



The 8 sins of PowerPoint

A rapid response guide for presenters

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Jigsaw Overview Graphic

The 8 sins of PowerPoint

Want to create really great visual support to elevate your presentation or stories? Avoid these pitfalls at all costs.

1. No clear point. Establish your presentation point near the beginning and end of your presentation.

2. Lacks “navigation.” Use PowerPoint as a roadmap to your point, chapters and content.

3. Doesn’t reinforce. Use the same language on the slide that you use when you speak.

4. Misses an emotional connection. To change an audience, make them feel something.

5. Doesn’t sell. Images and language should change the way audiences think or act.

6. Ugly. Yes, poor design is a factor – but it’s only one factor.

7. Contains too much information. Your slides are meant to be “referenced,” not “read.”

8. Delivers “content” instead of “context.” Use PowerPoint to Tell audiences “why” and “how,” not “what.”

Sin #1 – No clear point.

What's the one thing you want your audience to remember?

That one thing is your point. Put that exact statement in the beginning of your presentation. In fact, repeat it throughout your talk – then come back to your point at the end.

Too often, speakers careen from one idea to another. You've got so much to say – but your audience won't remember any of it if you don't wrap it around a cornerstone point, and make everything you do about connecting to, proving and activating your audience to that point.

Jigsaw Sample Graphic

Good presentation “points”

Your presentation should have one, central focus. It’s called your “point” and it needs to be a big part of your PowerPoint.

Our new brand represents the benchmark for innovation.

We are on course for our best year ever. Let’s talk about what we need to do to get there.

Here’s how our investment in innovation supports our overall vision.

Our success depends on our commitment to accountability.

I want you to remember one thing about the new product we’re launching today...

We are shifting our strategy to better connect with our customers.

We’ve been doing some research and we discovered something important.

Our new initiative will save you time, save you effort, and make your work more meaningful.

When we work together, we win.

This changes everything – including the next conversation you have with a client.

Sin #2 – Lacks “navigation.”

Here’s a hard truth – people are going to disengage from your presentation.

It doesn’t matter if you talk for five minutes or (shudder) an entire hour – people tend to fade in and out of conversations these days. Your opportunity is to make it easy to fade in.

Embed overt and subtle visual cues into your talk as a way to help your audience know where you’re going – and more importantly what’s most important in your presentation. Dividing your presentation into sections (or chapters) and having title slide for each of those chapters is a personal favourite.

Jigsaw Sample Graphic

How to create PPT navigational cues

Use navigational elements to help your audience to understand where you are and where you're going as a presenter.

Headlines are critical, referencing what you want the audience to take away from the slide.

Our Vision

Our New Brand

“Change the world”

Be bolder
We are more than a job

Push further
Find solutions for clients and each other

Ask questions
Does this “change the world?”

3 of 4

Subheadlines remind what chapter or segment of the presentation the audience is in.

2 - Our path forward

Simple, consistent colour blocks become a quick visual reference, indicating that the content you're describing belongs together.

Numeric indicators help the audience know how long your chapter or segment is. This reduces anxiety and disengagement.

A listing of the content you're covering on this slide serves as a mini table of contents and reinforces both language and messages.

Slide 7 of 10

Sin #3 – Doesn't reinforce.

Tell 'em what you're going to tell em. Tell 'em. Tell 'em what you told 'em.

It's a classic adage in speechwriting – one that extends to your PowerPoint. When it comes to talks, people simply forget. They forget numbers. They forget themes. They forget what you said 17-seconds ago. PowerPoint is a brilliant tool when it comes to specifically referencing the key components of your presentation.

Keep it simple. Headline-level language is best for reinforcement – language that is a literal duplicate of what you're saying on stage. Repeating key phrases is also helpful. That way, you've got a better chance to embed your idea in their heads.

Jigsaw Overview Graphic

How to write a headline

Headlines are your presentation's most valuable real estate. They keep the audience focused and help them navigate.

