

The Policy Project

Responsive today,
shaping tomorrow



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**

New Zealand Government

Developing slides for policy advice

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Purpose of this document

This publication provides guidance on preparing slide decks for presentations or as key points to accompany policy papers. Tips and tools are included to help structure and design slides effectively, including the use of visual elements.

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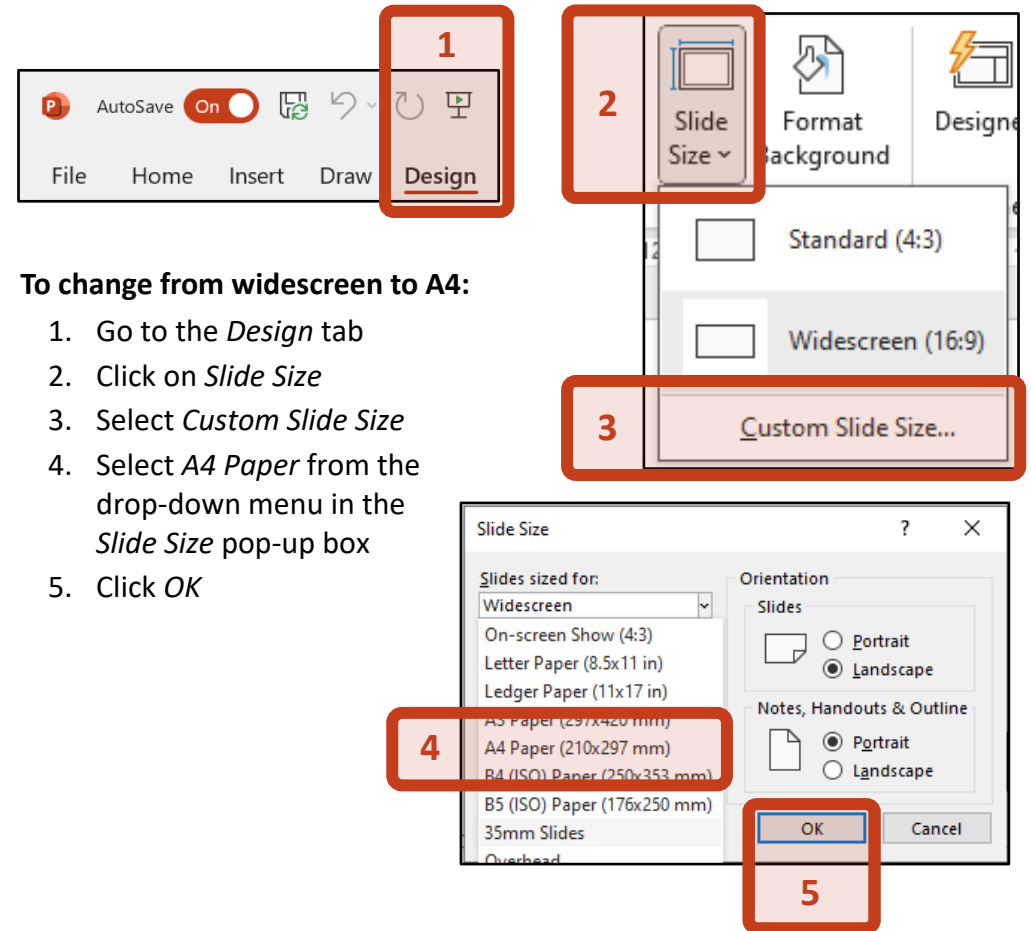
Choosing the right slide size

Widescreen layout

PowerPoint usually opens with a blank wide-screen slide, which has a size ratio of 16:9 and default measurements of 338x190 mm. This layout is ideal for reading on a screen or projecting onto a wall, as it allows the most room for content.

A4 layout

If the final purpose of your slides is to be printed, change the size from widescreen to A4. This matches the paper size (210x297 mm) and will prevent the slide's contents from shrinking down to fit when it prints.



