Tech Snacks: Beyond PowerPoint

Most everyone uses PowerPoint to create a lecture or presentation, but maintaining student engagement can be challenging. Are there ways to enhance the effectiveness and interactivity of PowerPoint presentations? What if we want to turn off the projector and try some "unplugged" activities? Let's go… **Beyond PowerPoint**!

A few PowerPoint Best Practices

Limit text – Display key words or phrases rather than full sentences or long, wordy definitions. Try to use slides to help you *illustrate* or *demonstrate* something or *tell a story* rather than displaying a slide full of explanation. One important exception: if you are asking students to join you in a close reading of a text (e.g., a passage from a historical document, a poem, a quote from a speech), then displaying a chunk of text can be appropriate.

Use concrete visual language – Research shows that high-imagery words are remembered better than low-imagery or abstract words.[1] Presentation slides are most easily remembered when they use concrete visual language to create mental images in the viewers' minds. Mental images and metaphors like houses or food or nature will stick in students' minds more effectively than abstract concepts or terminology.

Use chunking – The same research showed that *most people will only directly remember content from about 4 slides of any presentation*. But "chunking" — grouping a set of information around a theme or topic — will make content more memorable than if it is presented in lots of slides that are only weakly linked.

Limit direct reading but also paraphrasing – When presenters read directly from their slides, the audience loses interest quickly. However, studies have shown that it is *also extremely difficult* to process visual and aural information at the same time, especially if the information is conflicting. So, in many ways, it is worse to paraphrase a text-heavy slide than to read it directly because the listener doesn't know whether they should listen or read, and they end up doing both poorly.

Insert black slides – Insert black slides within your slide deck to remind yourself to stop and ask questions, move away from the podium, and engage students in discussion or other activities. Leaving even a single image on the screen can be distracting to students.
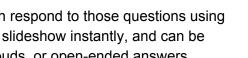
PollEverywhere

PollEverywhere lets you embed live survey questions into a PowerPoint (or Google Slide) presentation, and students can respond to those questions using their smartphone or laptops. Student responses appear in the slideshow instantly, and can be presented in several different formats, like pie charts, word clouds, or open-ended answers. PollEverywhere is free for up to 40 responses per question. This can be a great way to facilitate discussions, check understanding, and reinforce concepts.

Kahoot

Kahoot is an online tool for creating live quizzes in a colorful, gamified format. Similar to PollEverywhere, students answer questions using their cellphones. Unlike PollEverywhere, Kahoot is designed to work like a gameshow, with students earning points as they go, a leaderboard, music and sound effects, embedded media, and other fun features to keep students engaged. Kahoot is an effective tool for formative assessment, concept review and reinforcement, and test preparation.

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[1] Simon, C. Better PowerPoint: What We REALLY remember from PowerPoint. Retrieved from https://blog.polleverywhere.com/what-people-remember-from-powerpoint-presentations/

Blind Kahoots

In addition to being useful for formative assessment, Kahoot can also be used to introduce new material, a format called "Blind Kahoot." Rather than review content already covered in class or in the textbooks, start the Kahoot session with a question that you don't expect your students to know the answer to. Having to guess or deduce an answer will prime students to pay attention to the content, as you work through how they could have found the correct answer. You can find a detailed explanation of how to create and implement Blind Kahoots online.[2]

Jeopardy Labs

Jeopardy Labs is a website that lets you quickly and easily create Jeopardy-style review activities online, without needing to set up a complicated PowerPoint template. This can be especially useful for chapter reviews and test prep.

"Unplugged" Activities

Lecture slides are so ubiquitous these days that it's easy to forget there was life before PowerPoint. It can be refreshing to unplug and focus on creating memorable "time-on-task" experiences with everyday materials like index cards, sticky notes, and butcher paper.[3]

Brainstorming/Warm-up - Tape up pieces of butcher paper around the room, each with a key question or topic header that students need to brainstorm about. Divide students into groups and assign each group a sheet. When they're finished, have all groups move clockwise to the next sheet, where they add to or modify the previous group's answers. After a few rounds, discuss the ideas generated.

Collaborative timelines - Quiz students on their knowledge of important timelines, such as steps in a diagnostic process, historical events, cause-and effect sequences, or word order in a foreign language. Place students in groups, give each group a set of notecards, and have them place the cards in the correct sequence on a table (or stand in the correct order while holding the cards). Alternatively, use sticky notes and have students debate the correct order on the whiteboard.

Practice stations - When we lecture every day, we run the risk that students are being exposed to several new concepts without much time-on-task practicing them. For this activity, you create several different "practice stations," each with a worksheet, game, etc. that allows students to test themselves on the various concepts/skills you've covered. Number each folder and include a covered answer key for students to self-correct. Have them work in pairs to complete all of the stations. (Hint: create duplicate folders of some or all of the stations to prevent hold-ups.)

Interactive review - Before class, compile a list of questions and answers. Write each question on an index card of one color and each answer on a separate index card of another color. When students walk in the door, hand them a card. Have them find the student in the class with the corresponding answer/question and then check and discuss the answers as a class. You might want to provide students with a comprehensive list of the correct question/answer pairs afterward. This activity could work as a review of covered content or a pretest/introduction of new concepts.

Metacognitive activities - Write "How confident are you with…?" on the whiteboard. Draw a Likert scale with "Not Confident" on one end and "Very Confident" on the other end. Give each student a handful of sticky notes and jog their memories about the key concepts you've covered so far. Ask them to write these down on sticky notes and place them on the scale in accordance with their confidence level. Discuss trends, outliers, etc. as a class and how you'll tackle missed concepts.

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[2] Castle, S. (2015, October 28). The Art of Blind Kahooting. Retrieved from https://kahoot.com/blog/2015/10/28/art-blind-kahooting/

[3] A number of these ideas are taken from: https://barbihoneycutt.com/