Using PowerPoint or Prezi Effectively

PowerPoint and Prezi presentations are meant to serve as visual aids that can enhance audience engagement and their understanding of your speech. These 10 tips will set you on the path to presentation success.

Only use bullet points

You should not have full sentences on a PowerPoint or Prezi because they distract from your speech and you want your audience to listen, not read. Use short fragments or keywords to keep your presentation organized.

Have a backbone slide

Have a slide that demonstrates the direction your presentation will have by outlining the major elements of your speech.

Use animations VERY carefully

It may look nice, but it can also be a distraction. Only use them if they play an essential role in your presentation (such as concealing a bullet point for a later point in the presentation).

Make sure the text is visible

Your text should be large enough to be visible from the back of the room for someone with average eye sight. Sometimes, the text may get lost in the background of the slide (especially if the background includes a picture) or the text color is too close to the background color. Be sure to avoid red/green and blue/yellow color schemes as people with colorblindness may not be able to differentiate the text from the background.

Keep the focus where you want it

If you are going to incorporate a graph or a quote into your presentation, be sure to have a slide with only the graph or quote, allowing you to speak about it to your audience and to use it as a reference. If you use an image, you should generally limit yourself to one image per slide.

Cite your sources

For many of your presentations, you will be using outside sources. If so, be sure to cite the in the proper format on the last slide or throughout your presentation. For pictures, include an indication of the source next to the image. Be sure the pictures you chose are freely available for use. See creativecommons.org for great searching tools.

Show a slide when it's relevant

Use black screen or a blank slide to hide slides you're not ready to show the audience. If you are going to speak for any length of time without a relevant slide, add a slide to your presentation that is simply black. You can keep your audience's focus on you rather than on the slides.

Provide a warning when necessary

If you are using graphic images that may seem unsettling to members of your audience, be sure to let them know before revealing the image(s).

Have a backup

Sometimes you lose wifi access and sometimes your USB drive suddenly stops working. Be prepared by being able to access the presentation in multiple ways (e.g., have a copy in your email and on your laptop that you bring with you)

Do not depend on the PowerPoint or Prezi

Technical difficulties occur all the time, so you may have to deliver a presentation without a PowerPoint. Also, you should not have to read off the PowerPoint or Prezi. Remember: you are the expert on the subject!