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Changes Coming:

How Information Literacy and Presentation Software Intersect

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ABSTRACT

Information literacy should promote changes in a person's attitude and actions regarding an issue. Learning how to access and use resources is ineffective if changes do not occur in communicating more effectively. This paper focuses on eight changes: audience, storyboard, master views, handouts, action, control keys, bullets, and photography.

*Begin where
communication
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the audience.*

Academic Libraries often are proud of their ability to lead in developing information literacy issues. But I learned some humbling experiences recently in my quest to better grasp how to use one of the most popular pieces of software in the world – PowerPoint. Andrew Wahl identifies PowerPoint as the second most used software in business after e-mail.¹ What we may be assuming but failing to clarify is that good information literacy skills require an open mind and a willingness to admit that our current methodologies, information, and habits may be wrong. We are reluctant to change what we have invested much time in doing the wrong way. And in information literacy – not easily admitted – we stop garnering and communicating information on one topic for many reasons: the presentation is done, new topics intervene, and other responsibilities command attention. It is often assumed that novice and expert searchers will understand. We cannot say we understand everything or even enough about something based on initial research or even 10 years of research. We can only point to a particular spot where we stopped.

As Emily Dickinson said, “We play at Paste, Till qualified for Pearl.”² However, our paste playing may result in enough satisfaction and we don’t want to “deem ourselves a Fool.” As I explored my own uses of PowerPoint and the issues related to presentation software in general and even more generally how all multimedia relates to libraries the need for changes were necessary in all three levels. The new guidelines for Media from ACRL emphasize our need to continuously update and review our use and support of all types of information.³ Information Literacy is truly a lifelong project. In the interests of time, this paper will only discuss the changes I have begun to make in using presentation software in my professional work. Surprisingly, the first two changes don’t even begin with the software.

Change One: Consider the audience. An Information Competent person crafts his/her material to meet the particular needs of the intended audience.⁴ Since this is the fourth standard, libraries usually do not discuss it but it should be one of the first because of its implications for research. When you start working on a presentation, do not immediately begin with the presentation software. In fact, don’t even begin with the text or storyboard idea. Begin where communication always must begin: the audience. While most of us “learned” this in communication and composition classes, it hasn’t always transferred to our daily lives. If your audience is librarians, are you preparing something they can use or apply in their own library at either the administrative, technical, or instructional levels? If the audience is a committee, do you know anything about the members which you can use to enhance your information? If the audience is students, what is the reason for your visit to the class? What do the students think is the reason? If you have time do a little background research at the start of the class. Some of this research should be related to understanding generations in such books as *When Generations Collide*, By Lynn C. Lancaster and David Stillman. You might also look at learning theories such as Robert Mayer’s in *Multimedia Learning*.

Change Two: Start with the storyboard or text. Keep away from that computer. Write down your ideas, thesis, or story and identify the main issues before you decide if you need pictures. Cliff Atkinson’s book, *Beyond Bullet Points*, gives excellent help in setting up a storyboard.⁵ Your IT department may also have help in deciding how to incorporate a heavily textual format into presentation software. In fact using PPT is a natural means to collaborate with others on campus. Even if you don’t believe your presentation is entirely a story, you will probably have stories you wish to incorporate into the presentation. Setting

up this information in the beginning helps you to organize your information to fit into the timeframe you need. I definitely plan to continue working with storyboarding and prewriting information and to review older presentations for this. Even if you don't want to use PPT any presentation would benefit from this step.

Change Three: Know the master views. Create your own preferences rather than relying on the defaults in the programs. Again Atkinson has excellent guidelines in this area, but many other websites, such as Ellen Finkelstein's Power Point Newsletter, also discuss master views.⁶ Making these changes takes only a few minutes and can result in better use of your time to focus on the presentation.

Change Four: Consider your handouts. Most of us err in printing too much when we use the PowerPoint print command. You may believe everyone should be able to see a presentation in its entirety before you give it, but you may not like the defaults in the print commands. However, if you have Microsoft Office, you can send your presentation to a Word document and then reformat information as you need. It's worth the extra time involved in order to create fewer pages and clearer text. In addition, most students would benefit from a guided outline for note taking and review.

Change Five: More action, please. While I used to confine my actions on a screen to motion paths, I've become convinced that the best action method in a classroom is to use hyperlinks in the form of action buttons or to use Custom animation to allow items to disappear and appear; appear and fade, rather than bullet text (more about that later). All of this takes practice and different versions will require relearning or not doing some items, but the results are worth it. While I know most IT people would shudder, I've become more aware of good design by trying to make my actions work better with the information I wanted students to learn.

Change Six: Control Keys. You would think that everyone would want to use the control

keys which are available. I have yet to see anyone really use any in a presentation. And I didn't seriously attempt to use any until this year. The two I appreciate knowing about and plan to continue using are the B key (Black screen) and the Ctr. P key or pointer key. The black out key is so handy I even start non PPT presentations where I want to have a LCD projector active in order to start as soon as the opening routines are done without creating a second focus area in the class. Also, if I'm giving a presentation and a student or instructor wishes to add information or ask a question, I can black out the screen until we are ready to move on.

