Cheating Death by PowerPoint

Essential PowerPoint tips, tricks, and best practices

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DESIGN

!!!

PRESENTATION DESIGN
AND TRAINING

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Dedication

To my husband, Mike. Without your steady support I wouldn't be able to do this work that I love!

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Table of Contents

PowerPoint Resources

Next Steps

Why you should read this book

Bad PowerPoint is everywhere. I'm sure you've sat through a boring presentation where the presenter read his slides to you. You have no doubt been shown a complicated table and have been asked to figure out what the data mean. And we've all seen multicolored pie charts whose sections add up to more than 100%.

This is the norm. But this book is for people like you who think that you can do better.

You see, most people create bad PowerPoint presentations. They approach PowerPoint as something to be done at the last minute. Or they keep on producing text-heavy, bullet pointy decks that are loaded with too much data. How do you think audiences like being subjected to slides like that?

They hate it.

So if you can show them something different using PowerPoint to create a multimedia experience for your audience, you'll be doing something that most people aren't. You'll stand out in the crowd. And that could make a big difference if you're trying to persuade your audiences to take action, whether it's buying your product or service, learning your subject matter, or giving you the funding you're after.

This book offers practical step-by-step tutorials, advice on best practices, and resources you can use in your presentations that will help you to gain a mastery of PowerPoint that your competitors don't have.

With the help of this book, you can learn to Cheat Death by PowerPoint.

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PowerPoint How-to

PowerPoint Cheat Sheet: 5 Essential production tricks

During a recent one-on-one PowerPoint training session, my client asked me how to make two lines of text fit onto one line. I quickly clicked on an icon and made some changes, causing the text to pop into place.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, what did you just do there?" the client asked. So I undid the change I had made and went through the process slowly so that he could follow along.

"You should make up some kind of a cheat sheet," he told me.

Great idea! So here you are, dear reader, a cheat sheet of the five PowerPoint techniques I employ on every presentation design project:

Slide Show view/Start slide show on current page

To start a slide show from the beginning of a presentation, press F5. To start a slide show from the slide you're currently viewing, press Shift+F5.

You should review your work in the Slide Show view because that's how the audience will be seeing it. You can check out your animation sequences and make sure that mouse clicks do what they're supposed to.

Character Spacing

Character spacing (also called "kerning" or "letterspacing") is the space between individual letters or numbers. I often find it necessary to reduce character spacing to make text fit within objects or to make text fit on a single line.

The character spacing icon is found in the Home ribbon:
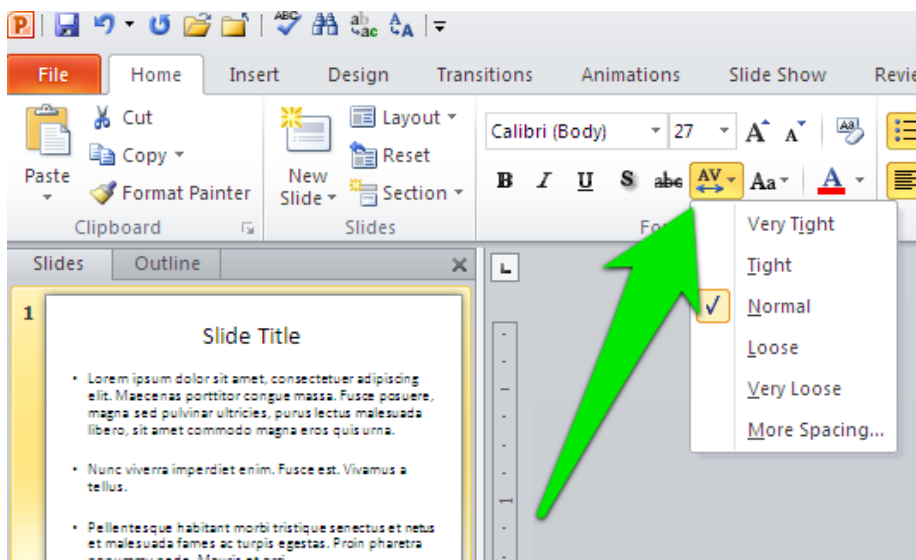
If the preset values don't give you the results you're looking for, then select "More Spacing" and enter the value you want. When condensing character spacing you should select the lowest possible value so that the text doesn't look too squished. Over-condensed text looks bad next to normal text.

Line Spacing

There are two kinds of line spacing: the space between lines of text within a paragraph without a return and the space that appears after you hit the return key.

The PowerPoint default line spacing looks bad, with too much space between lines without returns and not enough on lines with returns, so I always end up changing the default settings.

The line spacing icon is also found in the Home ribbon:
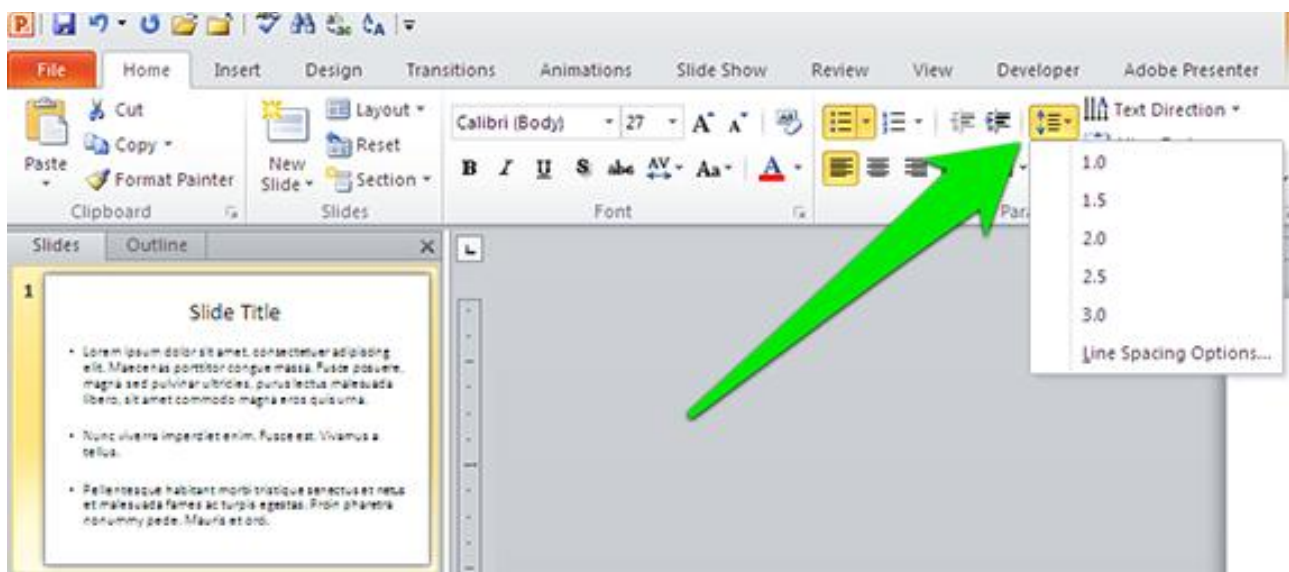
Select "Line Spacing Options" to have the most control over the spacing. I usually set the spacing before to 0pt and adjust the amount after until there's a good separation between lines. I set the line spacing to be exactly the same point size as the text itself. Here's a before-and-after comparison so you can see how this looks:

Before
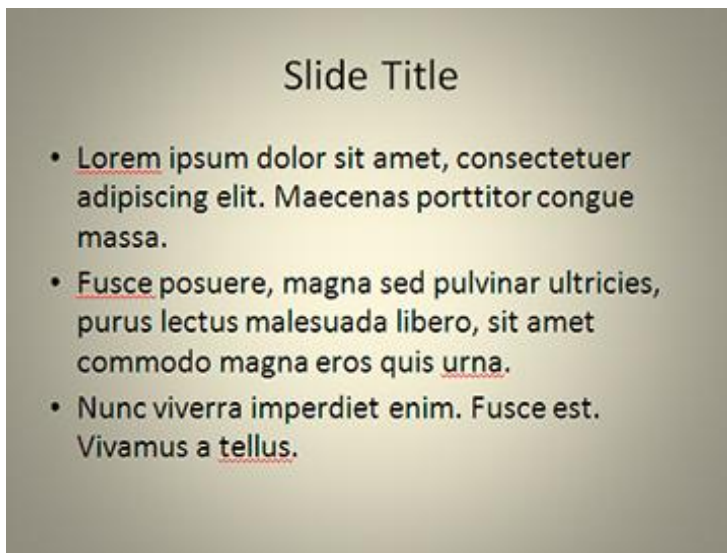
After
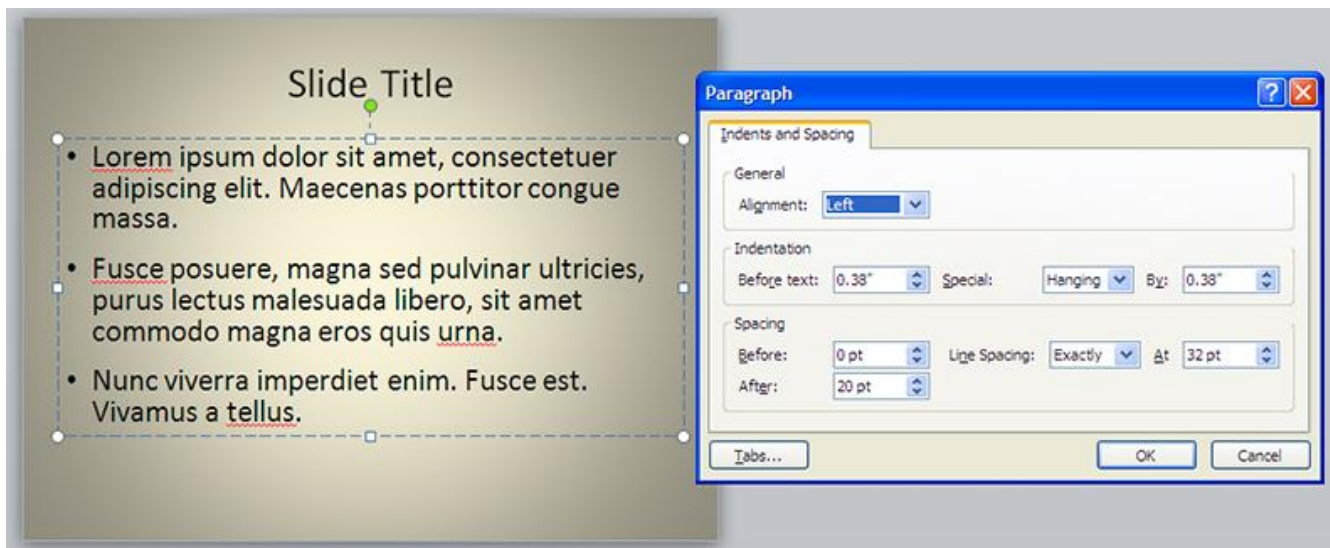
The line spacing for each bullet is now tighter, while the space between bullets has increased somewhat. This line spacing results in three distinct bullet points.

Format Shape

Right-clicking on an object gives you a flyout menu. Select "Format Shape" near the bottom of this menu to give you the ability to change all kinds of things about an object: fill color, line color, special effects, size, position, etc.

You can instantly see the results of your edits while the Format Object window is still open, saving you the trouble of reopening the window to make further changes. You can also leave this window open while you select other objects and close it when you are done with all of your formatting.

Format Text Box

The Format Object window has an option, Text Box, that is very handy for making text fit on one line within an object, orienting text within the object, and performing other text-related tasks.

Here's the trick I most often use within this command: changing the left and right internal margins to 0″. This will often give you enough room to make your text fit on one line, as in this example:

Before
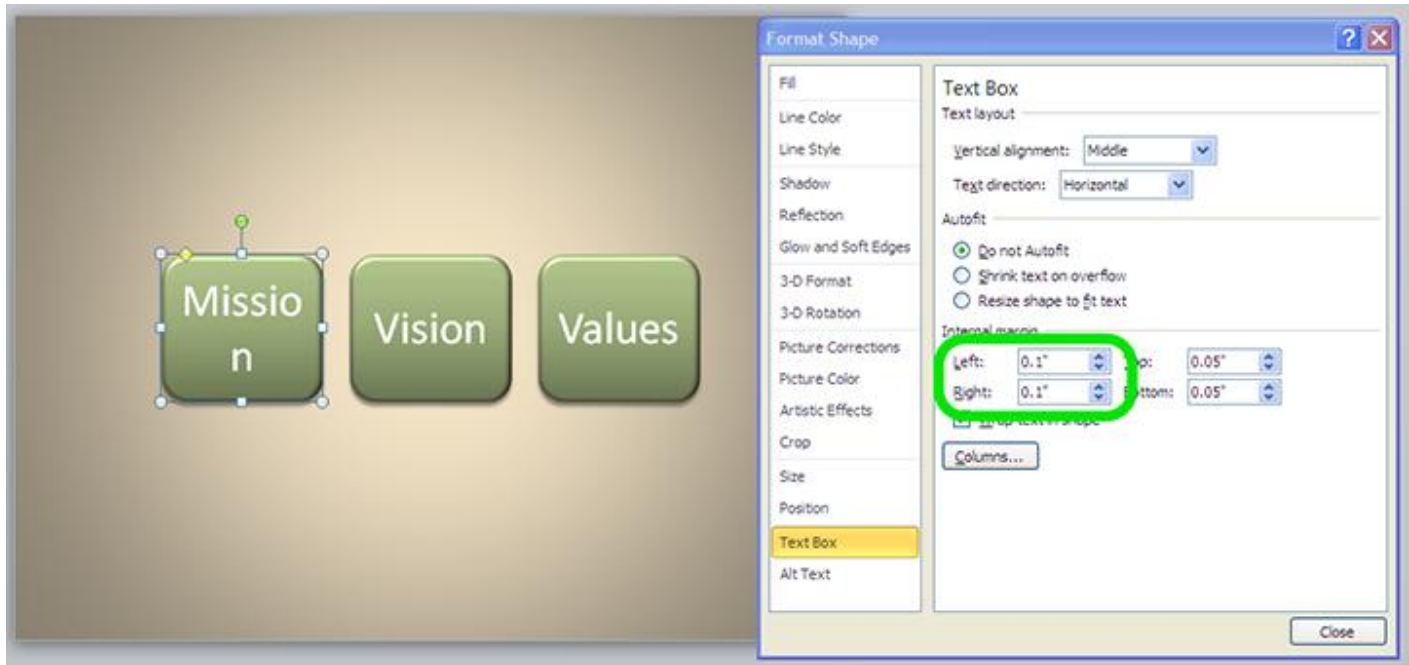
After
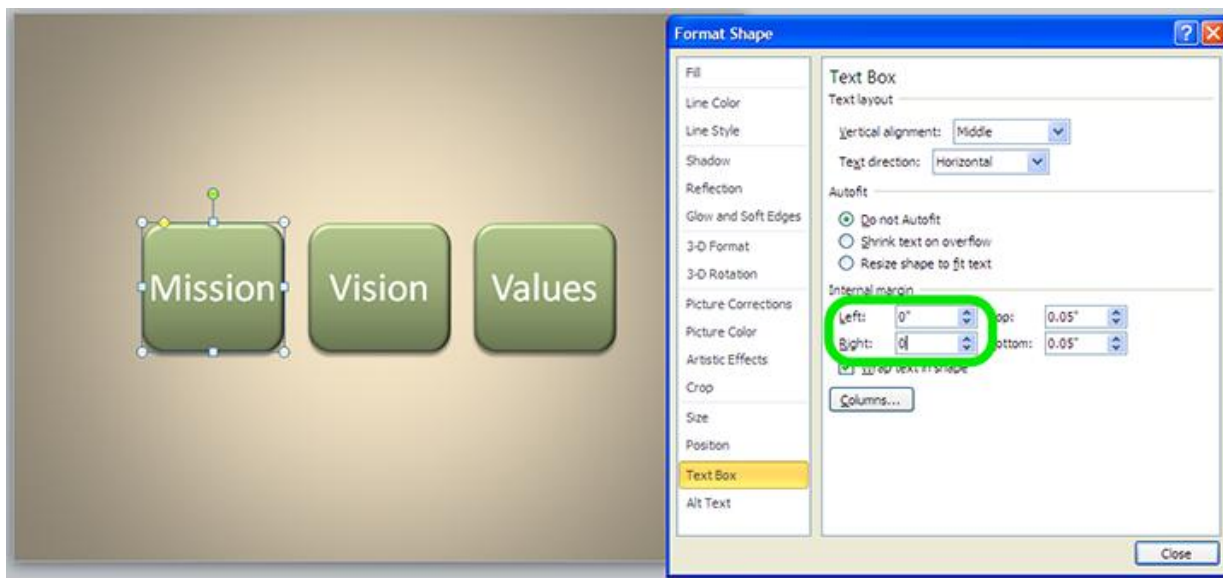
Interested in other PowerPoint shortcuts and techniques? Then please write to me and let me know and I'll provide more pro tips in a future blog.

The best PowerPoint trick you don't know about

PowerPoint has some amazing drawing tools that lets you create all kinds of illustrations. But sometimes it can be frustrating when you group text with an object to create an image because when you go to make it bigger or smaller the text remains the same size. That's because you're just resizing the text block, not the text itself. Bummer, right? Well, guess what—-it's possible to transform text into scalable graphics using the "paste as picture" command.

