



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

POINTLESS POWERPOINTS

As you read this article, thousands of people around the world – possibly millions – are sitting in meetings where speakers are projecting PowerPoint slides onto a screen. The speakers assume that these PowerPoint slides are helping the audience. But, with rare exceptions, they are wrong.

If I am ever granted the job of World Dictator, my first act will be to ban the use of PowerPoint.

Why? Because PowerPoint slides usually have far too many words on them, as a result of which, they distract the audience from what the speaker is actually saying.

I recently went to a conference where there were presentations by, among others, a senior official from the World Bank and another from the European Commission. Each of these two people spoke to a series of excessively verbose slides. I spent one third of my time trying to read what the slides said (but being distracted by the speaker), one third of my time trying to listen to what the speaker said (but being distracted by the slides), and one third of my time feeling really grumpy. Furthermore, if a slide dealt, at length, with points A, B, C and D, the speaker often spoke to only one of these, or to some point E that didn't even feature. What, please, was the point of these slides? I felt lost and – did I mention? – grumpy.

Here are some tips, from a frequent PowerPoint victim. If you are giving a talk and you want to provide your audience with a detailed record of your talk – OK, go ahead, create detailed slides. But then print them, and make the printout available at the end of your talk. During the talk itself, either use no slides at all – leading to the wonderful result that your audience will actually look at you and listen to you – or create some extremely simple slides with four or five bullets on each slide, with each bullet consisting of only four or five words. If possible, arrange your slides so that each new bullet only appears on the screen when you're ready for it, so your audience sees a brief summary of what you have said and of what you are talking about right now, but not of what you will say during the next few minutes.

PowerPoint has destroyed the art of public speaking. Down with pointless PowerPoints!

PS: Slides produced by the Global Fund are actually pretty good, in contrast to those mentioned above.

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