

Teaching Tip
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Presentation Tools Revisited

Teaching Tips is written by Dan Madigan (The Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology). If you have a teaching tip to share or if you would like to comment on any of the teaching tips, please write to Dan Madigan at dmadiga@bgsu.edu.)

I received a nice amount of feedback from faculty regarding my teaching tip a few weeks back in which I drew from McDaniel and McDaniel's paper on the "Perils of PowerPoint." In that tip, the authors presented 5 reasons why PowerPoint should be used with caution. In the following response to that article by Hamilton and Beery of Creighton University Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska, both authors challenge the notion that PowerPoint presentations are fraught with perils. Their response follows:

A PRUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON "THE PERILS OF POWERPOINT("

William R. Hamilton and Melissa F. Beery

PowerPoint(presentations are becoming the standard method to aid in lectures and college discussions. PowerPoint(is also frequently seen in financial, educational, and other professional institutions. The authors William R. Hamilton and Melissa F. Beery respond to the concerns presented in "The Perils of PowerPoint(" by Thomas R. McDaniel, and Kathryn M McDaniel. PowerPoint(presentations are reviewed in terms of the format, technology, and style.

1. "It's Inflexible."

PowerPoint(presentations are inherently flexible because each presenter is different and can adjust the PowerPoint(slides accordingly. For example, if a question is built into the slide, then the presenter can pause for a group discussion. When a person's lecture is flexible and accommodating, then the PowerPoint® presentation is a reflection of the author. In fact, PowerPoint® is only intended to be a framework for presentation of information and content of the lecture. Teachable moments can be created within that framework. The presenter need not be a slave to PowerPoint®, in that PowerPoint® presentations are as flexible as the author wants them to be.

2. "It's Risky."

Risk can be countered with options available outside of the technology. PowerPoint® presenters have a plethora of backup plans available if they chose to use them. A whole system failure is not common but slides can be printed in advance and used in the event the technology doesn't work at all. File management can be an issue but a CD, flash card, or the presenter can email the presentation to himself can all be options. Presenters need to be aware that a backup method is the key to any technological or other types of

"failures," and then adjustments can be made. For example, a presenter that relies on a prepared report in his briefcase but leaves that briefcase on the subway would be in the same position as the PowerPoint® presenter that is faced with a computer crash. Do the presentations continue in either case? That's up to the individual person, not the briefcase or PowerPoint®. Backup plans are available almost without limit.

3. "It's a Crutch."

In high school speech, some students will use note cards and try to hide their face behind a 3 X 5 card. Some of these students will outgrow their introverted tendencies, while others will not. The same goes for those who use PowerPoint® presentations. Regardless of the tool used, introverted tendencies will occur because of the individual. There are rare instances when a PowerPoint® presenter will try and use their technology as a barrier. However, barriers can be overcome by involving the audience. Some of the best presentations involve PowerPoint® presentations that are paused to allow group work and enhance discussion if the presenter wishes it to do so.

4. "It's Boring"

It is generally agreed that the more a student is "engaged," or the more senses are utilized when involved in a discussion, the more the student will retain the information. PowerPoint® enables students to "see" in addition to hear a presentation. A student who wants or needs to "Zone-Out" probably can make that happen even if they were electrocuted by the PowerPoint® presentation as they begin to drift off. Simple entertainment techniques can be added to break up the monotony of a lecture. To blame the technology for "The Zone" is like blaming paper for a poor lecture.

5. "It's Style without Substance."

If presenters wish to be successful to any degree, they must learn how to have a bit of style to enhance their presentation. Even a novice can manipulate PowerPoint® to his or her liking with minimal training and experience. On the other hand, PowerPoint® presentations can be tailored to fit even complex discussions. From graduate students to senior professors, many have used the PowerPoint® format to defend dissertations and present research. Styles will vary depending on the use of PowerPoint®, but the substance is in the content of the lecture.

In next week's Teaching Tip, I will posit that PowerPoint as a tool is not the problem. In fact, PowerPoint is just one of many tools teachers can use to make their presentations, and lectures more dynamic and helpful to the student learner.

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