



Spice up a list in a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation?

By Susan Sales Harkins

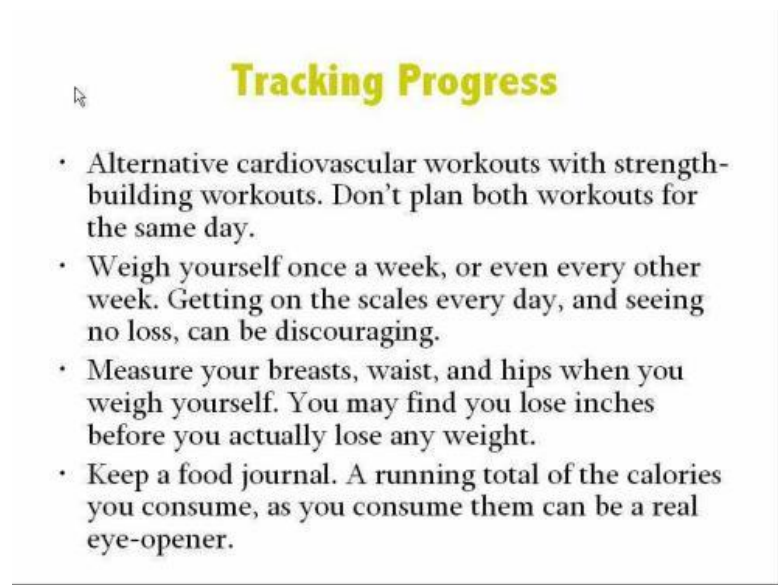
Most of us use bullets or numbers to introduce specific ideas or points. There's nothing wrong with them, but they are rather ordinary. In a [Microsoft PowerPoint](#) presentation, you might want to forego the ordinary and go with something a bit more novel, and certainly unexpected.

The concept of replacing bullets and numbers applies to all versions of PowerPoint. This article provides step-by-step instructions for PowerPoint 2003 and PowerPoint 2007.

Getting started

Deciding what to use instead of boring bullets (and numbers) can be a challenge. The key is to know your presentation and your audience. Use color or graphics to reflect or at least balance the content and purpose. For instance, the slide in **Figure A** uses bullets and frankly, it's boring. Considering the audience -- people you're motivating to lose weight -- the slide falls flat.

Figure A



Tracking Progress

- Alternative cardiovascular workouts with strength-building workouts. Don't plan both workouts for the same day.
- Weigh yourself once a week, or even every other week. Getting on the scales every day, and seeing no loss, can be discouraging.
- Measure your breasts, waist, and hips when you weigh yourself. You may find you lose inches before you actually lose any weight.
- Keep a food journal. A running total of the calories you consume, as you consume them can be a real eye-opener.

You need to motivate this audience, not put them to sleep!

How do I: Spice up a list in a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation?

Your first step is to remove bullets (and numbers) from the existing presentation as follows (in PowerPoint 2003):

- Choose Master from the View menu and then select Slide Master.
- Select the bulleted levels, as shown in **Figure B**, and choose Bullets and Numbering from the Format menu.
- In the resulting Bullets and Numbering dialog box, click None, and then click OK.
- Close the Slide Master by clicking Close on the Slide Master toolbar.

Figure B



Remove bullet lists from the Slide Master.

