

From Death by PowerPoint To Life by PowerPoint

with the Tell 'n' ShowSM method

Ellen Finkelstein

President, Ellen Finkelstein, Inc.

<http://www.tellnshow.com>

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Table of Contents

About the Author:	Page 4
About the Designer:	Page 5
Comments from Experts:	Page 6
Executive Summary:	Page 7
What is Death by PowerPoint?:	Page 8
Death by Content:	Page 9
Death by Design:	Page 12
Death by Delivery:	Page 15
General Comments:	Page 18
Life by PowerPoint:	Page 22
Life by Content:	Page 23
Life by Design:	Page 30
Life by Delivery:	Page 34
Takeaway Points:	Page 38
Where To Go From Here:	Page 39
Help others improve their presentations!:	Page 40
Invitation:	Page 41

About the Author

Ellen Finkelstein is a recognized expert, speaker, and best-selling author on AutoCAD, PowerPoint, and presenting effectively. Her articles have appeared in numerous magazines, newsletters, and blogs. She is Associate Editor of Inside PowerPoint, published by Eli Journals. Her Web site, <http://www.ellenfinkelstein.com>, offers a large assortment of tips, techniques, tutorials, and articles on these topics.

As a best-selling author, her books have sold over 300,000 copies and been translated into more than 14 languages. Some of her most current books are:

- [101 Tips Every PowerPoint User Should Know](#)
- [101 Advanced Techniques Every PowerPoint User Should Know](#)
- [How to Do Everything with PowerPoint 2007](#)
- [7 Steps to Great Images](#)
- [PowerPoint for Teachers: Dynamic Presentations and Interactive Classroom Projects](#) (with Pavel Samsonov, PhD)

Ellen's articles on PowerPoint have appeared in on Microsoft's website, and in Presentations magazine, Presentation Xpert, Computer Companion, and slide-share.net, among other publications.



About the Designer



This book has been designed and laid out by **Geetesh Bajaj / Indezine.com**

Geetesh has been designing PowerPoint presentations and templates for over a decade now, and heads Indezine, a presentation design studio based out of Hyderabad, India.

Geetesh believes that any PowerPoint presentation is a sum of its elements—these

elements include abstract elements like concept, color, interactivity, and navigation—and also slide elements like shapes, graphics, charts, text, sound, video, and animation. He explains how these elements work together in his best-selling book **Cutting Edge PowerPoint for Dummies**—the book has several five-star ratings on Amazon.com. Geetesh has also authored three other books on PowerPoint 2007.

Geetesh has been awarded the Microsoft MVP (Most Valuable Professional) title for PowerPoint since the last 9 years.

His Indezine.com site attracts nearly two million page views each month and has thousands of free PowerPoint templates and other goodies for visitors to download. Geetesh runs another PowerPoint related site at ppted.com—this site provides designer PowerPoint templates.

Geetesh has authored content for the Microsoft, Presentations.com, Presenters University, TechTrax, Infocomm and other web sites, undertakes training and consultancy for PowerPoint, creates custom PowerPoint presentations and templates and is a featured speaker on presentation technologies. In addition, Geetesh has also been part of the PowerPoint Live conference since its conception and a contributing editor to the erstwhile Presentations magazine for whom he has authored several Creative Techniques columns.

Comments from Experts

“A fine job of identifying and explaining sound principles that can make or break a presentation.”

- **Nancy Duarte**, author of *slide:ology*

“You may realize you need help with your slides, but you don’t know what to do. Ellen tells you what might be wrong with your slides and then she gives you advice on how to fix it. Her ideas are just what you are looking for so you feel fabulous when presenting with your slides!”

- **Claudyne Wilder**, author of *Point, Click & Wow! The Techniques and Habits of Successful Presenters*

“Ellen Finkelstein masterfully defines good PowerPoint presentations not only as a set of visual images, but also the experience an audience has with a speaker. There are so many pitfalls! So many ways you can fail! From slides with dense text and meaningless jargon, to poorly organized, irrelevant information, you’ll learn what doesn’t work-- before you create your next presentation. This is a primer that every business person and expert can use to make a stronger more positive connect with the audience. If your PowerPoint slides are putting people to sleep, read this, and learn.”

- **Suzanne Bates**, author of *Speak Like a CEO, Secrets for Commanding Attention and Getting Results*

“If you’ve ever wondered what people **really** think of your presentations, check out this white paper. It’s filled with candid comments from real people who have experienced “death by PowerPoint” and survived to tell the tale. You also receive tons of real-world tips to help you resurrect your presentations from the grave.”

- **Susan Daffron**, author of *Publishize, Web Business Success*

“A great introductory resource that provides insights and quick reference points to what’s good, and what’s bad, about PowerPoint and what you need to make your presentations successful.”

- **Mark James Normand**, author of the *Presentation Design* blog

Executive Summary

The phrase “Death by PowerPoint” has become increasingly popular. Most people have experienced Death by PowerPoint at some point while attending meetings, conferences, or seminars. The irony is that PowerPoint, which is supposed to make presentations more powerful and effective, can also be a weapon of mass destruction.

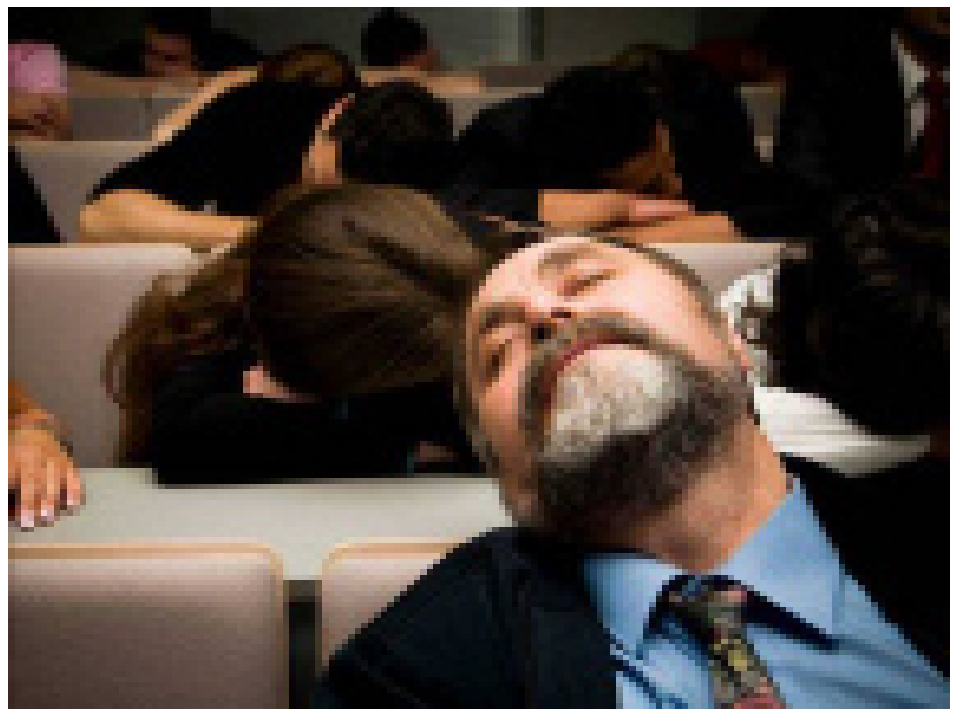
This white paper documents the symptoms of Death by PowerPoint, and, more

importantly, details the cures. There is no one cure, but rather many techniques. The good news is that the techniques are simple; you just need to implement them. When you do so, you turn Death by PowerPoint into Life by PowerPoint.

Research on multimedia learning and brain functioning also provides clues to solutions. The solutions in this white paper are backed up by both experience and research.

We recently conducted a survey, asking respondents to describe actual experiences of Death by PowerPoint. The responses were both funny and sad. Excerpts are quoted in boxed text throughout this white paper.

We start by documenting and defining Death by PowerPoint. The second half of the white paper provides solutions. These solutions explain the Tell ‘n’ ShowSM method.



What is Death by PowerPoint?

Everyone knows instinctively what Death by PowerPoint is because it's a visceral experience. You feel bored, tired, annoyed, frustrated, and even angry.

*Presentation was so bad I kept checking my watch against the clock on the wall to see when I could escape.
Portland, OR*

*These presentations use too much text with NO graphics at all. They are always BORING! Generally, there are way too many slides that all look the same except some have even MORE type than the others in a small, unreadable font. Death would be welcomed by most participants.
NB Atlanta, GA*

How does a presenter create such an unpleasant experience? Certainly, presenters don't want to inflict suffering on their audience. Most would be shocked to read these comments as feedback. What are the components of this experience? By breaking down the problem, we can discover the solution.

