Powerpoint Best Practices

Or…how to get the presentation to work…period.

Powerpoint can be an effective and powerful tool use for presentations but there are factors to consider when building your presentation to ensure smooth and effective viewing.

Fonts and Phrasing

Even something as simple as fonts can become an issue for a presentation. If the Powerpoint presentation is going to be shown on a computer that is not your own, use common fonts such as Times and Ariel. They may not be the coolest fonts but they will certainly be the most compatible on most computers.
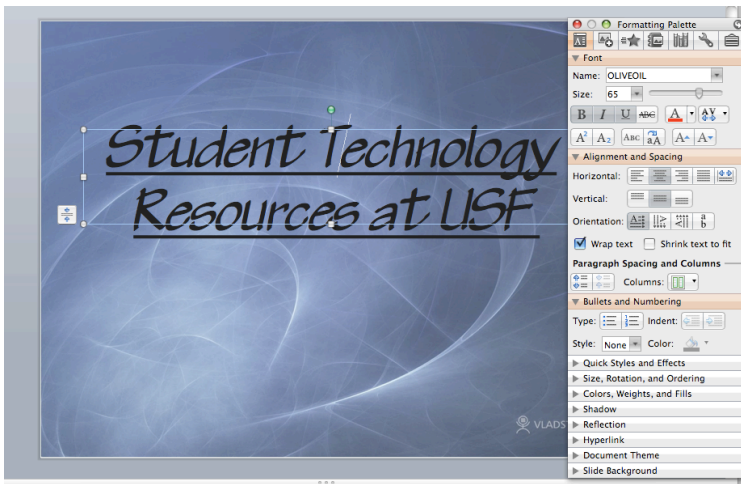

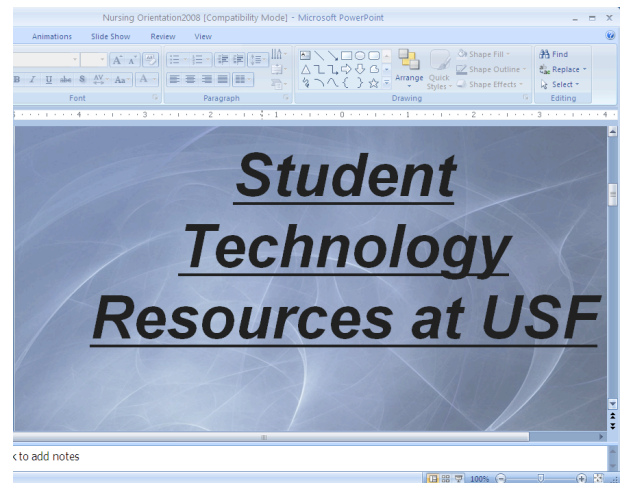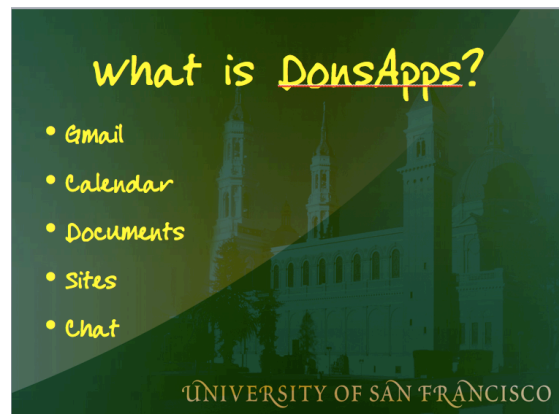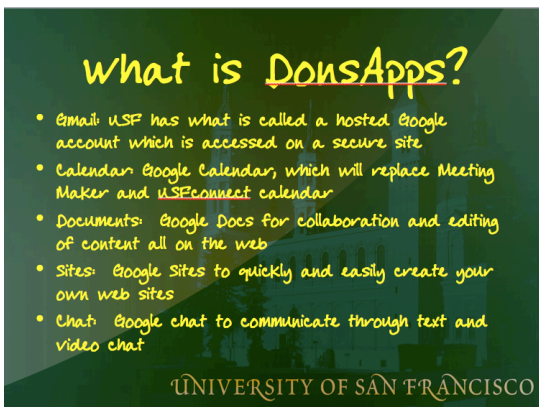**Figure 1: Font inserted on one computer..**

Figure 2: …may show differently on another!

