



## Public Speaking: If You Must Use PowerPoint...

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“The trouble with PowerPoint is, usually there’s no power and no point.” I’m not sure who said it first – the advertising executive I heard it from said it came from Bill Gates, former CEO of Microsoft, who many blame for unleashing a powerful tool on unsuspecting speakers and audiences everywhere. We have all heard snide references to “PowerPoint Hell” and “Death by Power Point.” Today’s blog post follows from an earlier one on public speaking, [Better Public Speaking: 6 Tips, 6 Sins and 1 Golden Rule](#), where I emphasized that perfectly fine, even terrific, talks can be delivered without the use of PowerPoint.

But if you’re going to use PowerPoint, there are a few rules. Let’s go over a few here, for your benefits of speakers and audience members everywhere. You can also check out this killer YouTube video, [STOP! You’re Killing Me with PowerPoint!](#)

**Rule 1: Words are important, but ...**

- Shaving 5% off U.S. electric peak loads (2000) would save 9.5% of total gas use, probably returning the market to \$2–3/MMBtu for 3–5 y
- At average 2000 load-management costs, costs ~\$5–15 billion
- Could save ~\$40b/y of gas + (McKinsey) ~\$15b/y el. Costs
- If focused on congested transmission zones, could also relieve alleged blackout-related constraints, stabilize power markets, and insure against price-gouging — all at negative net cost
- Could reduce power-sector vulnerability to insufficient gas storage or gas deliverability constraints, not just electric constraints
- Could also help insulate direct-gas consumers from spillover price volatility originating in the power sector
- Value of avoiding price spikes could be asymmetrical, as for oil
- 9–17% saving (2010–20) from profitable gas efficiency found by 5 Nat'l Labs but not in EIA forecasts
- El. & gas eff'y are blocked by perverse incentives that reward energy waste in all 48 states but OR/CA

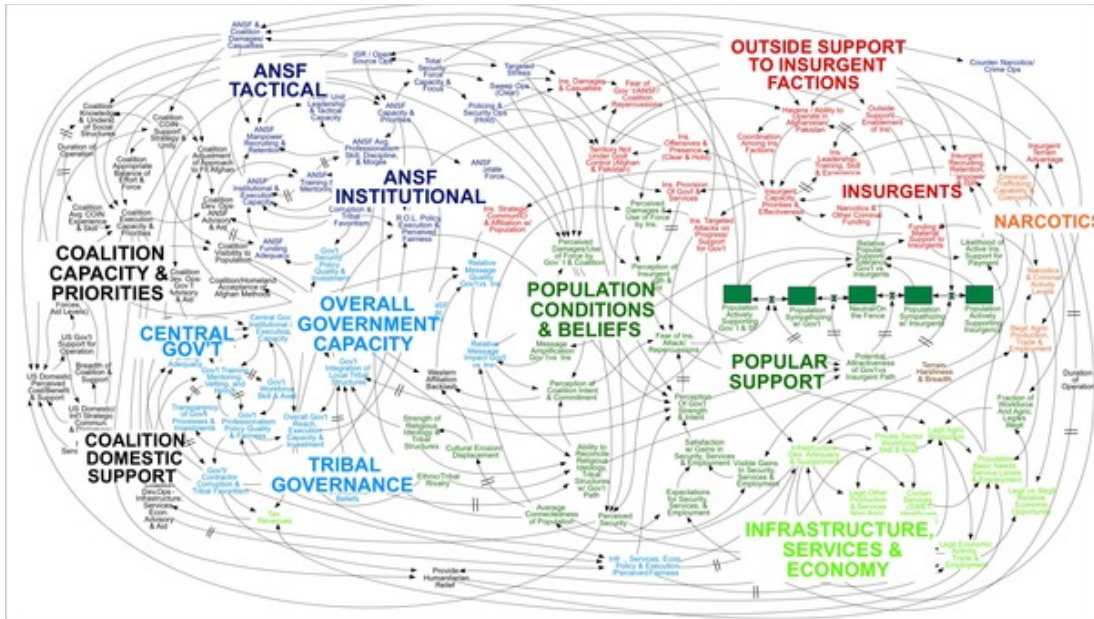
This is verbatim copy from one actual slide (out of about 60 or 70, if I recall correctly) delivered by someone who has forgotten more about energy than I will ever know. I removed it from its original template so readers could have fun guessing who might have delivered it and in what context.

I'm simply amazed that after so many years of PowerPoint use, and hundreds of books and publications on how to develop a PP presentation (and how NOT to), I still see presentations and slides such as this one. Slides like this one show contempt for your audience.

Regardless of who delivered it, or where, or under what circumstances, there's simply too much content for one slide. There's probably enough content here for an entire 60-minute talk. Your audience can only absorb a limited amount of information, widely believed to be three major points. Assaulting them with dozens of slides that look, more or less, like this one ensures you will fail to get your point across.

**Communications tip of the month:** *If you are going to use PowerPoint in your presentation, make sure it has power as well as a **point**. Follow the Goldilocks Rule: Stay away from slides that are copy-heavy or that contain busy, confusing art. Aim for a happy medium.*

**Rule 2: Art is good, but ...**



This is a real slide developed by the U.S. military to provide an overview to the war in Afghanistan. Visually, this one is a real mess.

Yes, you want to use art to help you tell a story. The only story emerging from this slide is chaos. Everything is related to everything, which means nothing is really related to anything. The drive for detail overwhelmed the creator of this slide. Don't make that same mistake.

**Rule 3: People process information in different ways...**



Researchers have identified three principal means by which people learn. Consciously develop your slides to use all three means:

- Learning by **seeing** is the dominant mechanism, accounting for about 60% of the information we gather
- Learning by **hearing** is the second most impactful means of learning about something, accounting for about 30% of the information we gather
- Learning by **doing** accounts for the remaining 10% of the information we gather

With that in mind, deliver information through all three channels whenever possible. . When you use PowerPoint, alter text-based slides with slides containing video or audio clips, pictures, live links to websites and other forms of multimedia. Periodically in your presentation, stop and ask the audience to share their experiences on a topic or react to what you have said. A presentation that includes visual and audio learning, coupled with audience participation or a small-group activity, will be more effective than one that does not.

If you know your audience members, at least one of them will have direct experience on the topic you are addressing. Identify those people in advance and ask them if they would be comfortable sharing their experiences. It is a great way to add another perspective to your presentation.

If the format exists, I recommend speakers occasionally break away from their slides to engage in a group activity, so that some people can learn by doing. Whether it's actually breaking into small groups, or having others share their experiences on a topic, what matters is that you ask your listeners to become *doers* for a brief period of time.



Each person in your audience learns through a unique combination of seeing, hearing and doing. Everyone has their own dominant form, and exclusive reliance on any one form is highly unusual. So speakers using PowerPoint should build their slides to convey information using all three forms of learning: seeing, hearing and doing. Failure to do that virtually guarantees your audience will end up like this one.