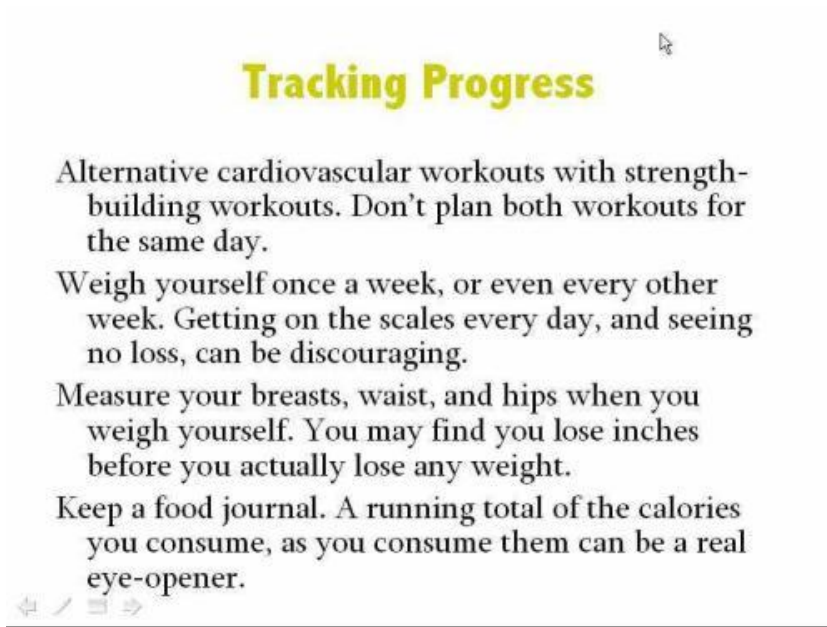
In PowerPoint 2007 do the following:

- Click Slide Master in the Presentation Views group on the View tab.
- Click the theme slide (the first slide from the thumbnail views to the left).
- Click the Home tab.
- Choose None from the Bullets control's dropdown list in the Paragraph group.
- Return to the Slide Master tab, and click Close Master View.

If you're working with an existing presentation that previously had bullets, review your slides. For instance, **Figure C** shows the previous slide *after* changing the Slide Master. Those hanging indents are an additional problem. Most likely, you'll want to ditch them. Return to the Slide Master and get rid of them as follows:

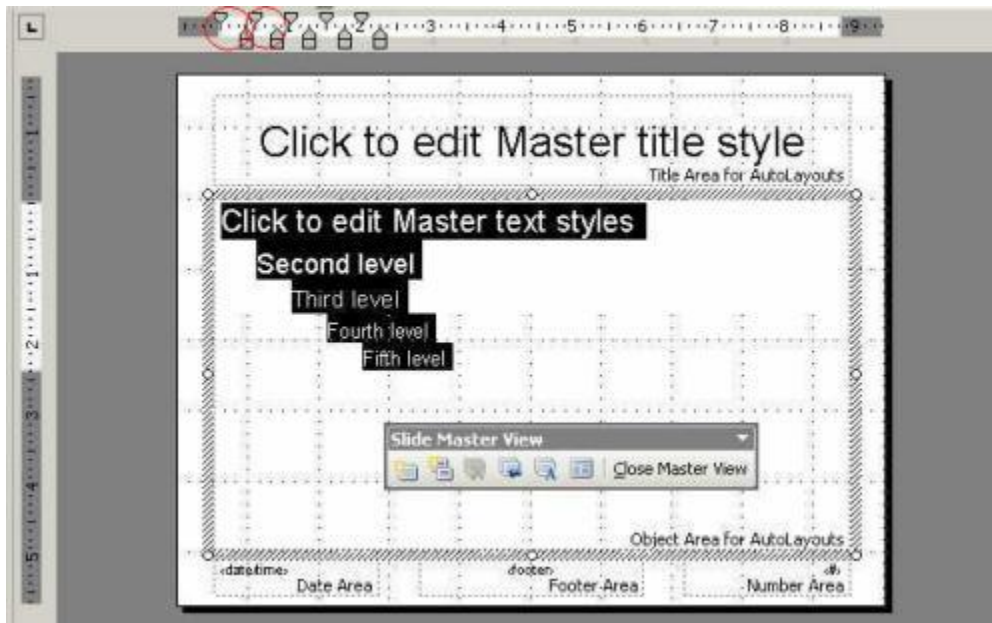
- Display the Ruler by choosing Ruler from the View menu (if necessary). In PowerPoint 2007, choose Ruler from the View tab.
- **Figure D** shows the left margin and the hanging indent for each level. (If you want to retain individual levels, repeat for each level.)
- Drag the first level's hanging indent marker to the left until it's directly under the first level's left margin marker, as shown in **Figure E**.
- Close the Slide Master.