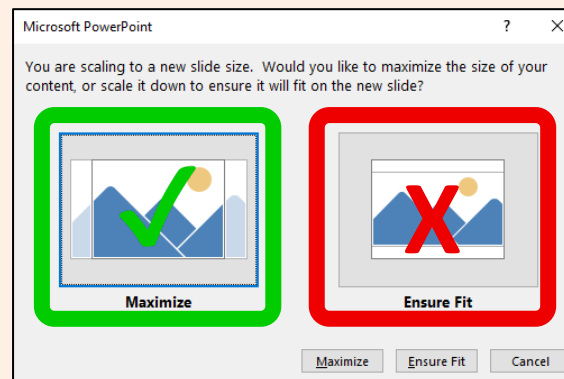
The image shows a sequence of steps to change the slide size in PowerPoint. Step 1: The Design tab is selected in the ribbon. Step 2: The Slide Size dropdown menu is open, showing Standard (4:3) and Widescreen (16:9) options. Step 3: The Custom Slide Size... option is selected. Step 4: The Custom Slide Size dialog box is open, and A4 Paper (210x297 mm) is selected in the Slides sized for list. Step 5: The OK button is clicked.

To change from widescreen to A4:

1. Go to the *Design* tab
2. Click on *Slide Size*
3. Select *Custom Slide Size*
4. Select *A4 Paper* from the drop-down menu in the *Slide Size* pop-up box
5. Click *OK*

Maximise or Ensure Fit?

If you change slide size and it asks you to choose between *Maximise* or *Ensure Fit*, select **Maximise**. This will alter the size of the slide without distorting the contents.



Ensure Fit may change the dimensions ratio of some visual elements when it changes the slide size. This has the potential to distort background graphics, images, and logos.

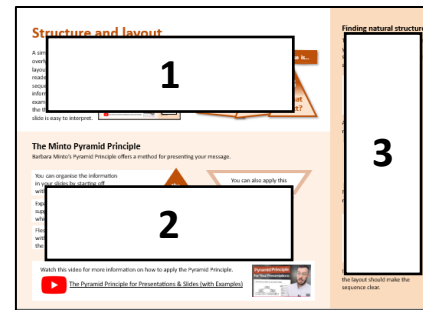
Structure and layout

A simple layout is more effective than anything complex or overly detailed.

A basic structure you can use is:

1. What?
2. So what?
3. What next?

The layout should guide your reader in the correct sequence through the information. For example, the order of the three sections in this slide is easy to interpret.



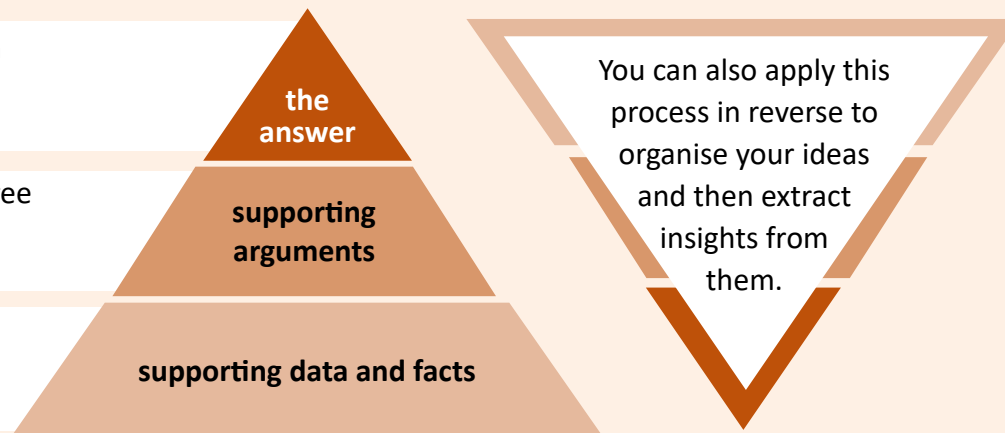
The Minto Pyramid Principle

Barbara Minto's Pyramid Principle offers a method for presenting your message.

You can organise the information in your slides by starting off with a single, main message.

Expand on that message with three supporting bullet points, each of which builds your argument.

Flesh out your supporting points with paragraphs that explain the thinking behind them.



Watch this video for more information on how to apply the Pyramid Principle.



