# Using Builds to Clearly Present Complex Information to Multidisciplinary Audiences

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Asian and Western academic writing and presentation often use opposite sequences for facts and logical explanations. It is common for Asian students to start with lengthy explanations of facts to establish expertise before making a logical explanation of their ideas. Western styles start with a thesis statement and expect the facts to prove these thesis statements. In the Western style, the amount of facts may be less, yet complexity also must not be sacrificed. The act of summarizing can in fact involve "creative thinking" and "critical thinking" (Rose & Kiniry 1998, 82). Build slides help present complex information slowly to improve audience memory (CLMB 2016). Graduate students in Asian universities are expected to present in both Asian and Western contexts. What strategies may help them clearly present large, complex amounts of facts in both contexts? This paper argues that builds, PowerPoint slides that slowly reveal large amounts of facts, can help present new, complex information clearly to non-specialist audiences by not letting complex information overwhelm logical argumentation.

## 1. Introduction

This paper asks what strategies may help students clearly present large amounts of complex facts in both Western and Asian academic writing contexts. This paper looks at builds. At a technological level, the most familiar definition of builds is slowly releasing a lot of information on one PowerPoint slide so that viewers can process the information, rather than feeling overwhelmed by a slide with too much data. This is usually now done as part of the PowerPoint animation function. However, for this paper this process is conceptually expanded to include other academic communication such as books, academic journal articles, and classroom board work. The aim of doing so is to achieve two objectives: 1) to show how builds would stimulate thought by breaking free of some of features of PowerPoint that do the opposite; and 2) to theorize a field that focuses a lot more on training than considering why we think. Thus, builds can be viewed not simply as an animation function on PowerPoint, but also as a concept of slowly revealing complex information both in writing and pedagogy that makes it more easily understandable.[1] The thesis of this paper is that builds, that slowly reveal large amounts of facts, can help present new, complex information clearly to non-specialist audiences by not letting complex information overwhelm logical argumentation. Builds do so by making PowerPoint more similar to other academic and media formats which it appropriates. (PowerPoint is capable of using almost any type of writing, sound, or graphic content that can be digitized and placed in a PowerPoint slide.)

The abovementioned theoretical situating of builds outside of PowerPoint rests on an intellectual framework which is wary of over-assuming the power of technology to automatically and spontaneously improve the human condition (Robins and Webster 1999) in this way by speeding up the communication of thought. Moreover, various forms of media – and PowerPoint can be assumed to be a medium of presentation – often obscure their very presence (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 70-71). By showing what one function of PowerPoint is built upon, the raw materials of teaching, reading, and writing, it is hoped that presenters can see it for what it is, a technological medium that influences thought. As a result, they may be able to more skillfully and thoughtfully use PowerPoint.

Before starting, it is useful to explain the situation that this paper arose from. I teach graduate level presentation classes at Nagoya University to graduate students from multiple disciplines whose first language is not usually English. However; these courses focus on logic and students' research and as such

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[1] Builds may apply to newer, electronic presentation platforms. Builds seem easier to do using a digital or video based presentation platform and probably would be fairly cumbersome for poster presentations or overhead projectors which would involve changing pieces of paper or transparent plastic leading to disorganization that would increase the likelihood of the presenter making mistakes.

are not standard college-level English classes. My discussion of students refers generally to what I have encountered while teaching these graduate level classes at Nagoya University. Nonetheless, to protect students' privacy, I avoid referring to specific cases about individual students.

The unique pedagogical context of teaching Western, thesis driven papers in an Asian classroom will be explored. Of particular interest is the process of ordering arguments and information which often – though not always – may be inverse in the two regions. I will explain how builds can be used to facilitate identifying the main argument when a thesis statement is not included.

To give a concrete example of how to use builds to explore complex information, I will briefly explain my own research. I use part of it to introduce and explain some concepts and logical structure of academic research in builds. I am also a researcher of political theory and cultural studies. This example comes from my main research project. I am currently conducting a large multi-disciplinary research project on the potential for common lands given in the Spanish-Mexican land grants in the U.S. Southwest to form an equitable form of environmentalism. This involves synthesizing and generalizing a large amount of data gleaned from archival sources, secondary sources in many fields, visual data, literary data, and artistic data. This project has influenced how I think about writing and presenting multidisciplinary work and is used here to empathize with some challenges that EFL students may have and subsequently create an appropriate pedagogy.

