Create Engaging PowerPoint Presentations that Facilitate Great Teaching–Really!
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Imagine that you're teaching a lesson on social psychology. In the midst of the discussion, one of your students asks a really good question that touches on material you covered in a lecture several weeks ago. You remember a perfect example, including diagrams and a great video, in the PowerPoint presentation you used during that lecture. Quickly, you exit from your PowerPoint presentation and start looking through your directories, trying to find the PowerPoint presentation for that lecture. Once you find it, you open the presentation and begin looking for the right slide. By this time, you've spent quite a while on your search, the students are getting restless, you're becoming frustrated, and the teachable moment may be lost. Sound familiar?

Lets try that again.

Imagine that you're teaching a lesson on social psychology. In the midst of the discussion, one of your students asks a really good question that touches on material you covered in a lecture several weeks ago. You remember a perfect example, including diagrams and a great video, in the PowerPoint presentation you used during that lecture. Quickly, you activate a hidden link in the slide that's on the screen. In only a few clicks, you've gotten to the very slide you wanted. Your students have no idea how you did it. You seem to have anticipated the question and already been prepared. Clearly, you're a mind-reader, or just a genius when it comes to teaching!

Does that sound better?

PowerPoint has become ubiquitous. It seems almost impossible to imagine our classes without PowerPoint. And when was the last time you attended a conference at which PowerPoint wasn't used by the vast majority of speakers? There are good things about PowerPoint–it keeps things organized, and the slides can be considerably more legible than some presenters' handwriting (certainly mine!).

Unfortunately, PowerPoint does have its problems. Many of us find the linear format too limiting in terms of how we like to present information, and it sometimes gets in the way of capitalizing on teachable moments. People who aren't adept at using presentation software also make some basic mistakes when designing their slides. How many talks have you seen where each slide contains vast volumes of densely packed information, resembling excerpts from a textbook or journal article? Such presentations encourage our students or colleagues to concentrate more on taking notes (or falling asleep) than on listening and processing information. In such cases, PowerPoint stifles conversation and consideration. No wonder so many of us complain of "death by PowerPoint" in classes, conference talks, and meetings.

Even with its problems, I suspect that very few of us are ready to chuck PowerPoint completely. There are many good strategies to help you develop excellent, motivating (or at least not too boring) PowerPoint presentations.

Begin by thinking of your PowerPoint presentations as part of a networked system, and not as individual presentations. This allows you to develop a relational, non-linear approach to developing your presentations, which will allow you to move from any slide in your presentation to any other slide in any presentation you have, with a minimal number of steps. This integrated network is very similar in design to a website. Development proceeds through seven steps:

1. **Needs analysis**
   Define your audiences and the kinds of presentations you need. Your choices should always be dictated by your objectives, so it's important to know why you're designing your presentations, and for whom.

2. **Content analysis**
   List all of your resources. These include your existing PowerPoint presentations, videos, links to websites, photographs, and artwork. Don't worry much about creating new things yet. Just assemble what you have.

3. **Organization**
   Design an appropriate network structure, build directories, and populate folders.

4. **Construction**
   Start by designing your system's look. Then build your presentation network, including specific presentations, appropriate menus to help you locate and use your presentations, and any special materials you'd like to use.

5. **Testing**
   Be sure to try everything. You can avoid unpleasant surprises by intentionally trying to do things incorrectly during this shakedown. That way you'll be able to identify and eliminate some of the problems that may happen if you activate the wrong elements in a particular menu. This is particularly important if you use hidden or invisible triggers in your slides.

6. **Use your presentations**
   This is the fun part!

7. **Maintenance**
   Keep expanding and modifying your presentation system as you need new presentations or find new resources.

It's also important to learn more about how to design good PowerPoint slides. This not only involves the use of text, but how to incorporate all sorts of other elements.

Edit the text on your slides down to a bare minimum. If you have too much text, your audience will be caught up in reading rather than listening or engaging with you. You're the presenter. You have interesting things to share. PowerPoint is a visual medium, so add impact with photographs, tables, illustrations, graphics, and cartoons. Often, you'll be able to show some graphic element with only a word or two of text.

