

Pros and Cons of Digital Slide Presentations

Brief: Before preparing a digital slide presentation, understand the advantages and disadvantages of using this type of presentation aid.

Learning Objective: Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using digital slide presentations.

Key Terms:

- PowerPoint: A presentation graphics software package from Microsoft.

Should You Use a Digital Slide Presentation?

Today, public speeches often include digital slide presentations. Digital slide presentations are so popular that audiences have come to expect them. In fact, the use of the most popular digital slide software, PowerPoint, is so common that your instructor might include its use as a requirement for your speech assignments.



However, before you dive into preparing a PowerPoint presentation, it's a good idea to assess how using this type of presentation aid might positively—and negatively—affect your speech.

The Advantages of PowerPoint

Design

Designing slides that incorporate graphics and/or text with PowerPoint is quick and easy. The basic features are simple to master; you don't need to be an expert to use PowerPoint. PowerPoint makes it easy to create a colorful, attractive design by simply using the standard templates and themes.

In addition, PowerPoint presentations are much easier to modify than many other visual aids, such as non-digital charts and posters. As you develop your presentation, you can easily edit and reorder the slides.

Delivery

PowerPoint slides with bulleted summaries can help simplify complicated messages for the audience, making your speech easier to follow. Text-based slides can also serve as helpful notes for you the speaker, keeping you on track and prompting you what to say next.

You can advance the slides in the presentation one after another with a simple key stroke. This ease-of-use allows you to maintain eye contact with your audience as speak. If the available technology allows it, PowerPoint slides can be easily projected to accommodate audiences of varying sizes, from the very small to the very large.

PowerPoint slides eliminate the need for handouts, saving paper and circumventing the distraction that handouts often generate.

The Disadvantages of PowerPoint

Design

PowerPoint's design features are easy to use, but that actually encourages some public speakers to go overboard, cramming too much text and/or too many graphics onto their slides. Too much content, distracting animations, and alarming sound effects can drown out your good ideas!

Conversely, while PowerPoint's standard templates and themes are useful, displaying a succession of uniform, cookie-cutter slides can bore your audience.

Delivery

Because PowerPoint requires technology, you're always at the mercy of faulty equipment or technological issues (such as the temporary loss of internet access). Always have a back-up plan.

Alternative Digital Slide Programs

Google Slides is a free presentation program that is very similar to PowerPoint. Google Slide can be exported to PowerPoint format, which is helpful if you need to create a slide presentation in PowerPoint format but don't have access to the Microsoft Office applications.

Prezi is a free application that allows you to create visual presentations by zooming in, out, and around your visual workspace. Instead of individual slides, these ZUI's (zoom user interfaces) are based on one infinite canvas on which all content is presented. This allows for non-linear presentations, richer detail of content, and a better overview of complex visual messages.

From Concept to Action

If you're planning to develop a PowerPoint slide presentation to support your speech, you've got work to do before you even open your first presentation file. Begin by reviewing your speech outline. How many slides will you include? And what information will they cover? It's likely that you only have three or four main points and two to three sub-points for every one of those main points. If you plan on including one slide for every main point and one slide for every sub-point, you'll have somewhere between 6 to 12 slides—a good range to aim for. Remember, your goal is to develop and support your main and sub points. If some points require several slides to fully explain, that's okay. But, in general, try to keep it simple.

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