

What's on your reading list?

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Look around your desk. Look around your bookshelf. What is your current reading list? Perhaps it is the latest issue of Toastmaster magazine. Perhaps you are catching up on news on the District 53 website. You are surely not reading your PowerPoint® slides in preparation for a speech, are you?

Do you find yourself reading the text on your PowerPoint® slideshow? Did you know that you are doing your audience a disservice by reading your slides? As of today, you can safely remove your PowerPoint slides from your reading list. Reading text on your slides to your audience decreases your communication with your audience.

Let me explain further. Professor John Sweller at the University of South Wales (yes, PowerPoint also works down-under) conducted a study which found that showing the same words on-screen and reading them to an audience makes it harder to learn and retain the information.

Sweller states that “Auditory/visual redundancy occurs when the same material, presented simultaneously, in written and spoken form, results in a learning decrement compared to the material presented in written or auditory form alone”.

Why? Well the reason is that an audience member sees your slide, understands the content, then listens to you speaker read the slide and then realizes that the material is redundant. Listening to your rendition of the slide prevents your audience member from deeper analysis of what he or she already understands.

Now that we have scientific evidence supporting what we have all experienced about reading slides, I propose that you change your reading list. Add books and websites to your reading list. Improve your presentation skills and learn how to create interesting slideshows.

You ask, what should be on a slideshow, if you do not put text on the slides? Well, think what is best portrayed on a projector – detailed text that your audience can read themselves, or images? I find that images and photographs are most suitable for slides. My advice is that text belongs in books, newsletter and reports but not on PowerPoint slides. Amongst the many tips published on the internet for using PowerPoint, I propose that you keep this simple tip in mind. Please feel free to get heartburn whenever you are tempted to enter text or start a bullet pointed slide. Ask yourself how you can communicate your message with visuals rather than through text. You cannot read text to your audience if there is no text on your slides.

In conclusion, enjoy your freedom to read books and periodicals. Learn about our world, and how to improve your communication skills. However, I request that you communicate clearly through colorful graphs and photographs on your PowerPoint slides.

Pledge that as of today, you will move your PowerPoint slides to the bottom of your reading list, and never read text to your audience again.

Improve your communication skills when using PowerPoint® at www.waynebotha.com. Wayne Botha grew up in South Africa, and now lives in Connecticut, USA. Colleagues and audiences frequently tease Wayne about his funny accent.

Published July 2007.