

PowerPoint Best Practices

Communications Office

jlabinfo@jlab.org

When creating a PowerPoint presentation, there are a few general rules of thumb that should be kept in mind. For questions or assistance, contact the Jefferson Lab Communications Office at jlabinfo@jlab.org.

Keep it simple. PowerPoint uses slides with a horizontal or “landscape” orientation. The software was designed as a convenient way to display graphical information that would support the speaker and supplement the presentation. The slides themselves were never meant to be the “star of the show.”

Minimize the text, maximize the thoughts. People came to hear you and be moved or informed (or both) by you and your message. Don’t let your message and your ability to tell a story get derailed by slides that are unnecessarily complicated or busy. Slides should have plenty of white or negative space. The less clutter you have on your slide, the more powerful your visual message will become.

The 7 X 7 rule. No more than seven lines per slide and no more than seven words per line. Use concise text to present the key ideas and points. Instead of having the audience read through a list or block of text, give them time to think about and/or discuss the main ideas and points presented in each slide. The general rule is to use as few words or phrases as possible to emphasize or reinforce an idea. This will make it easier for the audience to read, comprehend, and remember.

Limit bullet points and text. Your presentation is for the benefit of the audience. Boring an audience with bullet point after bullet point is of little benefit to them. The slides are meant to support the narration of the speaker, not make the speaker superfluous. Consider elaborating, clarifying, broadening and amplifying what is displayed on the screen. Audiences are much better served receiving a detailed, written handout as a takeaway from the presentation, rather than a mere copy of your PowerPoint slides. If you have a detailed handout or publication for the audience to be passed out **after** your talk, you need not feel compelled to fill your PowerPoint slides with a great deal of text.

Consistency is key. Presentations should keep to a consistent theme. Jefferson Lab uses one PowerPoint template or theme for all presentations. Since the slides being created may be incorporated into a larger slide deck, do not insert theme variations into your slides. The template can be found here: https://www.jlab.org/div_dept/dir_off/public_affairs/logo/

Font Use. Fonts communicate subtle messages in and of themselves, which is why you should choose fonts deliberately. The Jefferson Lab PowerPoint template uses san-serif font (e.g. **Arial** and **Arial Bold**), because san-serif is recognized as the most visible and easiest to read font type for use in PowerPoint presentations. Serif fonts, on the other hand (e.g. Times New Roman or Garamond), are said to be easier to read at small point sizes, but tend to get lost in presentations due to the relatively low resolution of projectors. Use the same font set throughout your entire slide presentation, and use no more than two complementary fonts. Make sure the font size is large enough to be read from the back of the room.

Font Size. The Jefferson Lab PowerPoint template uses the following standardized sizes of Arial and Arial Bold:

COVER SLIDE	CONTENT SLIDE	CLOSING SLIDE
Presentation Title: Standard size: 30 pt. Reduced size: 28 pt.	Slide Title: Standard size: 24 pt. Reduced size: 20 pt.	Questions: Standard size: 30 pt. Reduced size: 28 pt.
Name/Title: 22 pt.	Slide Body: 22 pt. - 14 pt.	Name/Title: 22 pt.
Footer: 10 pt.	Footer: 12 pt.	Footer: 12 pt.

Use appropriate charts. Always ask yourself, “How much detail do I need?” Presenters are usually guilty of including too much data in their on-screen charts. There are several ways to display your data in graphic form; here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Pie Charts: Used to show percentages. Limit the slices to no more than eight, include percentages, and contrast the most important slice either with color or by exploding the slice.
- Vertical Bar Charts: Used to show changes in quantity over time. Best if you limit the bars to no more than eight.
- Horizontal Bar Charts: Used to compare quantities.
- Line Charts: Used to demonstrate trends.
- Tables: In general, tables are good for side-by-side comparisons of quantitative data; however, tables can lack impact on a visceral level. A table tends to display information in a less dramatic or emotional way.
- Scientific Data: Before including a figure, always consider whether it is appropriate for the audience. If so, don’t forget to include supporting information about the figure in the text.

Animations and Transitions. Use slide animations judiciously. It is the content of your presentation that you want your audience to focus on, not the special effects. The overuse of animation effects is distracting. Some animation in a presentation can be useful, but stick to the most subtle and professional (similar to what you might see on the evening TV news broadcast). Additionally, choose one slide transition for the whole presentation, and make the transitions consistent throughout.

Photos. Photos of people doing things help the audience connect with the presentation on a more emotional level. They can also help break up the monotony of images focused on machinery and infrastructure. Jefferson Lab has a large library of high-quality images available for use in presentations. Whether using your own image, or one from the library, never simply stretch a small, low-resolution photo to make it fit your layout – doing so will degrade the resolution even further. Make sure the slide’s text does not interfere with the photo. For consistency, all images should have the same border. For the Jefferson Lab PowerPoint template, a 2 pt. black line border is recommended.

Graphic Use. Use images and graphics wisely to gain attention, explain ideas, and show relationships. Avoid using PowerPoint Clip Art or other cartoonish line art. If it is included in the software, your audience has seen it a million times before. It may have been interesting in 1993, but today the inclusion of such clip art often undermines the professionalism of the presenter. There are exceptions, of course, and not all PowerPoint art is dreadful, but use thoughtfully.

Video or audio. Use video and audio when appropriate. Using video clips to show concrete examples promotes active cognitive processing, which is the natural way people learn. You can use video clips within PowerPoint without ever leaving the application. Using a video clip will not only illustrate your point better, it will also serve as a change of pace, thereby increasing the interest of your audience. You can use audio clips (such as interviews) as well. Avoid using cheesy sound effects that are included in PowerPoint (such as the sound of a horn or applause when transitioning slides). The use of superfluous sound effects attached to animations is a sure way to lose credibility with your audience.

Spend time in the slide sorter. By getting out of the Slide View and into the Slide Sorter view, you can see how the logical flow of your presentation is progressing. You will be able to capture more of the gestalt of your entire presentation from the point of view of your audience. This may help you decide to break up one slide into several slides so that your presentation has a more natural and logical flow or process. You will also be able to identify more extraneous pieces of visual data that can be moved to increase visual clarity and improve communication.

Don't forget the bookends. In using your PowerPoint presentation to highlight your main points, don't forget the power of repetition. Including an introductory slide with your main points highlighted as an outline, as well as a conclusion slide with your main points highlighted again, can be an effective way to drive home your message and remind your audience of any questions they may have had about your material for the Q&A.

Backup Slides. Some presentations will benefit from the inclusion of backup slides that contain more detailed information about your most important points or tangential questions about your material. Don't forget to follow these guidelines for these slides, as well.