

Producing a Slide Show

by Peter Reid

After years in camera clubs, I have seen many wonderful images spoiled by being shown in poor slide shows. Often photographers who take great individual photographs need help to present them as a group. From teaching and working in education I've learned how to create good presentations, starting with the crucial organization of my slides.

Keeping Your Slides Organized

The more time spent up front, the less time spent later. In the field, I take brief notes about every photo on a note pad. I include the date and a word or two on subject matter, including the spelling of unusual names. (I also keep brochures for reference). On the film canister, I write the date of the last photo on the roll, followed by A, B, etc if more than one roll was taken that day. These dates are transferred to the film bags at processing so I can arrange them again in order.

When the slides come back from processing, I label them. On a small 4" x 5" light box, I first put a *big* black dot on the lower left-hand corner of each slide. Then I take my field-notes and, discarding obvious throw-outs, number each slide at the top by date taken and order, e.g. 98-01-25A, then 98-01-25B... 98-01-25AA, etc.

Since age 14, I have always dated my slides, which is very useful retrospectively. The other benefit is that I can rearrange my slides in the order they were taken, getting rid of the inevitable muddles. Also, it is easy to use the dates as a guide when adding a slide to a show or replacing one I have removed.

If I want to record technical information, such as film type, filter, camera, lens, exposure, I also record this at the top. Then, using my field notes, I write the subject at the bottom. On the right side I write the overall topic, such as "IOW" for Isle of Wight (where the slides were taken). When a show is assembled, I number all the slides on the right side by tray-number, such as I-24, so I can rearrange the show if I drop the slides on the floor!

If a slide is to be used for competition, duplication, or stock photography, I use a self-inking pad to stamp on the back: © Peter Reid 2002. All rights reserved.

Labelling seems like a lot of work, but it pays off when I organize my slide shows.

Purpose of the Show

Begin with a clear purpose. The family show is of interest to family members but picture quality may be less important than who is in them. The travelogue (sometimes called a talkalogue) presents a trip to an exotic location, typically sequentially by trip day. The specialized two-projector (or more) dissolve show expounds on a small topic but highlights excellent photographs. And the teaching show informs the audience.

Mistakes to avoid

No matter what type of program you are planning, avoid these mistakes. First, the tendency to show every picture taken. Boring! A photographer's greatest friend is the waste paper basket. If a slide has any technical fault, out it goes! Keep only the best of similar slides. Each slide should be excellent as a stand-alone — you should not be ashamed to enter it in a competition.

Every slide must relate to the topic. If not, no matter how good, remove it from the show. For a dissolve-show of 40 slides, I may start with 150 slides.

Your commentary is important. Many a time I have heard "and we ate ... here" — but, if the meal was ordinary or doesn't have an unusual story, it means nothing to the viewer. Only mention what is interesting and don't do things the same way for more than five minutes. You need a change of pace, topic, method, or presentation. It's your choice — variety or snores.

How can you present a travelogue without the "and on Monday we got up and boarded the bus and ..." format? One way is to reorganize your slides according to specific themes — for instance *English Churches* — in



lieu of talking of your visit to England day by day. One highly effective presentation I attended was *Postcards from Nepal*, where two presenters alternated by reading postcards on different aspects of Nepal, followed by showing the appropriate slides. Usually talking and changing slides at the same time means each action detracts from the other—variety is gained by doing just one at a time. A difficult task for most presenters is knowing when to be silent and let the photographs speak.

Organizing the Show

Once you have decided on a format, the slides must be organized. Now the fun begins. After all that labelling, it's a treat to run your slides through your projector.

How do you arrange groups of slides into shows? The biggest light-box you can make or buy pays off. Place all your slides on the light-box, then rearrange them in a variety of ways. A stack loader is useful to preview your show, as it makes it unnecessary to put slides into trays at this point.

The show may initially seem disappointing. The order is wrong, and many slides must be discarded for technical reasons. But some stand out in your mind.

Being ruthless creates a better show. Plan your changes of pace and topic. Use the fewest possible slides to do the job. Retain slides only if they are an essential part of the story. Don't include a photo just because you like it. Remove slides of friends and family, as they hold no meaning for others.

