

# Extreme Makeover: PowerPoint Edition

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Using the reality TV show as our inspiration, Mary and Rebecca decided to seek out IR colleagues who are facing hardships and are in need of hope as well as a makeover of a PowerPoint presentation. We ultimately selected Michelle Broderick from the University of Toronto, and the presentation her office uses to train data entry staff on processing academic records, as the beneficiary. They have been using this presentation for a couple of years with the goal of improving the accuracy and completeness of HR data, but so far have not noticed a significant effect.


These are the first five slides in the presentation.

<p><b>Processing Academic Records in HRIS</b></p> <p>Sara-Jane Finlay, Director Michelle Broderick, Senior Academic Research Analyst</p> <p>Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty and Academic Life September 2010</p> 	<p><b>Topics for Discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why is accuracy important?</li><li>• Understanding Academic Rank</li><li>• Academic Administrators</li><li>• Research and Study Leaves</li><li>• Common Errors</li><li>• Faculty Profiles</li></ul> 	<p><b>Why is accuracy important?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Internal analyses on salaries, education, faculty counts, etc. for the President, Provost, Vice-Provost Faculty and Academic Life and Vice President Human Resources and Equity</li></ul>  <p>What do you mean you can't tell me how many tenure-stream faculty we have?</p>
<p><b>Impact of Errors/Incomplete Info</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Verification for faculty HR matters requiring Provostial approval:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research &amp; study leaves</li><li>• Tenure &amp; promotion,</li><li>• Retirement &amp; emeritus titles</li><li>• Grant eligibility (e.g. for status only and adjunct faculty)</li><li>• SGS status</li></ul></li><li>• Identification of cohorts for workshops and professional development programs (for new and mid-career faculty academic administrators)</li><li>• Internal requests for data on academics from UTFA</li></ul> 	<p><b>Impact of Errors/Incomplete Info</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• External reporting on academic data:-<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National &amp; Provincial Governments and Lobby Groups -- AUCC &amp; COU -- (eg. Statistics Canada FT Faculty Salary Survey)</li><li>• National &amp; International Data Exchanges (G13DE &amp; AAUDE) -- Benchmarks (eg. Performance Indicators for Governance)</li></ul></li></ul> 	

Before starting the makeover, let's start with some key findings from communications researchers that have substantial implications for how to use PowerPoint effectively:

1. *People cannot listen and read at the same time, which means that communication is inhibited when the same words are spoken and displayed on screen, especially since we read faster than we speak. (Paivio, 2007)*
2. *People learn better from visuals **and** narrative than from narrative alone. This is because the brain has separate channels for processing visual and verbal material. The two separate channels of the brain work together to reinforce and retain the material. (Mayer, 2009)*
3. *Audiences need "mental breaks" every 15-20 minutes so they don't lose their concentration. A participatory mental break can be something such as asking the audience to write down an answer to a question or asking them to turn to the person next to them and discuss a particular topic for two minutes.*

These three findings are the conceptual basis for the following tips used in our makeover. The following are some tips with good and bad visual examples to help presenters identify and avoid bad PowerPoint habits, and to promote awareness of how best to use PowerPoint to create effective presentations.

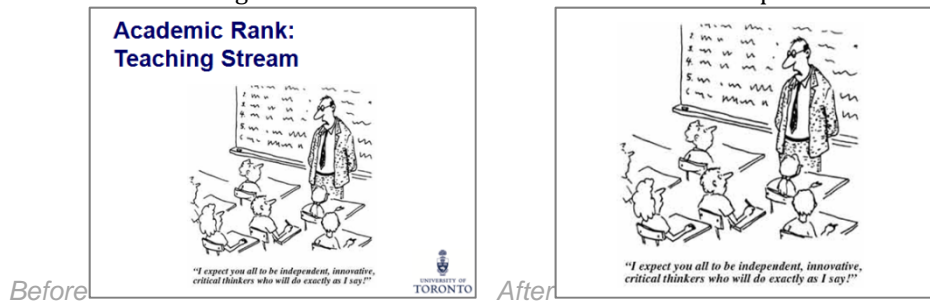
**Note:** This icon  indicates the slide is an example of bad design with good content.

### 1. Design a template that is free from distracting items.

Strive for simplicity and readability. Most PowerPoint templates contain distracting elements such as borders or shading that can detract from your message. It's best to create a template of your own that has a solid background and is free from non-essential items, such as footers and logos. When creating your template, keep in mind the advice of French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "A designer knows he has achieved perfection *not* when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."