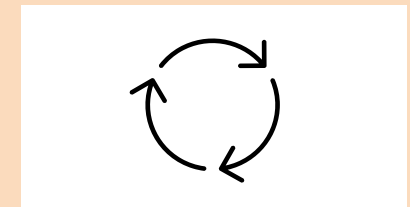
[The Pyramid Principle for Presentations and Slides \(with examples\)](#)



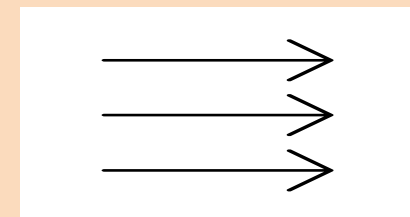
Finding your content's natural structures

There may be a natural structure in your information. Does the sequence or flow of your content suggest a certain layout?

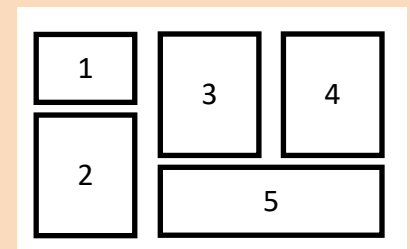
A policy cycle or annual phases might suit a circular diagram.



Parallel work-streams can suit stacked tiers or a Gantt chart.



If setting out content in boxes, the layout should make the sequence obvious.



Plain language

Because of the visual nature of slides, it's more important than ever to be concise and direct.

Communicating clearly doesn't happen by accident, and sometimes it means we need to unlearn certain habits and practices.

1. Choose plain, familiar language

Choose common words

Use the smallest word with the most obvious meaning that does the job. Use easily understandable and familiar words.

Avoid abstract terms

Avoid figurative language and metaphors. Abstract concepts can make your reader lose interest. Be literal.

Use verbs, not nouns

Verb phrases are more active than noun phrases. Compare 'We discussed the issue' with 'We had a discussion on the issue'. Verbs carry your reader through the text.

Avoid jargon and buzzwords

Sometimes technical language is necessary, but keep jargon to a minimum and avoid using buzzwords. Ask, 'Would a member of the public know this term?' If not, try rephrasing. Limit the use of acronyms where possible.

2. Use short sentences and paragraphs

Lead with action

Start your sentence with the main point. Don't bury the action at the end, or your audience may have to reread.

Keep sentences brief

15 to 20 words is an ideal length for ease of reading. Try to not go over 30 words per sentence.

Avoid redundancies

Remove any words that aren't needed for your reader's understanding. Are there phrases or descriptions that repeat often? Get other people to review your work with a fresh pair of eyes and keep an open mind to their suggestions.

3. Use the active voice

80 to 90% of verbs should be active

Active sentences are stronger and clearer. Consider the difference between 'Jack climbed the hill' and 'The hill was climbed by Jack'. Sometimes the passive voice is appropriate, but keep it to a minimum.

Use 'you' and 'we'

Personal pronouns are clear and short. They create a more appealing and engaging tone. No matter how educated or formal your audience is, using 'you' and 'we' will keep their interest and help their understanding.

Express action, not intention

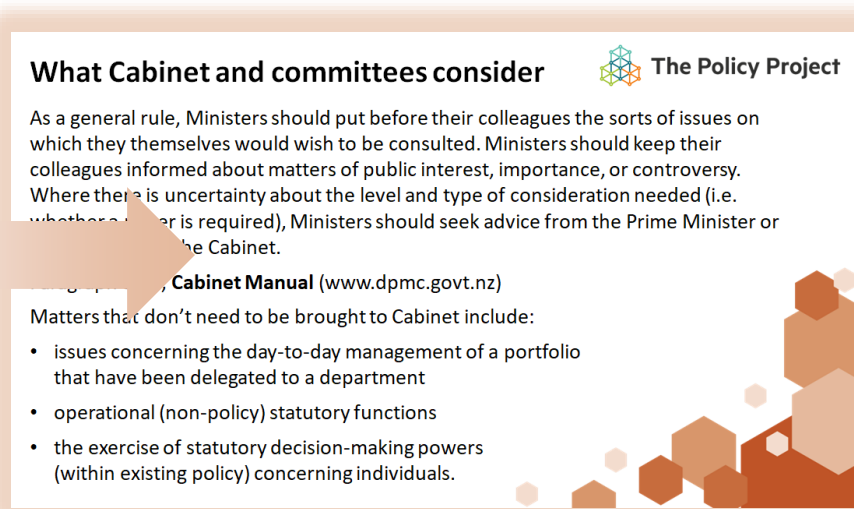
Consider the difference between 'I take responsibility' and 'I *want* to take responsibility: in the latter, no responsibility has been taken. Be clear and confident about the action you'll take. Unless you need to be vague, avoid weak words like 'hope', 'try', 'aim', 'seek' or 'intend'.

