PS. Note token use of ready-made slide colour scheme; awkward placement of picture
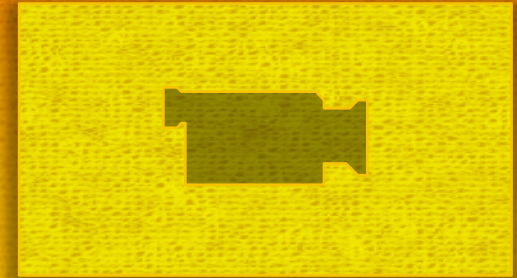
Being brilliant (or not) in academic presentations

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What are your goals?

- What impression of you do you want people to have after your presentation? Boring? Unrehearsed? Ill-prepared? Patronising? Disrespectful? Lazy? Confused? Technogically incompetent? All of the above?

- What memories should your audience have of your research? None? Annoyed? Useless pile of crap? Nothing new?

- What will be different about your slides? Smallest font ever? Most bullets ever? Most pointless clipart ever? Most ridiculous animations ever? Most slides in a 10 minute presentation ever? Worst combination of background/font colours ever? Most words on a single slide ever?

- If this is what you're looking for: go ahead, do what you've seen heaps of other students and academics do. Go on. Dare you!

Time is of the essence

- This is a short presentation slot, and I've a lot to say, so I'll begin by rather pointlessly telling you what I'm about to say. This avoids the chances of me actually having to say anything new, and assumes my audience have memory spans of a goldfish

- The first part of my presentation is telling you about the rest of my presentation

- The next part of my presentation comes after the first part

- The next part comes after the part that comes after the first part.

- The next part follows the same, predictable, boring pattern that you've come to expect from terrible presentations

- The next part is really important and where all the value-add lies, but don't worry because my time will be up before I get to that part

- The part after that is for discussion, but I'm more important than you so that's not going to happen. I'll still be waffling on about the second part (probably background or lit review)

More is more

- The most important thing is not to show that you're clever, critical, efficient, effective, sensible, able to make judgements about relevance etc.

- No! You need to show, above all else, that you've been busy. You work sooo hard. Way harder than everyone else.

- So more! More slides! More words! More bullets!

- 10 minute presentation? Anything less than 20 slides and you'll be laughed out of the room. 15 minutes? I'd say go for 50. 20 minutes? Land of luxury – 80 as a bare minimum. Think how many you need, double it, and that's half what the idiot (but hardworking) presenters before and after you will be using.

- You don't want to look like a workshy freeloader now do you?

Hey! I'm not an artist

- I'm studying (or paid) to read, write, and think. Not to be creative. Or even if I'm a creative type, that doesn't apply to computer software.

- Visually appealing slides are mistrusted: people think you're trying to slip rubbish past them and seduce them with pretty pictures.

- No, much better are boring slides. Preferably no colour. Black and white is more scholarly and serious.

- Despite the myriad options available, it's also generally preferable to use the default bullet list setting. Bullets are really meaningful and everyone loves them. Can't get enough bullets. And DEFINITELY no-one else will be using bullets, so it will help me stand out.

- Bullet

- Bullet

- Yay! Bullets!

I know this is bad practice but I'll do it anyway

- Too much text on your slide?

- Unreadable graphs?

- Lost control of the formatting?

- Slide out of order?

- No worries! That sort of mistake is great for stopping your audience falling into an even deeper slumber.

- Just say "I know you can't read what's on the slide" so the audience realise you're not the idiot you think they are. Maybe they'll just think you're lazy, ill-prepared, or don't care about their experience

Assume illiteracy

- You're presenting to a group of academics, or worse, students! They're a bit of a mixed bunch, so it's best to avoid assumptions about their prior knowledge and skills.

- Most important, don't assume they can read!

- No, instead, stand and read out, word for word, what's on the slide.

- That way you don't have to stop speaking at all during the entire presentation, and your voice can continue to annoy the audience incessantly.

In conclusion

- NBs

- 30WPS

- 3SF10MM

- NBs

- PMP

- DROV

- SIG

Well?

"The use of the PowerPoint presentation has been a disaster.... It should be ditched."

John Sweller
University of NSW