

Creating Exciting, Pain-Free PowerPoint Presentations
William S. Altman
Broome Community College

PowerPoint has become ubiquitous. It seems almost impossible to imagine some classes without it. And when was the last time you attended a conference at which PowerPoint wasn't used by the vast majority of speakers?

There are good things about PowerPoint—it keeps things organized, and the slides can be considerably more legible than some presenters' handwriting (certainly mine!). But all of us probably have been subjected to many talks in which each slide contains vast volumes of densely packed information, resembling excerpts from a textbook or journal article. It's even worse when speakers just read these over-stuffed slides to the audience. Such presentations encourage us (or our students) to concentrate more on taking notes (or falling asleep, or checking our Facebook pages or email) than on listening and processing information. No wonder so many of us complain of "death by PowerPoint" in classes, conference talks, and meetings.

Even with its problems, very few of us are likely to chuck PowerPoint completely. There are many good strategies to help you develop excellent, motivating (or at least not too boring) presentations. Learning to design good PowerPoint slides involves not only the judicious use of text, but also how to incorporate all sorts of other elements.

People enjoy and remember stories, so think of your PowerPoint presentations as narratives rather than as what science fiction fans sometimes refer to as "core dumps" of information. To do this, proceed through seven simple steps:

1. Analyze your needs

Define your audience and the kind of presentation you need. Your objectives should always dictate your choices, so it's important to know why you're designing your presentation, and for whom.

2. Get your resources together

Begin by listing all of your resources. These include your existing PowerPoint presentations, videos, audio files, links to websites, photographs, and artwork. Don't worry about creating new things yet. Just assemble what you have. Also, remember that while it is possible to link directly to resources such as *YouTube* or *TeacherTube*, you may want to download videos from those sites using a tool such as Video Download Helper. That way, if there's no good Internet connection you'll still be able to show your videos.

3. Storyboard your presentation

Create an outline of the narrative of your talk, perhaps laid out as a cartoon. Decide what you'll say and when, and the kinds of things you want to present with each slide.

4. Build your presentation

- a. Design your presentation's look. Choose a layout that is attractive, but not confusing.
- b. Copy the text from your storyboard onto individual slides.
- c. Populate your slides with the artwork, video, and other materials you specified in your storyboard. PowerPoint is a visual medium. Photos, tables, illustrations, graphics, and cartoons add impact.
- d. You can also create active demonstrations for your audience, without using any special technologies. All you need are some appropriate images and basic animation techniques, .
- e. Edit the slides to make them as clean and clear as possible.
 - i. Limit the amount of material on each one, to give what's there maximum impact. Often, you'll find yourself using some graphic element with only a word or two of text.
 - ii. Keep it simple!
 - (1) Stick to one large, easy-to-read font (or just a few, if you need to use more). Too many fonts—or fonts that look too strange—can distract or confuse people, making it hard to understand what you're trying to convey.
 - (2) Avoid overusing animation, video, or other "glitzy" elements. It's especially easy to go overboard on video, not realizing how much time the clips will take, so be sure to keep them short.
 - (3) Remember, everything in your presentation must help to communicate your point clearly. Anything that doesn't serve that purpose is best left out.

5. Test everything
Really. Everything. You can avoid unpleasant surprises by intentionally trying to do things incorrectly during this shakedown. That way you'll be able to identify and eliminate many problems. This is particularly important if you use hidden or invisible triggers in your slides.
6. Use your presentation
This is the fun part!
7. Upgrade and maintain your presentation
Keep expanding and modifying your presentation as you learn more about what works best for your classes or talks, and as you find new information and resources to enhance your presentation.

Resources:

Articles and Books

- Atkinson, C. (2011). *Beyond bullet points: Using Microsoft PowerPoint to create presentations that inform, motivate, and inspire*, (3rd Ed.). Redmond, WA: Microsoft Press.
- Daniel, D. B. (2005). How to ruin a perfectly good lecture: Presentation software as a teaching tool. In B. Perlman, L. I. McCann, W. Buskist, B. Perlman, L. I. McCann, W. Buskist (Eds.), *Voices of Experience: Memorable Talks From the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology*, (Vol. 1, pp. 119-130). Washington, DC US: American Psychological Society.
- Daniel, D. B. (2011). Practical PowerPoint: Promising principles for developing individual practice. In D. S. Dunn, J. H. Wilson, J. E. Freeman, J. R. Stowell, D. S. Dunn, J. H. Wilson, ... J. R. Stowell (Eds.), *Best practices for technology-enhanced teaching and learning: Connecting to psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 87-104). New York, NY US: Oxford University Press.
- Kosslyn, S. M. (2011). *Better PowerPoint: Quick fixes based on how your audience thinks*. New York, NY US: Oxford University Press.
- Lord, P., Martin, M. M., & Abramson, C. I. (2007). The use of PowerPoint shareware for making Jeopardy!-type games in the teaching of psychology. *Perceptual And Motor Skills*, 105(1), 8-14. doi:10.2466/PMS.105.5.8-14

More Web-based Information

- Using PowerPoint Effectively (Clip 6, by David Daniel):
http://college.cengage.com/psychology/shared/guest_lecture/popup.html
- Information about creating hyperlinked presentations:
<http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/advice/powerpoint>
- Basics about interactive PowerPoint for the classroom:
<http://ctl.byu.edu/tech-tips/interactive-powerpoint>
- Microsoft's advice about having students develop an interactive story with PowerPoint:
<http://www.microsoft.com/education/en-us/teachers/how-to/Pages/interactive-story.aspx>
- Creating a Jeopardy-style interactive game with PowerPoint: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2003april/tt2.php>

Other Useful Resources:

- Mozilla's Firefox: <http://www.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/new/>
- Video Download Helper (available through Firefox's add-on manager):
<http://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/video-downloadhelper/>