

Tip Sheet

Effective use of PowerPoint

A large number of lecturers use PowerPoint to assist in their lecture delivery. But is PowerPoint always well-used? Is it used too often?

Positives	Negatives
Hyperlinks to direct students to web pages	Can create a false sense of security if students believe all content is on the slides
Include images of video, including charts and pictures	Passivity if students do not take sufficient notes during the lecture
Visual effects that stimulate interest and/or deepen understanding of a concept	Students can become complacent if slides are always available, and complain if they are not provided
Embedded video and sound	

PowerPoint slide shows used in lectures can provide a structure for the students to follow (scaffold) and in that sense assist with cognition. They can print out handouts pages and write notes next to each slide as the lecture progresses. An added bonus of sharing the file with students is that it may be able to be accessed at any time, and thus can provide more cognitive assistance as a reminder, memory jogger and revision tool.

Pitfalls of PowerPoint

Students

Handouts may create a false sense of security in that students may feel that since the handouts come from their lecturers, they will contain all of the important information of the lecture. Students' own skills related to ascertaining the relative importance of information, and associated note-taking may decline (Brazeau, 2006).

Students may only be passively engaged if only reading bullet points and adding a few words next to each by way of 'note-taking'.

Students may come to expect handouts and PowerPoint slide shows as a matter of course, and if there is a deviation from this norm, may not cope well. Note-taking will be an entirely different experience with and without and some students may not be able to adapt.

Using pictures, graphs, graphics and the like may only overcrowd the information and disengage students. If students have English as a second or other language, have other language and/or learning difficulties, including visual impairments, cognitive processes may especially be hindered.

Lecturers

Some lecturers will tend to read their PowerPoint slides during a lecture. This is the thing that most students will complain about when evaluating a lecture. They prefer a more animated, more seemingly prepared, and more authoritative delivery. Some lecturers may feel nervous and that is why they read from their slides, and more practice will likely improve this.

Moderate your use of text on slides during your lectures. Displaying too much text on screen while simultaneously talking limits a student's cognitive processing of either set of words. Displaying a single image and short phrase during lectures will be more effectively comprehended than a paragraph of text (Mayer 2008).

Presentation considerations and tips

1. Be careful of over-designing. Busy PowerPoints slides may be distracting for learners
2. If you have things you want to stand out do not use red and green as colour-blind students cannot tell the difference.
3. Beware not all fonts are visible on a large screen (even when clearly visible to you).
4. Using different fonts can be good, but can also be an issue for some students, so if it is not necessary, it is wise use Arial or a font without a serif.
5. If you are including links to web pages, check them before the lecture.
6. If you need to download a video, do so before the lecture as students can easily lose concentration and interest if you are waiting to download something. Do the same for sound files. Have a back-up plan if the network is down!
7. Number your slides. This can be handy if you get lost.
8. Print out your slides so if technical issues arise you still have the lecture in front of you and you can write additional notes on the print out. Additionally, if the network is out of action, you may be able to use the visualiser to display the slides.
9. Don't read from your slides: it is best to have minimal (but useful) information on the slides and talk to them (using your expertise). It is much more interesting! This means that you need to be well-prepared.
10. ALWAYS carry a copy of the presentations.
11. ALWAYS proof-read your slides. While a typo can be embarrassing, in the wrong place it could also confuse students.

References:

Brazeau, G. A. 2006. Handouts in the classroom: Is note taking a lost skill? *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 70(2), 2-38.

Mayer, R. J., Cheryl 2008. Revising the Redundancy Principle in Multimedia Learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100, 380-386.