Presentations
A Guide to Designing Effective Presentations

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What makes a presentation effective?

Effective presentations are well organized, focused on their objectives, and engaging for the participants. They are meant to increase knowledge and influence learners. They should be relatable to the audience and tailored to the outcomes desired.

Presentation slides should focus on essential informaton and make use of visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, and other images. They should be planned, presenting information in a logical sequence The presenter should have a plan to engage the audience throughout the presentation, ensuring maximum participation and retainment.

An effective presentation is rehearsed and delivered in a confident manner. Questions should be encouraged, helping to engage the participants and clarify concepts to ensure learning.

Slides should be uncluttered and easy to read. Your narrative will allow for elaboration – avoid overcrowding your presentation materials. Avoid using too many slides during your presentation. Presenting too much information doesn't allow your learners to process what you are presenting and can lead to disengagement and confusion.

How do people process presentations?

Cognitive science suggests our brains can remember approximately seven (5-9) pieces of content at a time. The recommendation is to "chunk" information into 5-9 sections of content at most to avoid overwhelming your learners. Each section of content should last 5-10 minutes before a cognitive break, such as asking a question, occurs.

"Modality effect" shows us that individuals process auditory and visual information separately. Using both in your presentations enhances participants' ability to understand and retain the information you share.
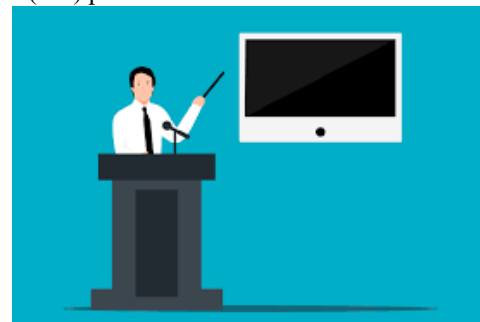
People remember the first and last pieces of information you share, so be sure to offer a strong introduction and conclusion to your presentation. Use questioning and other "cognitive pauses" throughout your presentation to break up information into digestible sections.

What resources can help me design a presentation?

MCW provides numerous resources to aid in the development of presentations. From software to library subscriptions, there are a wealth of resources to support you in presentation design.

MCW subscribes to Microsoft's Office 365 package. Information and training are available 24/7 through Microsoft Support. In addition, MCW IS offers training opportunities at little to no cost.

MCW Libraries subscriptions give us access to more than books and journals. For example, the Clinical Key database allows you to search for digital media, such as images and videos, that can be embedded into your presentations. Clinical Key even provides full citations for all materials, making it easy to copy and paste into your presentation to ensure proper credit.

Polling tools, such as TopHat and Poll Everywhere, allow you to engage your audience through interactive polling. At MCW, TopHat is used in degree-granting programs, such as the School of Medicine, whereas Poll Everywhere is used for non-degree programs, such as in graduate medical education.

Tools to design interactive presentations are available through programs such as Storyline Articulate and Adobe Captivate. Such presentations can be designed for asynchronous delivery, offering learners the opportunity to access the materials according to their own schedule.

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What are some tips for designing presentations?

Adapt your presentations to your target audience to ensure you present information at the appropriate breadth and depth needed for their learning. Break information into sections or "chunks" to help reduce the gap between where learners are and their learning goal(s). Integrate information visually to focus learner's attention and reduce cognitive load. For example, place labels directly next to a visual rather than off to the side.

Be mindful of the learner experience when designing your presentation. How will they receive and interact with the material you are presenting? How do visual aids enhance your content? Are you using consistent terminology and defining new terms as needed? Is your content focused on your learning objectives for the session?

Practice makes perfect and helps you to refine your content and delivery. Be sure you practice your presentation and do so with a trusted colleague if possible. Ensure what you are trying to convey is what your audience receives.

If you need assistance in designing or reviewing your presentations, contact educational_improvement@mcw.edu.