

Presentation Zen: Simple Principles for the Design and Delivery of Presentations

Based on the book by Garr Reynolds (see more at <http://www.presentationzen.com>)

What is design?

Design is not simply about how things look. It's not about decoration, but the organization of information (in this case, within presentations) to make ideas clear, and to make communication compelling. The process of design involves making decisions about what to include and exclude.

Don't let your presentations cause suffering!

What can lead to suffering of the viewer/listener? Lack of:

1. Significance (meaning, importance, passion)
2. Structure (organization)
3. Simplicity (comprehensible)
4. Rehearsal (delivery)

Outspoken critic of Powerpoint: Edward Tufte, specialist in the visual display of information. He wrote an article in a 2003 *Wired* magazine called "PowerPoint Is Evil," which outlined some of the problems with Powerpoint. (Also check book: *The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint*). Tufte talked about how cognitive style of Powerpoint is linear, sequential, and reductionist -- which can oversimplify your content and confuse your message (e.g., Columbia space shuttle).

What does cognitive science have to say?

Modality effect: working memory can be increased by using dual rather than a single modality. (e.g., it's more effective to target both the visual and auditory processors of working memory)

Redundancy effect: if one form of instruction (such as the spoken word) is intelligible and adequate then providing the same material in another form (such as lines of text on a screen that mimic the words being spoken) are redundant and can actually hurt understanding.

So ... use slides that reinforce what you say, but don't repeat verbatim what you say, or you'll be overloading working memory of your audience members!

(Reference: cognitive load research of Dr. John Sweller at University of New South Wales, Australia)

Three aspects of your presentation:

1. The words you say (most important!)
2. The Powerpoint slides (photos, graphs, some text)
3. Handout – document with detailed info (text, charts, etc.)
Relieves need for Powerpoint to include a lot of text.



Zen aesthetic values:

Kanso = simplicity

Shizen = natural, unforced

Shibumi = elegance

Wabi sabi = imperfection, impermanence

Design principles that embody these values:

Maximize signal to noise ratio

Negative space

Picture superiority effect

Simple font choices

Conscious use of color

Contrast

Repetition

Alignment

Proximity