**University of Vermont Graduate Writing Center**
**Designing PowerPoint Presentations**

To create a PowerPoint that enhances rather than distracts from your verbal presentation, try these tips:

**Layout**
For proper display, make slides landscape in orientation.

**Appearance**
Text heavy slides and bulleted lists hurt audience comprehension. Here's what can help:

- Reinforce your argument with visual evidence such as diagrams, figures, tables, or images. Make sure images are functional, not decorative or distracting.
    - Use as many of your own images and figures as possible.
    - If you use images and figures from others, make sure to cite them properly. (Learn how by visiting https://colinpurrington.com/tips/photo-creds.)
- Simplify your slide design. Only include essential information while verbally delivering the details.

**Font and Text**
- Use sans serif fonts such as Arial or Calibri as these are easier to read on a projected screen.
- Use fonts no smaller than 24 pt on any given slide.
- Use the "6x6" rule for bullet points—one thought per line, a maximum of 6 words per line and no more than 6 bullets/lines per slide.

**Headings/Titles**
- Just like other writing, PowerPoint presentations should convey a "*story*." In the sciences, for example, you might be telling the story of a set of experiments at a national conference, or you might be telling the story of your research-in-progress to your thesis committee members. Make sure you are clear about the purpose—*the story*—of your presentation and your audience's relationship to it. Undergraduates in Intro Biology may need you to include definitions of DNA, RNA, etc. while a thesis committee probably will not!
- Use *informative* headings instead of generic headings like "Introduction" or "Methods," and clearly state the slide's main idea in a complete sentence. For example, "The implementation method shows promise for reducing overall speed" is a much more informative, compelling, and storytelling title than "Results."

Check out these helpful online resources with more tips and do's and don'ts:

https://colinpurrington.com/tips/science-talks
https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/writing-a-powerpoint-presentation
https://miamioh.edu/hcwe/handouts/powerpoint-presentations/index.html

See the next page for examples from the Carnegie Mellon University Global Communication Center of how to re-design slides with informative headings and meaningful graphics.

**Slide Design: Before and After**

Text-heavy slide. Hard to follow and hard to figure out what matters

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Result

- The average before was 7
- The average after was 5
- The standard deviation before was 2.5
- The standard deviation after was 2

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The implementation method shows promise for reducing the overall speed

| Implementation | Before | After |
|---|---|---|
| Average Speed | 7 mph | 5 mph |
| Standard Deviation | 2.5 mph | 2 mph |

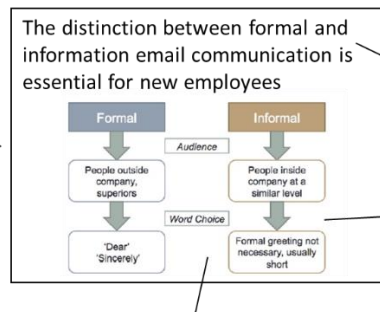Informative heading: Message is distilled into a sentence

Visual display (summary table) is easy to follow and highlights important results

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Bulleted lists like this are designed to help the speaker, not the audience

Formal vs. Informal Email
- Formal
  - Audience
    - People outside company
    - Superiors
  - Word Choice
    - i.e. "Dear", "Sincerely"
- Informal
  - Audience
    - People inside company at similar level
  - Word Choice
    - Formal greeting not necessary
    - Short

Text-heavy slide. Think about delivering details verbally

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The distinction between formal and information email communication is essential for new employees



Informative heading: Slide heading contains a message, not single topic

Visual display (flowchart) shows conceptual relationships between ideas

In addition to transforming bulleted talking points into a flowchart, bulleted lists can be 'built' on the slide. Have each talking point appear as you verbally discuss it, before you cue the next point to appear