

What Makes a Good Multimedia Presentation Design?

Introduction

We've all had the experience of how much presentation software has to offer. From backgrounds to graphics to fonts, there is always something that could be enhanced, adjusted, changed, or added. When we have the time, we can experiment with new features, knowing that there are probably still more available that haven't been discovered yet.

Also, some of us have witnessed what a room full of students with limited design guidance will do when given such an engaging application.. Focusing on the content of the presentation diminishes and "playing" with the software takes up valuable class time and may lead to student frustration and late or unfinished projects.

This article discusses design issues associated with multimedia presentations and some ways you can keep students focused on the task. Time "playing" becomes more limited with design guidelines. A lesson on these guidelines and a quick review each time a multimedia project is done will lessen the amount of wasted time, and keep students more focused. We will discuss general ideas, color, graphics, text, navigation items (buttons), videos and sound.

General Guidelines

Before the little details comes the "big picture". When planning the overall scheme of the presentation, students need to remember the following guidelines.

The User Interface Should be Simple

The presentation is not a venue for showing off all the neat features students have discovered at home, or that someone else has showed them. Users should only see what they need to know and have access to what they need to do when view the presentation.

Consistency is Important

Objects that perform similar functions, such as back and forward buttons, should look and behave the same throughout the project. Interface components should appear in standard locations on all the screens.

The User Should Control the Action

The computer should not be in control of the user. The student's audience needs to decide where to go, what to see, and when. Controls should be available for the user to stop a video or audio file if the user chooses. Provide clear instructions.

Immediate Feedback to the User

Tell your students that the user needs to know the computer “heard them” when they pressed a control. A short beep will keep the user interested

Use Familiar Metaphors

Using familiar objects and actions will keep the user within his/her own comfort level. Arrows for navigation would be an example of an object almost all users are likely to know.

Colors

Some general guidelines for colors are:

- Background colors should be consistent, and some feel pastels are best.
- Red backgrounds are uncomfortable for users to look at.
- Have students use 5 or less colors per screen.
- On dark backgrounds use lighter text.
- For light backgrounds dark text should be used.
- Consistent text color is important, as well as highlighting key words in a contrasting color.

Text

Text is often the first place students will begin to learn of the capabilities of desktop publishing software. Reminding them of these simple ideas will keep their presentations looks crisp and not too bogged down in text.

- Long lines of text should be avoided, get straight to the point
- Left justify the text (don't center everything)
- Double spacing is preferable
- Do not make any text blink unless absolutely necessary
- Do not place any text on top of a graphic unless the graphic is intended to hold text
- Use large enough font sizes and generic, clearly visible fonts.
- Use the same font throughout the project

Graphics

Students could easily spend hours with graphics, trying to get them “perfect” in placement and use.

Remind them to:

- Keep the graphics associated with the project, don't have unrelated pictures present
- Be consistent about graphic placement, or at least have some logic to the movement of graphics from screen to screen.
- Graphs and Charts should be labeled with text boxes or labels.

Navigation

As mentioned above, placing common navigation icons in the same location on the screen throughout the program is easier for the user. Also, students should keep these other suggestions in mind.

- Make the icons big enough for the intended audience to see
- Place permanent buttons along the edge of the screen
- Include back up buttons, as well as forward ones
- Include an exit button on each screen
- Provide instructions for navigation

Video files

If your students need to add a video clip to their project, remember that video files tend to be very large. Tell them to use video only when necessary. Also –

- Keep the segments short
- Include a replay button

Audio files

Audio files of students speaking are a nice personal addition to a project. Students (and their parents) love hearing their own voices coming from a computer. They should keep in mind the following:

- Use a conversation style talking
- Don't have the audio conflict with the text that is on the screen
- Other uses of sound include effects for cues and transitions
- Keep the audio segments to 10 seconds or less