

### Creating Audience-Focused PowerPoint Presentations

#### ***Identifying the PowerPoint Problem***

PowerPoint is a program that creates presentations or slide shows. It is a great lecture organizer, a great presentation tool, and can be a great learning tool as well. It all depends on how you use it. There is an ongoing debate about misuses of PowerPoint, mostly complaints that too often PowerPoint presentations are slide after slide of static, bulleted text which is read verbatim to an audience – a phenomenon known as “PowerPoint Poisoning.” Lots of folks much more famous than me have shared their insights and solutions, and Google search will reveal many hits on the topic, but for what it’s worth, here’s my two cents as to the cause of this problem – and a possible solution.

I think PowerPoint Poisoning has its roots in the dual uses PowerPoint offers: PowerPoint can be used to *organize* a presentation and it can be used to *present* a presentation. When we confuse one with the other, we run into trouble.

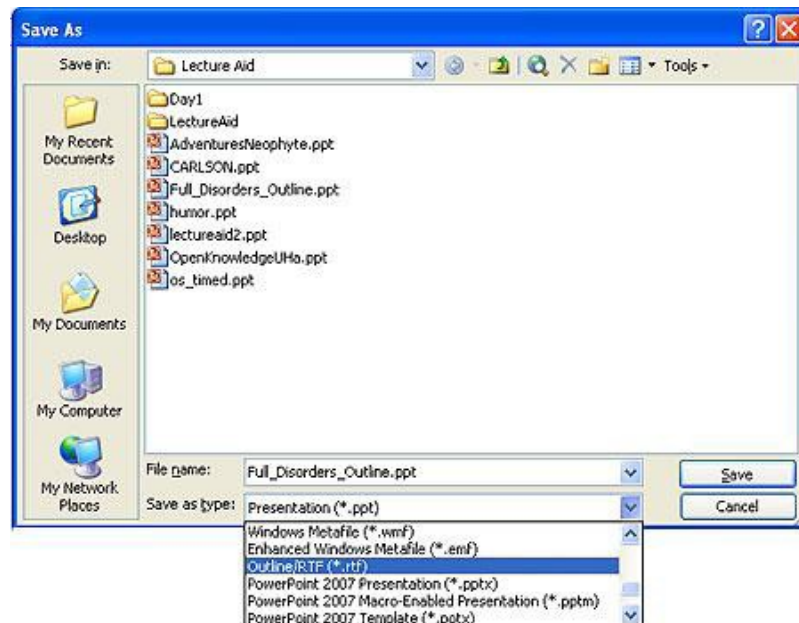
Here’s what happens. The presenter opens PowerPoint and begins to brainstorm about what he or she is going to present. Perhaps the content already exists in a word processing document and the presenter just needs to condense the material and put it into PowerPoint. Either way, the presenter opens PowerPoint and uses the bulleted slides to help outline a lecture presentation. I happen to think PowerPoint is an excellent tool for this, particularly if you use the outlining tool built right into PowerPoint. In cases where the lecture already exists in document form, the presenter often copies and pastes the lecture notes directly into slides, culling text and summarizing along the way. Voilà! The finished slides are a ready-made outline that will help guide you through your presentation. This is great for YOU, the presenter, but if you also use this text outline for the actual presentation, it will diminish your presentation, rather than enhance it because text on slides is simply not a very engaging way to present content. Imagine if you outlined your presentation on 4x6 index cards and then passed them out to the audience while you read them...not exactly a flashy way to reach an audience. Yet, this is exactly what many people do with PowerPoint.

Here’s an approach that might help - one that doesn’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. Try a two-step approach. First, outline the text version of your PowerPoint. Save this draft presentation; this is for you. Now go back and transform it into an effective visual presentation. First, open the draft and save it under a new name so that you have two presentations. The first one will help you outline your presentation, but it can also be distributed later to participants as ‘lecture notes’ or a study guide. The second is the one that you bring with you to your audience – It should be engaging, interactive, and visually appealing.

#### ***Step One: Create a Text-Based Presentation to Help You Organize***

Use text and bulleted slides to organize your content. Your aim is to create a cohesive, well-organized presentation with a logical flow; one that covers only 3 or so major points.

1. **Begin presentation.** Open up a new presentation and add title slide.
2. **Add a new slide.** On it, summarize key points – what main points do you want them to get? Decide key concepts, then break these down into supporting arguments.
3. **Add slides** – one for each bullet point. Type headings on them...
4. **Add supporting slides.** After each main concept slide, use **Insert Slide** to add bulleted slides. Use these for your supporting points (Cliff Atkinson calls these explanation slides).
5. **Add an overall metaphor** as a framework and theme for your presentation.
6. **Pattern the text** – add refrains (keep coming back to key concepts or main point), add a consistent and familiar slide flow.
7. **Add stories and narrative** if you can, to help support your key points and explanations.
8. **Review it in condensed form.** Save the file as **Outline/RTF** and review. Does the lecture flow well? Are your key concepts and supporting points grouped logically?



9. **Revise the lecture flow as needed.** Expand or contract text as needed. If you have too much material on a slide, cut it down or break that slide into two slides using Copy Slide. If you have not made supporting points, expand to do so now.

10. **Add closing summary**, which should reflect and refer back to your main point.

### **Step Two: Redesign It For Your Audience**

Take your outlined PowerPoint, go back and revise it for your audience. Ask yourself the following questions: Who is my audience? What will keep their interest? How can I make it

interactive and avoid reading my slides? Here are some elements you can use in place of narrative text: Quotes, poetry, images, emphatic text, Videos (YouTube, etc.), questions, story narratives, anecdotes, jokes, animations. The goal is to create two PowerPoints for each lecture: one for you and one for your audience. If you like, you can send the audience both versions afterwards, to help reinforce the learning.

