

How to Make Slides & Overheads

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A. Guidelines for Slide or Overhead Construction

1. Substance before style
2. Style is nice and increases your ability to communicate
3. Don't do slides just to do slides—use them to communicate information
4. Don't let your slides go until a week before your talk
5. Keep your slides simple. Fancy pictures can work, but often get in the way of information transfer
6. Spell check. You might as well, your audience sure will & and they will be judging you
7. Adapt ideas from other slide presentations—learn by critiquing
8. A slide or overhead presentation is often an outline. It is a roadmap to your presentation so that people can catch back up when they have been day-dreaming.
9. The *Rule of Sevens*: Never use more than 7 words & 7 lines and any one slide (or at least not too much more). Overheads can hold more, but not much!
10. Use tabs and indenting not spaces—this is what messes you up when you change fonts or margins!
 - a. Never, never, never, never, use two tabs in a row
 - b. Never put tabs in the middle of a paragraph or sentence
11. Never, never, never, never, use two spaces in a row. Yes, your typing teacher was wrong. Modern typefaces use the space for an elegant look. Two spaces will lead to “rivers” of white running through your document.
12. Make sure “fractional widths” is turned on (this is mainly for you lucky Macintosh people)
13. Use real quotation marks (“ and ”) not inch signs (")
14. Use real apostrophes (') and not foot marks (')
15. Use “en” dashes, and “em” dashes
 - a. Em dashes (—) are the ones that replace double dashes (--) and are real characters
 - b. En dashes are the ones that separate numbers and ranges (i.e., 18–65 years old)
 - b. In case you care, en dashes are the length of an “n” and em dashes are the length of an “m”
16. Follow numbers and other “bullets” (•) with a tab, not a space, otherwise you will probably get ragged edges on your list
17. Never underline—it just makes everything too hard to read
18. Use **bold**, *italics*, color changes, or SMALL capital letters for emphasis
19. ALL CAPITAL WORDS ARE HARD FOR THE EYE TO FOLLOW AND READ AND I HATE THEM
20. Don't mix horizontal and vertical slides in the same presentation. This is not a problem for overheads usually, but be sure your overhead does not extend off of the glass.
21. Use a title slide to open each new subject area. Not necessary, but this can help inform your audience of where you are in your talk

2. Make sure there is space around each word or idea. Use “white space” to draw the eye
3. Avoid using too many words on a single line & too many lines
4. Project tables for only a short time
5. Separate columns with tabs and control width with the rulers and tab settings in the slide programs

E. How to Think about Graphs

1. Simplify complicated visuals—remove unnecessary information
2. Examine charts from *USA Today*, *Time* magazine, etc.

F. Chart Hints

1. Line thickness
 - a. Make grids thin and curves thick
 - b. Use different line widths or colors to compare data
 - c. Use dashed lines for projections, plans, or budgets
 2. Bars and columns
 - a. Make bars & columns wider than the spaces between
 - b. With stacked column charts, order shade patterns from darkest to lightest
 - c. Stop grid lines at the boundaries of columns or bars
 3. Pie charts
 - a. Divide the pie into no more than five pieces
 - b. Order shade patterns from darkest to lightest
 - c. Separate one of the pieces to draw attention
 4. Axes
 - a. Write axis labels horizontally
 - b. Include zero or indicate that zero is omitted
- c. Label axes in increments that make it easy to interpolate