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Oh, no, no, not another boring Powerpoint presentation! My eyes, my eyes!!! ... How much does it suck to be in the audience for another presentation, boring and lifeless? Worse, how much is it like to be the one who gives it? The truth is, bad PowerPoint happens to good people, and often the person giving the presentation is just like poor sods listening to her or him. Here are ten tips to help you add some zing! For your next presentation. They are, of course, far from comprehensive, but they are a start. Don't share your tips in your comments. 1. Write a script. A little planning goes a long way. Most presentations are written in PowerPoint (or in another presentation package) without any kind of rhyme or reason. It's Bass Accords. Because your slide thing is to illustrate and expand what you're going to say to your audience. You need to know what you're going to say and then figure out how to imagine it. Unless you're an expert in pagers, be sure to write or at least list your presentation before trying to assemble slides. Make sure your script follows good storytelling conventions: give it a beginning, a middle, and an end; There's a clear arc building towards some kind of record. Get your audience to appreciate each slide, but you'll be eager to find out what's next, and when possible, always leave them wanting more. 2. One thing at a time, please. At any given moment, what should be on the screen is what you're talking about. Our audience will read almost immediately every slide as soon as it is displayed. If you have the next four points you plan to do up there, they'll be three steps ahead of you, waiting for you to catch up instead of listening with interest to the point you're making. Plan your presentation so that one new coda is displayed at any given moment. Bullet points can be discovered one at a time when you reach them. You can put charts on the next slide to refer to when you reach the data that the chart displays. Your job as a presenter is to control the flow of information so that you and your audience stay in sync. 3. No paragraphs. When most presentations fail it is that their authors, convinced they are producing some kind of stand-alone document, put everything they want to say on their slides, in large, ancient blocks of text. Congrats. You just killed a room full of people. Cause of death: terminal boredom poisoning. Your slides are the illustrations for your presentation, not the presentation itself. They need to specify underscore and reinforce what you say when you give your presentation — save the text paragraphs for your script. PowerPoint and other presentation software include functions for displaying notes on the presenter's screen that are not sent to the projector, or to use notes, a separate word processor document, or your memory. Just don't put it on the screen — and for God's sake, if you do for some reason put it on the screen, no with your back to the audience and read it from the screen! PowerPoint and other presentation packages offer all sorts of ways to add visual flash to your slides: fade, swipe, flashing text, and other annoyances are too easy to add with just a few mouse clicks. Avoid the temptation to dress your pages with retarded effects and focus instead on simple design basics: Use a sans serif font for body text. Sans serifs like Arial, Helvetica, or Calibri tend to be the easiest to read on screens. Use decorative fonts only for slide titles, and then only if they are easy to read. Decorative fonts — calligraphy, German black face, futuristic, psychotic handwriting, flowers, Art Nouveau, etc. — are difficult to read and should only be saved for large headlines at the top of the page. What's more, stick to a classic font like Georgia or Scarville. Insert dark text against a light background. Again, it's easiest to read. If you need to use a dark background—for example, if your company uses a standard pattern with a dark background—make sure your text is fairly light (white, cream, light gray, or pastel) and maybe bump the font size two or three boxes. Align text left or right. Condensed text is harder to read and looks amateurish. Arranges all your text into a right or left baseline - it will look better and be easier to track. Avoid the mess. Title, some bullet points, maybe a picture — anything more than that and you risk losing your audience as they sort it all out. 5. Use images sparingly there are two schools of thought about images in presentations. Some nations add visual interest and mixed viewers; Others say pictures are an unnecessary distraction. Both arguments have a certain value, so in this case the best option is to split the difference: use images only when they add important information or make an abstract point more concrete. Speaking of which, don't use PowerPoint's built-in clip collection. Everything from Office 2003 and earlier has been seen by everyone in your audience a thousand times - they've become tired, detaching clichés, and I hope I don't have to tell you to avoid tired, useful clichés in your presentations. Office 2007 and non-Office programs include clip art that isn't that familiar (though will be, and soon) but by now, the whole idea of Clip Art is already running its course - it just doesn't feel fresh and new any