

Organizing Information for PowerPoint Presentations

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WILD

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I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand. ---Confucius

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Organizing Material for Maximum Communication

Learning styles

Research has shown that different people learn things differently. Some learners are more visually-oriented than others. Some learn better reading rather than listening to material. There are other learning style differences among learners as well. We should strive to take advantage of the features of the media we use (in this case, PowerPoint) to provide the same material to different learners in ways that works best for each of them.

Why use visuals at all?

Have you ever thought about why we use visuals in PowerPoint in the first place? It is because the slides can support the information you present by providing a different “point of view” and/or accentuating key points. This helps the more “visually oriented” learners among us.

Learning is **not** enhanced when a slide contains one single visual, or one major concept, while the presenter is relating several hundred words of material with no visual support. The learner might as well listen to an audio recording. Why show a slide at all? And, since PowerPoint slides do not work well with too much information (too many words, and/or too small a font), content must be carefully presented in small, logical subject matter chunks, with each chunk supported by the appropriate visual.

A picture is worth a thousand words

“A picture is worth a thousand words” applies to more than photographs or drawings. It also applies to charts, graphs, icons, bullets, and screen captures. Strive for visual support. Seek out ways to support verbal material with a picture, chart, graph, or screen capture. If there is no appropriate visual available or practical, then we have to rely on bullet points for the visual reinforcement. Sometimes, a picture AND bullet points (or text boxes) are appropriate. Pictures also add interest and variety that helps make the presentation a more pleasant and engaging experience, so even “gratuitous” or “unnecessary” images (that do not add anything to the learning, but are somewhat related - such as pictures of people working at computers for computer subjects, or dollar signs for financial subjects) are welcome, as long as they are used appropriately and are not overdone.

Alignment within slides: Avoiding visual /aural conflict

While it is usually best to find some interesting and informative visual element to reinforce the words and ideas that you want to communicate, sometimes all we have are words. In this case, the bullet points become the visual element.

In general, bulleted lists should reflect and *support all the key points* that are being presented, *in the order they are being presented*. Bullet points in the slide should never conflict or compete with the material in the narration (or trainer notes). Conflict often happens when the slide bullets use different words from what is verbally presented. Do we expect the learner to listen to the presenter, or read the slide? They cannot do both at the same time *unless they are in alignment*. Conflict also occurs when the bullets present the material in a different order from the order presented in the narration. The learner’s eyes are searching on the screen for what they are hearing, and meanwhile they are missing some or all of what they are expected to learn from the narrator or instructor.

The best bullets contain key words that appear *early in the sentence or paragraph* from the notes that they are intended to support. Don't make the learner wait too long to hear the words in the bullet that their eye is falling on. The bullets should consist of short, succinct summaries of the information described by the trainer or narrator, using the same key words (whenever possible) in both the slide and verbal information, in the same order. This is *aural-visual alignment*.

Here's an example. The slide to support the concepts in this paragraph might be as shown in the box below:

“The **best bullets** contain **key words** that **appear early** in the sentence or paragraph from the notes that they are intended to support. In other words, **don't make the learner wait** too long to hear the words in the bullet that their eye is falling on. The bullets should consist of **short, succinct summaries** of the information described by the trainer or narrator, using the **same key words** (whenever possible) in both the slide and notes, in the **same order**.”

- | |
|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Best bullets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key words appear early<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Don't make them wait• Short, succinct summaries• Same key words• Same order as notes |
|--|

One way to create well-aligned bullet points is to write out your presenter notes - want to say. Copy and paste **all** the words contained in the notes into the slide, then remove words and add bullet points until you are left with the bare minimum number of words that contain the essence of the information. If you cannot remove enough words to make the bullets fit comfortably on one slide, you need two or more slides for that material.

“Chunking”: *Number of ideas and words per slide*

Presentations should provide the material that we wish audiences to learn in chunks that are small enough for them to have the chance to absorb an idea or concept before they move on to the next one. For each slide, you may say as few as a handful of words, or as many as about 100 or so words, but the amount spoken for an individual slide should rarely exceed 100 words. Look for logical, sensible ways to break the content into smaller chunks. There are inherent characteristics of PowerPoint that limits the amount of material that can be well-presented on a slide. Each individual slide should present a distinct concept or content unit.

One rule of thumb is the 6-by-6 rule: No more than six bullets, with no more than six words per bullet. This is something to strive for, but this rule can be broken when appropriate. For instance, if you have a list of seven or eight brief terms or items to present, then you may want to use seven or eight lines rather than split the material into two slides just so you can follow the 6x6 rule. Use a two-column layout if that helps.

