Marvelous Makeovers

**For the busy
professional for whom
everything is due yesterday**

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Less is always more

Sometimes slides can simply try too hard. Too much background, too much text, too many bullets, too many colors. Linda Pepper encountered this dilemma with this status update to the H.R. team. It was as if her slides were crafted with the intent to have them tell the entire story, leaving one to wonder what the presenter would say when faced with them.

Unfriendly slide design
The mustard-colored framing is probably unnecessary, but not horrible. The shadow below the white overlay is also unnecessary, but not criminal. The gray gradient immediately behind the red text, however, is worthy of a citation. It reduces contrast, thereby hurting readability.

Too much everything
If your headline spills into the background elements, as is happening top right, you know you have a problem. The underlining is also problematic; that's your job to create emphasis. Don't resort to the old typewriter days of underlining to call attention to an important point; do that yourself.
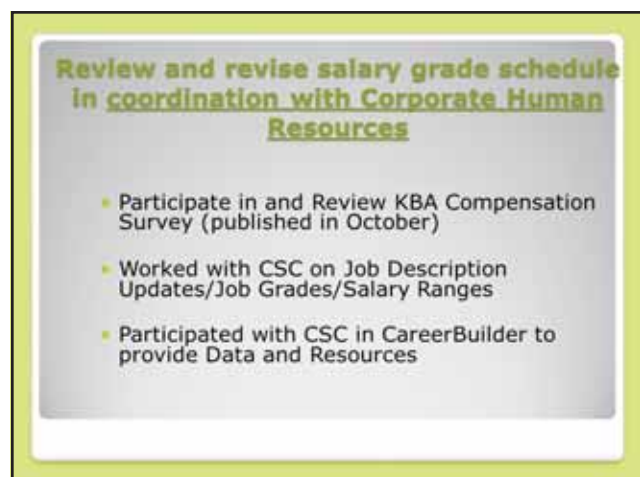
Simplify, Simplify!

This slide is a classic example of a visual that is about to sink under its own weight. It takes an inordinate effort to make it through just the headline. With so little breathing room and the contrast issues created by the gray background, there is little that compels an audience member to try to digest the slide.

First, create contrast

Watch what happens when we just create a black-on-white motif: much more contrast and readability. Even though we haven't made any other changes at all, the slide already feels a bit better.

Shorten headlines

Now begins the process of honing and distilling. By removing unnecessary words and phrases, audience members develop hope that they can make it through the content of this slide.
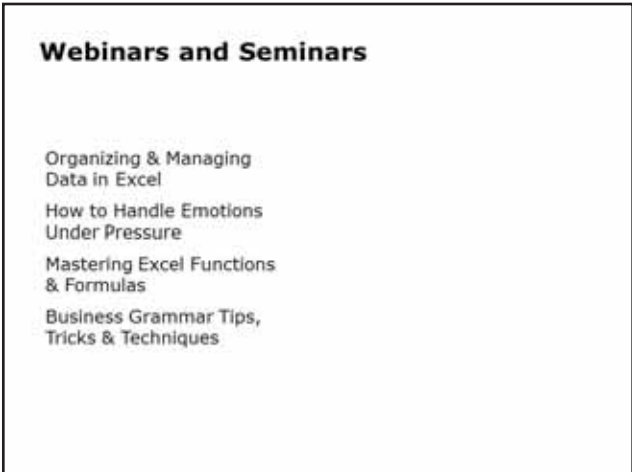
Next, breathing room!
With white space around text blocks, they inherit more definition and therefore more prominence. At this point, this slide could be pressed into service without presenting risk of overpowering the presenter.

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Keep honing, keep distilling
The title has been reduced to its core essence, and unless it is of import that there are actually four classes upcoming, let's lose the numbers.

Webinars and Seminars

Organizing & Managing Data in Excel

How to Handle Emotions Under Pressure

Mastering Excel Functions & Formulas

Business Grammar Tips, Tricks & Techniques

Relevant imagery
It's not hard at all to find photos of training sessions, and with the text properly shortened, it can be placed directly atop the photo. We create contrast with a semi-transparent shape placed in front of the photo and behind the text.

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The Art Form that is Smart Sequencing

Using animation in a presentation is a wonderfully scary experience, where you are never more than one step away from the boomerangs and spirals that define the scourge that marks one end of this territory. Jo Clem shows good instincts with her slides and just needs a reality test on when and when not to use it.

A whole lot of clicking and flying
This lengthy list of attributes was set so each bullet would fly in from the bottom when Jo clicks her remote. That makes everyone work harder: Jo on her clicker and her audience members with their patience and with their vision.

