

Editorial

The power of points in presentation

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Many topics came to my mind for this editorial, mostly health and medicine related, obviously. But I thought “why not break the track” and write about one of the most “used and abused tools” of presentations, of present day.

I had chances to attend many seminars and conferences and no presenter comes without a PPT, which means, a PPT is a part of our life, be it Medicine, Business, or any other profession, for that matter. As professionals, we would be required to know the effective use of PPT. Just having a basic knowledge of PPT which, to many seems to suffice, is actually not enough, which is why I used the terms the most “used and abused tool”.

Before we get on to the topic, I remember one of the presentations I attended. With due respect to the presenter, the presenter bombarded us with a PPT with so much content therein that we were busy deciphering the PPT and in the process we heard only half of what the presenter had to say. By the end of the presentation, we were left with more confusion and little information though the topic was very important. The ppt (precipitate) of Lesson learnt - *The technology should be used only to reinforce the information you have to share.*

As far as information sharing is concerned, a public health expert has to be really good in “putting things across” and highly vocal in presenting what ever data, that is in store, even if it is sparse. We are good “toggler”, some times, even “juggler”, conjuring up varieties of tables and graphs out of nowhere. The single minded aim and attempt is to convince “ at any cost”. These days, we have this powerful, fancy ally, the Microsoft Power Point, popularly known as “ppt”.

Seriously, it will be an understatement, if we comment that the most used, abused and overused tool of teaching and presentations, is powerpoint. It rang the “death bell” of conventional, faithful black board and even the fancy white board is not spared. Over head projectors which massacred the good old slide

projectors are now facing the same treatment at the hands of “ppts”. Powerpoints have become ubiquitous and almost “unavoidable”. Hence, it is important to understand the good and bad points of powerpoints so that we can make the best use of this “necessary evil”.

THE TEN SINS OF POWERPOINT:

1. PowerPoint is now used frequently as a speaker's "crutch," especially when the speaker is repeating or simply following what's displayed on a PowerPoint slide. This has been shown to diminish a listener's attention, and at the very least, it shifts attention from the speaker to the screen, which detracts from the speaker's ability to engage with his or her audience. **Speakers who simply recite what is on their PowerPoint slides are notoriously dull public speakers.**

2. PowerPoint users routinely put more information on a slide than slides should display. PowerPoint is best used as a tool of illustration—to show audiences things that supplement and *enhance* what the speaker is saying. Unfortunately, many PowerPoint users **put so much information on a single slide** that the typical audience member can't read it easily, or doesn't even try. (Such slides are humorously known as "eye charts.") And the speaker has lost the audience's attention to its frustration.

3. PowerPoint contains "tricks" of slide transition or text and graphics animation that are almost all unnecessary, distracting, and too “cute.” Tricks such as text that bounces into the screen, or shoots into the slide from the side margins, or flips upside-down, etc., add nothing to the presentation and usually **detract from its professionalism.**

4. Everyone has seen a PowerPoint presentation that exhibits an awful, sometimes even embarrassing, lack of design sense, especially when the presentation is displayed in low-contrast colors that make it difficult to read. Nothing destroys a presentation's effectiveness more thoroughly than when the **audience is straining to see what's on the screen**, or when people are wincing because of a bad design or color scheme.

5. PowerPoint routinely does something that trips up a speaker and suddenly the speech is stalled, or it becomes a series of mutterings about what has gone wrong with PowerPoint. When PowerPoint's behavior **gets in the way of delivering a speech**, the speech has gone wrong in a way that is all too familiar.

6. Many speakers today assume, without thinking about it, that when they use PowerPoint they should have a slide on the screen during the entire presentation. Or they simply leave a slide on the screen, again without thinking about it. A common result is that the audience is **forced to stare at a PowerPoint slide that has lost any connection to what is being said**.

7. Because speakers who use PowerPoint often assume, again without thinking about it, that their audience will be, and should be, looking at the projector screen, they put **little or no effort into their own visual engagement with the audience**. "Screen accompanied by still-life speaker" is unfortunately the most common picture of using PowerPoint for oral presentations.

