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Teaching tip: Students' opinions on what makes an effective powerpoint slide

[Laura Edelman](#) and [Kathleen Haring](#) from [Muhlenberg College](#), Allentown, Pennsylvania conducted a survey of students at the college asking what they liked and didn't like about their professor's PowerPoint presentations. They discovered the following:

Characteristics students don't like about professors' PowerPoint slides

- Too many words on a slide
- Clip art
- Movement (slide transitions or word animations)
- Templates with too many colors

Characteristics students like about professors' PowerPoint slides

- Graphs increase understanding of content
- Bulleted lists help them organize ideas
- PowerPoint can help to structure lectures
- Verbal explanations of pictures/graphs help more than written clarifications

According to Edelman and Haring, some conclusions from the research at Muhlenberg are that students learn more when:

- material is presented in short phrases rather than full paragraphs.
- the professor talks about the information on the slide rather than having students read it on their own.
- relevant pictures are used. Irrelevant pictures decrease learning compared to PowerPoint slides with no picture
- they take notes (if the professor is not talking). But if the professor is lecturing, note-taking and listening decreased learning.
- they are given the PowerPoint slides before the class.

Advice from Edelman and Haring on leveraging the working memory with PowerPoint:

- Leverage the working memory by dividing the information between the visual and auditory modality. Doing this reduces the likelihood of one system becoming

overloaded. For instance, spoken words with pictures are better than pictures with text, as integrating an image and narration takes less cognitive effort than integrating an image and text.

- Minimize the opportunity for distraction by removing any irrelevant material such as music, sound effects, animations, and background images.
- Use simple cues to direct learners to important points or content. Using text size, bolding, italics, or placing content in a highlighted or shaded text box is all that is required to convey the significance of key ideas in your presentation.
- Don't put every word you intend to speak on your PowerPoint slide. Instead, keep information displayed in short chunks that are easily read and comprehended.

Source: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/making-better-powerpoint-presentations/>

Have a great week!

-Debbie

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