

relevance, clarity and completeness, interaction and balance between text and visuals, usability, English, and so on. In the final workshop, student groups present their finished Web site sections in PowerPoint presentations, in which they explain their choices regarding design, information structure, content, and navigation.

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## ENHANCING PRESENTATION NARRATIVES THROUGH WRITTEN AND VISUAL INTEGRATION

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“SO, AS YOU can see,” the eager business communication student proclaims, sweeping her hand toward a newly beamed-up PowerPoint slide in a grant proposal presentation for her classmates. Her classmates gaze over a dense exhibit of estimated costs, economic drivers, and projected returns on investment, yet they truly can’t “see”; rather, they are overwhelmed by the dense packaging of data and text that

requires them to intuit the story the speaker wishes to share. Failing to identify a unified story that emerges from this slide, these classmates politely smile but fidget as they attempt to piece the story together themselves.

Sound familiar? We have all likely experienced such moments in our classrooms, and we increasingly recognize that students need a more contemporary, multimodal literacy that requires them to examine how their written, oral, visual, and electronic modes of communication inform one another to generate meaning. Helping students hone their multimodal literacies will enable them to develop PowerPoint presentations in ways that respond more forcefully to audiences' needs. Edward Tufte (2003), in *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*, argued that speakers who egregiously misuse PowerPoint fail to respect their audiences and hence ignore one of the most important virtues of public speaking. Increasingly, our business communication students enter our classrooms familiar with the Microsoft program, yet often, they fail to consider their audiences' needs in these rhetorical situations. In particular, students who do not carefully integrate written and visual elements in presentation slides often fail to consider that such careful integration helps turn mere information into more compelling narratives.

Jameson's (2000) analysis of shareholder reports examined verbal and visual manifestations in these workplace documents, and the ideas I share here encourage students to consider the narratives that will emerge in their PowerPoint presentations through more careful textual and visual integration. Slides that tell narratives become paramount for students, for these stories often determine outcomes (e.g., which team will win the bid, which team will advance in the case competition).

As a business communication instructor and communications consultant to my home institution's College of Business, I often find that students who integrate the textual and visual modes most forcefully in PowerPoint-enhanced presentations emerge as the most natural storytellers. In this article, I describe an approach, C-C-C ("claim," "call," and "comment"), that has worked particularly well when students craft persuasive presentations.

### **Establishing Claims to Introduce Narratives**

The first *C* in my teaching strategy for textual and visual integration invites students to construct persuasive *claims* that introduce data more meaningfully on individual slides. Often, students place headers in slides as topical identifiers but fail to see how more carefully

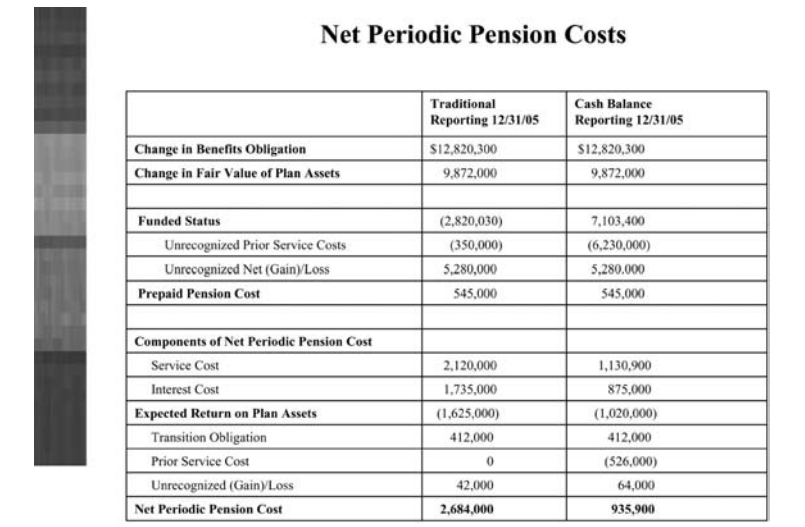
phrased claims can introduce data and prepare an audience to receive and interpret data displays. In Figure 1, the phrase “Net Periodic Pension Costs” functions as a topical header but fails to develop a narrative. However, in Figure 2, a strategic claim introduces the story that emerges from the data. If students use these claims consistently throughout a presentation, then a sustained narrative will emerge. When I storyboard presentations with students, I encourage teams to cut the claims off of all their slides and paste them into Word documents. As we examine their lists of claims, our collective goal is ensuring that a sustained narrative emerges from the first slide to the last. As students think more about the power of claims, they begin to see how visual elements (e.g., graphs and data displays) work with, rather than compete against, text to generate meaning.