## 2. Pedagogical context

As teachers, especially in foreign classrooms, there is a need to acknowledge cultural difference in writing. On the one hand, we are expected to provide a bridge to other cultures and their customs. In the case of Japanese institutions, foreign teachers are expected to provide students with skills that will help them function in different cultural contexts, especially presenting in international conferences and publishing in international journals which often do not follow Asian writing styles. On the other hand, out of cultural sensitivity and the need to help students on more general presentation and writing tasks that are local to their universities and countries, we need to recognize their non-international needs. This section provides a rough sketch of culturally different writing strategies and how builds can help with both. It recognizes, however, how Western and Asian writing strategies are also generalizations that cover up a lot of variations within and are thus mere guides to what might be encountered when teaching.

Using builds helps solve two challenges simultaneously. First of all, graduate students in Asian universities are expected to present in both Asian and Western contexts. When we make a simple dichotomy between Asian and Western contexts there are serious challenges. These challenges are further intensified by the fact that there is variation within Asian and Western contexts. Second, both Asian presenters and audiences may already have trouble understanding an inverse logic. This may lead to problems in understanding, especially when presenters speak too fast. Thus, there needs to be some method of presentation to help improve this situation.

This paper analyses some challenges encountered when teaching graduate students, most of whom studied exclusively in Asian universities that have different ways of writing and presenting, how to present in a Western, academic context. Since the students are presenting on their academic research and writing, this paper considers the process of writing to be important and accordingly begins with by discussing some general differences in Western and Asian writing structures before addressing how these can be bridged during presentations using PowerPoint. The problem that teaching academic presentation to EFL learners in Asia is situated in is the fact that the context that the students often learn in is often the inverse of the context that they will present in. Put simply, with acknowledgment that variations exist across disciplines, Western style academic writing begins with a thesis statement and adds carefully selected facts that support that thesis statement. Compared with standard Asian writing this may entail a lower quantity of facts, yet a similar amount of complexity bolstered with many citations to secondary sources. As a baseline for audience and readers' understanding of content, many international conferences tacitly expect both presentations and writing to follow this sequence.

Some generalizations about writing in Japanese classrooms illuminate an inverse approach to standard Western academic writing. While Western academic writing prioritizes structure that can almost be placed

into templates, and it is often recommended to write an outline beforehand, Japanese writing has some different features. Takagaki (2015) noticed "spontaneity" and a lack of "text planning." The writing structure also differed significantly from prescribed thesis to fact writing structures. For example, Japanese writing may prioritize *danraku* in Japan—which, while varying guidance is given as to its sequence and components, can contain explanations at the end and more than one main idea (Kimura & Kondo 2005). This differing logical structure is not limited to Japanese teaching and writing. Japanese and Chinese prioritize inductive logic, whereas Western audiences prioritize deductive logic (Chien 2007, 135).

To state these differences is not to say that one approach is better than the other. Nor is it to say that these generalizations are anything more than things that may often be encountered. Indeed, some disciplines in the West also place the thesis at the end (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2003). Writing following "period construction" may place thesis statements latter on in writing (Dombek and Herndon 2004, in Wadden 2015, 3-4) Students trained in Asia who research, write and present in such disciplines, may find themselves having to do less adjustment than students who do not.

In my experience teaching in Asian classrooms, the default style of presentation is as follows. Asian students commonly start with lengthy explanations of facts before making a logical explanation of their ideas. There is nothing wrong with this, yet even on its own it may convey a sense of expert dominance over non-experts when done in multi-disciplinary classroom, such as the ones that many English departments offer. This expert dominance comes from assuming that the audience should know everything that the presenter knows and cannot comprehend their logic otherwise. In this case the audience is set as a passive recipient of knowledge who cannot assess the arguments of the speaker. Though if we think of every researcher as an expert in some small part of their field, which only a few others may know about, this is also problematic for conferences which may or may not place the presenter with experts in their field. Not everyone on their panel or every audience member may wish to assume a dominated position and may simply decide that the presentation is too hard or of no interest to them.

