



Confident Communications

Top Tips Newsletter

My mission is to help people unlock their true potential through confident verbal communications — Bob Ferguson

Bob Ferguson's top ten tips for triumphing with PowerPoint

I am often asked whether PowerPoint is good or bad for presentations. The answer is neither. PowerPoint is just a tool and like all tools, in the hands of an educated presenter, it can offer a dynamic and exciting way to support your presentation. In the hands of an inexperienced presenter, it can be a drab and boring way to lose your audience's interest.

These tips will help you make the best use of PowerPoint and ensure that *you* remain the focus of any presentation.

1. Buy a wireless presenter

To use PowerPoint effectively, you need to be in control so I recommend that you always use a wireless presenter. They are reasonably cheap and allow you to step through the slides, forwards or backwards, and many have a built-in laser pointer. More importantly, they let you blank the screen, which allows you to retain control of the presentation so that:

- You do not have to keep running back to the laptop to press the "next slide" button and so lose valuable contact with the audience
- You can get the audience to focus on you when you are speaking and only look at the PowerPoint when you want your audience to do so.

Remember, when PowerPoint is on you are delivering a factual, impersonal message. When it is off and you are speaking, you deliver a personal, emotional message that connects with the audience – and that is what you are after.

2. KISS – do not make it too whizz-bang

Keep it short and simple. What you show via a PowerPoint presentation is there to support you and deliver a clear message. The more you clutter it up with whizz-bang effects, the more your audience's attention is distracted from you and your message. I have seen presentations where the special effects have been so fast and furious that the audience are too distracted to pay attention to the slides or the speaker.

So remember – keep it short and simple for maximum effect.

3. Use text on PowerPoint only when absolutely necessary

It would be nice not to use PowerPoint for text at all, but there are times when it is necessary. Use text to reinforce the structure of your presentation. This is particularly beneficial if you are training people and you want to give them a structure to imagine before you give them all the information.

The best guideline is to use between four and six bullet points with between four and six words on each. You do not need to put everything you want to say on the slide.

4. Use pictures

People take in data through three channels:

- Visual – people who like pictures and diagrams
- Audio – those who take in information by listening
- Kinaesthetic – those who learn by doing.

We automatically connect with the 'audio' people when we speak. We can involve those who are more kinaesthetic in their approach by doing exercises. To appeal to the 'visual' group, we need to use supporting pictures and simple diagrams to deliver the message.

A picture paints a thousand words and can convey a message that we would struggle to describe in words, losing much of its impact because of the time taken. So think pictures.

5. Use graphs and charts

When presenting to business professionals particularly, you may have a large quantity of complex data to deliver. If you put this up in numbers and words the audience will get shell-shocked with information overload. It's often easier for the audience to absorb information if you present it in graphs, bar charts and pie charts for easy comparison. The mind retains pictorial information best, so the more graphic your data, the more likely your audience is to remember it.

6. Build complex diagrams up slowly

If you show a complex diagram straight away, people will have difficulty in understanding it while still listening to what you have to say.

It is far better to talk about discrete aspects of the diagram and show only the part you are talking about. The audience will understand the diagram before they see the whole thing, giving them a much clearer understanding of the content.

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Bob Ferguson

7. Add audio

Even if you have a really well modulated voice, the people who prefer audio information will get used to it. You can break it up by adding sound effects and music to your presentation.

Music not only adds impact to the presentation but will also change the audience's mood. You can 'set' the mood of the audience at the start by playing some background music as they walk in. This can be really effective, but be aware that you need a mobile DJ licence if you choose to do this.

8. Place the screen to one side

The important part of the show is you (see tip 10), so it's important that you are centre-stage. If possible, put the screen on one side so that the audience can still see it but it's relegated to its proper position of a supporting act.

This way, you can always hold the audience's attention fully when the screen is blanked out. Before you start, just check that everyone in the audience can see it properly. Too often the screen has to be in the centre and people end up pushed to one side or making funny silhouettes as they walk across the front of the projector.

9. Practice

This is the bit most people dislike, and yet pays the highest dividends. In general, people don't like practising their talks. It takes a lot of time, and until you get used to it, it feels very odd talking to yourself. But it does some really valuable things for you.

Firstly, you get a real feel of what it is like to talk and think about what's coming next by practising. When you come to the real event, it will not feel so strange to be speaking. You can also record your talk and listen back to it at home or in your car.

This is one of the best ways to learn your speech, as you listen to it with the ears of an audience member. Having heard your speech, you will remember it far better.



10. Remember that you are the star

Finally remember – you are the star of the show. You are the person whom people have come to hear because of your expertise or knowledge. So it is far more important that they pay attention to *you* than sit gawping at the PowerPoint presentation.

At the end of the presentation, members of the audience will come up and thank you for your time and effort because you will have delivered a personal message – not just facts.

When we speak without visual aids, people understand how we feel about our work. They see the passion, the enthusiasm and the pride we have for what we do. That encourages people to build a relationship that may lead to future work, because people still buy from people.



About Bob Ferguson

Bob's passion for helping people gain maximum business and personal benefit from speaking out with confidence, grew out of his own development as a public speaker.

As a Chartered Engineer with an MBA, Bob spent 30 years consulting in the aerospace industry, where running successful space programmes is largely a matter of good organisation and communication skills. Bob feels that this experience brings a practical grounding to his skills and presentations.

Engineers, like many professional people, have the problem of delivering complex information and yet retaining the audience's interest, and achieving this was one of Bob's main challenges. One of the skills that Bob developed without realising it was the ability to mentor and coach others, so that they too could realise the benefits of communicating confidently.

To find out how speaking with confidence can help your business, or to book a place on one of our First Steps sessions call 0781 256 9360 today.

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