

# Communication Guru™

Tips, best practices, and resources for effective communication



by Debra Hamilton

## Create Useful Visuals that Help Listeners Understand and Remember

Many presenters make a common mistake. They translate the word “presentation” into “PowerPoint slide deck.” The result is too many text-heavy slides, or in other words, *death by PowerPoint* for the once-eager listeners.

The mistakes include using too many slides, cramming too much on a slide, and going overboard with special effects. Visuals should be simple, balanced, and uncluttered. Here are guidelines for creating useful visual aids that will help your listeners understand and remember your message.

**Every slide should have a purpose.** For each slide you create, ask, “What is the point of this slide? How will it help my listeners? Is this information essential for my bottom-line objective?”

**Use a descriptive heading on each slide.** A short yet descriptive heading will grab attention and clarify the main point of each slide. Headings also serve as signposts to help wandering minds become refocused.

**State key concepts only.** A picture speaks a thousand words, so presenters should use well-designed charts and pictures to simplify complex information. When creating text slides, use key words and concepts only so the information can be understood at-a-glance. This restrains you from reading the slide and enables you to discuss each concept with the audience.

**Use graphics and colors.** A study sponsored by 3M showed listeners’ comprehension and retention improved dramatically when black-and-white visuals were replaced with color. Graphics and color provide contrast which helps the audience understand and stay interested in complex information. Yellow text on a black background provides optimal contrast; use this combination as a rule of thumb.

**Use readable fonts.** Use a sans serif font such as Arial set in upper- and lowercase style for best readability. Ideally, headlines should be displayed at 44 points; body text should be set at 32 points.

Legibility is essential—avoid “fancy” fonts that look interesting but slow down your audience’s ability to read.

**Be consistent with color, theme, and layout.** Use the same fonts, colors, and design themes throughout your presentation for a streamlined look that will help your

audience focus on the content rather than the appearance of the slide.

**Go easy on the “glitz.”** Excessive animation, fly-ins, and sound effects will detract from you and your message. Transitions and builds can create momentum and coherence, but they should be used sparingly and consistently.

Well-designed, purposeful visuals become useful tools that help listeners stay engaged and retain more of your message. The Golden Rule of creating powerful slides is: *Less is more*. Visuals are a tool to support and illustrate your message. They should not take over the presentation nor should they exhaust your listeners.

To see examples of slide makeovers, visit our website at [www.businesslunchandlearn.com](http://www.businesslunchandlearn.com) and click on *Resources*.

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### ▼ Questions & Quandaries . . .

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