As for phrasing, use the slides to direct the audience attention to you as the presenter. Keep the wording on the slides to a minimum, so that the slide merely provides the direction and you provide the information.
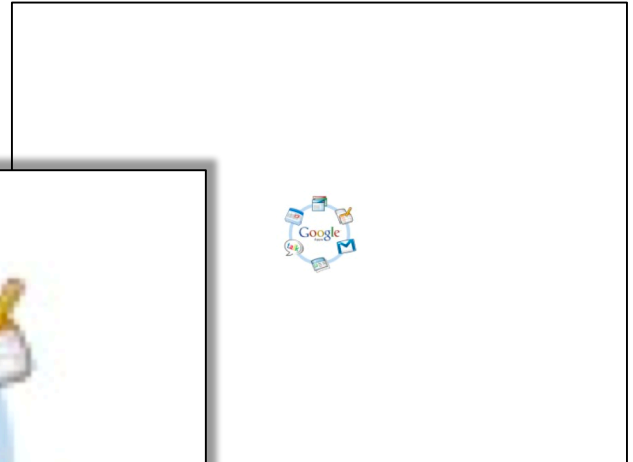
Images

Use of images can be a powerful addition to a slide to emphasize a point. Use them wisely, as an image can distract from the point you are trying to make. Keep them relevant to the topic!

Another factor to consider alongside relevancy is clarity. Especially with images from the web, look for those that have good resolution so that they can show clearly on the screen.

For example, a lower resolution image (100x100 pi) will seem to okay until you need to expand it to fill the slide, where it will show as blocky or fuzzy.

Compare this against an inserted higher resolution image (1488 × 1600 pi), which has much better clarity on the slide. There is nothing more frustrating than trying to discern what a chart, graphic or image is actually trying to show when it looks out of focus or pixelated.

Inserting images can also be a stumbling block to a smooth presentation. It is recommended that you insert images through the **Insert** command in Powerpoint, instead of dragging and dropping or copying and pasting the image onto the slide. This can cause issues particularly between the Mac and PC platforms. What may occur is the dreaded empty image placeholder where the image should be.

Figure 3: Inserted on a Mac...   **Figure 4: ...gone on the PC!**

Effects, Custom Animations and Transitions

As with images, use them wisely-effects, custom animations and transitions can either be an asset or a distraction. Again, use them wisely! If the effect does not enhance the flow of the presentation perhaps it is better unused. Even the speed of transitions and animations can be an issue-having it run too fast or slow can cause distractions from the content of the slides. As much as possible have the speed of the transition and animations match the tempo of your spoken vice so that the presentation flows with you and not against you.

Presentation Tricks

There may be times where you will need to move from your presentation to a website or another application to show or demonstrate topics in the presentation. Instead of escaping out of the presentation to go the demo, simply press   **(Cmd)-Tab** on the Mac or **Alt-Tab** on the PC to switch to that application or web site. When you are ready to return to the presentation, simply press the same keyboard combination to return to the running Powerpoint presentation at the place you left off.

Room Considerations

So far we have worked with the Powerpoint presentation itself and how to prepare for consistent viewing. Another factor is the room environment you will be doing the presentation in. Check out the room before the presentation if possible and note the lighting, room size and screen positioning and size; this can help as you begin to think about how to develop the slides for clarity and impact.

The size of the room as may determine how you setup your backgrounds, text size and styling, images and videos. For example, if the room is a long or deep and you have attendees sitting all the way to the back of the room, you will need to create the slides so that the last person in the last row can see and understand the content.

Equally important to consider is the lighting of the room. Glare from indoor or outside light can affect the viewing quality of the slides. The same would be true in a dimly lit room. If you need to have some complex slides make sure that it is adjusted to be viewable in the room for the presentation. When in doubt, use text and graphics that will provide the best contrast in a variety of rooms.

