



Getting the best from PowerPoint

The Arts Society Medway has been fortunate to hear consistently excellent lecturers with a tremendous depth of knowledge and engaging delivery, and this is reflected in the feedback from our members. If there is one area in which our members would like to see improvement it is the slides shown on the screen, particularly in a large room where the screen may be some way away.

Of course many lecturers are extremely proficient at using PowerPoint but we would remind less experienced lecturers that the slides are there to support the talk and not distract from it. Arts Society members want to hear a lecturer's experience and learn from their words so the slides should support their expertise, not replace it. Well-designed slides used sparingly and with good timing truly enhance a presentation.

We have listed below some suggestions to help lecturers get the best from PowerPoint. These tips are a guide only and may be varied as necessary.

TIPS FOR LECTURERS

1. Keep images simple

In a big hall, our most frequently heard comment is that there are too many images on the screen, especially for those sitting at the back. There is a danger of members spending too much time trying to decipher the pictures rather than listening to the lecturer. So we suggest:

- Only one image per slide.
- More than one picture on a slide only when you wish to compare images.

2. Minimise text

The second most common remark is that members cannot read the text on slides, especially if they are sitting towards the back of a large hall. This is usually because there is too much text in too small a font.

A picture paints a thousand words (and the brain processes images far quicker than words) so, if you can, get your point across with one image rather than lots of text.

- Use unfussy fonts with a font size of at least 20pt.
- Use concise bullet points rather than lengthy narrative. Use no more than 8 words per bullet point.
- Use no more than 4 bullet points per slide.

3. Reveal one bullet at a time

The trick when presenting text is to not distract your audience into reading the whole slide rather than listening to you.

- Reveal one bullet at a time to emphasise the point you are currently making.

It is important to regain your audience's attention when they have read the slide or looked at an image.

- Fade a slide to black to bring the attention back to you.

4. Avoid death by PowerPoint!

Sometimes a lecturer will have a wealth of wonderful slides and will gallop through them to fit them all in. Animations and transitions bring slides to life.

But just occasionally a lecturer may incorporate effects which are clever but distracting. Members become absorbed in trying to take in all this visual information, distracting them from listening to the lecturer. Remember that each time a new slide appears the audience leaves you and goes to the screen, so make sure the slide reinforces your current point.

- Aim to have around one slide for every 2 minutes of your talk, so around 30 slides maximum for a one hour lecture.

5. Create your slides last

Occasionally it feels like a lecturer has used PowerPoint to develop their talk. They use the slides as their script and constantly turn away from the audience so they can read from the screen. The slides should be designed to add to and enhance a well-designed talk, not replace it.

- When creating a new lecture, design and prepare your narrative and images first, then produce your slides last.

Liz Duckworth
Programme Secretary
The Arts Society Medway

July 2022