longer. Remember, the slides on the screen are just part of the presentation—not the main part. Although you might present in a dark room, give some thought to how you presentation — how you hold yourself, what you wear, how you move around the room. You're the focus when you present, no matter how interesting your slides are. 7. There's a hook. Like the best writing, the best presentation shocked their audience early and then rolled them in. Open with something surprising or intriguing, something that will make your audience sit and take The strongest hooks are often the ones that appeal directly to your audience's emotions - offering them something amazing or, if appropriate, scaring the pants off them. The rest of your presentation, then, will actually be your promise to make the amazing thing happen, or the scary thing won't happen. 8. Ask questions. Interesting questions, intriguing and engaging audiences. So ask a lot of them. Build tension by asking a question and let the audience simmer just before proceeding to the next slide with the answer. Test their knowledge and then show them how little they know. If necessary, contact your audience with a small question and answer when you ask the questions. 9. Regulate, regulate, regulate. Especially when you've done a presentation before, it can be easy to fall into a fort, going on and on with only minimal changes in your hue. Always talk like you're talking to a friend, not like you're reading index tabs (even if you are). If it's hard for you to maintain a lively and endearing tone of voice when presenting it, do some workout sessions. If you still can't get it right and presentations are a big part of your job, take a public speaking course or join Toastmasters. 10. Break the rules. As with everything else, there are times when any of these rules —or any other rule you know—will not apply. If you know there's a good reason to break a law, go ahead and do it. Breaking rules is perfectly acceptable behaviour — it ignores the rules or breaks them because you just don't know better that leads to boring, vile presentations that lead to boredom, depression, psychopathic breaks and ultimately death. And you don't want that, do you? Dear Lifehacker, I was tasked with doing a presentation for an event at work. I don't want to create a general PowerPoint with boring text or pictures. What are some ways I can improve the slide show so that it's impressive and knocks the socks off my audience? Best regards, panic over PPTDear panic, giving a presentation is a huge (sometimes) noble responsibility. After all, only you can prevent death by PowerPoint for your audience. Fortunately, a few tips, tools, and other resources can help you step up and make them more professional and captivityful. We focus on PowerPoint for most of the add-ins and templates below, simply because it's the most common business presentation software, but many of the other principles and tricks here apply to other presentation apps. Let's get started. Avoid the most common media in G/O presentations May get commission First, Before we look at jazz your slides, this is a good time to review how to avoid the reasons why presentations are so bad. Lack of preparation or passion. Presentations often don't work because the presenter hasn't practiced enough or can't convey the meaning of the presentation. When you Convey the meaning of your subject (perhaps even with a story structure to the drama), the audience notices. To do this well, you must practice your presentation; Otherwise, even the most beautiful slides won't help you. Slides that are too complex, cluttered with bullets, lack focus and/or are filled with poor quality images. It's easy to hate bad presentations in PowerPoint, but the real problem is how we use it. Do not use a slide as a call to your audience or as a place to store as much data as possible. Instead, they help visual communication to support the most important part of your presentation: you and your message. Almost every presentation tip we've highlighted in the past (including 5 design mistakes you should avoid and how to deliver polished Steve Jobs-style presentations) highlights three things for all your slides: simplicity, a clear and meaningful message, and high-quality visuals. The opposite of that: Whether you're an Apple follower or not, it's hard to argue that Steve Jobs isn't very... Read moreSeth Godin's five rules for preventing really bad PowerPoints are a good guide:No more than six words on the slide. Ever. There is no presentation so complex that this rule must be broken. [Also recommended in another post: No Balls. Use a separate slide for each sentence or idea.] No needy pictures. Use professional inventory images. There is no dissolving, spins or other passageways. Voice effects can be used multiple times in each presentation, but never use the sound effects built into the program. Instead, copy sounds and music from CDs and leverage the prostic effect it can have. If people start jumping up and going to the Grateful Dead, you stopped them from falling asleep, and you reminded them it's not your typical meeting. Don't hand out printouts of your slides. They don't work without you there. Similarly, for our guide on how to create presentations that don't suck, Media expert Nancy Duarte offered this helpful nap to