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# It's 2020. Why Are You Still Using PowerPoint?

The world's top communicators have stopped using PowerPoint. Why are you stuck in the 1980s?



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**Everybody hates PowerPoint.** Nobody, anywhere, anytime, has ever thought: "Hooray! He's starting his PowerPoint presentation!" That, in itself, doesn't *necessarily* mean that **PowerPoint is useless**. After all, dental drills are useful, but nobody has ever thought: "Hooray! He's starting his dental drill."

**PowerPoint, however, is much less than a necessary evil.** It's a tool that, even when used as intended, does not fulfill its primary purpose, which is to help you communicate more effectively with your audience.

Communication is effective when your audience understands and retains the information that you're trying to communicate. PowerPoint hinders, rather than helps, that process. This is not a matter of whether the tool is used correctly; the flaw lies in PowerPoint itself.

The premise behind PowerPoint (and its clones) is that audiences supposedly better understand and retain information when they see words on a screen while a presenter is speaking. While that seems to be intuitively true, all the evidence is to the contrary.

For example, [2008 study of PowerPoint usage at the School of Industrial Engineering at Purdue University](#) found that "students retained 15% less information delivered verbally by the lecturer during PowerPoint presentations."

Similarly, [a 2005 study published in the journal \*Teaching and Learning in Medicine\*](#) found "no differences in short- or long-term retention of material," regardless of whether presented using static overheads or animated PowerPoint slides.

In other words, all the time and effort you spend creating a fancy PowerPoint is at best wasted and at worst counterproductive. PowerPoint, in short, doesn't do what it's supposed to do.

The reason? Well, it turns out that when the brain tries to simultaneously process multiple versions of the same message, it creates confusion (a.k.a. cognitive overload), much like hearing the same song simultaneously played in different keys and tempos.

Ironically, the PowerPoint behavior that audiences hate the most--reading from the slides--is actually *more* likely to increase retention than if the speaker provides a commentary. "Speaking to" the slides may make a presentation less boring, but it also makes the content harder to remember.

The cognitive overload is even worse when PowerPoint is used to display diagrams that have been created in PowerPoint. Such diagrams are essentially multiple slides crammed into a single slide--a mosaic of bullet lists inside shapes connected with arrows and lines.

These spaghetti diagrams confuse more than they enlighten, as anyone who's sat through a PowerPoint presentation knows too well. As General Stanley McChrystal sarcastically quipped when confronted with one of these monstrosities: "When we understand that slide, we'll have won the war."

Now, it's true that PowerPoint can also display technical diagrams, like schematics, and multimedia content, like video clips. However, using PowerPoint as a media viewer is massive overkill.

Consider: Such data stored as jpg or mp4 files consumes a tiny fraction of the resources consumed by a ppt file, and, moreover, it can be displayed on any device (including smartphones) without

requiring a pricey and bloated software package.

PowerPoint has another huge disadvantage: It constricts discussion. Despite the obligatory "feel free to interrupt me at any time" remark, interruptions during PowerPoint presentations are clearly unwelcome (by presenter and audience alike), because they make the presentation even longer.

More important, such interruptions aren't meaningful until the audience has seen the entire presentation. So rather than sparking discussion, PowerPoint presentations tend to delay comment until the final "Questions?" slide. The built-in assumption is that the PowerPoint presentation contains everything the audience needs to know and therefore all that's left is to fill in a few details.

To make matters worse, because PowerPoint presentations are almost always accompanied by handouts, audiences are discouraged from taking notes with pen or pencil, which [according to research cited on PBS](#), actually *does* increase retention.

By contrast, other ways of introducing information into meetings (like [briefing documents](#), whiteboarding, and [workbooks](#)) tend to

encourage note-taking and therefore [increase both understanding and retention](#).

PowerPoint, in short, doesn't deliver. As a tool, it's like a gun that shoots backward. While you may occasionally use it to successfully shoot a blind pig, most of the time, the results are, well, suboptimal.

PowerPoint is a tool whose time has come and gone. [The world's top communicators have already rejected it](#), and obviously with good reason. Let's leave it back in the 1980s where it belongs. Enough already.

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