If student presenters' approaches will be translated into a thesis driven approach, collecting and summarizing facts can be considered to be a good start to presentations. Summarizing does not cancel out logical writing structure. Summarizing can in fact involve "creative thinking" and "critical thinking" (Rose & Kiniry 1998, 82). Even a pure summary involves some decision about inclusion or exclusion which may involve identifying a "pattern," or a "comparison" (Rose & Kiniry 1998, 81-82). All of these are more than simply hoarding facts. These activities involve the need for some type of logical decision and plan. When summarization is thought of this way, it seems to be more a matter of helping students create factual presentations, where the overall logical structure can be seen prior to the end, thus enabling audiences to at least better anticipate what a latent thesis statement may be. This latent thesis statement can be made more obvious later. Sometimes, students even place a thesis-like statement at the end so it may simply be a matter of sequencing it in the right order by cutting it from the current position and pasting it closer to the front of the paper.

In sum, there are quite different expectations between international writing norms and Asian writing norms. Neither is better than the other; rather one may be expected in a certain geographical context and not another. For teachers who are tasked with teaching a standard Western style, where the argument comes first in a thesis statement, to students who do not start this way, using builds helps to make information clearer. This enhanced clarity facilitates the teacher's ability to help students formulate a thesis statement.

## 3. PowerPoint and academic presentation: Drawbacks and solutions

For presentations, PowerPoint, has become the most common mode of projection. It is rare to see transparencies or paper used on overhead projectors. Yet, PowerPoint not only projects words and images onto screens, it also influences the way things are presented, and relationships between presenters and audiences. Therefore, it is necessary to understand some of the basic problematics of PowerPoint before discussing how builds can help address these challenges.

PowerPoint has a rather bad reputation. If this reputation is taken as fact, it may seem wrong to even suggest using PowerPoint in a presentation class. While PowerPoint has the capability to display things visually, which is a plus, since it does not show things side by side and instead it uses bullet points,

PowerPoint does not use visual reasoning through comparison (Tufte 2003). There are opportunities to make tables that have side by side comparison, but this is not the default of PowerPoint. The default is to create bullet point lists. Without proper presentation training it may be unlikely that presenters will know how to create tables and will instead simply use the default settings on PowerPoint slides. Edward Tufte (2003) sees the consequences for the lack of visual reasoning caused by the use of lists during standard PowerPoint presentation as so detrimental to thought that he indeed argues that PowerPoint should not be used at all. Tufte's work provides an excellent critique of what Kevin Robins and Frank Webster consider a historically situated belief in the power of technology to solve all of our problems (1999, 4) – in this case PowerPoint making difficult things easy to understand with minimal strategy on the part of the present and little attention and critical thinking on the part of the audience. Yet Tufte (2003) also sees a technological solution, though it is a reversion to pre-PowerPoint presentation technologies: manual overhead projectors with simple plastic transparencies with charts written or printed on them.

There should not be too much of a dichotomy between the hope for and fear of new digital technology (Robins & Webster 1999, 5). Therefore, it is useful to look to recommendations for how and when PowerPoint should be used in the presentation process which do not call for an outright prohibition or unconditional acceptance of the technology. According to R.M. Harden (2008, 834) PowerPoint should not be used in planning of presentations; after careful planning based on what the presentation needs, PowerPoint technique should be used carefully to avoid letting its functions overwhelm the presentation. This need for caution when using PowerPoint means that something similar to an outline for a paper should be done before a presentation is turned into a PowerPoint slide. Another suggested approach to using PowerPoint is to build slides that help present complex information slowly to improve audience memory (CLMB 2016). From these perspective, PowerPoint software is not to blame for illogical, difficult to understand presentations. There are some steps that presenters can and should take when using PowerPoint. This paper will turn to one such step: builds.[2]

In sum, there are at least two sets of opinions about how useful PowerPoint is and what can be done about it. On the one hand, it may be that PowerPoint is not useful. There are some merits to this argument; however, PowerPoint is so often used, that this advice is not practical and it does not account for techniques beyond the default settings of PowerPoint slides. Others have presented methods to reform PowerPoint and not let it overpower the presenter's aims. The use of builds described in this paper is situated in the latter, all the while not assuming too much for the potential of PowerPoint, or other competing software to create great presentations. The potential for this lies in the presenter's oratory and intellectual skill and cannot be created simply by using older or newer technology. Yet, beyond the potential to reform a frequently used software why are builds useful?

