

Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for
advancing teaching and learning at Mona

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Special points of interest:

- The Teaching Tips Newsletter is a publication of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The newsletter is published three times during each semester and a summer edition. It provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education and is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cetl>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you need additional teaching tips on specific classroom practices please contact us.

Improving Your PowerPoint: Avoid Bullet Points and Use Visuals



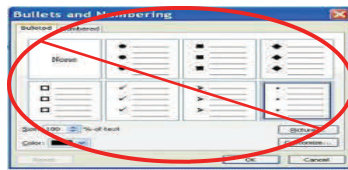
The use of PowerPoint slides is a big part of teaching here at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. It can certainly be used to engage, entertain and inform students. Obviously, it supports presentations in amazing ways. Despite that however, it is oftentimes considered to be overused and there are those who argue that it is used badly by many.

An oft repeated phrase used to dramatise some of the ills associated with the use of PowerPoint is “Death by PowerPoint.” There is also the statement “PowerPoint induced coma” which also conveys similar sentiments. With PowerPoint being so popular in higher education, many lecturers utilise it but alas, some make ineffective use of it as a teleprompter. Some place too much text on each slide making it very crowded and oftentimes it becomes very difficult to understand the content. Others, place content on slides using very small fonts. Sometimes the colours chosen for the background of the slide and the colours of the font clash.

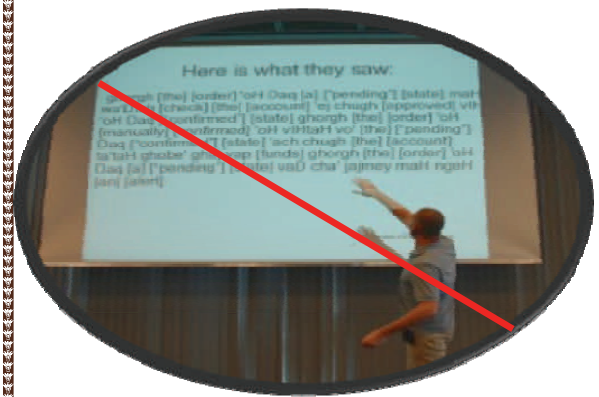
So there are myriad of problems with the use of PowerPoint as a teaching tool. Whatever the problem, the experts are now telling us that we should try to improve our PowerPoint presentations and we should not be using bullet points on our slides. Choose a standard font such as Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, Helvetica or Verdana. Maintain the same font throughout using size 24-32 –point-size for the body with 40-44 point for titles.

No Bullet Points

Some communications experts feel there is no good reason to use bullet points in your presentation since students will be able to read the information on the slide faster than you can say it and will stop listening to you. In fact, in making a presentation it is best to demonstrate familiarity with the content or the overall subject. Oftentimes bullet points serve as a crutch for the presenter. Without bullet points, you have to know your topic and speak naturally on it. In this way, you are able to have a conversation with students on the topic you are presenting on.

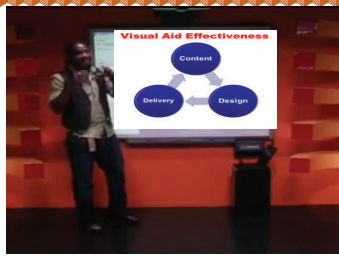


Quit Reading Slides



When we use PowerPoint to do a presentation, we often show our slides and sometimes read them to our students. We often use the bullets to facilitate easy reading and to communicate the importance of the points we are making. Our students must listen to our voice and process the information being read from the slide. From the research (Mayer & Moreno, 2003) we know that when we read from our slides when making a presentation, it diminishes the ability of the listener to understand the material. In fact, the members of the audience are being called to focus on two things, content written on the slide and in the same breath, listen to the message that the teacher is conveying by the reading of the slide. In such cases, an attempt is being made to send to the brain visual and aural messages at the same time and the brain cannot process them together. Unfortunately, the message will not be clearly communicated or worse yet, the entire message might be lost because the research shows that the brain processes and retains more information when it is transmitted in its verbal or written form but certainly not both at the same time.

Use Visuals



Our students love to see pictures and we know that the net generation has a special appreciation for images. A presentation filled with meaningful and relevant photos is more memorable than one filled with bullets. Decide on what message each slide will convey and find a relevant photograph, diagram or chart that can be used to convey the message. In looking for photographs, make sure you are aware of the copyright issues.

Tell a Story



In avoiding bullet points, structure your presentation like a story. This will increase retention of content. Ensure the beginning grabs the attention of your students, then place most of the content in the middle and respond to the big issues you are trying to deal with. The end will bring some closure by way of conclusion, summary or comments about where to go next or what to do next.

Interact Without the Slides and With Voice



By depressing the "B" key during a presentation you will darken the screen and this will enable you to interact with students without having the distraction of the slides. When you eliminate the distractions that the screen causes, you will find that the students will respond to you better. You can depress the "B" key to return to the presentation.

You might also want to draw on the screen during your presentation to illustrate a particular point. This might be accomplished by depressing the Ctrl-P key combination to activate the ink. Then, with the left mouse button, you can draw. In order to erase your drawing, press the "E" key. In order to hide the ink, all you need to do is press the Ctrl-H combination.

Adding voice to the slides is also possible and this might provide opportunities for greater interaction. Please see this document from Clarion University (2012) on how to add narration to your PowerPoint www.clarion.edu/342954.pdf or watch a tutorial, for instance www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZp3jumnWUg.

Become Familiar With Your Slides



In order to become familiar with your slides, practice reading them and rehearsing or memorizing the first few sentences of the presentation. Ensure sufficient proof reading is done for mechanical errors, to correct inaccuracies and run spell check.

Tips for a More Engaged Classroom



Getting more students to answer your questions in class

In many large classes there are usually less than 20 students who are doing most of the talking and participating robustly, especially answering questions. Of course, you want more students to participate and one way to get more students to respond to your questions, is to create opportunities for students to write responses to your questions. Once you have asked students to write responses to your question, find someone who does not usually talk or respond to questions in class to respond. Perhaps this student might feel better about answering a question.

Calling on students in class

From time to time you will come across students who do not want you to call on them in class. In fact, some become embarrassed and others are so shy that they are fearful of talking in class, especially in a large lecture theatre. Consider calling on two or three students who are sitting together. Allow them to work through their response as a small group and you might name one person or they might nominate someone to respond. Collectively the students might do a better job than asking a student to respond individually. This technique works especially well if the students have to negotiate responses, calling on higher order thinking skills or do a calculation, or work at the board.



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