Figure C



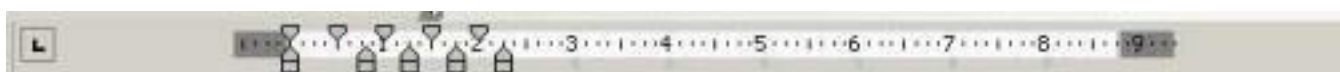
The bullets are gone, but the slide's still unimpressive.

Figure D



Each level's left margin has a corresponding hanging indent.

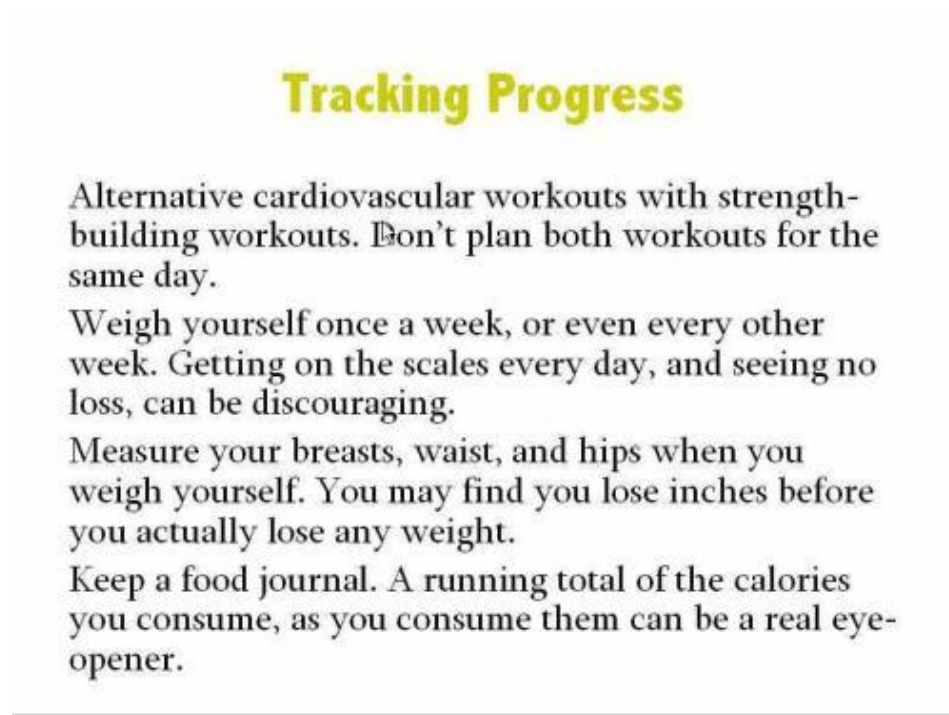
Figure E



Eliminate the hanging indent.

Wrapped lines now align with the first line of each item, but the slide shown in **Figure F** is still boring. Perhaps more importantly, the slide is confusing. It's hard to tell where one item ends and the next begins.

Figure F



The hanging indents are gone, but now the slide's confusing.