The following are before and after slides from the Toronto presentation:



### 2. Ensure your template promotes readability.

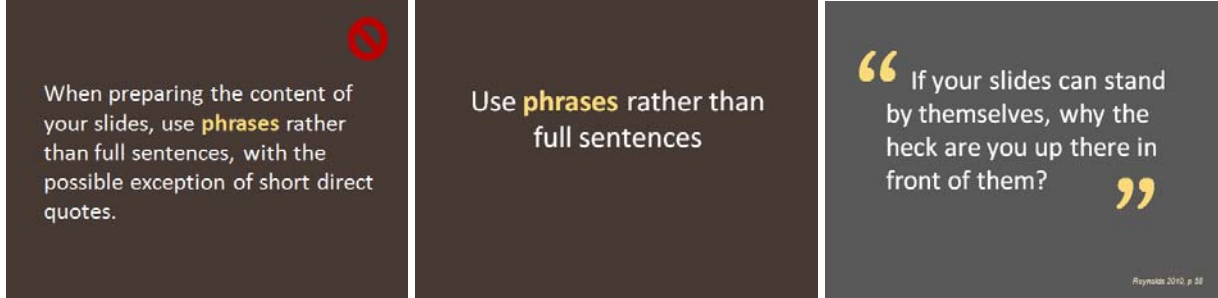
Choose color combinations that make it easy for the audience to read your slides. If your audience is unable to read your slides, then your message has been compromised. Consider the following advice from Reynolds (n.d.). If you will be presenting in a darkened room, then light text on a dark background works well. But if you will be in a room with the lights on or considerable ambient light, then dark text on a light background works better.



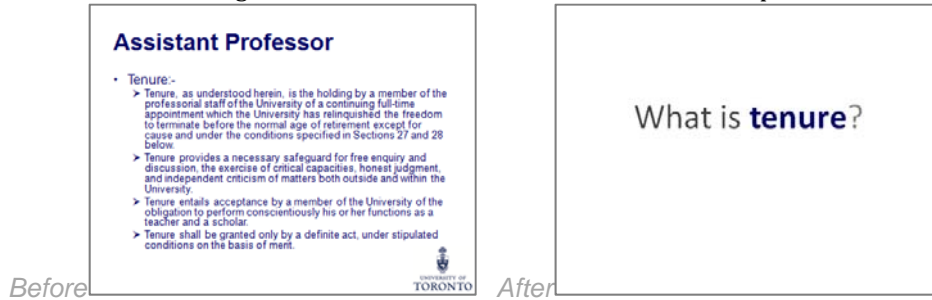
The template used in the Toronto presentation are completely readable, so no makeover was needed.

**3. Use phrases or abbreviated sentences, rather than full sentences.**

With the possible exception of short direct quotes, keep full sentences in your oral presentation and *off* the screen. “Humans are incapable of reading and comprehending text on a screen and listening to a speaker at the same time. Therefore, lots of text (almost *any* text!), and long, complete sentences are bad, Bad, BAD” (Reynolds, 2010, p. 57).

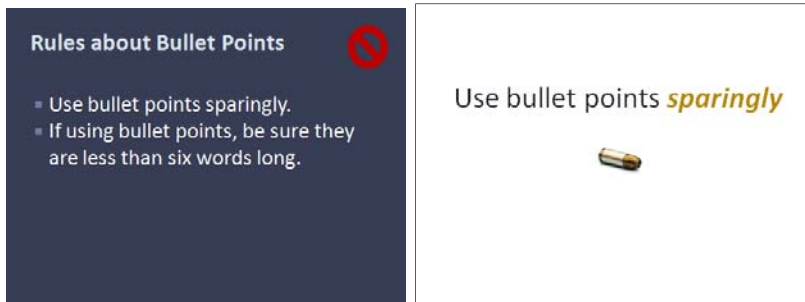


The following are before and after slides from the Toronto presentation:

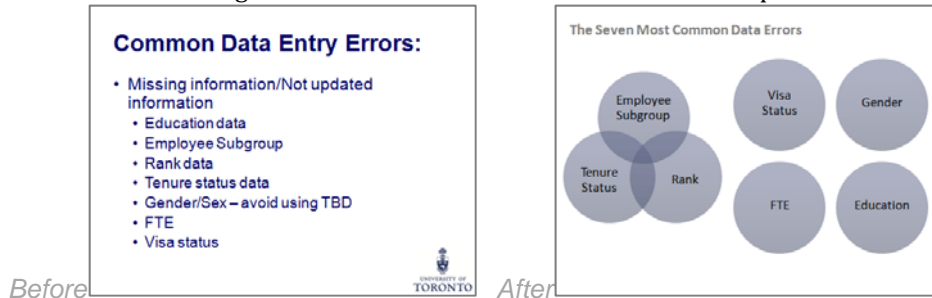


**4. Use bullet points sparingly. If using bullet points, be sure they are less than six words long.**

The most effective slides are often those with the least text. “Your presentation is for the benefit of the audience. But boring an audience with bullet point after bullet point is of little benefit to them” (Reynolds, n.d.). If you want to use an outline to organize your talk, keep it on paper rather than putting it on screen.



The following are before and after slides from the Toronto presentation:



### 5. Select a sans serif font.

Serif fonts, such as Garamond, Times New Roman or Century Schoolbook, have protruding “feet” (called serifs) that extend beyond the main shape of the letters. The serifs are beneficial in printed documents with a lot of text, but they will produce a blurred look on the screen. Sans serif fonts (translated as “without serifs”), such as Calibri, Arial and Trebuchet, produce a cleaner, less cluttered, easier to read look.

By limiting your fonts to two (at most), your presentation will have a consistent look and feel. This limitation does *not* include the use of bold, italic or bold italic; these alterations are considered the same as the base font.

Be sure to select standard fonts or embed the fonts in your presentation. If the fonts you use are not installed on the presentation machine, it will use a substitute font and potentially change the entire look of your presentation.



The font used in the Toronto presentation was Arial, a sans serif font, so no makeover was needed.

### 6. Use fonts that are 24 point or larger.

Displaying text that is too small to read compromises your message and frustrates your audience. If you have more text than can reasonably fit on a screen using at least 24 point fonts, then either: (a) create another slide or (b) shorten your text. As noted in tip #11, let your handout contain the detailed information and use your presentation to highlight your most significant points.



We addressed the font sizes in the Toronto presentation by completely revising slide content.

**7. Incorporate high quality photos, images or diagrams that reinforce your verbal message.**

Research has shown that communication is enhanced when a verbal message is combined with a powerful image on the screen. Many free high quality photos are available on-line (but pay attention to copyrights) and a plethora of professional photos are available at very reasonable costs (such as at iStockphoto.com). Avoid clip art, since it can make your presentation look dated and unprofessional. Incorporating your text into the photo presents a more unified and visually pleasing message than having them completely separate.

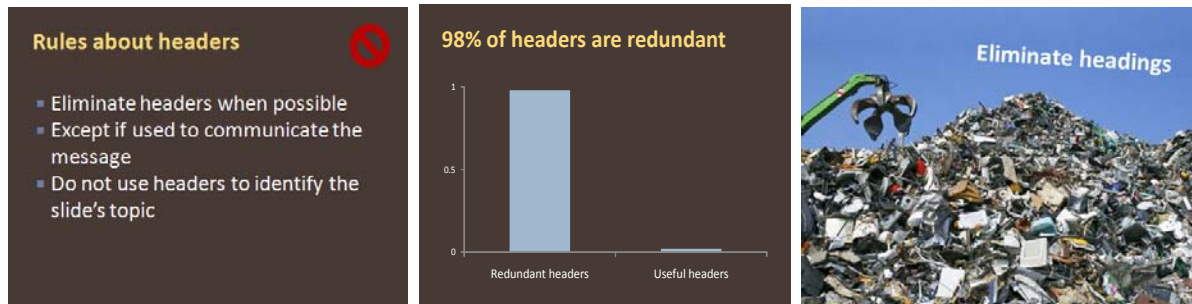


The following are before and after slides from the Toronto presentation:

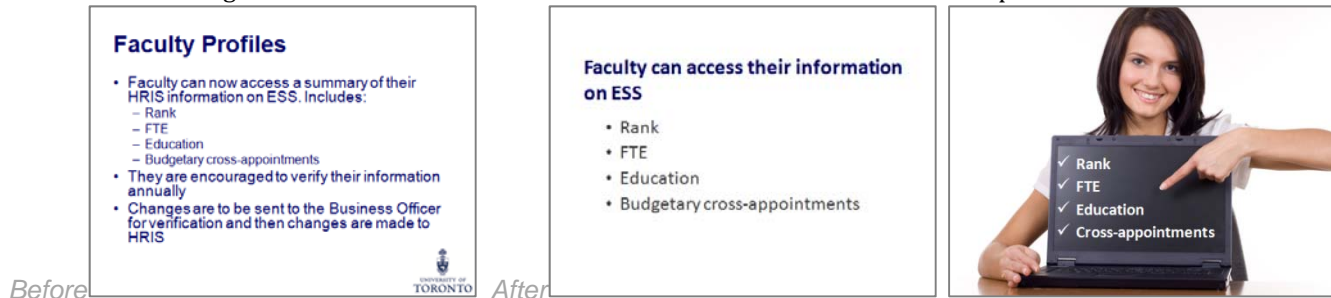


**8. Eliminate the use of headings or titles unless they communicate the main message.**

Headings should not be used to introduce or identify the topic of the slide, though they may be useful to call attention to the main finding in a chart or graph. Otherwise, headings tend to be redundant and should be cut.



The following are one before and two versions of an after slide from the Toronto presentation:



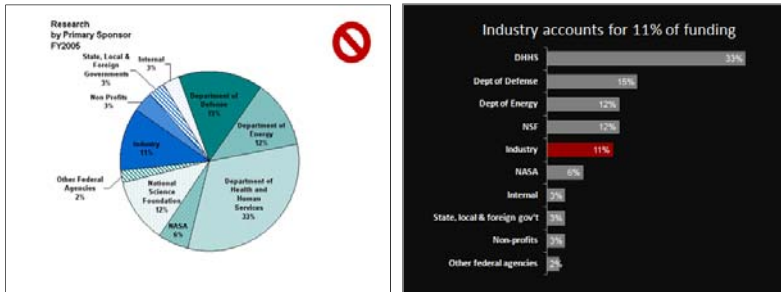
**9. Use animation, slide transitions, audio, and video sparingly.**

..and if used, do so only to reinforce a key concept. No examples are provided because they would be difficult to illustrate in this written format. Research has shown that when there is movement on the screen, the audience’s attention is immediately drawn to the movement, thus breaking their concentration on the presentation content. Audiences judge presentations on their interest in the content, not on how many fancy features are used in the slides. Because it is extremely difficult to portray movement in a static document like this, we cannot provide examples of the before and after slides associated with this tip.

**10. Highlight the most important information..**

By highlighting the most important information and presenting only as much data as can be readily understood (perhaps by presenting it incrementally), the audience will easily be able to discern the main message. Use color, larger fonts, or boldface to draw attention to the information you want to highlight.

This is appropriate use of slide transitions, which can be used to “build” your content and focus your audience’s attention. The following slides show an example of both a better graph choice and how to highlight data for your audience. See Paradi (2009) for an example of using builds to present a chart in PowerPoint.



The following are before and after slides from the Toronto presentation:

**Teaching Stream Faculty**

- **Lecturer**
  - Yearly contracts, although can be offered appointment up to 3 years.
  - Cannot serve at this rank for more than 5 years.
  - Review occurs in 5<sup>th</sup> year and recommendation is made to promote to Senior Lecturer.
  - Negative recommendation results in no further contracts.
  - Assessed on teaching effectiveness and pedagogical/professional development related to teaching.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

**Lecturers are reviewed in their 5<sup>th</sup> year**

Assessed on teaching effectiveness and pedagogical/professional development related to teaching.

Positive review

→ Promoted to Senior Lecturer

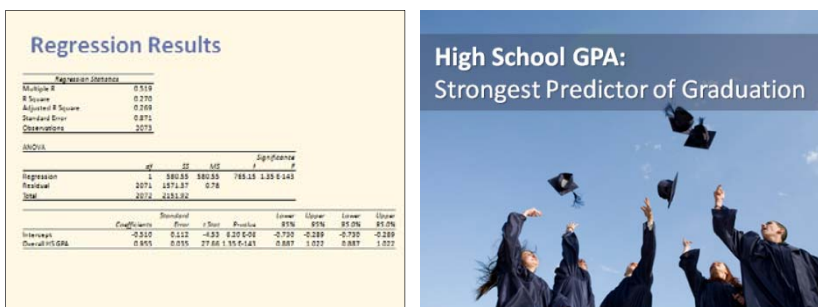
Negative review

→ No further contracts

Before After

**11. Create a handout to accompany your presentation.**

Many presenters try to make their slides function as both a handout and a presentation and end up failing at both attempts. Slides should be designed to visually enhance (not summarize) your presentation. Handouts should be well-written comprehensive reports, containing detailed information such as (depending on your content) complex charts, data, analyses, and references. . This approach takes time, but your audience will be grateful to take a well-written document with them, rather than just their scribbled notes.