*Presenters lose the audience
Presenters lose the audience right from the start with difficult to read slides, small fonts, lousy contrast and turn around to read the slides totally unaware that they are slowly killing the audience who has to endure the duration of such a presentation.
TG, Singapore*

A presentation has three components; we can find the causes of Death by PowerPoint in these areas.

- Content
- Design
- Delivery

Death by Content

The content of a presentation is comprised of its message, data, and conclusion. Obviously, thought should go into writing content that is meaningful, useful, and organized. Yet many presenters don't think about their content at all. Instead, they just use PowerPoint slides to write up a quick outline of bullet points and use the slides as a teleprompter when delivering the presentation.

The content of a presentation is separate from the design of slides or the delivery. For example, you can give a presentation without slides, or even any visual aids, and let the content stand on its own. Another example is a presentation delivered over the Internet, without a live presenter. Therefore, you need to consider the content on its own, before starting to create slides.

Symptoms of death by content are:

- Unclear objective
- Irrelevance to the audience
- Lack of organization
- Lack of supporting data or examples
- Errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, or usage
- Too much content

I'll briefly discuss each symptom and provide examples.

Unclear Objective

How frustrating it is to the audience when they can't figure out the overall message! When a presenter doesn't make clear the objective or purpose, people get confused. This often happens in a presentation with too much detail and data.

*Too many detailed explanations, main point missing!
A.D., France*

Perhaps the presenter never thought about the purpose of the presentation. The audience needs to easily determine the conclusion they should draw from the presentation.

The Accounting content of this regularly scheduled meeting is full of charts with so many trend lines and descriptions that by the end of the 3 hours no one knows for sure what was just stated.

Should the presentation convince, inform, motivate, or elicit feedback from the audience? There are different kinds of talks and presenter needs to ensure that the presentation achieves the goal.

*Unclear purpose.
AC Milan/Italy*

Irrelevance to the Audience

The audience needs to understand, and feel, the relevancy of the content to them. Nothing is more annoying when the presenter seems not to care about the needs of the audience and instead covers only what he or she deems important. For a sales presentation, irrelevance is devastating.

Focusing only on what presenter wants to communicate and not taking into consideration perspective, needs and interests of audience.

*No idea of audience needs TK,
Finland*

*Just plain and simple showing off.
PAR, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic*

Content was irrelevant to the audience and the stated purpose of the meeting.

It's even possible to go further and be insulting to the audience!

*Slides looked nice but did not lead in a logical fashion to the request for the money. Several word slides were repetitive-- including a quote that suggested that anyone who didn't understand this business was an idiot.
BNR Midlothian, VA*

How can the content of a presentation be irrelevant to the audience? Let me count the ways:

- It doesn't address their needs
- It's too technical
- It's too simplistic
- It doesn't contain enough data

Too much text, full sentences, focusing on presenter's needs not audience's.

*Too much text, too much detail on the points and lots of unnecessary background information on the topic and the instructor.
SLP, Montpelier VT*

*Too much text, didn't understand the needs/expectations of the target audience.
Portland, OR*

Overly technical.

Lack of Organization

Once the goal of a presentation is determined, the presenter can include appropriate content and organize it to achieve the goal. A very common error is to start with an overview of the presenter's company, instead of starting with issues that concern the audience. And a clear conclusion is a rare thing indeed.

There were 96 slides for a four hour time period. Every slide was full of bullet points and complete sentences. Organization of material was very confusing.

*Too much wording and not well organized.
CS, Kansas City, MO*

*Slides arranged with no narrative or organisational thread.
PL, United Kingdom*

Lack of supporting data or examples

Presenters often don't take the time to research ways to show the proof of their claims. The audience is not likely to believe such claims.

*Too... few examples of what the results should look like if you do the process correctly.
DB*

Errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and usage

Of course, errors make the presenter look unprofessional. Lots of credibility is lost this way! Not long ago, I attended a presentation in which the presenter used "it's" instead of "its." One error mistake might have been overlooked, but unfortunately the incorrect statement was repeated as a slide title several times. Later, I mentioned the presentation to another attendee as an example of an excellent coverage of the topic. She replied, "Yes, but he used 'it's' incorrectly. That blew it for me."

Mixed languages, mixed style of the slides, typos, examples the presenter couldn't explain

Spelling and grammar errors, does not cite sources. LJ, Baltimore, MD

Too much content

Most presentations are simply too long. Many people think, “I have 30 minutes to speak, so I’ll time my talk for 30 minutes.” They forget about the introduction, set-up time, and a Question & Answer period. In truth, a 30-minute presentation means you should speak for 20 minutes.

Too much content, bad organization, CM, Munich Germany

Speaker had 20 points (in one hour) - all text and bullet points. LH, Houston, TX

People have trouble listening non-stop for more than 15-20 minutes. They start to get tired and bored unless the speaker is riveting. This is probably due to the way modern technology has reduced our attention span to 30-second bytes, but it’s a fact of life these days.

Too many slides PERIOD. Over 200 per day. Too much text per slide. WAY WAY too much text that was overwhelming and impossible to cover in the time allotted. Columbus, OH

Too many bullet points. Unclear overall organization/ presentation of company changes. Speaker was reading from the on screen slides. Many slides were too “technical” for a company-wide meeting (didn’t focus content to meet audience needs). Too long (it was a three hour meeting that could have been summed up into five minutes). Chicago, IL

Often, presenters simply create too many slides and spend too much time on each slide. It’s important to cover the content meaningfully in the time allowed, without rushing.

Some of these comments about text-only slides also relate to design problems, which are covered in the next section. But often the problem simply starts with too much content.

Text only slides. Far too many of them for a 1 hr presentation. Presenter constantly told us that she would normally deliver this material over 4 hours - but she obviously hadn’t produced a reduced version of the talk for us. RM, Dublin, Ireland

Presentation was 246 slides, all full page text. RA Columbus, OH

Too much text, too complicated, too long, too much text on each slide, too many slides, too much information, too little time. SLP, Montpelier VT

Too much small, unreadable data that could have been summarized. EMR, Buffalo, NY

Death by Design

Slides are a visual aid, but they often hurt rather than aid. And sometimes they aren't very visual. Your audience is forced to sit there looking at your slides, so they shouldn't be painful. The main symptoms of this silent killer are:

- All-text slides
- Illegible text
- Silly clip art/inappropriate images
- Illegible charts
- Distracting, ugly background
- Inconsistent graphics
- Poor use of animation

I'll discuss each symptom in brief and provide examples.

There was nothing wrong with the design, THERE SIMPLY WASN'T ANY.
WC, Seattle. WA

All-Text slides

A common complaint by survey respondents was all-text slides. Whether the text is bulleted or full sentences, it's deadly.

Way too much text. All bullet points. It was barbaric.
CU Wall, NJ

Let's have a heart-to-heart talk about bullet points. Bullet points are lists. Since when was a list a good way of organizing the content of a presentation? A talk should lead to a conclusion, not be a bunch of lists.

Full sentences are just as bad, because the presenter is practically forced to read them word for word. Audiences simply read ahead, and tune out the presenter. Why? Because people can't read and listen at the same time.

A few years ago, Dr. Marcel Just, co-director of the Center for Cognitive Brain Imaging at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, published a study that was widely used to justify laws banning people from using cell phones while driving. This was the first study using magnetic resonance images of brain activity to compare what happens in people's heads when they try to do two tasks at a time. The study revealed that brain activity does not double. Instead, the brain activity

devoted to each task decreases. People performing two tasks simultaneously do neither one as well as they do each one alone. Performance always suffers.

The two tasks used in the study were chosen because they use different parts of the brain. Interestingly, the tasks were the following:

- They listened to complex sentences like, "The pyramids were burial places and they are one of the seven wonders of the ancient world," and had to judge them true or false.
- They were shown pairs of three dimensional figures and asked to rotate them mentally to decide whether they were the same.

Does that sound familiar? In a presentation, you are asking your audience to listen to your (probably complex) sentences and judge whether what you're saying makes sense. At the same time, you're asking them to look at a slide, a much more visual task.

Putting the text that the presenter speaks out on the slide divides the listeners' minds by making them attend to the spoken words, and the slide text, both at the same time, or back and forth constantly. What a headache!

Too many people try to limit the number of slides to tell their story. In doing so, they sometimes LOAD so much information on each slide that the audience finds it overwhelming and uninteresting.
TH, Chicago, IL

I was running the slideshow, The presenter had a delivery a little less energetic than Ben Stein. His slides were jam-packed with 10-12 point type in several different colors and fonts. I thought someone had dropped LSD in the coffee pot. Each slide was like a 4-part, 8-hour mini-series.