Before you think I'm just writing about some random PowerPoint command that you'll never use, let me give you some examples of how useful this command can be. Many years ago I worked at a company that created a lot of manuals for clients, and our desktop publishing software of choice was PowerPoint. Yes. To personalize them, we'd draw pictures of reports with the clients' names on them then paste them as pictures and use them as spot illustrations. Another way we'd use this command was to create little calendars with the session dates highlighted. Here's what they look like (I can practically draw these in my sleep now.):
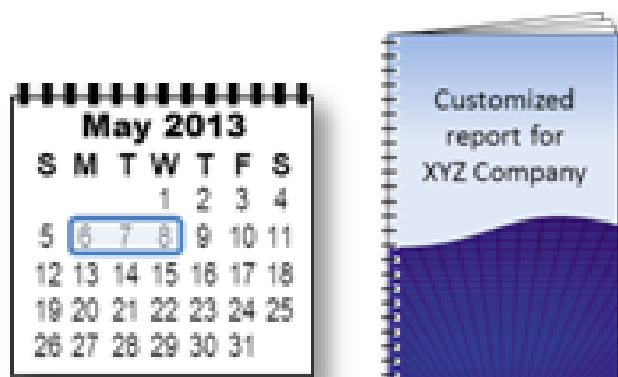
We'd create these graphics larger than what we needed, then we'd cut and "paste as picture" so that we could make them tiny and put them where we wanted in our documents.

You can also use the "paste as picture" command to resize charts and graphs if it turns out that you've made them too big or if you want to use them as illustrations.

All you need to do to access the "paste as picture" command is to right click anywhere on a slide after you've either cut or copied something. The window looks like this:
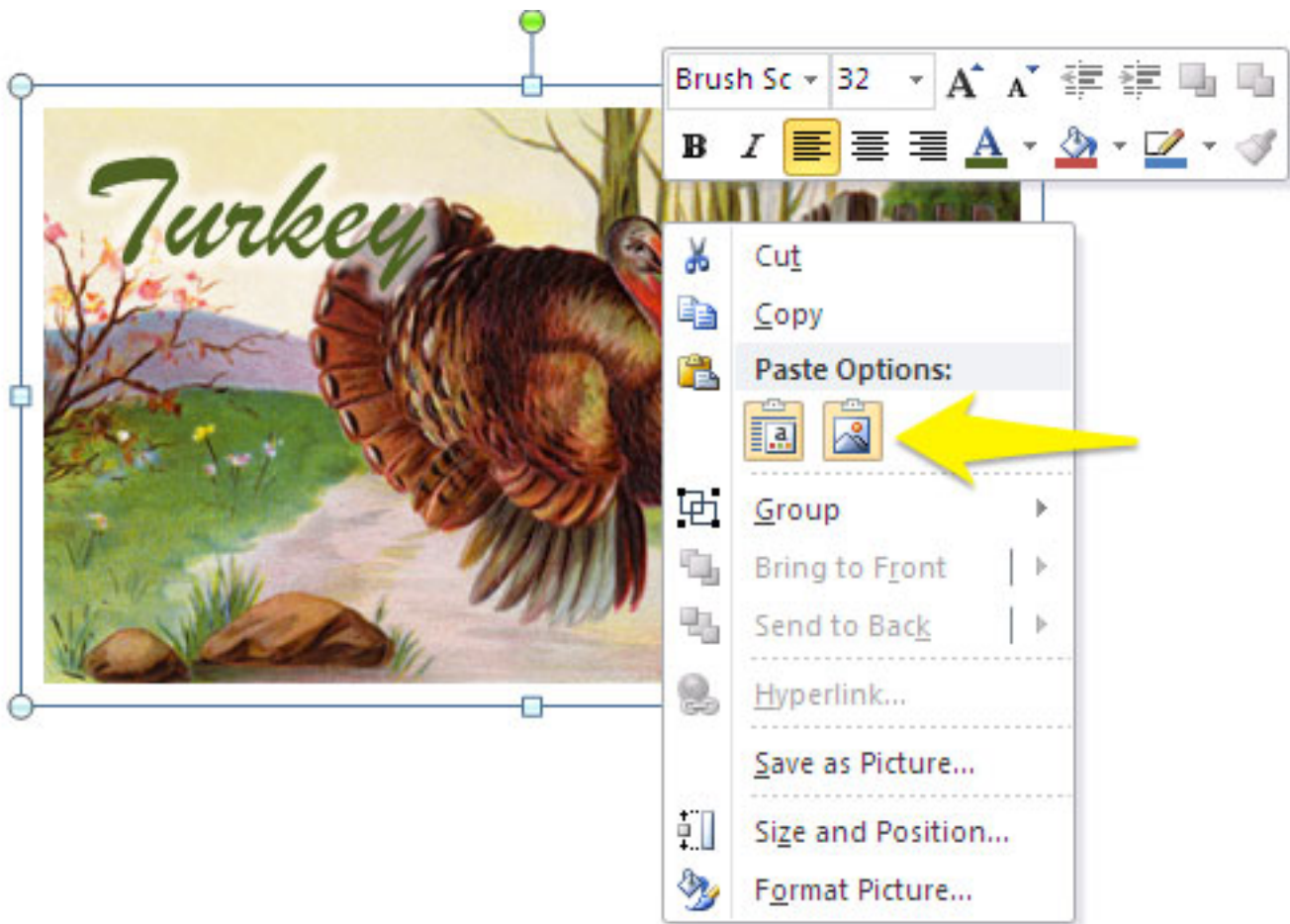
The yellow arrow is pointing at the little clipboard icon on the right after Paste Options; that's the "paste as picture" command.

It's important to note that when you paste something as a picture the text becomes uneditable, so be sure to save your source graphics just in case you need to make changes. As if that ever happens.

 Click here to watch a video about "paste as picture."

How to create an effective title slide in PowerPoint

You've sweated out the details of your presentation. You've labored over your PowerPoint deck, writing, rewriting, and editing until your key messages shine through. You're ready. But are you really?

Presenters often overlook a valuable opportunity to connect with their audience: their title slides.

Think about it. Your title slide is up there on the screen while you wait for the audience to arrive and find their seats. It might be onscreen while you're being introduced by your host. Your title slides can be very effective billboards for you, but only if you design them well.

The most important elements of a title slide

Since title slides are usually on display for a while before a presentation, you want to make sure that they're doing a good job of marketing you, your topic, and your company. Always include the following elements on your title slides:

- Title of presentation, with a subtitle if the presentation's title is unclear
- Your name
- Contact information (email address, Twitter account, website, etc.)
- Company logo

Providing this information on the title slide tells the audience what they're about to hear, who's responsible for the presentation, and how to get in touch with you if they need to.

Simple title slides

Let's look at a typical title slide for a corporate presentation:

Argh.

There are a number of things wrong with this slide: There is too much text on the slide and it's all competing for our attention. The abundance of Facebook logos distract viewers from the logo of the presenter's company. That subtitle looks more like a paragraph. You don't have to point out the organization to which your audience belongs. The audience already knows what company they work for. You also don't have to tell them what day it is.

Nice!

Here's how I would redesign this slide while remaining true to the template:

The multiple Facebook logos have been replaced by an image that appears to be on a computer screen. Because I chose the typographic Facebook logo, it doesn't compete with the presenter's company logo. The presenter's name appears to be a window on a computer screen, and his email address and Twitter name have been provided. The company logo is now on the top of the slide, giving it the most importance. The subtitle has been shortened from 19 words to four.

Animated title slides

Sometimes your subject matter will lend itself to a more interesting approach to your title slides. Animating a title slide can be a great way to provide contact information, to invite people to subscribe to your blog or newsletter, or to introduce opportunities for audience participation. The animation reveals information a little at a time, creating anticipation and interest.

We begin with a plain, unimaginative title slide:

Wake me when it's over

ZZZZZZZZZZZ.….snork! Wha.….what? I'm awake, I'm awake. I wasn't sleeping!

Yes I was.

The title and subtitle are fine, but, again, the remaining text doesn't tell the audience something they don't already know. And the layout is totally boring.

Now you're talking!

Presenting this information in the form of sticky notes is a good idea for this particular subject because they are used to organize thoughts and messages. They are often overused, being pasted on top of one another until their original purpose of organization is lost.

We start with a picture of a woman snowed under by paper. One by one the sticky notes appear.

This slide tells the audience who the presenter is, provides a personalized greeting, and includes four calls to action, including an opportunity for an audience member to win a prize. This last bit will keep people interested and engaged in the presentation, because everybody likes getting something for nothing!

[Click here to watch this title slide in action](#)

PowerPoint vs. Photoshop:
Making pictures better by flipping them

Photoshop is the number-one tool used by professional designers for photo manipulation. But you don't need Photoshop to do some incredible things with pictures for PowerPoint. And in this article I'm going to show you how to flip objects.

When you flip an object, you create a mirror image of it along either the horizontal or the vertical axis, like so:

To flip an object you right-click on it then click on the little triangle icon, pictured below. You can also select the object then go to the Format tab in the Ribbon and select the Rotate command to get the same flyout menu.
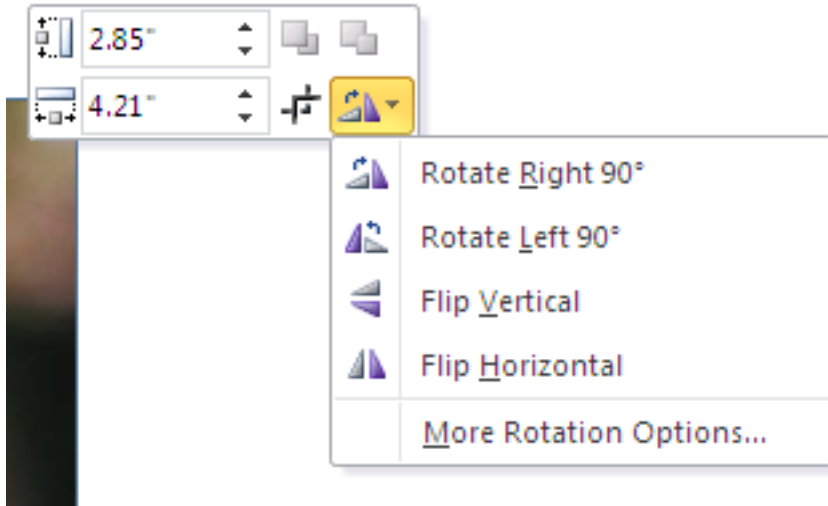
You can flip all kinds of objects, including shapes, photos, clip art, and videos.

Be careful when you use this command, though, because in some cases you don't want to flip an image. For instance, if you flip a photo of a woman wearing a wedding ring the ring will end up looking like it's on the wrong hand. And if you flip a photo of a well-known person, it will seem strange that his hair is parted on the wrong side, a mole is on the wrong side of his face, etc.

Bonus: Graphic design jargon alert!

While Microsoft calls this "flipping" images, graphic designers call it "flopping." It's the same thing. Why did Microsoft create a new term for something that had been done for years previously? Because it could.

 [Click here to watch a video about flipping pictures in PowerPoint](#)

Good PowerPoint Design: Typography and avoiding orphans

Good typography is one way of telling whose deck was designed by a professional presentation designer and which one was done by a nondesigner. Sometimes the changes the professional makes are so subtle that you don't even notice that they're there, but when you compare the decks side-by-side it's obvious that one looks better.

Let's talk about orphans. In typographic terms, a "orphan" is a single word that appears below the last line of text in a paragraph. It looks like this:

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy
dog.

In this case, the word "dog" is the orphan. You've probably seen lots of slides with this problem; it's a common error that usually goes uncorrected. Here's how the text should look:

The quick brown fox
jumps over the lazy dog.

Whenever possible, you should correct orphans wherever they appear on your slides. Although the change is small, it will make your decks look more refined. Let's compare two bulleted lists:

Bad typography:

- We should strive to exceed our customers'
  expectations
- Go above and beyond to provide excellent customer
  service
- Delighted customers will be our brand
  ambassadors

Good typography:

- We should strive to exceed
  our customers' expectations
- Go above and beyond to
  provide excellent customer service
- Delighted customers will
  be our brand ambassadors

Sure, the effect is subtle, but designers do it all the time. Go ahead, look at any book or magazine and I'll bet you don't find many orphans at the ends of lists and paragraphs. When you start getting into the habit of correcting this fault on your slides, it will be just another way that your decks will look better.

There are three ways to get rid of orphans:

- **Insert a soft return where you want the line break to appear.** A soft return is when you use the Shift+Return to create a line break. This keeps the lines part of the same paragraph and does not create a new bullet point in a list.

- **Increase or reduce the size of the text box.** By making your text boxes wider or narrower you can force the text to go where you want it to. Be careful about doing this, because if you're using a template then you don't want the slide to look too different from other slides that use the same layout.
- **Decrease the margins within an object.** If you are getting an orphan when you're typing text into an object, you can often fix it by reducing the margins within the object. To do this, right-click on the object, select "Format Text Box" then reduce all of the margins to 0″. Here's how this looks:
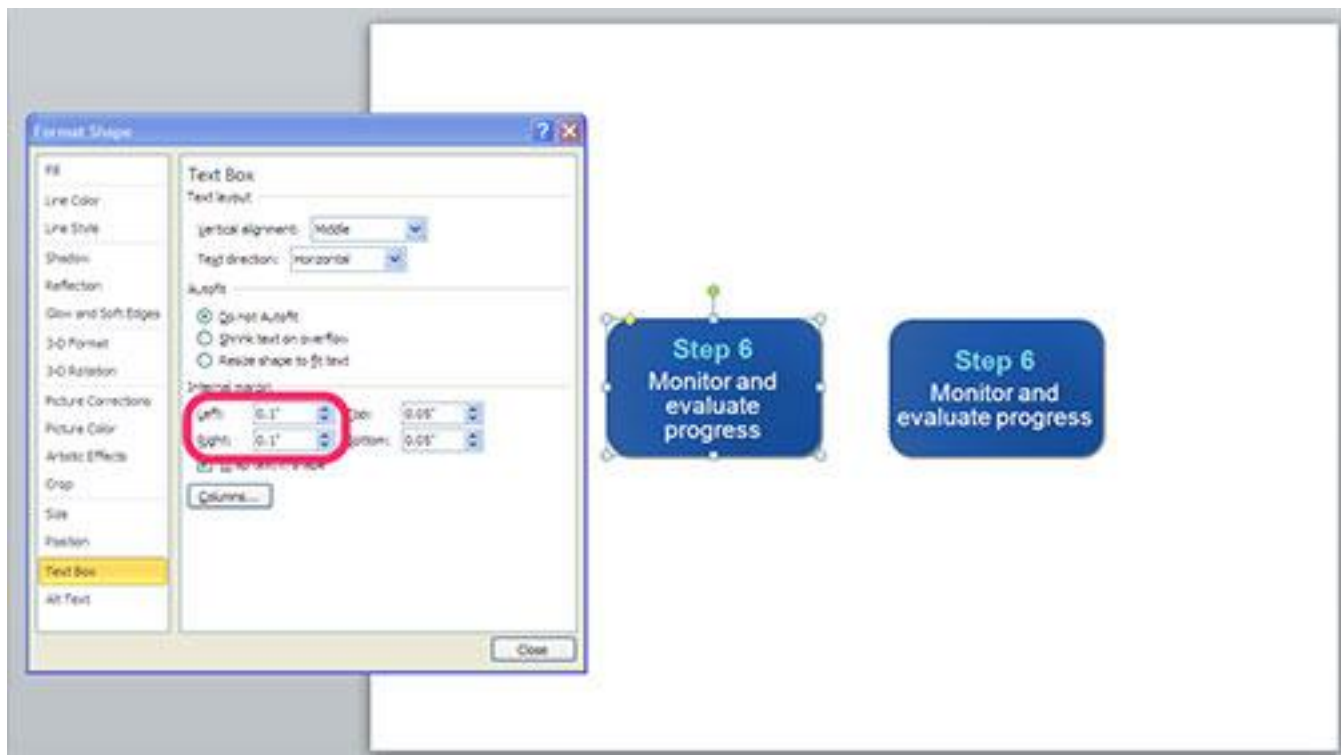
Object with .1″ margins. Notice how "progress" becomes an orphan.
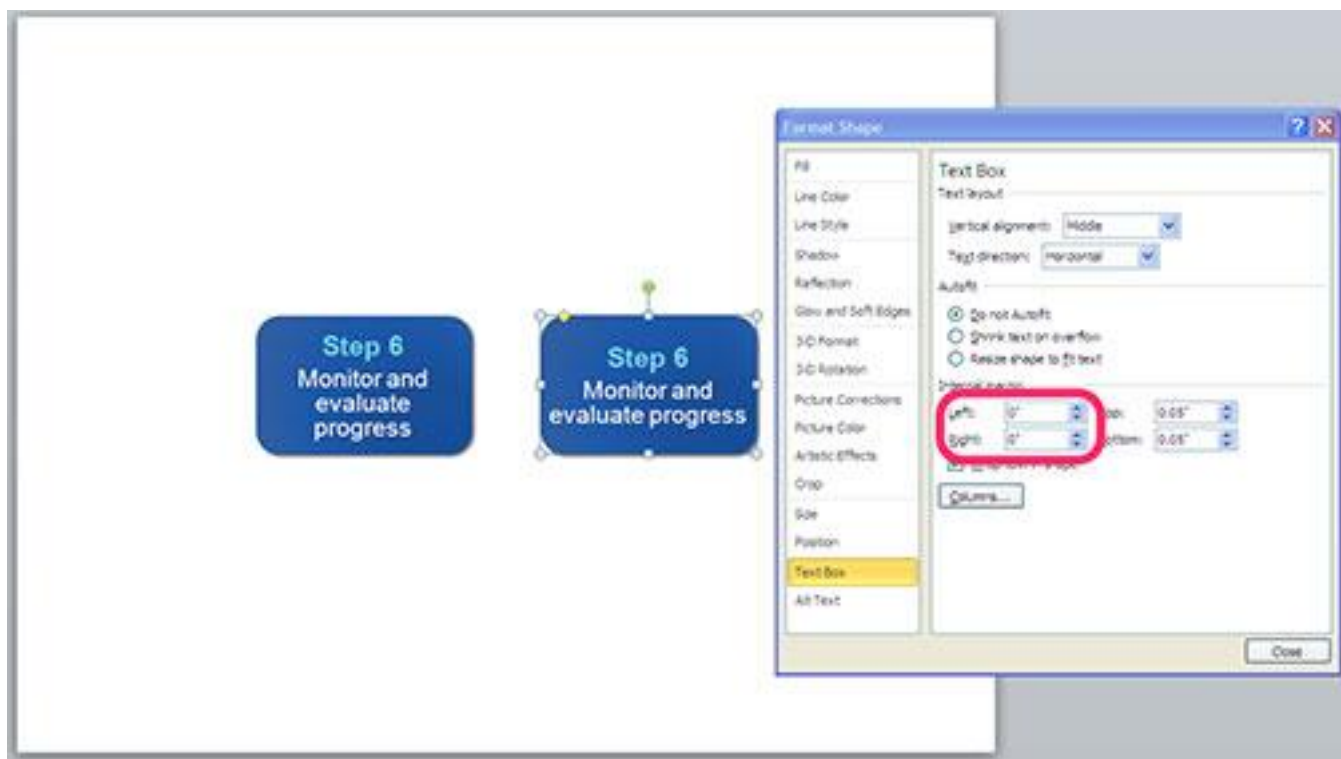
Object with 0″ margins. Now "progress" moves up to the previous line.

