

7 Dos and Don'ts for using PowerPoint slides at conferences

A companion guide to “Greener Events” to help conference presenters maximise the benefits of using PowerPoint.

The information you are presenting is important so you will want your audience to get the most out of it. PowerPoint slides can be a very useful aid in making conference presentations more effective whilst helping delegates to understand and remember the key points being made.

These 7 simple tips should help you avoid the pitfalls:-

Do maximise contrast between slide background and text, i.e. use dark coloured text when using a light background or light coloured text on a dark background (yellow text on a white background is simply bad practice - and will annoy your audience).

Don't use fonts with serifs (thin lines) like Times New Roman. Fonts without serifs, like Arial, are easier to read. Don't mix fonts within your presentation - a lack of consistency looks unprofessional. Use left justification - it is easier to read than centred, right or fully justified text (both edges). Words/paragraphs in capital letters, italics or underlined are harder to read.

Don't have too much (boring) text on each slide. 15 - 20 words is usually enough and will help avoid “death by PowerPoint”. Graphics help; of the information we take in, 55% is visual and less than 10% is from text.

Do avoid different effects. Text (or images) flying in from different parts of the screen, text arriving on screen one letter at a time, or animated graphics wastes time, looks gimmicky and insults the intelligence of your audience (!).

Don't use a laser pointer for highlighting elements of a slide - this can be hard to see from a distance. Simply describe the part of the slide you are referring to. You could add arrows beforehand to key parts of a graph that require explanation or highlighting.

Do remind delegates during your presentation that the slides can be downloaded from the event website (or emailed to them on request) to be viewed in detail later. This is especially important if you have used slides containing complicated graphs, or lots of text in a quote or extract from a key document, speech, regulation etc.

Don't overdo it! 10 - 15 slides with clear bullet points, effective illustrations/graphics* and a final summary slide for a 20 - 25 minute presentation are better than 20+ slides if you have to skip through them. * **Pictures speak louder than words** but when using graphs, photographs etc remember to respect copyright by quoting source - and obtain permission where necessary.

Greener Events on www.oursouthwest.com is a widely used national guide for reducing the environmental impacts of conferences and seminars.

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