Plan your joke carefully so that you can (1) get the point across as quickly as possible, (2) deliver it in a conversational manner with interesting inflections and effective body movements, and (3) deliver the punch line effectively. If you cannot tell a joke well, use humor instead—amusing things that happened to you or someone you know, one-liners, or humorous quotations that relate to your presentation. Refrain from any humor that reflects negatively on race, color, religion, gender, age, culture, or other personal areas of sensitivity.

- **Use presentation visuals.** Presentation visuals, such as handouts, presentation software, and demonstrations, enhance the effectiveness of the presentation. Develop presentation visuals that will enable your audience to see, hear, and even experience your presentation.

- **Encourage audience involvement.** Skilled presenters involve their audiences through techniques such as asking reflective questioning, role playing, directing audience-centered activities, and incorporating current events or periodicals that tie directly to the message. One communications coach's advice for getting an audience "to sit up and listen" is to make the presentation contemporary by working Twitter, texting, video, and other technologies into the speech.[8]

12-2c Closing

The closing provides unity to your presentation by "telling the audience what you have already told them." The conclusion should be "your best line, your most dramatic point, your most profound thought, your most memorable bit of information, or your best anecdote."[9] Because listeners tend to remember what they hear last, use these final words strategically. Develop a closing that supports and refocuses the audience's attention on your purpose statement.

- **Commit the time and energy needed to develop a creative, memorable conclusion.** An audience is not impressed with endings such as "That's all I have" or "That's it." Useful concluding techniques include summarizing the main points that have been made in the presentation and using anecdotes, humor, and illustrations. When closing an analytical presentation, state your conclusion and support it with the highlights from your supporting evidence: "In summary, you should select our communication training program because it offers ... ." In a persuasive presentation, the closing is often an urgent plea for the members of the audience to take some action or to look on the subject from a new point of view.

- **Tie the closing to the introduction to strengthen the unity of the presentation.** For example, you might answer the rhetorical question you asked in the opening, refer to and build on an anecdote included in the introduction, and so on. A unifying close to a speech to motivate women business owners might be, "Life is too short to spend it doing other people's work and paying the price with unhappiness. With appropriate planning, you can spend your days as I do, making a life you love."

- **Use transition words that clearly indicate you are moving from the body to the closing.** Attempt to develop original words rather than rely on standard statements such as "In closing" or "In conclusion."

- **Practice your closing until you can deliver it without stumbling.** Use your voice and gestures to communicate this important idea clearly, emphatically, and sincerely rather than fade out at the end as inexperienced speakers often do.

- **Smile and stand back to accept the audience's applause.** A solid closing does not require a "thank you"; instead, wait confidently for the audience's spontaneous applause to thank you for a worthwhile presentation. Appear eager to begin a question-and-answer period or walk with assurance to your seat.

12-3 DESIGNING COMPELLING PRESENTATION VISUALS

Speakers who use presentation visuals are considered better prepared and more interesting, and achieve their goals more often than speakers who do not use visuals. Presentation visuals support and clarify a speaker's ideas and help the audience visualize the message. A speaker using presentation visuals reaches the receiver with double impact—through the eyes and the ears—and achieves the results quoted in an ancient Chinese proverb: "Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I'll remember. But involve me and I'll understand." Research studies confirm that using visuals enhances a presentation.

The effective use of presentation visuals provides several advantages:[10]

- clarifies and emphasizes important points
- increases retention from 14% to 38%
- reduces the time required to present a concept
- results in a speaker achieving goals 34% more often than when presentation visuals are not used
- increases occurrence of group consensus by 21% when presentation visuals are used in a meeting

12-3a Design of Presentation Visuals

PowerPoint still remains the standard presentation software used in most organizational settings, even though its use has given rise to such sayings as "Death by PowerPoint" and "PowerPoint poisoning." The problem is that too many presenters approach a presentation as if they were reading a document to their audience rather than delivering an interesting and inspiring message. The result is "docu-points," or presentations composed of too many text slides that are overly complex, difficult to understand, and boring. One example is an "electability" PowerPoint slideshow sent by the 2008 Hillary Clinton Campaign to all House Democrats that contained nine slides, 275 words, one table, three bar charts, and two pie charts. Such "docu-points" are usually less effective than a concise, well-designed handout or summary report.[11]

Even though PowerPoint remains a standard in many professional environments, other presentation software packages are available. Flash is one of the best presentation software tools on the market because of its animation effects and ability to import video. Unfortunately, it also takes a high degree of proficiency to use. Prezi is another popular software tool that is available online and provides a very different experience than PowerPoint in that it is nonlinear and more interactive and dynamic. Apple users can use Apple Keynote. Other presentation tools include Google Docs and SlideRocket.

