

Teaching with PowerPoint

PowerPoint's most typical use in the classroom is as a tool for structuring and supplementing lecture—a function it can serve quite effectively. As with every tool, though, the skill with which it's wielded makes all the difference. Overly dense slides from which a lecturer reads to a passive student audience can do more harm than good.

A rich learning environment crafted in concert with PowerPoint, on the other hand, can engage diverse learners in a range of multimodal content, **scaffold** their note-taking, **foster participation**, and facilitate analysis and synthesis through **in-class writing** activities. Moreover, knowing that your content is organized dynamically within a visual roadmap can boost your confidence when presenting.

Some suggestions for teaching with PowerPoint:

Design your slides with intention and an eye toward active learning.

- Aim for sparse slides to underscore key concepts rather than to replicate your speech. Not only will this prevent students from struggling to listen, read, and write simultaneously, but it will also prime them to paraphrase in note-taking. As they do so, they'll be synthesizing and distilling, not transcribing (or, worse, taking no notes at all because the slide deck has done all the work for them).
- Identify inflection points in content to insert a breaker slide prompting students to discuss briefly with their neighbors or complete an **in-class writing** activity as a **performance of understanding**. (You might, for example, invite students to identify examples of a concept you've introduced, work out a sample problem, reflect on a targeted discussion question, or describe a connection to prior content.)
- Capitalize on the multimodal potential of PowerPoint by linking video, graphs, images, or sound clips to keep the lecture dynamic and allow students to examine primary sources.

Employ your slides as a supplement, not an anchor, when in the classroom.

- All speakers improve their delivery with practice. Especially when teaching from a deck for the first time, rehearse aloud to determine what elaboration you'll provide on each slide.
- When possible, rove the room to better hold students' attention and demonstrate you're alert to their engagement.
- There are arguments both for and against providing slides to students. Withholding slides they could use as a study aid serves no one. But affording them an opportunity not to take notes is equally counterproductive. Whatever you decide, consider how your slide design, the nature of your content, and the culture of your class might affect students' learning behaviors and make a purposeful choice to shape those behaviors toward active grappling with course material.

References

- Duarte, Nancy. *Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations*. Boston, MA: O'Reilly, 2008.
- Knaflig, Cole Nussbaumer. *Storytelling with Data: A Data Visualization Guide for Business Professionals*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015.

See also

Designing Documents for Students
Fostering Participation
In-class Writing
Teaching with Lecture