Microsoft PowerPoint: Best Practices

In this Learning Unit, you're learning the mechanics of how to create a PowerPoint presentation. But knowing how to add slides, bullet points, and effects to your presentation isn't enough. It's important that you also understand how to use these features in a way that makes your presentation look *professional*. For example, slides that are hard to read, have too much information, or include distracting elements will look sloppy and can reflect poorly on you as a professional. That's why we're taking the time to give you some guidelines to help you make the best impression possible. Be sure to follow these guidelines on your graded assignments, too!

1. **Use bullet points not paragraphs:** Your presentation should contain key points reinforcing the ideas you will talk about when you present. Remember that *you* are the star and the slides are the supporting cast – not the other way around. So, don't type long sentences and paragraphs. Instead, use bullet points to list the headings for major ideas. You will develop these ideas by what you actually say. Under no circumstances, should you stand and simply read your slides to the audience. The bullet points serve to help your audience follow your train of thought and stay focused on the main topic you are discussing at that moment.

2. **Follow the 6 x 6 rule:** To avoid too much information on one slide, use this as your guide: Only one thought per line with no more than six bullet points per slide and no more than six words per bullet point/line.

3. **Have one main idea per slide:** Each slide should cover only one main idea or theme.

4. **Consistency and variety:** Maintain a similar look for all titles and use the same theme and background color for each slide. For variety, use different slide layouts, depending upon the type of content you're using on a particular slide.

5. **Phrases vs. sentences:** Short, bulleted phrases, rather than full sentences, are usually best. However, the most important thing is to be consistent and concise. Don't mix the two on a single slide.

6. **Use a 32-point or larger font size (within reason) for bullet points:** We're used to using an 11 or 12-point font size in Word documents, but in PowerPoint presentations, we need to use larger fonts so that everyone in the room is able to read the information. The opposite extreme (using too large of a font) can also make your presentation look unprofessional. Also, you won't be able to fit your ideas on the slide. Remember the 6 x 6 rule for the maximum amount of content you should have on a slide.

7. **Use fonts that are clear and easy to read:** Use sans-serif fonts, such as Arial, Calibri, or Tahoma, rather than serif fonts, like Times New Roman or Georgia, as the latter are preferred for printed documents, but are more difficult to read on computer screens. Avoid script or hard to read fonts, such as *Mistral* and Old English, as well as overused, unprofessional fonts, like Comic Sans. Also, don't use ALL CAPS, as this is more difficult to read and is commonly interpreted as yelling at your audience.

8. **Make sure capitalization and punctuation are consistent:** If you're going to put a period at the end of a bulleted item, be sure to put one on each of them. Keep in mind that if you are using phrases rather than complete sentences, you don't need to use periods.

9. **Don't overdo animations or transitions:** These features add movement and interest to your presentation. However, keep in mind that a little bit goes a long way. Use just enough to add interest, but stop when they start to distract from the main point.

10. **Use consistent effects:** Avoid changing the animation effect for each bullet point or the transition effect for each slide, as this creates confusion and looks unprofessional. Using the same effect for bullet points throughout a slide (or even a presentation) adds interest without being distracting. The same is true for transitions from slide to slide.

11. **Keep it simple:** Just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you should. For example, a simple effect that moves smoothly, like "Float Down" for bulleted sub-points or "Rise Up" for main points, is nearly always superior to wild effects, like "Pinwheel" or "Basic Swivel," which distract and often look choppy when displayed by the average computer during an actual presentation. Unnecessary audio/video is also unprofessional.

12. **Color counts:** Think about the color scheme you use. Yellow text on a white background is *never* a good idea. Ensure the background and text colors contrast well with one another (light on dark or dark on light). Otherwise, the text will be hard to read. Avoid bright, vivid colors that make your audience feel like their retinas are being burned out. Clashing colors should be avoided. Also, avoid using red and green, which make it difficult for those with red-green color blindness to see your presentation.

13. **Images and photos:** Use moderately-sized, distinct images. You want your audience to be able to tell what the picture is, but not crash the computer because the file is so large.

14. **Cite your sources:** If you use published information, either from the Internet or other sources, you must include a reference to the source in your presentation to avoid plagiarism. You can do this either as a caption at the bottom of each slide or on a separate slide at the end of the show. Just remember to clearly give credit where credit is due!

15. **Synergy:** Make sure all elements of your presentation flow together smoothly and serve a clear purpose, including your bullet points, titles, theme, effects, transitions, and images.

16. **Proofread and view your presentation:** Use the Spell Check feature and also take the time to double check your spelling and grammar. Spell Check doesn't catch everything. Also, view your presentation, before submitting it, to ensure everything works properly. If one of your effects is off that can make your bullet points appear out of order. Take your time and pay attention to details. If possible, view it on the computer you will use when you present, just to make sure everything will work as expected.

    Now, let's see you put these principles into practice on your assignments!

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