

12



**common errors
to avoid in your
presentations**

Introduction

There are many guides available online detailing how to produce a winning presentation.

As a company that specialises in presentations we've read through lots of these so that you don't have to.

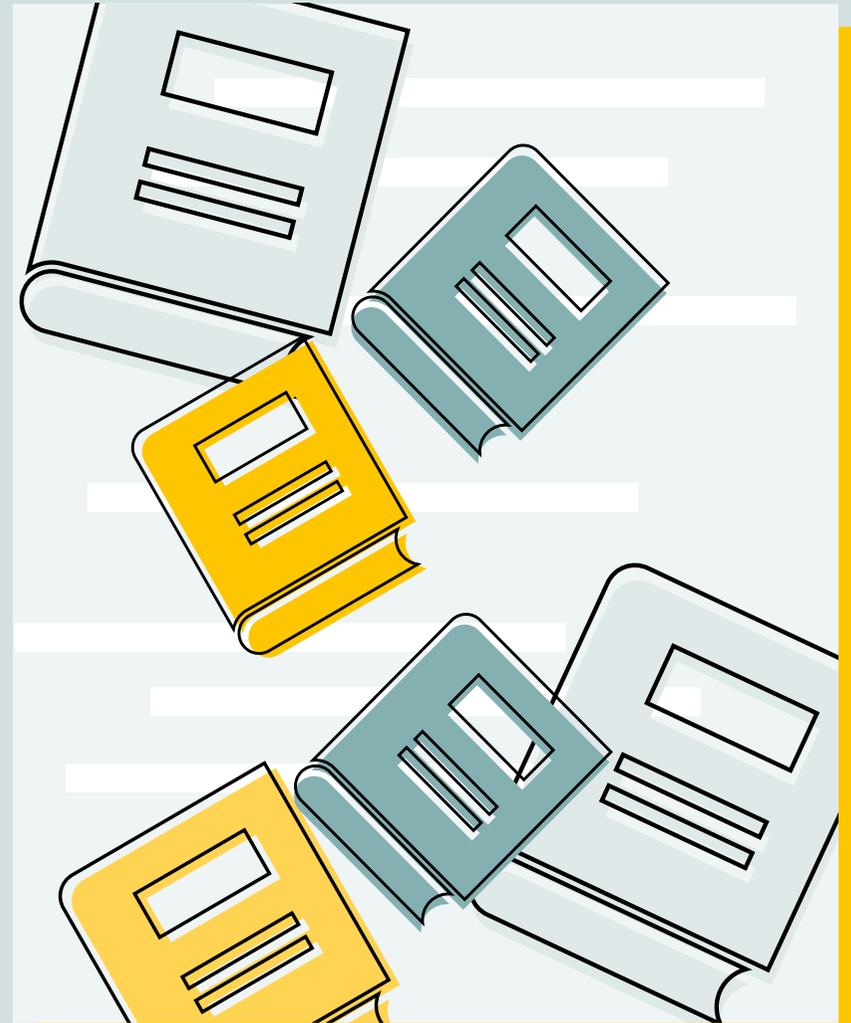
It will come as no surprise that there are common themes that emerge across all these guides. Each will have its own particular emphasis, its own pet hates, but there is a degree of consistency on identifying the most common errors when designing a presentation.

Although there are more sophisticated tools available, the corporate environment and its reliance on Microsoft products means that PowerPoint is still the most common presentation software in use.

This guide is not specifically aimed at PowerPoint, the suggestions apply equally to any presentation tool.

This is not a guide on presenter skills - but some of the suggestions will play into how you deliver your presentation. It is intended to give you the tools to ensure that your presentation, and specifically your slides, are as well constructed as they can be so that you reach your audience and do what you set out to do - get your message across.

Now, let us show you how to avoid the most common pitfalls.



12 common errors to avoid in your presentations

1

Too much information

This is the number one error when it comes to preparing your slides, far outranking any other single issue.

Your slides should convey information and ideas with clarity. If each slide is crammed with words your audience is either going to be overwhelmed or will struggle to understand exactly what you are telling them.

The same principle should be applied to bullet points. Use bullets only if they enhance your message, but be wary of falling into the trap of overkill.

