

Chapter 1

PowerPointing with the Best of Them

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting used to the new PowerPoint 2007 interface
 - ▶ Discovering PowerPoint's elements
 - ▶ Creating structure and workflow
 - ▶ Delving into different types of presentations
 - ▶ Giving the audience members what they want
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Unlike many other applications, PowerPoint is easy to figure out and to use. And although PowerPoint 2007 is even more amazingly simple to use than previous versions, this also means that creating terrible presentations is even easier! Although anyone can create a PowerPoint presentation with a few words and visuals, you can use PowerPoint to its complete potential only if you understand the composition of its *elements*.

All these elements come together to form the *structure* of a presentation — but there's more to a PowerPoint presentation than just structure and the elements. One of the most important ingredients is the *workflow* that makes up the order in which you create and add elements to your presentation.

This chapter first looks at the new PowerPoint 2007 interface. Then it discusses PowerPoint's elements, a presentation's structure, your workflow for creating a presentation, and more. Although these topics cover theory more than practical application, spending a little time internalizing these concepts will take you a long way toward making your finished presentations more effective and cutting edge.

And that brings me to what I mean by the term *cutting edge*. After all, that term is part of the title of this book. By *cutting edge*, I mean using simple concepts to create presentations that will work in all situations. The cutting-edge part here is the results — not that I expect you to create presentations in a space satellite somewhere outside the earth's atmosphere! And those types of results mean that you have to be element-savvy. Later in this chapter, I discuss these elements — and each of these elements is also discussed in separate chapters within this book.

Taking a Look at PowerPoint 2007

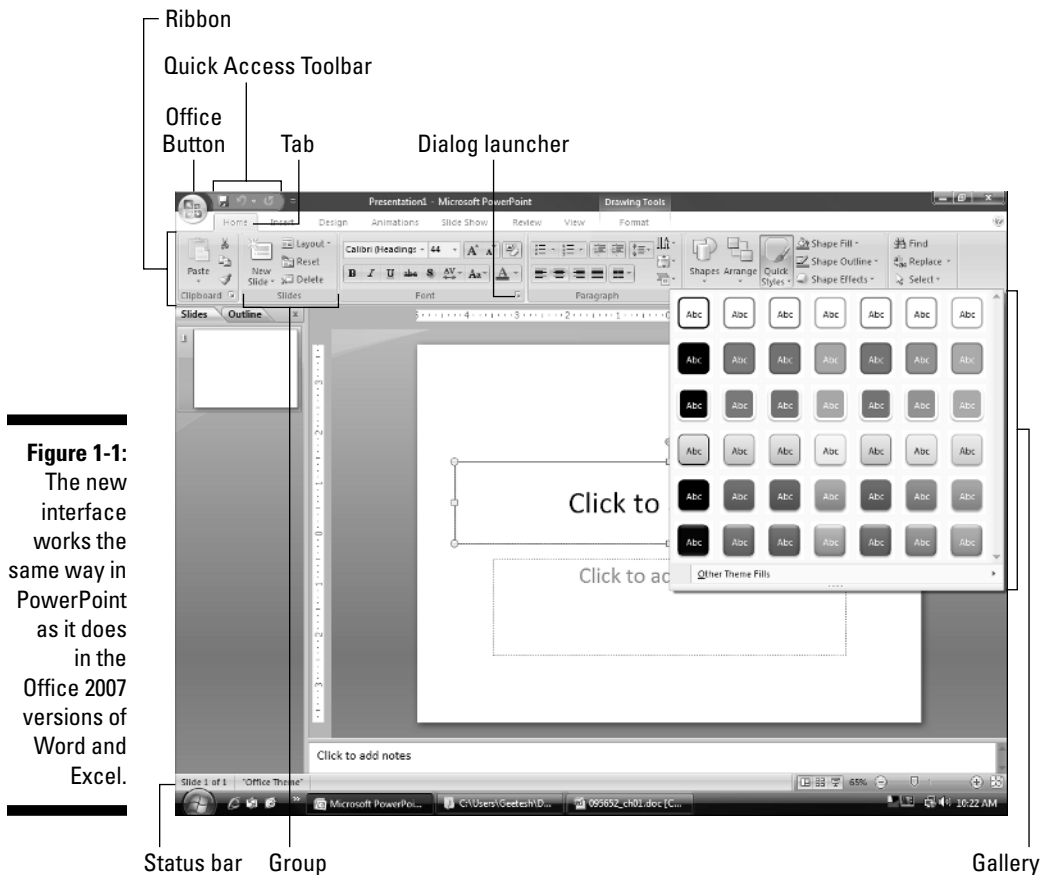
Maybe you've worked with PowerPoint for the last several versions of the program, or you might have just started with the program. Either way, you'll find that PowerPoint 2007 has a new interface. Gone are the menus and the toolbars. In their place, you see the Ribbon with all its tabs and galleries. And yes, you have the Mini Toolbar, as well.