Regardless of the software package you choose, your goal is to create an appealing, easy-to-read visual aid that supports and enhances your main points without overwhelming the audience. Presentation visuals should possess the same degree of professionalism as your delivery and per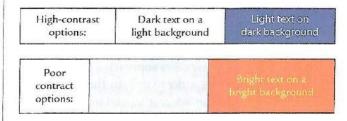sonal appearance. You can create dynamic and useful presentation visuals, including slides, handouts, and notes pages, by following these simple guidelines:

- **Limit the number of visual aids used in a single presentation.** While audiences value being able to "see" your points, they also welcome the variety provided by listening and the break from concentrating on visuals. Design compelling visuals that direct the audience's attention to major points and clarify or illustrate complex information. Use precise, vivid language that will involve the audience and enrich your message and delivery style.

- **Limit slide content to key ideas presented in as few words as possible, or better yet, visually.** Well-organized, crisp slide content enhances the audience's ability to grasp the speaker's meaning and find immediate value in the information. Good content also leads to an extemporaneous delivery rather than a speaker's monotonous reading of scripted slides. Short text lines are also easier for the eye to follow and open up the slide with appealing white space. Whenever possible, present complex information using graphic aids, such as tables, charts, or diagrams.

- **Develop only one major idea using targeted keywords the audience can scan quickly, understand, and remember.** Full sentences can be used for a direct quotation; otherwise, less is more. William Earnest, author of *Save Our Slides*, offers a cure for verbalitis: "PowerPoint is not a word processor"—it is a visual medium in which fewer words are always more.

  - Keep type sizes large enough to read when projected and to discourage crowding slides with text. Strive for these font sizes: slide titles, 44 points; main bullets, 32 points; sub-bullets, 24 points. Do not use text smaller than 18 points, as it is unreadable when projected.

  - Limit slide titles and headings to four words and follow the 7 × 7 rule, which limits text to 7 lines per slide and 7 words per line. Eliminate articles (*a, an, the*), understood pronouns/possessives (*we, you, your*), simple verbs and infinitive beginnings (*are, to*), and repetitive phrasing.[12]

  - If you must use text, develop powerful bulleted lists that are easy to follow and remember. For easy recall, limit the list to three to five main bullets, but absolutely no more than seven. To eliminate confusion and rereading, use bulleted lists that are grammatically parallel. One item appearing out of place weakens the emphasis given to each item and can distract audience attention from the message. Be certain each major point relates to the key concept presented in the slide title and

each sub-point relates to its major point. Unless sequence is important, use bullets as they add less clutter and are easier to follow than numbers.

- **Choose an effective template and powerful images to reinforce ideas, illustrate complex ideas, and enliven boring content.** Images and shapes are more visually appealing and memorable than words, and they enable audiences to grasp information more easily. Today's audiences expect media-rich, dynamic visuals, not a speaker's dense crutch notes displayed on screen. Although photographs and clip art available in your presentation software gallery are acceptable, avoid images that are overused, outdated, grainy, and convey an unprofessional tone. Instead search for or create high-quality, professional images that convey the desired message and can project onscreen without distortion.

- **Choose an effective color scheme.** The colors you choose and the way you combine them determine the overall effectiveness of your presentation and add a personal touch to your work. Follow these simple rules to plan a non-distracting, complementary color scheme that has unity with the template graphics:

- **Limit colors to no more than three colors on a slide, to avoid an overwhelming feel.**

- **Begin by selecting a background color that conveys the appropriate formality and tone.** Choose cool colors (blue and green) in muted shades for formal presentations; choose warm colors (red, orange, and yellow) or brighter shades of cool colors for a less formal and perhaps trendy look. Think carefully about whether your color selection has a natural association with your topic or organization. For example, a presentation on environmentally friendly policies might incorporate colors naturally associated with nature and cleanliness (earth tones, white and blue); a presentation to Pepsi-Cola likely would be designed around the company colors of red, white, and blue.

