

Your essential 'how-to' guide to using Prezi in an academic environment

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Presentation boredom can be a significant barrier to academic communication. [Ned Potter](#) provides guidance on the strengths and weaknesses of [Prezi](#) as a fresh approach to the PowerPoint doldrums. Prezi favours a non-linear format which also allows for more self-guided autonomy for viewers. But Prezi isn't brilliant for accessibility and the whizzy technology can interfere with what you're trying to say. Helpful tips are provided on how to get the most out of the interactive features.



[Prezi.com](#) is a zooming presentation tool which offers an alternative to PowerPoint. As it grows in popularity it is being seen more and more often across campuses; presentations created not just by academics and librarians but by students too. The quality of these presentations is variable; when used well Prezi can be a fabulous communication tool, but when used badly it can leave the audience feeling bamboozled, and potentially slightly sea-sick... There's a lot of academic interest to it, so with that in mind here's a brief guide.

Some context

Last week I ran a session for academic staff and researchers on Edtech – useful online tools for education. We covered 9 tools and asked in the feedback for people to specify if they wanted a hands-on workshop on any of them in the future; overwhelmingly, people wanted to know more about Prezi. The session itself was delivered via a Prezi, so here it is – to both illustrate the medium and because you might find the presentation useful in itself...

[View Original on Prezi](#)

Basic principles of Prezi

With Prezi you begin with a blank canvas (or with any of the potentially very useful templates Prezi provides). You position objects such as text, images, embedded videos or graphics, anywhere you like on the canvas. You then plot a path between them in the order you specify, so Prezi zooms in on each object in turn, allowing you to deliver the presentation to the audience.

Strengths

- Prezi is fresh and different. People sit up and take notice when they realise they aren't about to be faced with the usual [Death by PowerPoint](#).
- It can be completely non-linear. You can ignore the path you plot entirely and just click on objects to zoom in on (allowing for audience-led presentations), or change the path for every presentation depending on your audience and time-slot.
- PowerPoint forces a hierarchy of information on you, whereas you dictate the hierarchy to Prezi – the most important points can be huge on the canvas, with the smaller points literally nestled inside them, for example. When not forced to present your ideas in an endless line of identical slide-shaped chunks, you can actually reconceptualise your ideas and think about things in a new way.
- Prezi works better than a slide-deck does when you aren't there to talk over the top of it. You can easily embed a Prezi on any website or blog, or just direct people towards the presentation on Prezi.com itself – in either case it becomes a more dynamic online learning object than a set of slides. The audience can navigate straight to the information most relevant for them.

Weaknesses

- When used badly, the zooming and lurching nature of Prezi makes the audience feel motion-sickness. This happens a LOT – it is up to the presenter to ensure this doesn't happen (see the Tips section below)
- Prezi isn't brilliant for accessibility. A transcript is automatically provided, but it's not structured very helpfully – and screen-readers can't read Prezis. [Matt Cornock](#), an academic colleague at York, suggests a 'gold standard' of using Prezi for the face-to-face presentation but providing the information in an alternative format online afterwards, as well as linking to the Prezi itself.
- Prezi requires flash (unless you save your presentation to a USB stick)
- Prezi is so very different from the Microsoft Office suite we've become used to, that there is a learning curve on getting up to speed with using it effectively.
- Prezi is so whizzy and capable of tricks and flashy moves, that sometimes people become lost in the technology and the medium becomes (or obscures) the message.

Examples

For space reasons we won't embed them all here, but here are some links.

- [An example of just what Prezi can do](#) – this one is now freely available as a template for anyone to reuse
- [A nice academic example](#) from Steven Pinker at Harvard
- [An Interactive Map](#) I created for my Theatre, Film and Television students

Tips

- **Coherence matters.** Most Prezis are just a load of objects placed randomly on the canvas, linked to in some semblance of order. However it's much more effective if you have a planned structure (perhaps sketched out roughly on a sheet of paper beforehand) that works in a logical and relevant way.
- **Use the top-down, full-presentation view.** You can zoom out at any time to show your whole presentation at once. Prezi was originally invented with this in mind – it allows you to show your audience exactly where you are in the presentation, where you've been, and where you're going, as you move along. This anchors the audience and helps them get the key messages you want to deliver. The other way to use the top down view is for a big reveal at the very end – perhaps the entire presentation has been a visual metaphor that perfectly illustrates your conclusion...
- **Take responsibility for the motion-sickness!** As the presenter, it's your job to stop the audience feeling sick as your presentation zooms around. You can achieve this in various ways. Firstly, pace your Prezi sensibly – as you would a slide-deck – rather than whizzing from point to point every 5 seconds. Secondly, position your materials sympathetically rather than at random – in other words, work from left-to-right, or top-to-bottom, or anything that resembles a method of information delivery the brain is used to seeing. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, just because Prezi can rotate, barrel-roll, and spin about, doesn't mean you should! The best presentations I've seen on Prezi only use about 20% of Prezi's capabilities for most of the time, and have one or two special moments (going upside down, or an extreme zoom-in) to illustrate a key point.
- **Choose your visual theme early.** Prezi isn't like PowerPoint where every slide can be different – you choose your theme (fonts, colours and shapes) and stick to it. It's best to do this at the start, in case changing the fonts later ruins your perfectly positioned pieces of text, for example.
- **Sign up with your .ac.uk (or .edu) email address.** Academic users of Prezi get to upgrade to the Educational Licence for free, providing they sign up with an academic email address. This is well worth doing, as it gives you more storage space and the opportunity to set Prezis to 'private', ensuring no one finds them online until the presentation is finished

Further guidance

Finally, there are lots more tips and a whole lot of help in [this guide to Prezi I created in Prezi itself](#) – but if you have any questions this doesn't answer, leave them in a comment and I'll endeavour to reply.

When used badly, Prezi interferes with what you're trying to say and leaves the audience feeling queasy. When used well, it delivers information in a fresh and arresting way which increases its impact. It's not appropriate for all situations, but you may find it a really useful tool in some circumstances – have a try, and see what you think.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

About the Author

Ned Potter is an Academic Liaison Librarian at the University of York. He's the author of *The Library Marketing Toolkit* (Facet, 2012) and writes and speaks on the use of emerging technology in information services and academia. You can follow him on Twitter [@theREALwikiman](#), and find his website at www.thewikiman.org where there are several Prezi guides.

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