### Using Call-Outs to Situate Narratives

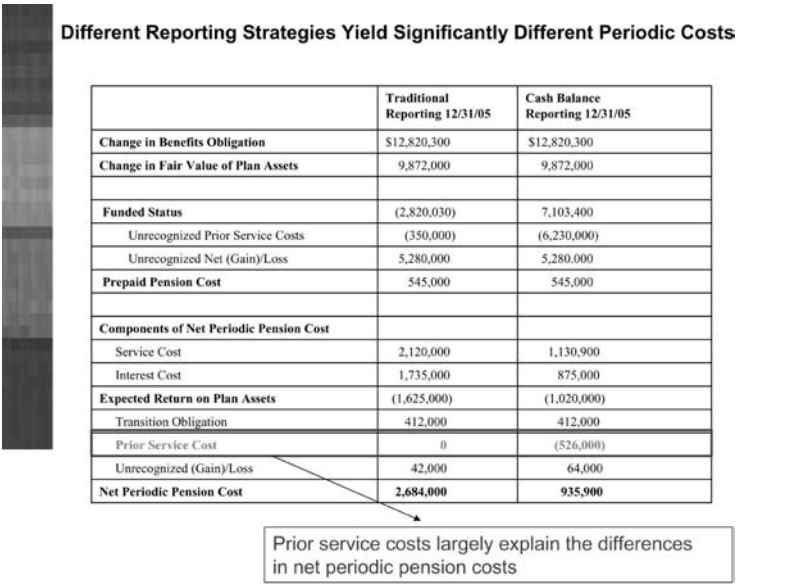
The second *C* encourages students to use *call-out features* to give complex, dense data sets a focal point for audience members. In Figure 1, the audience is required to process an inordinately large range of information, thus likely decreasing the attention that the audience will pay to the speaker. Furthermore, the data set lacks a sufficient focal point, one that should be consistent with the claim that introduces this data set. In Figure 2, the data set invites audience members to focus specifically on the prior service cost between traditional and cash balance reporting strategies. The true story emerges here, for the claim suggests that different reporting strategies, in this case traditional and cash balance, yield different results. To encourage students to determine where call-outs should occur in any particular slides, I display various slides from different disciplines for my students, so they can determine what data they would enhance visually for their audience. In fact, I like to take one slide and create two different claims for the slide; students recognize that the data they isolate or enhance are driven largely by the claim that introduces the data set. Therefore, this second *C* reinforces the role of narrative as a key driver in presentations.

### Making Comments to Enhance Narratives

The final *C* encourages students to add *comments* that illustrate why the call-out is essential. By inserting text boxes, arrows, and clarifying description into the slide in Figure 2, the speakers refrain from letting the audiences intuit the data’s meaning; rather, the students enhance



**Figure 1. A Presentation Slide That Lacks a Sufficient Focal Point**



**Figure 2. A Revised Presentation Slide That Reflects C-C-C (Claim, Call, Comment) Principles**

the data by making a forceful link between the data and the claim. Depending on the situation, explanatory comments could either be a larger, more accessible iteration or add supplementary explanation (as is the case in Figure 2).

## Conclusions

By using this C-C-C approach to teaching written and visual integration for students preparing PowerPoint presentations, students more cogently understand the power of narratives in meaning making. Furthermore, these narratives allow students to showcase their multi-modal literacies, those contemporary and comprehensive communication skills that allow students to navigate their way into various discourse communities more comfortably and confidently.

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## NOMENCLATURE, ANALYSIS, AND CREATION: AN APPROACH TO TEACHING VISUALS

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AFTER SEVERAL YEARS of experimenting with assignments and approaches, I have settled on a three-pronged approach to teaching visual aspects of business communication. We begin by creating a list of design variables, identifying criteria that are felt or noticed but not often named. Students then do a standard analysis of a piece of business communication that relies heavily on visual elements. A year ago, I added the third piece: Students now create a piece in which visual elements are essential in communicating a message. None of these three “prongs” is particularly revolutionary, but they complement one

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