

# For Even More PowerPointers...

If the tips inside have only whetted your appetite to learn more, here are five books that can help steer you away from PowerPoint's deepest pot-holes and aim higher when designing your next presentation:

## The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint

by Edward Tufte  
(Graphic Press LLC ©2003)

As reviewed in the June 2003 edition of *free-range thinking* (and alluded to earlier), this is a scathing critique from one of the deans of information architecture. The booklet, which can be read in an hour, is available at [www.edwardtufte.com](http://www.edwardtufte.com).



## Really Bad PowerPoint and How to Avoid It

E-booklet by Seth Godin

Short and bitter with very specific advice, Godin is a tad didactic for my tastes, but at \$1.99 (to download the booklet from [www.sethgodin.com](http://www.sethgodin.com)) you can't go wrong.



## Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising

by Paul Messaris  
(Sage Publications ©1997)

Many of the principles Messaris teaches about photography in ads apply to PowerPoint.



## Before and After

by John McWade  
(PeachPit Press ©2003)

Written for amateurs like me who must dabble in the field of graphic design, McWade's tips are oriented towards print but (like Messaris) are helpful in designing PowerPoint slides as well.



## Presenting to Win: The Art of Telling Your Story

by Jerry Weissman  
(Prentice Hall ©2003)

Solid advice on the art of presenting based on Weissman's extensive experience as both presenter and coach. The book also features illustrated examples of effective and ineffective PowerPoint presentations.



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# PowerPoint Corrupts

...and it can corrupt your presentations absolutely if you let it. Follow a few simple suggestions, however, and you'll discover how the software that everyone loves to hate can actually enhance your next talk.

Edward Tufte is no fan of PowerPoint. In his treatise, "The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint," the design guru asserts that the world's most widely used presentation software does nothing less than compromise "...the presenter, the content, and ultimately, the audience." Seth Godin, author of *Permission Marketing*, is even less diplomatic. "Almost every PowerPoint presentation sucks rotten eggs," he writes in his e-booklet, *Really Bad PowerPoint and How to Avoid It*.

Such harsh criticism is entirely warranted. PowerPoint, used poorly, ruins presentations and wastes the time of

everyone who must endure slide after slide of dense text, meaningless bullets, and unreadable charts. But the key words here are "used poorly." In the last three months alone I have delivered fifteen presentations and helped design a half dozen more for my clients. At the end of almost every talk, at least one audience member compliments my visuals and asks, "What presentation software were you using?" The answer, which inevitably surprises, is PowerPoint. Loathe it or hate it, most of us are stuck with PowerPoint, but the techniques described inside can help you deliver a few pleasant surprises of your own. ►



a goodman

GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

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Newsletter edited by Carolyn Ramsay.

► **First and foremost, understand what your presentation is *not*.**

A PowerPoint presentation is not a document. Proposals, reports, memos or leave-behinds can do the heavy lifting of information transfer. Your presentation—whether five minutes or two hours long—should neither resemble nor recapitulate printed matter. It is also not an outline projected on screen to help you remember the key points of your talk. If you need prompts, carry index cards.

Your time at the podium is your opportunity to convey the essence of your proposal, shine a spotlight on key points of a report, or tell a story that brings your issue to life in ways that only live delivery can. And the entire purpose of your PowerPoint is to provide visual elements that more clearly explain, more dramatically depict, and more emotionally emphasize each point you wish to make. Bearing that in mind...

**Go heavy on images, light on text.**

Even when taking copious notes, most audience members will retain very little from your talk. The more you throw at them, the less they'll tend to remember. Putting text on the screen while you talk only compounds this problem. Not only are you presenting even more information, you're asking the audience to divide its concentration between competing information sources. A compelling picture, in contrast, can provide an emotionally powerful backdrop that underscores points you wish to make.

For example: a speaker looking to highlight rising rates of childhood asthma in the U.S.

would have plenty of statistics from which to choose. A single photo of a young girl sitting in an emergency room with an inhaler in her hand and a frightened expression on her face would make a far greater impression on the audience than any set of numbers. (And keep in mind that black-and-white photography often possesses an authentic, documentary quality that color does not.)

In *Really Bad PowerPoint*, Seth Godin dictates, "No more than 6 words on a slide. EVER." I don't subscribe to such absolutes, but if you intend to display more text than can be read in a quick glance, stop talking and give your audience space to read.



*"I need someone well versed in the art of torture—do you know PowerPoint?"*

The pause will call attention to the text, honors the audience members' ability to actually read for themselves (which, amazingly, many speakers fail to acknowledge), and lets them "hear" the words in their own internal voice, which is uniquely powerful.

**Design outside the box.**

Most presentations I see use the default white background for each slide. This projects the familiar white box on the screen, causing so many presentations to look essentially the same. Even when presenters discover color backgrounds (or, heaven forefend, built-in templates), their images and text remain stuck inside

**PowerPoint Corrupts**

a box. A black background, however, puts nothing on the screen except the images and text you choose. This allows you to create slides with no apparent borders and focuses the viewer's attention precisely where you want it directed.

**Use animation to control the flow of information.**

When a slide with five bullet points appears on screen, the audience will automatically read all five bullets, even if you're still talking about bullet #1. Now they've missed part of your explanation and, since they know where you're going, may tune out the remaining comments until the next slide appears. Using an animation effect to introduce each bullet in sequence keeps the focus on the point you wish to make and eliminates these problems.

**Discover the miracle of the B key.**

Given the choice of looking at the speaker or a slide, audiences generally choose the slide. It's just human nature: if they can hear you, they won't feel obligated to look at you. Sometimes, though, you need their undivided attention. PowerPoint gives you the tool: the letter B key. Press it once while in VIEW SHOW mode, the screen goes black, and every eye in the place returns to you. Press it again, your slide magically reappears, and every head turns back to the screen. The B key won't help you design better presentations, but it sure comes in handy when you need all eyes on you. ■

