

## ON VISUAL AIDS:

### A Highly Opinionated Set of Guidelines

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1. Learn to use Power Point. Work with it, not against it. Use its templates, accepting its defaults regarding point size, margins, and placement. It will reward your allegiance.<sup>1</sup>
2. Use Power Point's bells and whistle in moderation. (For example, don't make audience motion sick!)
3. Strive for simplicity and visibility in all diagrams and text slides: Less is more! Eliminate any words, lines, and diagrams that do not add essential information to the slide.
4. Choose colors with care.
  - a. Seek contrast (e.g., white on blue; black on white).
  - b. Remember that ~10% of individuals are color blind and cannot distinguish certain colors from each other (e.g., red from green or blue from yellow).
  - c. Set the Master Slide template to a color scheme that works (e.g., #8h below). If you stick with this you will be able to mix and match slides from your different presentations with ease.
5. Diagrams are the best way to show most data in a presentation.
  - a. Figures are almost always better than are tables for displaying data quickly.
  - b. Use color,
    - Particularly if helpful as key (i.e., bars of same color are related)
    - Use the same color coding of variables throughout your talk (e.g., white as control condition, and bright green as experimental condition).
  - c. Use the space, making figures as large as possible.
  - d. Do not use more than 2 dimensions for 2 variables; 3-D is distracting and/or confusing.
  - e. Avoid several figures on single slide unless comparisons are critical.
  - f. Keep lines (>2 pt) and letters (>18 pt) visible.
  - g. Avoid backgrounds other than a solid color (e.g., fading, stripes, or photos). They are usually distracting and/or tedious. Simple dark blue works very well.
6. Text slides can be helpful – if used well.
  - a. Text slides used *selectively* can be very helpful as summaries. If your or your audience has language difficulties, text slides can convey your main points. However, if *overused*, text slides are tiring, at best.

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<sup>1</sup>We agree with the vast majority of PowerPoint's default settings. However, we strongly recommend you turn off the function that resizes type to fit the placeholder. To disable that feature, select Tools > Autocorrect > AutoFormat as you type. Then uncheck "AutoFit title text to placeholder" & "AutoFit body text to placeholder."

- b. Use telegraphic style (i.e., not full sentences), providing no more than 7 bulleted points per slide, each point on a single line.
  - c. Use a type size of 24-44 pt.
  - d. Generally use same font throughout—*mixing* FONTS is **distracting at best**.
  - e. Sans serif fonts (e.g., Arial) are easier to read and more attractive than fonts with serifs (e.g., Times New Roman).
  - f. Avoid too much **bold** or *italics* or WORDS IN CAPITAL LETTERS.
  - g. Ensure color contrast between letters and background; our preference is blue background, yellow title, white text.
7. “Builds” can be very useful for diagrams or text slides.
- a. Builds = sequential “building” of a slide by adding more material with each slide.
  - b. Can help focus audience attention on the point being presented.
  - c. Text builds can be made even more effective if you:
    - darken previous text as new material is added.
    - use custom animation (e.g., “wipe” or “appear”; but see #8b).
8. Use custom animation and transitions wisely.
- a. Animation in diagram can be used to focus attention, for example:
    - selectively adding lines or bars.
    - selectively adding arrow or circling portions of a figure.
  - b. English text is read from left to right; “wiping” text should mimic this.
  - c. Wiping from right to left or bottom to top, or “flying in” text is generally distracting.
  - d. Some fancy transitions between slides can be fun, but keep them limited.
9. Video clips can be quite effective.
- a. They must be on same computer as rest of presentation.
  - b. Make sure in advance they work.
10. Use different computers and projectors with care.
- a. Transferring material via flash drive with care can save time.
  - b. But it also can cause problems.
    - Be sure *everything* is transferred (e.g., video clips).
    - Be sure everything works (e.g., animations, videos).
    - If transferring, best to have your own computer as back up.
  - c. Special problems may be encountered with Mac to PC transfers.
11. Practice – with feedback – in making and using slides, it will pay off!