Cut the Ribbon and get started

Figure 1-1 shows you the new PowerPoint interface. It's actually the embodiment of simplicity, but I still explain its components because I refer to the interface all through this book!

- ✓ **Office Button:** The Office Button (see Figure 1-1) is a round button placed on the top left of the interface that works almost the same way as the File menu in earlier versions of PowerPoint.
- ✓ **Quick Access toolbar:** The Quick Access toolbar is a customizable toolbar that can store your often-used commands.
- ✓ **Ribbon:** The Ribbon comprises the area above the actual slide. It replaces the menus and toolbars in earlier versions of PowerPoint.
- ✓ **Tabs:** The Ribbon is tabbed. You can access each tab by clicking the tab header or selecting a particular slide element, which automatically activates one of the tabs. In addition to the tabs normally visible on the Ribbon, contextual tabs appear when a particular slide object is selected. In Figure 1-1, you can see the Drawing Tools Format tab of the Ribbon — that's a contextual tab.
- ✓ **Buttons:** Each of the tabs has several buttons that do something when clicked — they launch a dialog box, reveal a gallery, change the tab itself, or just do something on the slide.

- ✓ **Groups:** Buttons are arranged logically into groups. For example, all the paragraph formatting options are located within the Paragraph group of the Home tab of the Ribbon.
- ✓ **Galleries:** Galleries are collections of preset choices. Most of these choices are in the form of small thumbnail previews that show you how the final effects will look. Many galleries can also be seen as drop-down galleries so that you can see even more thumbnail previews.
- ✓ **Dialog box launcher:** Dialog box launchers are small arrows below some groups that launch a related dialog box.
- ✓ **Status bar:** The status bar provides information and viewing options.

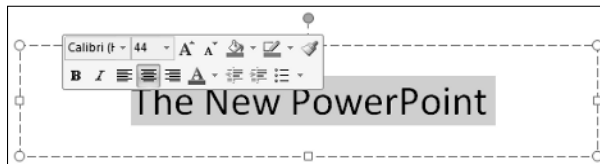


The Mini Toolbar

So what is a Mini Toolbar? As much as you might like that mini bar in your hotel room, I promise you this one is more helpful! If you select some text in PowerPoint, you'll see a semitransparent floating toolbar that provides all the text formatting options you need without having to make a trip to the Home tab of the Ribbon. That's the Mini Toolbar.

Figure 1-2 shows you the Mini Toolbar in all its resplendent glory. Just move the cursor away or deselect the text, and the Mini Toolbar gets sad and goes away. If you want to get it back again and it's in no mood to come back, you can always right-click the selected text to order it back into your esteemed presence.

Figure 1-2:
Here comes
the Mini
Toolbar.



