

One PowerPoint a Day

Idea In Short

Adopt the one-slide-a-day habit. Each page forces a working title, buckets, a storyline and reader-friendly layout, the complete consulting craft in miniature. Skip career-ladder anxiety and tackle something discrete instead, because productivity and judgment both compound through repetition.

A Habit From an Old Book

The expression one PowerPoint a day comes from *The McKinsey Way*, read many years ago and still useful.¹ Management consultants carry many flaws, and disciplined thinking is generally not one of them. Consultants are in the business of making the complex simple, converting a messy situation into a well-worded project plan, a scalable model, a presentation or even a clean email. Deliverables often take the form of slides, which makes the slide the natural unit of practice. Some professionals hold disdain for PowerPoint. Refreshing counter-view: a panoply of thoughts structured intuitively on one page is a small piece of craftsmanship worth respecting.

Practice Beats Career Anxiety

Productivity increases with repetition, no question. Getting better at a craft means putting in the time, advice that sounds like Vince Lombardi because it essentially is.² Professionals easily get caught in mid-term thinking about performance evaluations, promotions and career advancement, a loop that produces worry without output. Tackling something discrete instead, one slide, done today, is quietly empowering. The habit compounds the way all deliberate practice compounds, and after a year the difference between the practicing consultant and the coasting one shows on every page they touch. Eight lessons emerge from sustained daily practice.

Titles and Buckets

First, the title should say something. The title is the most important real estate on the page, so use it. A slide can carry heavy content and multiple data points while remaining clear because the title states the message plainly, such as a global education crisis summarized in three words. The pandemic's longest-lasting scar may be the education gap left across hundreds of millions of children, and a title that says so orients every chart beneath it.

Second, put things into buckets. Any topic worth a slide should not be obvious or inane, because basic content belongs in an email or a link. The material consultants analyze is complex, like the evolving role of the chief financial officer (CFO). Stream-of-consciousness brainstorming on paper is not what clients pay for. Think through the breadth of a topic and narrow it to the two or three dominant points covering 80 percent of the message. A related lesson for junior consultants is empathy: being an executive in the current economic, political and social climate is straight difficult, which is why the trusted advisor posture matters more than cleverness.

Stories and Tables

Third, tell a story. Fundamentally everything is storytelling, and the audience needs to know where you are coming from, what your intention is and what the so-what will be, because people remember stories rather than facts. A one-pager about federal subsidies once needed a flow-of-funds diagram that appeared nowhere in the source article, and that simplification carried the entire storyline of money moving to individuals and inadvertently rescuing state budgets. Secondary and tertiary effects of government spending become visible when the story gets drawn.

Fourth, use tables. This lesson takes time to learn: bullet points are not mandatory. When data accumulates, words get in the way, and a simple categorized table characterizes trends better than prose. Ten factors influencing private equity in a half-year fit cleanly into a table organized by raising money, purchasing and selling, with arrow indicators showing direction. The same content as an uncategorized bullet list would be unreadable, and updating the arrows after seven federal rate hikes would tell the next chapter at a glance.

Guiding the Reader's Eye

Fifth, highlight the most important points. Text-heavy slides fatigue the eye, so bold color on a few key takeaways relieves the boredom and steers attention to what matters. Sixth, use

bullets and numbering deliberately. Fitting complex material onto a page means tweaking wording until it lays out correctly, and numbering, underlining and connective words like so and but carry a careful reader through dense technical ground. Seventh, make it easy for the reader. Explain in simple, smooth, high-school-level language, with main bullets flowing in logical order: the law is this, it used to be that, here is why, here is who cares. Complexity in the subject never excuses complexity in the sentence.

Making the Habit Sustainable

A daily slide survives only if the bar stays realistic. The unit of work is one page summarizing something you read or thought that day, not a client-ready masterpiece, and twenty focused minutes suffice. Keep a running list of source material, articles, reports and podcast episodes, so the habit never stalls on topic selection. Date each slide and store them in one deck per quarter, because the archive becomes a personal knowledge base and a portfolio of your thinking. Review the quarter's slides occasionally and notice the improvement in titles, structure and restraint, which arrives faster than expected. Skipped days do not break the system as long as the weekly average holds, since the goal is repetition, not perfection.

Follow Your Curiosity

Eighth, choose practice topics you actually care about. Making a PowerPoint for fun sounds geeky, and it is, which is precisely why the topic must interest you. Think about your customers and the people who learn from you, and build pages on what serves them, whether that is a framework applied somewhere unexpected, like segmentation, targeting and positioning applied to recruiting, or a news story deserving one clear chart.³ One page, once a day, on something worth explaining: the cheapest master class in consulting available anywhere.

- 1The McKinsey Way
- 2Vince Lombardi
- 3Segmenting-targeting-positioning

Summary

One slide a day trains disciplined thinking: titles that say something, buckets that organize complexity, stories that flow, tables that replace bullet walls and highlights that guide the eye. Follow your curiosity, practice in public and let the craft compound.