Sometimes presenters type on the slide, word for word, what they say. This is always unbearable for the audience. They read ahead and then sit and wait for the presenter to catch up. They've already read the content and don't want to hear it again.

Whole speech written out on screen.

People often read their presentation or if you are expected to deliver the data everything is printed on the slide like it is intended to be read. Many presentations don't engage the audience and have nothing to hold their interest.
LH

Research shows (Richard E. Mayer, *Multimedia Learning*) that people learn better when text or narration is accompanied by nearby, meaningful images. Slides with no images are hard for the audience to understand and remember, effectively derailing the best efforts of the presenter.

Slides full of text put the slide between the presenter and the audience. The connection to the audience is lost or interrupted. This impacts on delivery, because the presenter is presenting to the slides, not to the audience.

No images, no charts - even when presenting numerical data that CRIED OUT for a chart, no diagrams. A few text-crammed tables - with major legibility problems again.
RM, Dublin, Ireland

Illegible Text

A major complaint in the survey was that the text was too small to read, or was illegible due to poor contrast with the background. To some extent, this is an issue of content, but it would be easy to divide up the text onto several slides. Therefore, this is also a matter of design.

There was so much text on the slide that it was unreadable. KC, Orlando, FL

Many slides consisted ONLY of small text that was difficult to read.
Columbus, OH

Used a PowerPoint template. It was clear that when the presenter was adding content, PowerPoint had resized text to fit, so text on some slides was too small to read.
Chicago, IL

Illegible text (size 12 font), not enough contrast.
TG, Singapore

Silly Clip Art / Inappropriate Images

Images can be helpful, but they can also be silly, irrelevant (think, logo on every slide), or overwhelming. Images should aid understanding and memory.

They can do this in two ways:

- Illustrate a point
- Elicit emotions (which aids memory and the ability to persuade)

Big logo taking up room on the bottom-right corner of each slide.
RM, Dublin, Ireland

Bartsch and Cobern published research (Computers & Education, 41, 77-86) concluding that PowerPoint slides with irrelevant pictures were detrimental to learning.

Too many clip-art type of pictures - distracting.

Illegible Charts, Diagrams, or Data

Over and over, people complain about charts and diagrams that are so busy or small, that they are incomprehensible. What is the point of including a chart or diagram if the audience can't read it?

WAY TOO MUCH. Horribly busy, a conglomeration of Visio, Word docs embedded on screen, the list goes on.

If an audience can't understand the graphic quickly, it's too complex. Very complex data should be provided in a handout, where people can study it at leisure. A slide doesn't offer that benefit; it's too far away and passes by fairly quickly.

Too small. Spreadsheets made up some slides.
LH

Slide design consisted of textual and graphic material clearly designed originally to appear in Excel and Word, not PowerPoint. Font and graphic sizes too small and detailed to be readable as slide material.
PL, United Kingdom

Charts were too focused on making the company look smart as opposed to educating the viewer.

JF, Phoenix, AZ

Poor Background

Why use a background in PowerPoint? It's not clear that a background is necessary at all, but some people like the colorful look. However, backgrounds become a liability when they're distracting and make the text illegible. Sometimes they take up so much space that there isn't enough room for text or images. Certain backgrounds simply give a poor impression of the presenter because they're unprofessional. Choosing a standard PowerPoint template tells the audience that they're not important enough for a custom background.

Busy background; hard to see writing.

Bradshaw (Journal of Visual Literacy, 23, 41-68) found that students got lower test scores when they viewed slides with interference (pink background, ornate font, transition sounds) compared to when they viewed slides without interference (high-contrast color, easy-to-read text and graphics).

Ugly. Just plain ugly.

Poor template; little useable space; odd font sizes.
NB, Atlanta, GA

Distracting Animation

Animation can be a great boon to presentations, but only when used appropriately. Animation can show growth and development of processes, for example. It can also help people focus on certain text or images. A little lively animation can simply inject a sense of fun or theatricality. But constant movement gives people eye strain and is very distracting from the message.

Dark background, Grey small text, no images at all, and use of animation so silly that it made people motion sick. They all flew in from the right and a gunshot went off with each point!

Horrible and inappropriate animation.
Portland, OR

Too many different transitions. Animations that make you bob and weave, worried about where the next bullet point will come from. Text that expands out until it looks like it will land in your lap.
CP Texas

Death by Delivery

Great content and design can be ruined by poor delivery. On the other hand, great delivery can overcome all sorts of content and design problems. During delivery, the presenter connects to the audience and makes his or her case.

Many people are nervous speaking in front of an audience. Jerry Seinfeld said it best: “According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”

In addition, many people are simply not experienced in public speaking. Whether CEOs, accountants, or scientists, they may be good at their job, but not at speaking. Yet speaking is a crucial skill in many professions. More generally, communication skills are essential for professional success.

George Bernard Shaw said, “The greatest problem of communication is the illusion it has been accomplished.”

Death by delivery comes in several varieties:

- Reading the slides
- No interaction with the audience
- Poor speaking skills
- Lack of practice

Reading the Slides

Presenters tend to read their slides if they consist of all text, especially full sentences. Even bulleted text is read mostly verbatim. As discussed earlier, audiences hate this, and it elicited some of the strongest comments in our survey.

*The presenter read, word for excruciating word, each and every slide. We were disengaged by the second slide.
MRD Columbus, Ohio*

Why do presenters read the slides? Perhaps they don’t know the effect it has on the audience, but mostly because they haven’t practiced. They use the slides as a teleprompter.

*Reading the slides because presenter was not familiar with content.
CS, Kansas City, MO*

*READING!!!!
JF, Phoenix, AZ*

*Speaker droned on and on, looking at and reading from the projected image.
WC, Seattle, WA*

*I think presenters use PowerPoint slides for their own comfort level - not as a communication device for the audience. I have probably been guilty of doing this myself early in my career. I wonder how much modern academia is reinforcing this bad habit. I am working on my masters and have been given assignments that dictate the misuse of PowerPoint. If students consider the text-based communication to be the norm, they will continue the pattern when they get into the workforce. I really despise someone flashing bulleted lists and then reading the lists to me. How insulting!
KC, Orlando, Florida*

While presenters might have the slides visible on a laptop, for some reason, they tend to look at the slides on the screen. In this scenario, they often face the screen rather than the audience.

*Presenter read from the slide with their back to the audience.....in a monotone. Couldn't be heard.
SWT, Washington*

*Very typical presentation style where presenter spent most of his time talking to the screen behind him, even though he had a view of his presentation on a laptop in front of him.
EMR, Buffalo, NY*

The result is the slides become the presentation, rather than what the presenter is saying. The audience feels disrespected.

Reading every bullet to the audience and rarely adding any extra information. When he was told by the conference moderator to speed it up he did not. He then went overtime into the next presenter's time slot. I'll never forget it!

Reading slides, no explanation about the graphs and charts, talking in monotone.

This was a slide-u-ment not a presentation. They read to us from the slide. It was horrible.

*Read the slides out word for word. Apologised constantly. Zoomed through material, constantly saying "I'll have to whiz through this, even though it's very important. I'd normally have much longer to deliver this information"
RM, Dublin, Ireland*

No Interaction with the Audience

It should go without saying that the audience is the reason for the presentation. Therefore, the people in the audience should feel as if the presenter is talking to them. They don't want to feel as if they're being ignored. Yet many presenters seem to pay no attention to the audience; they act as if the audience isn't even there!

*People need to address the audience, not the screen behind them! It's all too common. I would guess that 95% of the presentations I've witnessed over the last 5 years feature a speaker with his back to the audience over most of the presentation period. Go ahead and point your laser at the screen to make a point to the audience if necessary, but speak to the audience, and make some eye contact with them once in a while as well.
BMR, Buffalo, NY*

Ignoring the audience while she read her slides!

A presentation should include some interaction with the audience and not be just a one-person show.

*Not enough interaction.
MRD, Columbus, OH*

Poor Speaking Skills

Presenting with PowerPoint has become so common that people have forgotten that public speaking is a skill they need to work on. Many presenters throw some bullets on a slide, and then get up and read them, without any practice.

*Bad word usage: Trying to use BIG words, um, um, um, um, um, aah.
KAG*

*Presenter had the personality of a cardboard box, the topic wasn't exciting to start off with so not at least having a sense of humor made it an extremely long presentation/session.
DB*

Sentences too long; presenter put it all up at once so the audience ended up reading ahead of him, and as some of the content was meant to be a surprise, that spoiled the surprise.

Atlanta, GA

Too much talking, reading from slides, and “ya knows”. Plus there were 2 presenters who were talking over one another. Barbarism.

CU, Wall, NJ

Lack of Practice

It's not possible to deliver a presentation well without practice unless you've done it many times before (in which case, you've practiced). Technical glitches occur; these could be avoided by checking out the equipment in advance. But mostly, the presentation comes across as amateurish.