When designing slides always be a ruthless editor. **You** will be there to guide your audience through your presentation - your slides are to there emphasise and reinforce your message.

Your presentation is not intended to be an essay on a screen.



2

Poor imagery

This point ranks very highly in the “if you do it, make sure you get it right” stakes.

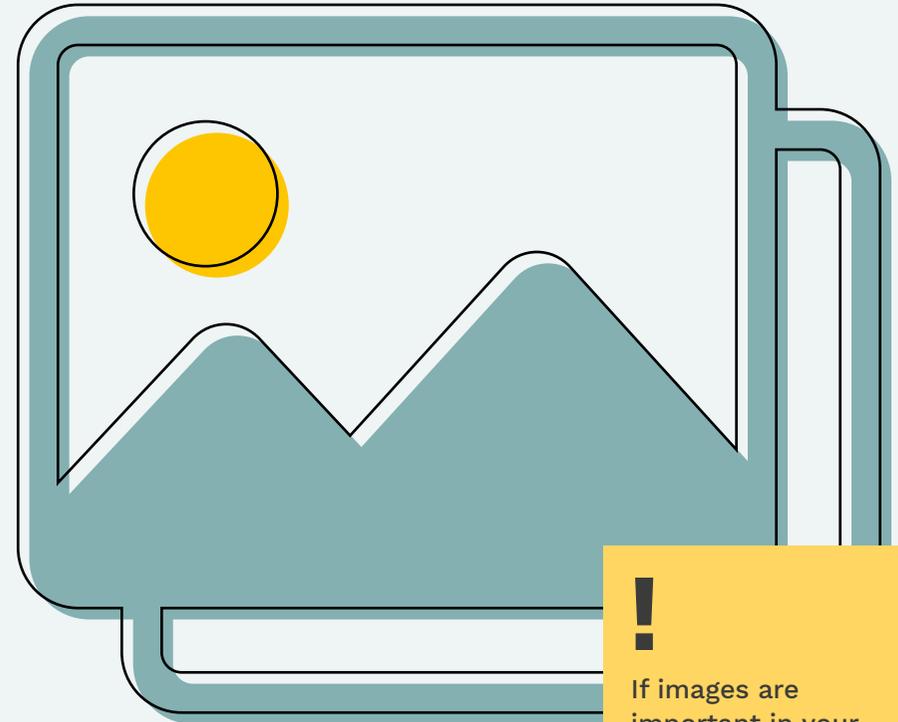
PowerPoint incorporates a lot of stock imagery from Microsoft and those images have been used time and time again. Your audience has probably seen them repeatedly, so any power they once had is long since spent.

There are many sources of good quality stock imagery and time spent in carefully choosing appropriate images which compliment and empower your message is time well spent.



Another very common error is the use of low resolution images. It is safe to work on the assumption that your presentation will be displayed at a much larger size than the screen you created it on.

Before you present always ensure that when displayed at full size your chosen images scale up correctly and do not become fuzzy or pixelated. Low resolution images are hard to look at, possibly hard to understand and distract from your presentation.



If images are important in your presentation try to be appropriate and original.

3

Colour scheme

Colour is attractive; it is literally eye-catching, but unless used carefully it can be distracting and off-putting.

Using garish, clashing colours may make your presentation difficult to ignore but painful to view.

Like everything else in your presentation, colour should be geared to reinforce your message and informing your audience about you and your brand.

A presentation that resembles a spilled bag of Skittles may not send the message you intended. As with all aspects of presentation design it is important that you test your presentation on a critical audience before delivery.

This is a difficult area to get right and our advice would be to err on the side of caution. Balanced colours and tints throughout your presentation gives the impression that your message is also balanced and well thought out.

If you are determined to go loud with your colour palette take soundings from your colleagues and be open to their opinions.



4

Poor Contrast

This can result from lack of variation in your colour palette. Poor contrast is common but can be easily avoided.

Slides with poor contrast are harder to read and also lose a considerable amount of their impact. The colour of your text, if not properly considered, can mean it fades into the background, and with it your message.

So It's definitely worth spending time getting the tonal palette correct with good contrast between elements on the slide.

Another important consideration is how your presentation will appear on intended display medium. Always check this before you actually deliver on the day – a combination of colours and tones that look subtle and elegant on your 4K monitor can suddenly look much less impressive when projected onto a distinctly non-4K screen or projector.

