Presentation Zen

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About the book

Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery
By Garr Reynolds, published by New Riders Press (312 pages)

http://kaneb.nd.edu/presentationzen - handouts, slides and more, including:

The ebook of Presentation Zen (access through the library's website)

Storytelling resources

Material about speed presentations

“What is an Ignite presentation, and why should you try it?” (Alex Rister)

“How To Give a Great Ignite Talk” (Scott Berkun) - includes video

"The Fastest Way to Create an Ignite Presentation" (Olivia Mitchell)
Presentation Zen – Challenges

The following ideas are not rules. They are tough guidelines aimed at breaking the “Death by PowerPoint” mold. They come from different sources and may even be mutually exclusive. I offer them as challenges to consider.

Prepare

Go analog. Don’t start at the computer. Use a whiteboard, paper, or Post-its.
Think like a beginner.
Focus on the most important thing you want people to remember.
Use stories.
Never hand out slides; make a handout with details.
Rehearse. Practice leads to confidence.

Design

Follow the rule of thirds – asymmetrical is okay; don’t center everything.
Embrace white space – don’t crowd the screen.
Subtract – when in doubt take a way, don’t add.
   Cut out unnecessary boxes, arrows, lines, and circles.
   Don’t use dissolves, spins or transitions within a slide.

Only have one concept or new idea per slide
Limit yourself to six words or less on a slide
Drop the bullets – get away from lists
Avoid templates – they can be restrictive, repetitive, wasteful

Use the highest quality images you can find.
   Show common, concrete things.
   Stay away from cheesy clipart.
Company logo – inly use it on the first and last slide.
Use simple charts with minimal data points and no 3D effects.

Deliver

Remove barriers – get away from the podium and use a remote clicker.
   If you need a microphone, use a wireless one.
   Keep the lights on.
Be mindful – “there” – engaged, “present”, “in the moment.”
Be “of no mind” – push away inhibitions, doubts, fears; practice will help.
   Move past your mistakes and other “bumps;” don’t dwell on them.
   Respect hostile audience members; don’t get angry or argue.

Never go over time.
## Visual Design for Presentations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Picture superiority</strong></th>
<th>Images are more likely to be remembered than words. Efficient images add meaning rather than decorate.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rule of thirds</strong></td>
<td>Photos and other visuals do not need to be symmetrical. Think of the screen as a three-by-three grid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contrast</strong></td>
<td>Without contrast, things blend together. Put dark text on a light background (or vice-versa). To make things stand out, put distinctly different shapes, fonts, or ideas side by side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limited emphasis</strong></td>
<td>Nothing stands out when too much is highlighted in bold/color/italics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mixed case</strong></td>
<td>Avoid using all uppercase letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justification</strong></td>
<td>Do not center paragraphs or lists. It’s okay to center headings and titles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two fonts</strong></td>
<td>As a general rule, use two fonts — one serif, one sans serif. Script and decorative fonts can be hard to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color scheme</strong></td>
<td>Stick to a palette of 3-5 colors. Using too many and will confuse viewers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empty space</strong></td>
<td>Minimize density; “white space is your friend”. Minimize clutter; cut out anything you don’t need.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Presentation Zen Rubric

Based on principles outlined by Garr Reynolds in *Presentation Zen.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Criteria for an excellent presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Restraint**     | ● Everything in the presentation is essential (no noise)  
| *Shibumi* (渓味)  | ● Practices brevity - there are very few words on each slide  
|                   | ● There is one main takeaway - a clear answer for “so what?”  
|                   | ● Leaves the audience craving more (80% full) |
| **Simplicity**    | ● There is only one point of emphasis per slide  
| *Kanso* (簡素)    | ● Visuals are clean and uncluttered - white space is used well, charts are clear and simple  
|                   | ● Grabs attention with single words or short phrases  
|                   | ● Everything is “as simple as it can be but not simpler” (Einstein) |
| **Naturalness**   | ● The presenter shows presence - enthusiasm, confidence, engagement  
| *Shizen* (自然)    | ● The presenter does not use notes  
|                   | ● The presenter connects with the audience - leaves the podium, makes eye contact, includes humor or a personal story |
| **Media**         | ● Visuals, video or sound are used to enhance meaning  
|                   | ● One or more media items are used in unexpected or creative ways  
|                   | ● Uses high quality media (no cheesy clip art or random sound effects)  
|                   | ● All media are used legally and sources are provided |
| **Visual Design** | ● Several elements are evident:  
|                   | ○ Contrast - colors, shapes, content  
|                   | ○ Alignment and proximity  
|                   | ○ Consistency and repetition  
|                   | ● Text is readable in terms of size, color and font choice  
|                   | ● The overall impression is subtle, graceful, elegant |
| **Content**       | ● Makes use of a story  
|                   | ● Includes one or more concrete examples  
|                   | ● Appeals to emotions |
| **Delivery**      | ● Voice is expressive, loud, and clear  
|                   | ● The presentation does not go over time  
|                   | ● Handouts (if used) are distributed at the end |
Presentation Zen
How to Design & Deliver Presentations Like a Pro

By Garr Reynolds
(info@garrreynolds.com)

This brief handout highlights many of the key points made in my recent presentations and seminars on presentation design. You will also find a bibliography of suggested readings and links to websites referred to in the presentations.

