

What makes a good presentation?

Is it Graphics? Fonts? Layout? Colors? All of the above. You can make a presentation with great graphics but have poor layout, color or font choices. This tutorial is based on my own experience of both making and receiving presentations both good and bad. There is no “industry standard” but there are some basic design rules that you should follow when putting together a presentation. For this tutorial, I will be using PowerPoint as my presentation software of choice but the principles apply to all presentation software.

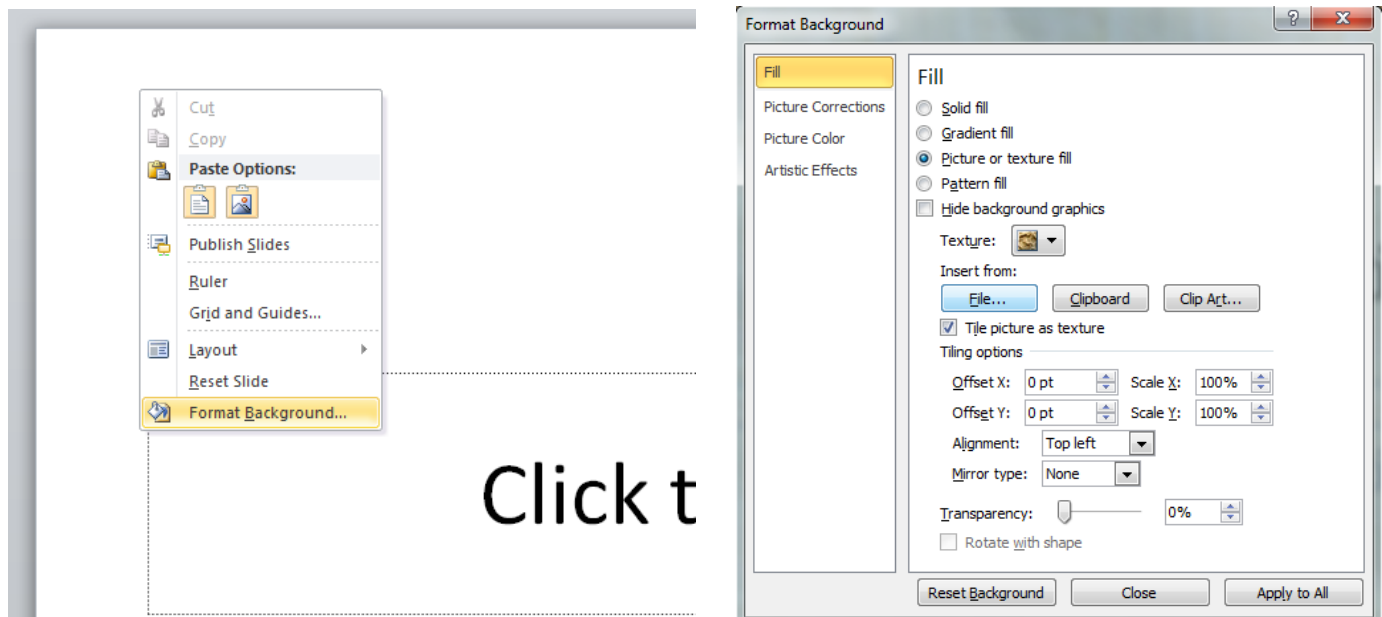
GRAPHICS ARE YOUR FOUNDATION

I always begin a project with choosing a background graphic because it is the foundation of the entire presentation. The graphic could be as simple as a single color or as complex as a motion graphic. For church music, I like to choose a single graphic that reflects the main theme of the song. For instance, my PowerPoint for the song, *As the Deer* simply has a picture of a deer drinking from a stream. The picture has been washed out by 15% so that the text stands out and is easily read. You may be tempted to have a different picture for each verse or each slide of your presentation but you need to consider that multiple graphics can be distracting to the worship or cause a visual overload – not to mention the time it would take to find multiple pictures.