remember as you perform your slides:Painfully bad presentations - both for the presenter who died a slow death in front of an audience and for Read Morestalus the clichésInformation needs an emphasis Designing componentsFit for your audienceLess is more when it comes to presentations (except font size): Rule 10/20/30 recommends limiting the number of slides to 10 and presentation time to 20 minutes, But uses a font size of at least 30 points. An old post but-goodie from entrepreneur Guy Kawasaki directly refers to the kind of problems read more these are basic presentation creation principles. Once you've matched them, see how you can improve slide design and their components. Improving presentation work points and other presentation tools are visual aids. You want to connect the look of your slide to what you're saying. As Godin writes: Home run is easy You put up a slide. It provokes an emotional reaction in the audience. They're going to sit down and want to know what you're going to say that fits that picture. After that, if you do it right, every time they think about what you said, they'll see the picture (and vice versa). To visually highlight your presentation, use and select this option carefully:Fonts: Use your own font instead of the default fonts on your computer. Smashing magazine has a list of free sources, quality fonts or you can buy a font in many other typography resources. Godin compares it to dressing better or having a nicer business card. It's subtle, but it works. Photos: Professional-quality images, instead of cheap clip art, will stand out in the presentation. You can buy photos on sites like Getty Images or find a free stock image using the search Everystockphoto.com engine. Diagrams and shapes: Simple graphics and diagrams can illustrate or mark your information better than text, but using them effectively can be tricky. This non-design guide for diagramming for slides will help you make sure that the visuals you use to emphasize are consistent, appropriately sized, and communicate well. Similarly, select the best chart for your data to display your information as clearly as possible. By following a few simple rules, anyone can create diagrams and illustrate more information... Read moreTemplates: Even if you don't want to use cookie cutter access to your presentation, a template can be a good starting point to customize later. Microsoft offers a collection of PowerPoint templates, many of which are professionally designed. Even better, Microsoft's picture and text effect templates (over 150 of them) feature bold, captivate slides that combine graphics with simple or animated text - and the instructions for creating them. VisualBee not only offers free PowerPoint templates, it can automatically design your presentations for you. Last resource: Slidevana provides over 150 really beautiful slide formats. It costs \$79, but if you often do PowerPoint presentations, it might be worth the investment. If you're tired of your PowerPoint presentations being a little tame, Microsoft has released... Read more Add: Improve PowerPoint capabilities with third-party add-ons. PPTools offers a number, including this start set, with tools to help you zoom in more easily, import images faster and more (this is an old addition, but still available). The previously mentioned pptPlex, now part of Microsoft Office Labs, gives you the ability to jump directly to specific slides and sign in and reach slide smoothness. TechRepublic offers a list of some other add-ons that might be useful. Windows with Office 2007 only: pptPlex, a free Office extension, makes PowerPoint presentations less... Read more For presentation assistants/other tricks: Work on your presentation like a pro with a few shortcuts. PowerPoint keyboard shortcuts help you create and promote slides using only slides A few keystrokes. To redirect focus from the slide to yourself, you can temporarily deface the screen. Check out the other pieces that can make your presentation more memorable, including apps that can focus only on part of the screen. I completed a Powerpoint presentation of 80 slides this week (it's true - who's your mom!), and... Read moreFind additional resources At last, there are plenty of other resources on the Web that can help promote your presentation, including alternative presentation software. Alternatives to PowerPoint: PowerPoint is still the most common presentation tool, but if you find it over-trained by or its linear format is too restrictive, many alternatives can fulfill your presentation creation needs. These include Prezi, with its unique zoom interface, and Haiku Deck, which is the easiest way to create amazing presentations with an iPad. Even if you're staying with Or required to use PowerPoint, just looking at sample Haiku Deck presentations might inspire you. When you need to create an interesting and engaging presentation for your boss, new customers, or... Read more Learn from presentation design masters. Read more, check out these great sites, which focus on make presentations beautiful and efficient: Zen presentations, beyond bullets and Duarte.Good luck with your presentation! Love, Lifehacker, do you have a question or an offer to ask LifeCare? Send it tips + asklh@lifehacker.com.Photos by Tobias Toft, @tniket/Infocus, Brandon George/Haiku Aboard. .