Zen and effective presentations
In the presentation, we discussed the current state of business presentations today which, more often than not, incorporate the use of PowerPoint in ways that actually undermine the speaker’s good intentions. Bullet-point filled slides with reams of text become a barrier to good communication. We have become accustomed to a “PowerPoint culture” in which a disconnect exists between the audience and the presenter. Many people, including many top business leaders, are fed up with PowerPoint. But it is not PowerPoint’s fault — PowerPoint is just a tool.

“Technical knowledge is not enough. One must transcend techniques so that the art becomes an artless art, growing out of the unconscious.”

— Daisetz Suzuki

If we apply some basic, accessible concepts borrowed from the world of Zen, we can improve our effectiveness and allow our content to connect in more powerful ways. One key concept is simplicity. However, simplicity is not merely a means to more effective communication. Rather, it is a consequence of our “Letting Go” of bad habits and much of what we have learned about multimedia presentations in the era of PowerPoint. Other important concepts include: The beginner’s mind; Being fully in the moment; Moderation, or “the middle way;” Minimization of chaos and clutter.

“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity.”

— Charles Mingus

In a nutshell: PowerPoint culture causes both audiences and presenters to suffer. And content suffers too. The root of the suffering is attachment to old PowerPoint habits and misunderstandings about how best to connect to an audience. Lose your attachment to the “normal” way PowerPoint is used and lose poor presentation habits to move to a higher level of effectiveness.

Effective use of multimedia
When designing our presentations and creating the supporting visual aids, we should keep in mind the way our audience will actually process our presentation. We must design our visuals and use PowerPoint in ways that take advantage of how people process information. Much can be learned, then, from a review of the key findings in the field of cognitive science concerning how people learn best in multimedia presentation settings. Below, cognitive scientist, Dr. Richard Mayer, summarizes the three assumptions of multimedia learning theory.

“Cognitive scientists have discovered three important features of the human information processing system that are particularly relevant for PowerPoint users: dual-channels, that is, people have separate information processing channels for visual material and verbal material; limited capacity, that is, people can pay attention to only a few pieces of information in each channel at a time; and active processing, that is, people understand the presented material when they pay attention to the relevant material, organize it into a coherent mental structure, and integrate it with their prior knowledge.”

— Rich Mayer, in an interview with Sociable Media, Inc.
(1) Review of Key Findings

- **Multimedia Effect.** Narration with pictures (visuals) is better than narration alone.
- **Modality Principle.** People learn better when words are presented as narration rather than text.
- **Redundancy Principle.** People learn better from narration & graphics rather than narration, graphics, & text.
- **Coherence Principle.** People learn better when extraneous visual material is excluded.

(2) Practical Implications for better PowerPoint Presentations

- Presentations must be both verbal & visual.
- Too much slide information overloads people's cognitive systems.
- Can your visuals be understood in 3 seconds? If not, redesign them to support your talk.
- Slide design & delivery must help people organize, integrate information.

Organization & Preparation Tips

PowerPoint is not inherently a bad tool. In fact, if presenters just avoid a few of the most common PowerPoint pitfalls, their presentations will greatly improve. Below, many of the items discussed in the presentation are highlighted in brief.

(1) **Start with the end in mind.** Before you even open up PowerPoint, sit down and really think about the day of your presentation. What is the real purpose of your talk? What does the audience expect? In your opinion, what are the most important parts of your topic for the audience to take away from your, say, 50-minute presentation? Remember, even if you've been asked to share information, rarely is the mere transfer of information a satisfactory objective from the point of view of the audience. After all, the audience could always just read your book (or article, handout, etc.) if information transfer were the only purpose of the meeting, seminar, or formal presentation.

(2) **Plan in “analog mode.”** That is, rather than diving right into PowerPoint (or Keynote), the best presenters often scratch out their ideas and objectives with a pen and paper. Personally, I use a large whiteboard in my office to sketch out my ideas (when I was at Apple, I had one entire wall turned into a whiteboard!). The whiteboard works for me as I feel uninhibited and free to be creative. I can also step back (literally) from what I have sketched out and imagine how it might flow logically when PowerPoint is added later. Also, as I write down key points and assemble an outline and structure, I can draw quick ideas for visuals such as charts or photos that will later appear in the PowerPoint. Though you may be using digital technology when you deliver your presentation, the act of speaking and connecting to an audience — to persuade, sell, or inform — is very much analog.

