

LISTEN, HEAR!

by Geoff Plant



hearLIFE

Using PowerPoint® for Testing and Training

Introduction

Over the past 10 or so years, Microsoft PowerPoint® has become a standard “method” used for presentations at conferences, meetings, presentations, etc. It has become so common that we are usually astonished if a speaker decides to use something as “old-fashioned” as an overhead projector in her/his presentation. I started to use PowerPoint® in 2001, and now I find it difficult to imagine how I would manage without it. On my computer I have around 100 presentations that I can access at the click of my mouse button, and it's a great relief to no longer have to carry around bulging folders filled with overhead transparencies.

PowerPoint® is a wonderful tool for use in workshops and at meetings, but lately I've started to use it more and more as a testing and training tool. I decided that this would be a good topic for this issue of “Listen, Hear!” because most clinicians/ teachers have access to this very useful program. I hope that the ideas presented here will encourage others to consider using PowerPoint® in their work with children and adults with cochlear implants.

Slideshows

When I am working with clients, I like them to know about the places I visit in my work and, especially with children, about the world in general. I had always taken photographs on my travels, but the cost of film and processing meant that I had to be careful in my selection of subjects. Since “discovering” digital cameras, however, these constraints have been removed, and I can now take pictures of anything and, sometimes it seems, everything! Once I get back from a trip, I put the pictures together to form a SlideShow that I can use with clients. I show each picture in turn and discuss them with the client as an auditory only or auditory-visual exercise.



Here are a few pictures that I used to develop a SlideShow on “Pandas”. I had visited Cheng Du in China and on the final day had visited a research center dedicated to the preservation of pandas. I've never met anyone who is not fascinated by pandas, so it's a perfect topic to promote conversational skills. I tell about the visit and use each of the pictures to provide cues that aid in understanding. I always end the presentation with the picture shown at the very right above, which I facetiously call “Geoff Plant being stalked by a panda”! I can never resist pointing out the similarities in color, with my black shirt and white hair mimicking those of the panda!

In the last issue, I talked about rebuses, and showed a couple of signs that used them. Since then I've put together a complete SlideShow on "Signs". I look for signs in each of the places I visit and add any new and unusual ones to this set of pictures. Here are a few that I think can be used to, again, promote the client's conversational skills and her/his speech perception. The "Flying Pan", for example, is a wonderful play on words that I found in Hong Kong, as was the bilingual "Exit" sign.



I've also included two pedestrian crossing signs – one from Austria (left) and one from the US (right). Both seem to have the same purposeful walking style, but in the Austrian sign, the man is dressed quite formally in a jacket and hat, while the US figure is highly stylized. I can also point out other differences between the signs – the shape, the background colors, etc – and these serve to encourage the client to engage in the give and take of conversation.

One of the most interesting signs I've found recently was an arrow containing the word "KIBLAT" painted on the ceiling of my hotel room in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I thought I knew what it was, but checked with some Malaysian colleagues to ensure I hadn't misunderstood its meaning. They confirmed that the arrow pointed towards Mecca, the Holy City towards which Muslims pray five times a day.

I would strongly encourage readers to consider producing your own SlideShows. If you don't have a digital camera, you can scan in pictures, postcards, or clipart and use these as the visual references. The topic doesn't really matter. It could be your last vacation destination, your hobbies, interests, etc. Just ensure it's something with which you are familiar and take it from there.

Displaying the Materials

When I'm presenting these materials to my clients, I always plug a second monitor into my laptop. This screen has a much better quality display than that of my laptop and it's also considerably larger, making for ease of viewing. Of course it's not necessary to have a second screen, but it is more convenient.

Background Materials

Another use of SlideShows is to provide important background information for training materials. Right now, for example, I am working on two projects that use Speech Tracking for training. Both introduce some unusual vocabulary items and situations.

The text I've written for one of these projects is a 32,000-word story, "Kumanjayi", set in Central Australia. This is an area unfamiliar to most people, so the SlideShow introduces the region via a series of pictures. The teacher/clinician is provided with a script, which s/he can use to ensure that the client has the necessary background, vocabulary, etc., before starting to use the story. I've included a few of the pictures.

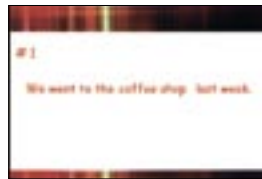
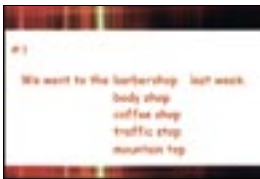


I've used this set of pictures with clients several times, and always point out that the silhouette of the rock at sunset looks like a comic strip character. Clients invariably respond with, "Oh, yes! It's Snoopy!" However, when I asked one teenager what character it resembled, he replied, in a suitably breathy voice, "Luke, I am your father!"