Slides for projecting as presentations



Slides for presentations need to be *extra* clear and easy to read. Design them for someone in the back of the room. It doesn't matter how good the slides look if people are struggling to read them.

They should have an oversized feeling, like the large print version of a book. Unless you need to publish them afterwards, always use the widescreen format.

Simple slides with large, plain text can be more effective than detailed designs that are harder to read.



Widescreen format has been used to make most of available space – the best option when presenting.

 **EXERCISE 4** 
Clarify drivers for action

Develop advice on a potential change to the time-period used for calculating the weighted average cost of capital (WAAC) – from a five-year period to a 20-year period.

Group questions
1. What are the drivers for action?
2. What are the root causes of the problem or what's driving the opportunity?
3. What are the gaps in our knowledge – do we know what the real problem or opportunity is? How do we know?
4. What could success look like?

All text should be oversized. Between 20 and 30 pt font size is good for readability.

Decorative elements are fine as long as they don't drown out the information or compete with the message.

If you have a lot of information to get through, spread it out across as many slides as it takes. Don't be concerned about the number of slides. The main priority is being able to read them easily.

Slides for communicating information

A visual presentation doesn't need to be complex or 'high concept' to simplify a large amount of information. The diagram shows the relationships between a range of factors that would need a lot of text to describe. In the same way that a picture paints a thousand words, your slide allows you to communicate complicated ideas in a way that makes them more accessible to your reader.

Heading is descriptive, plain, and sums up the content. It refers directly and exclusively to the content on that slide.

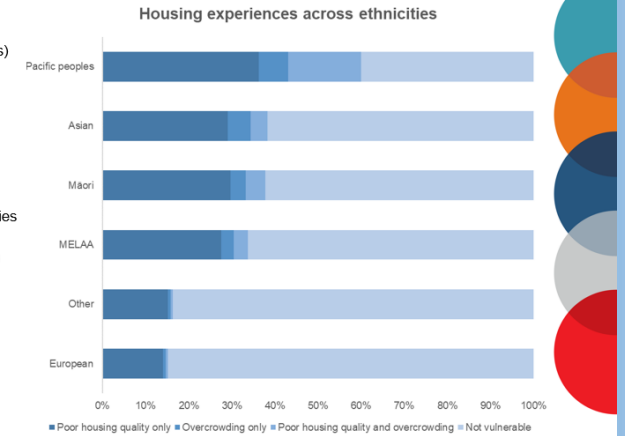
Icons have been used effectively to create visual hooks for the information.

Pacific older people disproportionately experience housing vulnerability

- Pacific peoples – 60 percent (7,100 individuals)
- Asian – 38 percent (11,700 individuals)
- Māori – 38 percent (12,100 individuals)
- MELAA – 34 percent (700 individuals)
- Other – 16 percent (1,800 individuals)
- European – 15 percent (70,900 individuals)

There were significant differences between ethnicities regarding any overcrowding:

- Pacific peoples – 24 percent (2,800 individuals)
- Asian – 9 percent (2,800 individuals)
- Māori – 8 percent (2,600 individuals)
- MELAA – 6 percent (100 individuals)
- Other – 1 percent (100 individuals)
- European – 1 percent (5,300 individuals)



Behaviours and skills underpin quality policy

Experience shows that certain behaviours – especially early in the policy project – are the key to driving high quality and clear advice on policy. These are the behaviours that skilled and experienced policy commissioners and teams typically exhibit in the early stage of policy projects.



Curiosity and openness

When you're starting out, focus on outcomes, impact and objectives, rather than jumping to solutions or policy options. Seek out a range of voices and opinions, including on what the problem is.



Political savvy

Test your thinking with senior people or experienced and trusted advisors. Ask "who are all the people who need to agree to this?"