This presenter didn't make sure ahead of time that her laptop would talk to the PowerPoint projector, and when it didn't, she didn't know how to fix it. Someone in the audience had to come and initialize the equipment so the PowerPoint presentation could be seen. This somewhat threw her off and the rest of the presentation was spent catching up to where she should have started from. Very embarrassing for both presenter and audience.

CS Kansas City, MO

Slides had timing built into them and presenter became disoriented when the slides changed by themselves because of the timing.

Dallas, TX

I provide support for live corporate events. Nowadays people constantly are producing PPT late, like on the plane to an event. Planning time is very short and creates weak presentations.

Dallas, TX

Without practice, the presenter has little idea of how long the presentation will take, which leads to rushing.

Insisting on covering all 20 points; toward the end speaker was rushing to get through.

LH, Houston, TX

There was no planning. The presenter apologized previously for “robbing the audience about one hour of your precious evening time”, and did this for just eighteen minutes - fortunately. At the end, he remembered to introduce himself, went through a long list of academic titles and job positions, and gave his e-mail for any questions that we might have.

ZP, Brasil

General Comments

At the end of the survey, respondents had an opportunity to write a general rant. These comments covered a wide variety of topics, but were often very powerful. They were too good to leave out!

Here are some of the comments that focused mostly on content.

This particular PowerPoint was provided by headquarters and was designed for internal customers and presented to external customers who already think that the government is too complicated and requests too much information and has too much paperwork. This was an hour and a half presentation, no breaks that gives way too much detail for a very complicated program. Presenter read slides and rarely provided out of text information. There was way too much text on way too many slides, font was way too small and even the handouts of the power point presentation were too small to really read. We are trying to rewrite this PowerPoint now and it almost is causing us to scrap the entire presentation and write a new one with fewer slides, more relevant photos and some automation that will keep their attention.
SLP, Montpelier VT

PowerPoint is not evil, but the content wizard sure is! Microsoft sets the de facto standard for presentation style, which has made presentations less than useless in many cases. Once upon a time, people considered what should be in a presentation before they wrote it. Now, all too many people create their outline in the form of bullets, slap on some silly graphics, throw in some animation, print handouts of the slides, and they're done. I think it's important for people to create a slide show using all the annoying features in PowerPoint, really enjoy playing with them and making the most garish thing possible, and then put it aside and make something that is audience-centered rather than easiest or most fun for the presenter.
E.H., St. Paul, MN

Many scientists present their results without thinking how the audience can understand the outcome of their research from the presentation. Many times they do not summarize at the end nor brief what they are going to talk about.
DB

Some comments were mostly about design.

ALWAYS a dark blue background and yellow letters! ALWAYS! He NEVER varies from this color scheme, puts so much overlapping animated text that it is impossible to print it out for reference. He uses PowerPoint for EVERYTHING, even a knowledge document not meant for a projector!

I hate it when too much information is added on a single graph, for example a bar chart with multiple bars per column, data labels, lines, tables and then it's made 3D. It's completely un-readable! Also, unnecessary animations can ruin a slide, Although it's not good when there aren't any animations at all either...
Abdingdon, UK

Too many people use bullet points when a great image or perhaps some other type of graphic would say it so much more clearly and in a more interesting fashion. Too much text is common as is trying to cram some kind of giant table on one slide. Poor quality images; trying to use something off the web that is too small and then enlarging it. Busy backgrounds. Excessive animation or use of sound clips.
Atlanta, GA

The most consistent problem I see is that little consideration is actually given to the design, supporting graphics or presentation. Most presenters seem to take a stock MS design, list a bunch of bullet points that they quote verbatim and throw in some stock MS clip art that probably has little to do with the content.
SW, Durham, NC

I work as a corporate trainer for a law firm. The attorneys are constantly presenting at seminars. I often have to edit their slide presentations. Most presentations are 100 plus slides with nothing but text. I provide training in PowerPoint, some classes specifically in presentation skills. The attorneys do not attend.
RA Columbus, OH

There were comments mostly about delivery.

People who read off the screen behind them and don't add anything to presentation than what is on the screen.
GS Olympia, WA

If the handout consists of nothing more than pictures of the slides, I'd rather get it e-mailed to me as a PDF. That sort of handout is a waste of paper. Charts that go up and to the right don't tell me anything. Give me some of the actual data, preferably on a handout that I can check later.
JJE, State College, PA.

I HATE when presenters give me a copy of the PowerPoint as a hand out for the class, if it is an effective PowerPoint presentation then copies of the PowerPoint will be an ineffective handout. A good handout will be a horrible presentation. I had one instructor give me a handout that was the standard 3 slides per page with the notes lines to the side of each slide. In the presentation most of the slides started out blank and then he used very effective animations to illustrate his points (the topic was the psychology of how people read advertisements). So I got a handout full of empty boxes with notes lines. Not usable at all.

Don't turn toward the screen and read your presentation off the screen - all your audience will see is your back turned towards them.
SG Lincoln, NE

This presentation was given by a "bigwig" in libraries and it stunk to high heaven. It showed that there are great writers in the world who cannot translate that greatness into a live talk. I was sitting in the front row during this presentation and lost interest after 10 minutes. Out of politeness, I stayed in my seat for another 35 before I got so angry I simply walked out and didn't return until after the break. Speaker ran nearly 20 minutes over their 1 hour allotted time. One of the worst presentations I have ever been to - the boredom and frustration in the room was palpable.
LH, Houston

*I object to "Death by PowerPoint" as a summary or slogan of/for the problem. "Death by PowerPoint" makes MS PowerPoint a scapegoat to a much larger corporate problem with communication. People spend far too much time bitching about software, making PowerPoint the focus and the evil thereby removing ownership in the two-way street that is COMMUNICATION. Many fundamental problems with communication stem from lessons NOT learned in the classroom...but that doesn't mean that these lessons are not taught. For blaming the educational system and teachers is just as bad as blaming software. Suck it up people. Admit we are terrible communicators and then WORK, actually work, on better communication. If something (i.e. a method of communication) isn't working, TRY SOMETHING ELSE and abandon the monkey-see-monkey-do (aka lazy) crutch that has become the PowerPoint presentation. Embrace the ever-evolving study of rhetoric instead.
Chicago, IL*

Finally, some comments covered all topics

*The real big problem with presentations is that everybody thinks they know how to use PowerPoint; they know how to use it technically but very bad in terms of design, preparation and delivery. It is like being in a candy store and you want to eat all the candies (use all the features that PowerPoint have and show them all). Not knowing their material and thinking all the time in themselves not in the audience. They produce a "slideshow" which I called "PowerPoint Rollercoaster" with too many ups and down with no purpose. They want to pack all the information in just one slide and then provide animation in all of the objects they place on the slide.
PAR, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic*

*Some other problems I have encountered is the screen is too small for the room. Another big problem is not all fonts are easy to read. Some animation is totally useless and distracting to the presentation. Many presenters only read the slides and have nothing extra to offer. This is really bad if there are handouts with the text. The audience could just take it home and save everybody a lot of time. One problem I have personally had was using a pre-prepared PowerPoint done by the editors of textbooks. These have to be reviewed and re-reviewed for errors because there are many. My face has been red a few times with totally incorrect information and bad spelling. As a nurse educator we stress attention to details and it's not so good when the textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, and the instructors give bad information.
VLD - Riverside, CA*

Presenters expect PPT to be the lead in their presentations instead of the accessory. They expect students to read the PowerPoint as a textbook while they are talking and often speaking away from the PPT subject. In addition, presenters believe that lots of small print and lots of lines can be read and absorbed instantly by everyone. They believe that people in the back of the room can read the small print.

*Death by PowerPoint to me means trying to teach every detail needed for a topic in PowerPoint, overdoing the bells and whistles instead of stressing large points of content, or reading aloud to me from slides with too much information packed into an ugly slide.
DC Alexandria, LA*

Life by PowerPoint

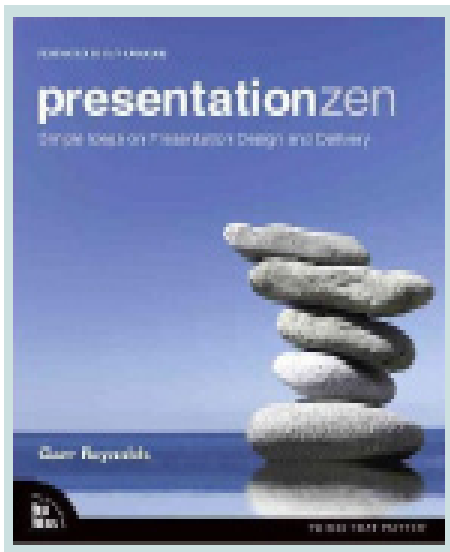
Having read this far, you may be starting to feel uncomfortable, thinking that you have been guilty of death by PowerPoint. You are not alone! However, the solution is not difficult, although it does take some time and attention.