Testing your presentation in a real-life environment is a vital aspect of designing it.



5

Big Fonts and Big Logos

It would be reasonable to assume that using large fonts and large logos would be a plus-point. Getting the message across to everyone including those at the very back of the room.

Using overly large fonts and logos runs the same risks as putting too much information onto a single slide - they overwhelm anything else on the slide, they eat up space and they can throw off the balance of the slide or the entire presentation.

AA

The size of text you use should be balanced between legibility and the overall aesthetic of the slide.

6

Alignment

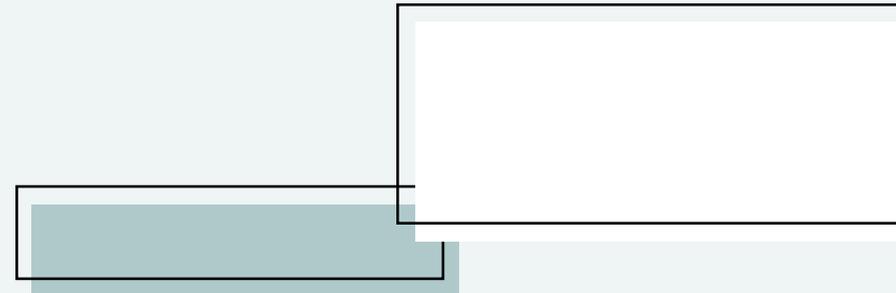
Ensuring that the content of your slides is properly aligned seems almost too obvious to mention

This also touches on our next subject, consistency. Slides with wildly varying alignment will give your audience an almost subliminal sense that all is not well.

Alignment is one of the items that should be on every presenters checklist.



You should ensure uniformity long before your presentation ever meets it's audience.



7

Consistency

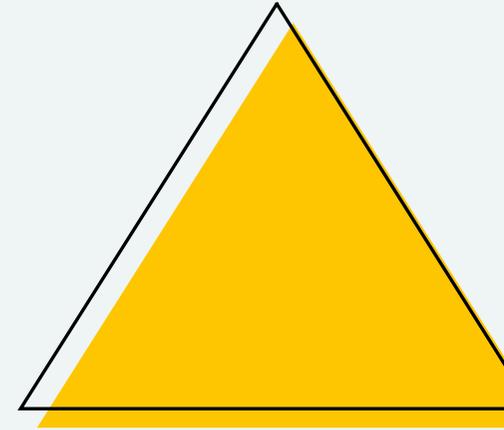
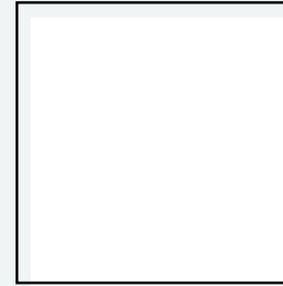
Another piece of advice that should be utterly self-evident but sadly isn't.

Whether by design or accident, a lack of consistency will either turn your audience off or make them focus on the slides themselves to the detriment of the information they contain.

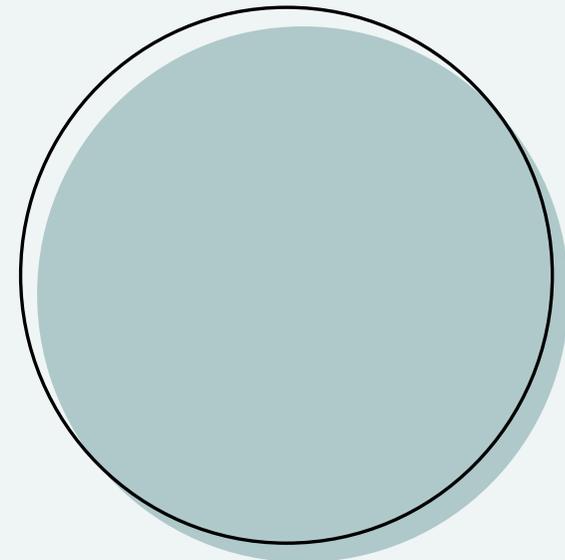
This could be changing up the fonts and typesize on every slide or the colours.

