Using PowerPoint

This guide introduces some general principles to help you make effective use of PowerPoint to support your presentations. Other useful guides from Student Learning Development: *Planning an effective presentation*, *Delivering an effective presentation, Using visual aids.*

Introduction

This study guide focuses on how you can utilise PowerPoint to effectively support your presentations. It does not cover the technical aspects of using the software. If you have experience of using other Microsoft Office programs such as Word, you may find PowerPoint easy to use. For information on the technical aspects of using the software, see details on our website at: www.le.ac.uk/slc/resources/it/powerpoint

What is PowerPoint?

PowerPoint is a computer program that allows you to create and show slides to support a presentation. You can combine text, graphics and multi-media content to create professional presentations. As a presentation tool PowerPoint can be used to:

- organise and structure your presentation;
- create a professional and consistent format;
- provide an illustrative backdrop for the content of your presentation;
- animate your slides to give them greater visual impact.

PowerPoint has become enormously popular and you are likely to have seen it used by your lecturers and fellow students or in a presentation outside of the University. Learning to present with PowerPoint will increase your employability as it is the world's most popular presentational software. Used well, PowerPoint can improve the clarity of your presentations and help you to illustrate your message and engage your audience. The strategies contained in this study guide will help you to use PowerPoint effectively in any type of presentation.

Before you begin

Not all presentations require support from PowerPoint so you should consider whether it is appropriate for your presentation. This decision will need to take into account the venue of your presentation, the availability of equipment, the time available and the expectations of the audience. Whether you choose to use PowerPoint or not, your presentation will need to be carefully planned and structured in order to achieve your objectives. See Student Learning Development's *Planning an effective presentation* study guide for advice on planning the content and structure of your presentation.

Step 1: Designing PowerPoint slides

There are a number of features to consider when designing effective PowerPoint slides. The guidelines given below will ensure you create slides that will be easy for your audience to read and understand.

Using colour

- Be consistent. Ensure that all of your slides have the same or similar background images and colour schemes. PowerPoint's design templates can be used for this.
- Prepare slides that use a bold colour contrast, e.g. black or deep blue text on a cream background (black and white can be too glaring for the audience).
- Avoid using red or green for text or highlighting as it can be difficult to read.

Using text

- Avoid using too much text. A useful guideline is the six-by-six rule (slides should have no more than six bullet points and each bullet point should be no more than six words long).
- Create bullet points which are clear summaries of key points. It is not necessary for bullet points to be complete sentences.
- Don't mix up your fonts and font sizes. Too many variations in font size and type can be visually confusing.
- Ensure that your text is at least 24pt otherwise it may be difficult to read on screen.
- Choose left align for all text to make it easier to read.
- Avoid multiple columns of text on a single slide as they can be difficult to follow on screen.
- Use **bold** for a clear and simple form of emphasis and headings rather than UPPER CASE, *italics* or <u>underlining</u>.
- Set clear hierarchies for type size to help your audience distinguish between headings, main text and other types of text.

Step 2: Making the most of graphics and animations

Using graphics

Many people find it easier to understand and remember concepts if images are used in addition to text. PowerPoint allows you to easily include graphics in your presentations, but think about the issues listed below.

- Try not to use Clip Art (files of images that come free with software packages) that you have seen in lots of other people's presentations: familiar images have less impact on an audience.
- Choose an appropriate quality for scanned images. Scan at 150 dpi for images where accurate colour reproduction is not important and at 300 dpi for higher quality images.
- Beware of images that you take from the internet. They are generally of a very low quality and are likely to pixelate (lose their smoothness) when you project them onto a large screen.
- Make sure graphics are relevant to your text and not just decorative.
- Consider using graphics to replace text where you think an image would be easier to understand.
- Ensure that the images that you use are simple and clear enough to be easily read at a distance. A small, overly complex and poor quality image will only frustrate your audience.

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Using animations and transitions

Animating elements of slides and using Slide Transition are two of the most powerful features that PowerPoint offers. However, it is very easy to overdo your use of these features and create a presentation where the animation distracts your audience from the content of your presentation.

