

“Making your case” more effectively

’TIS THE SEASON when local agencies regularly present proposals or technical information to city councils, county supervisors, and others. To increase your audience’s understanding of the information and their appreciation for your point of view, take some time to prepare an interesting, customized presentation that incorporates helpful visual elements.

Develop effective presentations using slides, overhead transparencies, or presentation software like MS PowerPoint. Such software can help you organize information, create a visually appealing presentation, and add “pizzazz” to technical material. You can incorporate graphics, charts and graphs, photographs, even sound and animation, to highlight important ideas.

Preparation tips

- Begin and end your presentation with a brief outline of your objectives.
- Use a large typeface—36 points is a good starting place—and only one or two fonts. Arial, Helvetica, Geneva, and Univers are easy to read on a screen.
- Keep content simple and brief, using key words and phrases instead of sentences. Six lines of six words each per slide is a general guideline.
- Use bulleted lists to highlight parallel information.
- Color can be a powerful visual tool, but use it sparingly. Use dark text on a light background, or very light (white or yellow) text on a dark background.
- Whenever possible, substitute pictures, tables, charts, and other visual elements for words. Keep them simple.
- Use photographs generously to help viewers “see” the topic. Photos can be especially effective in showing actual road conditions, sign placement, or safety problems.
- Use humorous illustrations and graphics wisely. Nothing off-color or insensitive, please. (And don’t get into trouble by using copyrighted graphics.)
- Double-check spelling and grammar.
- Generate audience handouts from your slides, transparencies, or software presentation.

Presentation tips

- Use your own computer and/or projection equipment if possible. If not, test your presentation on the equipment at hand before the meeting. Always have a backup plan in case the technology doesn’t work.
- Have an extra projector bulb on hand.
- Speak to your audience, not to the presentation. Use your slides or transparencies as a tool, not a crutch.
- Darken the room enough to see the presentation easily but leave enough light so your audience can comfortably take notes and participate in a discussion.

Tools for getting started

Check out these resources for developing effective presentations:

Powerful Presentations (website): Helps both beginning and veteran speakers by sharing ideas, giving pointers, answering questions, and suggesting resources. Includes articles on all aspects of presenting. www.powerfulpresentations.net

Presentations Magazine (publication, website): Includes tips on designing and making presentations, product reviews, and technology. www.presentations.com/

Presenter’s University (website): Includes tools, templates, and tutorials for PowerPoint presentations. Includes series of articles on content, delivery and visual aids. www.presentersuniversity.com/index.cfm

PowerPoint in the Classroom (website, course): Presents a humorous tutorial on designing PowerPoint presentations, including creating slides, making changes, adding images and charts, adding motion, adding sound, timing and rehearsing; and taking it with you. Tutorial can be used in print format. www.actden.com/pp/index.htm

Sonia Coleman’s PowerPoint Collection (website): Over 140 free PowerPoint templates for download. Also includes PowerPoint tutorials. www.soniacoleman.com/Templates.htm

PowerPoint FAQ (website): Comprehensive source for answers to frequently asked questions. www.rdpslides.com/ppfaq/

Effective presentations “. . . increase your audience’s understanding of the information and their appreciation for your point of view”

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