Achieving consistency is a matter of careful planning and review.

Resist the temptation to have a 'killer slide' which you think will, by looking intentionally out of place, capture your audience. You may find that you don't get the reaction you hoped for.



A display of consistent competence is more likely to win the day.



8

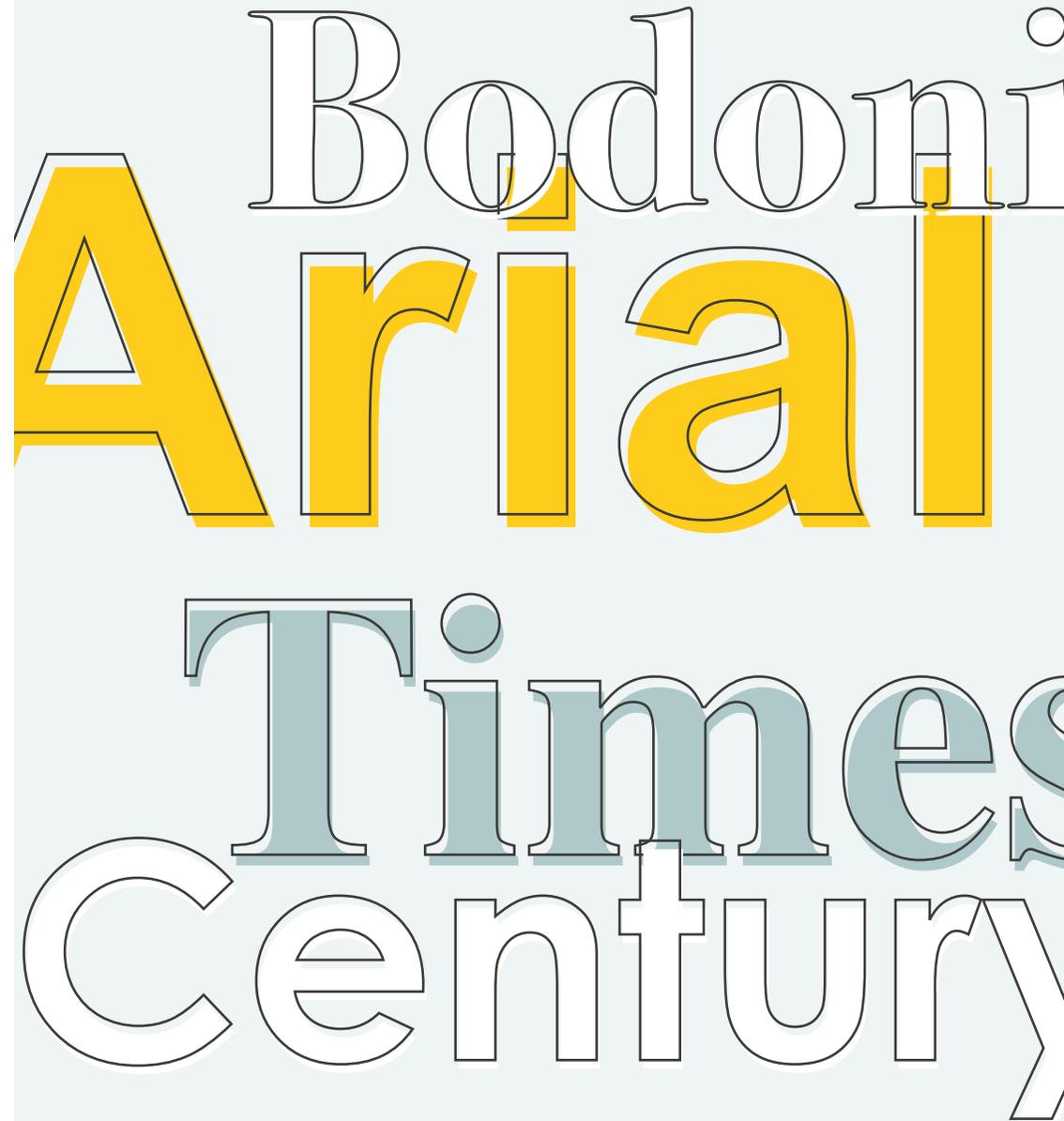
Too many fonts

Fonts are great!

