

5 common presentation design mistakes and how to cure them

By Claudyne Wilder with Jennifer Rotondo

You can create effective slides that give you a convincing edge in front of your audience. This article shows you six mistakes and how to fix them.

Design Mistake # 1 Using sentences

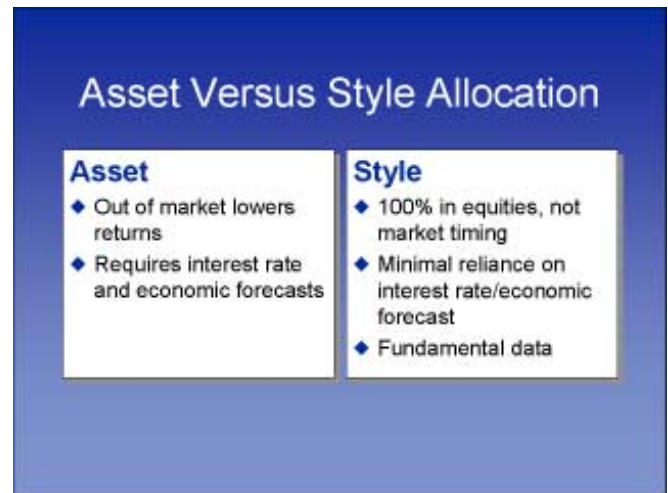
Cure
Eliminate all sentences on slides

being convincing is that the audience has to pay attention to you. Slides with sentences don't encourage the audience's full attention on the speaker.

Here are some other problems with the slide. The word allocation is on the same slide four times. That's using up lots of "real estate" on one slide for the same word. The font is Times New roman which is harder to read than a font such as Arial. And the bullets are in red. In this presentation the presenter is trying to convince the audience to invest with him. What does red signify in the economic world? Never use red as an accent color when you are attempting to convince people to give you their money.



Before: Look at this slide. There are sentences. Imagine the presenter. He stands up and either has to read all the words so the audience knows where he is on the slide or be quiet and let the audience read it. What presenters typically say is, "I don't read the words. I just talk to them." But in the meantime as the presenter talks, the audience reads the slide. The presenter is certainly not getting the full attention of the audience. One key quality about



After: The title is made simpler with allocation only one time. The

slide layout has changed. First, this layout is easier for the audience to compare the two types of allocations. Second, by using a different layout that changes the look of a slide. The font is Arial. This is a very simple slide and it will make it easy for the presenter to keep the audience's attention. He could build the slide by showing the Asset information first and then having the Style information APPEAR by clicking on his mouse.

Design Mistake # 2
Creating a data
"jargon" overload

Cure
Chunk data for
understandability



Before: Yes, this slide has a sentence also, but it has a different problem as well. The company has put together about eight to ten slides describing their business. Every slide looks like this but with a different title and sentence. Imagine the poor presenter. She gets up there and starts the presentation to

encourage a prospect to buy from her company and the first ten slides are ones she must read. And, at the end of that, the audience frequently still doesn't really know what her company is selling as the phrases have too many industry-specific jargon words. This may be the kind of sentence one puts in literature, but not on a slide.



After: Your first or second slide should be an executive summary of your business. There should not be many words. The presenter can fill in the gaps. Consider the concept of "chunking the date."

What we've done here is present an overview of the company. The slide follows the one that talks about the audience's needs. That means that the company doesn't talk about itself first, it talks about the audience's needs. Once those are established then the executive summary slide comes up discussing what the company is offering to meet those business needs.

Go back and look at all the places you could do an executive summary and save your audience the agony of seeing slide after slide of data. Also, be sure you use terms and words that are familiar to your audience. When you are attempting to convince people, it doesn't help when they don't grasp many of the words you use. Don't create a data presentation. Create a presentation in which understandable data is chunked in a logical order.

**Design Mistake 3
Making the audience
do the work**

**Cure
Show the information on
one page**

Below you see you two AFTER examples. Let's discuss each one and how you can use the ideas.

would have two slides. One slide describing the present and the next the future. But this makes it difficult for those visual people in the world—the ones who like to see the whole picture- to fully grasp his points. What the visual people do is start making their own chart as they listen. They make a chart like this one. They need to see the whole picture on one page.

	answerfriend.com	Co A	Co B	Co C
User experience	Excellent	Poor	Poor	Poor
Speed	Fast	Slow	Slow	Slow
Interface	Excellent	Excellent	Poor	None
Scope	Targeted	Broad	Broad	Targeted

	Present	Future
HR Information	Centralized control	Integrated access
HR Functions	Independent	Integrated
Employee Focus	Mutual loyalty Sacrifice	Personal focus Immediate benefits
Jobs	Static	Dynamic
Orientation	Long-term	Short-term

Example 1: Here the creator is talking about how the HR business is changing. He wants his audience to know the present situation and then where the business is heading in the future. Most presenters

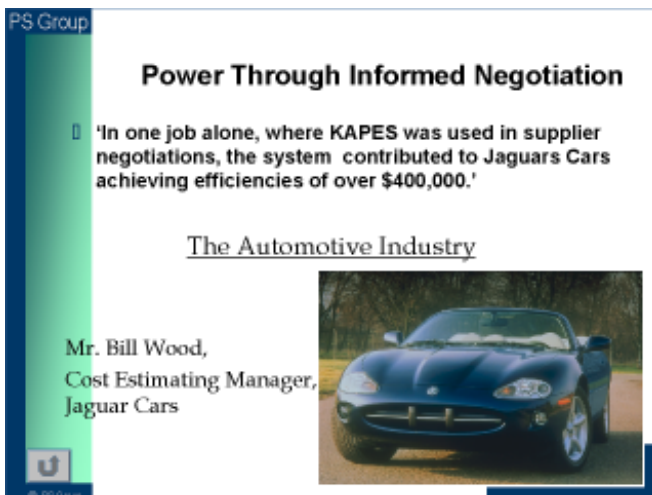
Example 2: The creators of this chart are selling their company and talking about how it will be different than the competition.

