

Chapter 1

PowerPointing with the Best of Them

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Unlike many other applications, PowerPoint is amazingly easy to learn and to use. Ironically, 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 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, if you spend a little time internalizing these concepts, you will go a long way toward making your finished presentations more effective and cutting-edge.

The Elements of PowerPoint

PowerPoint is just a tool. It presents you with a blank canvas that you color with your ideas and your message. The brushes and paints used for this electronic transformation from a blank canvas to an amazing interactive medium are its elements of composition:

- ✓ Text
- ✓ Background, images, and info-graphics
- ✓ AutoShapes
- ✓ Sound and video
- ✓ Animations and transitions
- ✓ Interactivity, flow, and navigation

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. Each of these elements is discussed in greater depth in separate chapters throughout this book.

Text

Text is the soul of a presentation — it relates to content like nothing else.

A barrage of visual content may 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 a good thing — they can both be harmful. For example, a slide with 20 lines of teeny-weeny text that nobody in the audience can read just won't work. The audience can't read it, and the presenter doesn't have time to explain that much content!

Backgrounds, images, and info-graphics

PowerPoint uses three types of graphical elements:

- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Pictures** share the stage with text.
- ✓ **Info-graphics** combine visuals and text to great advantage.

These tools can include charts, tables, maps, graphs, diagrams, organization charts, timelines, and flowcharts. Info-graphics can make complex information and statistics easy to understand.

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.

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

AutoShapes

Normal shapes include simple objects such as circles, rectangles, and squares. PowerPoint looks at the entire shape metaphor in a different way through its AutoShapes technology. These AutoShapes seem like regular shapes, but that's where the similarity ends; they are very adaptable in editing and creation. AutoShapes can also function as building blocks and form the basis of complex diagrams and illustrations.

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 sound abilities with every release. But that has meant compromises — most sound options are almost inaccessible to the everyday PowerPoint user. They're buried under heaps of dialog boxes and options. In Chapter 10, I show you how to unravel the sound mysteries of PowerPoint.

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 10, 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 that makes it easier for the audience to understand a concept.

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



Use animation without a purpose, and 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.

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 an image, 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 other. Flows can be smooth or abrupt.

- ✓ **Navigation** is the way your presentation is set up to provide one-click access to other slides.

Navigation is mostly taken care of by using PowerPoint's Action Buttons, but you can link from any PowerPoint object.



Non-PowerPoint 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 within 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 six elements mentioned at the beginning of this chapter into something like you see in Figure 1-1.

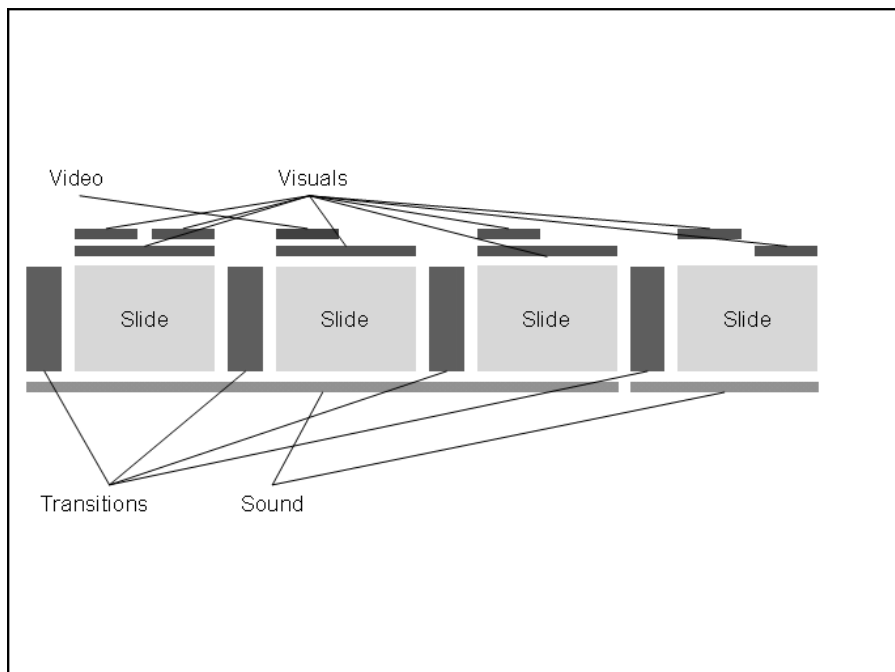


Figure 1-1:
A typical
presentation
structure.

