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PowerPoint Research Paper

Of the many recent technologies that have changed the way students are taught, the most widespread by far is PowerPoint. Released in 1987 for Mac OS, and later bundled as a part of the original 1990 Microsoft Office suite for Windows 3.0, the program has since grown to the point where it has all but a tiny percentage of the marketshare in presentation software. Although it bears many similarities to slide presentations from before the advent of the computer, it is set apart by the ability to incorporate multimedia elements within slides, such as audio and video, and the ease of creating slideshows from scratch. For these reasons, it has a firm foothold in educational environments, particularly colleges and universities.

Despite its obvious upsides, PowerPoint has a number of problems that have tarnished its reputation. The software allows users to create slides in whatever layout they choose, and has no restrictions on the amount or type of content that can be put on a single slide. As a result of this extreme flexibility, those who are unaware of best practices in presentations may cram slides full of text or graphics, which can be quite difficult for the audience to follow. Slides with small text can also be problematic for those who are visually impaired, or those who are sitting far away from the projector screen during a presentation.

Another oft-cited issue with PowerPoint is that it is all to frequently treated as the entirety of a presentation, rather than a presentation aid. When presenters do nothing but read the text directly from the slides, the presentation has added no informational value, as compared to a printed packet of information or pages in a textbook. Slideshows that include few or no graphics can seem dry and dull if no care is taken by the presenter to engage with the audience and expand upon the information in the slideshow.

Understanding how to avoid these pitfalls is vital, given the frequency with which PowerPoint is used in educational environments, where more is at stake than whether or not the audience is bored. Over 60% of college professors report using PowerPoint in a majority of class meetings, and only 11% claim to never use it. As alluring as PowerPoint can seem as a teaching aid, misuse of it will hinder learning. Unless professors have taken the necessary steps to learn how to craft an effective slideshow, they are doing their students a disservice by using PowerPoint, and should instead opt for more traditional methods of instruction.

In response to criticism of the software, many organizations have produced sets of best practices for the use of PowerPoint. Although the specifics vary, all seem to make similar suggestions. Slides should be brief, with a very limited amount of text on each line, and relatively few lines. Each slide should contain no more than one or two images, and content should be varied, so audience members do not lose interest. No more than a minute or two should be spent on each slide, and the presenter should only use the text on the slide as a reference, rather than reading directly from it. Text should be large enough that all members of the audience can easily read all slide content, and should be in one of the common typefaces that are known to be highly readable. Slide transitions or other animation should not get in the way of the presentation.

If the presenter will need to give the audience more materials than what can reasonably be put in the presentation, he or she should distribute paper or electronic copies of a supplement. This supplement can also contain a summary of the presentation, and can serve as a backup if technical issues prevent the use of PowerPoint; any excessive reliance on the slideshow can become a problem when problems with computer hardware or software inevitably arise. If a

presentation would be impossible without the use of PowerPoint, then the presenter is likely too dependent on it, and should restructure their plans accordingly.

As previously stated, PowerPoint can only serve as an aid to a presentation, and should never be thought of as an all-encompassing tool. Particularly in an educational context, presentations as a whole should be engaging to the audience. PowerPoint-based presentations can easily become one-sided and monotonous if the instructor does not pause to interact with their students by asking questions and probing for comments. Students will learn best when they feel their presence adds to the value of the lesson. Furthermore, input from students during the presentation can give the instructor an idea of how well they are doing, and indicate a need to refocus on the fly, to address an unforeseen stumbling block, or clarify any other issue students have with the material.

Much like any other tool, PowerPoint can be used well, or used poorly. The consequences of its use or misuse depend on the scenario in which it is used. In education, it can either add to students' experience, or be a cause of boredom and disinterest. Just the same as any other tool used for presenting information in a classroom, brevity and clarity are of the utmost importance. The competency of the instructor will be reflected in how effective they are in conveying their knowledge to students, no matter what medium they use, but taking into account how PowerPoint seems to be the most common medium of choice, it is necessary for instructors to be aware its strengths and weaknesses. Essentially, one should not depend upon PowerPoint slideshows as anything more than an organizational tool and visual aid, but when instructors learn the proper use for the software, it can greatly enrich the quality of modern education.

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