

12 Mistakes Made When Creating PowerPoint® Slides and How to Correct Them

By Jim Prost
Prost Associates

How would you answer this multiple-choice question?

Which of the following statements best describes your view regarding PowerPoint® slides?

- (a) My PowerPoint® slides demonstrate what a great graphic artist I am!
- (b) My PowerPoint® slides are great because I use every elements the software has to offer!
- (c) My PowerPoint® slides enhance my presentation, reinforce my points, support me and my message, and most importantly they do not overwhelm my audience!

From the audience's perspective, answer c the better choice.

Let's take a look at some common mistakes made when creating PowerPoint® slides and how to correct them.

Mistake #1 - What You See Is What You Get! (Remember WYSIWYG?)

Solution: What shades of colors you see on your computer screen will **not** be the same shades of colors that are projected. (If you don't project your presentations go to Mistake #2). Even some of Microsoft's templates are difficult to see when projected. Hint: Try to project your presentation for preview before you present to your audience.

Mistake #2 - Creating Slides That Are Hard On the Eyes or Even Impossible To Read

Solution: Think in contrasts! Use dark background colors and light colored type **or** light colored backgrounds and dark colored type.

Mistake #3 - Selecting Inappropriate Colors for Your Slides

Solution: Color can incite emotions! Unusual shades of red, brown, yellow and green can put your audience on edge throughout your presentation (this is not a good idea unless that is your intention!). Red is considered a "hot" color and should only be used as an accent color.

Mistake #4 - Choosing Difficult To Read Fonts

Solution: **Helvetica** and **Arial** are good fonts to use. Microsoft frequently uses **Times New Roman** but that font projects like "dot matrix" text. Sans-serif fonts (like Arial and Helvetica) look much better when projected.

Mistake #5 - Putting Shadows On Text

Solution: Putting a shadow on text makes the text difficult, if not impossible, for an audience to read. Putting a shadow on a textbox will automatically put a shadow on the text included in the textbox. Keep it simple and plain but attractive!

Mistake #6 - Not Letting Your Audience Know Where You Are

Solution: Put slide numbers on your slides so that your audience members can refer to them.

Mistake #7 - Starting Your Presentation Before You Are Introduced

Solution: What do I mean by this? I recommend putting a blank slide as your first slide in your PowerPoint® presentation. This way your title slide will not appear before you do!

(Value-added hint: if you must wait a long period of time before you start presenting, you may consider adding two blank slides. Click to the second blank slide a minute or so before you are introduced so that your computer will wake up – even if you turned the sleep or hibernate function off – just like people, they can fall asleep during a presentation!).

Mistake #8 - Selecting More Than Two or Three Fonts

Solution: In any one presentation, two or three fonts are all that you need. Keep it simple and plain but attractive! Sound familiar?

Mistake #9 - Using All the Bells And Whistles to Show How Good You Are With PowerPoint®

Solution: Be consistent! Whatever you do on one slide, do on all slides. For example, use the same fonts, coloring, animation, transitions, etc. across all slides. And do not use every element available in any one presentation!

Mistake #10 - Not Being Able To Read Your Print Out

Solution: I recommend going to the *View* pull down menu and selecting *grayscale*. Look at your slides in this view because this is how they will print on a black & white printer. If you see a solid black box or element, text, etc. right-click on that element and select the *grayscale view* and change it to black and white.

Mistake #11 - Animations That Don't Work

Solution: When you create a slide, the order in which you add each element is the order in which those elements will animate when you show the slide show. Go to the *Slide Show* pull down menu then click on *Custom Animation*. You can click on each element and add the wanted effect and select the order in which the object will animate in the custom animation sidebar. Again, keep it simple.

Mistake #12 - Each Slide in a Presentation Appears To Be Different

Solution: When creating a new presentation, go to the *Master Slide* and format the text both for color and font, what animations should occur, add the slide number and any other element you want to appear on each slide.

With a little talent, a dash of creativity, and a hint of restraint, your next PowerPoint® presentation will be a work of art instead of a solution to insomnia. Good Luck! Be sure to check out my other articles *12 Mistakes Made When Presenting PowerPoint® Presentations and How to Correct Them!* and *Resources for Powerful Presentations*.

If you have questions about this article, please email me at jimprost@prostassociates.com