Usually they would have slide after slide of bullet points. And usually the information is not well-organized. Consequently, after the presenter leaves and the audience is now sitting around a table discussing whether they should back this company. And without a set of criteria to discuss who knows how they discuss whether they should back the company.

This same dynamic occurs when you are selling a product or service. Make it easy for your audience to decide in your favor. Show them the comparisons. Give them what they need. Because if you trust them to do the research you have no control over what criteria they choose to use when considering your recommendation.

**Design Mistake 4
Not making the best use of photos**

**Cure
Use the photo to make the point**



Before: The point of this slide is that Jaguar used Kapes system and they saved money. The underlying message is, "We have clients who experienced the benefits of our product and they will give us quotes." The quote is on top but the slide doesn't bring the audience into it. There's too much going on all over the place with four different word chunks and the car off to the slide. Your eye doesn't know where

to focus.

This is a good example of a photo from the standpoint that it is big enough to see. Many companies put five to eight of their products on one screen. Consequently, none of the products can be really seen. Just because you have photos of all your products, you don't have to show them all on the same screen.

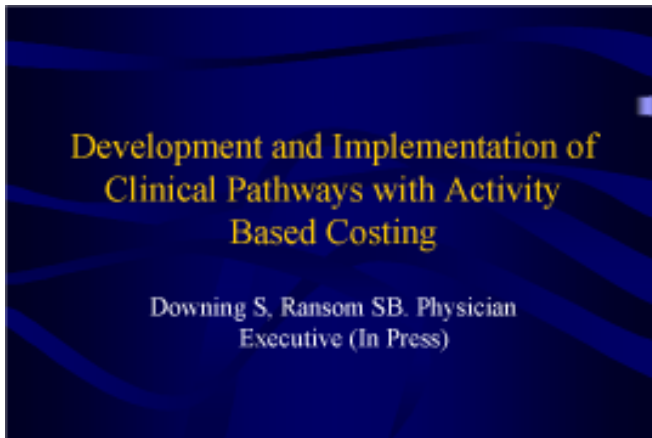


After: First, the photo is gorgeous, as it the car most of us would add. So, show it off. Put it in the middle. Then, put the quote at the bottom. Now the eye can focus.

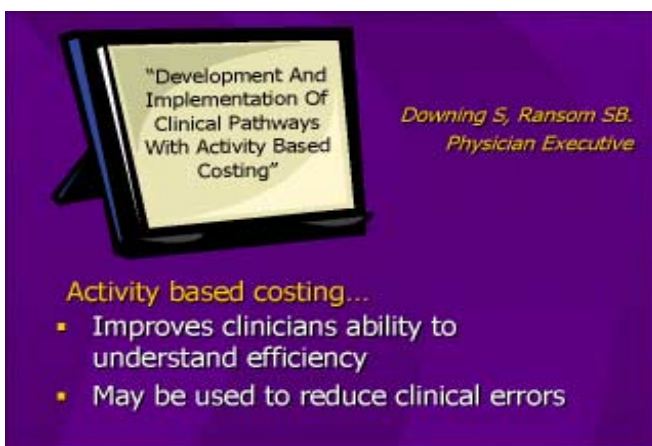
As you consider using photos, ask yourself these questions. 1. What point am I making when I show the photo? 2. How is the photo helping me get my message across? 3. Is the photo clear and good enough to help me make the message? In other words, don't use really unclear, fuzzy photos. That's not the message you want to send.

**Design Mistake 5
Lack of images for clarity**

**Cure
Use icons and images for continuity**



Before: The author here gives medical presentations. In those presentations he must tell his audience about articles that he has read and that they may wish to read. So during a presentation he shows this slide. He may reference four articles or more during an hour talk. All he's done is put up the name and author of the article.



After: How can the author add some interest to having to show a reference? He can have an icon image. Every time the frame comes

on the screen the audience knows they are about to hear about an article they might wish to read. After the second time seeing the image, they will know what it means. This changes the pace of the talk and makes it more interesting for the presenter. Maybe, just maybe, he might have a sound that goes with showing the reference. That really would depend on the audience.

During the talk the presenter usually says something about the article. But imagine it is now a month down the road and someone is looking at the talk and wondering which article has the information she needs. If only the article name and author are listed, she doesn't know if that's the one she wants. Here the author has added several phrases about the article. This will help when someone really wants to find certain key information.

As you look over these design ideas you'll notice there are two major points you want to consider as you design slides. First, will this slide help the presenter be effective and convince the audience. Second, will this slide be useful to the audience during the talk and after the talk. Most often a presentation is given for the purpose of convincing your audience, be sure your slides do that.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Claudyne Wilder teaches and licenses to companies and consultants her seminar: Winning Presentations: Development, Design, and Delivery with Confidence! To receive her free monthly e-newsletter Presentation Points email her at claudyne@quik.com or call 617-524-7172. See her web site at www.wilderpresentations.com

Jennifer Rotondo specializes in designing and creating multimedia presentations. She is a certified Microsoft PowerPoint expert. Contact her in Atlanta at 770-421-2476, via e-mail at rotos@mindspring.com or visit www.creativemindsinc.com

COLOPHON

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The headline is set in 18-point Frutiger 95 Ultra Black. Subheads set in 10-point Frutiger UltraBlack. Body copy set in 12 point Adobe Minion on 16.5 point leading.

Author and Colophon information set in 11-point Minion on 13.2 point leading.