They're fun and they enable you to add a specific look and feel to your work. They add power to your words and like any power they have to be used with care and respect.

It may seem like a great idea to mix it up, to be a bit unpredictable, a bit edgy, but the effect can be off-putting, suggesting a lack of care or a lack of suitable gravity.

Stick to two or three typefaces in your presentation which are chosen for good readability and have several weights available for use to create hierarchy of information on your slides.



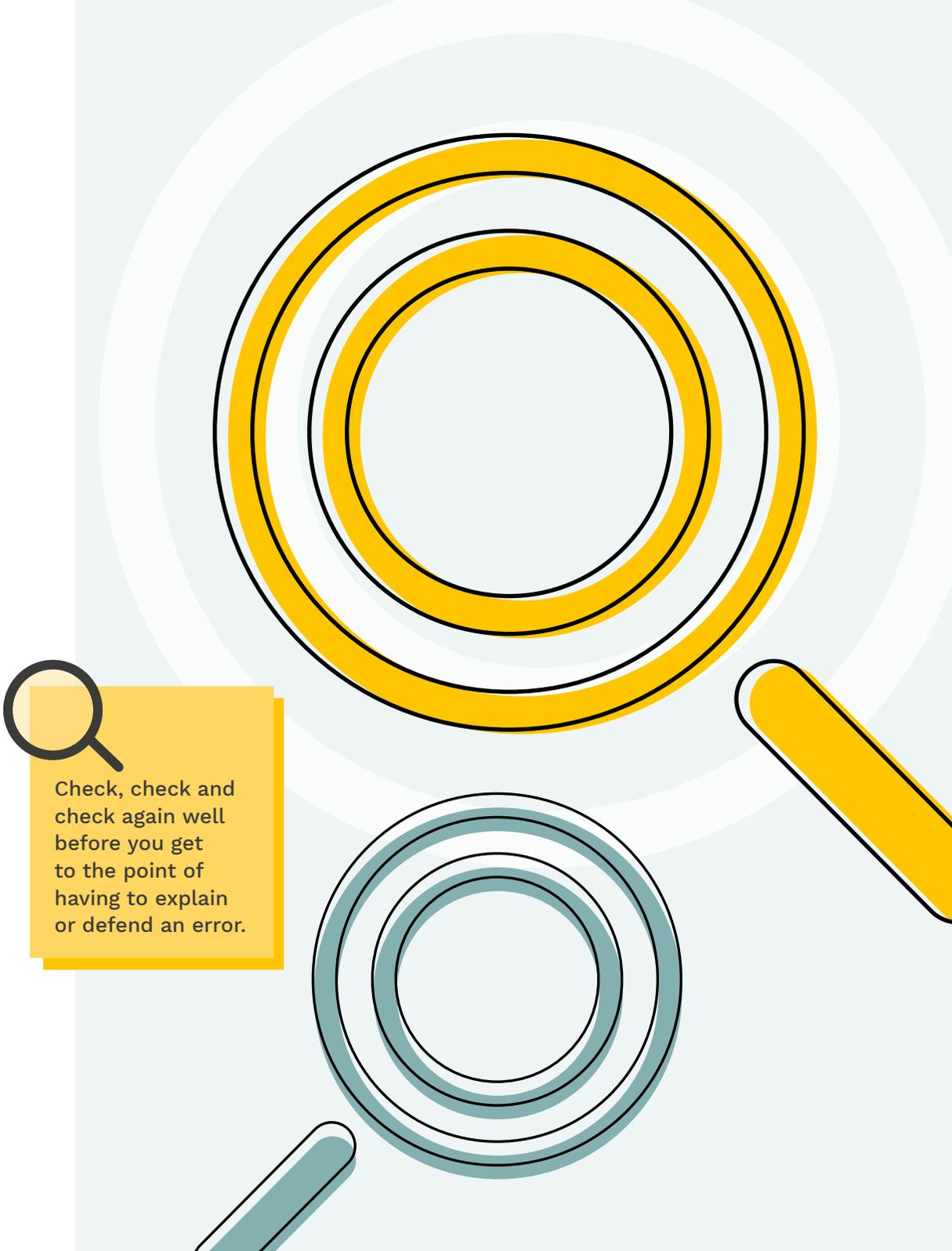
9

Inaccuracy

It's crucial that information presented should be accurate and correct.