Finally, consider the size of the screen in the room and where it is placed. For instance, in the example to the right, the room is pretty deep with a small screen set into the corner. Again develop the slides to maximize readability to the last seat in the last row.
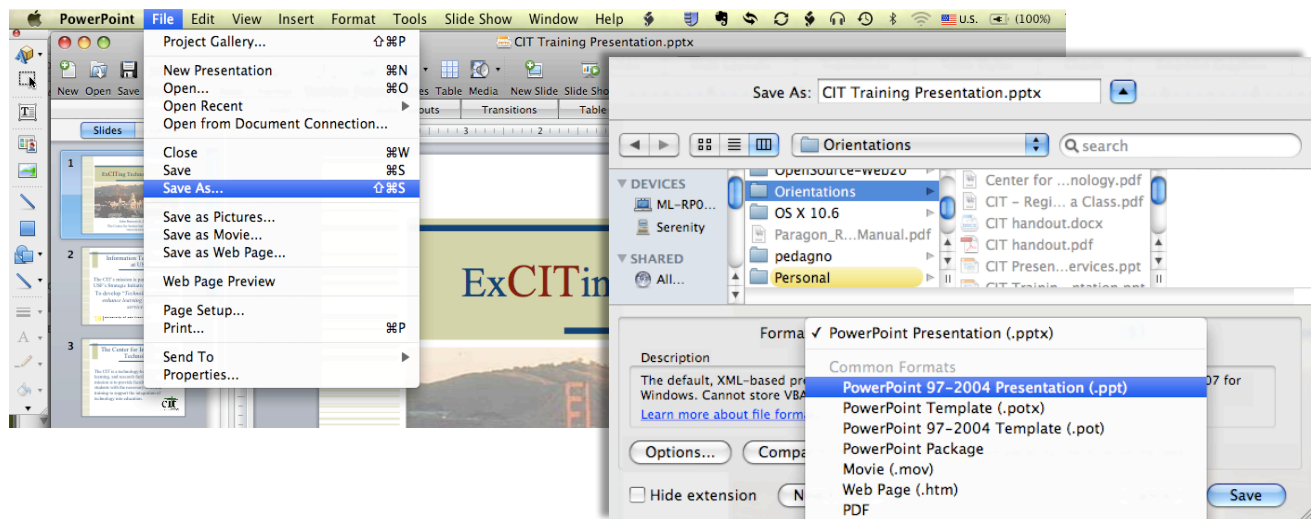
File Formats

Fortunately, or unfortunately, there will be up to 9 versions of Powerpoint that will probably be in use at the end of this year. This means that you will need to be mindful of the file format you save the presentation in if you are not taking your own laptop to show the presentation. The newest versions of Powerpoint save the files as a **.pptx** format but there are still older versions of Powerpoint (2004 for the Mac and 2003 for the PC) which do not open this format. If you are not sure what version of Powerpoint is going to be on the presentation computer, it is best to save the presentation in the older **.ppt** format.

On the Mac for Powerpoint 2008 and newer:
In the **File** menu select **Save** for a new presentation and **Save as** for existing presentations.
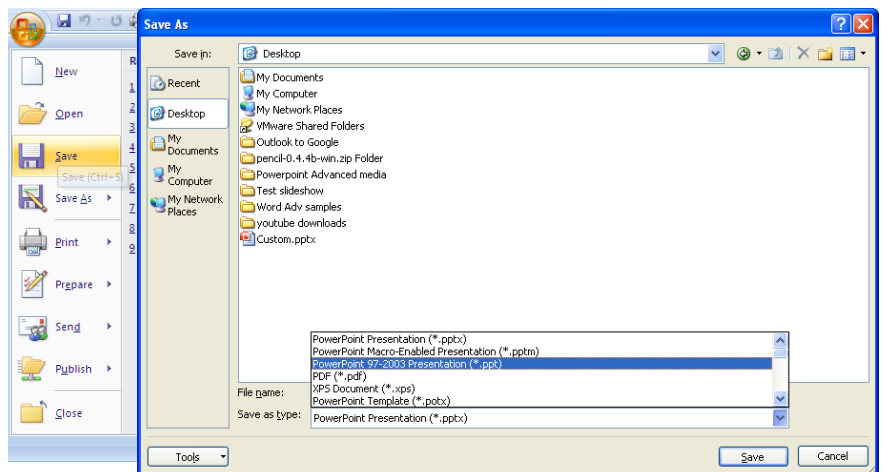