Figure 1-1 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.

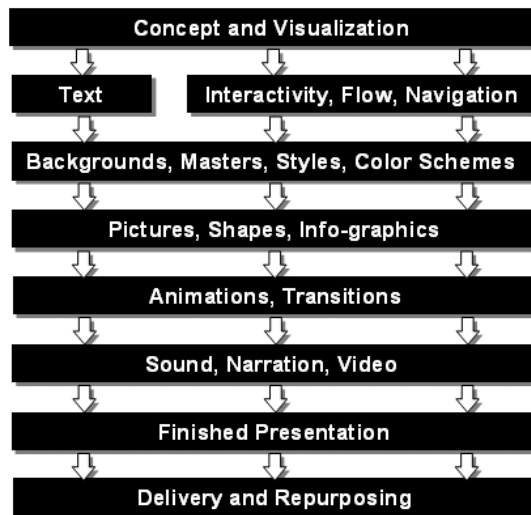
Presentation workflow

The presentation workflow decides the sequence of the six elements I explain earlier in this chapter. In addition, it also includes some more abstract elements like *delivery* and *repurposing*. Chapter 14 and the bonus chapter on the CD discuss these vital concepts.

Figure 1-2 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. . . .

Figure 1-2:
A typical
presentation
workflow.



What Can PowerPoint Be Used For?

PowerPoint can be used 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 collars come to see and hear content. And as the corporate corridors have discovered, the most important thing is to have a PowerPoint presentation ready for every proposal, product, and prayer — and I should add sale, service, and sin 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, like 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 are the next best thing to inviting those professors to speak to your students.
- ✓ **Kiosks:** Everything is on a kiosk nowadays — from travel information at airports to the play-list 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. As was that fancy slide show that showed you pictures from the mission trip to South America.
- ✓ **Government presentations:** PowerPoint is used everywhere in the administration 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 gets to share 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, PowerPoint can be used for so much more — electronic greeting cards, quizzes, posters, and even multiplication tables. You are limited only by your imagination.

Giving People What They Like to See

The simplest secret of creating great presentations is to give audiences what they like to see. Give them anything else and they are bound to complain and spurt into bouts of loud-mouthed vengeance and stupidity. (Okay — I admit that was an exaggeration. They are more likely to doze off and snore loudly while you are 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 between 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 did not believe that the earth was round — or that airplanes could fly. If what you are presenting is so groundbreaking, I'll let you put that in your next PowerPoint presentation. And I'm so proud that you are reading this book.

Style and design

To enliven your message, use as many of these style and design guidelines that 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.



As a test, insert 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, then 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 without squinting by the audience members in the last row.**

✓ **Make sure that you use just the right amount of visual content to get your message across** — not too little and certainly not too much.

- Don’t add 16 pictures of something when 2 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.

✓ **If you’re inserting sounds in your presentation, make sure that they 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 peacefully sleeping audience.

Spelling and grammar

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 are presenting in the U.K. or in India.

Avoid using the same word twice on a slide. You can use a thesaurus to mix up the text:

✓ PowerPoint 2003 has a thesaurus built in.

✓ If you have an older version of PowerPoint, you can use the thesaurus in Microsoft Word to find new and related words to enrich the text content on a slide.



Don't speak exactly what's on the slide while presenting — slight differences in language and wording can make all the difference. Audiences don't like to hear parrotlike repeated narratives of what's already mentioned on the slide — they want you to take the content further by sharing your experiences, opinions, and ideas on the subject.

No discrimination

Never use anything that can be thought of as discriminatory toward race or gender. Not only will racist or sexist phrases reflect you in poor light, they will also hijack the entire focus of your presentation.