Who will read this?
This is a nice story that many could relate to, but when the dialogue arrives on screen, who is expected to read it, the presenter or the audience? Animation can help provide a cue for that.
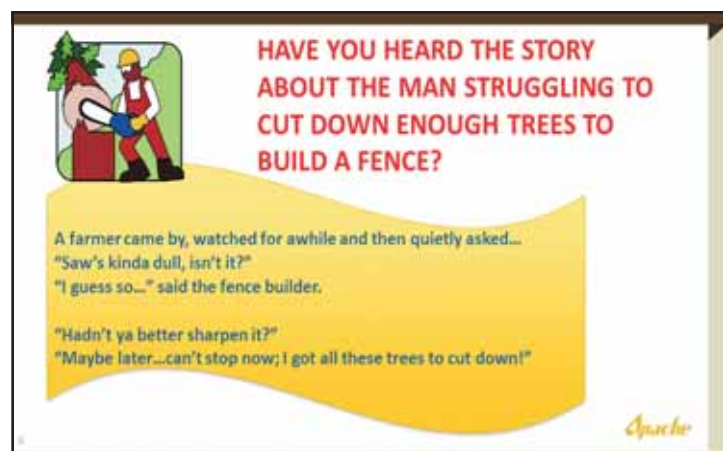
Playing video

This photo is actually a trigger to play a YouTube video, but that requires that Jo click on the photo, have a reliable Internet connection, and have her browser window sized and ready. Playing video within PowerPoint doesn't have to be that hard.

Sequence me!

This graphic is crying out for a bit of sequencing, but it's all one imported image. How might you be able to use animation without recreating it?

No animation needed

Ten attributes is too many to display on a slide. If you pick the top four, you give them the prominence they deserve, and you can discuss the others. Paring this list down removes the need to sequence them at all—this slide is now ready to go with the simplest of redesign treatments.

Animation makes better storytellers

This remade slide removes the title; that would be your job to tee up this tale. The dialogue comes in letter by letter, giving audience members their cue to read it themselves.

Sequencing video

Using one of the many video download tools, this short clip can be captured to your hard drive, imported into PowerPoint, and placed in the animation stream so it is available "On Click." That eliminates the need to click the photo, have an Internet connection, and switch out to your browser window.

Hide until ready

It's too much to expect that we could recreate a diagram like this, but with a bit of shape-shifting of rectangles, you can cover up each of the five parts of this graphic with semi-transparency. Using exit fades, each click introduces a part for discussion so the audience can easily follow along.

When Messy Means Busy

When Heather Wilson was told that nothing on her so-called "messy slide" could be removed, she was not a happy camper. If it's the "most comprehensive solution in the industry," her co-workers argued, it had better be busy! As tempting as it is to rail against that sentiment, it is not only pervasive in corporate America, but it has a semblance of validity: slides like this one do make the point that your company is active.

You don't have to agree with that, but you will have to accept it as a business reality: some battles you just aren't going to win. The solution in that case is to use the same treatment as the diagram on the previous page: hide each column with a rectangle programmed with an exit fade or wipe. Each click of your remote, therefore, will introduce a column. Bringing your audience along gradually like this will make this slide much more digestible.

Change for the Sake of Change

Angela Avery wanted to do something different, because she knew that her audience was going to be "subjected to two hours of Death by PowerPoint" prior to her presentation. Creating portrait-sized slides was an admirable response to the tired old sameness of conventional slides.

Formatting her agenda slide to be portrait was not such a hardship—that's just a string of text elements. But soon it became clear that she was swimming upstream when the images that she chose to use were all wider then they were tall. That required that she float those photos in her vertical space, all the while asking her projector and her screen to live in a portrait world that was not native to either.

Angela had already populated her Notes pages with a fully-fleshed-out talk track. Perhaps without realizing it, she had composed her thoughts in order to create a really nice set of handouts.
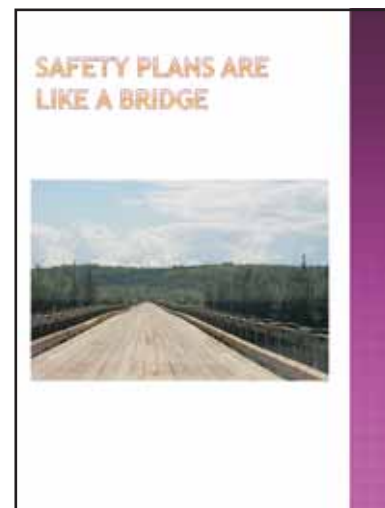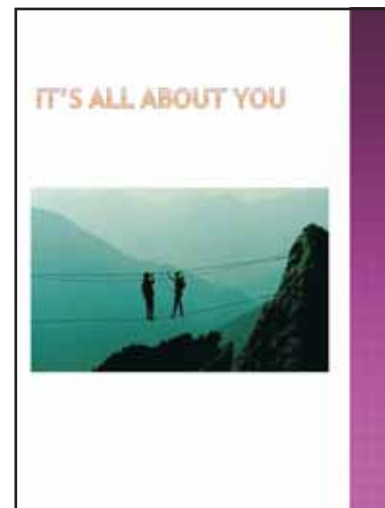
Creating handouts from notes