In this section, I provide specific techniques to ensure that you don't commit death by PowerPoint. You'll get better results, your audience will understand more, and even your career will benefit. I call it Life by PowerPoint.

A major feature of Life by PowerPoint is the Tell 'n' ShowSM method. I don't claim to have invented the concept, but the term is mine. What is the Tell 'n' ShowSM method? It just means that you tell your point and then show it. More on that later.

The very first step you should take when you learn that you will be giving a presentation is to plan. Don't immediately open PowerPoint. In "[Create a fast-moving presentation](#)," I explain why planning is so important.

Many experts agree that the most effective planning is not done on the computer. In [presentationzen](#), Garr Reynolds says, "One of the most important things you can do in the initial stage of preparing for your presentation is to get away from your computer."



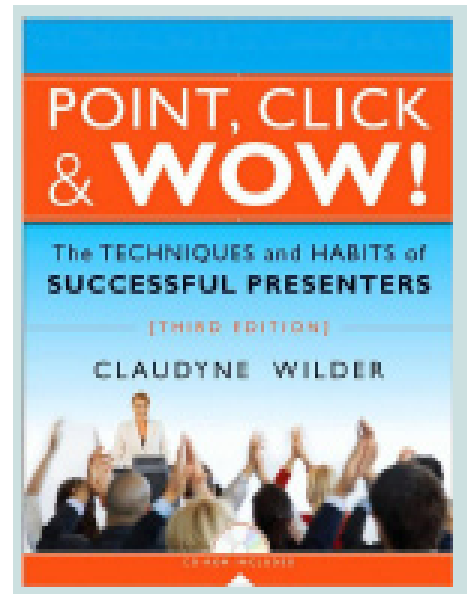
So, take out a pencil and paper, sit in a comfortable chair, and create an overview, using the guidelines that follow. Life by content follows these steps:

1. Know the goal of your presentation
2. Know the audience
3. Decide on a few main points
4. Support your statements
5. Decide on the most effective presentation techniques
6. Create a compelling conclusion
7. Get approval
8. Build your speech
9. Use the Tell 'n' Show method
10. Put one point on a slide

Know the goal of the presentation

The answer could be to inform my staff of a new company policy, advise senior management about the causes of increased costs last quarter, persuade a potential customer to buy the service I'm selling, explain the company's products and history to new employees, convince a committee to approve a proposal, and so on. As you write the text of your talk, you should keep in mind the goal at all times.

Claudyne Wilder, in her book, [Point, Click & Wow!](#), explains, "You should have only one clear, concise objective for a presentation. You may have other underlying objectives, but you need to specify one overall objective before you start



making the presentation. This objective answers these two questions:

- What does my audience want from my speech?
- What do I want from my audience?"

The goal includes what action or reaction you want from your audience. Do you want them to sign a contract, agree to a follow-up meeting, approve continuation of a project, or understand the new phone system?

Without a clear goal, it is easy for a presentation to become unfocused and become too long. You're also less likely to get the results you want. You should be able to state why each statement is important for your goal.

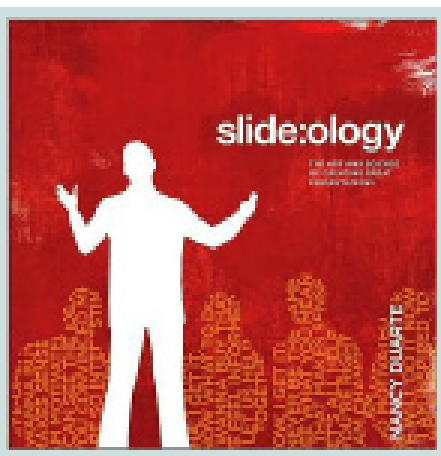
Way too much information for the time provided. The presenter's purpose was not clear. At the end of the training I figured out his purpose...to show us how much information he knew.

When you have a goal, write a title for the presentation. You can use a sub-title, too. Like a newspaper headline, the title should attract attention and convey the topic of the presentation clearly.

Know the Audience

You need to understand your audience before you can speak to them. How much do they know about the topic? What level of technical knowledge do they have? Are they executives concerned about the bottom line or middle-level managers concerned about administration? Do they expect to be entertained? What is their

emotional connection to the topic? How much do they care about it? How will they use the information?



In [slide:ology](#), Nancy Duarte lists “Seven Questions to Knowing Your Audience,” as follows:

1. What are they like? Not only demographics and psychographics, but try to describe what their life looks like
2. Why are they here? What do they think they'll get out of the presentation? Are they coming voluntarily or not?
3. What keeps them up at night? Find out what their worries are
4. How can you solve their problem? How will you make their lives better
5. What do you want them to do? Answer the question, “so what?” Make sure there's a clear action for the audience to take

6. How might they resist? Anticipate their arguments
7. How can you best reach them? People vary. Some people want detailed handouts, some want a discussion, not a lecture.

A common mistake is to include too many technical details for a non-technical or executive audience. Once you know your audience, you can write your talk appropriately. You may need to make some inquiries to get some information. “[Base content on your audience](#)” provides some further ideas.

*It was far too advanced for the majority of the audience.
VLD - Riverside, CA*

If you can't get any information, you need to build some flexibility into your presentation. In fact, you should be able to respond to the audience on the spot, when requests for more (or less) information, or a different direction, arise. As I explain in the section, “Life by Delivery,” you can use custom shows and hyperlinks to create options at the time of delivery.

Another common mistake is to spend too much time speaking about your own company and too little time speaking about the needs of the audience. Don't start with an overview of your company. Instead, start by explaining the problem the

people in the audience are experiencing, and then solve the problem. See [“Use an audience-centered structure.”](#)

Decide on a few main points

Write down three or four main points that you need to cover to attain your goal. If you have more than four points, organize some of them into a larger point. You can use these points in an initial overview and at the end as a summary. You will unpack these points as you speak.

Could not tell which points were important and which were superfluous info.

Support your statements

Now you create your sub-points that support your main points. You should back up your main points with supporting statements so that everything hangs together and makes sense. By considering the logic, you may find that you have to re-order your main points.

Not in any sort of logical order. Content that really didn't relate to the topic being covered.
DB

Consider which logic will have the desired effect. For example, senior management might not care that competing companies are switching to a new type of CRM system, but might care that the system will save time and result in increased sales. The logic needs to be appropriate for your audience.

What will support your logic and main points? People don't accept simple statements unless you have a lot of credibility. Each and every point needs to have one of the following:

- **An image:** Write down the ideal image for the point. Images should almost always be photographs, unless you're looking for something iconic, like male/female symbols

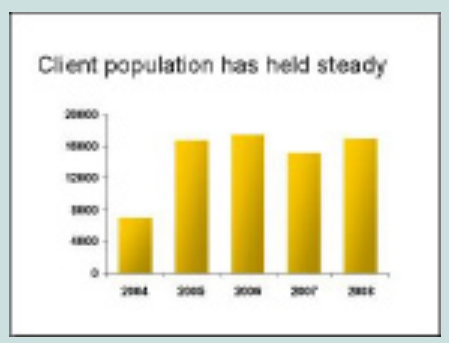
Few visuals, almost entirely text with a corporate logo in the corner.
JJE, State College, PA.



- **A diagram:** Sketch out a diagram that clearly shows the relationships you're explaining. Diagrams can show process, hierarchy, and so on



- **A chart (graph):** If you have data that shows a trend, you should use a chart



Statistics listed in bullet points, not presented with charts.
AC Milan, Italy

- A set of data, which may be in a table or spreadsheet: If you need to show non-trend data, a table may work best. You may already have this in a spreadsheet
- A quote: Look for quotes that support your point
- A story: Stories are powerful when they support your message. They can be personal, related to current events, examples from other customers, and so on

In deciding which type of support to provide for a point, consider whether the audience will respond better to an intellectual argument or an emotional one, or perhaps both.

Decide on the most effective presentation techniques

PowerPoint slides are not always the most effective way to reach people because they can come between you and your audience. They say, “Two’s a party; three’s a crowd.” Those slides can be like a third person.

I like to see pictures and short phrases only presented by someone who actually speaks to me. Too often the slides act as a barrier between the speaker and me. They should enhance/emphasize what the speaker is saying, not say it for him. Columbus, OH

While you may want to use slides for a visual aid, there are other options, and a presentation can include one or all of them, for example:

- Speak directly to the audience without a slide on the screen
- Do a demo
- Use a prop
- Ask the audience questions and get answers from them
- Let the audience ask questions and answer them

Tip: If you want to turn off the slides and focus the audience’s attention on you, press the B key on your keyboard to turn the screen black. Press it again to return to your slide.

