

Teaching with PowerPoint: Slide Design Tips



GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY®

**THE ROBERT AND MARY PEW
FACULTY TEACHING AND
LEARNING CENTER**

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You may currently use PowerPoint or Google Slides to share information with students or supplement discussions. Presentation slides can enhance instruction, but only when designed for an audience's needs.

If you choose to use PowerPoint Slides (or another slide deck type), please make note of the following evidence-based strategies for designing slides. These strategies help your audience retain information and stay engaged!

PowerPoint's default design encourages you to use incoherent phrasal headings and bulleted lists.

This phrasal heading tells us the general topic of the slide, but not the main take-away.



Problem

- Students are unprepared for college
 - 35% high school students at or above benchmark for reading
- Academic expectations are unclear
 - Students don't know what faculty want from them
 - Faculty assume students know what they want from them
- There is bias and lack of support
 - Against international students, non-native English speakers
 - Seemingly over-burdened support centers
- Need cultural competency training



Bulleted lists in the body of the slide are hard to read.

The default design may be helpful for the presenter reading from the slide, but is not designed for the audience's needs.

In a text-heavy slide, the speaker and the slide compete for attention.

Audiences will either:

1. Toggle back and forth between listening and reading
2. Tune out the speaker and try to read the slide
3. Ignore the slide and try to listen to the speaker

Belonging and mattering

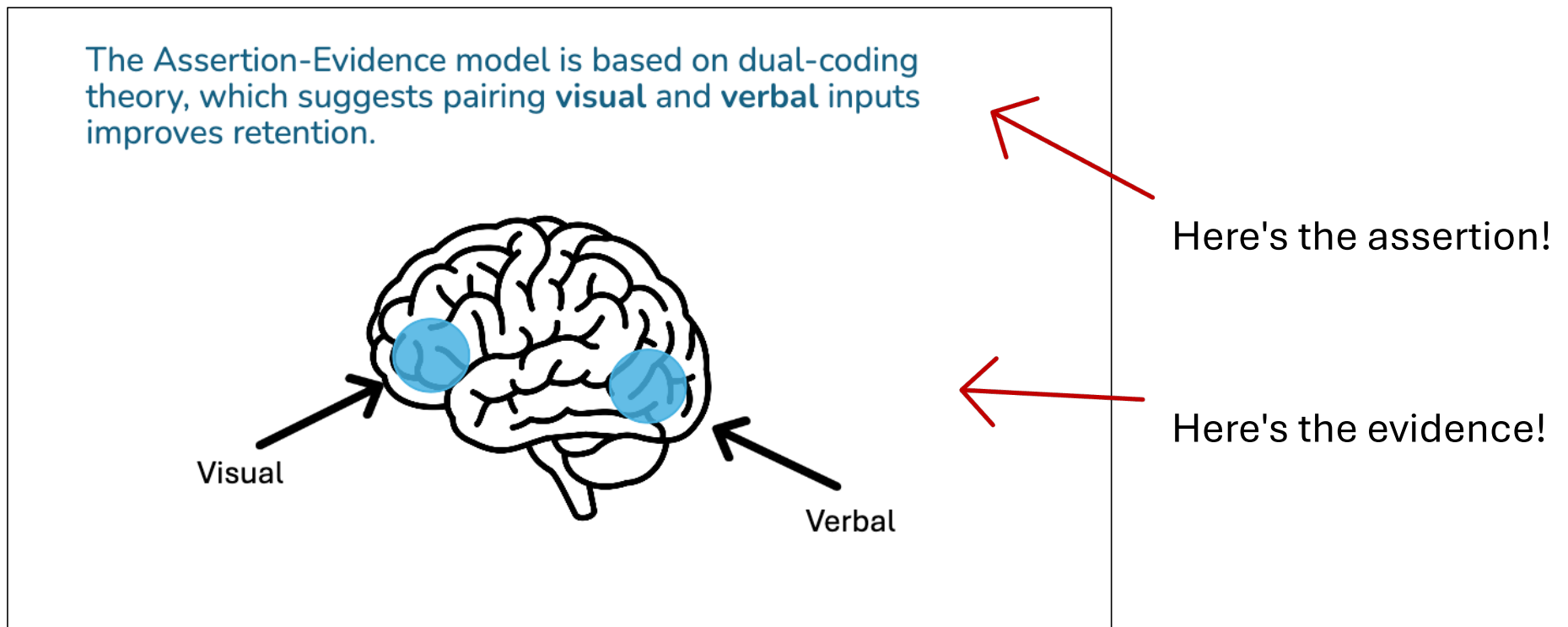
- Promotes a “culture in which all learners feel welcome, valued, and safe” (Hogan and Sathy 2022)
- Face educational challenges if they feel they don't belong (Addy et al., 2021).
- “A basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior” (Strayhorn 2012).
- “Fundamental to the health and psychological well-being of college and university students” (Flett et al., 2019).
- Correlation between learning and student's perception of care, support, competence, and good communication
 - These instructors create environments that are: highly organized, set clear expectations, and have high perceptions of learning

We recommend designing your slides with the Assertion-Evidence Model.

The Assertion-Evidence model is based on dual-coding theory, which suggests pairing **visual** and **verbal** inputs improves retention.



Think of your assertion like a newspaper headline.



