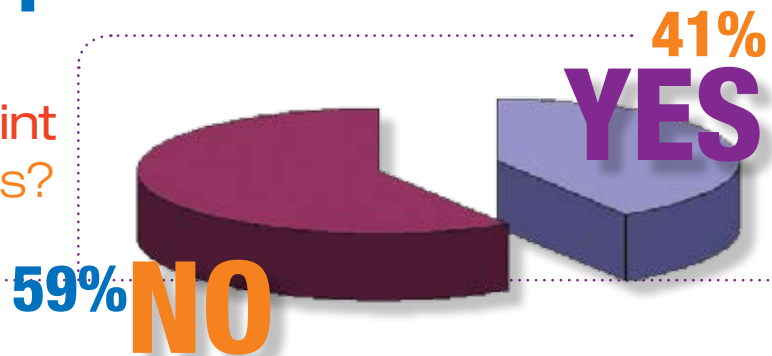


READERS respond

Is PowerPoint Crippling Our Students?



The crippling comes from the faculty that use PowerPoint. Bad lectures were invented way before PowerPoint. PowerPoint allows for very animated and even guided discovery-based discussions to occur. Interactive tutorials can also be produced in PowerPoint. Creative faculty can make PowerPoint be an engaging tool in the classroom.

*Scott A. Sinex, PhD
Professor and Chair, Department of
Physical Sciences and Engineering
Prince George's Community College
Largo, Maryland*

Looking at technology practices, it appears that PowerPoint has become the focus, in addition to the Internet, of current Ed Tech practices. Lots of time is spent on making PowerPoint presentations and Internet research, but I am not convinced students are actually benefiting or learning much from it anymore. Most students are already pretty PowerPoint savvy, so we are just recycling the same technology tools. Instead, I believe that PowerPoint is used because it's the one technology tool other than the Internet that teachers feel comfortable with and can easily integrate into their units and lessons so they can claim that they practice technology integration in accordance with district and state expectations.

*Bjorn Norstrom
Information Technology Teacher
Colchester Middle School
Colchester, Vermont*

To say that PowerPoint is crippling our students gives a single tool way too much power. Teachers and students need to understand PowerPoint as a speaker's aide; the elements of good design; and the features of PowerPoint that allow a student to add notes, references, and sources. Poor PowerPoint displays, like any other strategy or tool in the classroom, are ineffective and a waste of time; however, to use PowerPoint for the proper purpose and to its fullest capabilities is to give students a tool to build on their creativity and demonstrate their understanding of a topic.

*Diane Plantz
CESA 10 Ed Tech Services
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin*

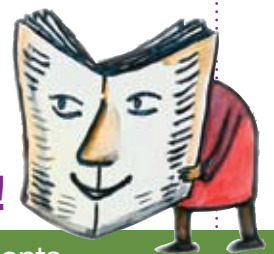


The PowerPoint point/counterpoint articles were disappointing to me. I hope that we can move beyond a technophobe/technophile dichotomy in our approach to educational technologies. PowerPoint advocates must recognize the reality that using PowerPoint for presenting, teaching, and learning has many justifiably negative associations in the public consciousness. At the same time, I wish that PowerPoint detractors would acknowledge that what they decry is how PowerPoint is often used, not PowerPoint itself.

A vital part of information literacy for teachers and students must be a critical approach to the tools of information manipulation. Given the properties inherent to its original use as a tool of persuasion for business/sales people, PowerPoint can easily be used in a stultifyingly linear, oversimplified, and pedantic manner. As a powerful multimedia tool, PowerPoint misuse can result (intentionally or not) in medium overwhelming content.

On the other hand, the affordances of PowerPoint, in the hands of critically thinking teachers and students, can enhance teaching and learning. Please see <http://www.fno.org/sept00/powerpoints.html> for an excellent article on a thoughtful approach to having students use PowerPoint, and <http://www.ntlf.com/html/sf/notevil.htm> for a thoughtful article on teaching with PowerPoint.