The abovementioned writings on PowerPoint are mostly intended for a general audience and consequently seem to focus completely on the process of presenting at conferences and conventions only. Moreover, these writings are largely not focused on how to teach people who are presenting and writing in a foreign language. In short, this is useful for telling people what to do and how to do it. However, it does not focus so much on the "why" aspect. In other words, why are builds useful not just for presentations but for helping both the presenter and the audience think through the presenter's material? The following sections will attempt to address this. The approach in the next two sections will be to go through a process from my own research that put me in a similar dilemma that students in my graduate level presentation classes work through when presenting in a foreign language that often uses an inverse logical structure: having more information to present than can be presented. This will be used to think through what could be done to help students present in a foreign language.

## 4. An Example of Builds for Academic Presentations

To illustrate how a build works and give an example of how one can be created, this paper looks at an example of complex information that can lead to conceptual analysis. As part of my research, I study

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[2] There are other presentation techniques which I teach such as charts, clines, proper use of graphics, note-taking and symbols, to name a few. In the interest of looking in theoretical depth at a presentation technique, this paper does not focus on these techniques, though much more could be written about all of them.

Mexican-American environmentalism in various forms of media over a long period of time (see Toohey 2017) and vastly dispersed, isolated geographical spaces, from about 1870 and in five large U.S. Southwestern states: 1) New Mexico, 2) California, 3) Texas, 4) Arizona, and 5) Colorado. Generating concepts spanning such a large time frame and across such a large geographical area is complex because of variations. As such, even learning from secondary sources is not a simple process of reading and remembering everything. There needs to be a process of pausing to understand not just what was written, but how it was significant. While I have started with a hypothesis that guides the selection of texts that I analyze, the large amount of material that I read requires strategies to keep my thought on point. Moreover, being human, I sometimes feel a need to talk about all the interesting facts that I have read, even though in the end I know this not possible in academic presentations and writing. In this sense I empathize with some of my students who feel compelled to present all of the facts that they encounter and lose track of a thesis statement, or feel compelled to place it at the end. Summarizing differences and similarities over such different points in time involves a complexity that is similar to what many of my students face when discussing complicated things to a non-specialist audience.

There are two problems and solutions that I have encountered. The first has to do with the potential for the audience to focus too much on graphics and not enough on the speaker. Arguably builds help the audience slowly understand complex tables. An example of this came from a summary I made from a book chapter on the history of Spanish-Mexican land grants in New Mexico. The most complex form of this table that summarizes all of the information can be seen in Figure 4 (below). While, a reader may have more time to look through this table, and perhaps go to the library and look up the sources, this is not the case for a presentation audience. My goal is for the presentation audience to understand this. Using builds, this can be done more gradually.

For example, in Figure 1 a small amount of the same information is revealed. It can be seen within a logical category rather than as an avalanche of information. I do not start with the complete Figure as in Figure 4. I instead start with a build that begins with a simplified table. The viewer can focus on the issue of exploitation of Native Americans by the early Spanish-Mexican land grants and how they impacted Native Americans. The impact on Native Americans is a crucial ethical point that is obscured by latter developments in Spanish-Mexican land grants that gave equitable living conditions to settlers and a

| **Exploitative** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Pueblo* (colonial outposts) [against indigenous peoples] (17) | | Economienda ("grant of the fruits of Indian labor") [exploitative of indigenous people] ( 18, 23) |
| | | | |
| | **Spanish Land Grant in the U.S. Southwest** | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| **Less Exploitative** | | | |

Figure 1. A slightly less complex graphic (based on Ebright 1987, 17-23).

component of civil rights protests in 1960s New Mexico. The first part of the build just gives some categories and a small amount of information. The implications of the early roots of the Spanish-Mexican land grants can be seen. Their initial roots, were destructive to indigenous peoples. A simultaneous, instantaneous focus on the exploitative and less exploitative aspects in Figure 4. may have excluded this.