- Use animations to show progression. Animation is very effective at revealing a process one stage at a time.
- Be conservative. Make sure that any animation you use serves a clear purpose (e.g. to introduce a new piece of information at an appropriate point). If you cannot think of a reason to animate your slide – **don't do it!**

- Be consistent. Try to ensure that you use similar types of animation for similar functions. For example, if your text always drives in from the left it will be distracting if it suddenly appears from another direction or uses another animation technique.

Step 3: Using PowerPoint to help structure your presentation

Once you have designed your slides you should review your planning and think about whether you need to refine the structure of your presentation. PowerPoint offers a number of features that can help you. All views can be selected from the 'View' menu.

- Use the 'Outline' tab in **Normal View** to display the textual content of your presentation. This can help you to focus on and review the structure of your content rather than the visual impact of your presentation.
- Use the 'Notes' pane in **Normal View** to create a script or prompts which you can use when you are delivering the presentation.
- Use the **Slide Sorter View** to gain an overview of the visual impact of your presentation. This is also a useful view for rearranging the order of your slides or deleting multiple slides.

Use these PowerPoint tools to give you an overview of your presentation so that you can create a clear focus and a logical structure for your talk. Avoid using too many slides in your presentation, as this will be distracting for your audience. In general you should use about one slide every two minutes, so a ten-minute presentation should have around five slides.

Step 4: Preparing to Present

Find out as much as you can about your audience and the environment in which you are going to be presenting before you present. Ask yourself the following questions:

- how large is the room that I am going to be presenting in? Will people be able to see my slides from the back?
- Do any of my audience have any special requirements (visually or hearing impaired, dyslexic, etc.)? Is there anything that I can do to ensure that they can access the presentation?
- Have I rehearsed my presentation to check that all of my slides work in the way they are supposed to?
- Does my presentation fit into the time that I have been allotted? Choosing **Rehearse Timings** from the **Slide Show** menu can help you to judge how much time you are spending on each aspect of your presentation (but choose 'No' when asked 'Do you want to keep the new slide timings to use when you view the slide show?').
- Have I checked that the necessary equipment (laptop, data projector, speakers for sound) has been booked for my presentation?
- Do I have an alternative plan in case the technology fails? This may be a second copy of the slides on acetates, a set of handouts or a second disk format (such as USB drive).

Step 5: Presenting with PowerPoint

An effective presenter uses PowerPoint to illustrate and emphasise points that are made in the presentation. An audience that is trying to copy down detailed information from slides will not be able to give you their full attention. Consider using handouts for your audience so they are free to concentrate on listening and understanding. Some points to consider when presenting with slides are given below.

- Treat each slide as a mini-presentation where you make a point to introduce the idea, give the detail and then conclude that slide with an explanation of how the point fits in with the rest of your presentation.
- Direct your audience's attention to the slides when they contain information that is key to getting your message across.

- Give your audience time to assimilate material on your slides. If, for example, a slide contains a quotation or a diagram - introduce the slide, give them time to read and understand it and then explain its relevance.
- Don't leave your screen saver on, as this will distract your audience.
- Don't move your pointer on the screen unless you are using it to demonstrate something as this will distract your audience.
- Don't just read out the text on the slides, they should be a summary or a supplement to the content of your spoken presentation.

Useful keyboard shortcuts

Keyboard shortcuts can be very useful when you are presenting and can help to ensure that your presentation runs seamlessly. Many more shortcuts can be found using the F1 key while running the slide show.

Key	Function
Space, N, →, ↓ Enter or Page Down	Advance to the next slide
Backspace, P, ←, ↑ or Page Up	Return to the previous slide
Number followed by Enter	Go to that slide
B	Blacks/Unblacks the screen
Esc	Ends slide show
F5	Starts slide show

Summary

PowerPoint is widely used across the world so it is worthwhile learning to use it. It can be a powerful tool in creating clear, well structured presentations that have a strong visual impact. However, over-use or misuse can detract from your presentation. Following the guidelines in this study guide will ensure that you use PowerPoint effectively to support your presentation and engage your audience.