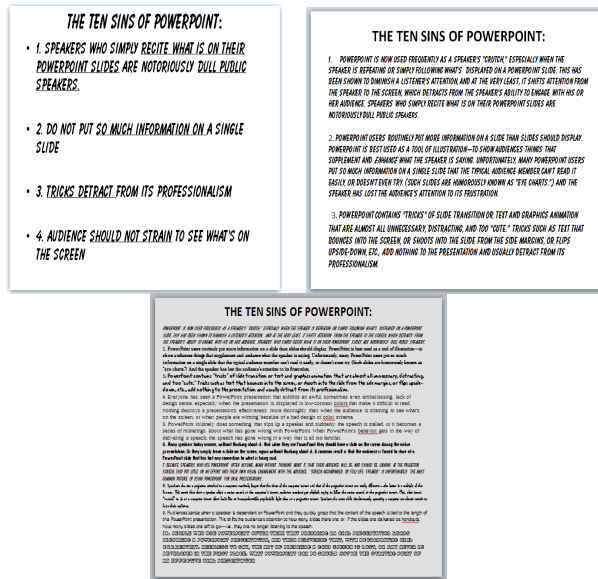
8. Speakers who use a projector attached to a computer routinely forget that the sizes of the computer screen and that of the projection screen are vastly different—the latter is a multiple of the former. This means that when a speaker whips a cursor around on the computer's screen, audience members get whiplash trying to follow the cursor around on the projection screen. Plus, what seems "normal" to do on a computer screen often looks like an incomprehensible psychedelic light show on a projection screen. **Speakers who orate while simultaneously operating a computer are almost certain to lose their audience**.

9. **Audiences sense when a speaker is dependent on PowerPoint** and they quickly grasp that the content of the speech is tied to the length of the PowerPoint presentation. This shifts the audience's attention to how many slides there are, or, if the slides are delivered as handouts, how many slides are left to go—i.e., they are no longer listening to the speech.

10. People who use PowerPoint often think that preparing an oral presentation means preparing a PowerPoint presentation, and then delivering that, with accompanying oral commentary. Needless to say, **the art of preparing a good speech is lost**, or may never be developed in the first place. What

PowerPoint can do should *not* be the starting point of an effective oral presentation.

Figure-1 : "The Good, Bad and the Ugly"



Computer haters (really, those who have no patience, confidence or aptitude to learn it) would be happy to note the above points and can utilize them to advance their points of arguments against "powerpoints". But, they forget that one should not try to swim against the tide. "ppts" are here to stay and we better learn how to use them effectively.

An effective presentation is one where your audience can easily grasp the ideas you are trying to get across. Anything that makes it *more difficult* for your audience to understand what you are trying to say *does not belong* in your presentation. Here are some tips for making effective powerpoint presentations:-

1. Organize!

Prepare your presentation just like you would do for anything else you write. Plan it first on paper by listing the main ideas, and then fill in the points you want to make under each idea. Add an introduction, describing what the presentation will be about. A table of contents will be very useful. Add a final summary, listing the key points that were covered.

2. Choose Colours Carefully

Your background, which can be either a solid colour or a design, should be a good contrast to the text colour you choose. The aim is to make your text easy to read. If you choose a design template, make it simple and unobtrusive, and use it on all your slides; don't keep changing it.

3. Text Size and Type

Choose a font that's easy to read, not fancy ones. Don't try to fit too much on one slide by decreasing the font size, especially if the presentation will be made on a big screen. Use more slides instead.

4. Sentences or Point Form?

If you are making an oral presentation along with the Powerpoint show, the ideas you present on-screen should be in point form. No-one likes a presentation where the presenter just reads what's on the screen. Your talk should be directed at the audience; use points bulleted on the screen to reinforce what you are saying. Even if your presentation is meant to stand alone, use point form; it will help you present your ideas more succinctly

5. Animations

Resist the urge to use all the animations. Stick to one simple effect (like a 'fly-in' or 'appear') and use it on all your bullets. (Don't even *consider* animating a sentence letter-by-letter!!) Make sure to set the animation to happen with a mouse click ... you want to make sure your audience has time to read it at their speed. And finally, add a little variety and structure by not animating the title of each slide.

6. Use Photos, Not Clip-Art

People like to look at photographs. Photos can convey a lot of extra information, and do a better job. Find pictures that illustrate what you are trying to say. Avoid the use of tired old clip-art ... it's been used so much in everything by everybody else that it's lost its punch ... it will just make your presentation weaker.