The destructive legacy of Spanish-Mexican land grants has to be understood. However, since returning the land contained in Spanish-Mexican land grants has been a social justice issue, the above information on its own cannot explain this. The procession of the build to the information in Figure 2 helps explain this by adding different information. It contains the previous information but helps progress it towards how the Spanish-Mexican land grant issue could be a social justice issue by introducing the idea of "usually common lands." Yet, it does not do so by giving the opposite situation (i.e., land grants as a social justice issue that are less exploitative), but by moving towards that opposite, less exploitative, situation where land grants contain a developed system of common lands and community land grants which benefited working class people.

| Exploitative | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Pueblo* (colonial outposts) [against indigenous peoples] (17) | | Economienda ("grant of the fruits of Indian labor") [exploitative of indigenous people] |
| | | | |
| | **Spanish Land Grant in the U.S. Southwest** | | |
| "usually common lands" (17) | | | Private grants (eighteenth century) |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Less Exploitative | | | |

Figure 2. Moving towards the other side (based on Ebright 1987, 17-23).

This part of the build begins by introducing the idea of common lands, which suggests a more equitable form of land sharing. It also shows private lands. These however are not a complete contrast. Rather I have added to the build information that transitions from exploitative to less exploitative. Figure 3 provides details about what common lands were and what their different purposes were. These are somewhat environmentally equitable uses of land, yet I chose here to explain their purposes before moving to the most equitable forms of land use.

| Exploitative | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Pueblo* (colonial outposts) [against indigenous peoples] (17) | | Economienda ("grant of the fruits of Indian labor") [exploitative of indigenous people] |
| | | | |
| | **Spanish Land Grant in the U.S. Southwest** | | |
| "usually common lands" (17) | | | Private grants (eighteenth century) can sell |
| *monte* (wood gathering) (17) | | | |
| *dejin* "fenced pasture land" | | | |
| *ejido* "multi-purpose" "threshing" trash "keeping stray animals" | | | |
| | | | |
| Less Exploitative | | | |

Figure 3. The common lands in more detail (based on Ebright 1987, 17-23).

This build shows some of the implications of how common lands can be equitably used, which differs from the less equitable uses mentioned at the top of the build. Yet it does not show the less exploitative uses. The part of the build illustrated in Figure 4 illustrates the complete table, again with its implications for the transition of land grants to less exploitative uses in the form of both common lands and community land grants.

This table, as shown in Figure 4, now registers the practice of community land grants which come from Spanish-Mexican land grants but are not as exploitative, or at least not more exploitative, than other land ownership in the United States by people that are not Native Americans.

The build is different both from the use of single complex charts that Tufte (2003) mentions because they are not shown at once and explained by a presenter with the assumption that the audience will keep their attention focused on what the presenter is saying. Yet, because these slides release complex information slowly, rather than all at once, they are not like the "chart junk" Tufte mentions which try to show everything at once. The point is that the audience here is guided through the text through a slow revelation to what the speaker is saying. If the speaker has not yet said something, it is not being projected on the screen for the viewer to misunderstand either by reading too fast or having insufficient knowledge on the subject. Moreover, the assumption is not quite that the audience would misunderstand because they do not know as much as the presenter, but rather because the information cannot be known at once.

| Exploitative | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Pueblo* (colonial outposts) [against indigenous peoples] (17) | | Economienda ("grant of the fruits of Indian labor") [exploitative of indigenous people] (18, 23) |
| | | | |
| | **Spanish Land Grant in the U.S. Southwest** | | |
| "usually common lands" (17) | | | Private grants (eighteenth century) can sell |
| *monte* (wood gathering) (17) | Community grants (Nineteenth Century) [can't sell] (23) | | |
| *dejin* "fenced pasture land" *ejido* "multi-purpose" "threshing" trash "keeping stray animals" | | | A lot of gray area between private and public lands and land grants (land was poorly regulated and surveyed) |
| | Common land (remaining land) (23) | | |
| **Less Exploitative** | | | |

Figure 4. Common lands in their entirety (based on Ebright 1987, 17-23)

In this way, builds help explain complex information efficiently and as quickly as is reasonably possible. Builds also do not under-assume or over-assume the potential of PowerPoint to impact presentations perhaps because builds are not entirely reliant on PowerPoint. Builds are not entirely new. Teachers are already using builds in regular classroom instruction. For example, because the process of writing on whiteboards, and especially chalkboards is slow and must be done in stages, information is processed slowly. In other words, teachers can only write one word at a time and one part of a diagram at a time. This gives students more time to take in what is being said than when a PowerPoint slide presents a complicated graphic that instantaneously shows everything.

