TIPS FOR CREATING AN EFFECTIVE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Today, PowerPoint is essentially synonymous with presentation. You may have already noticed that Hohenheim professors are very keen on presentations, much more so than writing assignments. Now, whether you regard the reason behind this as being that presentation skills are always necessary for a future career, or simply that they're easier to mark, you'll no doubt have to contend with a few of them.

■ Initial points to consider

Before you start compiling your slides, you should ask yourself the following questions:

▶ What is expected from you in this presentation?
▶ What are the main points you want to put across to your audience?
▶ What is your time limit? This will dictate how many slides you should include.
▶ Will there be a questions and answers session?

■ General layout

Below is advice to follow regarding the general layout of your presentation:

▶ **Slide design:** Hohenheim offers its own PowerPoint template which can be accessed at the following website address in either a white or blue design:

https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/organizingyourstudies

You're also free to use your own slide design. PowerPoint provides a number of options, or you can start from scratch. Just be sure to bear the following points in mind:

■ keep the design **simple** to make sure that it doesn't detract from the actual point you're trying to make
■ make sure your template allows for **readability**
■ use **contrasting colors** – dark text on a light background is the most common – and avoid using too many shades, as well as red, orange and green text (this is especially worth considering if you think your audience will want to print out your slides – dark backgrounds are going to use up a lot more ink)
■ be **consistent** with elements like background, font and colors

▶ **Title slide:** your title slide can be as fancy or as plain as you want. However, make sure that any text is clear, and that you at least include the following:

■ the title of your presentation
■ your name
■ your professor's or lecturer's name
■ the name of the module (if relevant)
■ the name of the institute
■ the date of your presentation

You can also incorporate the Hohenheim logo and/or any relevant organization logos.

▶ **Table of contents:** after the title slide should come your table of contents. You don't need to provide slide numbers, but you should ensure that all chapters and sub-chapters are included.

▶ **Slide numbers:** all slides should be given a slide number apart from the title slide and the table of contents.

▶ **Headings:** keep your headings short and concise. Use significant keywords and don't use whole sentences.

▶ **Font style:** stick to a **sans serif font,** e.g., **Arial, Calibri** or **Trebuchet.** Unlike serif fonts – like Times New Roman or Garamond – they're smoother and so appear less cluttered and easier to read. Avoid using more than two types of font. Lastly, use standard fonts or make sure that the fonts you've chosen are embedded within your presentation; otherwise, if the laptop you use on the day doesn't have them installed, it'll simply use a substitute font which may mess up all your design efforts.

▶ **Font size:** don't be tempted to go smaller than **22 point** – **24 point** is more ideal. If you're having size issues, simply shorten the text on the slide or use two slides instead of one. For certain tables and figures, a slightly smaller font might be unavoidable, but don't go smaller than **18 point.**

▶ **Animations:** as with the slide design, don't go crazy with slide animations, e.g., flying images or exploding text. They can be very distracting for your audience, and make your presentation look less professional. Keep any animations you use simple, subtle and consistent.

Builds – in which lines appear one after the other – is a simple animation style to use, usually from the top or the left. However, be aware that this can slow down your presentation.

▶ **References slide:** don't forget to include a references slide at the end of your presentation. The font used can be much smaller than that used for the main text.

■ Slide contents: text and images

Below is guidance on how to effectively include text and images in your slides.

▶ Each slide should contain around **60** to **90 seconds** of information. Of course, some will be less and others more. However, this will at least give you an indication of how many slides are expected of you in a presentation of a certain length, i.e., for a 10 minute presentation, seven to nine or ten slides should be enough.

▶ Limit the amount of **punctuation** and **capitalization** you use.

▶ **Don't fill up slides with information.** Keeping your font no more than between 22 and 24 point will help you to avoid this.

▶ Don't use full sentences – **only bulleted information** or **key phrases.** In general, try not to have more than six words per line (bullet point), and no more than six lines per slide. Your audience won't be able to listen to you and read a mini-essay at the same time.

▶ **Avoid slides which contain *all* text.** The great aspect of using PowerPoint is that you don't only have to use words: you can use a whole range of images. Your audience will be more able – and likely – to follow if they're not having to contend with a slide full of sentences

▶ Remember that your **slides should complement your talk.** In other words, you shouldn't be reading directly off each a slide as you go. They should be useful for the audience – reinforcing what you're saying – and also for you – providing you with useful reminders of what to say when.

▶ **Include citations.** Citations can be included in a smaller font. In fact, this is advisable – especially if you have a large number of them –otherwise, they can detract from the main text. Include citations for any:

■ images (e.g., pictures, photos, etc.) that aren't your own
■ data used in tables that isn't your own
■ figures (e.g., graphs) that aren't your own creation
■ direct quotations
■ to back up important points

▶ **Images,** including pictures and photos, are a great way to brighten up your slides and take up additional space. However, be careful not to overdo it, and, if possible, use the same type of image at least on the same slide. Avoid clichéd clip-art. Make sure that the quality (or resolution) of the image remains when up on a larger screen. If you copied and pasted the image from a website, you only need to provide the website address as the source. And lastly, pay attention to copyrights…

■ Slide contents: tables and graphs

Tables and graphs are very effective ways of getting information and data across quickly. To help make the most of these visual tools, here are a few words of advice.

▶ **Tables**
■ Make sure that if you copy and paste a table, all the elements are still legible.
■ Be careful how many columns and/or rows you include: you don't want to go much smaller than a font of 18 point for tables.
■ As stated before, don't forget to include any citations, unless you used your own data.

▶ **Graphs**
■ Using different colors will help differentiate columns and lines.
■ Don't forget to include all axes' captions and quantities.
■ Again, unless you used your own data, include citations for all the sources you used.

One last point on referencing tables and graphs: if you modified a table or graph in some way, for example, you reproduced it in Microsoft Excel as opposed to copying and pasting it directly from the source, you should state "Adapted from" and then the source as your citation.

Although a table or graph is a succinct way of getting information across, in a PowerPoint situation you'll only be spending a limited time on one so it's important to get the main message across, especially if you can read a lot from it. One way to

highlight the valuable feature(s) is by using the light function on your PowerPoint remote. If you're not using one of these, or you're one of those people who doesn't want to show their shakiness more than they have to by attempting to control a red pinpoint, then you can highlight the figure/bar/pie chart section, etc., by, for example, using a different color or circling the relevant area.

■ Editing

In order to edit your presentation, you'll need to carry out practice runs of it. Ideally, you'll do this in front of some form of audience. Otherwise, find a quiet space and speak it out loud to yourself (or your stuffed toys, pot plants, etc.). This will give you an idea of how long your presentation takes and, therefore, if you need to add or subtract content from it.

■ Proofreading

Don't forget to proofread your presentation.
- ▶ **Print out your slides:** with a printed version you can find mistakes you may have missed on screen.
- ▶ **Get a peer, friend or family member to check it for you:** a fresh pair of eyes is another effective way to pinpoint any additional blunders.
- ▶ **When you practice, practice using the slide show option:** it can help to see inaccuracies when they're larger…

■ And now to present…

For guidance on how to present your PowerPoint presentation, check out **"Tips for presenting"** in this series.

UHOH Faculty of Agricultural Sciences Academic Writing Aid
Creator: Katharine Cresswell Riol
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