Handout: Your Brain on PowerPoint

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Why "Seductive Detail" must be relevant

Jokes, stories, and pictures are sometimes referred to as "seductive details" because their purpose is to get learners' attention and draw them in.

In "Your Brain on PowerPoint" I suggested using a joke or a story to break the ice, and again at regular intervals to help keep the audience alert. I made the case for visual on-screen content in place of text-heavy slides whenever possible. I recommended that, for greatest benefit, such elements should be relevant to the presentation's content.

I also warned against using seductive details carelessly (and told a story about how I'd once done so, to my regret). Obviously, there's a line we don't want to cross – but where is it?

The following offer insight on relevance, context, and the importance of audience analysis when using seductive details. My takeaway is that seductive detail is a tool, and if it offers relevant support for the content, it can be beneficial. If not, it risks distracting the audience.

"Does cognitive load moderate the seductive details effect? A multimedia study"
http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563210001263

"The findings showed that students' learning performance was significantly higher when seductive details were presented under the low load condition (narration) as compared to all other conditions."

"Seductive Details in Teaching"
https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/critical-feeling/201609/seductive-details-in-teaching

"…materials that do not directly illustrate the learning content are not only pleasant but also impair learning, especially for academically weak students."

Myth and Misinformation

In "Your Brain on PowerPoint" I talked briefly about misinformation and Confirmation bias, and how persistent they can be. I should also have addressed strategies for dealing with them. Here is a link to a paper that does so. In short, the authors suggest:

- focusing on the facts rather than the myth
- keeping messages simple and brief
- providing an alternative — but accurate — narrative of events to fill the gap left when information once thought true is found to be false
- considering the specific views and values of your audience, since pre-existing attitudes and worldviews can influence their response
- Strengthening your message through repetition

"Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing"
http://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/rbtfl/FNCpLYuivUOHE/full

Take the quiz on Learning Myths; read about how Brain Myths come to be and how they stick:

"Learning Myths Quiz"
http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/03/22/520843457/you-probably-believe-some-learning-myths-take-our-quiz-to-find-out

"Neuromyths: Why Do They Exist and Persist?"
http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1751-228X.2012.01141.x/full

Books

"Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School"
by John Medina

Look for the second, updated/expanded edition (2014). Also a website: http://brainrules.net/

"How We Learn, and Why It Happens"
By Benedict Carey

I found this book more difficult than Brain Rules (above) – perhaps the seductive details were less effective? – but it offers plenty of good stuff too.