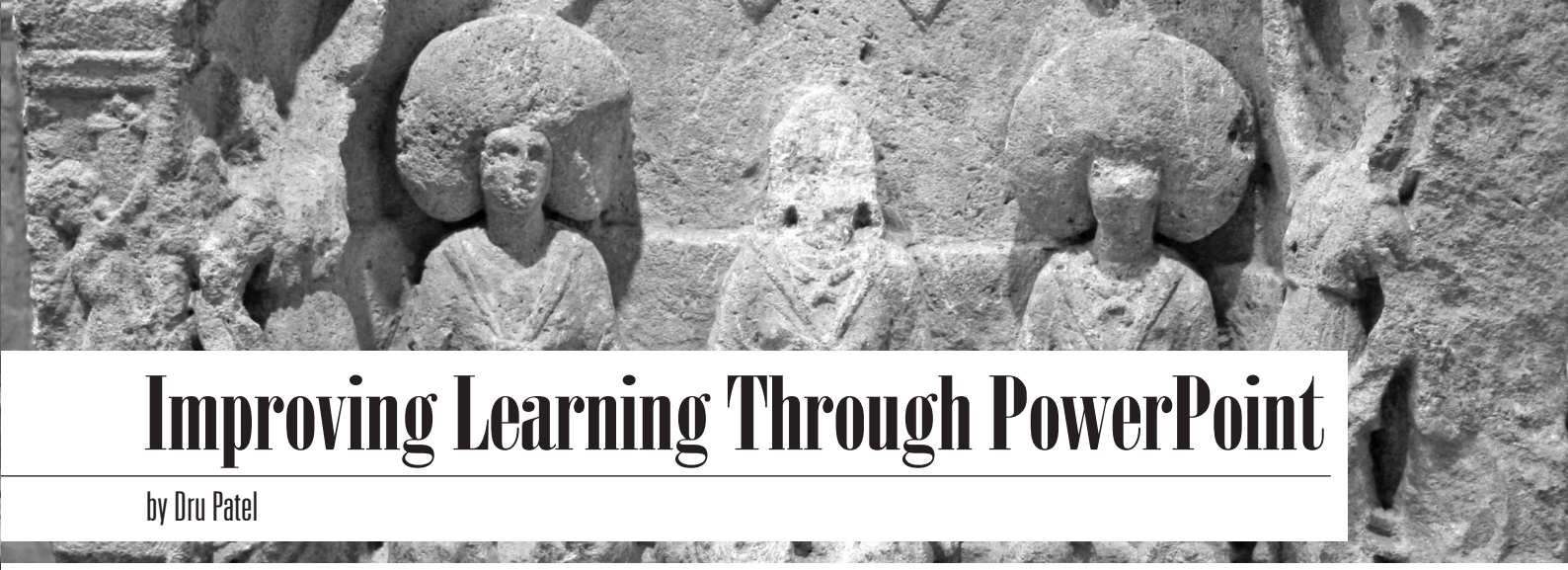

Improving Learning Through PowerPoint

by Dru Patel

Dru was exploring the effectiveness of PowerPoint as a presentational tool for the Year 7 Latin students in her placement school. The following is a report of the development of her use of a standardized PowerPoint 'frame' of her own devising. This did not just help her students comprehend the new grammatical features better, but also ensured that she herself thought through the lesson sequence more effectively.

PowerPoints in lessons can be effective teaching aids and teachers and students alike have become accustomed to their being part of school life. In my PGCE year, as I was creating PowerPoint presentations of my own, my mentor and I began considering what makes an effective PowerPoint.

I found that using PowerPoint was an ideal way of exhibiting artefacts in lessons for Classical Civilization or for presenting information and keywords in Ancient History, but using it to teach Latin grammar seemed to be more difficult. There was no continuity between my slides and students would often seem to forget information that was not immediately in front of them.

While planning my lesson for a mixed ability Year 7 class on the perfect and imperfect tense (from Cambridge Latin Course Stage 5), I realised that the 'lesson timeline' that my mentor and I usually wrote out on the side of the whiteboard each lesson could feature in the actual PowerPoint instead. I set aside the lesson plan that I habitually wrote before preparing my resources and set out my first slide in three parts. The side panel on the left could act as a 'lesson timeline' to keep track of what we had covered so far; while the main part of the slide could contain images, examples, information or tasks for the students.

This main part could further be subdivided into sections where further information could be presented. In Figure 1, the first slide from the sequence, we can see the basic subdivision of every slide from the series from CLC Stage 5: at present the 'lesson timeline' on the left is blank as the students have not got anything to recall; the main part of the slide is occupied by the first image from the CLC Stage 5 Model Sentences – 'Quintus per viam ambulabat'; the translation comes up *after* the students' own comprehension of the Latin.

After the first few slides of my original PowerPoint presentation recapping the pattern in the endings of the tenses, I saw that the way I had originally planned to introduce the grammar point would have been confusing to an 11-year-old audience. By setting the slides out in this new way and tracking my own train of thought by using the 'lesson timeline', I found it much easier to slip into the mindset of my students and anticipate their questions and difficulties. Maintaining the information in the lesson timeline was easy too, as the previous slide could be duplicated and changed or added to accordingly. The new layout of my slideshow had helped me to plan my explanations, anticipate any problems which the students might have, and engage the students by showing them the complete 'lesson timeline' in the left hand side panel.

When I used the PowerPoint in the lesson the next morning, I first drew the students' attention to the blank side panel and explained that it would become a 'lesson timeline' and assured them they could use it at any point if they were stuck. The students responded well to the information I presented them with and easily followed the slideshow's explanation of the perfect and imperfect tenses. It was very encouraging to see that even the less motivated students were highly engaged because they could see what they had achieved building up in the 'lesson timeline'. By the end of the lesson, I noticed how much the students' confidence had increased not only because they could see how much they had achieved by the end, but also because they had had something to refer back to if they had been stuck in the lesson.

Figure 1

Quintus per viam ambulabat.

Quintus was walking along the street.

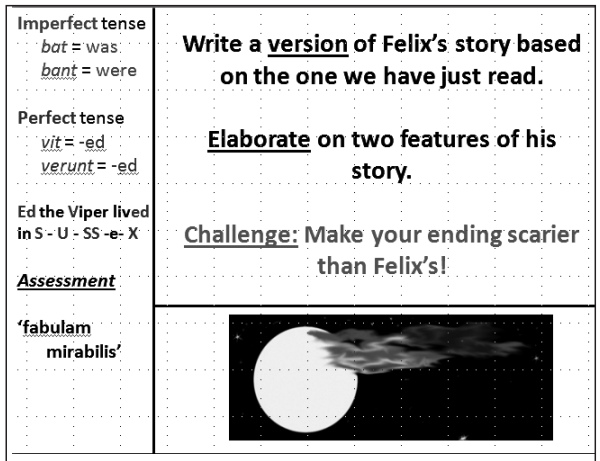

Figure 2

Figure 2 shows the final slide in the Stage 5 sequence: the 'lesson timeline' has now filled up with an accumulation of 4 elements from the lesson sequence (imperfect and different sorts of perfect endings, an assessment activity); the central part of the slide contains reminders of what must be included for the assessment activity; and a suitable image sets the scene.

The standardized frame helps the students follow the sequence of grammatical explanations, information and instructions. Unlike normal PowerPoint slides where such information disappears when the slide is changed, in this one, the information stays and accumulates.