“Macro” Alignment and chunking: *Organizing the presentation*

Just as each slide should be logically “chunked” and aligned, so too should the presentation, but on a macro level. The best way to organize the material is to align it with the your *objectives* – what key points are you trying to communicate? Organize your objectives in natural, logical subject matter units. Review the objectives to make sure they are in a logical, sensible order. List the objectives in

several slides at the beginning of the presentation, then create a separate unit within the presentation for each objective. Create a title slide for each unit, or section, that lets the learner know they are beginning a new objective. Present the material in the same order as the objectives, and use the same words (and numbering, if used) on the title slides as in the list of objectives.

Depending on the objectives or the natural chunks in the subject matter, a separate section might contain a small handful of slides, or it might contain 20 or 30 slides. A typical presentation might contain five to 15 separate sections.

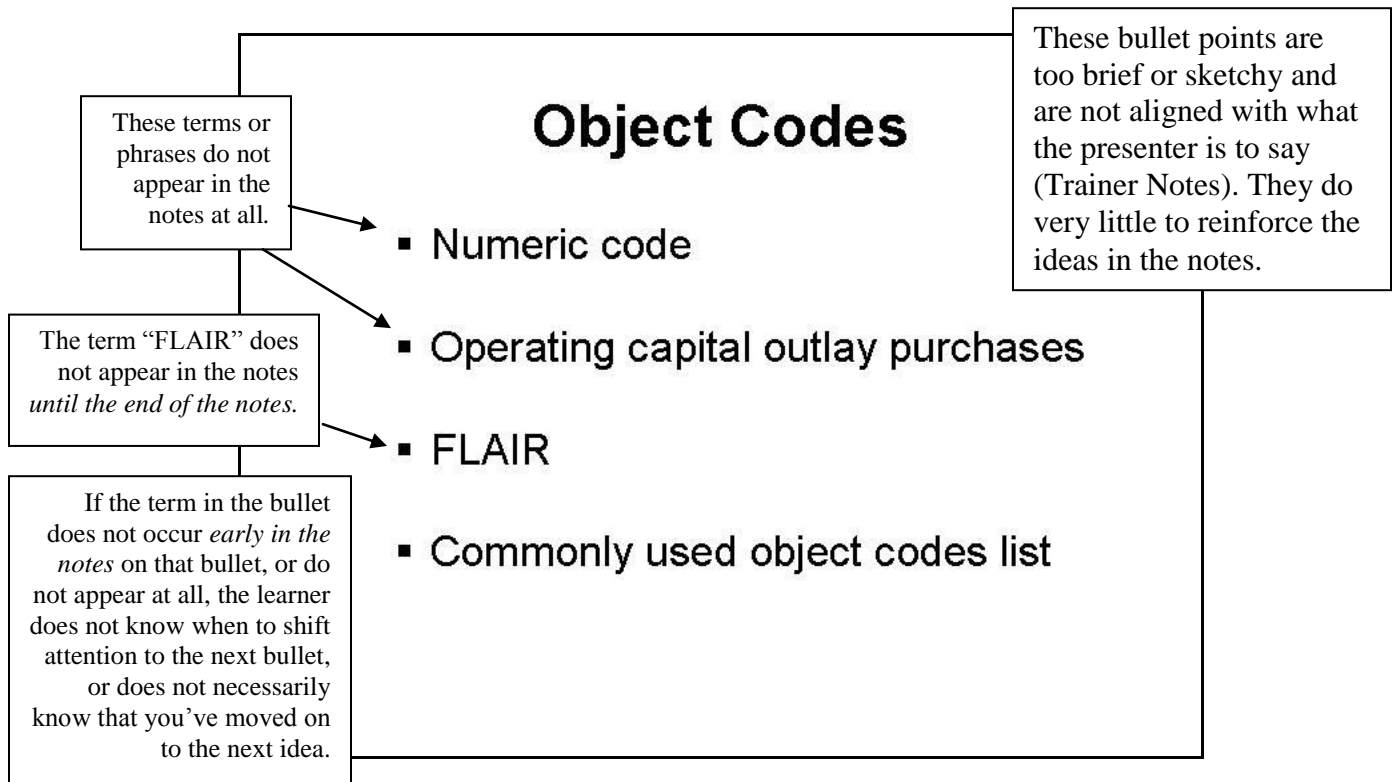
Context First

For complex units of subject matter, it is best to present the material first in a broad context, then present the material in smaller discrete units. For example, if there is a list of seven things, and each of the seven things requires a sentence or paragraph of explanation, first present a bulleted list of the seven things. Then present each of the seven things separately, in separate slides, with their own bullets. This provides the larger context first, then allows the user to absorb and understand each on the seven things separately before proceeding to the next thing. Then, if you really want to reinforce the relationship between the seven things, you can show the whole list again.

On the next pages you will find a before-and-after example of a poorly-aligned slide from a State of Florida training presentation that I was tasked with improving. The trainer notes show what the presenter is to say.