Use color

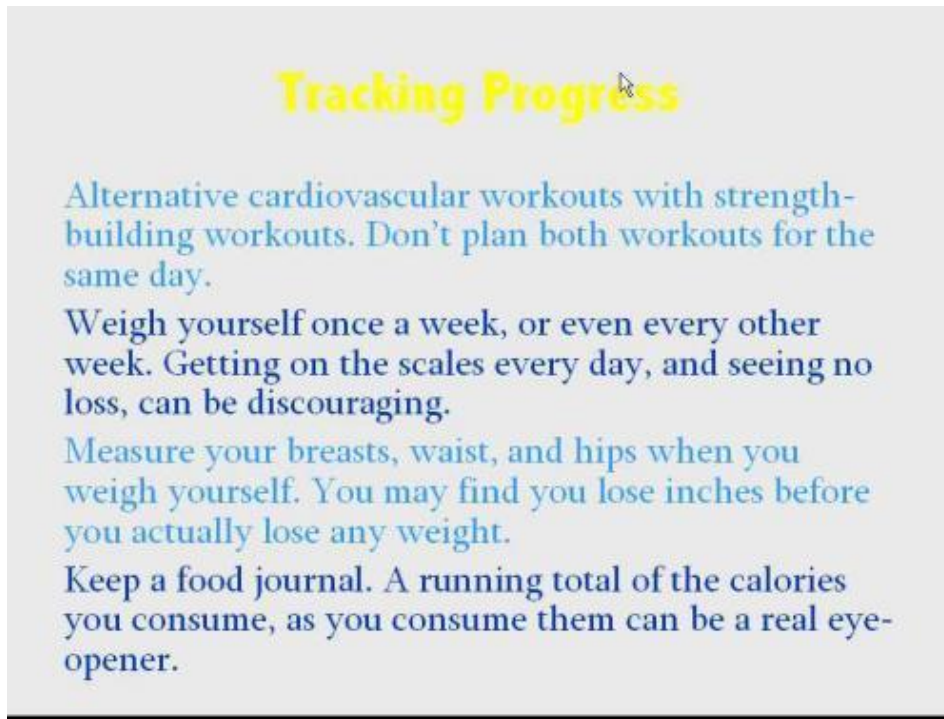
You can easily differentiate list items by alternating colors. As always, keep the presentation's purpose and audience in mind. Also, keep the choice consistent by applying the same colors to all lists (although that's one rule you can break for the right presentation). For the dieting crowd, you might consider shades of blue and yellow as some experts believe that blue suppresses the appetite and yellow improves digestion.

To apply alternating colors, do the following:

- Select a list item.
- Click the Font Color icon's dropdown arrow and choose More Colors to open the Colors palette. In PowerPoint 2007, use Text Fill in the WordArt Styles group in the Format tab.
- Click a color and click OK.
- Repeat the process for each list item.

The slide in **Figure G** isn't pleasant or easy to read, even applying what you think are appropriate colors for the subject. (This slide might actually startle me during a real presentation.)

Figure G



Alternating colors might make things worse!

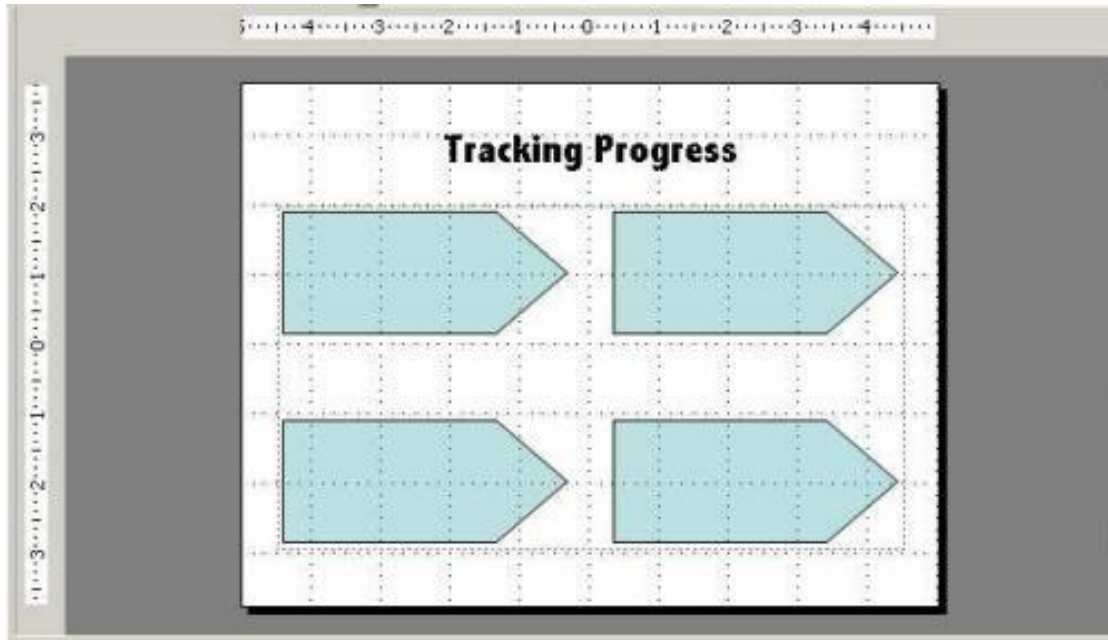
You could continue to play with alternating colors, especially if you have the artistic background for it. The truth is, alternating colors might work and they might not.

