The Writer's Lab	Put the power back into your PPT presentations

When PowerPoint was launched in 1984, it was a revelation – and a revolution.

Speakers everywhere were urged to ditch their smudgy OHTs and bulky slide cassettes and embrace the digital revolution.

Several decades on, PowerPoint is ubiquitous. Even worse, it's become boring. People know what to expect when they go to a PowerPoint presentation, and they're usually not disappointed.

This is a pity, because beneath the annoying clipart and endless dot points lurks an incredibly powerful communication tool. Here are some questions to help you transform your PowerPoint presentation from cliché to class:

- **Is PowerPoint really needed?** Does it add anything to your presentation? Every great speech in history has been just that: a great speech (take a look at the spot-on PowerPoint parody of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address here)
- **Is it big enough?** Use at least a 30 point font size. If in doubt, print a page, drop it on the ground and see if you can read it when you stand up
- **Is it bright enough?** Use contrasting colours for text and backgrounds. Remember that a projector screen is much dimmer than a computer monitor, so text and images need to be bold
- **Is it distracting?** Text should only 'appear' and 'disappear', not careen in from the edges or pirouette away. If you leave an image on the screen "to give the audience something to look at" while you talk, don't be surprised if they accept your invitation and ignore you completely
- **Is it overcrowded?** If you're tempted to crowd the slide with text, don't. Not only does it look bad, but it's completely disregarding your audience, who came to *listen* to a presentation, not to read copious text on a screen. Which brings us to…
- **Are you reading the slides verbatim?** Unless you have a bouncing ball over the text, the audience will read much faster than you can speak, making you little more than a droning irritation. If you know you'll be tempted to read the slides, only put up brief points that you'll have to expand on
- **Is it consistent?** Choose a style and stick to it. Audiences will quickly start playing 'spot the difference' if you veer too far from your chosen font and background.

And one final tip: **remember the power of the 'B' key**. Pushing this magic button fades the screen to black, removes all distractions and leaves the audience focussed entirely on you. Which is exactly what you want, isn't it?

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