Classroom board-work and academic writing encourage note-taking. Classroom teaching is fairly similar in format to giving a presentation and is thus a useful place to start. Generative note-taking avoids simply copying of large chunks of speech or text, as is frequently done using laptop computers, and instead seeks time to think about what is said and "summarizing, paraphrasing, and concept mapping" which links the process of note-taking to processes of academic writing (Mueller and Oppenheimer 2014, quoted in NPR 2016). This process of slowing down is a pre-PowerPoint form of builds as well because it diminishes the amount of immediacy expected in knowledge; the student who takes notes cannot expect to understand everything that the teacher says at once. Students furthermore cannot expect their brains to copy all that they have heard the teacher say into their memory. There is a gap, both in time, and in thought, which is filled by the process of understanding concepts and how such concepts relate to each other, e.g. "concept mapping." Yet, how does this apply to writing and reading? This will be explored in the next section.

## 5. An Example of Builds in Academic Writing

Though the literature on using builds in academic presentation does not focus on writing and reading, builds are also used in standard Western academic writing. There is no immediacy in non-fiction books. Standard academic writing moves from research questions to thesis statements to well-structured paragraphs that gradually explain the thesis statement (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2003). The researcher reads these gradually. The closest thing to immediacy in a book or journal article is the thesis statement. However, not all academic books have a thesis statement. Many theory and philosophy books do not have a thesis statement.

Reading has a certain slowness. This has to do with the denseness of written material which usually contains pages packed with words. This denseness of words, and the amount of words between research questions, thesis statements, paragraphs, and conclusions, means that someone reading a book cannot do three important things at once: 1) read the central question; 2) read the thesis statement; and 3) give argument and facts to prove the thesis statement. The reader is forced to do these tasks one at a time. A build presents different parts of an event or an idea one at a time, which is like a book though, hopefully, requiring less effort on the audience's part.

Arguably non-Western academic writing also uses builds, even in absence of a thesis statement or standardized structure. For example, the Japanese system (Kimura & Kondo 2005) uses a sequence of facts to generalized statements about the facts (the latter being like a topic sentence or thesis statement). This suggests that builds are also appropriate for non-Western writing. Next, I would like to provide a specific example of how builds are used in academic writing since this may be more challenging to understand than board-work or note-taking.

Academic writing uses careful, structured sequences to answer questions (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2003; Hamlitsch 2015, 43-43). At its most simple level, the answers to these questions come in the form of thesis statements (Indiana University 2014), though the process of writing a high-quality, graduate-student level and/or professor-level thesis statement requires more steps. Academic books and journal articles technically already use builds for thesis statements because at least two steps to creating an argument exist in academic writing: 1) asking a question, and 2) answering it in a thesis statement. A thesis statement cannot be written immediately on its own because it requires a question which is a different component and cannot be written in the same sentence. Consequently, a properly written thesis statement requires at least two sequenced components much like a build requires the division of at least two components.

An example of builds in academic writing that I came across in my research on Spanish and Mexican land grants in the U.S. Southwest and environmentalism is Paul Burkett's *Marxism and Ecological Economics: Toward a Red and Green Political Economy* (2005). This book is useful to discuss builds across a multidisciplinary audience for two reasons. First, it has a clearly identifiable sequence of building up from question to thesis statement and conclusion. Second, it is a complicated multidisciplinary book that combines complex theory from political economy and ecology.