The Pointer function is a little clunky when you use a mouse, but even so, I've used the highlighter to help focus all eyes on a section of a picture or phrase. I also teach in a room without a whiteboard and find that the Slide and pointer is sometimes a better place to put information than trying to write on a flip chart which no one can read.

Change Seven: Lose the bullets. Well, not really, although for some going cold turkey may be the only method to break this bad habit. Be more creative about using bullets. For instance, don't read from the bullets on the screen. "Students learn better when words in a multimedia message are presented as spoken text, rather than written text."⁷ Research shows that most people do not remember more than 5-7 items in a sequence.⁸ If you are interested in retention and transfer of learning – a crucial element in Information Literacy – then you need to present information orally as well as visually and to know that reading text on the screen does not promote either retention or transfer.⁹ We need to change our attitude about text on screen and find new ways to use it. Sara Tucker addresses a better use of bullets such as suggesting we use them at the end of a session or have the students create a list.¹⁰ If you are doing review, you can use a summary slide at the start of the class to determine where to focus the attention for the remainder of the period. I did this with a class and not only shortened the presentation but had many positive comments about the need to review.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Andrew Wahl. (2003, November). PowerPoint of no return. *Canadian Business* 76(22), 131. Retrieved 9 December 2005, from ABI/Inform (478831461), p. 134.

² Emily Dickinson. (n.d.). "We Play at Paste." In *Selected Poems*. Retrieved 11 July 2006 from <http://www.mith2.umd.edu/WomensStudies/ReadingRoom/Poetry/Dickinson/we-play-at-paste>

³ Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries Review Task Forces. (2006) Guidelines for media resources in academic libraries, 2006. C&RL News (67): 246-253 <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/guidelinesmedia.htm>

⁴ See Standard Four of "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education." American Library Association. 2006. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html> (Accessed 13 Jul, 2006)

⁵ Clifford Atkinson (2005). *Beyond Bullet Points: Using Microsoft PowerPoint to create presentations that inform, motivate, and inspire*. Redmond Washington: Microsoft Press. The entire book discusses reasons and methods for using scripts and stories as effective communication.

⁶ Ellen Finkelstein (2006). *Quickly Get Rid of Bullets in PowerPoint Tips Newsletter*. Retrieved 28 February 2006, from http://www.ellenfinkelstein.com/powerpoint tip_get_rid_of_bullets.html

⁷ Richard E. Mayer (2001). *Multimedia learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 134 See also my comments about this book in the bibliography.

⁸ Mayer, p. 49. New York: Cambridge University Press. The bibliography at the end of this chapter provides additional research on cognitive capacity.

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Change Eight: Spice up your PowerPoint with Photography

If the right picture is important to help convey information, then we librarians need to provide as many resources for pictures as possible. We also need to consider adding additional software to help create images which aren't possible in PowerPoint.

While Microsoft has an abundant supply of pictures and clip art which are great for beginning and for practice, they are overused by everyone. You can reuse if you consider cropping the pictures or ungrouping them, but both techniques are labor intensive.

I discovered a variety of resources for photographs on the web and have begun working to find a way to add local photography to our site. Although I haven't incorporated photography into an IL session, copyright and royalty issues can be effectively demonstrated with this use. I also recommend seriously investing in photography software for the library so that students who are working in your labs as well as you can use the best technology and technique to improve your presentation.¹¹

When I presented my findings at ACL Conference 2006, I considered what I would do if the technology completely failed. Running in circles, screaming and shouting were not the immediate options. I knew I had practiced it enough that I could engage the audience without the pictures and still discuss the main issues because I was focused on the audience.

Has PowerPoint or other presentation software helped or hurt information literacy? The real question is can it effectively assist the speaker to communicate? The advantage of current technology is that we can store our weaker efforts and continue to make changes. Our paste can become pearl or stay paste as long as we wish. I have many power point slides on

my computer which are practice efforts for custom animation, clip art, photography, and text combinations. I can also create "new" collections of materials and ideas without significantly dismantling older constructs. But if I am not prepared to make changes in how I view and use this information in media, these collections have little meaning, and instruction is in vain.¹² †

RESOURCES

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⁹ Mayer, p. 155

¹⁰ Sara Tucker (2000-2005). Presentation styles and strategies: How to interact with students and other audiences. In *Advanced PowerPoint*. Retrieved 15 November 2004, from <http://www.washburn.edu/cas/history/stucker/AdvPPTPedagogy.html>. paragraphs 7-10.

¹¹ Over the years I have gleaned information and resources from a variety of resources such as Brainy Betty.com <http://www.brainybetty.com> and photography sites, I collected over the years. A search of many academic sites such as Tomaiuolo's "The Web Library," <http://www.ccsu.edu/library/tomaiulon/images.htm>, will retrieve royalty free and inexpensive resources. I also have a list of other sites available upon request.

¹² For additional reflection on content see Cliff Atkinson's book, *Beyond Bullets*, and Ellen Finkelstein's PowerPoint Tips http://www.ellenfinkelstein.com/PowerPoint_tips_blog.html