Use AutoShapes

If colors just don't work for you, try AutoShapes. As with color, the shape you use is up to you, but let the audience and the content guide you. Some shapes will be more intuitive to your cause than others. To add an AutoShape, do the following:

- Display the Drawing toolbar (if necessary) by choosing Toolbars from the View menu and then choosing Drawing. Alternatively, right-click any toolbar and menu and check Drawing. In PowerPoint 2007, find Shapes in the Illustrations group on the Insert tab.
- Click the AutoShapes button's dropdown arrow to display its options. To add the Block Arrow AutoShape shown in **Figure H**, choose Block Arrow from the resulting submenu and then click the third item on the fifth line.
- The slide has four list items, so the slide needs four arrows. You might have to resize the AutoShape.
- Once the arrow's the right size, select it and press [Ctrl]+[C] to copy it to the Clipboard.
- Press [Ctrl]+[V] three times to add three more arrows.
- Drag and drop the arrows to their respective spots. In this case, the four arrows are equally spaced between two columns and rows.

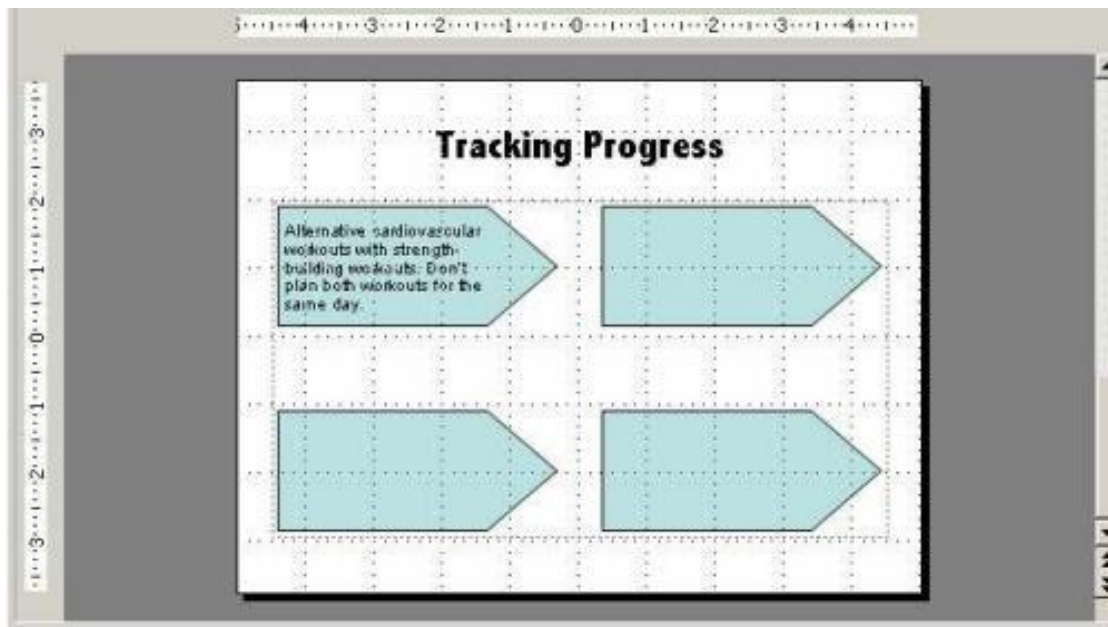
Figure H



Use AutoShapes to differentiate list items.

