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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Slide rules

The Frost Room here in the School (named in honor of Wade Hampton Frost; 1880-1938) is one of the rooms where doctoral PhD examinations are held. The room has a large painting of Frost standing in front of a table lecturing with a slide rule and papers on the table.

Often, when it was my turn to question students, I would ask about Frost. Eventually I would ask if the student knew the name for the gadget on the table. I do not recall any student knowing what it was.

This piece is about slide rules but not the kind in front of Frost, but rather about the kind you create with clicks of your mouse for meetings.

If you are a trialist, you are a slide maker. Slides for training investigators. Slides for training clinic coordinators. Slides for meetings of research groups. Slides for data monitoring committees. Slides of results for investigator and scientific meetings.

I cannot tell you how many talks I have attended where I have nodded off from “slide overload”. The idea with slides is to keep your audience engaged, not dropping away like people giving up on catching the bus in Bob Newhart’s bus driver training skit (on YouTube).

People cannot talk without slides even though sometimes talks are better without slides -- but it takes courage to go slideless.

Your worst nightmare is standing in front of an audience and the screen goes dark. Watch what happened to Don Knotts when he had to ad lib the weather forecast (on YouTube). If you do enough slide presentations, sooner or later you will be like Don Knotts when the screen goes dark.

Slide rules

- 1 Remember your goal is to inform, not to dazzle with your artistic talents
- 2 KISS! Less is more when it comes to slides
- 3 One point per slide or your audience will drop away faster than people running after Bob Newhart’s bus
- 4 You have too many slides if the number is greater than the time allotted for your talk
- 5 The amount of screen time should be proportional to density of the slide
- 6 If you have to apologize for a slide do not use it
- 7 If you cannot read a slide from the lectern neither will any one else in the room
- 8 The best screen background is white any other background reduces contrast and ambient light
- 9 Maximize contrast with the default being black on white; there is a reason why newsprint is black on white paper
- 10 Avoid shading for emphasis; if it is important why obscure it with shading?
- 11 Colors are hard to differentiate, especially in line graphs without symbols to differentiate lines

- 12 Avoid use of colors as the sole means of identification
- 13 The eye has difficulty differentiating more than three colors
- 14 Reds on dark backgrounds are difficult to differentiate; avoid
- 15 Number your slides
- 16 Check your slides for errors before using
- 17 Check for readability; ideally determined by projection in room similar in size to where they will be presented
- 18 Practice including when the screen goes dark; commandeer someone to listen; anyone even your cat or dog; if no one, talk to yourself in front of a mirror
- 19 Project slides prior to presentation using the equipment where to be presented; important because strange things can happen when projected by different software than that used when they were produced
- 20 Keep an electronic file of your slides; you may need the file for another talk