

## PowerPoint Ethics

How fast can you move through your slides in a power point presentation to lawyers on a CLE type presentation?

If you have an hour to present, how many slides, maximum can you use?

If you follow the Pamela Reif format and go from slide to slide every 60 seconds [and thus close to 60 slides in an hour], will you make their heads spin, or is it up to them to keep up? Might it be dangerous for those in the audience if you move so fast?

Thanks.

---

I guess it depends on the type of presentation and how much information you show on the slides.

My last one-hour presentation had 25 slides and information on each slide varied but I think that it was a good number of slides. You have to ask yourself if you, when attending a presentation, want to see too many slides that you cannot keep up with presentation and the presenter or maybe have one slide up there for 2 or even three minutes.

It also differs if you have interaction with your audience during the presentation, maybe even a handout.

Personally, I think that 60 slides for one hour are too much.

Alexandra Kleinfeldt, Florida

---

I think it depends considerably on what is on the slides, your audience and your presentation style. I have spoken for 30 minutes on a single slide and have also used 120+ slides in 60 minutes (although in that instance simulating a test so as soon as an answer is yelled out — a couple of seconds — I move to the next slide). My personal style is to have fewer words on slides, use a lot of graphics, and convey much of the material by speaking. If more written information is useful to participants, I'll include in handouts. Also, don't be afraid of changing pacing (several quick slides then one slide for a few minutes then a couple more). Good luck!

Kristin Haugen

---

1 slide filled with lots of text per minute is typical but too much--it's why lawyers get so much flack for their presentation skills. The non-legal trend now is minimalist (e.g., 1 word per slide with minutes of discussion) with splashy graphics, which is the antithesis of a CLE where you're trying to give people information. I personally feel you're better off giving them a packet with the information digestible and organized nicely (e.g., a slide deck for consumption, that they can take notes with), but you don't have to use that for the presentation itself.

Silverlegal

---

I dont think it really matters unless you load up the PowerPoint and just read from it.

Hieu Vu

---

This is not an ethics question. It is a question of pedagogy. Before you approach the question, you have to understand that this has nothing to do with ethics; otherwise, you won't be able to properly analyze the issue.

Before answering the question, you need to ask, what is it you want to accomplish, and then what is the best way to accomplish that?

I have given dozens and dozens of presentations at legal conferences over the past 20 years, with most being in the past eight years. They have ranged from a half hour to four hours. While some believe that slides should be entertaining and have only key words, I take an extremely contrarian view.

The argument is that if you put too much on a slide, people will stop listening to you and read the slide. But, I disagree.

My slide style reflects the frustration I have had with what others have presented. Often times, for a talk that others give, there will be slides AND written materials.

The slides are more or less place holders with some key points. The meat is in the written materials. The problem is that when a speaker presents, I want to listen to the speaker and take as few notes as possible. The more someone writes, the less that person is able to listen and digest. However, if the slides only contain key words, with the meat in the written materials, I can't know how much I need to take down in notes. Thus, I need to follow the written materials AND the slides and keep track of what is spoken and in the written materials, as well as what is spoken and NOT in the written materials, all the while, keeping pace with the slides, which are highlighting what is important. I do not like this back and forth, back and forth. Accordingly, my slides ARE my written materials. That is, the slides contain FAR more information than what I would ever be able to cover in a presentation. That is by design. There is no back and forth. Rather, for a 60 -90-minute talk, I may 150 - 200 slides - with LOTS of small print. I also keep a running outline in the left-hand margin, with a red arrow pointing to where we are in the talk so that nobody gets lost. In other words, the slides ARE the written materials.

Sometimes I am criticized for having way too many slides. That's ok. That person just failed to "get it." This is a CLE, not a Sunday afternoon talk at the library, or a cruise ship lecture. I expect attendees to be able to refer to my slides after the talk and learn from them. And, during the talk, I want attendees to listen to me and not have to write down any more than is necessary. If they can follow my talk, by following the slides, they can see what is being presented is also right in front of them. While I don't read my slides, per se, I do closely track the material in the slides. And, up front, I make very clear, just in case someone may be prone to not "get it" that I have far more slides than we could ever expect to cover in the presentation, but that they are intended to be a resource for use following the presentation.