Once you get into the habit of eliminating orphans in your decks it will become second nature to you and your slides will look better!

How to customize PowerPoint themes: The down-and-dirty method

You've just been told that you're responsible for your company's next big presentation. Due tomorrow. And you have no corporate PowerPoint template or theme. Uh-oh! How are you going to get in front of your prospects without a well-designed presentation? By using one of the built-in PowerPoint themes? Pfft! Have you even looked at those?

Fortunately, it's is possible to knock together a quick corporate template that bears more than a passing resemblance to your other marketing materials. It isn't a substitute for a well-designed theme and style guide, but it'll do in a pinch. Here's how to do it:

1. Start with the Office Theme, the very first choice on the far left of the screen in the Design tab.

2. Click on the Colors button.

3. Pick a palette from the list that contains colors that look good with your company logo.
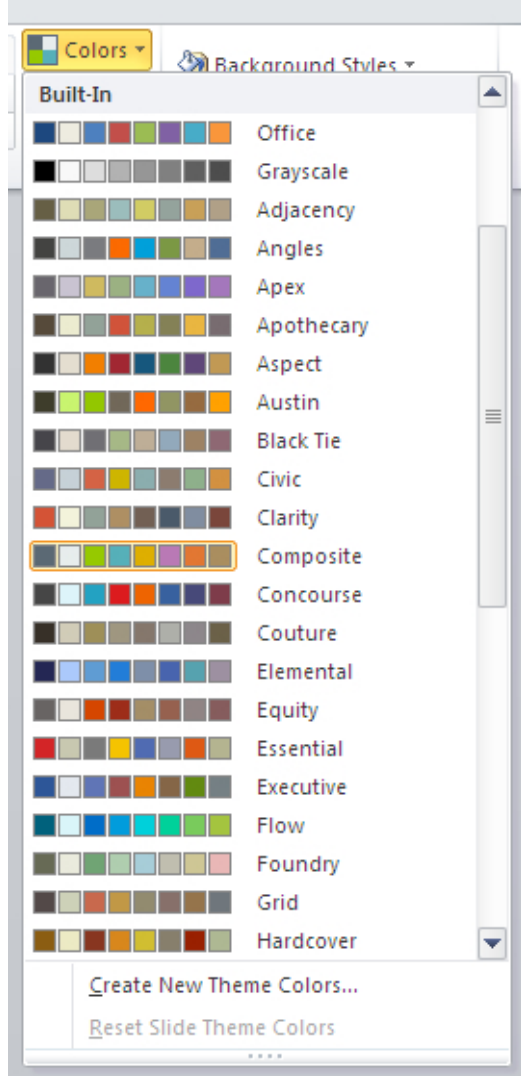
4. Go to View/Slide Master.
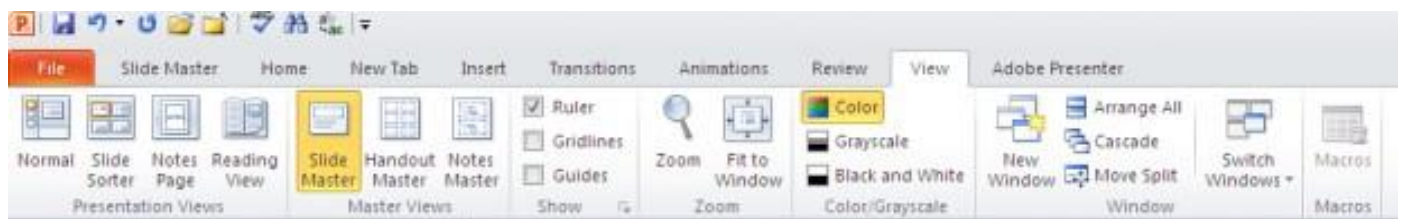
5. Click on the Office Theme slide master (the first one in the display on the left).
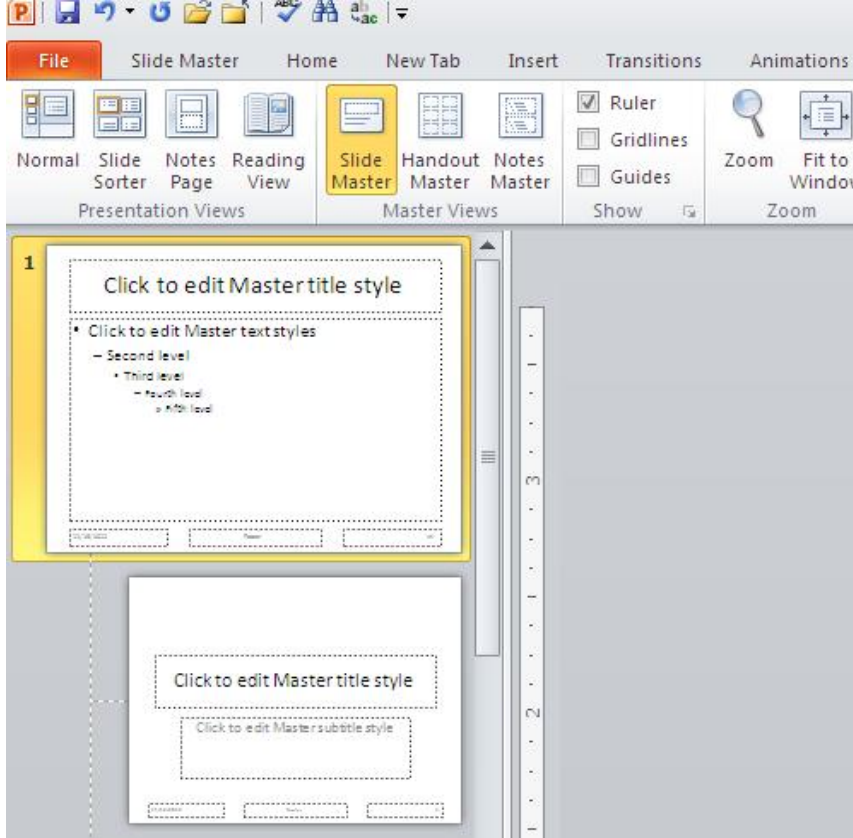
6. Select all of the text boxes on the slide master and change the font to your corporate font (if it's available) or something that resembles it.
7. You know you don't need your logo on every slide, and that big header and footer blocks just take up space, right? If you do but your boss doesn't, then you can add these onto the master slide.
8. Furthermore, you know that you don't need slide numbers, right? Delete all of the footer placeholders. Insist on this.
9. If the white background seems too stark, change it here in the slide master. You might add a splash of color by inserting graphics taken from your company website and using them on the top or bottom of the slide. Just be sure these are of a high enough resolution to display properly, and don't add too much distracting stuff in the master.
10. When you're done editing the slide master, click the Slide Master tab, then click on the Close Master View button on the right.
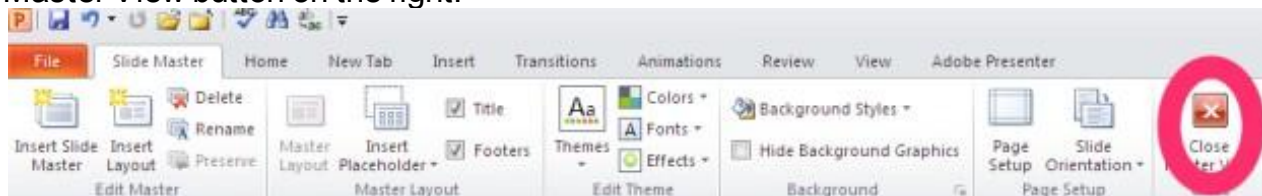
11. Start typin' mister (or missus) because you've got work to do!

Some Cool PowerPoint Tricks

There are some great things you can do with PowerPoint that you might not know about! Here are four of my favorites:

Clip Art Library
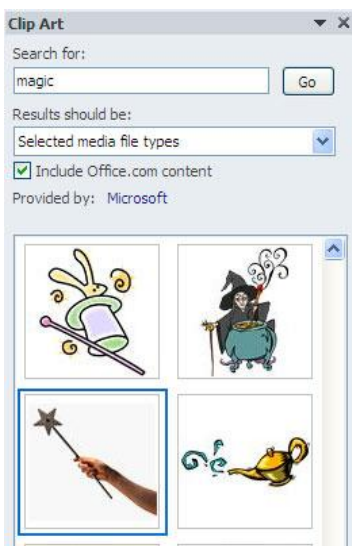
Microsoft Office comes with an extensive library of photographs, illustrations, video, and audio that you can use in your presentations. And it's not all cheesy line drawings—the above image came from the Office clip art collection. The best part? It's searchable, so you just type what you're looking for. But how did I get the image out of PowerPoint and onto the Web? Well, it's easy if you use…..Save as Picture

To get that image out of PowerPoint and onto this Web site, I right-clicked the image and selected Save as Picture. This little trick will save any placed image in PowerPoint in a variety of formats such as GIF, PNG, JPG, and TIF. I opened the image file in Photoshop then rotated the image and added the blue glow behind the star. By the way, the use of the image in this blog is legal according to the Microsoft Service Agreement. Make sure your use is, too!

Insert Random Filler Text

When designers show layouts to clients, we don't want them to get distracted by reading the documents, we want them to concentrate on the design. So for placeholder text (also called "dummy text" or "greeked text") it is very common to use Lorem Ipsum, a kind of jumbled-up nonsense Latin that fills up space and can be used to show text layout, font choices, etc. Well, it's possible to generate Lorem Ipsum in PowerPoint 2010 if you are designing a template or slide and want to show somebody the general layout. Just type "=lore()" (without the quotation marks) in a text block and hit return. Voila!

Insert Screenshot
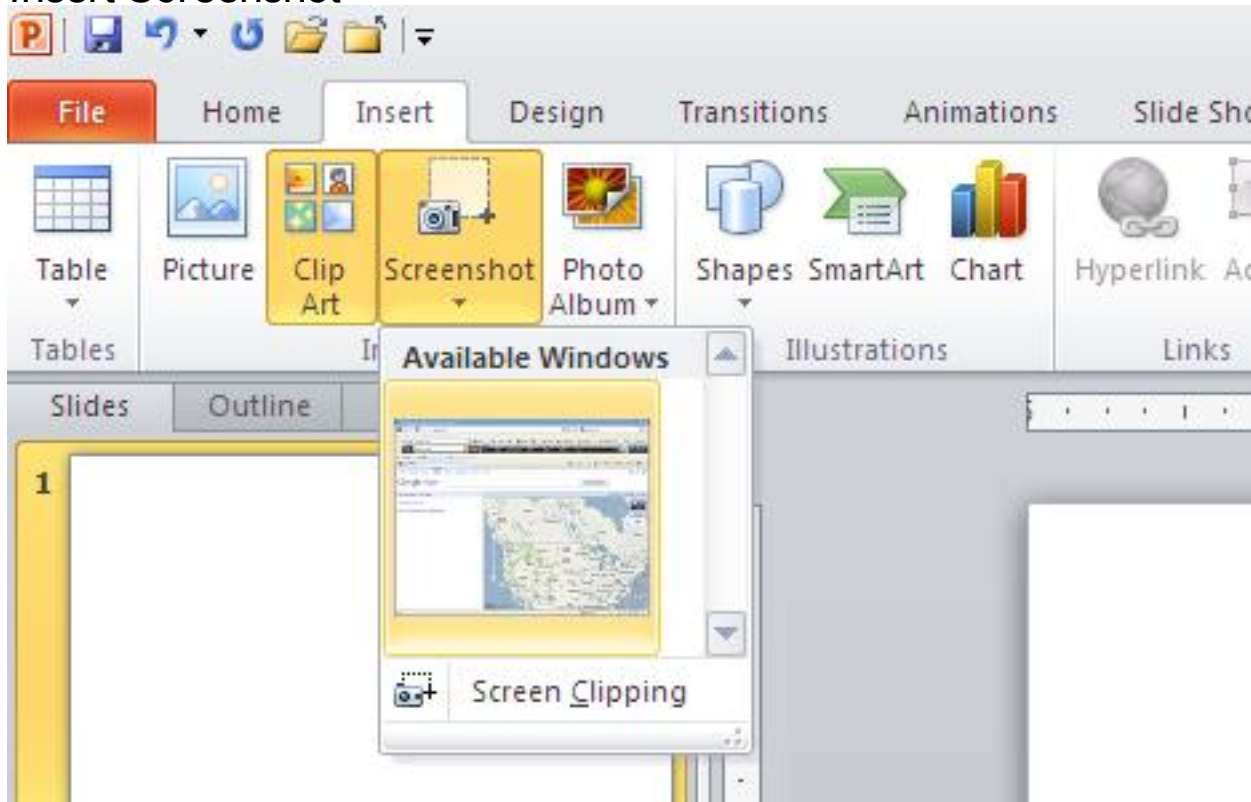
With PowerPoint 2010 it's super easy to insert a screenshot of a window. Simply open the window, go to PowerPoint, then click on the Insert tab. Click on the fourth icon from the left (Screenshot) and you will be able to insert the entire window or a portion of it as a graphic. And if you want to save that screenshot as an image for later use, you right-click on it and Save as Picture.

PowerPoint for Print? Sometimes!

Last week, I did some work for a client who wanted me to create an image library in PowerPoint. The person I was working with was appalled and would have preferred doing the job using InDesign. While it's true that InDesign would have yielded professional results, this time it wasn't the right tool for the job. Neither was Microsoft Word, which would be the logical choice for creating a printable document that a client could edit.

This client is a housewares retailer that has hundreds of product lines, each with its own individual package design. They needed a catalog of images so that each marketing manager could tell at a glance what products they were overseeing this year. In some cases, the images supplied might need to be changed later on. Most importantly, the client needed to be able to make changes when the need arose.

Strangely enough, PowerPoint is very well suited to this kind of job. Unlike Word, which creates kind of a "scroll" document, PowerPoint creates individual slides or, in this case, pages. While it's possible to rearrange pages in Word, it's not as easily done as in PowerPoint's Outline or Slide Sorter. What's more, with the Normal View's split screen, when you click on a title in the outline view on the left side of the window, the slide pops up on the right side, showing you what's on it. This combination of text- and image-based navigation makes it easy for somebody who isn't a publication designer to rearrange or add pages.

Speaking of adding pages, have you ever tried to add pages into a Word document? It's not easy. But with PowerPoint it's as simple as dragging a slide from one presentation to the next. True, there may be some reformatting involved, but it's not that difficult.

The handling of graphics is easier in PowerPoint in some ways, too. PowerPoint backgrounds can be set to appear on all slides, or you can hide the background elements when you want so that you can include other graphics. Again, it's not impossible to create different backgrounds for each page in a Word document, but doing so requires that you create a new section for each new background. It's a big drag and not for the faint of heart.

This isn't the first time I've used presentation software for page layout. Years ago, I worked in an office where we used Aldus Persuasion for page layout. It was selected for the reasons I've mentioned, plus at the time its drawing tools were superior to those of Word. When Persuasion was bought by and subsequently discontinued by Adobe, all of the office's documents were converted into PowerPoint.

For this most recent project, the biggest factor in choosing which layout software to use was simple: it's what the client asked for. Now, usually I wouldn't cite this as my main motivator because clients typically hire me because they don't know exactly what they want. They turn to me to provide alternate solutions to their problems that they may not have thought about. But the reasons in this case were very clear: These files are for internal use only, to be printed out on an office printer when needed. The files needed to be editable by everybody using familiar software. It's cheaper and faster for the client to do their own edits.

