

4 PowerPoint rules you should follow

To help an audience tune in to your PowerPoint presentation instead of zoning out, stick to these four cardinal rules from communications coach Carmine Gallo when creating a presentation:

Scenario: Your presentation is 15 minutes long and contains seven main themes.

Cardinal rule 1: Stick to three or four themes. Researchers say that our brains are better at taking in information if it arrives in three or four chunks. Consolidate topics under a larger heading, if necessary.

Why you should follow the rule: Seven themes in 15 minutes leave only two minutes per theme—way too many themes for a speaker to cover in that amount of time. The audience won't be able to grasp them all.

Scenario: Some of your slides contain about 200 words in 9-point type.

Cardinal rule 2: Type should be no smaller than 30 points.

Why you should follow the rule: Imagine how hard it would be to read 200 words of 9-point type from the back of a room, while you're listening to a speaker, all within two minutes. *Bonus:* By keeping your type big, you're forced to limit the number of words per slide.

Tip: To pack a punch, create some slides that contain only one word in 96-point type.

Scenario: Two-thirds of your presentation contains charts.

Cardinal rule 3: Use charts sparingly, and spend time explaining to the audience what each chart means.

Example: "This green upward-angled line shows that growth doubled within a decade."

Why you should follow the rule: Unless a speaker can interpret the chart for the audience, the graphic will cause people to tune out, especially if it's kept on the screen only briefly.

Scenario: You have 75 slides but only 10 minutes allotted for your presentation.

Cardinal rule 4: A good rule of thumb, says entrepreneur Guy Kawasaki, is to take the number of minutes you're allotted to speak, and divide it by two. That's how many slides you should have.

Why you should follow the rule: Actually, you can bend this rule. Just remember that if you have a lot of slides, strip down the type and rely on images to complement the spoken word.