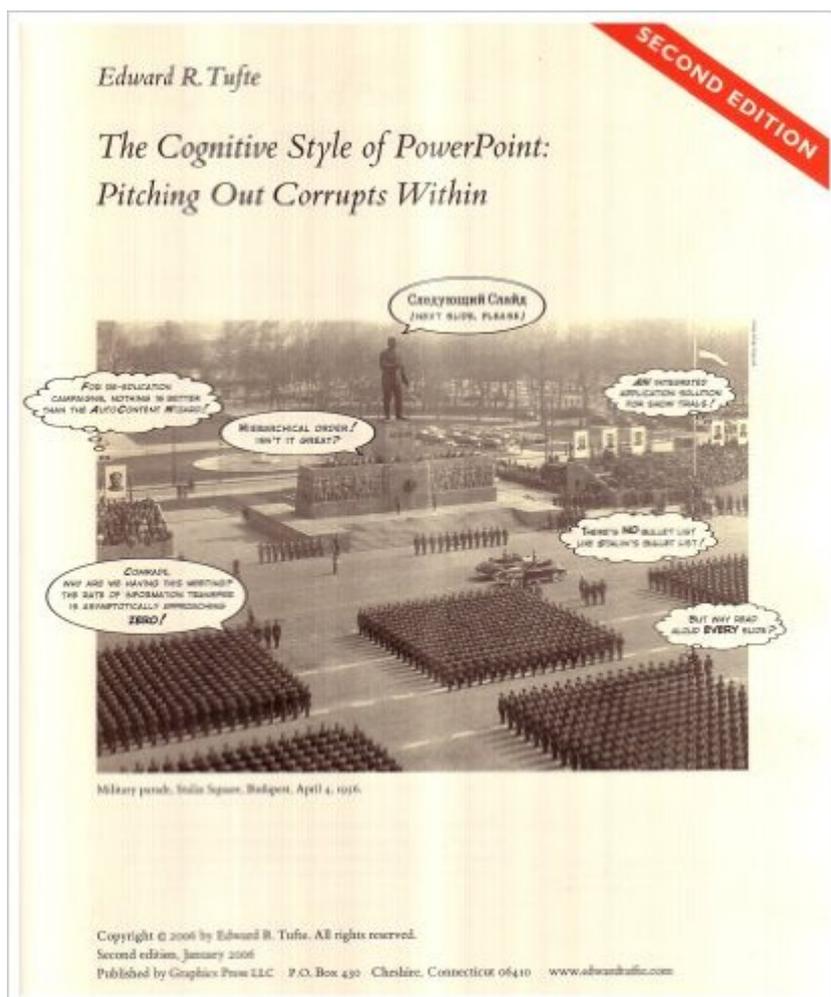# The Cognitive Style Of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within, Second Edition

Synopsis

Book by Tufte, Edward R.

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Customer Reviews

If there were a fan club for Edward Tufte, I would gladly sign up to be an officer. His three books changed the way I think about presenting information, and added the invaluable term "chartjunk" to my vocabulary. I was enormously excited to learn that he had written about Powerpoint and could hardly wait to lay my hands on the publication. Unfortunately, it wasn't worth the wait.To those thinking about buying this booklet (28 pages) let me save you the expense by summarizing it:PowerPoint slides don't have much information in them, and you're limited to a sequential presentation order.That's about it. His booklet is an extended indictment of the limitations of PowerPoint. Anyone interested in suggestions for Powerpoint improvements will find a refernce on the last page in a postscript to read the third chapter of his book, Visual Explanations, or visit his web site.Do that instead of reading this booklet.

Edward Tufte is the foremost advocate of communicating complex data simply and clearly in the world today. It was naturally only a matter of time before he cast a critical eye on the software most responsible for dumbing down information transfer across the fruited plains---PowerPoint.Don't worry: Tufte's criticisms of the software package are not the latest round of Microsoft-bashing from an academic elite practically wed to its Macs.Rather, Tufte sets his sights on bigger and more

rewarding game: how presenters have watered down their presentation styles to suit off-the-rack presentation templates provided by this software package.His thesis is as simple and elegant as his goal of streamlined, impactful communication. PowerPoint lacks the resolution necessary to convey a rich stream of information to the presentation audience.If you're inclined to defend the software, ask yourself if you've endured the following in a PowerPoint slideshow:- An unending stream of bullet lists or "talking points" consisting of a handful of words per slide- Branding (logos, headers, footers, titles etc) which takes up a large portion of available slide real estate- "Sesame Street" style animations which obscure rather than illuminate the subject matter- Distracting audio cues which draw the audience's attention away from the speaker and toward "the machine that goes, 'PING'"Or try a simpler exercise: Think back to the best talk or pitch you can recall. Was PowerPoint employed? I suspect not; and for good reason, as Tufte argues.Sadly, thanks to the ubiquity of the software, the abuse of PowerPoint has consequences far beyond bored audiences. In a particularly powerful section of the essay, Tufte demonstrates how PowerPoint contributed to the space shuttle Columbia disaster.Since my purchase of this pamphlet, I have shared it widely with my PowerPoint-happy colleagues. The result, I'm happy to say, has been far more impactful and dynamic presentations which do not shirk on the data.Once my dog-eared copy circulates widely enough (or enough freeloaders buy their own), my company may well break off the shackles of boring meetings and overly-slick sales pitches once and for all.

After the first read, I was disappointed with Edward Tufte's essay on PPTs. I was expecting more practical suggestions from the master of visualizing information; steps we could all take to make our PPTs better. This essay mostly gives graphic examples of bad PPTs. We've all seen plenty of bad PPTs in our lives. Do we really need to pay Mr. Tufte to see more?The point of the essay seems to be, instead of trying to make your PPTs better, you shouldn't even bother using the evil software package from Microsoft. Instead, make a nice handout for your audience.So I decided to perform a test. I was involved in an internal presentation to a different group in the company. One by one, eight different managers gave a 10 to 15 minute presentation to a group of about 25 people. While the other managers worked on their PPTs, got their laptops ready, and made sure a screen and a Boxlight would be in the conference room, I worked on a one-page handout. My presentation would stand by itself, without the crutch of PPT illuminating the wall behind me; the handout would supplement my presentation, and would allow the audience to take something physical back to their offices.After the presentations were over, the audience was asked to fill out a survey. To summarize, they hated the handouts, loved the PPTs. And the PPT presentation they loved the best

was one of the most hideous examples I had ever seen--one Mr. Tufte would have had a field day tearing apart, one slide at a time.I agree that too many presenters use bad PPTs as a crutch, and as presenters we should rely more on handouts as a secondary communication tool. However, in my own experience the audience seems to want and *expect* PPTs-in which case a bad PPT might be more effective than no PPT at all. Read Tufte's essay and take his points to heart, but ultimately, KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE!

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