

Avoiding PowerPoint pitfalls

by Bill Janke

Conversations on Writing (COW)

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Everyone who has viewed or delivered a PowerPoint presentation has an opinion of what makes a good presentation. One such person is an entrepreneur who advocates applying a 10/20/30 rule to PowerPoint presentations: "[The 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint](#)".

On the surface, it appears that applying the 10/20/30 rule eliminates bad presentations. However, the 10/20/30 rule greatly oversimplifies what works and doesn't work for great PowerPoint presentations. The best thing you can do as a presenter is to remember PowerPoint is only a tool to *assist* a presentation – it is **not** the presentation itself. The quantity of slides, or font size, or presentation length does not always make a difference between a good or bad presentation.

The audience members judge the merits of a presentation based on the ability of the speaker to communicate what they need to understand. An audience forgives a speaker for adding extra slides, going overtime, or adding extra words to the slides *if* they perceive the speaker is adding value to the presentation.

PowerPoint is a common tool used for creating dynamic presentations. If you are not careful, you can commit serious presentation mistakes that can disenchant your audience. Here are ten things you should avoid doing in a presentation:

- Turning your back to the audience.
- Assuming everyone is familiar with the terminology and interested in the subject.
- Using lots of text in a really small font and leaving out graphs, photos and visuals.
- Setting up the projector a few minutes prior to the presentation and messing with the controls.
- Depending on a live software demo that can fail to move quickly or a glitch appears. Prepared simulations are a fail-safe solution.
- Using a laser pointer to underscore the text as you read it word for word.
- Delaying questions until the end of the presentation. Individuals may forget the questions or not want to keep the others from leaving.
- Using a mouse tethered three feet from the laptop. Using a wireless mouse-clicker gives you freedom to move and interact with your audience.
- Zipping through the presentation because you have given it so many times.
- Leaving out examples or good stories that emphasize your points.

Creating and delivering successful PowerPoint presentations requires work and skill. The time you invest in both areas will pay huge rewards in the end. By avoiding some of the pitfalls listed in this posting you are on your way to winning the hearts and minds of any audience.

About the author

Bill Janke has extensive experience in writing for print and electronic media. His work has appeared in materials for training, documentation, marketing, advertising, and public relations. He works as a technical writer and instructional designer for WAUSAU Financial Systems, Inc. in Omaha, Nebraska. He also enjoys photography and sells his work at art fairs. You may contact Bill at billjanke@gmail.com.

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