Slide and graphic formatting checklist

Small formatting errors accumulate into big distractions. As you refine your presentation, use this checklist to catch issues that undermine your message.

Slide design

- ☐ Make each slide title an assertion rather than a topic.
- ☐ Provide evidence in the slide body that supports the assertion.
- ☐ Use graphical evidence whenever available.
- ☐ Use white (or light) backgrounds with dark text.
- ☐ Keep colored bars, logos, and other visual decorations minimal and non-distracting.
- ☐ Add slide numbers and your name to each slide.
- ☐ Use animation sparingly, or not at all.

Slide text

- ☐ Spell out all abbreviations and acronyms.
- ☐ Write complete sentences, not fragments.
- ☐ Make text large enough to be readable if slides are printed six per page.
- ☐ Use sans-serif fonts.
- ☐ Use no more than two font sizes and two colors.

Special-purpose slides

- ☐ Include your name, affiliation, talk title, coauthors, and sponsors on the title slide.
- ☐ Include contact information and further resources on the conclusions slide.
- ☐ If using backup slides, use five or fewer and format them to the same quality as the main slides.

Graphics

- ☐ Pick a figure type that makes the main message obvious.
- ☐ Use the most distinguishable elements (position, then color) for the most important comparisons.
- ☐ Remove all borders, background shading, and other markings that don't serve your message.
- ☐ Omit figure titles and captions (rely on the slide title).
- ☐ Use direct text annotations instead of a legend whenever possible.
- ☐ If a legend is necessary, match the vertical order of entries to the data.
- ☐ Label all axes with the property name, variable name (if used), and units.
- ☐ Label the numerical values and property name of the color scale when using color as a third dimension.

- ☐ Use subtle tick marks; omit labels for intermediate ticks to reduce clutter.
- ☐ Ensure y-axes start at zero for bar charts and scatter plots (unless truncation is explicitly justified).
- ☐ Make axis limits consistent across subfigures when using them for comparisons.
- ☐ Choose a color palette that facilitates comparisons and is colorblind-compatible.
- ☐ Make text similar in font size to the body text on slides.
- ☐ Use consistent color schemes and font sizes across all figures.
- ☐ Pair equations with graphics or add annotations to document variables.
- ☐ Use boxes or shading to highlight the most relevant values in tables.