The Elements of PowerPoint

When you open PowerPoint, it presents you with a blank canvas that you color with your ideas and your message. The brushes and paints used to transform this blank canvas into an amazing interactive medium are its elements of composition:

- ✓ Text
- ✓ Background, images, and info-graphics
- ✓ Shapes
- ✓ Fills, lines, and effects
- ✓ Sound and video
- ✓ Animations and transitions
- ✓ Interactivity, flow, and navigation

If you've heard or read any of those "Death by PowerPoint" cries in the media these days that bemoan the lack of aesthetics in PowerPoint presentations shown all over the world, you need to make friends with all the elements of PowerPoint so that you can use these elements more effectively to create more aesthetic PowerPoint presentations.

In the following sections, I explain more about these individual elements and then follow it up with how they team together to form an entire presentation workflow. I discuss each of these elements in greater depth in separate chapters throughout this book.

Text

Text is the soul of a presentation — it relates to content like nothing else. Your text could be in the form of titles, subtitles, bullets, phrases, captions, and even sentences.

A barrage of visual content might not be able to achieve what a single effective word can say — sometimes, a word is worth a thousand pictures. Text is significant because it means you have something to say. Without explicit text, what you're trying to say might not come through as strongly as you want.



Too much text is like too much of any good thing — it can be harmful. For example, a slide with 20 lines of teeny-weeny text just doesn't work. The audience can't read it, and the presenter doesn't have time to explain that much content! Anyway, if you're cramming so much text on a slide, you've already lost the focus of your presentation.

Backgrounds, images, and info-graphics

PowerPoint uses three types of graphical elements:

- ✓ **Backgrounds:** The backdrop for your slides. Backgrounds need to be understated.

You can create a great presentation with a plain white background. On the other hand, artistic backgrounds are a great way to bring a presentation to life.

The new *themes* in PowerPoint 2007 also let you recolor background graphics by applying new *Theme Colors*. These are explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

- ✓ **Pictures:** Images that you insert in slides. Pictures share the stage with text.
- ✓ **Info-graphics:** Images that combine visuals and text to make complex information and statistics easier to understand. Info-graphics include charts, tables, maps, graphs, diagrams, organization charts, timelines, and flowcharts. You can also create info-graphics in a separate program, such as SmartDraw or Visio, and bring them into PowerPoint later.



Images and text always work together — collectively, they achieve more than the sum of each other's potential. However, images need to be relevant to the subject and focused; using an unsuitable visual is worse than using no visual at all. The same rules apply to info-graphics, as well.

PowerPoint provides many ways to present images — from recolored styles, effects, and outlines to animations and builds.

Shapes

Simple objects such as circles, rectangles, and squares can help you explain concepts so much better. PowerPoint looks at the entire shape concept in a different way through its Shapes gallery. The shapes within the Shapes gallery seem like regular lines and polygons, but that's where the similarity ends; they are very adaptable in editing and creation. Shapes can also function as building blocks and form the basis of complex diagrams and illustrations.

Fills, lines, and effects

Shapes, pictures, and even info-graphics in PowerPoint can stand out from the slide by using an assortment of fill, line, and effect styles. Most styles are found in galleries on the Ribbon tabs.

Sound and video

PowerPoint provides many ways to incorporate sound: *inserted sounds*, *event sounds*, *transition sounds*, *background scores*, and *narrations*.



PowerPoint was perhaps never intended to become a multimedia tool — nor were presentations ever imagined to reach the sophisticated levels they have attained. Microsoft has tried to keep PowerPoint contemporary by adding more sound capabilities with every release. This version finally makes it easier to work with sound in PowerPoint by adding a whole new Ribbon tab containing sound options.

As computers get more powerful and play smooth full-screen video, viewers expect PowerPoint to work with all sorts of video formats. But that's a far cry from reality. In Chapter 11, I look at workarounds that keep PowerPoint happy with all sorts of video types.

Animations and transitions

Animations and transitions fulfill an important objective: introducing several elements one at a time in a logical fashion to make it easier for the audience to understand a concept. Keep these guidelines in mind when using animations and transitions:



- ✓ Animation is best used for a purpose. An example would be using animation to illustrate a process or a result of an action.