So, heck yeah! PowerPoint can—in some instances—be an effective tool for page layout. But don't tell any other graphic designers I said so; they'd drum me out of the corps!

How to set default fonts in PowerPoint and why it's important

A colleague of mine told me that one of his clients wanted to know how to set a default typeface for all new PowerPoint documents. This client recognized the need for a consistent look for the PowerPoint decks his company produces. Bravo!

Fortunately, if you already have a corporate PowerPoint template it's very easy to set a default typeface. In fact, most of it's been done for you because corporate templates are already set up to use particular typefaces in the title and text blocks. But what do you do when you've got some rogue operator who wants to add a bunch of his own text blocks to the slide?

How to set default fonts

Slide masters are set up so that all of the usual text boxes—-titles, content, etc.—-use specific fonts, weights, and sizes. The reason for this is to make using a template idiot-proof. Trouble is, a new kind of idiot comes along and creates new text boxes that aren't part of the template, possibly adding new typefaces.

But to get around this, all you need to do is to create a default text box style in your template. Here's how:

1. Open the template and create a text box.
2. Type a word.
3. Double-click on the word to select it, then set it to whatever you want the default type style to be. Select the font you want, the color, the alignment, the size, the space between the letters—anything you want to become the default.
4. When you're done, right click on the text box to select it, then choose "Set as Default Text Box" on the pop-up menu.
5. Delete the text box, then save the file as a template (.potx).

Now, whenever someone uses that template to create a new presentation, the default text box will have the settings you've just created.

Is it foolproof?

Heck, no. The type attributes can always be changed on any text box. But at least it's a step in the right direction.

Why it's important

Companies spend a lot of money establishing their brands. Why? Because doing so is the key to differentiation, that which makes one company rise above the rest and be more attractive to consumers. Brands are reinforced by a company's marketing mix—the combination of all of the different kinds of marketing that it produces. The marketing mix includes websites, commercials, vehicle graphics, packaging, white papers, case studies, Twitter home pages, uniforms, email signatures…..in short, anything that can be branded. Any single component of the marketing mix should be easy to identify as coming from that particular company. This consistency is essential for building a brand identity.

Of course, PowerPoint presentations are also a part of this marketing mix since they are brandable communication designed to influence an audience to take action. So why in the world do some people play fast and loose with their decks, using any old typeface they like, diluting the brand? It's because they don't know any better. But you do.

Keep it professional, stick to the corporate typefaces, and stay away from Comic Sans.

PowerPoint Best Practices

How do you tell a story in PowerPoint?

Storytelling is not a new way of communicating ideas. In fact, people have been telling stories since the beginning of recorded history. Why do stories like the tale of Gilgamesh, the fable of the fox and the grapes, and the saga of Jason and the Argonauts continue to be enjoyed today? Because people can still learn from them and we can picture ourselves in similar situations.

With the right story, you help people to understand about how what you're talking about relates to them. For example, during a sales presentation you could describe a problem that a client of yours experienced that you were able to solve with your product or service. If you're an educator you could tell the story about how penicillin was discovered. A human resource professional could create a fictional character whose actions are unacceptable in the workplace and tell the audience about all of his gaffes.

A typical bullet-point-ridden PowerPoint presentation is the opposite of good storytelling. An outline format is a terrible way to tell a story. It's boring and offers little for a reader to relate to because it's just facts, facts, facts. If you can figure out a way to weave those facts into a story, then they will have more meaning for your audience.

Here's a before-and-after comparison of a Death by PowerPoint slide and a redesigned slide with a good story:

Before: Death by PowerPoint

The Great Molasses Flood

- Occurred on January 15, 1919
  - North End neighborhood of Boston
  - Storage tank owned by the United States Industrial Alcohol Company
  - Unseasonably warm temperatures
    - Mid 40s
- Large storage tank burst
  - Tank had capacity of 2,300,000 gallons
  - 50 feet tall, 90 feet around
- Wave of molasses flooded area
  - Up to 8 feet high
  - 35 MPH
  - Lots of damage and flooding
  - About 150 people injured, 21 people and several horses killed
- Volunteers help with cleanup
  - First on the scene were cadets from a training ship docked nearby
  - Afterwards came Boston Police, Red Cross, Army, and Navy personnel

After: The Story of the Great Molasses Flood
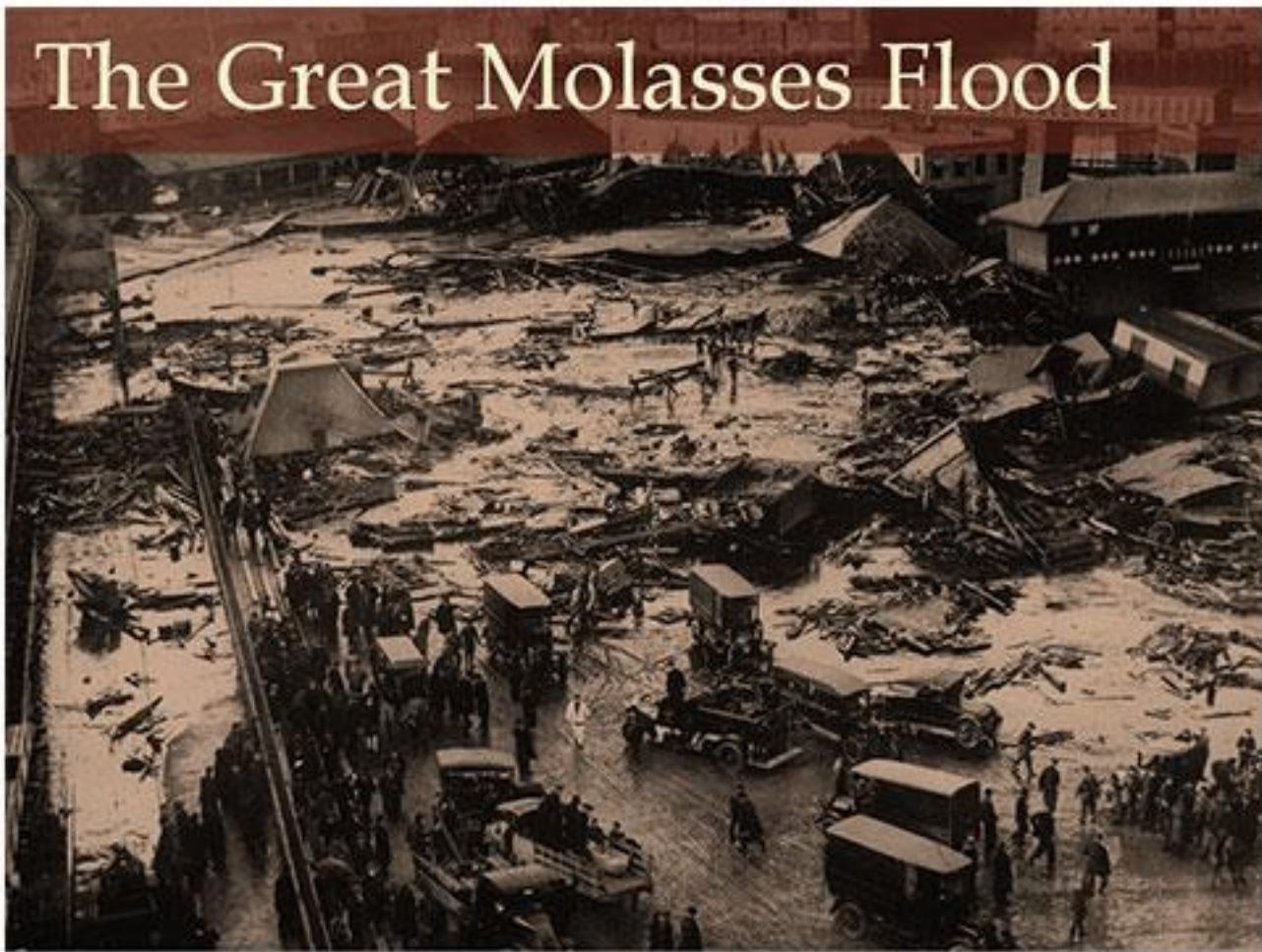
[Spoken by presenter] Some folks like to complain that others can be "as slow as molasses in January" but you won't hear me saying it because I survived one of the strangest disasters there ever was: The Great Molasses Flood.

It was January 15, 1919, a Wednesday. I remember that it was pretty warm for January—about 45 degrees or so—which was very different from just a few days earlier when the temperature was about zero degrees. There were lots of folks out that day in the North End, just going about their business as usual. In that part of town there's a distillery called the US Industrial Alcohol Company and they used to have these huge storage tanks full of molasses. The tanks were massive—about five stories tall—and could hold more than two million gallons!

I was on my lunch break when it happened. Without warning, there was a low, rumbling sound then I saw a huge, black wave headed straight toward me! I didn't even have time to stand up when the wave took me and carried me along like I was a leaf in a stream! I was tossed end over end as the wave went down, and when it finally stopped I tried to yell for help but I couldn't because my mouth was clogged with sweet, sticky molasses. I passed out and when I came to I saw a cadet from a training ship staring down at me.

I sat up and looked around, and what I saw will haunt me to my dying day. The support beams for the elevated railroad were all twisted up and I could see a train car dangling off the tracks. All around me there were horses struggling to free themselves from the sticky goo, cars covered in what looked like black tar, and the wreckage from ruined buildings. And here and there I could see brown lumps. I knew what they were and I wanted to tell myself it wasn't true, but it was. Twenty-one people died that day.

I was one of the lucky ones because apart from a few bruises and scrapes I was all right. The next day I went back there to see if I could help in any way. It took two weeks for us to clean up the mess: scrubbing cobblestones, clearing out debris, trying to clean up homes and shops as best |
we could.

I will never forget that awful day as long as I live. And I've never eaten molasses since.

Storytelling works! Try telling one at your next presentation to see if it makes a difference in how your audience reacts. If you want a more scientific explanation as to why storytelling is so effective, check out [What listening to a story does to our brains](#) by Leo Widrich. It's a fascinating read!

Get Your Facts Straight

From the July 27 edition of Fox News' *The Live Desk* (hat tip to Twitter user **StefanoScalia**):

THE MIDDLE EAST

ISRAEL
SYRIA
EGYPT
IRAN
JORDAN
SAUDI ARABIA

FOX NEWS .COM

SECY GATES MEETING WITH ISRAEL'S MINISTER OF DEFENSE EHUD BARAK **LIVE**DESK

HAT THE GOVT DID NOT COERCE CHRYSL   DOW ▼ 37.94

I was glued to the television for the premiere of *Falling Skies*, the latest series to tackle life in a post-apocalyptic world. I loved just about everything about it: the premise, the plot, the special effects. But one thing really bothered me, and that was the geographical inaccuracies. It made me think that a few wrong facts can really derail your message.

The story begins in Massachusetts six months after an alien invasion. The aliens have just bombed Boston, so the surviving humans must leave the city and fan out into the suburbs. While I congratulate the writers for using the actual names of Massachusetts towns, the dialogue contained many made-up facts. Which wouldn't be noticeable by most viewers, but I happen to live in Massachusetts and grew up in the town next to where much of the action in this show takes place.

The survivors are split up into several smaller groups, one of which is instructed to travel north on Route 3 until they reach Revere. *Uh, Route 3 doesn't go anywhere near Revere.* Another group must go to Acton, meeting at the (nonexistent) Littleton Bridge before they reach their destination. *Excuse me, Littleton is further west, so they'd actually travel through Acton to reach it.* When they finally make camp in Acton, they dispatch some scouts to the (fictitious) Acton Armory and climb a hill with a commanding view of Boston (which, if you could actually see from Acton, would look much farther away than it does in the show).

It's true that for the vast majority of viewers, these things didn't matter at all. Everybody knows that Hollywood takes liberties and that it's impossible to get all of the details exactly right. But the inconsistencies pulled me out of the story. And they would have been so easy to avoid if the screenwriters had just consulted a map.

What has all this got to do with presentations? Well, if your presentations include "facts" that you haven't checked, or if you make claims or include information that is later proved to be inaccurate or false, you will lose credibility. People will ignore your message, preferring instead to wait for your next mistake. They might even let you get to the end of your presentation before telling you that you are wrong. Worse, they'll say nothing to you but Tweet, blog, and email all their friends and colleagues about what a dope you are. Is that your message?

Make sure you have all your facts straight for every presentation. That one time you stretch the truth or include information you haven't verified, there's bound to be someone in the audience who'll know you're wrong.

What is the number-one PowerPoint annoyance?

If you think that a core dump and recitation of your entire store of knowledge on a particular subject makes for a captivating PowerPoint presentation, think again. According to a survey conducted by renowned PowerPoint expert Dave Paradi, a whopping 73.8% of the 603 respondents chose "The speaker read the slides to us" as the number-one most annoying thing that can happen at a presentation.

There's a time and a place for reading things verbatim to an audience. As a matter of fact, I'll be doing it all the time as a volunteer in my son's Kindergarten classroom, where my audience will be learning to pair my vocalizations with those squiggly marks on the page. But when you do this to an audience of people who already know how to read, such as college students, seminar attendees, or the prospects you're trying to win over, you are communicating very well. But you're probably not sending the messages you think you are.

Here's what you're telling your audience by reading off of your slides during your presentation:

- **I have no idea what I'm talking about.** People will be able to tell if you're doing a cold read off your slides, and they'll conclude that you not only have no knowledge of your subject but you're unprepared.
- **I don't value your time.** In *Galaxy Quest*, a sci-fi comedy about a TV show much like *Star Trek*, Computer Officer Tawny Madison's only job is to repeat what the computer says to the rest of the crew. At one point in the movie she yells that she knows her job is stupid, but it's the only thing she does on the ship and she's gonna keep on doing it. Similarly, if you aren't improving the presentation experience then why are you in front of your audience? Why not save everyone's time and just email the presentation to everybody? Oh, and by the way, create it in Word so at least you'll have a little more control over formatting, page flow, and layout.
- **I don't have a compelling story.** Some of the best presenters don't use PowerPoint at all. *(Yeah, I know: "GASP!")* But if you have a great story and are animated when you tell it, then you sure don't need to read it to your audience. Memorize the fundamentals and then improvise each time you present, changing little details here and there but basically sticking to the script. Your knowledge and passion for the subject will stay with the audience a lot longer than ten bullet points per slide ever could.
- **I need to use my deck as the handout.** No you don't. Your presentation is the teaser, the invitation to your audience to learn more. When they need more information, you can direct them to your Web site, send them documentation (professionally designed, of course), or schedule a one-on-one meeting.
- **No, my boss said I have to use the deck as the handout.** What, your boss hasn't seen a TED talk? Ok, then put all your information into the Speaker Notes and distribute that. Then tell your boss to stop hassling you and let you do your job as a stunning presenter.

So stop reading and start communicating!

Read the interview with Dave Paradi on the Indezine blog to discover the other top four biggest PowerPoint annoyances.

Clever image a real distraction during Webinar

© 2005 WIRED Magazine

Take a look at this image. It's part of a series run in WIRED magazine called "Artifacts from the Future." Every month they feature an imagined everyday object from the future that solves some sort of problem we're having today. It's the first thing I look at every time I get that magazine in the mail (#ImSoOldFashioned) because it's clever, funny, and a great demonstration of what you can do in Photoshop.

What does this image have to do with PowerPoint? Well, last week I attended a Webinar called "Stop Presenting! Start Succeeding – How to Create Webinars That Engage." It was really good and I leaned quite a bit. But this image appeared in the deck, and that's when my attention started to waver. Pretty ironic, huh?

The presenter included it in reference to something completely unrelated to WIRED Magazine, futurists, humor, or Photoshop. He didn't credit the photo or talk about it much at all, which got me thinking, "Where have I seen that before?" Then I clicked away from the Webinar, did a search for "future Huggies," and came up with this image, along with a collection of all of the "Artifacts From the Future" for 2005. So I spent a little time poking around that page until I realized that I was missing the Webinar. Oops.

One of the big problems with Webinars is distraction. People Tweet, check their email, and surf online while attending. There's always lots to do online, so presenters need to engage their listeners and give them a reason to focus. If you give people a mystery to figure out, such as "Where did this cool Photoshopped diaper come from?" then your audience is off and running.

Main takeaways?

- Don't use uncredited images in your presentations.
- Images unrelated to your content are a distraction.
- Images that are funny, mysterious, clever, and otherwise fascinating are a **_huge_** distraction.
- If you really must use such images, spend a few seconds explaining what they are, where you got them, and why they're relevant to the conversation so that your audience doesn't go walkabout during your presentation.

Are you presenting for yourself or your audience?

Mary Nell McCorquodale is a management consultant with decades of experience presenting to savvy audiences, from C-level professionals to top brass in the US Military. As a young presenter, she learned very quickly that if you stick to your own agenda without finding out what your audience wants then it will be impossible to get your message across.

Early in her career, the company that Mary Nell was working for—a multinational technology and consulting firm—offered a weeklong training program for their clients. She was conducting a workshop on Day Three of the program, and was made aware of a major problem the minute she got started. It turns out that by the time they reached her session, the executives were pretty fed up. Their perception was that it the whole event was a rah-rah program for the host company, and they told her that if her session was going to be more of the same then they would leave. Suddenly, Mary Nell's entire presentation as she had practiced it was worthless.