The judicious use of video can liven up some of your presentations. While it is possible to link directly to resources such as YouTube or *TeacherTube*, it's generally better to download the material from those sites using a tool such as Video Download Helper. That way, if there's no good connection to the Internet, you'll still be able to show your videos.

You can also use PowerPoint to create active demonstrations for your audience, without using any special technologies beyond PowerPoint. For example, look at the Müller-Lyer illusion, below:
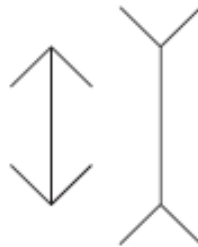
You could tell your audience that the two vertical lines are the same size. But it would be much more effective to animate the line on the left, and move it over to cover the line on the right, without changing its size. By working with images and some basic animation techniques, you can design many different kinds of active demonstrations.

There are some basic pitfalls to avoid. Beside limiting the amount of text on each slide, be sure to stick to one large, easy-to-read font. Too many–or too strange-looking–fonts or overly complicated graphics can distract or confuse people, making it hard to understand what you're trying to convey. Avoid overusing animation, video, or other "glitzy" elements. (It's especially easy to go overboard on video, not realizing how much time showing the clips will take, so be sure to keep them short.) Remember, everything in your presentation must have a purpose–to communicate your point clearly. Anything that doesn't serve that purpose is best left out.

Many resources are available to help you learn how to develop relational presentations, and how to design more interesting and interactive PowerPoint slides. A few are listed below.

Articles and Books
- Atkinson, C. (2011). *Beyond bullet points: Using Microsoft PowerPoint to create presentations that inform, motivate, and inspire*, (3rd Ed.). Redmond, WA: Microsoft Press.
- Daniel, D. B. (2005). How to ruin a perfectly good lecture: Presentation software as a teaching tool. In B. Perlman, L. I. McCann, W. Buskist, B. Perlman, L. I. McCann, W. Buskist (Eds.) , *Voices of Experience: Memorable Talks From the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology*, (Vol. 1, pp. 119-130). Washington, DC US: American Psychological Society.
- Daniel, D. B. (2011). Practical PowerPoint: Promising principles for developing individual practice. In D. S. Dunn, J. H. Wilson, J. E. Freeman, J. R. Stowell, D. S. Dunn, J. H. Wilson, ... J. R. Stowell (Eds.) , *Best practices for technology-enhanced teaching and learning: Connecting to psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 87-104). New York, NY US: Oxford University Press.
- Kosslyn, S. M. (2011). *Better PowerPoint: Quick fixes based on how your audience thinks*. New York, NY US: Oxford University Press.
- Lord, P., Martin, M. M., & Abramson, C. I. (2007). The use of PowerPoint shareware for making Jeopardy!-type games in the teaching of psychology. *Perceptual And Motor Skills, 105*(1), 8-14. doi:10.2466/PMS.105.5.8-14

Aspire Communications has a lot of information on relational presentation, including some excellent books for each version of PowerPoint.
- Basics: http://www.aspirecommunications.com/relational-presentation-about-1.html
- Books: http://www.aspirecommunications.com/books-index.html
- Free tutorials: http://www.aspirecommunications.com/FreeTutorials.html

More Web-based Information
- Using PowerPoint Effectively (Clip 6, by David Daniel): http://college.cengage.com/psychology/shared/guest_lecture/popup.html
- A video about interactive menus: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbdAz0dP0UY
- University of Pittsburgh tutorial for making interactive, non-linear slide shows: http://www.pitt.edu/~poole/Office2003Tutorials/Lesson102003.pdf
- Information about creating hyperlinked presentations: http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/advice/powerpoint
- Basics about interactive PowerPoint for the classroom: http://ctl.byu.edu/tech-tips/interactive-powerpoint
- Microsoft's advice about having students develop an interactive story with PowerPoint: http://www.microsoft.com/education/en-us/teachers/how-to/Pages/interactive-story.aspx
- Creating a *Jeopardy*-style interactive game with PowerPoint: http://www.joe.org/joe/2003april/tt2.php

Other Useful Resources:
- Mozilla's Firefox: http://www.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/new/
- Video Download Helper (available through Firefox's add-on manager)