

# Using PowerPoint for ESL Teaching

Don L. Fisher

fisher\_d [at] madera.k12.ca.us

Madera High School (Madera, California, USA)

This article is a basic introduction to the use of PowerPoint in the classroom. It discusses where to find teacher created presentations, how to find resources such as tutorials, and how to use PowerPoint in different settings. There is a short section on the equipment needed to use PowerPoint.

## Introduction

Although PowerPoint has been in existence for many years, it has just begun to spread to schools and ESL classrooms. The reason for this delay is that technology requires hardware, which is relatively expensive. However, more and more classrooms and teachers have computers and the equipment to use PowerPoint. Not only are more teachers using these presentations, but more are producing their own. Some are even placing them on websites for others to download. PowerPoint is a useful tool that is now being used in many classrooms.

Before continuing, let me give a brief definition. PowerPoint is a type of presentation software that allows one to show colored text and images with simple animation and sound. PowerPoint is just one of many types of presentation software. Hyper-Studio is another.

PowerPoint is the most popular because it comes bundled with Microsoft packages. PowerPoint will run on either Macintosh or Windows PC's. The files are easy to create and can be e-mailed as attachments. They can be posted on or downloaded from websites, and can be converted to html webpages. Not only can PowerPoint presentations be traded and exchanged, they can also be modified to fit any individual classroom setting. Although other presentation software may have the same capabilities, PowerPoint is the most common, and it is user friendly.

## Classroom Uses of PowerPoint

PowerPoint presentations can be used in many ways in the ESL classroom as well as in other classrooms. Presentations can be used for initial teaching, for practice and drilling, for games, for reviews, and for tests.

### Initial Teaching

PowerPoint can be used to teach new ideas and concepts to students. In theory this sounds very good; however, in practice this can be tricky. The teacher must anticipate areas of misunderstanding and difficulty. Once the teacher knows the troubles, which the students will face, he or she can create or adapt a presentation for the students. The presentation must be clear and uncluttered. It should address anticipated areas of student difficulty in an orderly manner. This type of presentation is difficult to prepare, but it can be done. Once an initial teaching presentation is prepared, it can be saved and used again and again, and it can be shared with others.

### Practice & Drill

I have used PowerPoint presentations much more for practice and drills. To do this it is necessary to have the type of material, which can be repeated many times. A presentation of irregular verbs is one example of something which can be repeated again and again. Other types of material can be repeated on a weekly or biweekly basis. Presentations using the correct preposition, or the correct form of an adjective, or countable and uncountable contrasts could be practiced and reviewed periodically.

Games are a good way to review and practice English. Teachers can use PowerPoint to create their own games to use in the classroom. Once a game has been created, it can be reused by the author or shared with other teachers.

## Review

PowerPoint presentations are great for reviewing ideas which have already been taught. After the students have learned and practiced something, it is good to see a presentation. I do not show presentations every day. I like to save them for a special treat sometime during the week. They provide a break in the routine and a way to see material differently. Not only do students find this interesting, but it is also a good way to check and see if they have mastered a concept. When I use a presentation created by another teacher, my students have a chance to see old ideas presented in different ways. PowerPoint presentations are also good ways to review before a test.

## Tests

A teacher in our school uses PowerPoint for his tests. He places pictures of items on slides to be shown at preset intervals. (He sets his timer for a reasonable number of seconds for each slide.) The students then write down the name of each item. It's a great way to test vocabulary. Using the timer feature, a teacher could design a many types of tests or quizzes.

## How to Obtain PowerPoint Presentations

### Create Your Own PowerPoint Presentations

Any teacher can create presentations if he or she has the PowerPoint software. There are many good tutorials on how to create presentations. Some of these can be found at the following links:

- <http://www.actden.com/pp/>
- <http://www.electricteacher.com/tutorial3.htm>

For PowerPoint tips and tricks:

- <http://www.bitbetter.com/powertips.htm>
- <http://www.teachers-connect.net/cc/99-00/advpp.htm>

### Get PowerPoint Presentations from Others

There are many great websites where a teacher can download PowerPoint presentations. I like to download presentations for elementary school children and then modify them for my ESL students who are older. As you become more familiar with PowerPoint, you may wish to do the same. You can find these by putting "English PowerPoint presentation" in a search engine. You might also try "ESL PowerPoint" and other such variations, or you might try several different search engines. Some sites allow you to preview the presentations, but most simply list them. You can download them directly. Some are read only or protected. If you want to modify such a file, simply open a new presentation and copy the read only file into it. You can then modify the copy which you have made.

There are several problems which can arise with downloaded presentations. If the presentation was created on a different platform (Mac or PC) from yours you may have some font problems with specialized symbols. A second problem is the macros. You can pick up a virus attached to a macro. Be careful and download only from trustworthy sites.

### EDITOR'S NOTE: How do you evaluate this? / Can you do a virus check to find macros?

Below is a list of some of my favorite websites for PowerPoint downloads:

- <http://208.183.128.3/ce/ppt.htm>
- <http://oswego.org/ocsd-web/teaching/resources/resources-x.cfm?Type=P>
- <http://www.elko.k12.nv.us/nntc/ppp.htm>

The above resources should enable you to get started finding presentations for your classes.