The other Speech Tracking text is "Fire!" a 10,000-word story set along the Appalachian Trail in the eastern United States. Again, I've used pictures (photographs and line drawings) to introduce the main characters and some of the vocabulary used in the story.

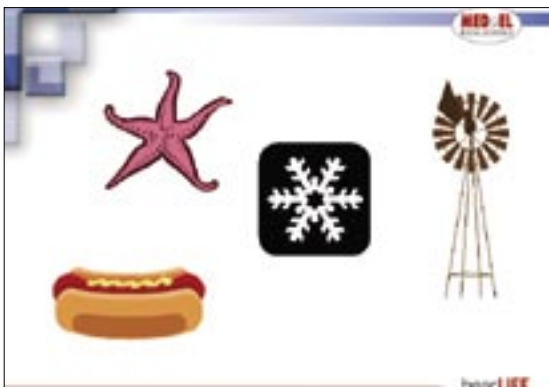
Presenting Test Alternatives

I often present test materials using a closed set format, and the range of alternatives can also be presented using PowerPoint®. One advantage of this approach is that I can use a large font size to ensure ease of reading. Many older clients appreciate this as it enables them to read the text without having to put their reading glasses on.



In the example shown here the client has to determine whether the target word(s) were "barbershop," "body shop," "coffee shop," "traffic stop," or "mountain top." The next slide presented gives the client the correct response – "coffee shop."

The response alternatives can also be presented pictorially to meet the needs of clients with limited reading skills.

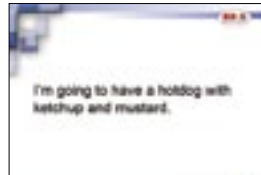


In this example, the client has to determine which of four spondaic words – "starfish," "snowflake," "hotdog", "windmill" – was presented as the stimulus. Again, the next slide can be used to provide the client with immediate feedback as to the correctness of her/his response.

Other Training Materials

Clinicians often ask me for materials that can be used with teenagers and young adults, and it was this group that I had in mind when I developed a series of topic-centered sentences with pictorial cues. The topics that I have developed so far include: "History," "Around the Home," "Sports," and "Food." Each set consists of 50 sentences or short paragraphs, each of which has a pictorial cue.

In the example shown below the client is shown a picture of a hotdog, and the sentence “I’m going to have a hotdog with ketchup and mustard”, is presented for identification. Once the client has responded, I provide feedback by showing her/him the next slide. The pictures can also be used to cue a set of sentences.



This picture of a toaster, for example, is used with the sentences – “What would you like to have on your toast this morning? We have jelly, honey, peanut butter, or cheese”.

Speech Production Training

I’ve also prepared a series of PowerPoint® presentations for speech production training. For younger children, I’ve produced a series of “flashcards”, which provide them with practice in producing critical consonant targets such as [s] and [k]. Here’s an example from the set for the consonant [s].



The child is shown a picture of the target word “saw”, is provided with the correct pronunciation in IPA, and is asked to say the word in the short sentence, “I see a saw”. The materials could be presented using a series of flashcards or in a book, but sometimes using a computer to present the stimulus materials just seems more fun for children.

Many of the young adults with whom I work have difficulties producing a good contrast between the voiceless sibilants [s] and [sh]. This is especially true when the words containing the targets are presented in a sentence format. For example, the client may be able to produce the words “save” and “shave” correctly in isolation, but has difficulty doing so in a short sentence such as, “I said SAVE, but she said SHAVE”. Notice that this sentence format also contains two other words requiring correct [s] and [sh] production.

I have made up a SlideShow that presents a large number of such contrasts for the client to produce. These include [s] and [sh] contrasted in both the initial – sort/short, sigh/shy, same/shame, etc., – and final – mass/mash, lease/leash, Russ/rush, etc., – positions. This can be used for production training, and, if appropriate, the stimulus items can also be used for auditory training.

Conclusion

PowerPoint® is a very useful tool for both testing and training, and I hope that other clinicians/therapists will consider using it in this fashion. Digital cameras and scanners provide opportunities to include relevant and colorful illustrations to enhance the appearance of such presentations. Finally, as always, I would welcome any comments, feedback, or suggestions. Please contact me at hearf@aol.com
Geoff Plant