



## Using Slides in Presentations

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The following comments are based upon my experiences as a university professor and statistical consultant. I have given probably a couple of hundred talks and observed thousands and have made most, if not all, of the mistakes that I will comment on.

Consider some of the following comments as guidelines; others should only be violated under penalty of having to substitute teach in a second grade class room the day before summer break. Perhaps I remember some aspects of bad talks better than the really outstanding ones because they really grate on me or maybe it is because I have heard so many more bad talks. However, there are a relatively small number of really bad practices, that when fixed can help produce a good presentation and occasionally, an outstanding one.

So here are some concerns and suggestions on the use of slides in presentations.

- The presenter needs to ask the question, “*Does a slide, add significantly to the presentation?*” If not, delete it should be deleted. Slides often are overused. Not every talk needs slides.
- Slide *content needs to be keyed to your audience*. Is your audience homogeneous, heterogeneous, general, people in your discipline, recovering from a long lunch, etc?
- There is no prize, at least none that I have discovered, for having the most slides in a 20 minute talk. *Most presentations have too many slides*. There are guidelines, such as one slide per minute, but this can vary as a function of the complexity of information on the slide.
  - Think about numbering your slides in descending order. That way when someone walks into your 20 minute talk and sees that you are starting on slide 120 she or he can head for the nearest pub.
- Many slides contain *too much information* making them unreadable. This may be because there is too much text or too many graphs or too much information on a graph. If you insist on doing this, consider a one slide talk where the slide is left up for 20 minutes.
  - Presenters who are young and just out of college sometimes feel the necessity to present everything they have learned in 20 minutes. For those of you in this category, I wish you a long and successful career with lots of opportunities to show your contributions in small segments.

- I still hear presenters say, “I know you cannot read this but...” Ugh!
- *Graphs* often are too complicated; axes are unlabeled or unreadable. The following web reference to data visualization by Michael Friendly is the best that I have seen on the good, bad and ugly of graphics.
  - Best and worst graphics: <http://www.datavis.ca/gallery/>
  - Pie charts are worthless. Don't turn a one dimensional graph into a two dimensional one.
- Look carefully at your *color scheme*; some do not work. For example, anyone using dark red letters on a black back ground should have to write a thousand times, “I will never do this again.”
- *Animation*, used judiciously, can be helpful. Often it is not. Seeing a duck waddle across the bottom of a screen can be funny, but unless it is an integral part of your talk, is distracting.
- *Don't read slides* – wing it. If your audience cannot read you have big problems. You might, when speaking to those who are not fluent in English, consider substituting graphs for words.
- Have *someone look at your slides* before you go on prime time.
- When possible, *view your slides* in the same size room as your presentation.
- Think about making *two sets of slides*; one for your presentation; a second that can contain more information and more detailed graphics that may not be suitable in your presentation. Hand the latter out but not until the end of your talk.