Stewardship

Know the views of your minister but ask what a future or different minister might want. Ask what the impact is on the next generation of people in New Zealand.



Agility

Ask what would change if a major assumption turned out to be incorrect. Think about what you would do differently if you had half the time or resources. What if you had double?



Courage and honesty

Ask for more clarity, if necessary, from busy or difficult commissioners. Admit that you don't have all the skills and resources to do the job, and seek support by partnering with others.

Design is accessible with sharp contrasts, left-aligned margins, and a layout that suits the content. This could also have been designed with the five behaviours stacked horizontally on the right side.

The slide hasn't been packed with information. It has one theme and contains only the information that relates to that heading. Leave enough white space to let the content stand out.

The main text is a good size, and labels on the graph are also easy to read.

The layout is simple – just one graph and explanatory text.

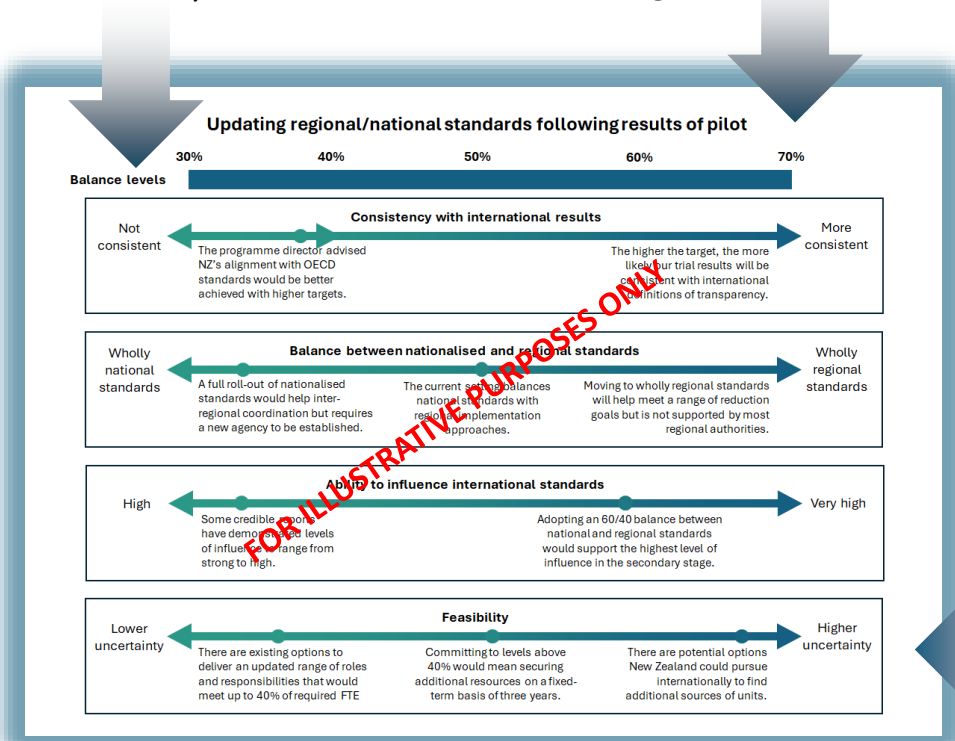
Slides for working through policy options

Presenting policy options visually can make complex ideas much easier to understand. Usually slides or A3s will accompany a paper, so you may need to start by identifying the most important points that are needed to explain the options, including pros and cons. The accompanying paper will contain the full detail, so be ruthless when deciding what to include in the slides.

If using symbols or icons, they must be relevant to the topic and the text they accompany.

The message of each factor is clear. Both direction of travel and current state are easy to understand.

Percentage scales can be easier to understand when a range from 1 to 100 is used.



Supporting public food gardens to improve community wellbeing

A two-year pilot in ten regional communities will assess whether the benefits of growing fruit and vegetables in publicly-accessible gardens are sufficient to expand the practice nationally.

The most reasonable option to pilot is Option 1 – permission may be sought to introduce fruit and vegetable plants to one designated garden per participating community.