(3) **Good presentations include stories.** The best presenters illustrate their points with the use of stories, most often personal ones. The easiest way to explain complicated ideas is through examples or by sharing a story that underscores the point. Stories are easy to remember for your audience. If you want your audience to remember your content, then find a way to make it relevant and memorable to them. You should try to come up with good, short, interesting stories or examples to support your major points.

(4) **It's all about our audience.** There are three components involved in a presentation: the audience, you, and the medium (in our case, PowerPoint). The goal is to create a kind of harmony among the three. But above all, the presentation is for the benefit of the audience. However, boring an audience with bullet point after bullet point is of little benefit to them. Which brings us to point number five, perhaps the most important of all.

“Respect those who come to you with open ears
and foster a sense of community.”

— P.T. Sudo
(5) Reduce the text on your slides to an absolute minimum. The best slides may have no text at all. This may sound insane given the dependency of text slides today, but the best PowerPoint slides will be virtually meaningless with out the narration (that is you). Remember, the slides are suppose to support/supplement the narration of the speaker, not make the speaker superfluous. Yes, it is true that many people often say something like this: “Sorry I missed your presentation, Steve. I hear it was great. Can you just send me your PowerPoint slides?” Well, you could. But if they are good slides, they may be of little use without you.

(6) Do not read the text word for word off the slide. Audiences can read, so why do presenters insist on reading long lines of text from slides? Also, it is very difficult — if not impossible — to read a slide and listen to someone talk at the same time. So again, why all the text on slides these days? One reason may be that it is convenient for the speaker when organizing the presentation to write out his/her thoughts one bullet point at a time. But as Yale professor and visual communications specialist, Edward Tufte points out in a September Wired Magazine article “…convenience for the speaker can be punishing to both content and audience.” Speakers also may be thinking that their wordy slides will make for better handouts, a common “handout” technique. However, the confining, horizontal orientation of a slide (one slide after another) makes for difficult writing and reading. Which brings us to the next point below.

(7) Written documents (research papers, handouts, executive summaries, etc.) are for the expanded details. Audiences will be much better served receiving a detailed, written handout as a takeaway from the presentation, rather than a mere copy of your PowerPoint slides. If you have a detailed handout or publication for the audience to be passed out after your talk, you need not feel compelled to fill your PowerPoint slides with a great deal of text.

Remember: (1) your slides should contain only a minimum of information; (2) your slide notes, which only you see, will contain far more data; and (3) your handout will have still far more data and detail.

Slide (PowerPoint) Tips

(1) Keep it simple. PowerPoint was designed as a convenient way to display graphical information that would support the speaker and supplement the presentation. The slides themselves were never meant to be the “star of the show.” People came to hear you and be moved or informed (or both) by you and your message. Don’t let your message and your ability to tell a story get derailed by slides that are unnecessarily complicated, busy, or full of what Edward Tufte calls “chart junk.” Nothing in your slide should be superfluous, ever. Your slides should have plenty of “white space” or “negative space.” Do not feel compelled to fill empty areas on your slide with your logo or other unnecessary graphics or text boxes that do not contribute to better understanding. The less clutter you have on your slide, the more powerful your visual message will become.

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.
— Leonardo da Vinci

(2) Avoid using Microsoft templates. Most of the templates included in PowerPoint have already been seen by your audience countless times (and besides, the templates are not all that great to begin with). You can make your own background templates which will be more tailored to your needs or you can purchase professional templates on-line (for example: www.powerpointtemplatespro.com).

(3) Avoid using PowerPoint Clip Art or other cartoonish line art. Again, if it is included in the software, your audience has seen it a million times before. It may have been interesting in 1992, but today the inclusion of such clip art often undermines the professionalism of the presenter. There are exceptions, of course, and not all PowerPoint art is dreadful, but use carefully and judiciously.

(4) Use high-quality graphics including photographs. You can take your own high-quality photographs with your digital camera, purchase professional stock photography, or use the plethora of high-quality images available on line (be cautious of copyright issues, however). Never simply stretch a small, low resolution photo to make it fit your layout — doing so will degrade the resolution even further.
(5) **Use object builds and slide transitions judiciously.** Object builds (also called animations), such as bullet points, should **not** be animated on every slide. Some animation is a good thing, but stick to the most subtle and professional (similar to what you might see on the evening TV news broadcast).

(6) **Synchronize your speaking with the builds and transitions.** In other words, show the next item (new slide or new build) at the same time you begin talking about it. This requires practice, but it takes only a short time to get the hang of it. Watch the evening news on TV and you'll notice that bullet points and graphics appear at the same time or just after the reporter speaks on the particular item.