Delivering something that is obviously wrong or, possibly worse, that contradicts an earlier slide, is an error that is going to undermine your whole pitch.

At best, you may be asked a pointed question and have to admit to making a mistake. At worst, it strikes at the integrity of your entire presentation, wasting your time, your audience's time and possibly robbing you of an opportunity that was months in the making.



Check, check and check again well before you get to the point of having to explain or defend an error.

10

Content Stuffing

Don't succumb to the temptation to make sure that every slide has as much detail as possible.

Our advice would be to always reassess your overall presentation when completed and then decide to remove some content instead.

Your audience will retain a limited amount of information after your presentation so try to cut things back to the information that really counts.

The problem with content stuffing is that it can seem like a solution to sway the argument with substance but your audience will see through it immediately and, like some of the other danger areas, it will strip credibility from your presentation.

Adding too much text may actually make your presentation harder to understand

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11

Too many slides

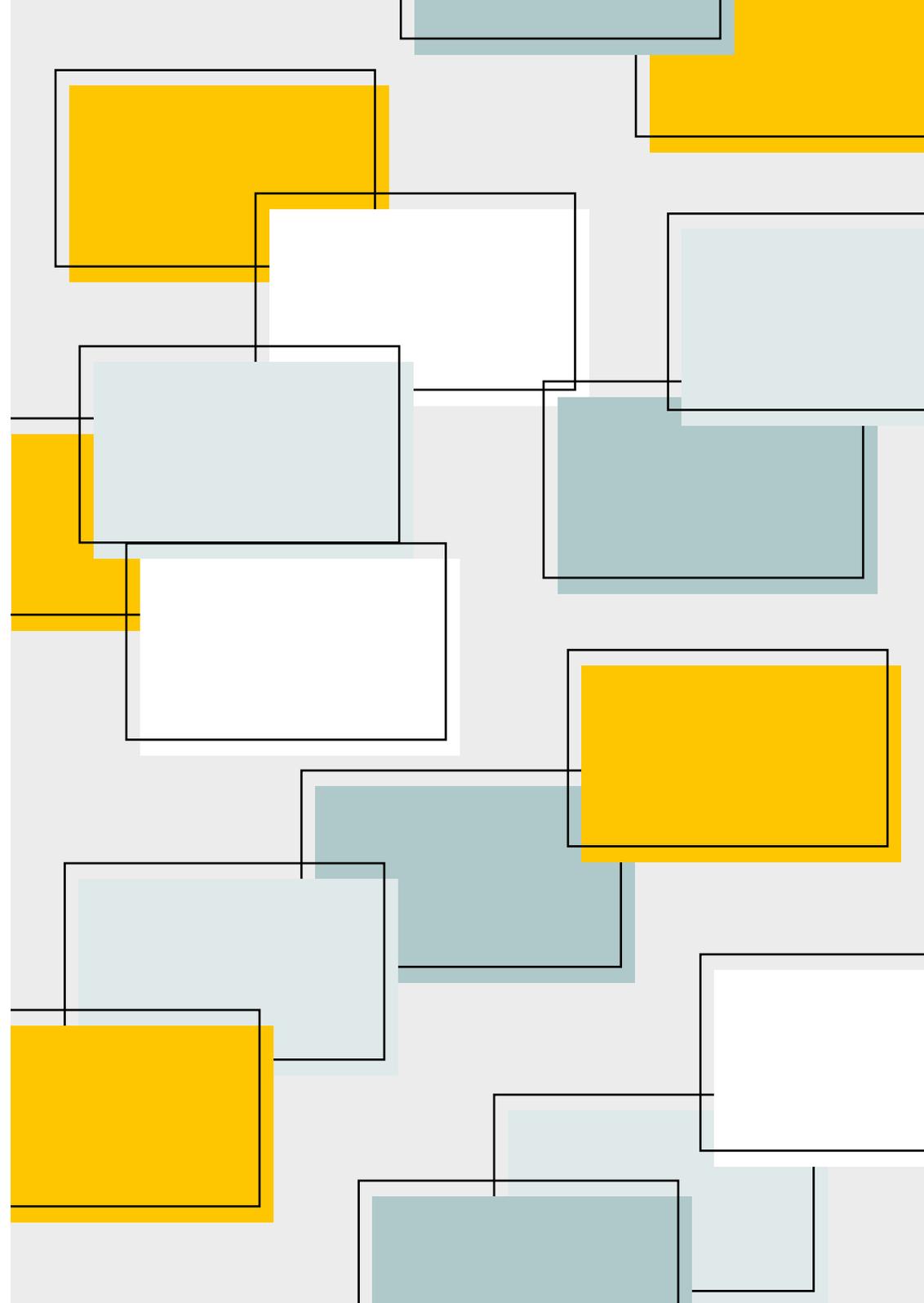
A straw poll of various guides and sites suggests that a ten minute presentation probably requires between 8 and 10 slides.