In the dialog box, click on the dropdown menu for **Format** and select **Powerpoint 97-2004 (.ppt)** and click **Save**.
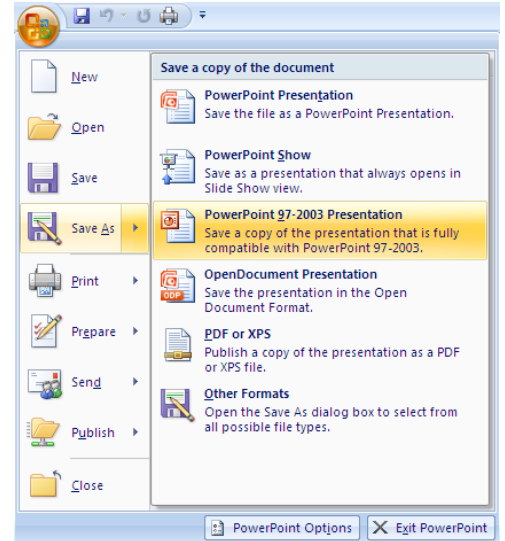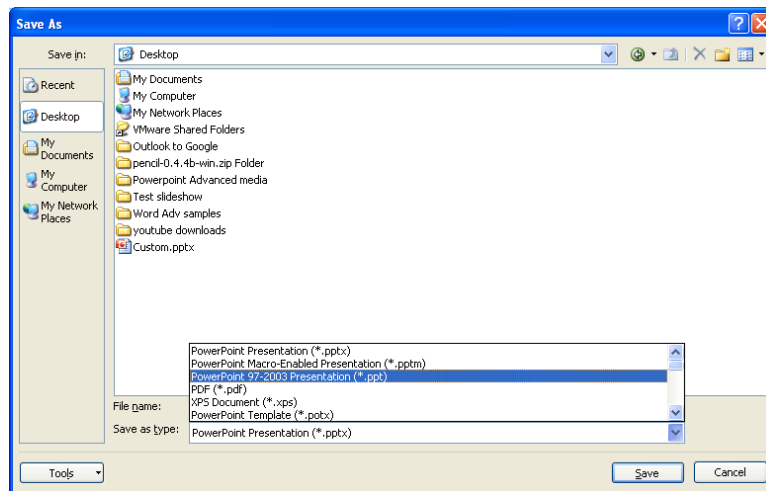
On the PC for Powerpoint 2007 and newer:
Click on the **Office** button (2007) or the **File** tab (2010) and select **Save** for new presentations and **Save As** for existing presentations.
Selecting **Save** will bring up the Save dialog box; select **Powerpoint 97-2003 Presentation (.ppt)** from the **Save as Type** menu and click **Save**.

Selecting **Save As** will display a submenu; select **Powerpoint 97-2003 Presentation** to bring up the **Save As** dialog box. Select a location and click **Save**.

After saving always check the presentation for any formatting issues as certain features in the .pptx version of the document may not work the same way in the .ppt version.
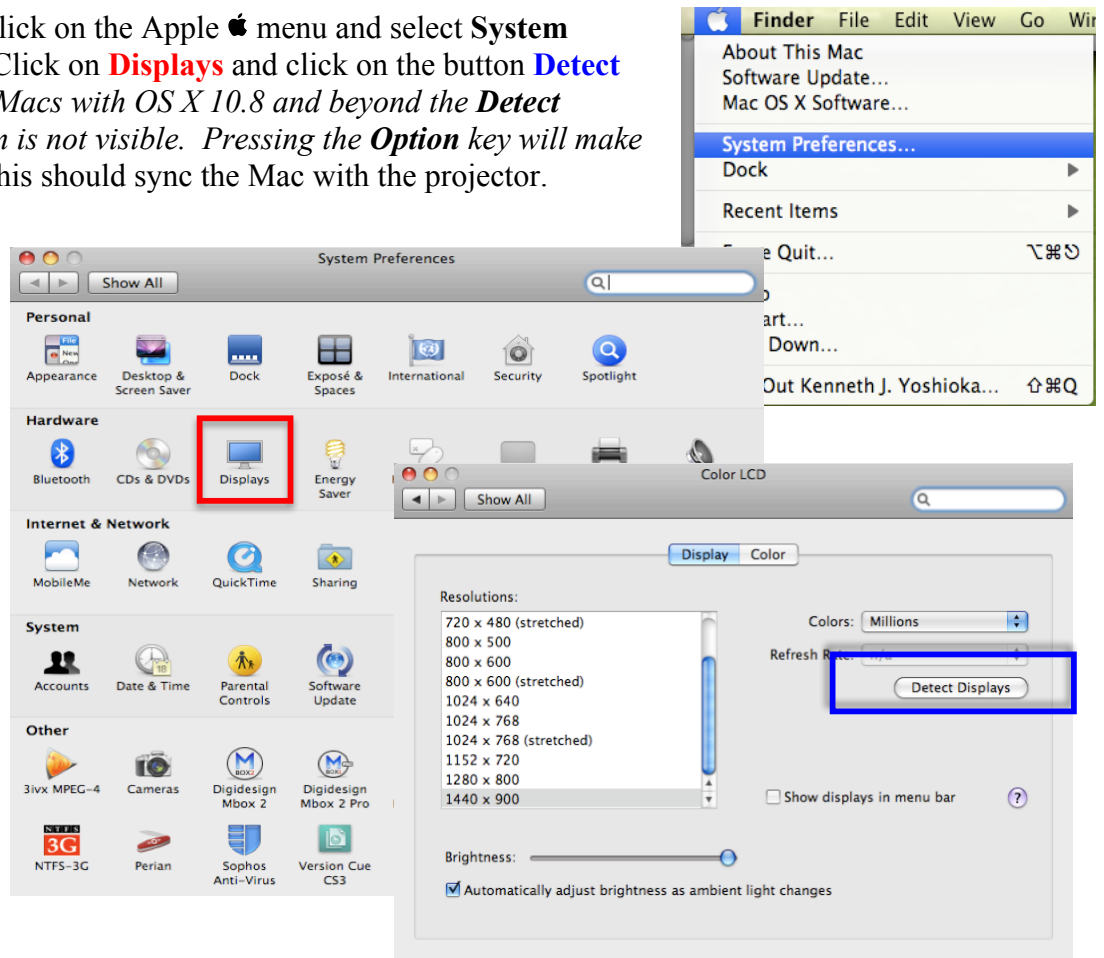
Bringing Your Own Laptop for Presentations