(7) **Use video and audio when appropriate.** You can use video clips within PowerPoint without ever leaving the application or turning on a VCR. Using a video clip not only will illustrate your point better, it will also serve as a change of pace thereby increasing the interest of your audience. You can use audio clips (such as interviews) as well. Something to avoid, however, is cheesy sound effects that are included in PowerPoint (such as the sound of a horn or applause when transitioning slides). The use of superfluous sound effects attached to animations is a sure way to lose credibility with your audience.

(8) **Limit your ideas to one main idea per slide.** If you have a complicated slide with lots of different data, it may be better to break it up into 2-3 different slides (assuming no side-by-side comparisons are needed).

**Delivery Tips**

(1) **Move away from the podium — connect with your audience.** If at all possible get closer to your audience by moving away from or in front of the podium.

(2) **Remember the “B” key.** If you press the “B” key while your PowerPoint slide is showing, the screen will go blank. This is useful if you need to digress or move off the topic presented on the slide. By having the slide blank, all the attention can now be placed back on you. When you are ready to move on, just press the “B” key again and the image reappears. (The “.” key does the same thing).

(3) **Use a remote-control device to advance your slides and builds.** A handheld remote will allow you to move away from the podium. This is an absolute must. (http://www.keyspan.com/products/).

(4) **Make good eye contact.** Try looking at individuals rather than scanning the group. Since you are using a computer, you never need to look at the screen behind you — just glance down at the computer screen briefly. One sure way to lose an audience is to turn your back on them.

> **Perfect adequacy (non-attachment) teaches us to transcend ourselves so that we may respond to the inner requirements of those around us.**
> — Robert Linssen

(5) **Take it slowly.** When we are nervous we tend to talk too fast. Get a videotape of one of your presentations to see how you did — you may be surprised at the pace of your talk.

(6) **Keep the lights on.** If you are speaking in a meeting room or a classroom, the temptation is to turn the lights off so that the slides look better. But go for a compromise between a bright screen image and ambient room lighting. Turning the lights off — besides inducing sleep — puts all the focus on the screen. The audience should be looking at you more than the screen. Today’s projectors are bright enough to allow you to keep many of the lights on. If you are presenting to a small group, then you can connect your computer to a large TV (via the s-video line-in). With a TV screen, you can keep all or most of the lights on.
Speed Presentation

In this kind of presentation, you are limited to 15 or 20 slides, with 20 seconds to talk about each. Pecha Kucha and Ignite are well-known formats.

Examples

Learn More

1. Challenging the Presentation Paradigm
2. Pecha Kucha: Get to the PowerPoint in 20 Slides
3. Rules and guidelines for Ignite Phoenix
4. Ignite Tips | More Tips
5. Presentation Zen (Garr Reynolds)

http://learning.nd.edu/remix/projects/SpeedPresentation.html  --or--  http://goo.gl/OZ6LzF
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Objectives
After earning this badge, you will be able to create more effective presentations by:
- Keeping things simple and clear,
- Using images and stories, and
- Applying basic visual design principles

In his excellent book, Presentation Zen, Garr Reynolds promotes planning, simplicity, use of images and stories, and several other strategies for improving presentation quality,

1. EITHER attend the Presentation Zen workshop
   OR read the actual book (ebook - ND only)
   OR watch / read these five items
   - Watch the overview video
   - Read Garr Reynolds’ handout
Developing a story for a class presentation

A story is a sequence of connected events presented in words and/or images. Those events can be fact or fiction from the past, present, or future.

Basic story elements
1. Set-up – the protagonist decides to accomplish something or make a change
2. Complication – confronting an antagonist or dealing with a test, obstacle, or setback
3. Resolution – the protagonist is transformed or reaches the a goal

Additional characteristics
- Hook – something that grabs people's attention
- Passion – emotional appeal
- Climax or turning point
- Takeaway or "call to action"

Presenting a concept through a story
- Metaphor – show a parallel concept
- Evidence – illustrate part of a concept
- Illustration – show a concept in action
- Provocation – pique interest, stimulate discussion

Physics
What Johnny did today – a series of events that illustrate conservation of energy.

Chemistry
A story that compares chemical bonds to a series of romantic relationships.

English
The journey of writing a paper – a metaphorical story about the writing process.

History
A real or imaginary story that illustrates a historic development or event, like Ken Burns’ example about Thomas Jefferson's slaves.

Business
A story that illustrates what happens when there’s a shortage of products, materials, or labor.
BEGINNING - setup
Hero / protagonist -
Problem / challenge / need -

MIDDLE - rising action
Conflict / confrontation / obstacle -
Antagonist / enemy / other side -

MIDDLE - climax
Turning point or moment of discovery -

END - resolution
Call to action -