1. **Analyze your audience** – what works for them, who are they?
2. **Select Design Template** or edit the slide master to fit the needs/interests of the audience and also the content.
3. **Storyboard** your original outline. Use images and draw each slide using only images (avoid text!).
4. **Copy and Paste** the text on each slide into the *Notes* area below the slide.
5. Now, on the slides, **replace factual text with stories, quotes, or other narratives**.
6. **Cull text** so it is in summary form. If you can't do this, you should consider creating an accompanying word or excel handout
7. **Add images**; remember a picture tells a thousand words.
8. **Add appropriate transitions**...fades mean time passage. Cuts mean quick action. Fading from black means new topic, new timeframe, etc. **Avoid all other transitions – especially fancy effects such as closing blinds and checkboxes!**
9. **Add effects**. Embellish with *judicious* use of effects. Be very careful here...don't use bells and whistles unless they enhance your points or build your theme visually.
10. **Build in interaction**. Instructors often use a mix of group work and presentation. This breaks up the monotony of watching slide after slide in a dark room (zzzzzz). You can pause the show using the keyboard letter 'b'. This makes the screen black, so you can do something interactive with the audience and then seamlessly return to PowerPoint. When you want to resume your PowerPoint, hit 'b' again.
11. **Add credits**. Insert a new slide and add credits and citations. Be sure to cite sources. You can ask a reference librarian about how you should cite digital materials, and online sources.
12. **Add contact information**. Insert slide and add contact information.
13. **Invite Q&A**. This can be done verbally or on a slide.

In his book, *Beyond Bullet Points*, Cliff Atkinson suggests a different approach. He suggests you do a three step analysis, reviewing a presentation in three different views to see if it has met the criteria of being a focused presentation, balances narrative with visuals, and is visually engaging for the audience (Atkinson, 2005).

### **Step Three: Practice and Prepare for the Presentation**

1. **Memorize the narrative** so you don't read the slides. Although you have culled the text from the presentation, this doesn't mean you are leaving it out. The verbal narrative that accompanies your PowerPoint presentation should match the slides somewhat, but provide added value – give them more. As an FYI, visual images accompanied by verbal narrative is supported by research as being highly effective. Narrating visual text is found to produce cognitive dissonance (Mayer, 2001). Be sure to match your narrative to any visuals or graphics.
2. **Rehearse.** This word is used intentionally to infer that you are acting and you are – sort of. You are trying to engage your audience from a make shift stage, so you need to include some acting skills. If possible, record yourself...do you look enthusiastic? Sincere? Are you fidgety? Varying pace, pitch and volume appropriately will help capture the audience and keep them engaged. Time your narrative so that you allow the audience time to scan the slides before you begin speaking.
3. **Scope out room and practice** once there (if possible). This will help you avoid technical 'gotchas' and let you get used to the acoustics. Does the room have all you need technically? Figure out where you will stand in the room. Can you maintain eye contact with audience? Can you see the projector screen?



4. **Use a wireless presenter mouse.** This will allow you to wander around the room.
5. **Decide ahead of time how to transport your presentation.** Now that you know the room and what equipment is available, decide how you will transport PowerPoint there. Email, Dropbox (<http://www.dropbox.com>) or a flash drive are all good options, depending on the computer setup available in the room.
6. **Establish contingency plan.** What if the projector isn't working? Are you going to be ready to present without your presentation? Bring a handouts version if there aren't too many folks in the audience. Handouts are a great contingency for technical failures.
7. **Follow up with email,** etc.

### **Works Cited**

Atkinson, C. (2005). *Beyond Bullets*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Press.  
Mayer, R. E. (2001). *Multimedia Learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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## ***Getting Help with Technology at the University of Hartford***

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### **Faculty Center for Learning Development (FCLD)**

FCLD provides consulting and instructional support to faculty and staff who are using technology in teaching and learning. The FCLD Faculty Lab in Mortensen 203a is available for faculty support and use and is equipped with instructional technology- related equipment including: PCs, Macs, scanners, and projectors as well as support staff. Faculty and Staff needing support with Blackboard or other instructional technologies should contact FCLD.

**Phone:** (860) 768-4661 **Email:** [fcd@hartford.edu](mailto:fcd@hartford.edu)

**Website:** <http://www.hartford.edu/fcd>

### **Student Blackboard Support**

The following is student support for Blackboard only. All other support technical support issues need to be addressed to the Office of Technology Services (below).

**Phone:** (860) 768-4636 **Email:** [bbsupport@hartford.edu](mailto:bbsupport@hartford.edu)

**FAQ/Submit a Ticket:** <http://www.hartford.edu/studentbbsupport>

### **Office of Technology Services (OTS) Help Desk**

For general computer and Internet/network support questions (not directly related to the classroom but rather passwords, Internet/email problems, Banner/Self-Service, campus Facebook).

**Phone:** (860) 768-4357 (on campus) or (844) 292-3213 (off campus)

**Email:** [ots@hartford.edu](mailto:ots@hartford.edu) **Website:** <http://hartford.edu/ots>

### **Media Technology Services (MTS)**

Faculty should contact MTS for assistance scheduling or implementing classroom technology (2-Way interactive video classrooms, Smart Podiums, laptops, etc.), for setting up WebEx accounts, or for scheduling and instruction for a wide variety of media equipment and resources like LCD data projectors, CD/cassette players, TVs and VCRs, digital video, and more.

**Phone:** (860) 768-4643 (Main) or (860) 768-4662 (Tech Line)

**Website:** <http://www.hartford.edu/mts>