
- Bibliographic slide: include full-length bibliographic citations for all sources used within the presentation, either on the slideshow or in your oral delivery. Follow the documentation style requested by your instructor.

### Presenting with a Slideshow

When you present using a slideshow, you want the slideshow to complement your oral delivery. You do not want to over-rely on it or let it distract from your spoken words. Keep the following tips in mind:

- Avoid reading directly from your slides. Your audience can read them; they do not need you to read them. This also suggests that you do not know your material well enough to speak extemporaneously on it. This is another good reason to keep your bullet points short; it will prevent you from reading off the slides too much.
- Avoid spending too much or too little time on each slide. You might spend more time on some slides than others, but it can be distracting when a presenter lingers on the same slide for several minutes or, conversely, speeds through slides before the audience can read them. Practice your presentation numerous times to get a sense of your timing.
- If possible, practice with the technology in your presenting location ahead of time to minimize the potential for technical difficulties\*.

\*Note: Sometimes, technical difficulties are inevitable. If you cannot get your slideshow to work during the presentation, do not waste a lot of time trying to fix it. Have a backup plan. Ideally, you will know your material well enough that you can present on it without your slideshow. Consider making hard copies of your slideshow in advance to hand out to audience members or use yourself in case of a technical failure. Also, it’s a good idea to bring your slideshow in multiple forms, such as emailing it to yourself or instructor in advance, bringing it on a flash drive, and saving it as a Google Slides.

### Delivery and Slideshows

While this resource does not focus specifically on delivery, it is important to remember the components of effective delivery when presenting with a slideshow (for more on delivery, see our resource on “The Basics of Delivery”). Keep the following components of delivery in mind:

- Eye contact: do not look at your slideshow more than you look at your audience. You should just glance at it to remind yourself of your talking points.
- Gesturing: do not let your slideshow inhibit your ability to use your hands in expressive ways. Using a clicker to transition between slides is ideal, but if you do not have one, you may need to use the keyboard. If so, make your transition to the next slide as quick and smooth as possible. Avoid clicking too aggressively.
- Positioning: avoid standing in front of your slideshow or covering it with your gestures. Be especially mindful of this when presenting in a group.
- Movement: do not walk in front of your slideshow in the middle of discussing a slide. However, it can be effective to move to the other side of the slideshow as you transition to a new slide (but do this sparingly; too much movement is just as distracting as no movement at all).