Create a compelling conclusion

Your conclusion should lead to your stated goal. Summarize your main points and either ask for desired result, or confirm that they understood your message. If you’re selling a product or service, or recommending a course of action, ask for approval.

If you’re training, you may want to conduct a quiz to see that the students learned the content. For a way to do this in PowerPoint, see “[Easily create a quiz in PowerPoint using Visual Basic for Applications.](#)” A game is a fun way to accomplish this. See “[Create a quiz game.](#)” For extensive instructions on creating quizzes (with and without programming) and games, read [PowerPoint for Teachers: Dynamic Presentations and Interactive Classroom Projects.](#)

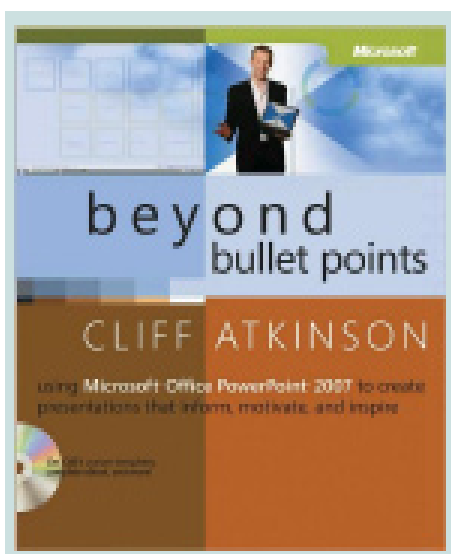
Get approval

When you have finished writing out these basics, get approval, if required. Do so before you start expanding to a full-blown speech and presentation. It’s always

easier to rewrite a short overview of your ideas before you've done hours of work. Then go to colleagues and get some feedback. Are your ideas clear? Does the logic work? Is your approach appropriate for the audience? Then go back and rework your overview.

Build your speech

Slides are meant to be a supporting player to the presenter and shouldn't take center stage. In fact, the electricity, your computer, or the projector might not work. Remember, you are the presentation; the slides are not the presentation.



Therefore, start by writing your speech, based on your planning notes. It's OK to go to the computer for this. In [Beyond Bullet Points](#), Cliff Atkinson calls this process writing your script. He says, "The single most

important thing you can do to dramatically improve your presentations is to have a story to tell before you work on your PowerPoint file."

As you type, do two things:

1. Create short, informative, interesting headings for each point you want to make. Then add what you'll say about those headings. Each heading will be a slide. Therefore, you should have lots of headings and not much text under each heading. This is the "tell" in the Tell 'n' ShowSM method.
2. Enter notes about visuals, data, and diagrams that you would like to use. Include notes about non-PowerPoint techniques, such as a demo. This process is called storyboarding, and it helps you integrate visuals with your speech. The visuals are the "show" part of the Tell 'n' ShowSM method.

What's an informative heading? Instead of "3rd quarter sales," write "3rd quarter sales up 3%." Instead of "New user interface," write "User interface is clearer."

For high-concept slides, you may not need a full heading. Sometimes just a word or two is more powerful.



You can embark on a formal storyboarding process. One way is to use Post-It notes and put one point on a note. You can stick them to your wall. They're easy to move around if you decide to change your organization.

Another way is to use PowerPoint. Cliff Atkinson, in [Beyond Bullet Points](#), describes a method that puts each point in the title placeholder of a slide. He then explains how to format the slide master to remove bullets, and use slide sorter view to mimic Post-It notes on a wall. You can then easily drag slides around to change their order.

Make sure that your presentation has an opening, body, and conclusion. Use the AIDA principles of copywriting to create this structure:

- **Attention:** Come up with an opening that attracts the attention of the audience.
- **Interest:** Use the body of the presentation to keep their interest.

- **Desire:** If you're selling, create a desire for the product or service by explaining how it solves the audience's problems. If you're teaching, show how the knowledge is important and relevant.
- **Action:** Use your conclusion to create a spur to action. In a training environment, motivate the audience to use the knowledge for their benefit.

For more information, see "[Use copywriting principles for your presentations.](#)"

You're ready for your first practice. Give the speech out loud. Record it and listen to the recording. A simple audio recording is good now, because you want to focus on the content. You'll probably notice room for improvement, so rewrite as necessary. Also time it. Most first run-throughs are too long. If you will have 30 minutes to speak, leave time for setting up or an introduction and time for questions. That means your talk should take no longer than 20 minutes. If it's too long, cut it down until you can present without rushing in the time allowed.

Use the Tell 'n' Show method

If you haven't done so already, now is the time to create a new PowerPoint presentation file. If you're using another presentation program, create a new file in that program. The first thing you see is something like this:



Go ahead and fill in the title you created. Add the sub-title or your name, or both. Then add a new slide. You'll see something like the bottom figure. Additional slides will look the same if you use the default layout.



With rare exceptions, you don't want to use the "Click to add text" section. By default, it creates a bulleted list and that's the route to Death by PowerPoint. It might work for an agenda, executive summary, or final summary. Remember that lists are not a good way to organize a speech. Instead, you want to make a point, back it up, use logic to get to the next point, and back that up, until you're done.

The idea is that you put one point on a slide, as a headline. Then you add an image, diagram, or chart. Cliff Atkinson, in [Beyond Bullet Points](#), says, "Sending the statements to the title areas of PowerPoint slides unlocks your ability to create a storyboard of the presentation... When you add graphics to the slides in Normal view, you make sure that the images are simple, clear, and related specifically to the headlines. This keeps the design process focused on effective communication, not on ornamentation or aesthetics."

Michael Alley, in his book, [The Craft of Scientific Presentations](#), presents a similar concept for the scientific and academic community. He calls it assertion and evidence.

You can view a [slidecast about the Tell ‘n’ ShowSM method on authorSTREAM.com](#). While you may think that this principle is only about design, it encompasses content and delivery, as well. After all, the “tell” portion is about content. You tell the story, then you show it.

Put one point on a slide

Enter your first heading in the title area of the second slide. In the Notes pane, enter the text that applies to that heading. Add a new slide and enter the next heading in the title area and its accompanying text in the Notes pane. Use the Title Only or Blank slide layout. Continue until you’ve completed the presentation.

Don’t do any formatting now! You’ll do that in the design phase.

Later, you should go back and rework some of the text and the conclusion, and maybe add some links to other content, whether via [custom shows](#) or [other presentations](#). You’ll want to build in some audience participation. One way to do that is to [create a menu](#) on the first or second slide.

Your first round for the content is done.

Design means how the presentation looks. Many people think design is unnecessary, but it's very important, for several reasons. Good design does the following:

- Makes the content easier to understand
- Makes the content easier to remember
- Reduces audience frustration

Background interfered with legibility of text. Awful background, incomprehensible graphics.

The purpose of design is simply to enhance communication.

Overwhelmingly, the presentations I see are supported by poorly designed slides pulling material from source documents never intended for use as presentation graphics. This material is then leant on by presenters, as the old saying goes, for support rather than illumination. Bullet points are read verbatim, and charts are pointed to with the expectation that the audience will draw conclusions the slide designer didn't have time to highlight and emphasise when the

presentation was being pulled together. Despite the great work available, from Seth Godin's 'Really Bad PowerPoint' to Garr Reynolds' 'Presentation Zen' via Cliff Atkinson's 'Beyond Bullet Points,' presentation design seems to be getting worse, not better.
PL, United Kingdom

Jim Endicott of [Distinction Communication, Inc.](#) explains that we hire professionals to design our Web sites and printed marketing materials, so we should do the same for our PowerPoint presentations, which are just as important for our marketing. In fact, the presentation is often the final connection that a company makes with a customer to close a sale.

Instead, we often design our own PowerPoint slides not because we should, but because we can.

Internal presentations are still important, especially for the reputation and career of the presenter, but may not justify the expense of an outside designer. For this situation, presenters should learn some simple procedures and techniques for designing effective slides.

The steps to life by design are:

1. Create a color scheme
2. Format the slide master
3. Decide whether or not to add a background
4. Use the Tell 'n' ShowSM method for slide design
5. Put one point on a slide
6. Think visually
7. Use animation appropriately
8. Keep design simple

Create a color scheme

The first step in design is to decide what colors you'll use. This is a step that most people never take. Julie Terberg, one of the top designers in the United States ([Terberg Design](#)), recommends starting by creating a color scheme and then sticking to it.