When showing a sequence, start with a wide-angle or setting shot, then focus on details, building to a climax. Even if you're not preparing a dissolve-show, arrange your slides to blend from one to the next in colour, brightness, composition, content, and orientation. Do sequences of vertical or horizontal slides, don't mix them. You can mix pictures of the same place taken at different times, or from different but similar locales, since no-one else, not even those were you on the trip, will know the real order or location! For each new sequence ensure that there is enough contrast with the previous sequence to make the change of pace clear, or use a title slide, or even a black slide. Only include slides when there is enough of a sequence to tell a story—isolated slides, no matter how good, are aggravating.

All the time, consider your title slides. Keep a note of the titles needed, as well as relevant maps or historical photos. Make titles for slide-show name, photographer, music credits, maps, towns and locations, and of course "The End."

When you're done, number your slides to indicate where they fit in your program, so that they can be removed, or replaced if they fall out of the tray.

The organization process is detailed and lengthy; but it is fun, rewarding and essential.

Making the presentation

Now prepare for the show. Consider your audience, preparing and presenting the same show differently for your family, camera club members, specialists in the subject-matter, and the general public, editing your slides and comments to fit what they know and are interested in. Don't base your show on what you like to talk about, but on what they want to see and hear.

Remember that there is *never* a show without a technical glitch—you can anticipate them, not prevent them. Bulbs burn out, the power fails, your projectors freeze, and on and on. Bring a spare bulb, an extension cord, a hand-held slide changer, a laser pointer, a screwdriver, a flashlight, a rag to hold hot bulbs, a loonie to remove a tray with a stuck slide, and a focusing slide (often this can go in the *last* slot in the tray, so that you always have one for every show). Arrive early to set up properly. Even if you're late, take the time to do it right.

After you've been introduced, tell the audience the scheme of your show, so they know what to expect. Good title-slides help. Acknowledge your music sources. If you use maps, make sure they are clear and easy to read; a laser pointer can help. I also find it invaluable to have a computer printout in my hand to refer to, with key facts and information I want to include in *large black* type—otherwise I'm sure to forget! Also, when I pull out the show years from now, I will have the printout in the tray to remind me of what I did previously. On this sheet I always note any changes I wish to make to my program—make these notes as you go along, because at the end of the program they may be forgotten.

The next part of a presentation is the actual *presenting*. Five minutes is the maximum you can continue without a change of pace. If the audience is getting bored, *do something!* Humour is a great wake-up. Or change the tone

and volume of your voice. And use silence—often it is better to say nothing. If things go wrong, slow down, work it through, and try to find some humour.

The images at the start and end of the show make the strongest impression. Near the end, a summary of key ideas or highlight slides can help. Make it clear when the end of the show arrives; here the proverbial sunset or “THE END” slide can help.

After the show is over, expect questions. Sometimes audience members want to be contacted later on; if they do, take notes and follow up. Afterwards think the show over, and how you can improve it. I never do two identical shows—little improvements add to the quality over time.

An Example

In August 2001, I visited Cowes on the Isle of Wight, England. The 150th Jubilee of the America’s Cup was on, the largest regatta ever including over two hundred large and famous racing yachts. During a spectacular week of racing, I took 250 slides

I knew I had good photos, now I wanted to weave them into a story, avoiding the pitfalls of a talkalogue. I began with a history of the America’s Cup, using title-slides to give key information such as details of the J-Boat Class. Then came slides of the regatta’s opening, as well as the arrival of the 12 metre-class boats—all accompanied by narration. Next, narration-free, came a segment on the seeming chaos of racing starts, with yachts milling around, spectator boats and spectators everywhere. This was followed by race scenes—first the manoeuvrings after the start, then the yachts returning home—presented with no talk unless my audience asked for details. In these sequences, I melded together pictures from several races over the week.

After the race scenes, it was time for a change of pace. Along with some dialogue came a photograph of the overall winner, and then pictures of problems during the race—groundings; dismastings—all described with a touch of humour.

Now it was time for the “Big Race”, re-enacting the original 1851 Round-the-Island Race. Photos of the trophy and the course were presented and described. Photos of the start were presented silently; then, for variety, places that the racers passed as they sailed around the island. My best photos were of the spinnaker ending of the race—presented as a visual treat, with no narration. To end the show, I used a title slide and photo of the winning boat, then as finale a memorable photo of the Concours d’Élégance boat.

Thus my presentation was divided into small segments, with corresponding changes of pace. Some of the time I talked, sometimes I didn’t; I was able to react to the audience. The 113 slides took about 25 minutes to show. It was a success.

I hope my suggestions will be useful to you in creating your own slide-shows. Good luck—and may *I* be lucky enough to see one!