Bring context

Bring context. Good headlines do more than describe information, they offer insight and advance conversation. Use your headlines to create a specific impression in your audience.

Bad headline

Our Q3 Results

Good headline

Your attention to customer experience made Q3 the best quarter ever.

Help them navigate

Headlines serve as a roadmap to your presentation, helping an audience understand where you are and where you're going. This reduces anxiety in an audience so that they can focus on your message.

Bad headline

We're also working on a new IT initiative.

Good headline

The second thing I want to talk about today is our new IT initiative – a critical step forward.

Make them active

Use an active voice to deliver your headlines where appropriate. Using present tense, strong verbs and definitive language give your headlines urgency and power.

Bad headline

We will be looking at new investment opportunities during the next quarter.

Good headline

We are investing in new technology – here's what we can tell you.

Write multiple versions

Quickly jot down multiple versions of your headlines, instead of revising the same headline repeatedly. This helps you rapidly develop and tweak your words. Now, step back and choose the best headline for your presentation.

Sin #4 – Misses an emotional connection.

Most people don't change their minds because of logic.

In fact, the more evidence you have, the harder it can be to move someone from an entrenched position.

That's why you often have to appeal to emotion as a way to create action. That's important are about getting an audience to do/feel/think differently – and using PowerPoint to appeal to emotions can get you there.

Imagery is an easy way to trigger emotions – and not only dramatic photography. You can use vibrant words to illustrate a story. You can even use a single number on a screen as a visual to jostle your audience.

Ways to make your PPT “emotional”

Emotional connections change minds and attitudes. Use your presentation PowerPoint to back up stories and trigger emotion.



Sin #5 – Doesn't sell.

Sell, don't tell.

Your presentation is designed to change something, and that requires the tools of persuasion. Instead of pushing a set of facts and stories at an audience, you need to craft and control the specific conversation you want to have – your PowerPoint is essential in defining and reinforcing that conversation.

Start with your audience. How do they feel about your content? What do you have to say to win them over? Use a combination of visuals, context-setting headlines, step-by-step navigation and simple, benefit-driven body copy to sell your idea to your audience.

Jigsaw Sample Graphic

Sell vs. tell

It's a dirty secret, but in order to get your idea across, you're going to have to use the tools of persuasion in your PowerPoint. Here's how.

Don't do this – this is “tell”	Yes do this – this is “sell”	
Communicate	Market	
Say something	Change something	
Share your idea	Create action with your idea	
Present content	Bring context	
Explain	Persuade	
Deliver “to” your audience	Connect “with” your audience	
React to a conversation	Define a conversation	
Detail	Inspire	
Your information	Their biases	

Sin #6 – Ugly.

Almost all PowerPoint is ugly.

And by “ugly,” it’s not simply the combination of stretched graphics, overloaded slides and off-brand colours that are the problem – it’s the entire UX that’s a problem. That’s right, when designing your PowerPoint, you should think more about the user experience than how pretty it looks.

A good user experience has an information hierarchy. It tells your audience what they should take away from the slide, it should provide a sense of navigation in terms of where you’re going in your presentation. It should also be consistent in its look and feel – a problem I see all too often with presentations. Same structure, colours, typefaces and way to share information.

Why this is an ugly PowerPoint slide

Ahhhh, it burns! Avoid these colossal design mistakes when it comes to your visuals (better yet, hire an actual designer).

No visual hierarchy. People need to know where to look and what's important.