OPTION 1	OPTION 2	OPTION 3
Approval required for planting in one designated garden	Pre-approved plants allowed in designated gardens	Open approval to grow any food plant in designated gardens
Approval will be granted on a case-by-case basis for planting fruit and vegetables. Each participating community may establish one designated public garden.	Applicants may request approval to plant any of a range of pre-approved varieties. Five designated gardens will be set up for each participating community.	Open approval for all members of the community to plant any fruit or vegetables in any of ten designated gardens set up for each participating community.
PROS	PROS	PROS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants with gardening experience can apply for an allotment in the designated garden. Approval process will screen for allergenic, invasive, or pest-ridden plants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of pre-approved plants set out clear guidelines for the community. Approval required for participation only. Multiple gardens allows for higher number of community members to participate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities have access to locally-grown produce. Low administrative burden as no approvals required for participants or plant varieties. Open participation offers highest degree of value to community wellbeing.
CONS	CONS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration required for approvals. Limited space allows limited participation. Only one designated garden offers arguably reduced community benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher number of gardens means a significant cleaning and maintenance burden. No lever for control over number of plants introduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for introduction of invasive species. Cleaning costs and damage costs likely. Safety hazard resulting from blockages to pedestrian areas.
COST	COST	COST
LOW TO MEDIUM Garden set-up and maintenance, ongoing admin.	MEDIUM TO HIGH Set-up and maintenance of multiple gardens, some initial admin.	HIGH Regular cleaning costs, damage repair.

At a glance, you can see the pros and cons for all three options. This 'bird's eye view' is difficult to achieve with text alone, making it a valuable complement to a policy paper.

You don't need to use lots of shapes that can be difficult to align. This slide uses a table with no borders to organise the content into rows and columns that are perfectly aligned.

Note the impact of aligning shapes and text margins. This can make it easier for the decision maker to read the slide quickly.

Tables

Tables are the best graphic form to use when:

- the reader needs to look up individual values
- comparing individual values
- data is precise
- you include multiple units of measure (e.g. averages and totals)
- you both show details and summarise.

Don't put a border around the entire table. Instead, use horizontal lines. Even some of those might not be necessary, as shown below.

Ethnicity	Child		Caregiver	
	No	%	No	%
Māori	439	28.1	352	22.5
Pacific	177	11.3	172	11.0
Asian	123	7.9	118	7.6
European/Other	824	52.7	921	58.9
European	814	52.1	909	58.2
Other	10	0.6	12	0.7
Total	1563	100.0	1563	100.0

Remember:

- Use sentence case for column headings.
- There should always be a black line beneath the bottom row.
- Don't leave data cells blank. If data is unavailable, use an appropriate symbol or the numeral 0.
- Sometimes a smaller text size might be needed for the sake of space, but don't go below 10 pt. 12 pt is still ideal.
- If you have a very small table, consider presenting the information as bullet points instead.

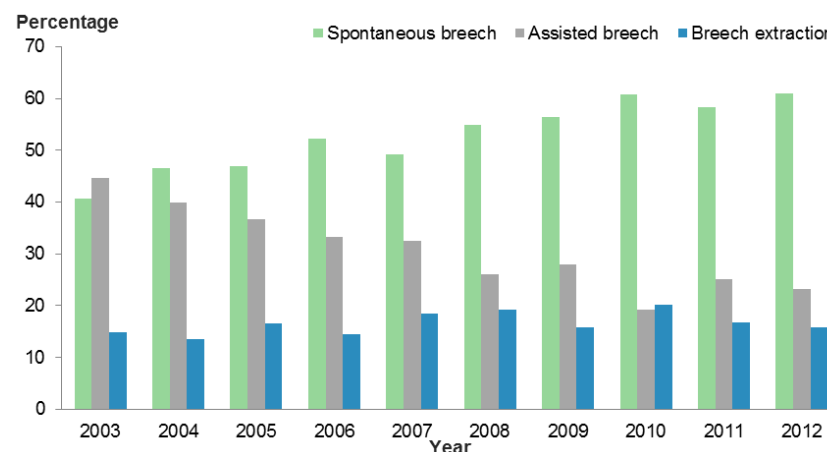
Graphs

Graphs are the best graphic form to use when you want to feature:

- patterns
- trends
- exceptions
- entire series of values at once.