What would you have done, faced with a hostile audience that didn't want to hear what you'd prepared? Well, rather than just pack up and leave, Mary Nell asked them to tell her exactly what they wanted to learn about her company's products and what they hoped to get out of the session. She wrote everything down then called a recess so that she could retool her presentation to be able to address all of her audience's concerns. When they returned, she delivered a very effective presentation with which her audience was extremely satisfied.

Over the years, she's added another useful item to her presentation toolbox: the BLUF line. This acronym stands for Bottom Line Up Front, and it's the way you tell your audience—within the first five minutes—how what you're talking about will benefit them. It is also an opportunity to edit your presentation on the fly.

For example, if the first half of your presentation is about how to bake a cake and you find out that you're in front of a roomful of pastry chefs, if you deliver your BLUF line early on you will realize that you should skip that part. Otherwise you will bore your audience by telling them something they already know.

Reading a room and adapting on the fly isn't easy, especially if you have prepared extensively for your presentation, but it gets easier with practice. Communication is a two-way street, so you must listen to your audience to make sure you're sharing information that has value to them.

Should my logo be on each PowerPoint slide? No.

Now, I know you're probably thinking along one of these lines:

"We paid a lot of money for that logo, and I want people to see it!"

"I'm reinforcing my company's brand by showing my logo on each slide."

"That's the way our template was designed."

I would counter that if you start and end strongly during your presentation, with a good title slide that has your logo on it and an ending slide with your logo and contact information, then people aren't going to suddenly forget that they're at the XYZ Company presentation during slides 2-48.

Branding has many aspects; logos are just a part of it. A company's brand identity comes across in the designs they choose, the typography, the style of photographs and/or illustrations, the color palette, the type of messaging they employ (e.g., playful, serious, trustworthy, irreverent), their jingle, uniforms or clothing color, etc. etc. etc. These things come into play in all components of a company's marketing mix, including the PowerPoint presentations.

Need more convincing? Well, let's think of the logo-on-every-slide deck as a real-life conversation:

"Hello there, I'm Bob Jones of Bob Jones Investments. Thanks for visiting Bob Jones Investments today! I'm Bob Jones of Bob Jones Investments. How can I help you? I'm Bob Jones of Bob Jones Investments. I specialize in retirement planning. I'm Bob Jones of Bob Jones Investments."

You see what I'm getting at here? People don't need a constant reminder of where they are, who you are, why they came there, and what company you're from.

You need more convincing? Well, how about this: your logo's taking up a lot of real estate on the slide, room that could otherwise be used to get your message across.
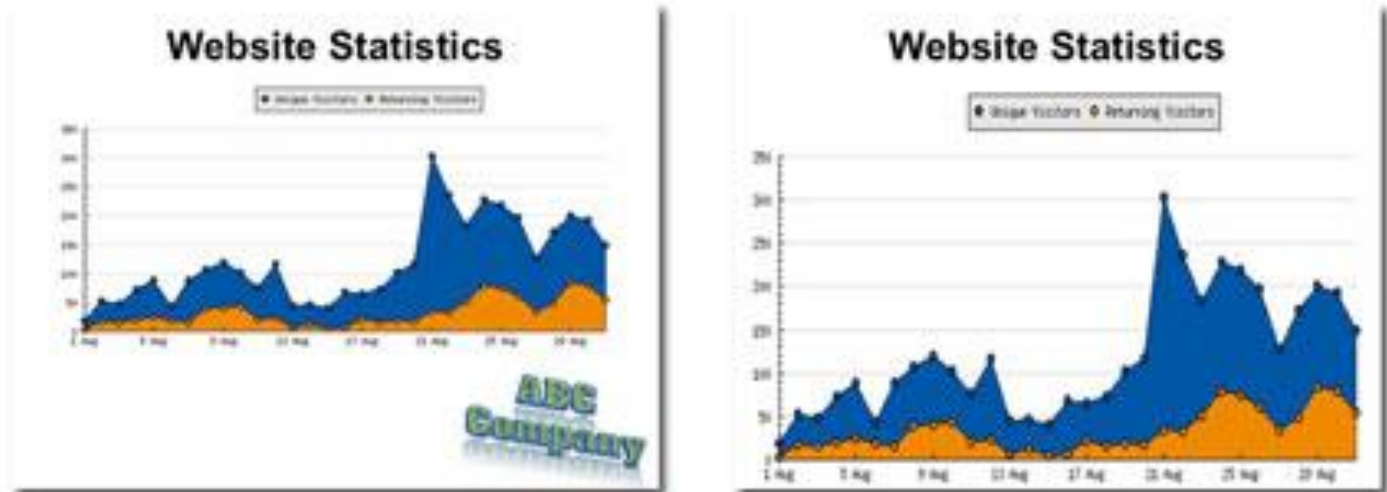
Take a look at the slide on the left. Because the logo is part of the footer and must remain separate from other slide elements, it is taking up about a quarter of the slide! It's competing visually for our attention with the graph because of the clashing colors and all that white space surrounding it.

In the slide on the right, the logo is gone so the graph can be bigger, placing the emphasis on the data.

So, not insulting the intelligence of your audience and having more room for important information on each slide. Pretty compelling reasons not to put your logo on every single slide, eh?

How much text on a slide is too much?

It's surprising how many presenters equate loads of text on a slide with effective information transfer. Some people believe that if they include every last scrap of data on the subject they're presenting that their audience will become as knowledgeable as they are. News flash: it doesn't work.

People do not attend presentations to read, they do so to learn. And you are the teacher.

In Don't Make Me Think, required reading for anybody who deals in information design, Steve Krug writes about the attention span of a typical Web user. It's minimal. People often visit Web sites with a specific purpose in mind: learning more about a product, getting somebody's contact information, and comparing prices, for example. They don't want to mine for information, it needs to be readily available and immediately apparent to the most casual observer. So Web designers must make it easy for people to accomplish these tasks. This book explains how it's done.

The same principle is true for PowerPoint. You have to make your message really obvious to your audience. When you cram tons of text onto a slide you are making people work too hard because instead of listening to you they're reading. The slow readers will be frustrated if you advance the slide too soon and the fast readers will be waiting for you to catch up. Either way, you're shifting focus away from the main reason people have for being in the room: listening to you.

Here are two popular rules for PowerPoint design to get you started on the concept of Less is More.

The Takahashi Method

Invented by Japanese computer programmer Masayoshi Takahashi, this style is characterized by stark white slides with large black text like the slide at the top of this page. There is only room for a few words, so once the audience has read them all of the attention must focus on the presenter. Read Garr Reynold's blog post, Living large: "Takahashi Method" uses king-sized text as a visual, for more information.

The 10/20/30 Rule

Marketing evangelist Guy Kawasaki came up with this formula for making PowerPoint presentations easier for an audience to view.

- 10: The optimal number of slides in a presentation
- 20: The number of minutes your presentation should last
- 30: The minimum point size of text on each slide.

Read Guy Kawasaki's blog post, The 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint for more details.

These rules are not hard-and-fast and there may be some instances where you need to have more than two words on a slide or ten slides in a presentation. But keep them in mind and always strive for simplicity. Your audience will thank you.

Ready, Fire, Aim! The wrong way to design a PowerPoint deck
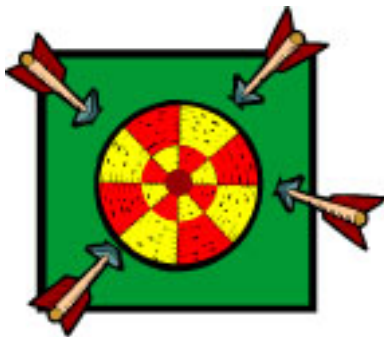
I once got a call from a woman who wanted some PowerPoint advice. She said something along the lines of, "Well, I've finished all the slides, now I need to work on my script." "You fool!" I wanted to shout. "You've done it backwards! Throw it away and start all over again!" Then I pictured myself throwing her laptop across the room, adjusting my beret, and storming out as she gazed in stunned silence at her ruined computer.

Well, imaginary artistic hissy fit aside, I did tell her that she was doing things backwards. Most creative endeavors start with rough drafts and/or sketches. You use these to build a solid idea then work through a number of changes before arriving at a finished product. Think of an artist's sketchbook, a reporter scribbling notes, a photographer taking test shots with a portable phone, or a songwriter noodling around on a piano trying out different melodies.

"What does this have to do with PowerPoint?" you're probably wondering. It has *everything* to do with PowerPoint, because with forethought, planning, and creativity you can make each deck a strong part of your company's marketing mix. If you start from the ground up, you can make decks that do a better job of communicating your messages. If you start with the design first and develop the message afterwards, then to quote Foghorn Leghorn, "You're doin' it all wrong, boy!"

Start with an outline

An outline is a great tool for getting your thoughts in order, organizing them into a logical progression, and exploring ideas. It's how I started every paper I ever wrote for school, and it's how I start all of my PowerPoint presentations to this day. You can create the outline right in PowerPoint, either in the Outline view or right on the slide.

All of what you're trying to say—the facts, your story arc, examples, whatever—goes into the outline. Think of the outline as the core dump of your brain.

Now, a lot of folks do that then say "Done!", slap their laptops shut, and call it a day. Wrong wrong WRONG!

Now do the visuals

The outline is only the beginning. You don't want to be the schlub who reads bullet point after bullet point to an increasingly bored audience, do you? Of course you don't!

The outline goes into the Speaker Notes so that you can reference it to keep on script, but the slide is where the magic happens. The slide is where you add the photos, graphics, words, video, and charts that support your message.

Use the slide to do what words cannot. Choose images instead of descriptions, videos instead of still photography, graphs instead of tables, brief sentences instead of paragraphs.

And don't forget that you as a presenter will be there to guide your audience along the path of knowledge that you lay out. Whether you are presenting live, using cloud technology like [Brainshark](#), or conducting a webinar, you yourself are a very important part of your presentation. You are there to tell the audience what you want them to know; the PowerPoint deck supports you, not the other way around.

I don't know if that woman took my advice. It must have seemed harsh since she'd spent so much time on the slides by the time she called me. I wish she'd called me at the very beginning so that I could have spared her hours of work. But at least she gave me the idea to write this post so that I could help you!

Slide numbering in PowerPoint is stupid. Discuss.

More often than not, people ask me to include slide numbers on their decks. Maybe it makes them feel like they're accomplishing something if they glance at the screen and see that they're on slide 92, I don't know. But putting slide numbers on your decks is a holdover from the last century and if you do it you should stop immediately! Why? Consider the following:

PowerPoint is not a print medium.

How many times have you watched TV and seen a counter ticking down the minutes until the end of the program? Answer: never. Since PowerPoint is primarily a visual, on-screen medium, calling attention to the passage of time by including sequential slide numbering is pointless. To the audience, PowerPoint presentations are measured in the length of time it takes to deliver them, not the number of slides they contain.

Animations can increase the size of your deck.

It is often easier to break animations across a series of slides so that elements can be edited easily. To the audience it looks exactly the same as if everything's on the same slide…except if the slides are numbered. In this case, slide numbers can be confusing ("How did we start on slide 3 and end up on slide 10? Did I miss something?").

Slide numbering is distracting.

How would you feel if you were at a presentation when suddenly you noticed that the speaker was on slide 110? Would you think "Boy, this presenter sure has a lot of knowledge to impart!" or "Holy cow, 110 slides? How much more of this do I have to endure?" By numbering slides, you bring your audience out of the moment and give them an opportunity to speculate on how many slides they've seen and how many are yet to come. Don't distract your audience(Squirrel!); allow them to focus on the most important part of your presentation: you.

PowerPoint already keeps track of slide numbering.

All slides in a PowerPoint deck are numbered in the Outline, Slide Sorter, and Notes views. So my clients can tell me "Please change the image on slide 5″ and I know exactly where to go in the document.

So if slide numbering detracts from visual, kinetic storytelling, makes it look as though the audience might have missed something, is distracting, and doesn't help during editing, why do it?

Yeah, your kid's cute. Now what?

Let my mom redesign your deck!

Earlier this month I attended a seminar where I was exposed to many presenters and their various presentation styles. One presenter barely referred to his PowerPoint slides at all, instead relying on his dynamic personality and evangelical delivery style to get his message across. Most were seasoned presenters whose slides really supported their messages. Others, less used to public speaking, got off to a shaky start and improved as they went on.

A presenter who made an impression on me was a man who seemed a little nervous at first (understandable, since there had to be more than a hundred people in the room). To break the ice, he talked about how if he could do inbound marketing, so could anybody. Then he cued a short video of his kids enthusiastically yelling "You can do it, Daddy!" After the video the room was silent for a moment, then the presenter picked up where he'd left off.

The effect on me of the presenter's video was to publicize and focus on his own nervousness at presenting to a crowd. It was intended to provide a light moment, but actually it was a little awkward. Did we really need to see an affirmation?

Now, don't get me wrong; I love kids. They're fun, playful, cute, and full of surprises. Heck, I even made two so I could have 'em around to play with. But I have never understood why people use their own kids to advertise their businesses. From radio spots with a little boy squeaking "My daddy can make your old car look like new!" to a picture of an adorable little girl in a print ad for a product that has nothing at all to do with children, people seem to think that if a kid pitches the product then people will absolutely buy it. Instead, it seems like a transparent ploy to attract people's attention and get them on their side.

My advice is that unless your presentation has something to do with kids, or you've got a kid cameo in your deck that proves a point, then you should leave the young 'uns at home.

Great PowerPoint presentations start with the words

I recently got a call from a woman—let's call her Sally—who sought my help to create a PowerPoint presentation as part of her senior thesis. Sally's biggest stumbling block was finding images to represent the topic of her presentation, the challenges of teaching English to non-native speakers quickly and effectively at Lackland Air Force Base. "Other people are doing presentations on topics that have lots of graphics that go along with them," she lamented. "But my subject is language learning. What kind of graphic goes with that?" Sally was desperate to find the ideal images to go into her presentation because she knew she'd be just one of dozens of presenters that day. Each student would be given ten minutes to present and ten minutes to answer questions, and she believed that the right pictures would make her presentation stand apart from the rest.

I asked her if she'd ever looked at the TED website. "It's required viewing for my class," she responded. So at least she knew that a great presentation starts out with a great message. I recommended to her that she start by writing her script, and that the ideas for images would come after she had decided on what she wanted to say.

That's when inspiration hit me. "You don't happen to speak a foreign language, do you?"

"Yeah," she answered, "French, Spanish, and Farsi."

Bingo. I recommended that she start her presentation by telling the audience, in Farsi, that she was about to say something that wasn't true but which was needed to prove a point. She should continue by announcing that there was some sort of emergency going on nearby and that they had to quickly follow her orders to stay safe. She should get more and more agitated as people failed to respond or if they asked her what she was talking about. I told her that she should let the audience wonder what she was saying for a moment or two longer, then she should translate what she'd just said and introduce her main message: In a military setting it is essential that everyone under a chain of command clearly understands orders. A lack of understanding is problematic, and can even be deadly. Since the audience will just have experienced this, they will be eager to learn more.

Sally's main problem was in trying to make her topic conform to her preconceived notion of what a PowerPoint presentation should look like. But for effective communication, it's more important first to define the message, then to design a PowerPoint deck that supports it.

You Can't Taste PowerPoint

 Some people are so hung up on PowerPoint for giving presentations that they forget that in the olden days before thumb drives, projectors, and laptops there was such a thing as an engaging public speaker. I often reference the PowerPoint Gettysburg Address as a shining example of how PowerPoint can often bring down even the most brilliant speech. PowerPoint is meant to be a tool that helps to elevate a presentation; it should never be used as the entire presentation.

Mike Consol is a California-based coach who specializes in helping professionals to become better communicators. His recent blog post, Adding the "Touch Factor" to Your PowerPoint Presentation, addresses moving away from strictly PowerPoint-based presentations and engaging the senses. For example, for a presentation about a durable and comfortable new fabric that is going to enhance the clothing industry, the presenter should put a swatch of the material in audience members' hands so that they can feel it for themselves.

The head of sales at The Country Hen, a Central Massachusetts egg farm, takes a similar approach on sales calls to potential distributors. Rather than rely on a PowerPoint deck that extolls the virtues of his organically farmed, Omega 3-rich eggs, he lets the product sell itself. During the meeting, he takes out a portable cookstove, frying pan, and a case of eggs and starts cooking. He hands a plate of scrambled eggs to each person in the meeting so that everyone can see, smell, touch, and (most importantly) taste the eggs. After everyone has eaten, he closes the sale.

It's easy to slip into bad habits, communicating your entire message with a PowerPoint slide deck. But if you want your presentations to have more impact, a little extra effort can yield memorable results.

How to be a crappy presenter

Sometimes it seems like people go out of their way to be terrible at giving presentations. It's almost as if they follow these ten steps to being awful:

1. Show up at the last minute.

To ensure that your audience realizes from the start that you are a crappy presenter, you should make it a point to arrive at your speaking engagement at most five minutes before go time. This will enable you to run around in a panic, determine which of the several thumb drives you keep jumbled around in your pocket is the one with your presentation on it, and open your deck in the Normal view.

2. Don't give yourself any time to mingle with the attendees before your presentation.

Another benefit of a last-minute arrival is that you can keep your attention focused on the computer the whole time and that you don't have to waste any time hob-nobbing with all of those scary strangers in the room.

3. Awkwardly fumble with the mouse to get your presentation into Slide Show view.

By all means don't memorize the fact that pressing the F5 key automatically starts your presentation from the beginning in Slide Show view. Instead, click random places on the screen until a helpful audience member shouts out the instructions. This helps the audience to feel smart.