If you use animation without a purpose, your presentation might end up looking like an assortment of objects that appear and exit without any relevance.
- ✓ Transitions can be either subdued or flashy depending on the flow of ideas being presented. In either case, they need to aid the *flow* of the presentation rather than disrupt it.

Animations and transitions are covered in Chapter 12.

Interactivity, flow, and navigation

Amazingly, interactivity, flow, and navigation are the most neglected parts of many PowerPoint presentations. These concepts are easy to overlook because, unlike a picture, they aren't visible:

- ✓ **Interactivity**, in its basic form, is the use of hyperlinks within a presentation to link to
 - Other slides in a presentation
 - Other documents outside a presentation (such as Word files)
- ✓ **Flow** is the spread of ideas that evolves from one slide to the next. Flows can be smooth or abrupt.
- ✓ **Navigation** aids interactivity. It is the way your presentation is set up to provide one-click access for the user to view other slides in the correct order.



Navigation is mostly taken care of by using the PowerPoint Action Buttons, but you can link from any PowerPoint object to move from one slide to the next.

Interactivity and linking are covered in Chapter 13. Good flow concepts are influenced by proper use of consistency and animation. Consistency is covered in Chapter 4, and animation is covered in Chapter 12.

Going Outside PowerPoint to Create Presentation Elements

Although you might believe that all the elements of a cutting-edge presentation are accessible from within PowerPoint, that's not entirely true. Professional presentation design houses don't want you to know the secret of using non-PowerPoint elements in your presentation — this knowledge is often the difference between a cutting-edge presentation and an ordinary one!

Examples of non-PowerPoint elements include the following:

- ✓ Images retouched and enhanced in an image editor, such as Adobe Photoshop
- ✓ Charts created in a dedicated charting application
- ✓ Music and narration fine-tuned, amplified, and normalized in a sound editor
- ✓ Video clips rendered in a custom size and time in a video-editing application
- ✓ Animations created in a separate application, such as Macromedia Flash

When these non-PowerPoint elements are inserted inside PowerPoint, most of them can be made to behave like normal PowerPoint elements.

Structure and Workflow

The words *structure* and *workflow* might sound a little intimidating, but they are merely a way of ensuring that your presentation elements are working together.

Presentation structure

A typical presentation structure combines the elements I mention at the beginning of this chapter into something like what you see in Figure 1-3.

