

Tech Snacks: Making Better Slides

PowerPoint and Google Slides are pretty ubiquitous when it comes to structuring a lecture or presentation. But are you making the most of your presentation? Are your students retaining information and engaging with the content as well as they could be? Are there any tools or tricks that can improve your presentation? Let's make some better slides!

Create previews, indexes, and signposts

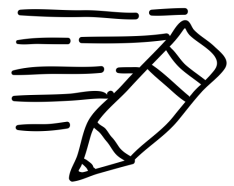
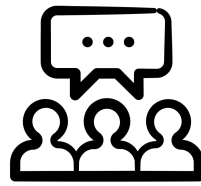
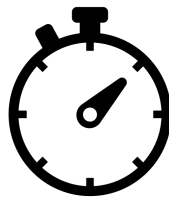
It can be hard to sit through a presentation when you don't know what to expect, or what the objectives of the presentation are.¹

Start with a preview slide that lists the main topics or objectives of the presentation. Use signpost slides to transition between topics.

Also consider using icons or images to represent activity breaks in the presentation. Consistent visual cues can help students understand expectations for each activity. *Thenounproject.com* is a great source for Creative Commons-licensed icons and illustrations.

What we're going to do

- Explore & articulate classroom design preferences
- Identify decision nexus for classroom design choices
- Develop a systems-based plan for improving the design of our classroom



Google Slides and PowerPoint both have tools that allow you to create a clickable Index or Table of Contents slide. This can be especially useful when you're sharing slides via Brightspace or elsewhere, and can help with student accessibility needs.

Use better text

Limit text — Display key words, phrases, or bullet points rather than full sentences or long, wordy definitions. One important exception: if you are asking students to join you in a close reading of a text (e.g., a passage from a historical document, a poem, a regulation), then displaying a chunk of text can be appropriate.

Supplement with a handout — If you need to provide a lot of information, or if you want your audience to be able to refer back to your slideshow later, don't just try to cram everything into the slides. Create a handout that includes lecture notes, more detailed information, or further references. This has an added benefit of accommodating some accessibility needs, especially if you also include an electronic copy of the handout on Brightspace.

Use concrete visual language — Research shows that high-imagery words are remembered better than low-imagery or abstract words.² Presentation slides are most easily remembered when they use concrete visual language to create mental images in the viewers' minds. Mental images and metaphors like houses or food or nature will stick in students' minds more effectively than abstract concepts or terminology.

Use chunking — The same research showed that *most people will only directly remember content from about 4 slides of any presentation*. But "chunking" — grouping a set of information around a theme or topic — will make content more memorable than if it is presented in lots of slides that are only weakly linked.

¹ Gonzalez, J. Let's Make Better Slideshows. Retrieved from <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/slideshows>

² Simon, C. Better PowerPoint: What We REALLY remember from PowerPoint. Retrieved from <https://blog.polleverywhere.com/what-people-remember-from-powerpoint-presentations/>

Use better visuals

Outdated clipart, low-quality images, inconsistent slide designs, and overly-complicated animations can all distract your audience from the content being covered.

Use high-quality images — There are lots of high-quality, open-source image libraries available online. *Pixabay.com* and *unsplash.com* both have tens of thousands of high-resolution stock photos that are free to use. When inserting images into a slide, make sure to maintain the aspect ratio of the image, so that it doesn't get stretched or squished.

Go light on the animations — PowerPoint has a huge library of animations: bouncing bullet points, spinning slides, checkerboard transitions... but these can be distracting, and get old quickly. It's usually better to stick to simple transitions, to keep focus on the content.

Maintain consistency — Stick to a simple color scheme, a few easy-to-read fonts, and a similar slide layout throughout the presentation.

Insert black slides — Insert black slides within your slide deck to remind yourself to stop and ask questions, move away from the podium, and engage students in discussion or other activities.

Include interactivity

PollEverywhere — PollEverywhere lets you embed live survey questions into a PowerPoint or Google Slide presentation, and students can respond to those questions



using their phones or laptops. Student responses appear in the slideshow instantly, and can be presented in several different formats, like pie charts, word clouds, or open-ended answers. PollEverywhere is free for up to 40 responses per question. This can be a great way to facilitate discussions, check understanding, and reinforce concepts. *Note: To embed PollEverywhere questions into a slideshow, you must install a plugin to either PowerPoint or PollEverywhere. Test it out before trying to use this on a presentation computer.*

Kahoot — Kahoot is an online tool for creating live quizzes in a colorful, gamified format. Similar to PollEverywhere, students answer questions using their cellphones. Unlike PollEverywhere, Kahoot is designed to work like a



gameshow, with students earning points as they go, a leaderboard, music and sound effects, embedded media, and other fun features to keep students engaged. *Note: Kahoot uses an external website, and does not embed directly into a slideshow.*

Jeopardy Labs — Jeopardy Labs is a website that lets you quickly and easily create Jeopardy-style review activities online, without needing to set up a complicated



PowerPoint template. This can be especially useful for chapter reviews and test prep.

Note: Jeopardy Labs uses an external website, and does not embed directly into a slideshow.

Consider “unplugged” activities

It can be refreshing to unplug and focus on creating memorable “time-on-task” experiences with everyday materials like index cards, sticky notes, and butcher paper.³

Brainstorming — Have students work in groups with sheets of butcher paper to create brainstorming lists based on your prompts.

Timelines — Have students use index cards or sticky notes to create collaborative timelines for concepts like steps in a diagnostic process, historical events, procedural sequences, etc.

Metacognitive checks — Write “How confident are you with...?” on the whiteboard. Draw a Likert scale from “Not Confident” to “Very Confident”. Give each student a handful of sticky notes and jog their memories about the key concepts you've covered so far. Ask them to write these down on sticky notes and place them on the scale. Discuss trends, outliers, etc. as a class and how you'll tackle missed concepts.

³ A number of these ideas are taken from: <https://barbihoneycutt.com/>