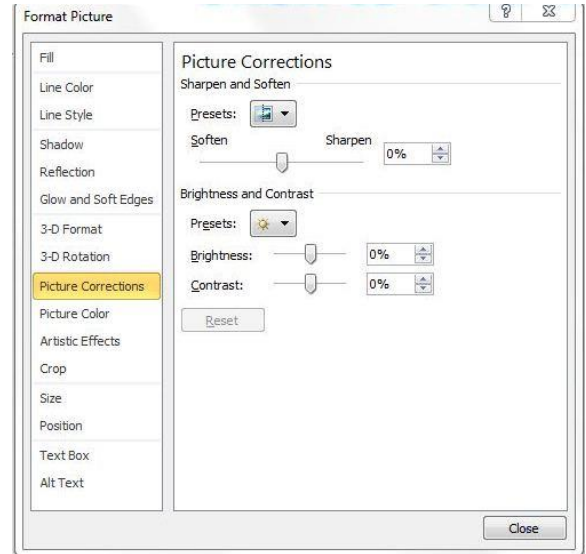
Whether to use motion graphics, solid backgrounds or a still picture or no picture at all is a mixed bag. It all depends on the venue and audience where your presentation will be shown. I have been both complemented and criticized for my choice of graphics in the same day for the same presentation. The problem is everyone has an opinion but as long as it fits within the guidelines of your church or organization it is ultimately your choice. **RULE #1 - You are the creator so be creative.**

There are 3 ways to put a graphic into your presentation in PowerPoint.

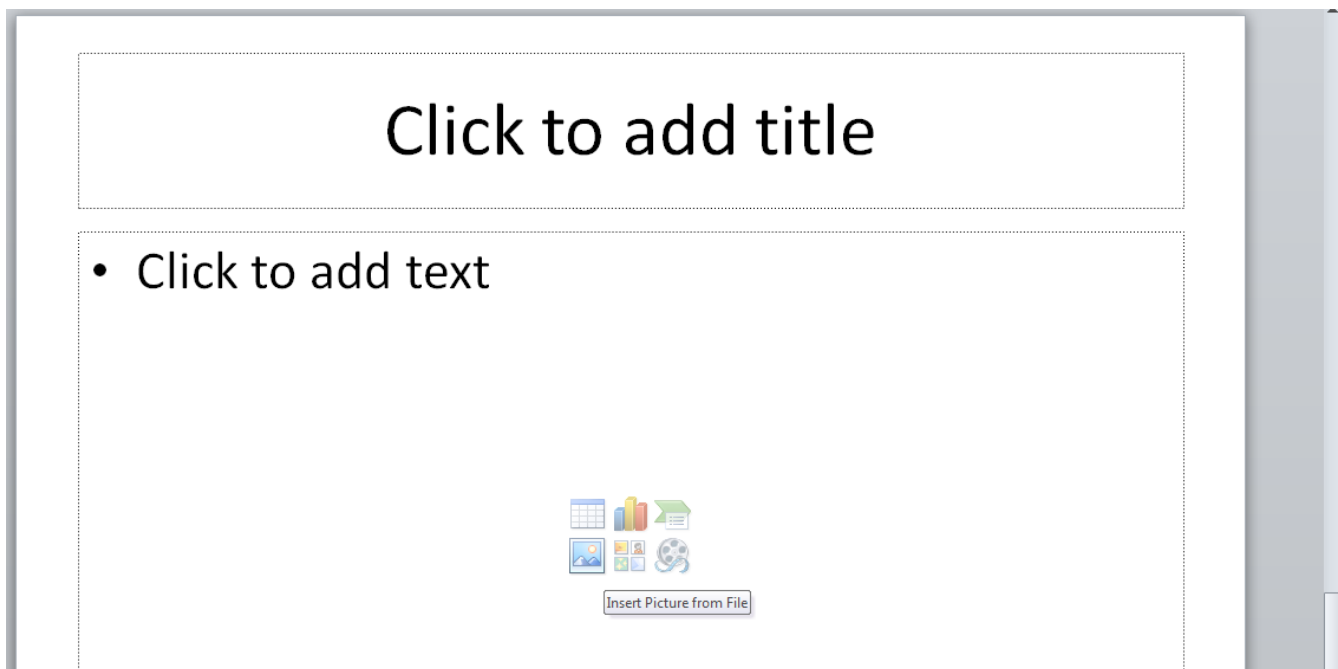
The **FIRST** way is to RIGHT CLICK on an open space in the slide, scroll down and click on FORMAT BACKGROUND. From here you can choose a number of options such as a solid color, gradient, pattern, as you can see below. To insert a picture, click PICTURE OR TEXTURE FILL. The menu will change like the one below. Click the highlighted FILE button and choose the picture you want. The image will apply to the selected slide in full screen. *Warning - This may stretch or shrink your picture out of proportion.* If you have multiple slides on which you want the picture, click the APPLY TO ALL button in the bottom right corner. You can also manipulate the picture or wash it out by adjusting the TRANSPARENCY slider in this menu.