Sample Slides

A Typical Training Module Slide (BEFORE ALIGNMENT AND CHUNKING)



Trainer Notes

An object code is a six-digit code that identifies what commodities/services can be purchased with your revenue in FLAIR. Object codes that begin with a "5", identify that purchase as an OCO purchase, (OCO will be discussed later in this training), and records the purchase in our "Asset Manager System" so inventory will be tagged properly. Also, using a "5" code adds a special approver to your requisition approval flow within MFMP. If the object code selected in a requisition for a particular purchase is not properly populated on the accounting page, it means the code is not valid for the organizational code within FLAIR and, essentially, that type of purchase is not allowed from that revenue source. To have that code added in your set file within FLAIR, you will need to contact your budget representative. A list of commonly used object codes is located on the central Purchasing Office Intranet site.

There are 153 words in the above notes. This is usually too much for any one slide, even if it covers one subject. Notes should rarely exceed 100 words per slide, and can be as short as one brief sentence. The material above should be on at least two slides.

Additionally, if presenter notes are in the dense, paragraph block form shown seen here, there is nothing to help the presenter reference the notes at-a-glance, and nothing that will help the audience make the connection between the bullets on the screen and what is to be said (and heard) about the bullet. Better to arrange trainer notes in an outline form that is exactly reflected by the slide bullets.

See the following revised slides for improvements.

Revision Of The Above Slide

Better alignment, still too much material for one slide.

This slide is better aligned but there is too much material for one slide. This would be better as two or more slides. See next pages.

Object Codes

- **Six-digit numeric code**
- **OCO purchases**
 - Object code begins with “5”
 - Recorded in *Asset Management System*
 - “5” adds a special approver in MFMP
- **Codes not properly populated in FLAIR**
 - Contact your budget representative
- **Commonly used object code list**
 - On Web site - see appendix page XXX

These bullet points summarize the notes more completely and accurately. For example, point three is not about FLAIR per se, it is about *incorrect entries* in FLAIR.

The words in bullets appear early in notes text so learner knows which bullet is being discussed and can shift their attention accordingly.

Same rules apply to added sub-bullets. All text in the notes should be supported by a bullet.

Six-digit numeric code

- An object code is a six-digit code that identifies what you will be spending with your revenue in FLAIR.

Operating capital outlay (OCO) purchases

- For operating capital outlay, or OCO, purchases, the notes will be discussed later in this training), and records in the “Asset Management System” so inventory will be tagged properly.
- Also, using a “5” code adds a special approver to your requisition.

Codes not properly populated in FLAIR are disallowed

- If the object code selected in a requisition for a purchase is not valid on the accounting page, it means the code is not valid in FLAIR and, essentially, that type of purchase is not allowed.
- To have that code added in your set file within FLAIR, contact your budget representative.

Commonly used object code list

- A list of commonly used object codes is located on the website. See appendix, page XXX for the URL.

These notes are designed so that the trainer (or online user) can see *at-a-glance* what information in the notes is connected with which bullet.

Bullet points are shown in the notes, and under each are the details for each bullet.

Main points are broken into separate sub-bullets, *just as in slide*.

Presenter can, at-a-glance, note what is to be said for that bullet. This makes them *less likely to read it, and more likely to paraphrase it, or say it in their own words.*

I had to slightly revise notes or bullet to make *the words in the bullet appear early in the notes* so learner can shift attention to next bullet.

Note the *use of a check-box for a bullet*. The trainer can mentally or actually check off each point as it is covered.

SEE NEXT PAGES (BELOW) FOR THE TWO-SLIDE VERSION OF THIS INFORMATION

Same Material, Better Aligned, on Two Slides

Object Codes - **Slide One Of Two**

Object Codes

- **Six-digit numeric code**

- **OCO purchases**
 - Object code begins with “5”
 - Recorded in *Asset Management System*
 - “5” adds a special approver in MFMP

Six-digit numeric code

- An object code is a six-digit code that identifies what commodities/services can be purchased with your revenue in FLAIR.

Operating capital outlay (OCO) purchases

- For operating capital outlay, or OCO, purchases, the object code will begin with a “5”. (OCO will be discussed later in this training), and records the purchase in our “Asset Manager System” so inventory will be tagged properly.

- Also, using a “5” code adds a special approver to your requisition approval flow within MFMP.

Object Codes

- **Codes not properly populated in FLAIR**
 - Purchase not allowed from that source
 - Contact your budget representative

- **Commonly used object code list**
 - On Web site - see appendix page XXX

Codes not properly populated in FLAIR are disallowed

- If the object code selected in a requisition for a particular purchase is not properly populated on the accounting page, it means the code is not valid for the organizational code within FLAIR and, essentially, that type of purchase is not allowed from that revenue source.

- To have that code added in your set file within FLAIR, you will need to contact your budget representative.

Commonly used object code list

- A list of commonly used object codes is located on the central Purchasing Office Intranet site. See appendix, page XXX for the URL.