



arts for all

Los Angeles County Regional Blueprint for Arts Education

Creating Powerful Visual Communication

A clear, concise story and powerful pictures are essential to creating effective visual communication. However, all too often we subject parents, board members, and potential funders to lengthy speeches about the importance of arts education without getting the emotional reaction out of them that we desire. How can we get others to adopt our point of view? *Presentation Zen* teaches us how to use “simplicity as the ultimate sophistication” in order to turn documentaries and PowerPoint presentations into powerful visual communication tools.

“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” –
Leonardo da Vinci

Do you have hours and hours of video footage of arts experiences, but no documentary to succinctly tell this story to potential funders? Have you ever seen (or delivered) a PowerPoint presentation with endless lists of bullet points, lots of text, and cheesy clip art? This seems to be the status quo. However, there is a better way. The following ideas will help you greatly improve your storytelling capacity with PowerPoint and/or documentaries. The following ideas are taken from *Presentation Zen* by Garr Reynolds and the Digital Arts Alliance website. (See resources at the end of the report.)

***Presentation Zen* Concepts** (pg. 25)

- Like a Japanese bento, great slide presentations contain appropriate content arranged in the most efficient, graceful manner without superfluous decoration. The presentation of the content is simple, balanced, and beautiful.
- Presentation Zen is an approach, not an inflexible list of rules to be followed by all the same way.
- The “Death by PowerPoint” approach is common and “normal” but it is not effective. This is different from the way everyone else does it. But everyone else is busy defending the status quo (which is easy) and you’re busy championing brave new innovations, which is difficult.
- In the conceptual age solid presentation skills are more important now than ever before. Presenting well is a “whole minded” skill. (References to Daniel Pink’s book, “A Whole New Mind: Why right-brainers will rule the future.”) Good presenters target people’s left and right brains.
- Live talks enhanced by multimedia are about storytelling and have more in common with the art of documentary film than the reading of a paper document. Live talks today must tell a story enhanced by imagery and other forms of appropriate multimedia.
- We’ve learned some ineffective habits over the years. The first step to change is letting go of the past.

General Design Principles (pg. 163)

- ❖ Signal vs. Noise Ratio
 - Think of as essential vs. nonessential. Remove visual clutter.
- ❖ Picture superiority effect
 - People remember visuals better than bullet points.

- ❖ Empty space
 - Empty space is not nothing: it is a powerful something.
- ❖ Contrast
 - Use contrast to create strong dynamics.
- ❖ Repetition
 - Repeat selected items throughout your slides to give your presentation unity.
- ❖ Alignment
 - Connect elements visually on a slide.
- ❖ Proximity
 - Ensure related items are grouped together.

Zen Aesthetic (pg. 107 – 117)

- ❖ Simplicity
 - Simplicity means the achievement of maximum effect with minimum means.
- ❖ Elegance
 - High taste moves beyond brilliant color and heavy ornamentation to a simple and subdued refinement.
- ❖ Subtlety
 - Be suggestive rather than descriptive or obvious.
- ❖ Naturalness
 - Never use elaborate designs over refinement. Restraint is a beautiful thing.
- ❖ Empty/negative space
 - Good designs have empty space...Think “subtract” not “add.”
- ❖ Amplification through Simplification
 - By stripping down an image to essential meaning, an artist can amplify that meaning.

“Find the big picture and let go of the rest.”

Things to Avoid (pg. 105)

1. Too many elements in one slide
2. Overuse of bullet points
3. Long lines of text
4. Cheesy images
5. Too many colors
6. Overused gradation
7. Weak visual communication
8. Clutter (no white/negative space)

How to Improve Immediately (pgs. 21 and 130-131)

1. Make slides that reinforce your words, not repeat them.
2. Create slides that demonstrate, with emotional proof, that what you’re saying is true and accurate.
3. Use professional stock photo images, not cheesy clip art. (see resources below)
4. No dissolves, spins, or other transitions.
5. Create a written document, a leave behind, but not a printout of your slides—your presentation should not mean anything without you there to present it!
6. No more than 6 words on a page. EVER. And if you really can’t adhere to that, see the next rule.
7. Use the 1-7-7 rule:
 - a. Only one main idea per slide.
 - b. Insert only seven lines text maximum.
 - c. Use only seven words per line.



8. Use bulleted lists sparingly.
9. Keep it simple.
10. Try the *Pecha-kucha* exercise:
 - a. *Pecha-kucha* is the Japanese word for chatter, and it is a concept for creative presentations.
 - b. 20 slides for 20 seconds each = 6 minutes, 40 seconds
 - c. These tight restraints keep presentations brief and focused. It's a good exercise even if you don't use the method for your future presentations. If you cannot tell the essence of your story in less than seven minutes, then you probably shouldn't be presenting anyway.

“You can't spread the word if you don't know what the word is.”

Creating your Powerful Presentation

1. Brainstorm
2. Organize/edit/identify core message
3. Storyboard analog
 - o For PowerPoint
 - Slides audience will see
 - Notes only you will see
 - Handout/report for audience members after presentation
 - o For Movies
 - Create the voiceover
 - Create the storyboard
 - Add images, audio, visual, and special effects
4. Storyboard digital

Show. Don't tell.

We teach our students in their language arts classes to pre-write, write, edit, organize, etc. We want the students to write clearly in order to effectively communicate their idea. It's time we practice what we preach. You'll know when your next presentation is a home run: you'll put up the slide and it will trigger an emotional reaction that leaves your audience wanting more. Remember to show, not tell. Yes, these concepts are different than what everyone else does. *But everyone is busy defending the status quo (which is easy) and you're busy championing brave new innovations, which is difficult* (pg. 22).

Resources

Reynolds, Garr (2008). *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*. New Riders, Berkeley.

Digital Arts Alliance <http://www.digitalartsalliance.org/pre-production.html>

Open Source stock photos:

Morgue File www.morguefile.com

Flickr Creative Commons Pool www.flickr.com/creativecommons

Image After www.imageafter.com

Stock.xchnng www.sxc.hu

Everystockphoto search engine www.everystockphoto.com

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