Recognizing that with so much material, conference attendees could get lost, I put a yellow background behind anything I want to highlight. I am not highlighting the text, per se, but rather, I place a borderless box around the material to be highlighted, fill it with bright yellow, and then "send" the box to the back, so it does not cover up the text.

I do not have any animations, fade ins, fade outs, etc, for my slides. I want the attendees to pay attention to me and not be distracted by a showy PowerPoint.

Once conference attendees understand that the slides are meant to be used as a resource, they are less likely to be critical about trying to cram too much into the slides. Two days after your talk, few are going to remember much of what you said.

But, if they can refer back to your slides, they will have it all there - if you are willing to put in the work to put it all there.

When I give the talk, I may stay a few minutes on one slide and then skip the next 15 slides. I say during the talk what I want to highlight, but in order to actually TEACH the material, it is just not possible to expect that one can convey in just one hour all of the material necessary in order to be able to gain some competency in the subject of the talk, unless one were to give a talk that is so narrowly focused, that many in the target audience may just tune it out.

What I have also done in recent years is add case histories to the presentations in order for conference attendees to learn how the principles or rules taught in the session can be applied in real world situations. If I have a lot of time, say, two hours or longer, I will present case scenarios with questions and have people break up into small groups to work on solutions and, when we re-convene, we discuss the answers to each question.

One final word: About a year ago I gave a local talk to a group of estate planners. One attendee was critical, stating that he felt that it was a "canned" talk, one that I had given many times before and not tailored to the crowd, and that I must have used slides for that talk that I had pulled from another talk. While it is true that I have spoken on some topics many, many times, I have never given a talk without reviewing the slides, making sure that they were current, and addressing what I believed conference attendees ought to learn from the talk. What I say to a crowd of my Social Security colleagues, will not be identical to what I say to a room full of estate planners.

Hope this helps,

Avram L. Sacks, Illinois

---

Thanks to all. Your responses so far have been very helpful.

Ethics? Well, that was my attempt at humor and getting folks to read my post.

My goal: make their heads explode.

Too many slides? I like Mr. Sacks' view, you can't have too many slides.

Written materials? As with Mr. Sacks I think my slides will be my written materials. Available on demand after the show.

But I await further suggestions.

Roger M. Rosen, California

---

Avi is right that it comes down to how you can best communicate the information to the attendees.

When I give presentations, I want the student-educator interaction that in my mind is fundamental to information retention. This means my slides are generally there to support me, not the other way around.

My slides are a combination of information and humor, in a variety of media. And they are all designed to elicit responses from attendees. My favorite presentations are the ones where the audience and I have a conversation, and exchange of ideas.

More directly to your point, for an hour presentation I'd have 20-25 slides. Tops.

Your mileage may vary. Eat your greens.

Andrew Wentzell, Florida

---

It all depends on what you are presenting and your presentation style.

Ross Kodner used to do a presentation, "60 tech tips in 60 minutes," which I never saw but I would imagine it was pretty rapid-fire PowerPoint presentation. I, personally, tend to rely more on written materials, in fact my written materials will usually cover more than my actual presentation; I tend to cover the highlights and emphasize certain points in my presentation. And I use relatively few slides; to the extent that I use them I try to use them to focus on difficult things, like analyzing a complicated statute. There's really no point in putting up for instance case cites, those are in the written materials. Now, I did one presentation where I did NOT write the materials, it was actually an ethics presentation, and though I followed the general outline I was presenting additional material; there I would put up case citations, rule

citations and such. But I tend to find excessive slides distracting; if it's in the written material I would rather say "see page 37" then put page 37 up.

Ronald Jones, Florida

---

1) Fast! But...

2) This requires discipline. **DO NOT READ YOUR SLIDES! DO NOT PUT YOUR SPEECH ON YOUR SLIDES!!!**

Your slides should be EXHIBITS to the speech, they should not be the speech.

Erik Hammarlund, Massachusetts