*Jim Julius
Associate Director
Instructional Technology Services
San Diego State University
San Diego, California*



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Send your comments to us at letters@iste.org

After reading the two editorial position statements, I decided that the last statement made by Kathy Johnson is perhaps most important. She asks, “perhaps I need to review how I use it?”

PowerPoint, like any software, can be used inappropriately. When PowerPoint was introduced at Graceland, the faculty were not shown how to use it effectively, but rather how to use it in general. They repeated the same mistakes made nationwide by creating slideshows with multiple fonts, colors, sounds, and effects. Faculty used PowerPoint to replace chalkboard writing and created dozens of slides full of notes and in many cases, proceeded to read them. Graceland students soon began to refer to some classes as “death by PowerPoint.”

Using PowerPoint effectively is fairly simple. Ask the question, “what is the purpose for using it?” If you are using it to simply replace writing lots of notes on the blackboard or to provide yourself with lecture notes it probably is an ineffective and boring application. I like to advise students to use PowerPoint as a prompt or focal point for a class activity. The PowerPoint document should only be 1–3 slides in length. A broad, thought-

provoking question or intriguing video clip can be placed on a slide and used to stimulate discussion. The beauty is that it remains on the screen even after the class activity evolves. It is the reminder of what the overall topic of the activity is.

When we use technology we have to be cognizant of its effectiveness and appropriateness to the situation. Anyone can make the best technology “bad.” It requires an introspective and informed teacher to make it better.

*Dennis McElroy, PhD
Asst. Professor/Director of Technology
Graceland University, School of Education
Lamoni, Iowa*

I firmly believe that PowerPoint can be a valuable learning tool that promotes inquiry-based learning. However, the effects of PowerPoint on student learning are relative to how the teacher uses the program. Like all software programs, if the teacher utilizes PowerPoint to engage learners, it will benefit the students. A great example of this type of hands-on learning would have students creating their own PowerPoint presentations. This activity encourages

students to creatively demonstrate their understanding and apply concepts that are related to a particular topic. As a result of increased creativity and interest, PowerPoint may also encourage students to research the topic in more depth than a traditional assignment. When students are interested, they want to keep exploring and learning more.

On the other hand, if a teacher only uses PowerPoint to disseminate information (to enhance a lecture), it can become a deterrent to learning if the teacher does not design the presentation to allow for dialogue and/or deviation from the lecture.

*Kimberly S. Kleyer
Eighth Grade Computer Teacher
Collinsville Middle School
Collinsville, Illinois
Associate Faculty - Educational Technology
McKendree College
Lebanon, Illinois*



Has no one heard of “Death by PowerPoint”? Anything longer than a few slides can be deadly long and possibly boring. The

only good use may be having students construct their own presentation of information they may have gathered. However, there are many other better programs to do that, such as HyperStudio or Apple’s Keynote.

*Bob Pettapiece, EdD
Wayne State University
College of Education
Detroit, Michigan*

No, PowerPoint is not crippling our students ... but some teachers are. Too often teachers with little or no understanding of application integration will assign a presentation to the students and accept their work with little attention to its content. The transitions are all there but the purpose for the assignment is lost amongst them.

*Art Fulcher
Instructor, Lincoln University
Jefferson City, Missouri*

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN *L&L*

Learn to Catch Plagiarism

Online tools have made it easier for students to plagiarize, but they have also made it easier to catch plagiarism. *L&L* senior editor J.V. Bolkan lists some tools and techniques to ensure that you will not be fooled if a student turns in work that is not original.

Manage School Communication

L&L columnist Don Hall tackles the sticky issue of communication throughout a school or district about technology uses, needs, and priorities. Hall provides tools and strategies to ensure that not only higher-ups but also the community values the role technology plays in your educational settings.

Technology Partnerships

Assistant professor (Department of Technology, Kentucky State University) Melissa Bledsoe describes ways high school business teachers can partner with elementary teachers to integrate technology. Teacher exchanges, mentoring partnerships, and multi-age student projects are just a few of the options Bledsoe provides.