PowerPoint lacks a good handout engine (the Handout master is nothing more than a way to print slides in various formats), so until Microsoft gets a clue about this, the Notes page stands as the best way to create handouts. Here, the notes master has been redesigned with the thumbnail removed and a much larger placeholder for text. This allowed for the super-easy creation of handout pages like the ones below.
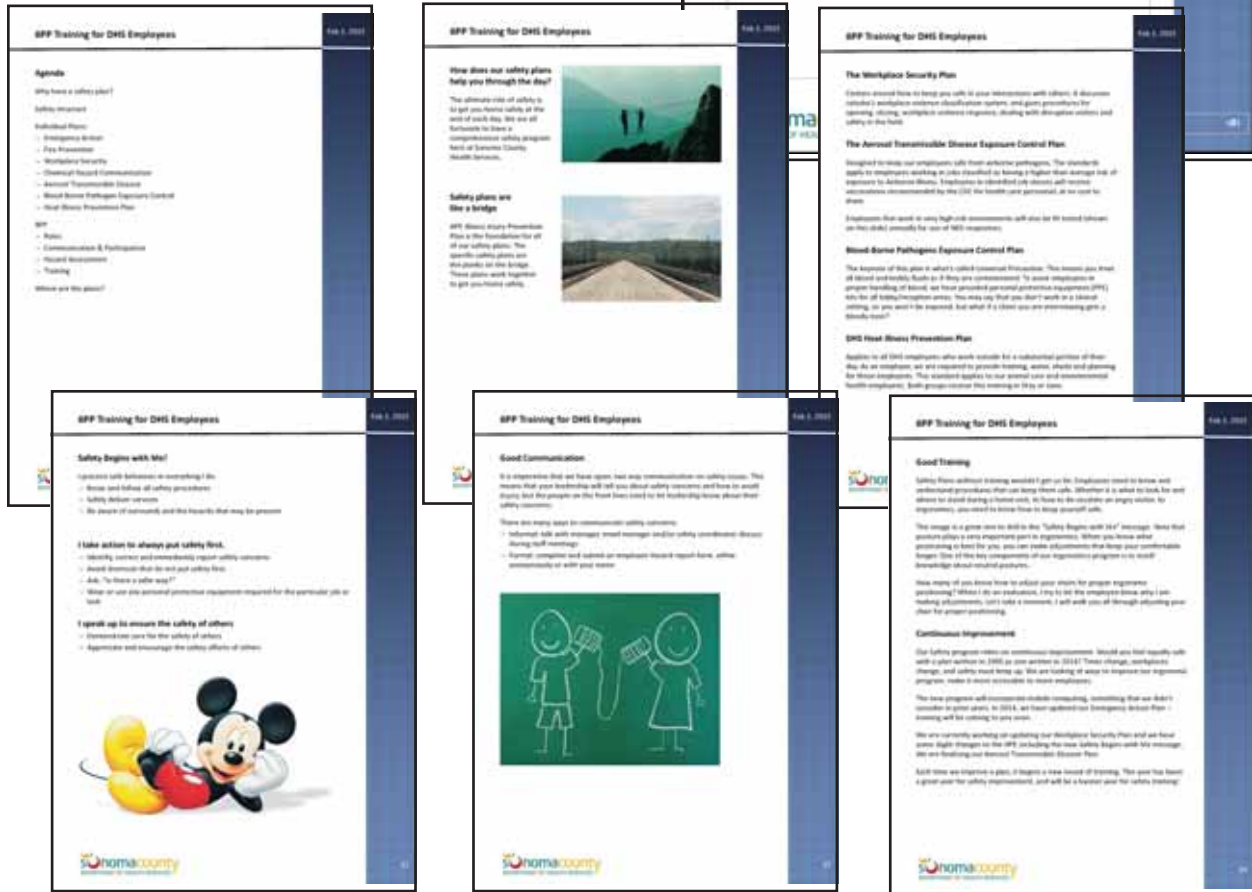
Slides should be landscape
By creating such good handouts, Angela would have satisfied her desire to deliver something unique and extraordinary to her audience. That would have delivered her from trying to create portrait slides, an uphill battle against technology and audience expectation. And by providing so much detail in print, her slides could be ultra simple. That alone would be a victory.

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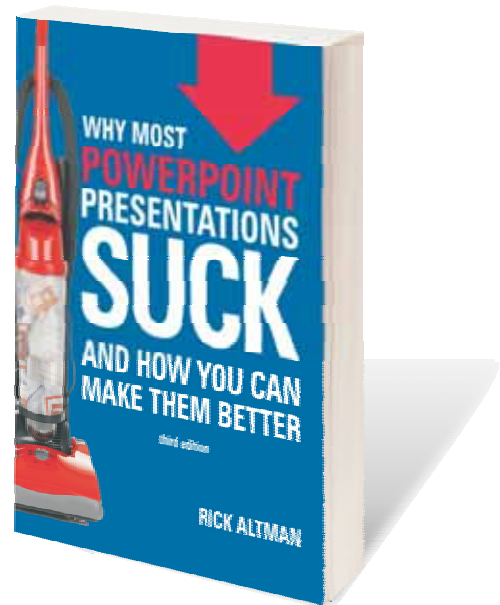
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