
The Presentation Was Sort of OK, the Slides Were Just a Bit Busy



Ross Fisher

*****@***googlemail.com

Consultant Paediatric Surgeon -
Sheffield Children's Hospital, UK

[LinkedIn](#) [Twitter](#)

A clinical sign such as oliguria is a marker of a significant problem. "Busy slides" in a presentation are a similar warning in a presentation. Neither oliguria nor busy slides can be accepted as a minor issue and resolved with a simple prescription. One must address the whole patient, diagnose the underlying pathology and manage that.

"Busy slides" happen for many reasons; the script, something to read, the handout, what everyone does, "because of learning styles", "academic" and because it is quick and easy. They are not effective. They limit the message, they are not only restrictive to learning, but actively inhibit it. They disengage the audience, they are a huge barrier to effective communication, they make terrible handouts and virtually everyone hates them. Or at least calls them "busy."

A presentation is made of three presentations; [the message as a presentation \(p1\)](#), the [supportive media as a presentation \(p2\)](#) and its [delivery as a presentation overall \(p3\)](#). The value of a presentation is the audience perception of the product of all three factors ([p cubed](#)). The standard presentation with "busy slides" effectively is $p1=p2=p3$; all that is said is written on the slides and read out.

The purpose of a presentation is not the transfer of a large quantity of data but of a message. Less than 10% of a presentation is retained; it is the least efficient method of data transfer. The most efficient is a document but an audience has not attended to receive a document, rather the input of the speaker on the topic of the document. The document (data) may be delivered by alternative means such as a handout but what the audience will value most is a single, specific to their need, memorable key ([p1](#)) that will allow them unlock this data at a later date. Rather than teaching, the audience is looking for learning.

Once the purpose of the presentation has been changed from downloading data to sharing a message it is clear that the media that supports this ([p2](#)) will then be illustrative rather than annotative. Psychological literature is clear that one cannot interpret disparate spoken and written media contemporaneously let alone add cognitive enquiry to the complexity of the task. One cannot read, listen and think all at the same time due to cognitive load. Image superiority adds understanding and memorability without distracting from the interpretation of the spoken message. Illustrate the message with clear, high quality, single images rather than obscuring it with "busy slides".

Finally, the spoken delivery of a presentation ([p3](#)) freed from the constraint of a massive data download can be engaging and reactive to the understanding and needs of the audience. The language used is different, extemporisation is more easily undertaken and there is no perceived conflict or distraction by the "busy slides" of the script projected behind the presenter.

In the same way there is more to managing oliguria than just giving frusemide, to improve presentations will take more than simply making the slides "less busy". One needs to address the fundamental pathology of the purpose, construction and delivery of presentations. This will lead to engaging, effective and valuable presentations, with less busy slides.

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