

EFFECTIVE SLIDES AND OVERHEADS

Or

How to Avoid Embarrassing Yourself

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This handout was written to help agricultural research and extension workers develop suitable visuals for agricultural audiences. Your involvement as a speaker or organizer at workshops, training sessions, or technical conferences implies an interest in conveying information to a group of people. Yet, in spite of repeated pleas and reminders, audiences are still subjected to horrible and ineffective slides and overheads. Why? The audience may leave without benefit from your effort if you use poor visual aids or if you present too much information. Here are some tips that will help you tell your story.

A presentation does not necessarily result in the communication that you wish to take place. Slides and overheads are effective communication aids only if they are readable and simple.

Slides

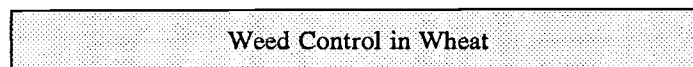
Slides are the preferred medium because they can be enlarged more by the projector than an overhead. Here's some guidelines on how to make your slides effective.

1. Limit the amount of information, probably no more than 10 to 12 pieces of data on one table.
2. Use simple language and names.
3. Make sure the letters and numbers are readable. Hold the slide up and read it with the naked eye. **If you can't, don't use it!**
4. Divide tables of data into two or more slides or leave some out and provide the full report as a handout.

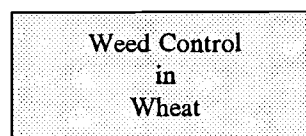
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5. Be careful in using computer-generated tables or graphs as slides. Multidimensional graphs are often confusing to the viewer. Some of the slide-making systems fail to fill the frame and colors often give poor contrast. Dark reds, greens, and blues on a dark background cannot be seen.
6. Vericolor film and a selection of filters will produce sharp high-contrast print slides and can be processed by most photo labs in one day or less.
7. Arrange your text or graphics in a 3 by 5 ratio to fit a 35mm slide. A simple example:

Change



to



8. When shooting slides of print, try to fill the slide frame if there is any doubt about the readability of your slides. If you don't have a macro lens, buy extension tubes, which are much cheaper.

Overheads

Overhead transparencies are fast to prepare and can be used in lighter rooms than slides to encourage discussion. They have few other attributes.

1. Always enlarge the subject with a copy machine or printer before making the overhead. Standard size print is unacceptable. **Don't do it!** You will embarrass yourself and your organization!

2. Large print with colored felt pens will produce readable overheads that are far superior to small block type.
3. Never make overheads of large tables and graphs. The print cannot be seen. Remember, the smallest character should be 3/16 inch for a small group and 3/8 inch for a large group. You are trying to communicate, so print should be easily read from the back of the room. If the audience has to squint, the print is too small.

General Rules of Thumb

1. Color. The most readable color combinations are listed below. Other combinations are consistently less appealing visually. The colors should be presented in their primary hues.

The Best Colors

Blue and White
 Green and White
 Red and White
 Black and White
 Black and Yellow

Never use more than three colors; two is usually better

2. Terminology. Use English units and common names to describe treatments for grower audiences. For example: 2 qts/ac Nortron rather than 2.2 kg/ha of ethofumesate. Use metric if required at professional meetings. Make two slide sets.
3. Remember your take-home message. Don't show all your data. Simplify, condense, summarize! If you need to show data in a table, limit yourself to as few numbers as possible. Never exceed 10 to 12. Don't even think of photographing a table from a report. Often, data can be effectively communicated verbally in combination with a good picture. For example, if a chemical caused dramatic crop injury, show the injury and just report that injury was significant.
4. Don't teach statistics. Don't take up space on slides and overheads with statistical gobbledygook! It may be better to leave statistical measures off visuals, especially at grower meetings, and just verbally report that it's significant. Do not subject farmers to tables of non-significant data. Simple statistics may be justifiable at scientific meetings but even there the inclusion of experimental design and statistical analysis is best left to the written report.
5. Round to whole numbers.

Following is an example of how to improve a data table.

[Poor]

The Effect of Fungicides and Cerone on Septoria and Yields in three varieties of Winter Wheat.

Treatment	Variety		
	Hill 81	Malcolm	Stephens
	(bu/acre)		
Check	135.6a	140.1b	142.3b
Cerone	130.2c	129.7c	140.0b
Tilt	134.0ab	163.5a	158.1a
Tilt + Cerone	133.5abc	159.9a	156.8a
LSD (0.5)	3.4	8.5	4.3

[Better]

Cerone and Fungicides for Septoria on Wheat

	Hill 81	Malcolm	Stephens
Control	136	140	142
Cerone	130	130	140
Tilt	134	164	158
Tilt + Cerone	134	160	157

6. Make sure that print on graphs can be read. It is usually easy to see the graph but many people fail to enlarge the print on the graph.
7. Time. This depends entirely on the slide or overhead. Some need 5 seconds, others can be discussed for a minute or longer. A common mistake is spending too little time on key visual aids.
8. Intersperse data slides with appropriate photos or illustrations of materials, events, locations, or even some humor or philosophy.
9. Readability. Words with upper and lower case letters are more readable than those done in capitals. Use bold type, not capitals, italics, or stylized letters. For example: **Stem Rust** is better than STEM RUST, or stem rust, or *Stem Rust*.
10. Words and Lines. Title slide: Limit to ten words. Lines on a slide: Five or less.
11. Conclusion. Use a conclusion slide to nail down your take-home message.
12. Communication is the goal.