# How to Show PowerPoint Presentations

If you are not creating your own presentations, but only want to show them, you can download a free viewer from Microsoft:

- Free PowerPoint Viewer for Macintosh: <http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=e25cb1e5-209c-4a58-b283-23e84b616477&displaylang=en>
- Free PowerPoint Viewer for Windows: <http://microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyId=D1649C22-B51F-4910-93FC-4CF2832D3342&displaylang=en>

## Technical Considerations

There are some technical points that need to be considered when using PowerPoint or other presentation software. First you must have a computer. Second, there are several ways to present to students.

Either an IBM compatible PC or an Apple Macintosh will run PowerPoint, so platform is not a problem. The software will run on both laptop and desktop computers. These characteristics make PowerPoint versatile.

There are three basic ways to display presentations.

- a regular computer monitor
- an ordinary television set
- a special projector

### Computer Monitor

The regular computer monitor is good for individual work. Small groups of two to four can also view a presentation in this way, but individual viewing works very well. One student can drill or review material at his or her own pace. He or she can also view a presentation. I once had a student who had been absent, view a presentation when she returned as part of her make-up work. I set up a laptop and put it on her desk and showed her how to click for the next slide. It worked very well. (Caution: naughty students can alter your PowerPoint if they are not supervised. Backs up copies are always good.) PowerPoint works well with individuals.

The negative side is that many computers are required if a large class wants to go through a presentation individually. Most schools do not have the computers available for this kind of practice and drill.

### Television Set

PowerPoint presentations can be viewed on ordinary television sets. All one has to do is to plug the computer into the set. However, it's not always that easy. First, the computer must have the right type of output. Older computers will need a special piece of equipment called a presenter. This takes the monitor output and makes it compatible with a TV. Presenters cost around US\$100 to US\$150. Newer computers may be equipped with presenter cards that work internally. Most new laptops are sold with presenters built in. Some contain s-video output for better pictures. Manufactures are starting to market outputs for high definition TV's. Teachers need to find how they can get the right type of output from their computer for a TV.

All TV sets are not the same. Different regions of the world use different systems. My laptop will output PAL or NTSC. Another consideration is the type of input a TV can accept. Older sets have only coaxial input. The easiest ways to connect to these is through a VCR. Most VCR's have input jack sockets on the front, back or both places. Some TV's have sockets for s-video or for RCA jacks. Some TV's immediately recognize an input signal, but most have to be programmed to receive them. Programming is done with the remote control. Usually pressing the input button will switch the TV; sometimes one needs to press a button labeled display or external. (Check the instruction books.) Each TV and VCR is a little bit different; you'll need to learn how to send the signal to the TV before you have students.

There are many advantages to using TV. A whole class can view the same presentation at one time. (The screen must be big enough and the letters big enough for the students in the back to see clearly.) The teacher can lead a discussion or point out important ideas as the presentation progresses. I use a cordless mouse with my PowerPoint presentations. With new batteries I can walk up to 20 ft.

(6.5 m.) away from my computer. I can also lay the mouse down on a student's desk and have him or her change the slides. (Students love to do this during drills. They will quiz others before changing the slide.) For large classes it is possible to hook two or more TV's in tandem to run the same presentation. Once you get through the problem of how to make your computer run the TV, the rest is great fun.

## **Projector**

Increasingly business people and churches are using projectors for PowerPoint. Projectors give a much clearer and bigger picture than a TV. Instead of 20 or 30 watching, 200 or even 2,000 can view a single presentation. Projectors are very nice to use. The room may need some slight dimming, at least in the projection area. A screen is much better than a blank wall for projection. The projected image is much like one from an overhead projector in size and brightness. The difference is that PowerPoint images have motion and sound.

The biggest drawback is cost. Projectors range from US\$2000 to US\$5,000. Most teachers and schools cannot afford these items. The best ones will run on 50 or 60 hertz and automatically switch between 110 and 220 volts. Newer projectors are very small and light (under 5 lbs. or 2 kg.). Projectors are wonderful, but they are currently expensive.

## **Conclusion**

PowerPoint presentations are easy to obtain, modify, and create. They are versatile and a great asset to any classroom. Good presentations may take time to produce or adapt, but they can be shared and used year after year. They can be used for whole class presentations and reviews, for drills, or for individual work. PowerPoint presentations run on both Macintosh and Windows platforms. Files are small unless many pictures and sounds are added. Small files are easily stored. These presentations can be viewed with a computer monitor, TV, or a projector. Because of all these advantages, we are going to see more and more PowerPoint presentations used in English language teaching.

## **Link**

The author of this article has helped The Internet TESL Journal begin an archive of PowerPoint presentations for ESL/EFL students.

- <http://iteslj.org/t/ppt/>

---

The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. IX, No. 4, April 2003

<http://iteslj.org/>

---

<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Fisher-PowerPoint.html>