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Never Give A Boring Presentation Again: PowerPoint Tips from a Late Adopter

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These days, many of us take PowerPoint and other slide-sharing tools for granted. Presentations that feature slides have become so commonplace in colleges, boardrooms, and professional training environments that the phrase “death by PowerPoint” is not unfamiliar to those who feel inundated with slide-centric lectures.

But how can those of us in the military and government space ensure that we aren't boring our audiences to death with slides, but are instead using PowerPoint to make presentations more engaging and memorable? A recent post by Federal Computer Week's Steven Kelman titled “Confessions of a PowerPoint convert” offers some insights to help answer this question.

As a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, author of several books on public policy, and former Administrator at the federal Office of Management and Budget, Kelman can speak from many perspectives on the ways we learn and teach in the government space. Kelman offers the following tips to government readers on delivering engaging, informational PowerPoints:

1. **Minimize text** on slides and use concise bullet points instead of paragraphs
2. **Use different colored text** to draw focus to specific content
3. **Try animations** (such as text zooming into view) to grab viewer's attention
4. **Focus on appealing visuals** such as photos and charts – and don't be afraid of image-only slides!

And what results did Kelman see when using PowerPoint for the first time in his classroom while following the guidelines above? He states:

“I saw the first results while I was teaching, which was a dramatic increase in the amount of student notetaking. But I just got more detailed results — my students' evaluations of the first classes where I used the PowerPoint presentations. My overall teaching ratings went up. But there was a very dramatic increase in one specific area: “Clarity of the main ideas presented in class.” With the slides, participants were able to absorb main points and themes better.

This has been a real eye-opener. I know some people believe slides inhibit learning. I am now inclined to think that, used well, they really do help learning. And this is with executives who are not part of the videogame, text-message generation. I haven't even tried this yet on my twenty-something master's students; this will happen when the semester starts in a few weeks. There is something here, I think, not just for professors, but for managers or anybody else trying to get messages across.”