Use the next page to help you choose the right kind of graph for your data. Whichever type you choose, always label both axes and the graph itself, as in the example below.

Distribution of breech birth types, 2003–2012



Remember:

- When you create the graph, make it the same size as you want in the slide. This will help you control the font size of the text labels.
- Copy the graph into your slide as a picture, 'Paste as picture'. This locks the dimensions and formatting so you won't have to deal with unstable elements.
- List the items in the legend in the same order as they appear in the graph.

Choose the right graph



	Points	Lines	Bars	Pie
Time series Values display how something changed through time (yearly, monthly, etc)	Yes (as a <i>dot plot</i> , when you don't have a value for every interval of time)	Yes (to feature overall trends and patterns and to support their comparisons)	Yes (vertical bars only, to feature individual values and to support their comparisons)	
Ranking Values are ordered by size (descending or ascending)	Yes (as a <i>dot plot</i> , especially when the quantitative scale does not begin at zero)	No	Yes	
Part-to-whole Values represent parts (proportions) of a whole	No	Yes (to display how parts of a whole have changed through time)	Yes	
Deviation The difference between two sets of values	Yes (as a <i>dot plot</i> , especially when the quantitative scale does not begin at zero)	Yes (when also featuring a time series)	Yes	
Distribution Counts of values per interval from lowest to highest	Yes (as a <i>strip plot</i> , to feature individual values)	Yes (as a <i>frequency polygon</i> , to feature the overall shape of the distribution)	Yes	
Correlation Comparison of two paired sets of values	Yes (as a <i>scatter plot</i>)	No	Yes (as a <i>table lens</i> , especially when your audience is not familiar with <i>scatter plots</i>)	
Geospatial Values are displayed on a map to show their location	Yes (as bubbles of various sizes on a map)	Yes (to display routes on a map)	No	
Nominal comparison A simple comparison of values for a set of unordered items	Yes (as a <i>dot plot</i> , especially when the quantitative scale does not begin at zero)	No	Yes	

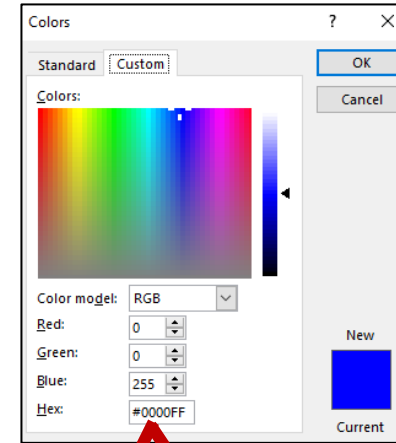
Do not use pie graphs. It can be difficult for the reader to interpret the message that pie graphs convey.

How to check your colour contrasts

Making your work accessible helps all readers, not just those with visual impairments. It is about more than making work accessible for people with visual impairments. Anyone can suffer from eye strain, and anyone will find your slides easier to read if the colour contrasts are consistent with accessibility guidelines.

The WebAIM [Contrast checker](#) is an easy online tool for identifying the contrast ratio of a pair of colours, and letting you know if that ratio meets requirements.

1. Use the pop-out Colour menu in Word or Powerpoint to find the hex code of your foreground colour (the text colour) and copy it into the foreground colour field.
2. Do the same for the background colour.
3. It doesn't matter which way around you enter the colours – the contrast ratio remains the same for white text on a blue background or blue text on a white background.
4. The contrast ratio is then generated – in this case 8.59:1 which exceeds the required ratio of 4.5:1 for regular text and 3:1 for large, bold text.
5. You can experiment with sliding this bar up and down to lighten and darken the colour. See how it changes the ratio, and get a feel for the point at which it changes from a fail to a pass.
6. If you don't have the hex code but you do have the RGB codes for the colour, you can click on the coloured bar to open a pop-up box that allows you to enter the RGB code.



Fonts and formatting

Your organisation will have a style guide that sets out which fonts and colours are part of your agency's brand. Whatever font you use should be consistent throughout your slides. Try to use only two or three different font sizes.