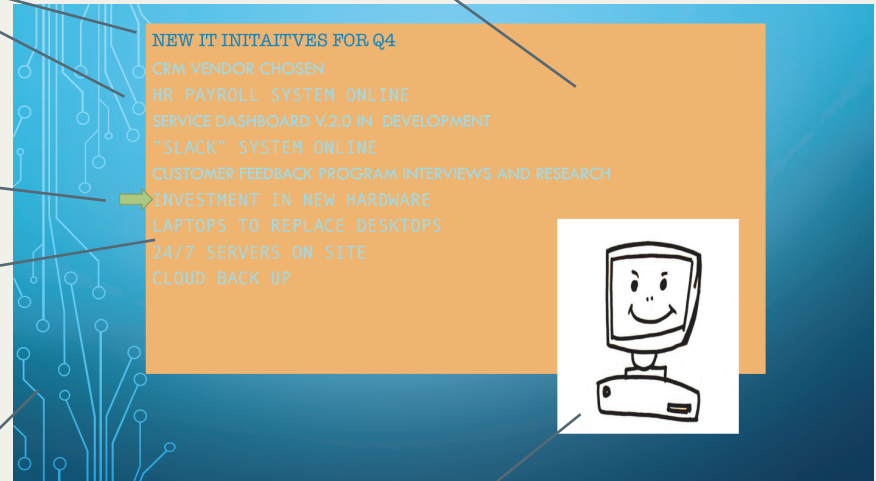
Colour confusion. Too many colours. Colours that fight with one another. Colours that are impossible to read on a slide.

Useless stuff. What even is this thing? Why is it important?

Font shenanigans. Too many typefaces. Typefaces that don't work together. All caps that are impossible to read.

Stock templates. Everybody knows them. Everybody uses them. You can find better ones online. Better yet, use a good designer.

Crummy imagery. 1990s clipart. Blocky, low rez photos. Stretched images. Please stop.



Sin #7 – Contains too much information.

Stop putting Every. Single. Word. on the screen.

The role of your PowerPoint is to help your audience understand your presentation. If your audience needs to read your slides, you've got too much information.

Instead of loading up the screen with text, think in terms of headlines and subheadlines. One big headline at the top to bring context. Subheadlines to help your audience steer their way through the content. Visuals to generate emotion.

Jigsaw Checklist

Reduce the amount of PPT information

Stick to context, headlines, emotion setters and key themes.

Only place things you want people to memorize on a slide.

Headlines –
Seven words or fewer.

**Text –
10 words or fewer**

Text –
Replace full sentences with trigger words or phrases.

**Bullets –
Maximum of four short bullets.**

Images –
More full screen photographs.

**Speaking Notes –
Use a separate screen for notes from the notes section. Do not use your actual slides as speaking notes.**

Rehearse more –
Know your content so you don't read your content.

Yes –
Headlines
Context
Single word slides
Chapter slides
Numbers as images

No –
“What” headlines
Bad clip art
Useless words
Sentences

Sin #8 Delivers “content,” instead of “context.”

Not “what,” but “why.”

Too many PowerPoint presentations describe content instead of delivering context. The reason you're on stage is that you are the expert. You define the conversation. Your presentation graphics need to back you up. Don't throw all your data on a screen and ask your audience to assemble it in their minds.

Tell them the context. Describe “why” and “how” instead of only “what.” It's not “Q3 Results.” It's “Q3 Results – Social Media drives our biggest quarter.” Bringing context with your PowerPoint, tells your audience what's important – and what to pay attention to in the verbal part of your presentation.

Jigsaw Sample Graphic

“Content” vs. “context”

Your PowerPoint needs to do more than say “what,” it needs to sell your audience on “why” and “how.” Bring context to your slides.

Bad – this is content	Good – this is context	
What	Why, how	
Agenda	Five things to remember today	
Our vision	We need you to achieve our vision	
Results	New comp = 8% increase in employee sat	
Where we’re going	How we drive team collaboration	
Your role	Ask 3 questions every day	
Accountability is important	“Accountability” is this process	
Next steps	Next step – Feedback by 1pm Thursday	
Conclusion	Focus on four parts of your day	

Personal Whiteboard

Personal Whiteboard

See. Solve. Sell

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Quick reminder tips and questions



Easy-to-Follow thinking tools

Write your objective here

Illustrate an exercise here

Illustrate an exercise here

List next steps or outcomes here

Create a parking lot here

web
email
twitter
instagram
youtube
linkedin

thinkjigsaw.com
jason@thinkjigsaw.com
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