How do you choose colors? Especially for marketing presentations, you use the colors of your Web site and printed brochures. This enhances your branding. When you have decided on the colors you want, including text and shape colors, create a color scheme (theme colors in PowerPoint 2007) using those colors.

Next, create a slide and insert some text and shapes and format them with those colors. Put them next to each other to see what looks good. If you have an idea for formatting shapes, such as using a gradient, try it out here. This is called a sampler slide and it facilitates formatting the entire presentation, because you can copy objects to new slides, instead of creating the formatting over and over. When you are done with the presentation, hide this slide so that it won't appear during the presentation.

Format the slide master

The next step is to format the slide master. If you don't do this step, your presentation is likely to be inconsistent in the placement and size of text. It won't look the way you want it to, and you'll waste time editing individual slides.

Delete the second through fifth level of bullets. Fifth level? Are you kidding?

You can usually delete the footer boxes. If you want slide numbers, keep the right-hand footer and move it into the corner.

Now comes the time to remove the bullet from the first line of text on the slide. Don't worry, you can always add it back on a specific slide, but removing the bullet on the slide master will remove the temptation to use bullets more than necessary.

Select the first line of text, "Click to edit Master text styles" and click the Bullets button on the toolbar or ribbon. But there's one more step; you need to get rid of the outdent (which aligns the first line of a paragraph further to the left than the rest of the lines). To do this, drag the lower triangle on the ruler to the left, to match the upper triangle.

I have heard that too many slides are a problem. I say it depends. When I create a PowerPoint it will always have pictures or graphics to tell the story as well as my bulleted text and my narration. I try to hit all the senses. I see people put all the bullets up at one time and that is a distraction. I also don't like to be read a bullet, unless it is a quote.

*I can read your slide faster than you can read it to me. If you are doing nothing but reciting what is on the screen, then you are slowing me down.
JJE, State College, PA.*

Now is the time to format the rest of the slide master. Choose a font, a font size, and a font color. Julie Terberg recommends left and bottom justifying the title text. The result is that titles don't jump around from slide to slide. That's easier on the audience's eyes and brain.



Decide whether or not to add a background

That depends.

Traditionally, people add a colorful background (often blue), and such a background can indeed be pretty, interesting, and add a design flair. Backgrounds are especially useful for the first and last slides, and perhaps section slides.

Then, there's the other side of the story. Many designers now use a white background; you could say that white is the new blue. Their slides are very visual, with little text.

It's a clean look and has another advantage—the background doesn't interfere with the image or text. Interference comes in two types:

- Colorful backgrounds can make text hard to read if the contrast is low
- Images on the background naturally attract attention and reduce the attention going to your message

Other possibilities are a black background or a mild gradient.

Dark background. The projector wasn't bright enough to pull it off. It was tough on the eyes. C.U., Wall, NJ

Use the Tell 'n' ShowSM method for slide design

I've already discussed the basics of the Tell 'n' ShowSM method; it will truly revolutionize your slide design. Anyone can do it. In fact, the Tell 'n' ShowSM method is a technique of slide design for non-designers. Refer to the basic concept, explained here: [Tell 'n' ShowSM slide design](#). As discussed earlier, each slide should tell a point and then show it. Put a statement in the title area and then use an image,

graph, or diagram to illustrate, elaborate on, or back up the statement.

Put one point on a slide

A corollary of Tell 'n' ShowSM design is that each slide should contain one point. If you have a slide with four bullet points on it, convert it to four slides. I explain this technique in my tip, "[Put one point on a slide](#)." You can [see a video showing this same technique at YouTube](#).

When you use these two techniques, your presentations will look better, but more importantly, your audience will understand what you're saying more clearly.

Think visually

Every time you think that you need a lot of words on a slide, consider what you want the audience to take away. What is the essential message? Then ask yourself how to depict the concepts visually. You can use images in several ways:

- **Literally:** If you're talking about a piece of equipment, show a photo of it rather than describe its specifications
- **As a metaphor:** What metaphor would you use for what you're saying? If you're talking about a

concept, such as getting through hard times, you could show a photo of a rocky road or a mountain.

- **As a schematic:** If you're talking about a process, show a diagram. Even just adding arrows is helpful

If you're talking about a change over time, you would use a chart/graph.

*Too small text, not easy to understand graph, one slide with 4 graphs!
PM, Jakarta, Indonesia*

If you have a whole phrase that includes a number, consider adding a photo that portrays the situation and using only the number. Eliminate the rest of the text. For example, if the text says, "Pension portfolios have lost an average of 40%," show a picture of a stock certificate, a down arrow, and just the text "40%."

What do you do with the text that you take out? Simply cut and paste it into the Notes pane. Then print out the notes to go by when you speak.

Images should not look silly or unprofessional. Clip art is generally a no-no. For more information on images, read "[7 Steps to Great Images](#)."

Use animation appropriately

PowerPoint has great animation features, but they are often misused. Animation should have a reason; it should enhance understanding. Occasionally, if you're design oriented, you can use animation just for the Wow effect, and to add beauty. This type of animation is best for consciously commercial presentations. Otherwise, stick to the basic three animation types:

- **Appear:** The object just appears
- **Fade:** The object fades in or out
- **Wipe:** The object wipes in the chosen direction, good for arrows and bar charts.

Loud sound effects and cheesy animations rarely do it for me.

Keep the design simple

If you're not a designer, keep the slide design and layout simple. The tip "[Simplicity and understatement](#)" offers a few more tips. You can come up with two or three slide designs that

always look good and are easy to create. Your presentations will look better and you'll spend less time creating them. You can use these slides as a prototype for future presentations, as well. Remember that a busy slide is distracting. When you put too much content on your slides, you force the audience to focus on slides, rather than you.

*Overloaded slides (sequence diagram with > 5000 arrows!)
A.D., France*

Of course, the whole point of a presentation is to deliver it. You can make or break your work here. A presentation with good content and marginal design can succeed with great delivery.

What is great delivery? Great delivery is connecting with your audience in a way that meets their needs.

Always remember that PowerPoint slides are not the presentation; what you say is the presentation. You are the presentation.

In a nutshell, PowerPoint should simply be a facilitator, not the presentation itself.
JF, Phoenix, AZ

The steps to life by delivery are:

1. Prepare supplemental content
2. Interact with the audience
3. Practice, practice, practice
4. Know the technology
5. Work on your speaking skills

Prepare supplemental content

In order to meet their needs, you have to know what they are. Sometimes, you can do research beforehand; doing so lets you write your content and design your slides with the audience in mind.

Other times, you don't have an opportunity to find out about the audience. In these cases, you have two options, and you should use both of them:

You should have content that you can show if the audience is interested. This could include additional data, information about other products or services, testimonials, and so on. Without supplemental content, you'll almost certainly come across a situation where you can't give audience members the information they ask for. One way to handle this is with printed handouts. If you want to use PowerPoint to present additional information, here are four methods:

- **Hide slides:** You can hide specific slides. You can create hyperlinks to those slides to use if you want, or unhide them just before the presentation if it seems appropriate
- **Custom shows:** Custom shows are like groups of hidden slides and you create hyperlinks to access them. Read how at "[Add flexibility with custom shows.](#)"
- **Hyperlinked menu:** You can include a menu that links to sections of the presentation. The tips, "[Create a visual menu](#)" and "[Design a web-style presentation](#)" explain this technique.

- **Links to other presentations:** You can include links to other presentations, play them, and then return to your original presentation. See "[Using hyperlinks](#)" for instructions.

These techniques add complexity to your presentation structure, so be sure to test them and practice using them in advance.

One of my greatest peeves is when a presenter needs to switch between PowerPoint and another app (such as a web browser or media player). At the college convocation last week, this happened with four presentations, and in each case, the speaker pressed Esc to exit PPT slide show mode, so we all got dumped onto the slide sorter view while they tried to locate the other app on the taskbar. Hasn't anybody ever heard of using Alt-Tab to cycle between apps?
TG, Arlington, Virginia

Interact with the audience

While many presenters take questions from the audience, fewer ask questions of the audience. However, when you ask questions, you can discover a lot about what the audience needs and wants. You can then use the answers to direct your presentation.

PowerPoint tends to draw many presenters toward the screen and away from the audience. They need to realize the need to talk to people instead of inanimate objects.

Of course, offering the audience a chance to ask questions is also important. Be sure to allow time in your planning for audience interaction. "[Have a conversation with your audience](#)" covers several ways of interacting.

The presenter read the slides word for word. Can you believe it! If he would have looked at the audience, he would have seen how bored we were. Some people actually took out newspapers to read.

Meet the eyes of members of the audience. When possible, mention someone's name. Plan some time when you black out the screen to focus the audience's attention on you. Think of a presentation as a conversation, rather than a one-way street. In this way, you make a connection with people.