If you are using your own laptop for a presentation, make sure that the laptop is set up for projection to the screen. After connecting your laptop to the projector, you may find that the laptop display does not show on both the laptop screen and the projector screen. If this occurs, you can sync the laptop in the following way:
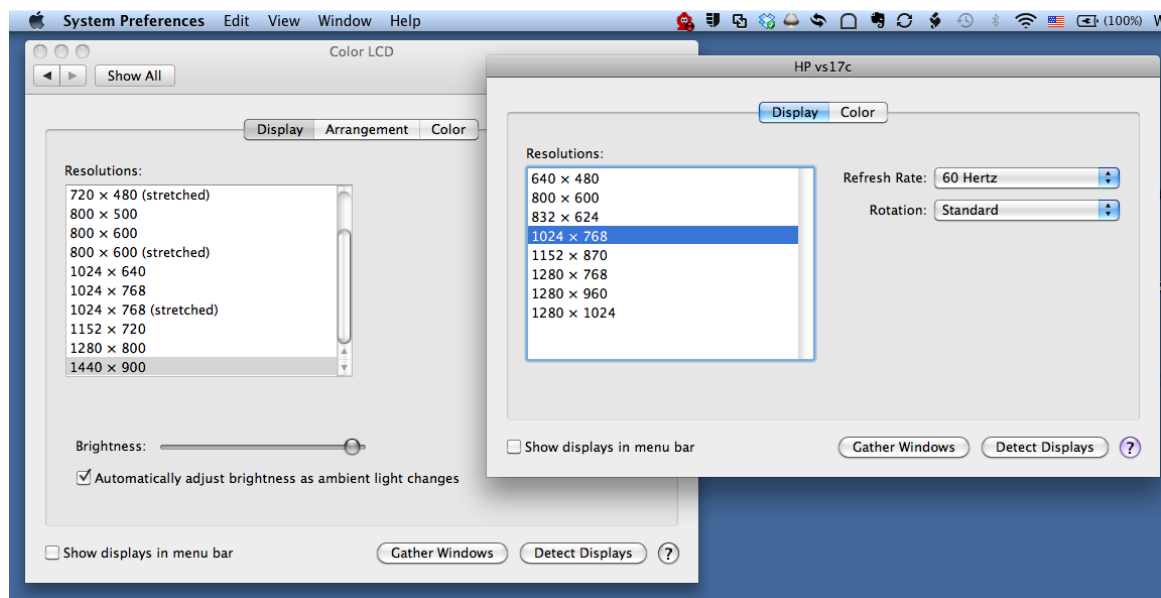
On the PC: On the keyboard, look for the **function key** along the top row of keys with a symbol for the display. It may be labeled as **CRT/LCD** or with a box symbol like this ▭. Press the **Fn** key and then the **function key** once *and wait for the laptop to sync*. You may have to perform the same key combination again to get the laptop to mirror properly with the projector screen. On Windows 7 you can press **Windows+P** on the keyboard to bring up the choices for syncing to the projector.
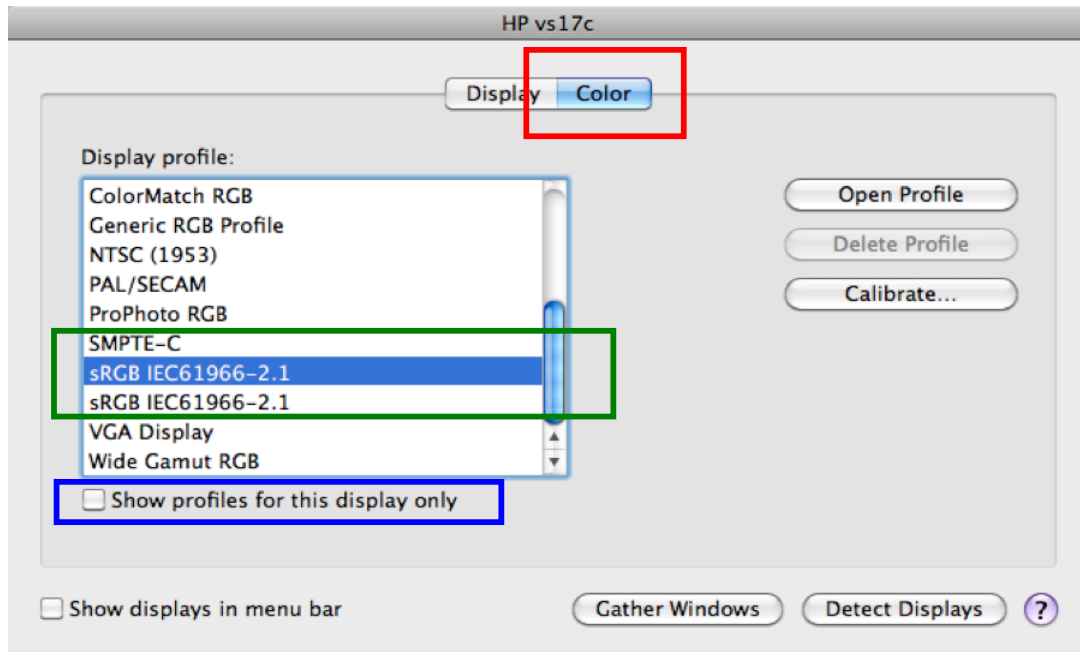
On the Mac: Click on the Apple menu and select **System Preferences**. Click on **Displays** and click on the button **Detect Displays**. *On Macs with OS X 10.8 and beyond the **Detect Displays** button is not visible. Pressing the **Option** key will make it available.* This should sync the Mac with the projector.

