

# **Making a Good Presentation – the 10 Commandments**

Bruce Herbold, June 2009

1. **PRIME DIRECTIVE: SHOW ME WHAT YOU WANT ME TO SEE; TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT ME TO HEAR.** Don't put up visual aids that you have to describe because 'I know you can't see this...' and don't put up slides that put me in the position of being read to.
2. **DECIDE WHAT YOUR POINTS ARE AND AIM TO COMMUNICATE.** Have something to say. If the model didn't work, the fish didn't get caught, or your only copy of the data was eaten by the dog then let the organizer know you don't need your time slot. You don't need to be entertaining or funny, you just need to be clear, relevant, and credible and have content.
3. Use a word processor or pen & paper to outline your talk. **DO NOT START WITH POWERPOINT** and especially don't use any of Powerpoint's helpful guides.
4. Decide what visual images you need to show to support your presentation. **USE NECESSARY IMAGES AND NO OTHERS.**
5. **TALK TO YOUR AUDIENCE.** Don't talk to the screen or your notes. Don't read to your audience stuff they can read off the screen. Trying to read while someone is talking is confusing. It is even more confusing if the speaker is saying something different than what you are trying to read. So put as little text up on the screen as possible. Leave the lights on as you introduce yourself and while you tell them why you are there. Turn the lights back on after you are done with your visual aids in order to directly address the audience with your conclusions.
6. **PRACTICE YOUR TALK BEFOREHAND.** Know what you are going to say and how you're going to say it, but particularly make sure that you can say it all in the allotted time. Recruit a practice audience and practice.
7. **PREPARE A TALK, NOT A REPORT.** If your Powerpoint can stand on its own, then why are you there? Almost everyone can read faster than you can talk, so reading to your audience is a waste of their time. Bad powerpoints are often used as lousy reports because they tend to be full of ambiguous, partial sentences. A good powerpoint is entirely useless as a report because the words are presented verbally.
8. **MAKE THE VISUALS CLEAR.** Be sure everything is legible when projected on a screen. Use a suitable font size. Ensure high contrast between background and foreground. Don't use red figures or text. Red disappears into most backgrounds and 10% of the men in your audience are probably red-green color blind. Blank areas on the slide help focus attention.
9. **MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS.** If your audience is admiring the cool transitions and pseudo-animations then they aren't paying attention to your talk. Most of the tools in the Powerpoint toolbox will make your presentation worse.
10. **BE CONSISTENT.** Don't change fonts or colors or formats or variables without a reason – your audience will spend their attention trying to figure out why things are different.