7. Sound Effects

No! Don't even *think* of using sound effects to highlight the arrival of your bullets on-screen! Screeching tires and cowbells don't belong in any presentation! Using the same sound effect over and over will drive your audience crazy; using a new one every time will take the emphasis off your ideas ... the audience will spend all their time wondering what sound will come next, instead of concentrating on what you are trying to say.

The secret to using PowerPoint successfully is to be minimalist – fewer slides and less text. PowerPoint is a powerful tool. Used

well, it will enhance a presentation. Used poorly, it can destroy it. Few more useful suggestions in relation to “powerpointing”, some of them to emphasize the already mentioned points, as they are most important:

1. Highlights:

Use PowerPoint to emphasize your key points. Your presentation likely has five or six (or ten) key points. Use PowerPoint to reinforce those points graphically.

2. Not a crutch:

Don't use your PowerPoint slides as your script or note cards. Few things are less engaging than watching a presenter read their PowerPoint slides to the audience. (Often referred to as death-by-PowerPoint.) One of the benefits of using your PowerPoint slides to just reinforce your key points is that they cannot substitute for your notes.

3. Only use a maximum of six (6) words on each line.:

Too many words is too much clutter and hard for your audience to read.

4. Only use a maximum of six (6) lines of text on each slide.:

If you have too many lines of text your audience will spend their time reading your slides and not listening to you speak.

5. Use animation where relevant but don't overdo it.:

This feature can really highlight a key message... or distract your audience if not done correctly.

6. Don't rely on your PowerPoint:

Technology can sometimes fail us - know your content and also have a hard copy of your presentation with you at all times.

7. Not a distraction:

You are the presenter. PowerPoint is there to support you. Don't make it the other way around. Human interaction is still the best means to communicate. Don't focus on making your PowerPoint slides too animated or splashy. This shows up often when a presenter is uncertain of his or her presentation skills and tries to compensate by creating dazzling slides. Audiences can see through this ploy. They want to connect with you, not your PowerPoint slides.

8. Can you do without?

Ask yourself honestly, do you really need PowerPoint for your presentation. Is it going to enhance your presentation? Will your presentation be more impactful without it? Don't feel obligated to use it if you don't need it. Not using PowerPoint will likely set you apart from other presenters. With PowerPoint so overused, many audiences will thank you if you choose not to use it, at least once in a while. **Consider it.**

And most of all, make your presentation a conversation. Most people enjoy conversations. If your presentation is conversational instead of a lecture, your audience is much more likely to enjoy and remember it. When it comes to lecture materials, less is more. Put as little information on each slide as possible. Remember, you don't want your students to concentrate on writing down lots of words-- you want them to listen to you and to interact with you. According to Rich E. Mayer who has done a scientific analysis on powerpoint overload, "Cognitive scientists have discovered three important features of the human information processing system that are particularly relevant for PowerPoint users: *dual-channels*, that is, people have separate information processing channels for visual material and verbal material; *limited capacity*, that is, people can pay attention to only a few pieces of information in each channel at a time; and *active processing*, that is, people understand the presented material when they pay attention to the relevant material, organize it into a coherent mental structure, and integrate it with their prior knowledge."

As per the essence Dual Coding Theory, we can process words and pictures or animation simultaneously quite effectively. By tapping into the Dual Coding Theory, learning can be enhanced if your presentation uses both visual and verbal format. Humans can absorb information quite easily if shown an image and told about the image at the same time. Our mind naturally creates both visual and verbal representations in our memory. But remember, it is difficult for any audience to process two amounts of same type of information such as text and speech - and it can be overwhelming, as the audience struggles to understand what you are saying and what's on screen. Most people end up jumping between what

you are saying and what is on the slide, but don't do either of these things very well.

With text, reveal one bullet point at a time; this is known as Progressive Disclosure. Four to five words per bullet point is best. This minimises the amount of time people spend reading the information and maximises the amount of time they spend listening. If it is crucial to present a lot of text on a slide, stop talking for some of the time to allow the audience to read the text and then proceed. Try to pause to give the audience time to absorb the information and then allow them to focus on what you say next. If your PowerPoint slide contains complex information such as a graph, always take extra time to explain the contents of that slide.

What has been narrated above is the result of thoughts based on my experiences and the product compiled from surfing and search, relevant and applicable to almost all fraternities, more so to the teachers and practitioners of community health as their "bread and butter" is communication. We should make sincere efforts to sharpen the tool of our powerpoint presentations so much so that we can make it a "boon" and not a "bore".

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