The **SECOND** way to insert a picture into your presentation is to click the **INSERT** tab and click **PICTURE**. You will then be able to position or resize your picture as needed. You can also layer the picture(s) and text box(es) when you **RIGHT CLICK** on the picture and click **SEND TO BACK** or **SEND TO FRONT**. *On older versions of PowerPoint you will need **RIGHT CLICK** on the picture or text box and click **ORDER** to send the picture(s) or text(s) to the front or back.* You can also format the picture. **RIGHT CLICK** on the picture and choose **FORMAT PICTURE**. This will give you multiple options to choose from. Occasionally I will wash out a picture by increasing the brightness by 10-15% so that the words are easier to see.



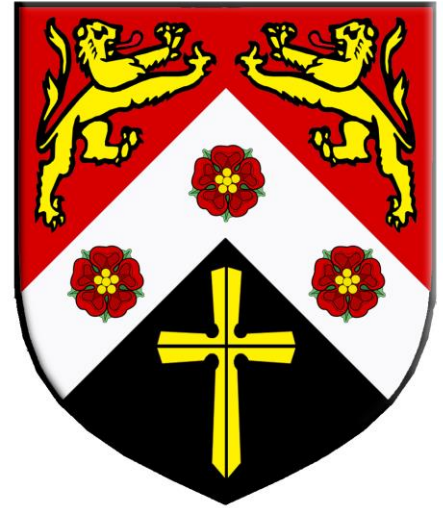
The **THIRD** way to insert a picture is a new feature on the newest version of PowerPoint. When you add a 2nd slide, a new option shows up in the lower text box like the one below. Simply click on the picture in the lower left, choose your picture and click insert.



So where do you get graphics? There are a plethora of sources online where you can get a graphic – some are free but most of the good ones are a yearly subscription based or pay per graphic. Currently my church uses sharefaith.com which has a lot of great graphics and videos for presentations, websites and even church bulletins. **Rule 2 – DON'T download and use a graphic without permission - it is theft of intellectual property.**

YOU NEED A LITTLE COLOR IN YOUR LIFE

When armies lined up for battle in the middle ages, each knight wore a coat of arms so they could know friend from foe. An important part of a coat of arms was the use of color. Tintures was the system that was developed and as a basic rule the “colours” (reds, greens, blues, browns, blacks, etc.) could not touch each other without being separated by “metals” represented by gold (yellow) or silver (white). So what does that have to do with your presentation? Everything! Your choice of color is critical to your presentation both aesthetically and functionally. Many times I am given a presentation where there is a dark text on top of a dark background or graphic which makes it hard to read – i.e. maroon text on a blue background. Dark backgrounds need light colored fonts and vice versa.



Rule 3 –Always check your presentation on the projection screen. Just because it looks good on your laptop or computer monitor does not mean it will look good on the screen.

FONTS MUST BE READABLE

Font type and size is also a mixed bag. Sometimes you will find a font that seems to fit the presentation well but readability from a distance is an issue – RULE 3. Sometimes increasing the font size can increase readability but not always. Keep in mind that if you transfer your file from your computer to another, the font you chose may not be available and your entire PowerPoint will be reformatted with a new font. When in doubt, use a standard font like Arial, Times, or Helvetica.