4. Read your presentation to the audience, making sure your full attention is focused on the screen.

Audiences absorb information so much better if they are read to and shouldn't have the needless distraction of having to make eye contact with you.

5. Stick to the script.

Never allow an audience to distract you with questions, no matter how pertinent to the presentation they may seem. It's just a trick that people like to play on presenters to mess them up by making them lose their places while they're reading off of slides.

6. Avoid using any pictures on your slides

Pictures are distracting so only use text, the more, the better.

7. If you really must use pictures, make sure to use several different styles of clipart.

You want to make your presentation interesting, right? Then use a variety of clipart styles, from line drawings to Web 2.0-type graphics to animated GIFs. Sometimes it can be good to mix things up a little bit. Keeps the audience on its toes.

8. Don't waste your time practicing.

Practicing's for suckers who don't put the full text of their presentation on the screen. The smart money's on learning as you go along with the audience. That's how you keep your presentation fresh!

9. Don't include any calls to action in your presentation.

Any whats to what? Exactly.

10. Be a clock watcher!

If you've been scheduled for a 20-minute gig, make sure your bag is packed by 19:59 and you're out the door at 20:00 on the dot. Anybody who wants to ask questions about what you just talked about are free to look up the answers on your company website. That's what it's for, right?

Don't follow any of these instructions

Does what you've just read seem like advice followed by any presenters you've seen?

Please, folks, if you want to be a great presenter, do the exact opposite of everything I've written here. If you follow these instructions you'll end up alienating, insulting, and angering your audience! Give yourself the time you need to practice, to meet with members of your audience, and to engage with the people you're speaking with. You'll see improved results from your presentations and your audience will appreciate your efforts.

Why PowerPoint colors are important

Color is a huge part of design and communication, but it's often ignored by people banging out PowerPoint presentations at the last minute. This can be a big mistake for several reasons.

Colors are part of your brand.

A company's brand is much more than just a logo; colors play a large part in reinforcing corporate identity. Consider the following example:

Here's a Redbox kiosk that is on the sidewalk in front of a Central Massachusetts supermarket. It's a red box, get it? Redbox. This kiosk is an obvious extension of their brand because their signature color is red.

Now let's look at picture of another Redbox kiosk, this one located in a Walmart:

Hey, what just happened? Everything is blue now except for the little bump on top. It's still a Redbox kiosk, but it's not red anymore. Why not? Here's a hint:

Red is the color of Walmart's arch-rival, Target. Walmart doesn't want anything in their stores that remind their customers of the competition, so they require Redbox to put a differently colored kiosk in their stores. And Walmart is such a huge, influential retailer that the folks over at Redbox were only too happy to comply in exchange for kiosk placement.

How does this relate to PowerPoint? Well, if your company has spent loads of money on branding then your logo and corporate palette (what we fancy designers call the colors a company uses in its marketing materials) should be applied to all marketing communications, including PowerPoint decks. That's because brands are built on the principle that all of a company's marketing communications look like they came from the same place. They all use the same logo, design style, and colors. When PowerPoint presentations deviate from the standard it erodes a company's brand by not being part of this combination. They look different, unprofessional, last-minute.

Build your brand by sticking to the company colors in your PowerPoint decks.

The wrong colors make slides illegible

This is an easy-to-read slide:
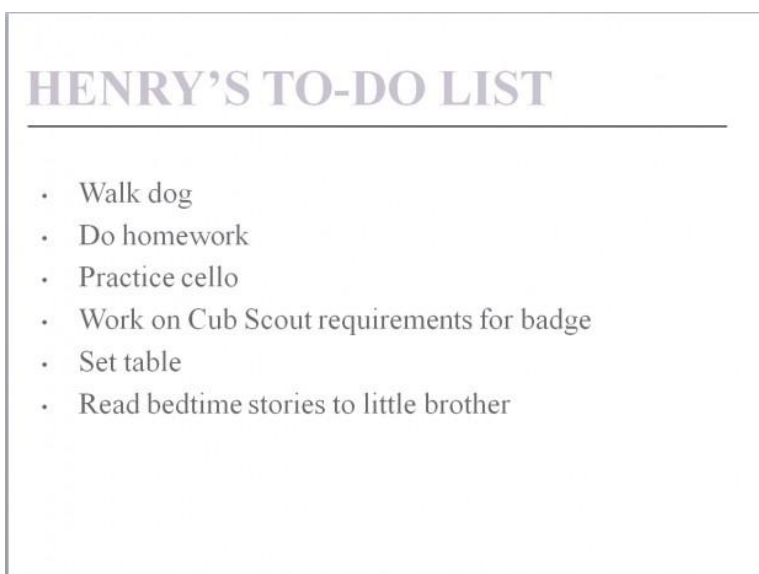
Gorgeous, right? But at least you can read it, and that's because the grey text really stands out against the white background. This is what you'd call high-contrast text. Here's the same slide with a different background:

The text is the same color as before, but the new background makes it very hard to read the text. This is low-contrast text and it's a problem that comes up again and again with PowerPoint. Make sure that the colors you choose for your slides are high contrast so that people will actually be able to read your slides.

Some colors are distracting.

Colors can be heavily associated with other things, making your slides unnecessarily distracting. What do you think your audience will make of this slide?

They won't be concentrating on the amount of widgets sold, they'll be thinking about Santa Claus and mistletoe, because red and green are Christmas colors. These colors bring a whole new meaning to the slide that is completely different from the desired message.

Here's another slide with a distracting use of color:
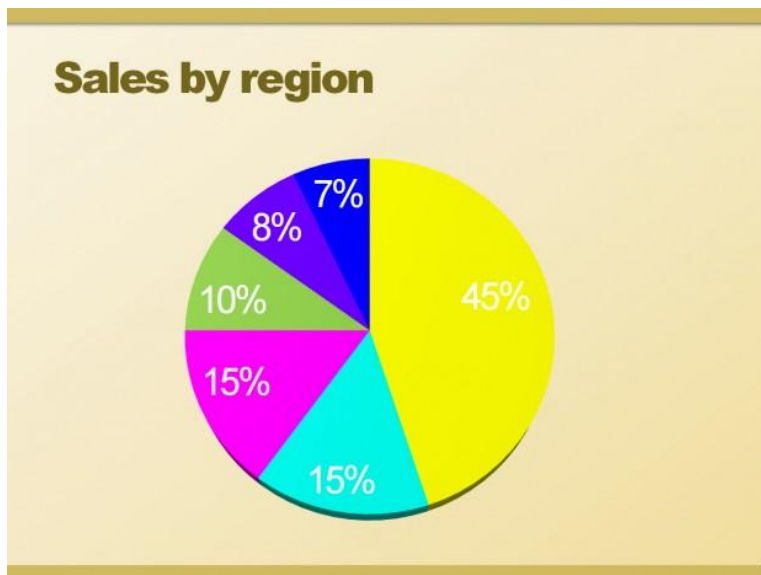
Sweet Mother of Mercy, what's going on here? The colors look like they've escaped from the circus and they don't go at all with the background colors. What's more, there's not enough contrast in the white number against the yellow wedge, making it almost impossible to read.

The bottom line

For PowerPoint presentations that reinforce your company brand the best way to go is to use a customized PowerPoint theme. If you already have a one, use only the colors that come standard with that theme. Don't go all maverick and decide that your colors are better because you'll dilute your brand and create unnecessary distractions for your audience. If you need a custom theme, then talk to me about designing one for you. Or you can create your own theme using colors that work with the background that you've chosen, that are easy to read against your background, and that look good with your logo.

Why does PowerPoint suck?

It's easy to hate PowerPoint because it's so awful, right? I mean, how many ugly presentations should you have to sit through in your life? Don't people know that PowerPoint saps your will and makes you into a drooling zombie? It's just terrible and it should be outlawed. PowerPoint sucks!

I can't tell you how many Tweets I've read about boring professors reading presentations word for word to their students, professional training PowerPoint sessions that send employees crawling up the walls, and dread about upcoming "Death by PowerPoint" presentations people are about to endure.

Yes, PowerPoint sucks. Or does it?

PowerPoint itself doesn't suck. Claiming that it does is like blaming the hammer when a carpentry project goes wrong, or throwing the pots and pans away because they made you cook a terrible dinner. Maligning the tools is the easy way out. Learning how to use them properly is the tough part.

What makes people say that PowerPoint sucks?

Too much stuff on slides

If there's too much text on a slide, overly complicated graphs and tables, and confusing diagrams, guess what? The audience spends most of its time trying to figure out what's happening on-screen and not paying attention to the presenter.

Reading slides word for word

A presenter who does this hasn't memorized his lecture and isn't ready to be in front of an audience. It demonstrates that he doesn't place a high regard on his audience's time, that he believes that they have nothing better to do than to sit and listen to him at Story Time. It can also imply a lack of knowledge about the subject.

Ugly slides

How many of us have seen a pie chart done up in circus colors? Pixellated images stolen from websites? Yellow or rainbow-colored backgrounds? "Humorous" clip art that has nothing to do with the subject at hand? When the slides are ugly they're distracting.

Bullet point after bullet point after bullet point

When I was in school, a layout that consisted of brief sentence fragments and nested bullet points was called an "outline" and it was what you created at the very beginning of a project, not the end result to be handed in for grading. An outline is the framework of the presentation, not the presentation itself. Audiences should *never* be subjected to nested bullet points.

Core dump

The truth is that audience members don't need every last little detail about your subject matter. Sometimes it's because they don't need to know, often it's because they don't want to. If you put every scrap of information about your subject into your presentation, then you will make your audience glaze over while they suffer from information overload.

Distracting animation

Some of the animation effects available in PowerPoint are just plain stupid. "Boomerang"? Come on. Sometimes people use animation as a substitute for thoughtful layout and editing. Unless you're trying to deliberately create a distraction on-screen, don't think that adding animation will always enliven an otherwise boring slide.

Presentation design is more than sitting down the night before your big meeting, typing a stream of consciousness manifesto that you hope will land you that sale, teach your students, or get people to visit your website. It requires deliberate planning, good storytelling, and some effort at good design.

"That's easy for you to say; you went to art school."

If you're not a professional graphic designer, that's OK. There are loads of easy-to-learn techniques you can use to create better slides.

- My Slide Makeover series shows you how to transform boring, ugly slides into effective ones.
- Free PowerPoint tutorials take you step-by-step through the process of creating great slides.
- Indezine.com is a fantastic resource for free tutorials, themes, and graphics.

You want PowerPoint to stop sucking? Do something about it—create great presentations.

How do you show bad news in PowerPoint?

Sometimes it's necessary to tell your audience something that's not so great. Most presenters really don't want to be the Bad Guy, but it's important that their audiences have all the facts about what's going on, whether it's an underperforming fund, a bad quarter, negative ratings, or flagging sales. If people don't know what's wrong, it's hard to develop a plan to fix the problem.

But you don't want the whole presentation to be a downer, so you need to temper the bad news with some good news:

"Yes, sales are down 4% this quarter, but we have hired a sales mentor who is working with our team to bring their numbers back up."

"We received some negative feedback on Twitter about our widget, so we contacted every unsatisfied customer and fixed their problems."

"Fund X did not perform to expectations, so we are diversifying our holdings."

You should address bad news but you don't have to lead with it. Here's what I mean.

I recently met with a medical product client who showed me his "Pitch Deck," the presentation he gives to venture capital firms and other groups when he seeks funding for his company. One slide showed a table that compared their company's product against similar products being developed by two competitors. My client had a lot of great things going for him:

- His company already had products in the marketplace
- These products were making money
- They had big-name partners

This product also had a slight problem: it causes a medical condition in 85% of its users.

The slide looked a bit like this (The data have been changed to protect proprietary information.):

I asked him about it, and he said that it is a common side effect for this kind of medication and that it is easily treated during outpatient surgery with great results. So the story he's trying to tell is Great News, Great News, Great News, No Big Deal. But when I look at this table as a member of the audience might, I see this story: Great News, Great News, Great News, ***Slam-on-the-Brakes Major Problem!!!***

While it's important for investors to have all the facts, it's crazy to present the data in a table that doesn't stress the positive and provides any relief for the negative.

Here's how I would redesign this slide:

This slide focuses on the positive by including a well-known partner logo, making the yearly profits stand out with large type, and showing the product name, which has been trademarked and is on the market. The first panel is green, which implies "go" and "cash," and the competitors' panels are drab by comparison. Look at how they lag behind! Who wouldn't want to fund this guy?

But it would be unethical to withhold the bad news, so here it is:

Here, I've emphasized the fact that the side effect won't kill patients and can be corrected fairly easily. The presenter would discuss the side effect and its treatment in greater detail when he's in front of the audience.

How be a better presenter by manipulating data

There are ways to show data to make them more compelling and there are ways to use data to put an audience to sleep. Unfortunately, since it's much easier to present data as a bullet-pointed outline or a table, many presenters opt for the latter. In PowerPoint as in life, the easy route is often not the best one.

Data visualization is the art of creating graphics that convey statistical information in a clear, informative way. But it's not always necessary to be an infographic designer to get the point of data across. Sometimes it can be done simply with type and photographs.

Let's start out with some statistics. This table is the result of a study conducted in 2012 by the National College Athletic Association on the probability of high school athletes being drafted by professional teams.

Probability of competing in athletics beyond high school

	Men's Basketball	Women's Basketball	Football	Baseball	Men's Ice Hockey	Men's Soccer
High School	535,289	435,885	1,095,993	474,219	35,732	411,757
High School - Senior	152,940	124,539	313,141	135,491	10,209	117,645
NCAA	17,890	16,134	69,643	31,999	3,891	22,987
NCAA - Freshman	5,111	4,610	19,898	9,143	1,112	6,568
NCAA - Senior	3,976	3,585	15,476	7,111	865	5,108
NCAA - Drafted	51	31	253	693	10	37
High School to NCAA	**3.3%**	**3.7%**	**6.4%**	**6.7%**	**10.9%**	**5.6%**
NCAA to Pro	**1.3%**	**0.9%**	**1.6%**	**9.7%**	**1.2%**	**0.7%**
High School to Pro	**0.03%**	**0.02%**	**0.08%**	**0.51%**	**0.10%**	**0.03%**
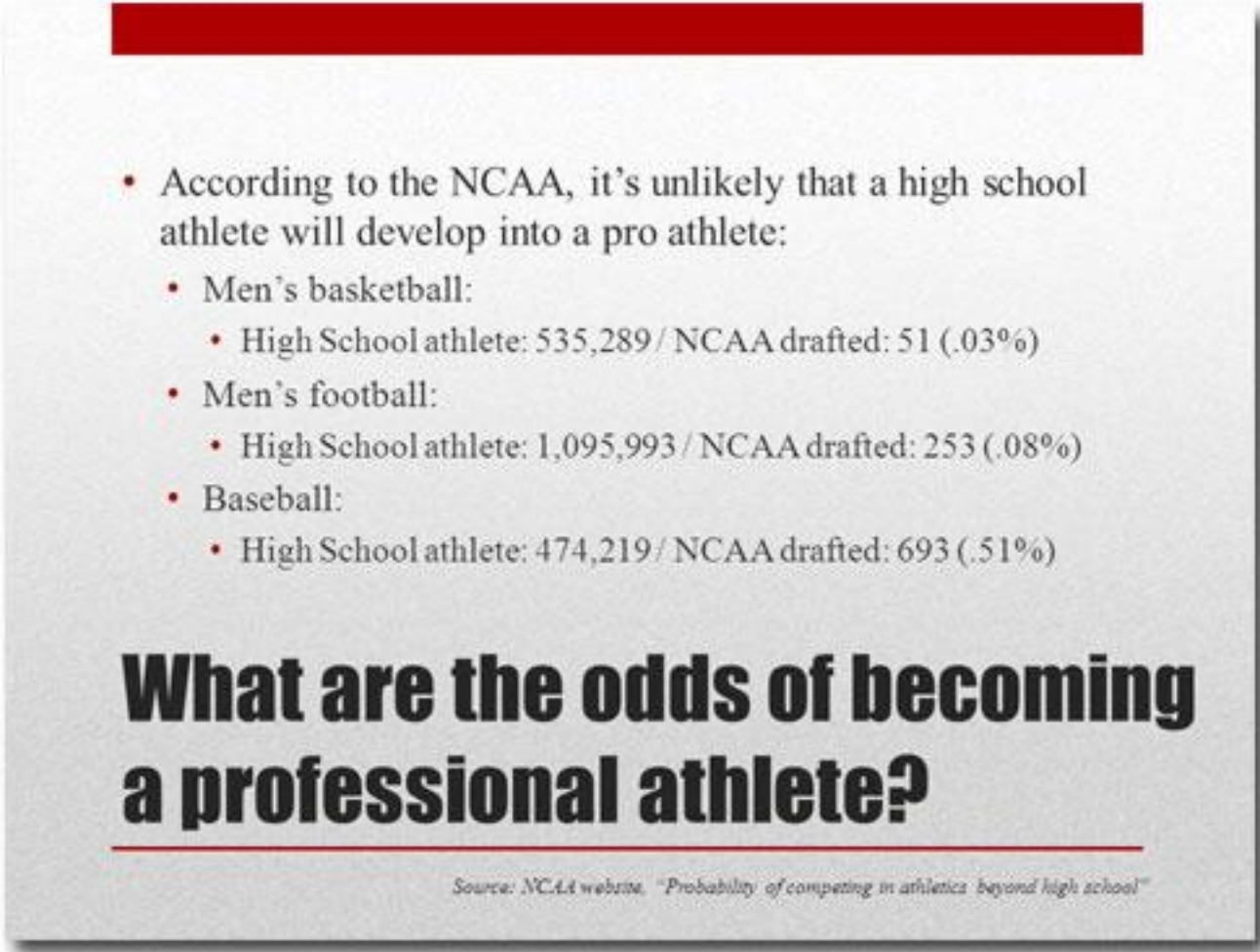
Source: NCAA website http://bit.ly/R8ryzI

If you take the time to read the entire table, you'll see that the chances are slim that high school athletes will make the pros. But as presenters, we don't want to make our audiences read tables to draw their own conclusions. It is our job to present the data in such a way as to make them meaningful.

