7. A Word about Presentation Skills

Now you have learned how to make a nice PowerPoint presentation. But a good presentation is not just about mastering PowerPoint. When you do a presentation, it is usually because you need to convey a message to some recipients.

The goal is not simply to make a nice presentation, but to ensure that the recipients understand and perhaps even accept the message. That part PowerPoint cannot help you with. PowerPoint is a tool that you can use to help you present something so it looks nice.

If you have given no consideration to presentation skills, you run the risk of failing to achieve all your aims.

7.1 PowerPoint in Practise

PowerPoint is used in practice for two purposes. One is to display an information screen that simply runs in an infinite loop while presenting some information. It could be in the cafeteria, at work or in a shop window.

The second purpose is support in connection with a presentation. It could be project status, talks, teaching, etc.

If you are aware of the possible pitfalls when you submit something, you can avoid them. It is not that hard to learn how to make a good presentation, but I have seen many otherwise talented people who have failed to get their message across because they were unaware of some basic pitfalls.

7.1.1 Do not let PowerPoint run the Show

Use your PowerPoint as an aid to your presentation. It is you and not the canvas, who are important. I have seen people make slides with lots of text that they have read from almost verbatim. In such a case they might as well have sent the presentation by mail so we could watch it ourselves at our convenience.

Use PowerPoint to illustrate and emphasise your message. Keep the use of text to a minimum, and vary the presentation a little by using a blackboard or a flip chart. Walk around a little instead of remaining nailed to the same place all the time. Looking at the big screen for prolonged periods of time tends to make you sleepy.

Make sure you are well prepared, so you do not get confused when you are presenting, especially if you are already a bit nervous.

7.1.2 Not Everyone has Eagle Eyes

I have seen text that was too small for me to read. The letters might appear large, when you are standing only a few feet away, but that is not necessarily the case when you are sitting in the back row.

One tip is to only use fonts without "feet"; for example the font "Arial". Fonts with feet such as "Times New Roman" are good when you read a book, but can be tiring to read on a canvas or screen

It is equally important to ensure that you are using the proper font size. If you have the chance, you can test it by stretching an arm out in front of you. Make a fist and walk back from the screen until the fist covers the screen, then lower the arm. If you can still read the text it is ok. If not, you need to make it larger to ensure that people in the back row can read it as well.

You should also be careful with the colours. Make sure there is a good contrast between the text and the background. If you use the built-in colour themes you can be fairly sure that this aspect has been taken care of.

7.1.3 Use the Effects with Care

It is tempting to play around with all kinds of animations and flashy transitions. But it can easily become too much. Too many cool effects become ridiculous and draw attention away from what you want to say.

Select one transition effect for your slides, and stick with it throughout.

Please also note that when something happens on screen, it takes about 5 seconds before you can get the audience's attention again. If you start talking in the middle of an animation, there will be many who are not listening to what you are saying!