Font size is relative to the venue in which your presentation is shown. A size of 20-30pt may be fine in a small classroom or conference room but as the venue size grows so must your font size. If you are in a large classroom, lecture hall, auditorium or conference center, keep in mind that your presentation should be easily read from the back row. Another factor to consider is the age of your audience. Older eyes need larger fonts. For example, in my church the distance between the screens and the back row is about 70 feet. My audience is a mixture of young and old but most of our elderly sit toward the back half of the church. Older eyes need bigger fonts. With these factors in mind, my target size using the Arial font is 45-55pt. Keep in mind that some font sizes are larger or smaller than others and that the size will need to increase or decrease accordingly.

As much as possible, font size should be consistent from slide to slide. This is a personal pet peeve of mine – especially for music slides. If you find you need to increase or decrease the font size for one of your slides to make it fit, the rest of the slides need to be adjusted to match – unless the size is only increases or decreases by 1 or 2 points. However, for a business presentation it may look fine so change the size. Remember rules 1 and 3.

Another big mistake I see is trying to cram too much text on one slide. I can't tell you how many times I get a presentation that has so much text that you can't even read it. Combine that with poor font or color choices and it becomes ugly fast. Remember rule 3

TO HIGHLIGHT OR TO SHADOW – THAT IS THE QUESTION

Highlights and shadows seem to be the least utilized features in a presentation and yet they can make all the difference in the readability of your presentation. Say you have a picture that is perfect but it has a color gradient transitioning from dark to light. Knowing that color is critical to your presentation, you want to choose a color that complements the picture. Typically, I try to match the highlight with the lightest or darkest portion of the background on which the font sits – that way the highlight or shadow can disappear into the background. Positioning highlights and shadows are also important because if your graphic has a light source (i.e. the lightest corner or point of the picture) you want to highlight the side of the font closest to the light or shadow the side farthest from the light. For example you would not want a shadow on the top left of your font if the light source in your graphic originates on the top left corner.

THE SAFE ZONE is a margin around the sides, top and bottom of the slide that you should leave free of text. It is ok to bleed a graphic off the slide but your text should never touch the edges of the slide. Why? First, it makes it hard to read – Remember RULE 3. Second, computers and projectors or TVs don't always play nicely together. This may skew your slide off the edge, cutting off part or the whole first or last letter of each slide. Generally, new slides are given text boxes that already incorporate safe zones.

LAYOUT is tying all these elements together in a way that is pleasing to the eye. When doing music presentations, I always layout the first slide and make sure it looks right before I continue. In my earlier days I would throw all the text into PowerPoint and then try to lay it out which wastes a lot of time. Once the layout for the first slide is done, the rest of the process is usually pretty simple. You can use the keyboard shortcut **CTRL D** to duplicate the selected slide which continues your layout.

ORPHANS are single words that usually are abandoned on the last line of the slide. Depending on the length of the word, this may not be an issue but if at all possible, try not to have any orphans.

TRANSITIONS – No matter what software you use, there is a plethora of wipes, dissolves and other cool transitions available to use between slides. The temptation is to use them all but this too can become a distraction to your audience. I suggest you use one or at max two within the same presentation. Keep in mind that the transition you choose needs to add something to the presentation – not distract.

TIPS AND TRICKS – You may know you can justify your text Left, Center and Right but did you know that you can also justify the text box to Top, Middle and Bottom. This allows you to keep all the text in the top, middle or bottom of the text box when you type. To do this, Right Click on the text box and scroll down to Format Place Holder. Under the TEXT BOX tab you can choose your text anchor point from top, middle and bottom

You can also rotate the text box in the same way under the SIZE tab or fill the text box with color under the COLORS & LINES tab. In newer versions of PowerPoint you must Right click on the text box and scroll down to Format Shape.

If you want to create layers in the same slide with multiple pictures or text boxes you can right click on the object and scroll down to *Bring To Front* or *Send To Back*