Let's see how two presenters might tackle the problem. I've asked them to highlight the data for men's basketball, football, and baseball.

Presenter #1

"A lot of high school athletes are dedicated to their sports, hoping that one day they'll make the pros and earn a big salary. But the odds are against it. According to a recent NCAA study, here's the reality:

"As you can see, chances are that a high-school athlete won't be able to make a career out of his sport as an adult."

Presenter #2

"A lot of high school athletes are dedicated to their sports, hoping that one day they'll make the pros and earn a big salary. But the odds are against it. This year, a study was done by the NCAA about exactly what percentage of high school athletes actually make it to the pros.
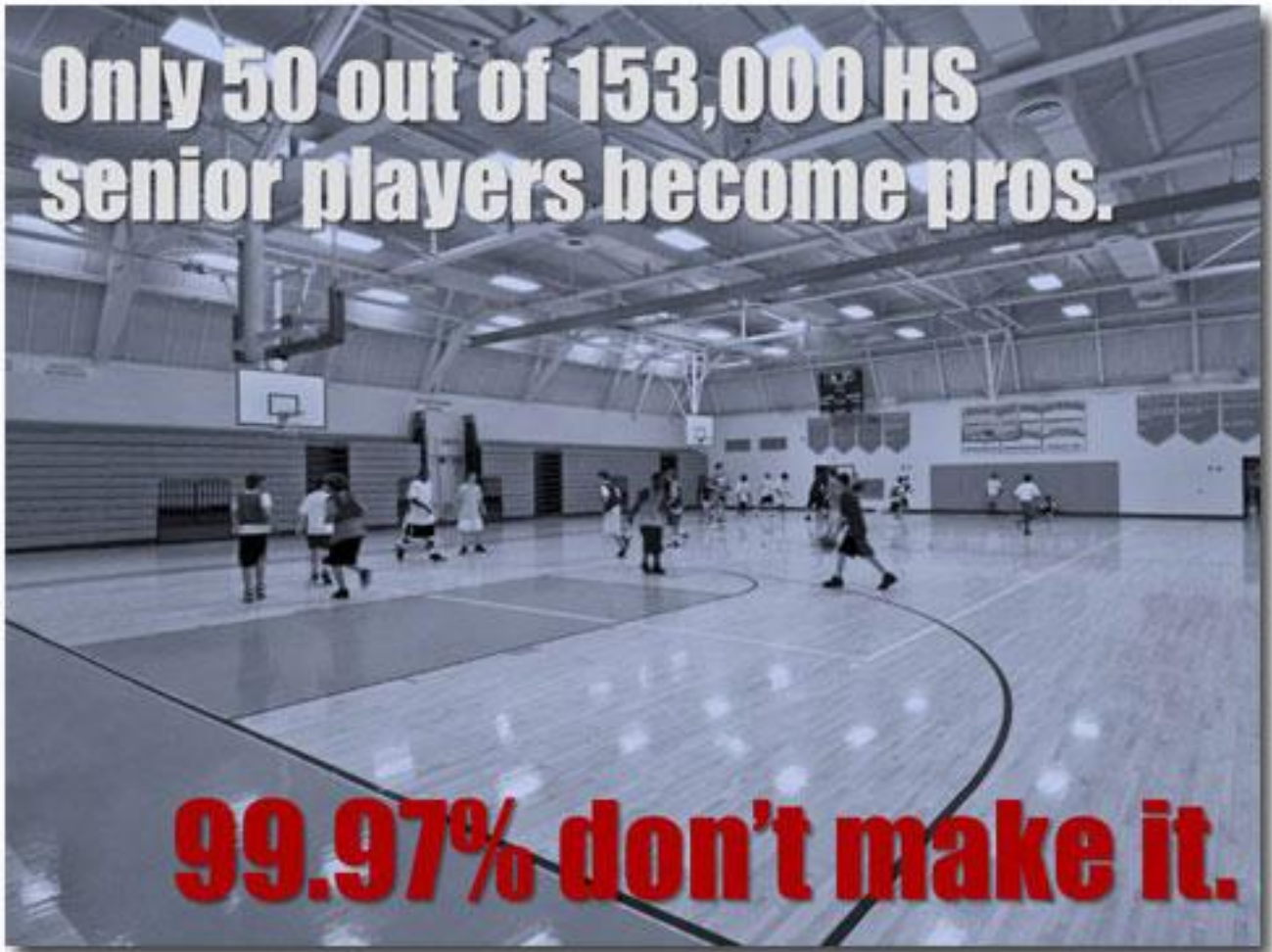
"Out of close to 153,000 basketball players who are seniors in high school, 50 will make the pros. That's only zero point three percent! Ninety-nine point nine seven percent don't make pro.

"The chances that a high school football player will become a professional athlete are marginally better. Out of about 313,000 high school senior football players, slightly over 250 will be drafted by the pros. That's zero point eight percent of the high school number, meaning that ninety-nine point nine two percent don't make it.

Only 700 out of 135,500 HS senior players become pros.

99.5% don't make it.

"If the kid's a baseball player, his chance increases to a whopping one half of one percent. Out of about 135,500 kids, almost 700 of them will become pro ball players and ninety-nine point five percent of them will not."

Why Presenter #2 does a better job

Both presenters started out with the same data, but the two approaches are very different. Presenter #1 has lifted the data straight out of the table and has put it into the dreaded bullet point format *(*shudder*).* He leaves it to the audience to read the data rather than talking about them. This is a very passive approach and does little to capture the audience's attention.

Here's what makes Presenter #2 more successful than Presenter #1:

- The numbers on Presenter #2's slides are slightly different; he has rounded the numbers up or down and has used the word "about" to describe them in his script. He felt comfortable doing this because these changes are statistically insignificant.
- He has broken a single slide up into three individual slides, each focusing on a different sport.
- He's used photographs of young athletes to illustrate the concept of "high school athletes."

- Instead of focusing on the numbers of people who do make it to the pros (e.g., .03%) he has highlighted the percentage that doesn't (e.g., 99.97%) and has put this number in bold red text. Because the point of the presentation is that the majority of high school athletes fail to make the pros, it makes more sense to show the data this way.
- The red text contrasts very well with the photographs of high school athletes doing their best at sports.
- What he says is much more lively than what Presenter #1 says.

If you want people to care about data, you have to give them a reason. Simply presenting them in a table or as bullet points isn't going to liven up your audience. You have to do that yourself.

How to steal from Steve Jobs and make millions of dollars

"Good artists copy, great artists steal."
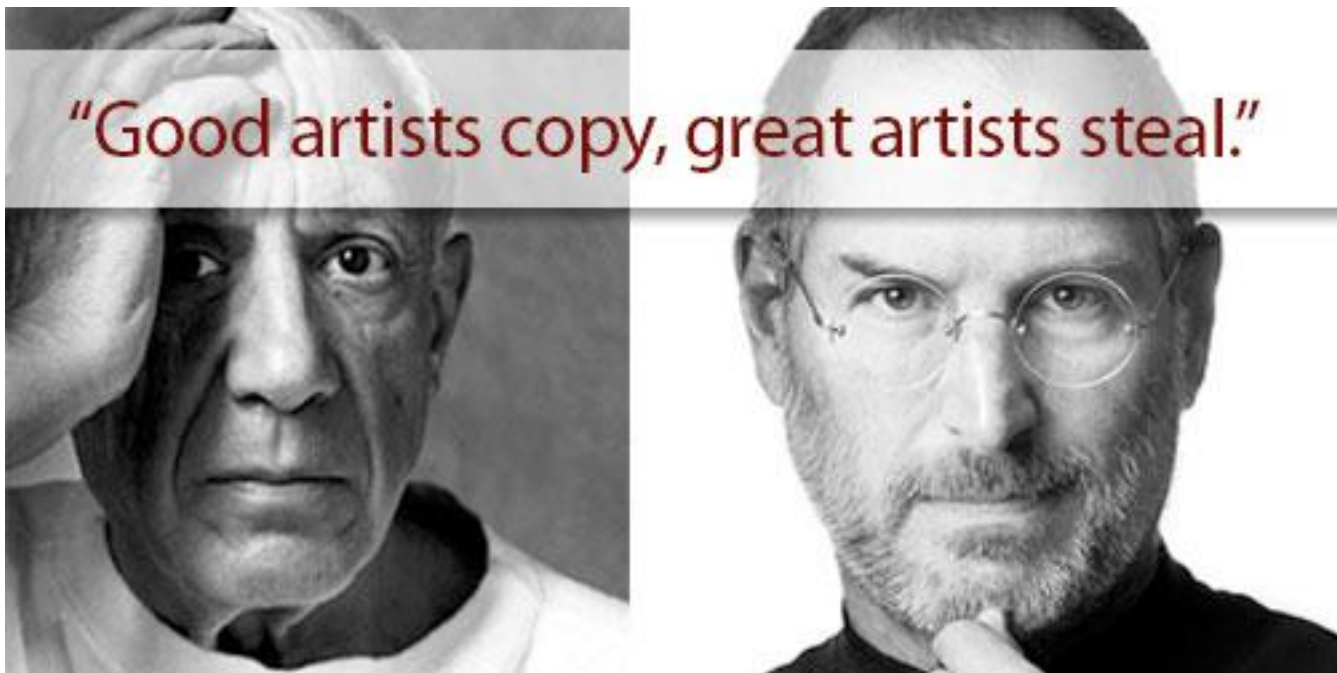
When Steve Jobs returned to Apple in 1997, the company was unfocused and sliding into bankruptcy. It had close to 300 products, none of which was doing exceptionally well in the marketplace. You could pick up Apple shares for about $22 back then.

Jobs streamlined Apple's product offerings to just ten in order to be able to focus on making these ten products great. A string of hits came shortly afterward: the turquoise-and-clear iMac, which broke the tradition that computers had to come in beige cases; the iPod, which revolutionized the recording industry and the way people listen to music; the iPhone, which quickly sent competitors scrambling to catch up with the technology; and the iPad, a lightweight tablet computer so simple to use a child can operate it yet powerful enough to be used extensively for business. Apple's now trading at about $643.

Another thing revolutionized by Jobs was the keynote presentation. He turned keynotes into theatre.

In a 1994 interview, Jobs quoted Pablo Picasso, who famously said "Good artists copy, great artists steal." He wasn't speaking about stealing intellectual property or infringing on patents; rather, he was referring to blending ideas from various disciplines such as the arts, science, and music and combining them in innovative ways to achieve something new. He brought this style of thinking to developing new technologies and to the way he announced Apple's new products.

A recent blog by Carmine Gallos peaks about a small business owner who has landed millions of dollars worth of contracts because he adopted the presentation style of Steve Jobs. Or stole the presentation style, whichever you prefer.

According to Mr. Gallo, Joe Mosed of Equature—a company that manufactures technology to record 911 emergency calls—was on a flight to pitch his product to a new client. He had a typical PowerPoint deck with him that he was going to use. You know the kind: text-heavy, overly technical, boring. Fortunately for Mr. Mosed, he was reading Gallo's book, *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs*. Long story short, he trashed the original presentation, created and rehearsed a new one, and landed that job and many others.

Jobs developed a knack for public speaking in his later years, adopting a theatricality and style that became world famous. But his way of framing his messages wasn't new. In fact, he addressed the Marketing 101 question that's on every consumer's mind: What's in it for me?

During his keynote presentation in 2001 at the launch of the iPod, Jobs could have shown the technical specifications on a series of boring slides. Instead, he focused on the *benefits* of the iPod: its tiny size, light weight, ease of use, and data capacity. His phrase "1,000 songs in your pocket" summarized these benefits beautifully and immediately explained why the iPod was a better choice for portable music.

This was the lesson that Mr. Mosed gleaned from the book. He changed the focus of his presentation from *how* his product worked to the *benefits* it provides: Simplicity. Reliability. Speed. This became a tagline that summarizes why his product works well in emergency situations, when every second counts.

The main objective of a pitch presentation is to get the prospect excited about your message, to want to find out more. That's when you hit them with the technical specs, the costs, the nuts-and-bolts details. Don't bore the crap out of them with highly technical, complicated, and wordy slides! Steal Steve Jobs's presentation secrets. After all, that's what he would've done.

How to royally screw up a PowerPoint presentation

In August 2012, I conducted a contest exclusively for Design Dispatch readers to find all the flubs made by Joe Fumbler during his presentation, and reader Robbie Kularski came up with eighteen mistakes! Thankfully, this presentation never really took place, but mistakes like these are perpetrated by bad presenters all the time.

Read on and see if you recognize any of these gaffes.

Transcript of Joe Fumbler's Presentation

"Hi, welcome to my presentation. Let me just get these slides up…wait a minute…OK there. Whoops, now let me get out of Normal View here and just get into Slide Show mode. There we go! Now, could somebody hit the lights so we could get started? Great!

> *Very unprofessional opening. These people are not your friends in a living room. Presentation not cued. Not prepared with lighting. (Editor's Note: Ideally, you want the room dim enough to clearly see your presentation while having enough light for attendees to take notes.)*

"So, let me start by saying thank you very much for having me here. I know you're really going to like what I have to say! Let's take a look at the Agenda slide here on the screen and read with me a minute as I go over with you what I'm going to talk about during the presentation."

> *Reading Agenda slide word for word*

"Now let me tell you a little bit about myself." [Talks for ten minutes]

> *Talking too long about himself. Booooorrrrring!*

"Well, that's my background. Now let's see what else we have here…oh yeah! Here's a picture of our office, and our office mascot, Barky. Barky is waiting for your order! Heh, heh."

Office mascot? Who cares? Rotten joke about Barky

[Awkward silence]

"Now, you're probably wondering why you should buy widgets from me and not Acme Company down the street. Well, there's a good answer for that. We've been in business for 50 years and our engineers have been working around the clock, pulling in lots of overtime, to perfect this widget. So we *really* know what we're doing."

Nobody cares if you know what you're doing or how long you've been in business. What is important to the audience is themselves and their agenda.

Mentioning his chief competitor, Acme, might not be such a great idea. (Editor's Note: It would be if Joe could clearly differentiate his company from the competition on something other than price.)

"Wait, I'll answer all of your questions at the end of the presentation. Thank you."

Answer the question! And during his introduction he might have mentioned that there will be a question and answer period at the end of the presentation. Don't tell your audience what to do; they don't like that.

"Anyway, our experience makes us the best choice because we know our stuff."

Opening sentences with words like "anyway" shows a lack of professionalism and practice.

"Let me show you this table that compares the performance of our widget against the competition's. As you can see in row 10, column 12, the bottom line is that our widgets are better. Plain and simple."

A table with 10 rows and 12 columns, as you've kindly pointed out more than once, is much too big.

"Again, we're your best choice for widgets because we've got the most experience."

"Again" comes the part of the presentation telling the audience that having the most experience is the chief reason they should choose his product. (Could be they are a little more than interested in price or service.) (Editor's Note: Focus on service as a differentiator, not price. When you devolve into a pricing war you lose the advantages you might offer based on your experience.)

"Excuse me? What's our experience in your industry? Well, I'd asked you to hold all questions until the end, but I can tell you that our experience is with a lot of industries and we find that we're able to use what we know for pretty much any customer."

Once more, Joe chastises the person who asks a question—bad! And he doesn't answer the question. (Editor's Note: He's offering a one-size-fits-all solution and not bothering to customize his presentation for that particular audience's industry.)

"OK, moving right along. Oh. That's the end. Any questions?"

Joe didn't realize he'd reached the end of the presentation because he didn't practice.

[Pause for audience member's question.]

"I don't know that we do that. Any other questions? No? Good, because I have a plane to catch. Thanks very much for your attention, and I hope we'll be hearing from you real soon."

[Joe quickly gathers his things and bolts out the door.]

"I don't know" is not an acceptable answer. (Editor's Note: Here's a better one: "That's an excellent question! I'm afraid I don't know the answer to that one, but I'll call the office during the break to see if someone there can help us out with that. If your question requires more research, then I will be happy to get back to you as soon as I can.")

"I have a plane to catch" = "You, the audience, are inconveniencing me. Besides, I'm far too busy to care about you." FA CRYIN' OUT LOUD, It isn't going to kill him to miss his plane in order to help out a prospective customer in any way he can. Again, poor planning. By the way, did our Mr. Joe ever tell the audience his name? I hope not.