When the Mac is properly synced, the Display window will show one setting for the MacBook display and one for the projected display.

One other issue that may come up is color tinting where the projected display is much darker and contrasted than the MacBook display. To adjust the color correction, click on the **Color** tab in the setting window for the projected display. Uncheck the box to **Show profiles for this display only** to view all of the display profiles. Finally, select the profile that begins with **sRGB** (there may be two identical listings-select the top one) and the color should match closely with that of your MacBook display.
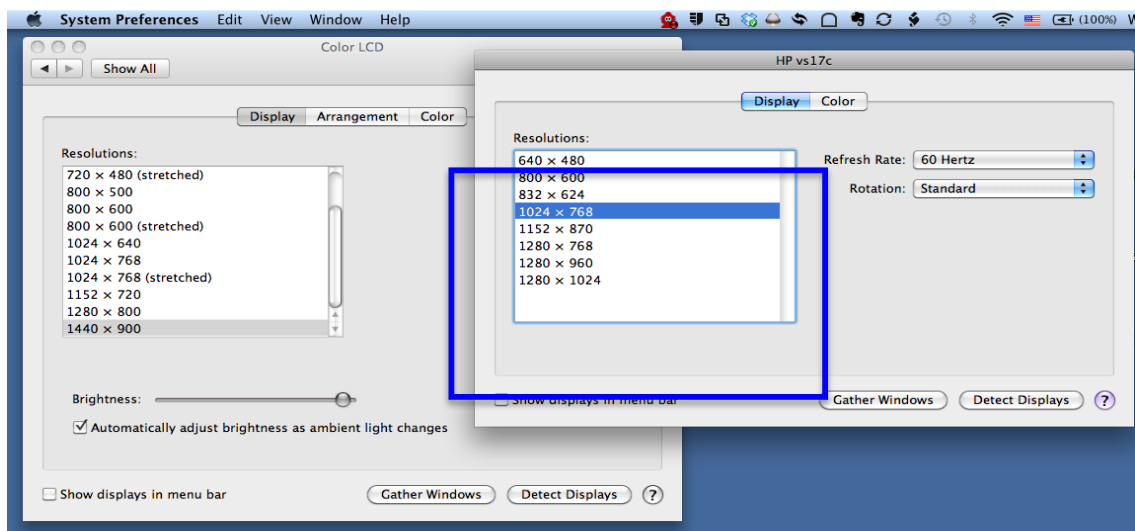
