

## CTLT's Spring Semester 2006 Teaching Tip for February 15

Okay, so please don't shoot the messenger, but as the Center has been researching people and topics for our newsletter and workshops, we found a number of references to the misuse of technology in the classroom. The following is a report from Educause, discussed in "When Good Technology Means Bad Teaching," <http://chronicle.com/free/v51/i12/12a03101.htm>

In a recent survey of students at 13 colleges conducted by Educause, a higher-education technology group, students said they liked technology-when used well-but some gave their professors failing grades when it came to using PowerPoint, course-management systems, and some other kinds of classroom technology. Some specific complaints:

**Reading PowerPoint slides verbatim:** Many professors cram slides with text and then recite the text during class, which some students say makes the delivery flatter than if the professor did not use slides.

**Wasting class time fumbling with software and cables:** Professors who are uncomfortable with technology can spend too much time troubleshooting instead of teaching.

**Failing to moderate chat rooms:** Some professors require students to make weekly contributions to online chat rooms or discussion forms, but then never monitor the results or mention the discussions in class, making the discussions seem like busywork.

Considering the information reported in this Chronicle article, maybe we should all take a closer look at our use of PowerPoint. There is much valid criticism directed at the use of this presentation software. The most critical charges are that it distorts and manipulates our information. That is a serious allegation, and when it is made by a scholar like Edward Tufte, we need to pay attention. Tufte says about PowerPoint:

“Alas, slideware often reduces the analytical quality of presentations. In particular, the popular PowerPoint templates (ready-made designs) usually weaken verbal and spatial reasoning, and almost always corrupt statistical analysis.”

To demonstrate his point, Tufte directs us to the following PPT presentation that may make you smile, but it certainly does prove Tufte's point that there are some concepts and ideas that can't be well expressed in a series of bulleted points. Visit this link and see how PowerPoint could revise the eloquent prose of the Gettysburg Address.

<http://www.norvig.com/Gettysburg/sld001.htm>

The use of PowerPoint should be deliberate, and the content and design must be learner-centered. Sometimes students need direction about the “basics” of PowerPoint. Use the following link for you and your students to be well informed about the basics of this presentation software that can be used effectively and often-only after consideration of “what” we want to communicate and “who” is receiving the message.

<http://cit.information.unl.edu/tips/Webpage/saveasjpegs/index.shtml>