You are not the focus of your PowerPoint presentation
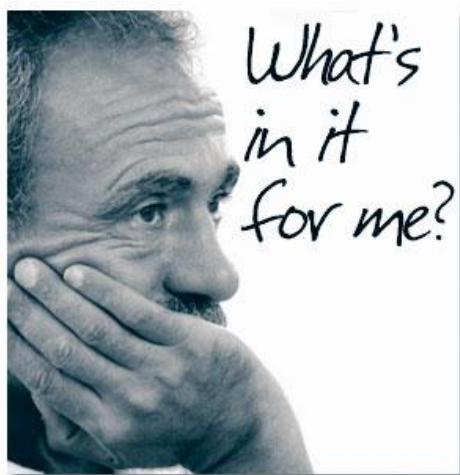
The other day, a friend of mine wanted my advice on pricing the redesign of her client's pitch deck, the initial presentation shown to a prospect to get hired. When I opened the presentation, my jaw literally dropped because it was an 11-page résumé in 16-point type sandwiched between a title slide and a closing slide. And the closing slide didn't even have any contact information.

My friend's client seems to believe something similar to the *Field of Dreams* maxim: "If you build it, they will come." In his case it was "If I tell people how great my company is, they will hire us." But this is a terrible approach.

When you focus entirely on your own qualifications, education, and achievements you're not necessarily demonstrating your worth. Instead, you're bombarding your audience with data about how great you are while ignoring issues they may be facing. The focus has to be on the audience and address the big question that's on everyone's mind: "What's in it for me?"

In marketing we speak of "client pains"—problems the client has—and how to solve them. The best marketing addresses these pains directly ("Are you tired of paying too much for cable?" "Been in an accident?" "You could save over $475 on car insurance!"). It can be even more effective if you're able to reveal pains the client didn't know he had which could cause problems later on. By providing solutions to these pains, the savvy marketer positions himself as the only logical choice for the client. Addressing and solving client pains is client-centric, not egocentric, which is what great marketing should be. What's in it for me? You could save money, increase efficiency, live longer, be happier, lower your risk, etc. etc. etc.

To be fair, the client approached my friend because he recognized that his deck was unattractive. And as everybody knows, admitting you have a problem is the first step to overcoming it. But redesigning this deck would've been like putting lipstick on a pig because it was entirely presenter-focused.

What can help for this type of presentation when you're trying to get someone to hire you based on your credentials?

Client testimonials

Ask satisfied clients to described how you helped them to save money, finish a task in record time, avoid red tape, etc. Would they rehire you? If so, quote them on it!

Highlight benefits of certifications

If you're certified or trained in a particular specialty, how does that save your client money? Ensure the success of the project? Prevent rework?

Photos of completed projects

A picture's worth a thousand words.

Success stories

You don't need full-blown case studies, just some anecdotes about how you helped your clients to solve their problems.

Relevant companies with whom you've worked

Focus on companies you've worked with that are similar to your audience's.

Remember, the presentation is always about the audience, not about the presenter. Always focusing on the "What's in it for me?" question will help you stay on track to create presentations that really mean something to your audience.

Do you read your PowerPoint slides to the audience? Knock it off!
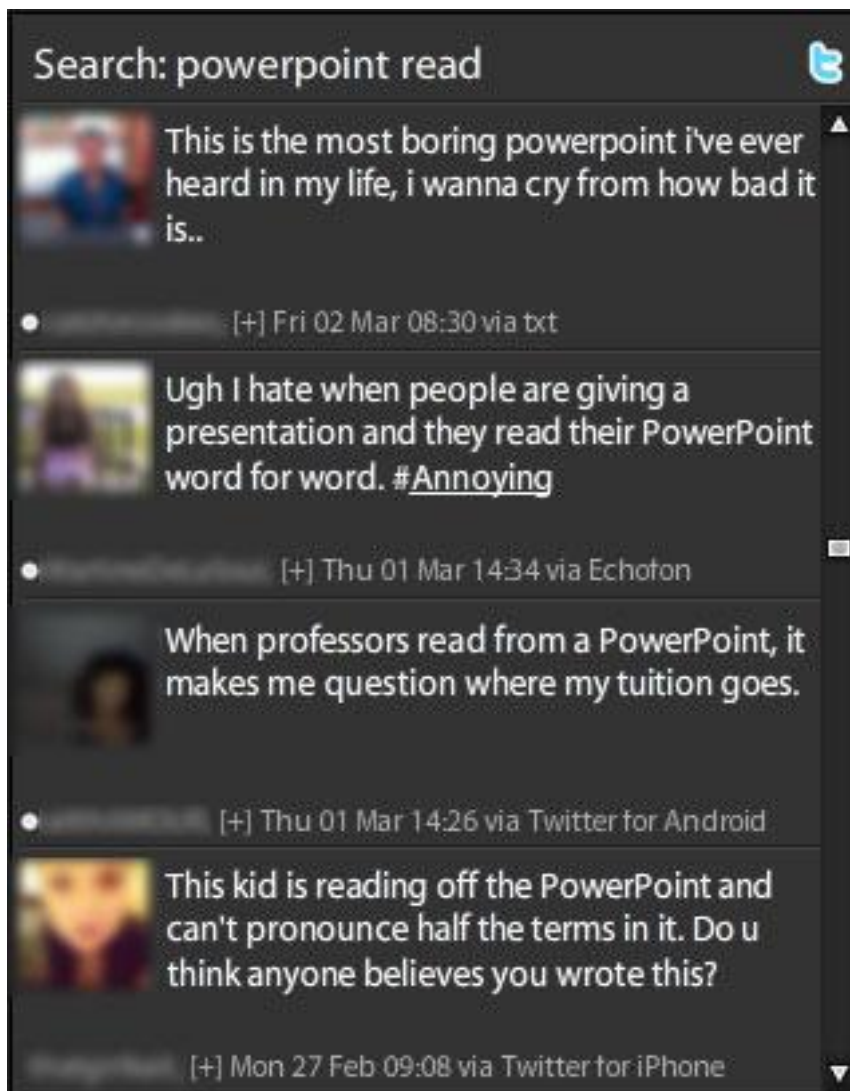
According to a recent survey conducted by PowerPoint designer Dave Paradi, the number-one PowerPoint annoyance is when presenters read their slides to the audience. In fact, "reading from the slides" has been one of the top five most annoying PowerPoint habits since he started conducting this survey in 2003! So why do people continue to do it? It's simple.

Presenters read from their slides because they are unprepared.

Do Broadway stars read from scripts on opening night? Did Steve Jobs have a fistful of index cards at the ready during his legendary Apple keynotes? Of course not. Great presenters know what they're talking about, know their lines, and rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!

If you are guilty of reading to your audience from your slides, stop it right now. Though they might not come right out and say it, inwardly they're seething, counting down the seconds until the end of your presentation, and tweeting snarky comments about #DeathByPowerPoint.

Why you shouldn't read from your slides

If consistent survey results over the past nine years and nasty anti-PowerPoint posts in Twitter don't convince you, here are five more reasons you shouldn't be reading from your deck:

- **You look unprepared.** The only reason to read from a PowerPoint slide is if you don't already know what's on it. If you don't know your subject inside and out, then why are you presenting?
- **You waste people's time.** If everything you want to communicate is on each and every slide, why are you asking people to give up the time it takes to attend your presentation and listen to you read? Wasting people's time costs money—estimate the hourly salary of each attendee in your presentation, add it together, then multiply that amount by how long it takes to read your deck to them. Do the world a favor and if you're gonna stuff all your text into your deck ([which you shouldn't do, by the way](#)), just email it to people. They read the deck on their own time and get your message. Maybe.
- **You waste your own time.** You have a captive audience in the room with you, listening in silence to your every word. Don't blow this golden opportunity to tell your story, to lead people to the conclusions you want them to reach, to add your perspective and insights, and—-most importantly—-to engage with your audience.
- **Your slides look ugly.** PowerPoint is a visual medium. When you cram loads of text onto a slide, it just looks bad.
- You look stupid.

The bottom line is that if all you do is read your slides to the audience, you look like you don't know what you're talking about.

Why you should never send your PowerPoint decks to people who ask for them

How many times have people asked you to send them your deck, either after or (worse) instead of your presentation? On the surface it seems like an OK idea. It requires minimal effort and we don't want to appear rude by saying no. And it's a common enough request, so why not, right?

Don't do it.

The minute you send your deck to someone you lose control of how they experience the presentation.

Presentations aren't about the slides, it's all about the presenter: how she's dressed, the tone of her voice, the excitement she generates, her interaction with the audience. The deck is just a backdrop to the speaker, supporting key messages. Take away the presenter—the most important component of the presentation—and much of the impact is gone.

The presenter's biggest job is to guide the audience through the story so that they arrive at the inevitable conclusion she wants them to reach. That's why presenters use remotes to advance their slides, to control when information is revealed. When you send your deck to someone, all of that timing is lost and the viewer has a number of ways to display your slides, some of which are better than others. All of the suspense and big reveals get lost in the Slide Sorter view.

Animated slides can present problems, too. Complicated animation can make slides look really awful in any view but Slide Show. And viewers might breeze through the animation just to see the effects play out, rather than absorbing your message with the timing you provide during your live presentation.

As a good presentation designer you're putting all your text and bullet points into the Speaker Notes, right? So if you send your presentation out, then the person who receives it has to know enough to look at the Speaker Notes to understand what's going on. And if your slides have a minimalist look that you've spent a lot of time to achieve, it will all be ignored when the viewer decides it's easier to simply read your notes.

Then there's the fact that PowerPoint files are source documents which means that they are editable. What if someone decided to use your deck as the basis of one of their own?

Early in his speaking career, Brandon Dunlap of [Brightfly](#), a Seattle-based computer security consultancy, was asked by the organizers of a conference to send them the PowerPoint file of his presentation.

"I was just starting out, and I didn't know any better, so I did it," says Brandon. "Turns out the conference organizers put everyone's presentations on USB sticks, which were given to all the attendees."

The following year Brandon presented at the same conference. He was approached by one of the previous year's attendees and was dumbstruck when that man told him, "I gotta thank you, man! I got your presentation at the last conference, and it was great! I've been using it all year, you know, spreading your message."

"Now when people ask me to provide my deck I give them PDF files of the Slide View," reports Brandon. "Since my decks are just a backdrop to what I'm saying, they don't have a lot of text and bullet points. All that's in the Speaker Notes, so my deck can't be presented by anybody else and I maintain control of the message."

All of this sounding good? Still want to send out your presentations?

When somebody asks you to send them your deck, what they're really saying is, "I want to view your presentation when it's convenient for me." The good news is that there are several ways you can create a presentation that not only can be viewed anytime and anyplace, but which can be created in such a way that you control how your message is delivered. And isn't that why we present in the first place?

PowerPoint Resources

Where can I get free photos for PowerPoint?

Boring PowerPoint's for chumps, and by now we all know that photographs can really elevate a presentation. What they can also elevate are your expenses, because royalty-free photographs can run into some money depending on how many you include.

Some people think that images they find online are free because they are, well, online. This is wrong, and in many cases it is a breach of copyright law to use photos you find online without paying for them. Unless you are given explicit permission, whether it is granted to you in writing or if you have purchased a license, you shouldn't use photographs you've found on the Internet in your presentation. You have to dig deeper than a simple Google image search.

This doesn't mean there are no free images available to you. On the contrary, there are many ways to get free photographs for your PowerPoint presentations or for personal use that won't land you in Copyright Court.

- MorgueFile is a "public image archive by creatives for creatives" that offers thousands of free images.
- Stock.xchng has a robust search engine and the ability to create lightboxes (collections of photos) which you can share with others.
- Wikimedia Commons is a vast collection of photographs, many of which are in the public domain. This means that the copyright has expired and you can use the photos freely. Other images are offered under the Creative Commons license, which means that you must "attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor." This is usually as simple as putting the phrase "Image © 2012 Joe Smith via Wikimedia Commons" on or near the image in your presentation. Scroll down the screen to determine what the copyright situation is for each image you find.
- Use your own pictures. How many of us have a smartphone that can take pictures? OK, you can put your hands down; I can't see you anyway. If your smartphone takes high-resolution photos then why not use some of these in your presentations? Or you could use your digital camera for better resolution. Images of clouds, grass, city streets, traffic signs, and any number of subjects are just a click away. And you can submit your own photos to MorgueFile or Stock.xchng if you want to share the wealth.

One big caveat

You knew that the other shoe had to drop sometime, right?

Photographs of people require special consideration. If it's impossible to tell who the people are, such as in a blurred image of a crowd, a hand holding an object, or a foot kicking a ball, then you don't have to worry. But photographs of identifiable people require a [model release](#)—written permission from the subject of the photograph to use the image for commercial purposes (e.g., your PowerPoint presentation). You can get into legal trouble for using a person's photograph without their explicit permission, especially if your use implies their endorsement of your product or idea.

Stock photography companies take care of obtaining model releases, but there's not much governance on the free photo sites. If you're using your own photographs, the same rule applies: get a model release or don't use pictures of identifiable people.

Where can I find music?

Adding music to PowerPoint presentations can be a great idea. Just as soundtracks help to set the mood in films, music can help to set the right tone(heh)for your PowerPoint presentations. Music, like pictures, has a universal language all its own, enabling an audience to react to what you're saying without you having to spell it out for them. ("I'm playing sad music right now so you should feel sad when I am presenting from this slide.")

Whether you include brief musical snippets or continuous tunes, music can be a great way to get your point across during your presentations. Here's how you might use music in a PowerPoint presentation and where you can get music files for free.

Stings

A "sting" is a brief musical phrase used to punctuate a scene in order to set the mood: tense, dramatic, frenzied, funny, etc. For example, imagine you're talking about your company's sales projections versus actual sales for the past couple of years. You go through the historical data when suddenly… [DUM DUM DAAAAAAAAAHHHH](#)! sales weren't so good this year. On the other hand, maybe sales were fantastic and a musical " [Ta daaaaaa!](#)" accompanies the happy news. Or how about using a [rimshot](#)for a corny joke?

Stings aren't often used during presentations, so if you sprinkle them in here and there they can perk up your audience.

Beds

A "bed" is music that plays at low volume while you speak. It can play continuously throughout the presentation or be used as an "intro" or "outro," meaning that it plays briefly during the introduction of your presentation and again at the end of it. While it's common to use beds in prerecorded PowerPoint presentations such as Brainsharks and YouTube videos, they can be very distracting during a live presentation.

Beds reinforce a company's brand when they are derived from a corporate jingle. If you don't have a corporate jingle, then you can use the same music for every prerecorded presentation you make so that the melody becomes associated with you. As an example, you can click on any one of my [Cheating Death by PowerPoint Brainsharks](#)and hear that I use the same music in all of them.

Music beds should always be instrumentals because otherwise the sung lyrics interfere with the voiceover.

Background music

Sometimes as a presenter you want to remain silent while your audience views your slides. Maybe you are showing a series of photographs or you want them to read something. At this point, rather than have the room be dead quiet it might help to include some background music, especially if you're trying to set a mood. A great example of this in action is the "In Memorium" segment of the Academy Awards, where they present a slide show of the notable actors who have passed away the previous year accompanied by a singer or prerecorded music.

I'm convinced. Now where do I get free music?

Well, I'm glad you asked. It turns out that there are loads of places where you can download free, non-copyrighted music.

PowerPoint Clip Art

Wait a minute…clip art? Yes! If you go to the Insert tab and select clip art, then click on the "Selected media file types" area you'll see that there's more than just crummy drawings in the clip art library!
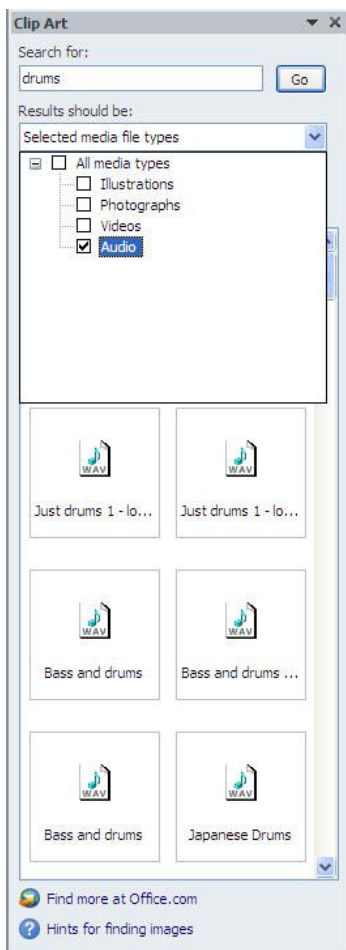
Notice at the bottom of the window you can click on "Find more at Office.com" where they have a wealth of audio resources, all available for you to use in your presentations.

Free online resources

- [Free Music Archive](#)
- [FreeStockMusic.com](#)
- [NoiseForFun.com](#)
- [Soundbible.com](#)

Now that you know how to use tunes in your presentations and where to find them for free, your next lecture should be music to your audience's ears.

Next Steps

Getting in touch with Laura

I hope that you find this book helpful and that the information it contains helps you to Cheat Death by PowerPoint.

If you need some help bringing your PowerPoint to the next level or if you'd like to receive PowerPoint training for yourself or your group I'd love to hear from you!

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Free Tutorials

Cheating Death by PowerPoint: Analyze and Synthesize
In this video I teach you how to get rid of excess text on your slides, making it easier for your audience to focus on you and your message.

Cheating Death by PowerPoint: Animation
This video demonstrates how animation can boost the effectiveness of your slides.

Cheating Death by PowerPoint: Graphs as Infographics
Off-the-shelf PowerPoint graphs can be a real bore. When you customize PowerPoint graphs you make it easier for the audience to follow along as you describe them.

Click here for more videos in the Cheating Death by PowerPoint series.

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