# Using Braille as a Presentation Tool: PowerPoint and Google Slides

## The Braillists Foundation

<https://braillists.org>

### Why use braille when presenting?

* If you're a fast braille reader, it may result in a more fluid reading experience.
* Some people can present very well from speech, however, if you find yourself stumbling over the words and constantly having to repeat yourself, braille may be a more effective option.
* It allows you to be free of headphones. This serves two purposes. Firstly, you may look more attentive to the audience. This is particularly the case when presenting live. Secondly, you are better able to read the room, picking up on subtle cues as to whether your audience is engaged.
* You can play audio and video content without having to change the output of your screen reader.
* If you do choose to present with both braille and speech, it’s recommended that you change the output of your screen-reader so that it goes to your headset, and other media to the speakers.
* It’s also recommended that you wear only one headphone, or invest in bone conducting headphones.

### Available presentation tools

A number of pieces of software can be used to write presentations.

This session will focus on two of them, Microsoft PowerPoint and Google slides.

Other options are available, such as Keynote by Apple, however with limited time we chose to focus on only two.

It's worth mentioning that you could also write a presentation in something like Markdown, negating the need for presentation software at all.

### Which should you use?

We can't tell you which piece of software you should use to create your presentation. This will depend on a number of factors, such as the technology available to you, and your own needs.

You may also find that the situation dictates the software, for example in an academic or workplace setting, or where you're working on a group project, the software package has been decided in advance.

It is best to know how to use both of these tools, though you are likely to develop a preference for one over the other.

### The difference between PowerPoint and Google Slides

Firstly, the most obvious difference is that they are made by different companies.

PowerPoint comes as part of Microsoft Office, and Slides is part of the Google suite of products.

If your workplace or academic institution uses office365, you should be able to get access to PowerPoint. Slides can be accessed using your Google account.

Google slides is a free, web-based tool. All you need to access it is a google account, which most people will have or can create easily.

In contrast, to use PowerPoint most effectively you will need to purchase Microsoft office, though as mentioned getting access to office365 through a workplace or academic institution is fairly standard.

The advantage of Google Slides is that as a web-based tool you can access it from anywhere.

If you're using a library computer, you need only log into your google account.

Collaboration is also arguably easier in Google Slides. You can work with a team online, rather than having to deal with sync issues.

Having said all of this, one of the major downfalls of Google Slides is that many companies will expect you to send them a PowerPoint file, and if you're sharing your presentation with other people, you are likely to be expected to do this.

When saving a presentation from Google Slides to PowerPoint, the formatting is often disrupted, making for a challenging reading experience.

PowerPoint is a more robust tool, and you have a much wider range of options available to you.

### Creating and viewing a presentation using braille in Google Slides

* First, open google chrome and navigate to the address bar. I suggest Chrome, as to use the Google Suite of products most effectively you will need to use either Chrome or Edge.
* Open up slides.new.
* Once on this page, you will want to alter the JAWS settings, if that is the screen reader you are using. You can do this by pressing insert f2 and navigating to settings centre.
* Go to web/html settings, then navigation.
* You want to make sure that smart navigation is off, and document presentation mode is set to simple layout.
* Now close settings centre.
* When you are in the new presentation, you can enable and disable braille presentation mode by pressing control, alt h.
* Braille presentation mode should be disabled when creating the presentation in order to get the best results.
* You can add a title, by typing either on your computer or the braille display. Once you have written the title, press escape, or the appropriate command on your display. Now, you will tab to the subtitle field.
* To insert a new slide, press control M.
* This slide is slightly different, as instead of having a title and subtitle, it has a title and body.
* To start your presentation, press control f5. The text will display on your braille display. You can use the arrow keys to move between slides, and the tab key to read the various parts of the slide.
* Control f5 will take you out of the slideshow.

Here is a useful video, which shows a blind person using this method to create a presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCPuBwTFI9c>

### Creating and reading presentations in PowerPoint

If you're familiar with Microsoft office, then creating presentations in PowerPoint is a fairly painless experience.

By connecting your display to your computer, you'll be able to read any text displayed on the screen without having to change the settings.

You can also input text, using braille key entry.

When you open up PowerPoint, you'll be presented with a choice of themes.

It’s recommended that you choose a blank template if you're experimenting with your braille display.

Much like in Google slides, the first slide open has a centred title, and a subtitle.

When you're on title, you can start typing, then hit escape to navigate out of the text field.

Tab to the subtitle, and fill it in, making sure you escape out of it.

Tip, when using PowerPoint if you want to edit the text you've already typed, you can press f2 on the field, which will open up an edit box. This also works in excel. It's particularly useful because you enter the text field without accidentally inputting or deleting anything.

Press control M to add a new slide. You'll remember that this was also the command used in Google Slides. This is quite useful, as you don't have to remember too many commands.

This slide has a title, and an object field.

To navigate between slides when editing, press page up and down.

To start the slide show, you will want to use f5.

The view for these slides is very nice, you can simply arrow through the content, or read it on your display.

To move between slides, use page up and down again.

There are different view modes which can be activated in PowerPoint.

When editing, you'll be using what we call the normal view.

Slideshow view occupies the whole screen.

Presenter view can be activated using alt plus f5 and unlike the slide show mode, this does not occupy the whole screen. It is best used when your audience have their own copy of the presentation, or where you're using it for your own reference only.

A list of keyboard commands for use with PowerPoint: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/use-keyboard-shortcuts-to-deliver-powerpoint-presentations-1524ffce-bd2a-45f4-9a7f-f18b992b93a0>

### Things to remember.

Creating accessible presentations is important because if you need to share them with an audience, particularly sending them the presentation file, you want to make sure they can access it.

Both the Google Suite of products and Microsoft Office allows you to add alt text to any images you include in the presentation.

This is important for accessibility reasons, but it will also help you when presenting in braille.

If there's no alt text, you'll have to remember what images you included and where.

If you add alt text, you can read those descriptions using your braille display.

The most important thing to be aware of is that using a braille display with these products requires you to be comfortable with the commands used on your model of display.

It's worth testing these out, as different displays won't necessarily handle commands the same way.

Alternatively, you can still use a qwerty keyboard, with your display in front of it. This will allow you to use standard windows commands, but still read braille output.

If you really aren't comfortable handling the technology, you may be in a position to have someone else move between the slides.

You should still know how to navigate through the slides using your display.

It isn't just blind people who have someone else control the presentation, often in workplace and academic contexts, particularly in group projects, one person is responsible for managing the transitions between slides.

The most important thing is that you find a solution which is effective for you.