The next step is to add the list item text. From the Drawing toolbar, position a Text Box on top of the arrow and enter the appropriate text, as shown in **Figure I**. Repeat the process for each list item. You don't need the Text Box controls. You can right-click the AutoShape, choose Add Text, and start typing, but I find the results harder to control.

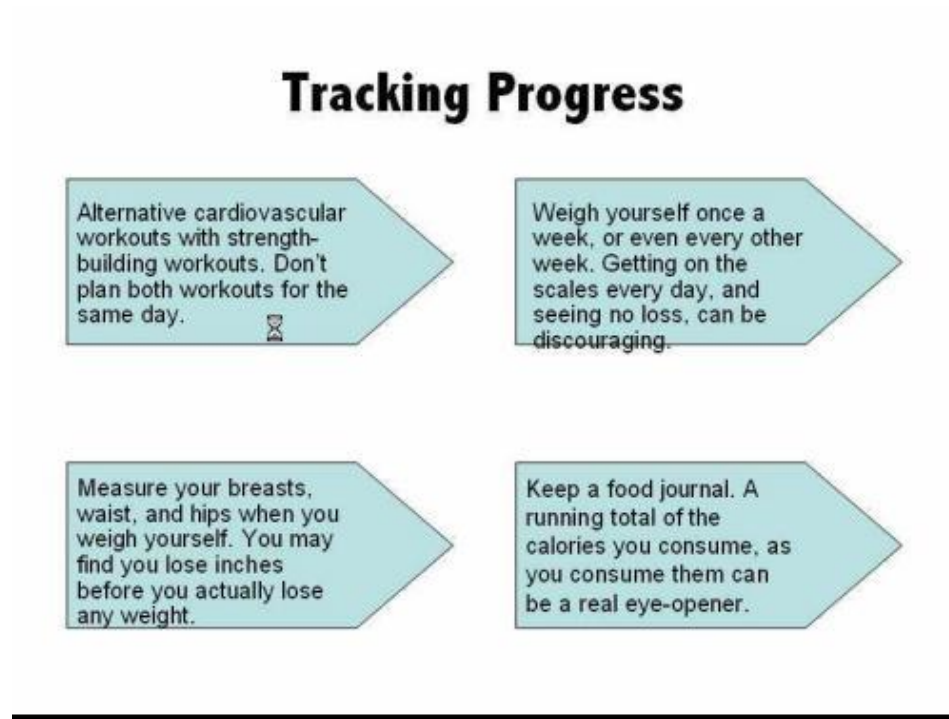
Figure I



The list items are in a Text Box control positioned over the AutoShape.

Figure J shows the initial results. The text doesn't always fit, but that's easily fixed. Reduce the text font (usually a bad idea), increase the size of the arrows, or eliminate some of the text. On the other hand, it *is* a more interesting slide than the original list, but we're still not done.

Figure J



Some of our original list text doesn't fit.

Figure K shows several changes:

- By eliminating just a little text, the items fit. Also notice, that a few typos are fixed. It's always a good idea to keep your editor hat on.
- Each arrow's fill effect helps pull the reader from arrow to arrow.
- A few appropriate graphics illustrate list items. You don't need a graphic for each item.

Figure K



It only takes a little imagination to liven up a slide.

Don't settle for ordinary

Bullet and number lists are appropriate, but they might be too ordinary for your purposes. Study the content and learn all you can about your audience. Then, use your imagination to eliminate the already done and over done with something unique and interesting. Just don't go overboard -- too much excitement can be as bad as too little.

Susan Sales Harkins is an independent consultant and the author of several articles and books on database technologies. Her most recent book is "Mastering Microsoft SQL Server 2005 Express," with Mike Gunderloy, published by Sybex. Other collaborations with Mike Gunderloy are "Automating Microsoft Access 2003 with VBA," "Upgrader's Guide to Microsoft Office System 2003," "ICDL Exam Cram 2," and "Absolute Beginner's Guide to Microsoft Access 2003" all by Que. Currently, Susan volunteers as the Publications Director for Database Advisors at <http://www.databaseadvisors.com>. You can reach her at ssharkins@gmail.com.

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