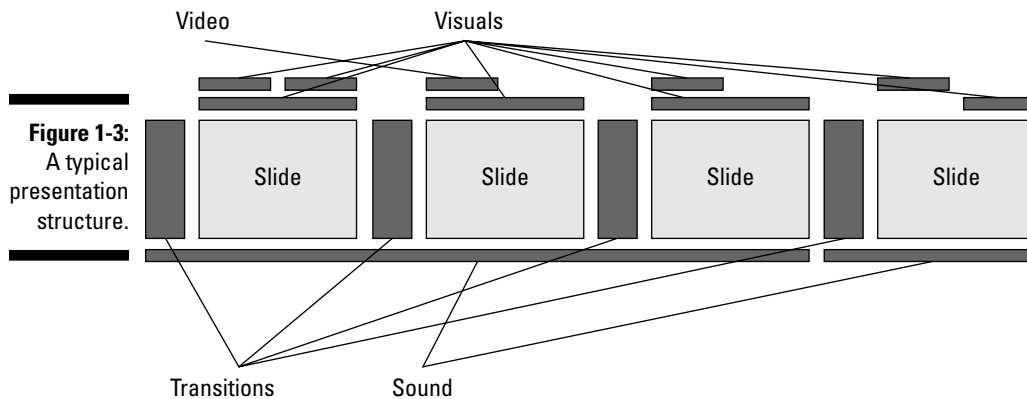


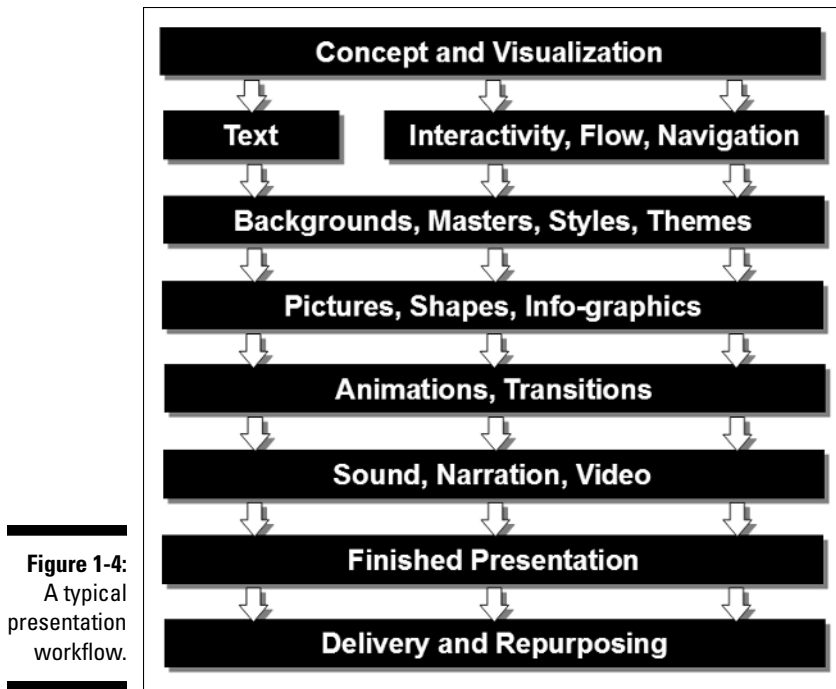
Figure 1-3 is just an example — almost every presentation has a unique structure depending on the content of the presentation and the audience. On the other hand, the presentation *workflow* for most presentations remains unchanged, which is what I explain next.

Presentation workflow

The presentation workflow decides the sequence of the elements that I explain earlier in this chapter. In addition, it includes some more abstract elements such as *delivery* and *repurposing*. Chapters 14 and 15 discuss these vital concepts.

Figure 1-4 shows a typical presentation workflow.

As you can see, the workflow begins with concept and visualization and ends with delivery and repurposing. But that's not entirely true — repurposing can often be the same as the concept and visualization of another presentation! That's food for thought — and the stimulus for thoughts on another interesting subject. . . .



What Can You Use PowerPoint For?

You can use PowerPoint to create all sorts of presentations:

- ✓ **Business presentations:** More than anything else, people use PowerPoint to create presentations intended for the boardrooms and conference halls of the corporate world, where people of all sorts come to see and hear content. And as those in corporate corridors have discovered, the most important thing is to have a PowerPoint presentation ready for every proposal and product — and I should add sales and service to that list!
- ✓ **Homework projects:** Don't be flabbergasted if your kid asks you to help create a presentation for school. Or maybe you are a kid reading this and can't understand what's so great about creating a PowerPoint presentation for a project. Schools all over the world are discovering the virtues of PowerPoint — the program lets you assemble all sorts of media, such as images, text, and sound, in one document. And think about the amount of paper and ink you save by replacing that project poster with a PowerPoint presentation!

- ✔ **Educational content:** Colleges and universities commonly have their own banks of presentations for every conceivable subject. Some of these presentations are sold for very high prices as “talks” by specialized vendors — and the high prices are because these talk presentations were created by highly renowned professionals. Even at the high cost, these talk presentations are a steal because they’re the next best thing to inviting those professors to speak to your students.
- ✔ **Kiosks:** Kiosks can display anything and everything nowadays — from travel information at airports to the playlist at the coffee shop jukebox. And many of those kiosk displays are actually PowerPoint presentations.
- ✔ **Religious presentations:** And now for the godly frontiers — that projection of the hymn lyrics in church was likely created in PowerPoint. So was that fancy slide show that displayed pictures from the missionary trip to South America.
- ✔ **Government presentations:** PowerPoint is used everywhere in the administrative sphere. Be it presidents or prime ministers — or even organizations like the United Nations and its various agencies all over the world — so much these days happens on a PowerPoint slide. And yes, when something goes wrong, such as space shuttle disasters, PowerPoint often is given some of that blame!
- ✔ **Multimedia demos:** This is probably the most controversial use because PowerPoint was never intended to be used as a tool to create multimedia demos that run from CD-ROM. Nevertheless, PowerPoint allows interactivity and navigation between slides — and because so many people already have PowerPoint, all those bosses decided that they might as well ask untrained office staff to put it to good use!

