Powerpoint® Unplugged - Part One: 7 Ways to Transform a Slide Show into a Learning Tool.

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Powerpoint®: *noun* 1. An overused presentation tool that is a trainer's joy and a learner's nightmare; 2. A slide creation program that is as good, or as bad, as its live user; 4. A computer application that can either aid - or destroy - learning.

Let's get one thing straight: Powerpoint® was *never* intended to be a learning tool. Its original purpose was to help presenters organize their material, grow confident in their ability to speak, stay on track, and create a visual form of their verbal presentation. As such, it has succeeded superbly: presenters are more organized, more confident, and more "on track."

From an audience's perspective, however, Powerpoint® is a lousy tool for learning, at least when it's used the way most presenters and trainers use it: as a visual display of lecture notes. Most Powerpoint® users lecture straight from the screen, reading their slides aloud, word for word, while learners read them silently.

It can get worse. Some folks even say, "Well, I know you can't read what's on this slide, so I'll read it to you..." and then proceed to do just that, reading from a slide that is unreadable to everyone else.

The only upside for audiences is that, with the lecture notes on Powerpoint® slides and Powerpoint® handouts, listeners can elect to grab the handouts and head out the door if they wish - the slides and lecture are all there for them to read over a cup of coffee in the comfort of their own homes.

If you've ever had the honor of being part of an audience that had to sit through a lengthy, boring Powerpoint® presentation, you know how painful the experience can be.

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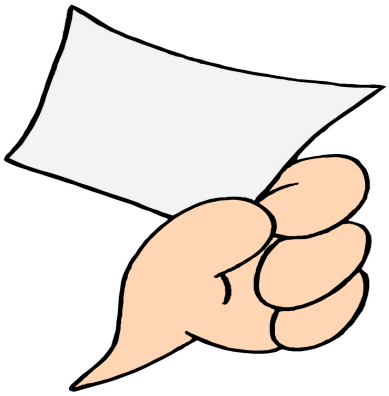
As a trainer, you do NOT want to inflict that kind of pain on your learners. So what kinds of changes can you make to your slide presentations, while still covering the material? How can you use slides without losing your learners in the process?

Here are seven suggestions to begin with - simple ideas that will turn a slide show into a learning tool. Use one or all of these ideas in your next slide presentation, and watch learners' interest and involvement increase while boredom flies out the window.

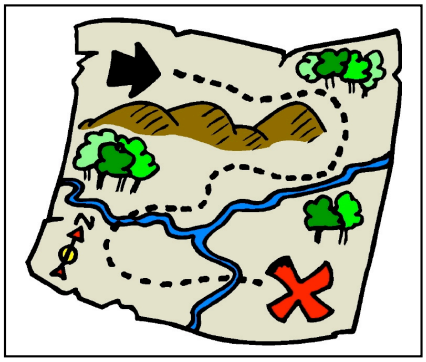
1. Cut your slide show in half.

If you use 20 slides for an hour presentation, aim for 10 instead. That's about one slide every 6 minutes. Then get creative with the slides you leave out, using other media to display the information: handouts, charts hung around the room, index cards, or single typed sheets of paper. Information printed in large type on single pages can be placed on tables or taped to the backs of chairs. When the time comes to cover that information, learners can take a moment to hunt for the information - moving around in their seats or standing around a wall chart. The movement breaks up the lecture and awakens the dozing bodies and minds.



2. Use images to teach concepts.

A picture is, indeed, worth a thousand words. We all know this! We remember images longer than words. So, whenever possible, use photos, graphics, or cartoons on slides to illustrate the information. Make sure the image is related to the concept printed on the slide. And make sure the image is large and clear enough to capture the interest and attention of the learners.



By the way, stories, metaphors, case studies, analogies, and real-life examples all create mental images as well. The more concrete you can make the information, the more interesting it becomes and the better it will stick in the minds of your learners.

3. Use the need-to-know versus nice-to-know rule.

Only put on a slide what your learners need-to-know. Put the nice-to-know information in resource packets, or at the back of the handouts, for learners to read later.

How do you know which is need-to-know versus nice-to-know? Ask yourself, "What information is crucial to the learners, the lack of which will cause

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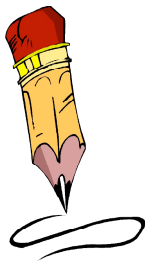
them to lose their jobs?" THAT is the need-to-know stuff. Cover this information first. Only if you have time to spare, do you go back and cover the nice-to-know material.

4. Keep it simple.

Instead of lecturing directly from your slides, put only the most important words or phrases on the slides and lecture from your notes instead. This means the slides have NO paragraphs, NO sentences, NO fillers (like "therefore," or "quite possibly," or "in conclusion,") - USE ESSENTIAL WORDS ONLY on the slides.

* **Important words.**
* **Bulleted phrases.**
* **Shorter is better.**
* **Less is more.**



5. Lose the template.

Attention drops when slides look boringly alike. "Habituation" kicks in and the brain begins to screen out repetitive images and data, causing learners to daydream. If your company policy dictates using the same logo or template on each slide, then vary its location or position, or add graphics.

6. Check for distance and color.

Stand at least five feet away from your computer screen and look at your Powerpoint® slide show. If you cannot EASILY read every word on every slide, the font size is too small. The rule is to use at least a 30-point font size or larger. No script fonts, please - they are difficult to read. Use printed fonts only.

Black print on a white background is the easiest to read from a distance. Colored backgrounds and light print (red, yellow, white, green) wash out in bright or fluorescent-lighted rooms. Use colors for graphics or borders. Be aware that the colors on your computer monitor may look totally different when projected onto a screen.

7. Use the 10/20 rule.

Break up your lecture into segments about ten minutes in length. In between each segment, pause and ask a question, solicit comments, or do a quick, one-minute review activity (see other articles or books on the www.Bowperson.com website for these 60-second activities). The interactive break will be beneficial for you as well as your learners.

Every twenty minutes, stop talking and direct learners to MOVE: stand and stretch, sit and stretch, take a few deep breaths, write on a wall chart, write on note-taking pages, form standing groups to discuss what they have heard, turn to the persons seated next to them

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and ask a topic-related question, etc. Movement increases blood flow to the brain which, in turn, makes the brain work better - a good thing if you want learners to remember what you're teaching them.

Final Thoughts.

The choice is yours, every time you use Powerpoint® as part of a presentation or training: Do you want your learners to be bored to tears or to listen and learn - awake, involved, and wanting more when you are finished training? Small, simple changes make all the difference. Go for it - and watch your learners come alive when you do.

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Note: For more Powerpoint® "how-to" tips, look for Part Two of this article on Sharon's website.

This article is part of Sharon's newest book, to be published in 2008 by Pfeiffer Co., a division of John Wiley & Sons. Log onto ***www.amazon.com*** for Sharon's five popular training books already in print.

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Sharon Bowman helps educators and business people "teach it quick and make it stick," - fine-tuning their information-delivery skills and turning their passive listeners into active learners.

Sharon is also the president of Bowperson Publishing & Training, Inc., professional member of The National Speakers Association (NSA), and member of The American Society of Training and Development (ASTD). Over 60,000 of her popular training books are now in print.

For more information about Sharon and her books and training services, log onto ***www.Bowperson.com***, or email her at ***SBowperson@aol.com***.

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