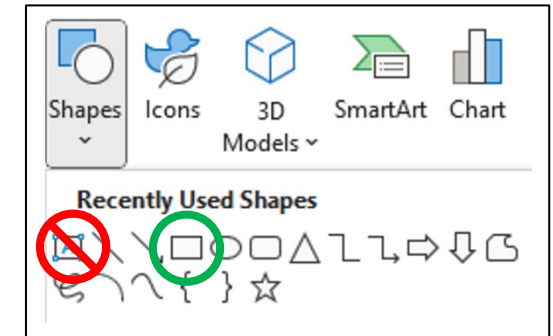
Remember the following principles for good practice formatting:

- CAPITALS CONVEY A SENSE OF SHOUTING AND ARE USUALLY NOT A GOOD IDEA.
- Don't Capitalise Every Word In Your Headings. Sentence case – not title case – is best for readability.
- Always use left-aligned paragraph margins. Text with justified margins is more tiring to read.
- *Italics are slower for the brain to process and are harder to read for everyone, especially those with visual impairments. It's unnecessary to italicise quotes. In formal writing, italics should be reserved for publication titles and scientific names.*
- Underlining is an old-fashioned style of emphasis used by typewriters that could do little else. Save it for hyperlinks.
- **Bold is effective for occasional emphasis, but be careful not to overuse it, and don't use it for paragraphs or blocks of text.**
- Some people use grey text because it looks softer than black, but it's harder to read because the contrast is lower. Black text on a white background is best for minimising eye strain.

Tips

Use regular shapes rather than text boxes

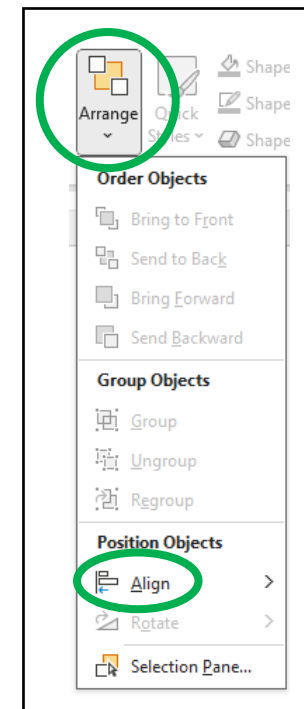
It can be difficult to change the shape of text boxes, as they're designed to auto-fit the text inside them. You can get around this by using a regular shape, which will stretch to any dimensions you want.



Use PowerPoint's alignment function

PowerPoint is helpful for making sure objects are aligned, but if this is done poorly, it can make the quality of your information seem less assured. Use the alignment function to make your A3s look professional.

On the Home tab, select 'Arrange' and then 'Align'. You can also 'distribute' objects equally, left to right or up and down.



Additional resources

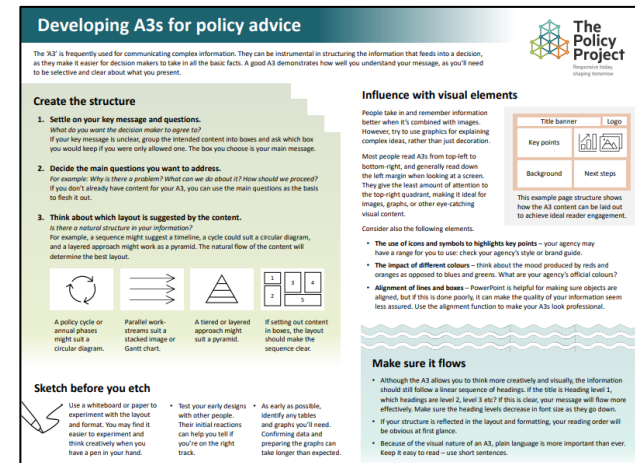
Writing for Ministers and Cabinet



This document contains guidance on different types of communication with ministers and Cabinet. Whether you're writing a Cabinet paper, a policy paper, an aide memoire or an A3, you'll find high level descriptions of what's involved, links to resources, and tips for success.

This guide can be used as a training tool for new or developing public servants. It can be a reminder of good practice for more experienced advisors and analysts who want to refine their writing skills, in a policy context.

Developing A3s for policy advice



This double-sided A3 provides information on how to develop your own A3s for policy advice.

A good A3 demonstrates how well you understand your message, as you'll need to be selective and clear about what you present. You can find tips that include creating the structure, using visual elements, checking the accessibility of your colour contrasts and more