Research shows a sentence heading + visual body **increases** comprehension

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Slide BEFORE using the
Assertion-Evidence Model

I learned the issue is complex and perceived in
different ways.



Students'
unpreparedness



Unclear
academic
expectations



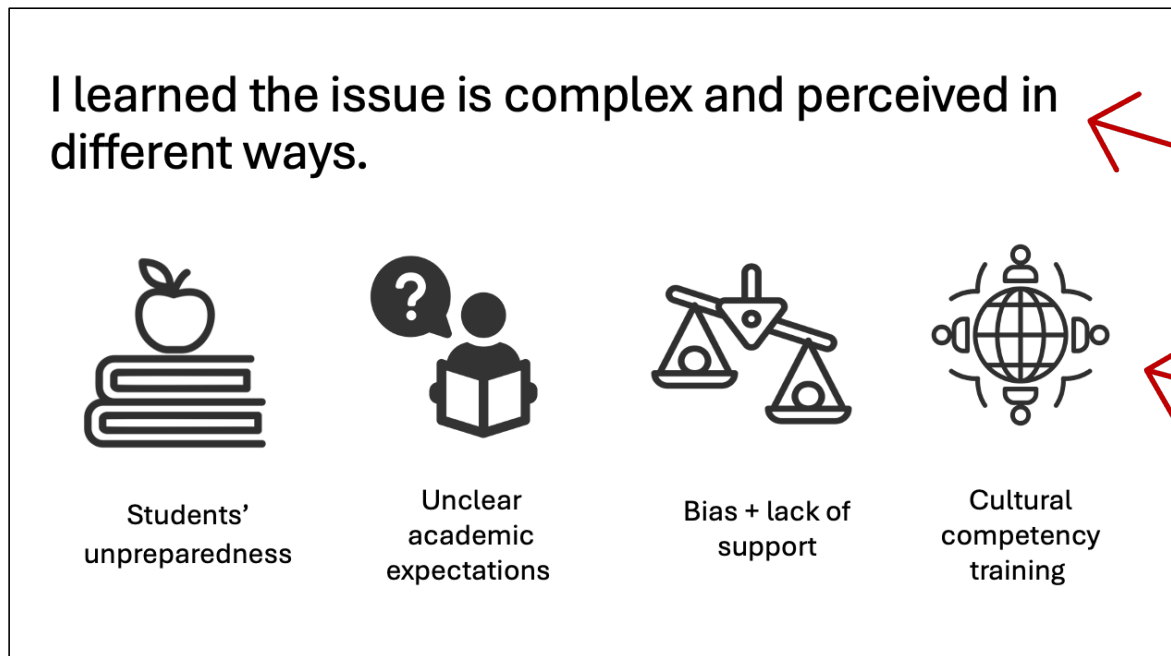
Bias + lack of
support



Cultural
competency
training

Slide AFTER using the
Assertion-Evidence Model

Research shows a sentence heading + visual body increases comprehension



Here's the bottom line - assertion

Here's the visual evidence

- ① When designing your slide, first identify the main takeaway.

In other words, what do you want the audience to know from this one slide? What is the bottom line?

- ② That main takeaway = your slide header (aka assertion).

Have a lot of text you do want to share?

Consider printing it out on a handout.



TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

These types of durable skills are incredibly important, but can also be incredibly hard to develop. This handout will help you identify key transferable skills and pinpoint those a student might want to develop for future success, using the National Association of Colleges and Employers' [Career Readiness Competencies](#).

CREATIVITY	LEADERSHIP	COMMUNICATION
• Generate innovative ideas and solutions. • Adapt thinking to overcome challenges. • Combine concepts to create unique outcomes. • Approach problems with fresh perspectives.	• Prioritize tasks and organize people and resources to achieve goals. • Identify resources for effective problem-solving. • Delegate tasks and ensure completion through collaboration. • Motivate and lead diverse groups to foster teamwork. • Create environments that promote growth and innovation.	• Ask focused questions to gather specific information. • Use various written styles to convey messages effectively. • Present information using diverse media formats. • Describe objects and events neutrally, communicating value judgments when needed.

ANALYTICAL	TEAMWORK	INVESTIGATION
• Identify problems and assess needs. • Evaluate reliable, diverse data and information. • Evaluate reasoning to draw logical conclusions. • Manage resources to meet competing demands.	• Listen actively, ask questions, and avoid interrupting. • Respect diversity, manage conflict, and adapt to ambiguity. • Own responsibilities, leverage strengths, and foster collaboration. • Promote compromise, interaction, and group cooperation.	• Investigate problems, including their history, causes, and origins. • Analyze the scope and impact to understand significance. • Evaluate past solutions for successes and failures. • Present insights to guide effective problem-solving.



Through your academic journey, as well as through work, volunteering, and other experiences, you've developed a broad set of transferable skills that are highly valued in the workplace. Critical thinking, effective communication, problem-solving, and adaptability are just a few examples of the capabilities you've honed. Employers care less about the specific experiences you've had and more about how you apply these versatile skills to tackle challenges, collaborate, and drive success in any professional setting.

Sample handout from the 2025 Fall Conference on Teaching and Learning, created by Rachel Becklin, Rachel Campbell, Bradford Dykes, Dana Hebreard, and Lisa Knapp

Want a consult on how to make your
slides more learner-centered?

Contact our Assistant Director, Maggie Goss, PhD

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