One final issue on both PCs and Macs can occur when you first connect the laptop to a projector. The screen resolution on the laptop and projected display may default to the minimum 800x600 and cause the icons on the screen to become too large.
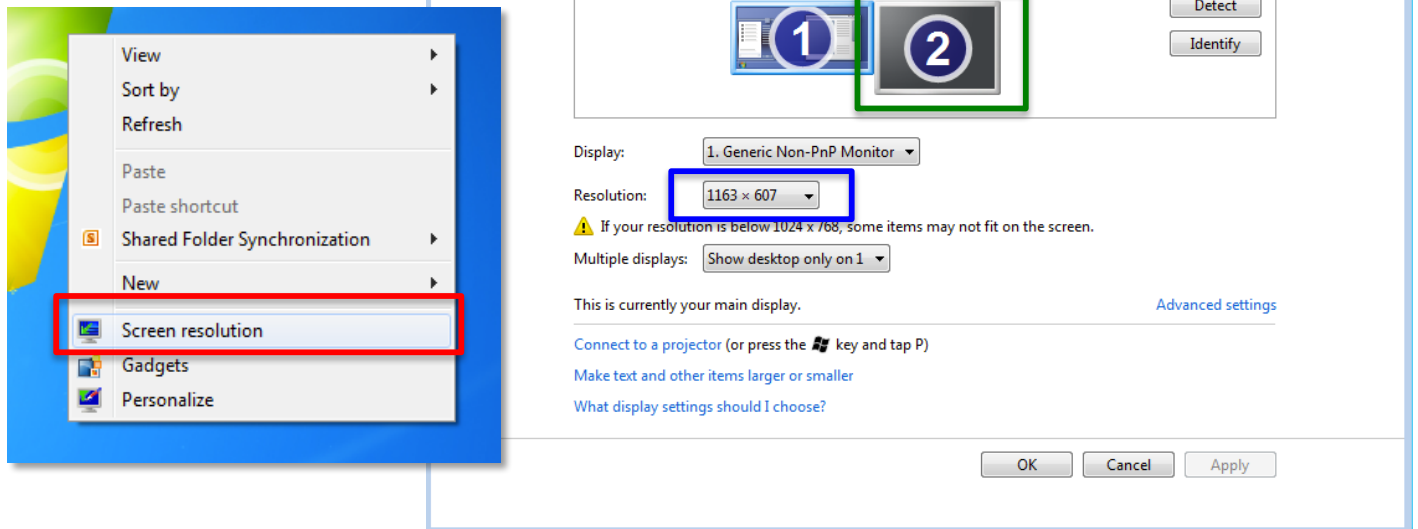*To revert the resolution to higher levels:*
On the Mac:
 Click on the menu and select **System Preferences** and click on **Displays**. In the **displays** panel for the projected display, change the **Resolution** to a higher setting.

On the PC:

Right click on the desktop and select **Screen Resolution**. In the dialog box there will be a selection for the laptop and projected displays. Select the **projected display** (Normally seen as display 2) and change the **resolution** to a higher setting.
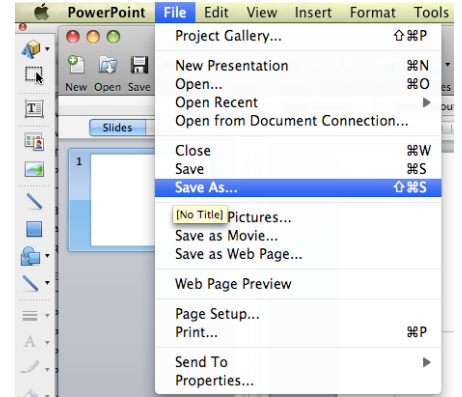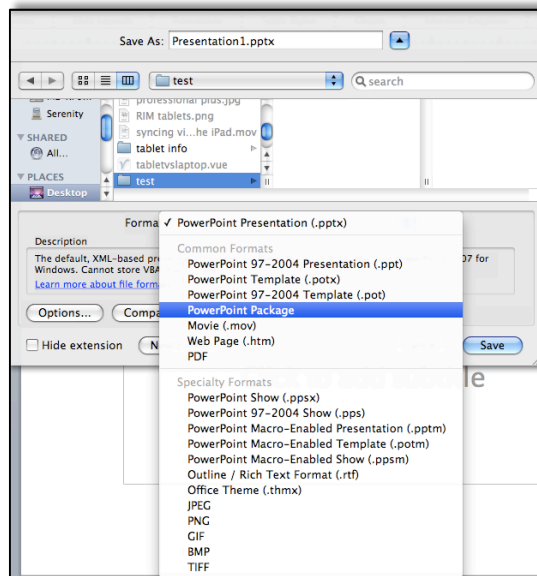

