

PowerPoint software comes as part of the Microsoft Office package. First launched in 1994, it has become the most common tool for presenters at conferences. Where people formerly used a flipchart and pen, or an overhead projector and transparencies to write key points, with PowerPoint you save a slide presentation which can include text, cartoons, photographs, colour, movement and sound effects. Its use and abuse in presentations is a topic of debate (see for example <http://joycevalenza.com/powerptart.html>, accessed 11 June 2006), particularly in terms of the effect it can have on a speaker's interaction with their audience. In its favour, though, is that it can lead the speaker to present their information in an organised and clear way – and it is easily updated or amended for different purposes. As a visual tool, it can also help the people looking at it to focus on and retain the information. Used judiciously, the variety of sound and visual effects can grab attention. Because of these features, I find PowerPoint particularly useful for bringing therapy and assessment activities to life.

1. Phonology assessment

My phonology assessment is not standardised, and I change and improve it from time to time, but it is a lot of fun for the children.

Each slide contains a target picture which I have chosen to be clear and unambiguous. I use photographs which I have taken myself or downloaded from the internet (Google images or Microsoft), also cartoons and animations which are carefully selected for their humour. Some have accompanying sound effects such as a tiger roaring or a cat meowing. These provide motivation to name the pictures and rewards for speaking. The result is a child who interacts with the computer as they click on the buttons to advance the slides and generate the sound, and who laughs and provides a pretty good sample of spontaneous speech as they explore the cartoons.

2. Therapy activities

In phonology work, the picture comes up on the computer screen, the child names it and I ensure the appropriate sound symbol zooms / flies / whizzes in to reinforce the correct production. For example, when I am working with a child on s clusters, a picture of a key appears on screen. The child 'calls' sammy snake by saying /s/ and pressing the arrow on keyboard. Sammy Snake then crawls onto the screen, in front of the key. The child says /s-ki/, presses the button and an arrow points to an animation of a boy skiing. Snails can crawl in, tops can spin or teddies boomerang. The motivation this produces is amazing, and varying the method of entry and exit of the picture means the child is fascinated to see the next slide and hardly realises how much they are talking about it.

Children who can read can have a picture / cartoon appearing followed by the target word as reinforcement.

I find PowerPoint particularly effective for verbs as I can include animations so that the action is really *action!*

I have also used this method with people with mild to severe aphasia. Sentence completion is fun when the first part of the sentence appears and the client clicks to bring the rest up on the screen after saying it and clicking on the button. This can give a sense of control and independence to people who have lost so much. Naming activities with big, bright and realistic pictures are enjoyable and infinitely adaptable.



One of Elizabeth McBarnet's own therapy pictures

We usually associate the Microsoft Corporation's PowerPoint software with presentations at conferences, but Elizabeth McBarnet finds it invaluable as a therapy and assessment tool.

More Power to you

3. Making the slideshows

To produce slideshows for assessment or therapy, you will need a computer with PowerPoint software (or other presentation software), internet access, a digital camera and a scanner.

1. Identify the client's interests and therapy targets and find suitable graphics, ensuring there are no copyright issues.
2. Open a new PowerPoint slideshow.
3. Download the pictures you have chosen from the internet, or scan and save them to your computer, and paste them on to the relevant PowerPoint slides.
4. Use the 'custom animation' tool to arrange order of appearance and method of entry / exit of the pictures.
5. Add sound if required (downloadable from Microsoft online, www.microsoft.com).

It takes me hours and hours to create these programmes but once they are made I can reuse and adapt them for

each individual I see. Everybody gets therapy tailored to their interests and needs. One little boy who was working on /s/ wanted me to include the 'SpongeBob SquarePants' character, so we went online immediately and found a picture that we could download to include in the set. These were printed and he took them home to practise. PowerPoint programmes can then be copied on to a disk or a CD and handed or e-mailed to clients if they have their own computer and compatible software.

Elizabeth McBarnet is an independent speech and language therapist working with children and adults in Ballyclare, County Antrim.

Resource

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