

# The dark side of animation

June 11 2009

---

We've all sat through one of those presentations where the animated slides are more interesting than the speaker. Bold and brassy titles slide into view, tasty slices of pie chart fill the screen one by one, and a hail of arrows spikes the points the lecturer hopes to highlight.

But, are these custom animations and slide fades and dissolves actually adding anything to the lecture, or do they have a dark side that detracts from the message and impacts negatively on the message being presented?

Microsoft PowerPoint has, over the last couple of decades, become the tool of choice for creating instructional slideshows. Long gone for most are the overhead projector with its fickle fan and its high-temperature and temperamental bulb, the smudgy marker pen, and the transparent plastic sheet.

Instead, lecturers, speakers and anyone else with a visual message to present with their talk uses PowerPoint and its ilk to present their digital slides. According to the authors of a study in the *International Journal of Innovation and Learning* published this month, many instructors use these options regularly with the impression that such effects enhance student learning by allowing concepts to be introduced incrementally.

Stephen Mahar of the University of North Carolina Wilmington and colleagues have explored the impact of custom animation in PowerPoint lectures and examined the idea that custom animation may, in fact, negatively impact student learning.

To test their hypothesis, the team recorded two versions of a PowerPoint lecture. The presentations differed only in the presence of animation to incrementally present information. They then showed students either the animated or non-animated lecture and then tested the students recall and comprehension of the lecture.

The team found a marked difference in average student performance, with those seeing the non-animated lecture performing much better in the tests than those who watched the animated lecture. Students were able to recall details of the static graphics much better. Animated slides meant to present information incrementally actually require greater concentration, which makes it harder to remember content as well as reducing overall exposure time to the "complete" slide, the researchers found.

Although students appear to like the use of animations in lectures delivered using PowerPoint, there is now strong evidence that animation is nothing more than an entertaining distraction.

The team points out that their study was applied only to the teaching of new concepts. It is possible that teaching a technique might work more effectively with animated, rather than static, slides. Follow-up work will investigate that possibility.

Source: Inderscience Publishers ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: The dark side of animation (2009, June 11) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-06-dark-side-animation.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is
---

provided for information purposes only.