



## SWC 1: Composing an Effective PowerPoint

PowerPoint and other publishing programs (such as Prezi) are used to create dynamic visual aids, typically to accompany speeches, lectures, and other instances where a large amount of information must be given to an audience in a way that both educates and holds people's attention. The text on a PowerPoint should only be enough to reinforce the presentation being given and to help prompt you, as the speaker, without showing your speech verbatim. Before you start creating your PowerPoint, consider the following elements:

- **Audience:** When you begin composing, it is important to consider who your audience is. For example, if your PowerPoint is part of a class assignment or speech, your audience will likely be your professor and your classmates. If the PowerPoint is for an organization or an event, it might be seen by complete strangers. Knowing this information will help you make the best choices with the words and the images that you use.
- **Purpose:** Why are you making a PowerPoint? What are you trying to achieve with it? Many people make the mistake of using PowerPoint presentations as additional notecards while giving a speech and simply read from the slides, but this strategy does not use the visual aid effectively. For a speech/presentation, a PowerPoint should highlight key terms for the audience and provide images that will help the audience connect the larger ideas of your speech. However, if the PowerPoint is not for a speech but intended to be a stand-alone document that a viewer interacts with on their own, more words than images might be necessary.
- **Subject Matter:** What do you want your audience to take away from your PowerPoint? In the case of presentations, less is often more. Choose what terms/information you want to highlight in your PowerPoint carefully to make sure that they fit with the message you are trying to convey. The same is true for the images that you use. For example, if your PowerPoint is about ice cream and you only use images of hamburgers, your audience might spend more time wondering why you chose those images than learning about your subject.

Write down some ideas about your audience and their expectations, your purpose, and your subject matter here:

### Design

Once you have made the above considerations, the next decisions are all about design. Whether you are trying to educate, inform, or entertain, your PowerPoint should convey your information in a visually interesting way. A good PowerPoint designer considers the lines, shapes, colors, textures, etc. that create an overall composition.



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When making your PowerPoint, consider the following principles of good design:

- **Balance:** Balance is the distribution of objects (text, images, shapes, etc.) throughout your design. There are three types balance – symmetrical (even/mirrored distribution), asymmetrical (purposefully uneven), and radial (around a central point). When choosing the balance of your PowerPoint slides, be consistent. If you use a symmetrical balance on one slide, it is a good idea to continue to use that throughout so as not to be too distracting for your audience.
- **Dominance:** In design, dominance refers to how you prioritize elements within your design. What information or imagery is the most important? What do you want your audience to see first? There are three levels of priority – headline (most important), subhead (second-most important), and further information (least important). Look at this handout as an example. The headline is the title of the handout, and it is bolded and centered. The subheads are the key terms that are bolded and use bullet-points. All other information on the page is plain text. This helps focus the audience's attention where you want it to go.
- **Harmony:** Harmony (also called “unity”) is achieved when all the elements of a design work together as a whole. Much like a musical harmony that works together when all the separate instruments and voices come together to create a wonderful song, harmony in design comes from all the different shapes, images, and text are unified. Though they may be separate pieces, they all work together. When this occurs, the design is truly complete. For PowerPoints, harmony might be achieved through the use of recurring design elements, colors, animated transitions, or headings.

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