*Start with 1024x768
as this is usually considered as the "normal" setting for most projectors. You can then try higher resolutions to see if the display will show correctly and provide better clarity on the screen.
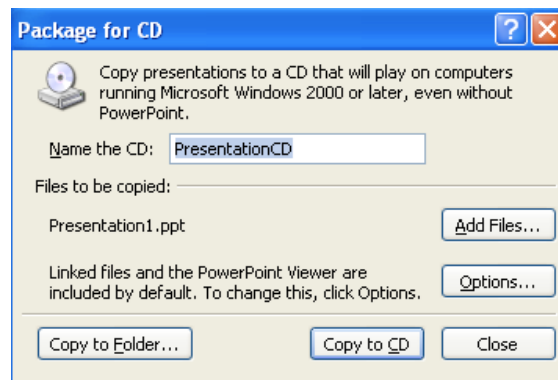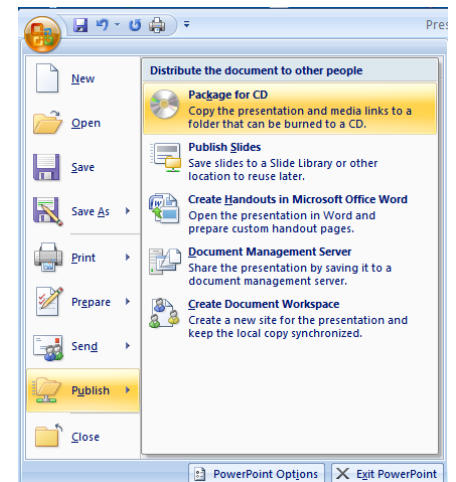
Multimedia in Powerpoint

If your presentation includes inserted audio and/or video files, first note that the video formats you use are platform specific. The Mac will accept primarily .mov and .mp4 files. These file types will *not* play on Powerpoint for Windows before 2010. Powerpoint 2010 now allows Quicktime video to play in presentations. In a Windows Powerpoint presentation, you need to use either .wmv or .avi files. These files types will not generally play on Mac Powerpoint. Thus, if you build it on a Mac, you will need to play it on a Mac-the same is true for Windows too. Secondly, inserted audio and video are not embedded in the presentation but linked to the presentation. If you need to show the presentation on another computer, you need to package the presentation for travel.

On the Mac, click on the **File** menu and select **Save As**. In the dialog box, click on the dropdown menu for **Format** and select **Powerpoint Package** and click **Save**.

In Powerpoint 2007 for PC, Click on the **Office** button and in the **Publish** submenu, select **Package for CD**. In the dialog box, name the package and click **Copy to Folder** to create the package. In Powerpoint 2010, the Package for CD function can be found in the **Save and Send** section of the **File** tab. In Powerpoint 2013 and 2016, this function can be found in the **Export** section of the **File** tab.

Powerpoint will then create a folder with a copy of the presentation and any audio/video you have inserted within. You can then put the folder on a USB flash drive to transport it. *Note that in Powerpoint 2011 and above for the Mac inserted multimedia is embedded into the presentations and no longer need to be packaged. Check to make sure that the multimedia will run on the version of Powerpoint that you will be presenting on.*

Finally, for Mac users, be sure to bring a video adaptor so that you can connect your Mac to the projection system. Most projection systems require a VGA connection so you will need some form of the Mac VGA adaptor (VGA to DVI/mini to DVI/mini display) to connect.

Apple DVI to VGA Display Adapter

Ships: Within 24hrs

★★★☆☆

$19.00

Apple Mini DVI to VGA Adapter

Ships: Within 24hrs

★★★⯪☆

$19.00

Mini DisplayPort to VGA Adapter

Ships: Within 24hrs

★★★☆☆

$29.00

Some PC laptops have been produced with a DVI or HDMI instead of a VGA video out port. In this case a DVI to VGA or HDMI to VGA video adaptor is needed to connect to standard projectors.

"Try Before You Buy"
Remember that it is not about how it looks on the computer screen but how it will look on the big screen. If at all possible, test drive the presentation in the room, or someplace similar so you can evaluate the look and feel of the presentation. The technology is not there to replace you but to enhance the ideas, concepts, information *you* are bringing to the presentation.