



PowerPoint: One More Word

Author : Mike Smith

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Is PowerPoint making us dumb?



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- Sure, PPT has its problems.
 - Its default templates encourage endless bullet-making (like these right here!)
- But PowerPoint isn't making us dumb.
 - ***Dumb PowerPoint presentations are making us dumb!***
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 - When used correctly, there's nothing better.



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Slide Illustrating Bad Features of PowerPoint

My posts on PowerPoint this week have emphasized more negatives than positives. A couple of you pointed me to [an article in Slate from yesterday](#) that identifies positive uses for slide software—"No More Bullet Points, No More Clip Art." The author makes the point that bad presentations should not be blamed on the software, which is a neutral tool that can be used for good or evil. Many of you have made the same point. "But if you use it correctly, slide software can help you captivate and inform an audience in a way that a speech alone could never manage."

The article offers the following suggestions for when to use PowerPoint or any other presentation software. "First, make sure your topic is right for PowerPoint." He uses Edward Tufte's example involving the space shuttle Columbia and says that "it is a bad choice for topics that involve complex, number-heavy scientific or technical data." He also endorses "[t]he two iron laws of PowerPoint: You must be speaking to a large audience, and your topic must benefit from visuals." I'm not persuaded about the first law—I think there are circumstances when good visuals can help even with smaller audiences. The article also advocates against using bullet points because it turns "a presentation into a series of boring lists" and because "you're bound to start reading them out to the audience, which is the worst sin of PowerPoint."

The article includes several nice examples of effective slide presentations. Al Gore uses slides with wonderful visual images—a mix of charts, photographs, and videos—to illustrate his talk on the environment. Steve Jobs uses slides "creating something closer to a movie than a slide show" in



his talk unveiling the iPhone. Both keep the use of text to a bare minimum, and instead they use visual images that illustrate their words, and it makes their presentations much more interesting. The article uses a presentation by Harvard law professor Lawrence Lessig to illustrate that slide software can make impenetrable subjects mesmerizing. It is worth looking at because it is very different from the other examples. He is illustrating a talk about the Google book search lawsuit—which is more like many of our presentations than the other examples.

I was glad to see this article because I don't want to end this series on PowerPoint on a negative note (this is the end, I promise). I will continue to use PowerPoint in my presentations, and I hope to use it more effectively. Dale Roenigk has offered to pull together some informal sessions so that we can share ideas. I look forward to those sessions and to learning from all of you.