This is a very rough rule of thumb - you may well have a couple of slides which, quite legitimately, require 2-3 minutes to deliver.

Alternatively you may have some slides that are purely 'scene setters' and are images that are on screen for seconds. Our advice is that number of slides depends on the pace of delivery.

Always practice timing in advance and then adjust your slide count (or content) accordingly.

Remember:
you are the presentation,
your slides are there to support you, not the other way round.



12

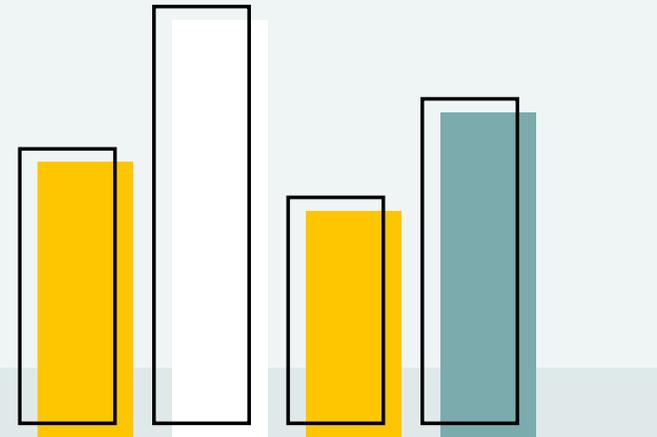
Overly complicated charts

Charts and graphs can deliver complicated information quickly and clearly, this makes them exceedingly useful in the proper context.

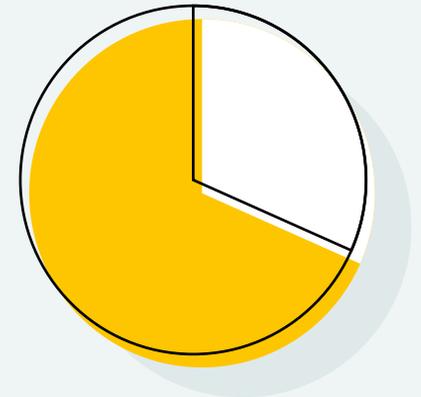
However charts that are too complicated can create confusion and disengagement very quickly.

Your audience should be able to identify the relevance of the chart quickly and clearly. The key figures or trends should be easily understood.

If there is a lot of irrelevant data points or a long-winded explanation is required then its probably time to revisit these items before your presentation.



Simplify charts down to key figures and use a maximum of three colours with varying tones.



Some final thoughts...

There is a risk in guides like this that the message seems to be “Don’t take any chances!” – nothing could be further from the truth.

As a creative design agency our job is to find original ways to deliver your message in as effective a manner as possible and the last thing we would ever want to be accused of is being boring!

If you are designing a presentation you owe it to yourself, your organisation and your audience to do your best to project a clear and strong message.

That’s not about being boring, it’s about recognising the importance of the task and applying appropriate time and attention.

The more important the message the more care you should be willing to take, the more time you should dedicate to designing, testing and fine-tuning your presentation.



Need expert advice?

We understand the amount of craft and consideration involved in producing a truly memorable presentation, and our skills in this area have been honed through a decade of experience.

The bigger the opportunity, the bigger the stakes.

With good planning, the right techniques and a bit of good advice you can avoid common errors and produce a presentation that can really engage and influence your audience.

If you have material or a presentation you'd like us to review, upload it here and we'll be in touch to arrange a **free consultation**.

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