

CS-488—Senior Seminar
Study questions for *Is PowerPoint Evil?*
Fall '04

Jim Rogers

25/Aug.

Primary Papers

Tufte, Edward R. “Power Corrupts. PowerPoint Corrupts Absolutely.” *Wired*, Sept. 2003,

<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2.html>,
accessed 22 Aug. 2004. Also in *Wired*, Vol. 11, No. 9, pp. 118–119, Sept 2003.

Cook, Trevor “Death by Slides: Say It, don’t Show It.” *Australian Financial Review*, 15 Nov. 2003,

<http://afr.com/articles/2003/11/14/1068674378566.html>,
accessed 22 Aug. 2004.

Holmes, Neville “In Defense of PowerPoint.” *IEEE Computer*, Vol. 37, No. 7, pp. 98–100, July, 2004.

Additional Papers

David Byrne “Learning to Love PowerPoint.” *Wired*, Sept. 2003,

<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt1.html>,
accessed 22 Aug. 2004. Also in *Wired*, Vol. 11, No. 9, pp. 112–117, Sept 2003.

Waddell, Richard L. Jr., Boddie, John, Kowalik, Janusz and Holmes, Neville “Letters” *IEEE Computer*, Vol. 37, No. 8, pp. 6–7, Aug., 2004.

Questions for all five papers.

1. What does Tufte see as the weaknesses (or even evil effects) of PowerPoint?
2. Does Tufte find anything of value in PowerPoint?
3. Tufte is best known for his work in developing principles for graphical presentation of data. In his example, though, his “good” presentation is a table of text and numbers while his “bad” presentation of the same data is graphical. Why is the graphical presentation bad in his estimation. How does this become an indictment of PowerPoint.

4. What does Tufte perceive to be the role of bullet items in presentation slides.
5. What does Cook perceive to be the role of bullet items in presentation slides.
6. Cook observes that presentations consisting of slide after slide of bullet items are numbingly dull. How does PowerPoint address this issue? To what extent does the enhance the communication of information?
7. Where does Holmes put the blame for bad PowerPoint presentations.
8. In defending PowerPoint from charges of being an evil influence is Holmes actually advocating it? (Are any of these writers actually advocating it?)
9. What does Byrne like about PowerPoint? Is he advocating its use? For what?
10. What do you suppose Tufte's ideal presentation would be like? Cook's? Holmes's?, Byrne's?
11. PowerPoint was developed for the marketing industry. To what extent do the requirements for marketing presentations differ from those of academic presentations?
12. John Boddie (mis-acknowledging Dijkstra) claims that the tools we use influence the way in which we think. To what extent do our tools influence the way we think? To what extent does the way we think influence our tools? What potential consequences follow from adopting tools for one style of discourse for use in discourse of a contrasting style?
13. Why do presenters use PowerPoint in domains other than marketing?
14. Why do we teach the use of PowerPoint in our schools?
15. What, if any, is the role of slides in an academic presentation?