- **Choose complementary foreground (text) colors that have high contrast to the background to ensure readability.** To ensure high contrast, choose either dark text on a light background or light text on a dark background. For example, the often-used color scheme of yellow slide title text and white bulleted list with a blue background is a good choice because the colors are complementary and have high contrast. Choose a slightly brighter color for the slide title that distinguishes it from the color chosen for the bullet list.

Black text against a white background has the greatest contrast. A blue background with yellow text contrasts well, but a light blue background with white text would be difficult to read because of low contrast. Evaluate the readability of the following contrast variations:

High-contrast options:	Dark text on a light background	Light text on dark background
Poor contrast options:		Bright text on a bright background

Because the lower resolution of projectors can wash out colors and make them less vibrant than what is seen on a printed page or computer screen, choose options with very high—not minimally high—contrast. Project your presentation ahead of time in the room where you are to present so you can assess the color scheme. You can also double-check for readability and typographical errors at the same time.

- **Choose the accent colors that complement the color scheme.** Accent colors are used in small doses to draw attention to key elements: bullet markers; bars/slices in graphs, backgrounds (fills) of shapes and lines, selected text; or drawings that are color coded for emphasis. Avoid red and green when differentiating important points as almost 10% of the population is color impaired and cannot distinguish between red and green. The red and green bars in a graph would be seen as one large area.

- **Choose an appealing font that can be read on-screen easily.** Avoid delicate, decorative, or condensed choices that are difficult to read when projected. The clean, simple lines of a sans serif font, such as Calibri, Tahoma, or Verdana, are ideal for projecting on a large screen, newspaper headline, sign, or billboard. A *sans serif* font has no short cross-strokes, known as *serifs*, which provide extra detail that helps guide the eye on print media. Examples of serif fonts are Cambria, Times New Roman, and Garamond.

- **Follow these keyboarding rules for easy reading.** Use capital letters sparingly as they are difficult to read from a distance. Capitalize the first letter of important words in slide titles (initial caps) and the first letter of the first word and proper nouns in a bulleted list (sentence case). Omit hard-to-see punctuation at the end of bulleted lists and elsewhere, and avoid abbreviations and hyphenations that might cause confusion.

- **Reflect legal and ethical responsibility in the design of presentation visuals.** Like the graphics you developed in Chapter 10, presentation visuals should be uncluttered, easily understood, and depict information honestly.

- **Proofread the visual carefully following the same systematic procedures used for printed letters and**

FIGURE 12.2 | DESIGNING COMPELLING SLIDES

The revised slide

- Includes short descriptive title that captures major idea of slide.
- Limits content to meet the 7 × 7 criteria.
- Recognizes the difference between a written communication channel and a visual one through enhanced use of visual elements and reduction of text.
- Takes advantage of SmartArt feature of Microsoft PowerPoint to increase visual appeal while reducing time needed for custom design creation.
- Uses a simple but appealing template with high-quality, relevant image that is large enough for audience to see and has not been overused.
- Uses high-contrast background and sans serif fonts to ensure legibility. Color choices are complementary and convey a professional tone.
- Uses initial caps in slide title, capitalizes the first word in bulleted list, and omits period at end of bulleted items.
- Has been proofread carefully to avoid misspellings that damage credibility.

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reports and electronic communication. Misspellings in visuals are embarrassing and diminish your credibility. Double-check to be certain that names of people, companies, and products are spelled correctly.

Figure 12.2 offers a review of slide design guidelines. The poor example (left) relies on text to convey the message, while the good example (right) illustrates the point.

12-3b Design Tips for Audience Handouts and Notes Pages

Audience handouts should add value for individual audience members; otherwise, the information can better be conveyed in a projected format for group benefit. An effective handout can help audience members remember your message, serve as a reference for later consideration or action, and encourage involvement when space is provided for note taking or response. You can prepare useful presenter notes on small index cards or on pages generated by electronic presentation software.

12-4 REFINING YOUR DELIVERY

After you have organized your message, you must identify the appropriate delivery method, refine your vocal qualities, and practice your delivery.

12-4a Delivery Method

Four presentation methods can be used: memorized, scripted, impromptu, and extemporaneous. Impromptu and extemporaneous styles are generally more useful for business presentations.

Memorized presentations are written out ahead of time, memorized, and recited verbatim. Memorization has the greatest limitations of the speech styles.

memorized presentation a presentation in which a speaker writes out a speech, commits it to memory, and recites it verbatim