## 12. *Be passionate about your topic.*

Regardless of how well designed your slides are, the success or failure of your presentation will hinge on how effectively you engage your audience. If the audience can't tell that the topic you're presenting is interesting to you, it won't be interesting to them. The slides should serve to enhance your oral presentation, let them help you. Bullet points are not passionate, not even when they're highly decorated.

**Be passionate**

- You control the message.
- The audience should focus on your words.
- The slides should enhance, not be the presentation.
- Bullet points are not passionate.



We believe this tip will be the key for Michelle and the University of Toronto. If their audience are engaged in the presentation and it is memorable after they leave, then the chances of changing their behavior are increased.

## ***The Reveal***

The following are the madeover slides along with notes about what would be said while each is on screen.

**Building a Foundation:**  
Processing Academic Records in HRIS

Sara-Jane Finlay  
Michelle Broderick  
Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty and Academic Life

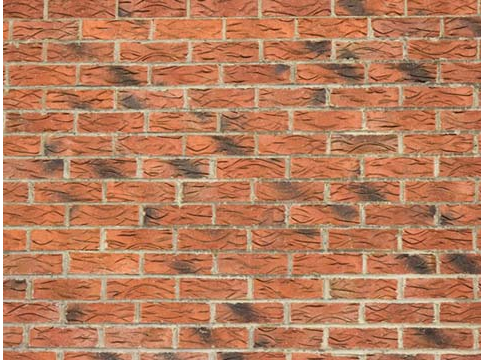
Let me begin today by telling you how much we appreciate what you do to make our HRIS system work so well. You might not think that processing academic records is important, but having accurate and complete data provides a foundation that allows the university to keep moving forward.

You may not realize how critically important your work is to the integrity of our entire HRIS system. It may seem trivial, but by the end of this session I hope you'll realize just how important it is.

Age

Subgroup	Education	
Rank	Tenure Status	FTE
Name	Gender	Salary

Each detail entered about a faculty member, such as their education, tenure status, and more, is part of an information system that forms the foundation for how the university functions.



It's not terribly sexy or interesting, but without the solid foundation provided by the data you enter, some very serious consequences could result. If the data are not accurate or complete, then ...



.. our foundation of data would crumble.

We can fairly easily identify missing data, but it's harder to identify when data are incorrect. Unless you are vigilant, then bad data will be used for decision-making and be included in reports sent outside the university. There are a lot of organizations and individuals that rely on having the information be accurate. So it is important to enter complete and accurate data from the beginning.



Accurate data matters to the national and provincial governments, who require substantial reporting on academic data like the Statistics Canada Full-time Faculty Salary Survey.



Accurate data matters to the university because they are reported to national and international data exchanges for benchmarking, including the University of Toronto Performance Indicators for Governance.



Accurate data matters to the Provost and other senior administrators because they use data to plan budgets, make salary decisions, understand our faculty population, and monitor a host of other key indicators. If the data aren't accurate and complete, administrators can make bad decisions or have to wait for answers to even simple questions.

Accurate data matters to the two of us because we are the one who provide data to the Provost and have to explain missing and inaccurate data.



Finally, accurate data matters to your faculty. The data are used to identify cohorts for workshops and professional development programs as well as to verify HR matters that require Provostial approval like:

- Research & study leaves
- Tenure & promotion
- Grant eligibility and
- Retirement & emeritus titles

Imagine what would happen if the tenure status of an assistant professor was miscoded and a faculty member missed his opportunity to apply for tenure.



It may just seem like processing academic records is tedious or "filling in the blank," but it actually has an impact on peoples' lives.

So we're here today to see what we can do together to help ensure the entry of this important data is as accurate as possible. By the end of this session, you will have a better understanding of the terms used, the overall structure of the HR system and how the pieces fit together.

(The presentation would continue and transition into detailed content about processing HR records.)

## References and Recommended Reading

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