Presenter looked at the projected slides and read rather than look at the audience.
AE, Greenville/SC

Practice, practice, practice

Rehearsal heals so many ills that it's impossible to overemphasize. Let's be unequivocal here: unless you've given the presentation many times before, it's impossible to deliver a successful presentation without practicing. Great presenters rehearse many times, just as actors do.

The speaker wasn't a bad speaker - but I think the slides were for her benefit - like crib notes. She was rarely utilizing the slides other than as a refresher for herself.
KC Orlando, Florida

The magic of rehearsal brings these benefits:

1. You won't need to read the slides. If your slides are more visual, you won't have many words on them, but you'll know what to say, because you practiced.
2. You'll be able to maintain eye contact with the audience, instead of looking at the slides.
3. Your talk will go more smoothly, with fewer ums and uhs, and of course, fewer mistakes.
4. You'll seem and feel more natural and relaxed. Being prepared is one of the best ways to avoid nervousness.

The attorney giving the presentation read every single word on the slide.
RA Columbus, OH

There's a right and a wrong way to practice. When you first create your talk, before you open PowerPoint, practice your talk to time it. Practice in front of colleagues to see if they understand it. Afterwards, can they tell you the main points? If not, rewrite. Tape your talk and listen to it; you're sure to find something to improve.

If you are going to present, do a test run in front of a colleague for some feedback. If your presentation is long, bring in some humor or engage your audience to ensure that the attention is not lost. Use more images, less text and PLEASE do not insult your audience by reading the slides verbatim.
AE, Greenville,SC

The delivery was a non-delivery. The speaker tried to turn the meeting into a dialog session without providing an adequate framework for discussion. Hence he was answering questions that were covered again later in the presentation, and referred to maps and graphs that were not yet presented. Once he got to the maps and graphs he mentioned that he had already talked about them and skipped over some very important information prompting audience members on several occasions to ask the presenter to go back and explain them.

BNR Midlothian, VA

After you have your PowerPoint slides, do a run through in front of your computer to accustom yourself to speaking with the slides. Again tape your talk, listen to it, and edit. Finally, do a dress rehearsal. If at all possible, use a projector, stand up, and look out at the imaginary audience. Practice with a remote so that you don't have to be close to your laptop. If you can videotape this rehearsal, you'll learn a lot about how you look and sound. Nothing hides from the camera. You'll see awkward transitions and gestures and be able to fix them.

Continue to rehearse until you think you're ready to give a great presentation. Most professional speakers rehearse several times before they actually get up in front of their audience. Your presentations are also important, so give them the time they need.

Laziness. Selfishness. Lack of concern for the audience. Lack of concern for outcomes. Monkey see, monkey do - management clearly aren't making effective presentation a priority and they clearly aren't setting a good example. The vast majority of presenters are using PPT as an AutoCue rather than as a tool to enhance their message. It's last-minute, zero-rehearsal stuff where the presenter bangs down a few thoughts and then gets up and presents that first draft. They HAVE to read out the presentation - they are so unfamiliar with the material. Way too many unnecessary, self-indulgent presentations that should be circulated as a Word document instead.

RM, Dublin, Ireland

When you get up in front of the audience, you want to know your stuff so that you can act naturally and respond to your

audience. You'll be more relaxed and will be able to just be yourself. Let your interest and enthusiasm show through. You want to get to the point where your audience doesn't think you're working from a script, but instead are truly communicating.

Reading the slides, I can read! Boring delivery, monotone, seemed to not believe in his own product.

KAG

Know the technology

Technology is a wonderful thing-when it works. Practice using a projector with your laptop. Practice using the remote. Know how to replace the projector bulb or know someone who knows how. If all else fails, have an alternative, such as giving out the handouts in advance and speaking from your copy. Speak without (gasp!) a visual aid. Change the presentation into a discussion.

He could not get the connection between computer and [projector] to work and could not function. After traveling to our city, buying us lunch, he could not present his usual canned presentation, so he simply apologized, told us he would send us slides, loaded up, and left.

Work on your speaking skills

The truth is that some people are natural speakers and others aren't. If you're one of the latter, you need to work harder at it. Join Toastmasters, which will give you practice delivering short talks. Work on your technique, and you'll certainly improve. Items to work on are:

- Varying your tone
- Varying your speed and including some moments of silence
- Speaking loud enough, but not too loud
- Speaking at the right speed
- Avoiding fillers, like "um," "uh," and "you know"

Person read word for word what was on PowerPoint, lots of Ums Uhs, etc.

Have a strong opening and stronger close for presentation and even your discussion of each slide. One of my teachers called this the Oreo cookie principle, although she was talking about writing rather than speaking. You sandwich the content between an overview and a summary or conclusion.

*It was a cliché-induced, text-laden, "ya know"-laden presentation that made me shift in my seat and want to just give the presenter the "move on to the next slide" gesture. It was painful. It made me anxious and uncomfortable. I learned nothing except for how not to present.
CU Wall, NJ*

Takeaway Points

Print this page and refer to it whenever you work on a presentation

What Is Death by PowerPoint?

The components of **death by content** are:

- Unclear objective
- Irrelevance to the audience
- Lack of organization
- Lack of supporting data or examples
- Errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, or usage
- Too much content

The components of **death by design** are:

- All-text slides
- Illegible text
- Silly clip art/inappropriate images
- Illegible charts
- Distracting, ugly background
- Inconsistent graphics
- Distracting animation

The components of **death by delivery** are:

- Reading the slides
- No interaction with the audience
- Poor speaking skills
- Lack of practice

What is Life by PowerPoint?

The steps to **life by content** are:

1. Know the goal of your presentation
2. Know the audience
3. Decide on a few main points
4. Support your statements
5. Decide on the most effective presentation techniques
6. Create a compelling conclusion
7. Get approval
8. Build your speech
9. Use the Tell 'n' Show method
10. Put one point on a slide

The steps to **life by design** are:

1. Create a color scheme
2. Format the slide master
3. Decide whether or not to add a background
4. Use the Tell 'n' ShowSM method for slide design
5. Put one point on a slide
6. Think visually
7. Use animation appropriately
8. Keep design simple

The steps to **life by delivery** are:

1. Prepare supplemental content
2. Interact with the audience
3. Practice, practice, practice
4. Know the technology
5. Work on your speaking skills

Where to go from here

So what now? If you've read the respondents' comments, you now know that the audience hates Death by PowerPoint. They notice and they care. They even get angry.

Decide that your next presentation will be better.

Work on making the content useful and meaningful. Make sure that the design doesn't hurt your cause. Never use bullets again, except maybe for an agenda. Practice! Then deliver in a way that connects with your audience.

Start by making over an existing presentation. See what you can improve; this will help you improve your next presentation.

Continue learning. Read blogs about PowerPoint, presenting, and speaking. Here are links to useful books and courses:

- [101 Tips Every PowerPoint User Should Know](#)
- [101 Advanced Techniques Every PowerPoint User Should Know](#)
- [Slide Design for Non-Designers](#)
- [Create an Outstanding Presentation Self-Study Course!](#)

For all these products, use the code **whitepaper** to get 15% off.

Get training

Ellen Finkelstein provides comprehensive, customized presentation skills training to organizations and individuals.

[Contact her to learn more.](#)

If Death by PowerPoint is the topic, then consider me an experienced mortician. I've been to more funerals than I care to remember. Since I have been making presentations since before PowerPoint was invented (in the olden days we used slides, multiple projectors and programmers to create visual effects), I've seen it all. Of course I have seen the all-too-familiar wrong sized text, hard to read fonts, absurd backgrounds, lack of contrast and too much information on slides. I've also seen the presentation that had the entire text of the talk on the screen from which the presenter read (I'm not lying!). The best, however, was the PowerPoint presentation that didn't arrive with the speaker. The presenter, who was scheduled for 15 minutes, spent 50 minutes looking at a blank screen and describing each slide that wasn't there and then giving the part of the talk that related to the slide. The first few descriptions were quite good, but by about slide 30, most of the audience was asleep, or had slipped out of the room.

BNR Midlothian, VA

Help others improve their presentations!

Join the Campaign Against Death by PowerPoint! The next time you go to a presentation, print out the invitation on the next page. If the presenter needs the knowledge in this white paper, offer the invitation to the presenter after the presentation. You can download the invitation by itself at www.tellnshow.com

Invitation

*I invite you to learn more about
effective presentation skills.*

For an excellent introduction,

I recommend the white paper,

*“From Death by PowerPoint to Life by PowerPoint
with the Tell ‘n’ ShowSM method,”*

by Ellen Finkelstein

You can obtain it for free by going to:

<http://www.tellnshow.com/whitepaper.html>

A member of the audience