SHARE YOUR RESEARCH: HOW TO GIVE A GOOD TALK
HANDOUT: DO’S AND DON’TS OF SLIDE DESIGN

Here’s an overview of some fundamental DO’s and DON’Ts of slide design to help you communicate your research more effectively and help your audience understand complex data more easily. Remember that clarity and simplicity are of the utmost importance.

1. **DO keep your slides simple**: A busy slide is distracting and could dissuade your audience from reading it or paying attention. A well-designed slide should have a clear title echoing its key message and one or two key supporting figures or images. Make sure that your slide is not cramped and that there is enough negative or white space. Search for downloadable templates online to assist you with slide layouts. Templates exist for all major presentation software applications: Keynote, PowerPoint, Google Slides, etc.

2. **DON’T have a lot of text on your slides**: Avoid using big blocks of text (i.e., too much text). You want your audience to pay attention to what you are saying. You can’t expect them to read and listen to you at the same time. Whenever possible, text should be replaced with visuals. If it is absolutely necessary to use text, make sure to summarize it and use short bullet points to highlight key takeaways.

3. **DO simplify how you are displaying your data**: As a general rule, showing a screenshot from a paper is never a good idea. Each slide should only contain the information that is essential for your audience to understand the message. Get rid of the things that do not support your message (e.g., remove nonessential data points). When dealing with complex slides, you can rely on animations to dissect the data and guide your audience through it. Use circles or arrows judiciously to highlight key pieces of information. GraphPad’s Prism and R are useful tools for compelling data visualization.

4. **DO mind your colors**: Too colorful slides are distracting, and bland slides are uninteresting. You can use colors strategically to emphasize or call attention to certain elements of your slides. For example, you can use colors to highlight text or a key piece of data. When picking the colors for your slides (both background, text, and images) consider contrast and the lighting in the room you will be presenting in (if it’s possible to learn this beforehand). For example, while a black background can draw attention to colorful microscopy images, dark background colors can look dull in a bright room. Also, it is important to consider if the colors you are using will be accessible to the majority of your audience. Be mindful that some people are colorblind and will not be able to see certain colors.

5. **DO choose your fonts wisely**: As with colors, typography and fonts can be a source of distraction. Usually, Sans Serif fonts, such as Arial and Helvetica, work best for slides projected on-screen. Don’t use more than two complementary fonts and make sure the font size you pick is legible, particularly in a large auditorium. Titles should be larger than the rest of the text on your slides (more on how to choose your talk titles later in the course). Stylizing effects, like **bolding** and *italicizing*, should be used sparingly for emphasis.

6. **DON’T use low-resolution images**: Images and figures in your presentation should be of high quality. You can show your own or look for high-resolution royalty-free images
online. Make sure you have the rights to use these images and mention the copyright holders on your slides, especially when posting your slides online or presenting at a conference.

7. **DON'T overuse transitions and animations**: Too many transitions and animations can be confusing and distracting. Limit the use of such effects and use them judiciously for emphasis. “Fade”, “Move,” or “Slide” transitions are simple and are the least distracting.