Of course, you can use PowerPoint for so much more — electronic greeting cards, quizzes, posters, and even multiplication tables. You’re limited only by your imagination. PowerPoint is a great tool to present your ideas.

Giving People What They Like to See

The simplest secret of creating great presentations is to give audiences what they like to see. If you give them anything else, they’re bound to complain with bouts of loud-mouthed vengeance and stupidity. Okay — I admit that was an exaggeration. They’re more likely to doze off and snore loudly while you’re presenting!

So what do audiences like to see? That’s what I discuss next.

Truth and sincerity

More than anything else, audiences want sincerity and truth. Just because you put that sentence in a 48-point bold font in a contrasting color doesn't mean that your audience will believe what it says. If there's something in common among audiences of any place, age, and sex, it's that they want something they can believe — and if there's even a hint that something mentioned in your presentation is gobbledygook, you can wave goodbye to the remaining 999 slides in that presentation! (And please don't make such long presentations.)

Of course, there are rare exceptions to that rule. A few centuries ago, audiences didn't believe that the earth was round — or that people could find a way to fly. If what you're presenting is similarly groundbreaking, I'll let you put that in your next PowerPoint presentation. And I'm so proud that you are reading this book.



Never use any content that can be thought of as discriminatory toward race, gender, age, religious beliefs, weight, and so on. Not only will discriminatory phrases or even images reflect badly on you, they'll also hijack the entire focus of your presentation.

Style and design

To enliven your message, use as many of these style and design guidelines as you can balance on a single PowerPoint slide:

✓ **Choose an uncluttered background for your presentation.**

- Plain color backgrounds get around that clutter problem just by being plain!
- Other background types, such as textures, gradients, and photographs, have to be more carefully chosen.



Test your background choice by inserting enough placeholder text in an 18-point font size to fill the entire slide area in two slides. Use black text on one slide and white text on the other. If you can read text on both the slides clearly, your background really works! If just one color works, you can use that background if you make sure that you use the right colors for all other slide objects. See Chapter 3 to find out more about picking the right colors.



- ✓ **Make sure your text is large enough that it can be read even by the audience members in the last row.** You don't want to make anyone in the audience squint to read your slides!
- ✓ **Make sure that you use just the right amount of visual content to get your message across.** Don't use too little and certainly don't use too much.
 - Don't add 16 pictures when a few are enough.
 - Use only relevant content; don't waste your audience's time and energy (or yours, for that matter) on images that have nothing to do with the topic of discussion.
- ✓ **Make sure that any sounds you insert in your presentation all play at the same volume.** You don't want the sound on one slide to be low and then follow that with a sound that's loud enough to wake up your ancestors.

Correct spelling, accurate grammar, and good word choice

Nothing is as embarrassing and shameful as a misspelling on a slide — especially considering that PowerPoint includes an excellent spell checker. But even beyond the spell checker, make sure that the spellings work for the country and audience you are presenting to. Thus, *color* is perfectly fine in the United States, but make that *colour* if you're presenting in the United Kingdom or in India.

Avoid repeating the same word on a slide when possible. For example, if you see a phrase like “report results in weekly reports,” you need to do some editing! You can use PowerPoint's thesaurus (accessible on the Review tab of the Ribbon) to find alternatives if you find yourself repeating certain words.



Don't read the slide aloud to your audience while you're giving your presentation. Slight differences in language and wording can make all the difference. Audiences want you to take the content further by sharing your experiences, opinions, and ideas on the subject.