A sequence of moving from research question to thesis statement to conclusion can be found in *Marxism and Ecological Economics*. First of all the question is stated: "The central question this book poses is whether the methodologies and concepts employed by ecological economics are adequate to its aspirations for multidisciplinary, methodological pluralism, and historical openness" (Burkett 2005, 3). The reader has a question that limits what will be researched. Basically, the book is about the field of ecological economics and whether or not it can achieve its goals. Since this is phrased as a question, rather than an accepted fact, the reader needs a solution. This comes in the form of a thesis statement. Thesis statements provide short answers to the research question: "More specifically, it is argued that Marx's class perspective, especially its notion of class as a material-social relation of production, can help the discipline better live up to these aspirations" (Burkett 2005, 3). So, gradually the reader moves from a simple question about the field of ecological economics to an assertion that contributions from Marxism are needed. This is clear and to the point, though it hardly contains the entire complexity of the idea, which is alluded in more detail after ninety pages of theoretical argument (rather than all at once like Tufte's (2003) PowerPoint "chart junk"). A reader might be wondering why Marxism would be necessary for ecological economics, which is a slightly different academic field. According to Burkett ecological economics claims to be able to incorporate all

types of academic fields. Burkett explains that "At the same time, the commitment to pluralism means that ecological economics encompasses, and is heavily influenced by, neoclassical environmental economics as one of its 'subsets' (Costanza 1989, 1). And it is well known that neoclassical economics accepts only one pattern of thinking…the market model'" (Burkett 2005, 93). From this last statement, the reader can learn that Marxism, which eschews market thinking, is needed to make ecological economics compatible with non-market thinking – Marxism, but also progressive politics, anarchism, etc. – because there is a certain type subfield, neoclassical environmental economics which prevents all types of academic inquiry from being used. This could be incorporated into a thesis statement, though it perhaps would sound a little blunt at the outset. It needs proof that can only be absorbed gradually to be understood. Thus, Burkett's book employs something akin to a build to discuss things which may seem too ideological if explained prior to supporting details.

The situation in Burkett's book in some ways relates to problems that Asian learners of English may have. It is usually not considered culturally correct to communicate a thought without first having provided adequate factual evidence first. While most students are not criticizing standard, accepted modes of economics, it may seem too blunt to say less standard things. Therefore, their final statement may indeed need a less controversial thesis statement followed by a sentence that says the more controversial statement later on, as provided in Burkett's book.

Nonetheless, controversy is not the only problem that builds address. The abovementioned discussion looked at controversy, but the structure taken from Burkett's book could also be applied to complexity, which is a more generalizable dilemma. Students could start off their presentations and papers with a simpler thesis statement and end it with a more complicated thesis statement that is knowable only after the facts are presented. To do so is a compromise between the East Asian logical writing systems where logic is stated after facts are known and Western logical systems where facts can be evaluated only after a thesis statement.

This section has shown how builds can be used outside of PowerPoint animation in actual academic writing. In the case of *Marxism and Ecological Economics* (2005) there is a progression from thesis statement to more complicated arguments. In this way, academic writing does not overwhelm readers with information instantaneously. Rather, it slowly reveals information. This is a process similar to a build. To mention this as conceptually similar to a PowerPoint build suggests how PowerPoint presentation could be used to enable deeper thought in a way that is more intellectual than what Tufte (2003) or other critics of PowerPoint have observed.

## 6. Conclusion

For different reasons, both Asian students and native speakers of languages that international presentations are done in may be overwhelmed by complicated speech, text, and graphics. In Japanese and Chinese logical structures, as well as some Western disciplines, argumentation comes at the end – complex information does not get ordered by logical argumentation until the end. Over-complicated information presented to a multidisciplinary audience or a lack of information can overshadow argumentation.

Minimizing information overload helps the viewer look for the presenter's reasoning when there may not be a thesis statement. This is especially helpful for a teacher that is tasked with helping a student craft a thesis statement.

There are a few more reasons that builds are helpful. These are independent of: a) whether or not there is a thesis statement; and b) whether or not there is an explanatory sentence, much like a thesis statement that comes at the end. These reasons, however, are particular to classes with a high number of EFL learners. First of all, using a foreign logic may influence subconscious resistances to understanding. The audience has to reorder logical sequences and criteria to correctly interpret what they are hearing. If they do not, the presentation will appear illogical, even if the presenter took the time to build a logical structure.

In classrooms with both EFL and native speaker students, which may be more common in graduate schools, complexity of information may confuse native speakers. Complex logic presented all at once often moves too fast and potentially prevents presenters from checking to see if the audience understands. Complex logic may not even be focused by a thesis statement that comes first. This is not just a problem with Asian logic/rhetoric. In some cases, Western writing may have a simple and/or non-controversial thesis

statement which is restated later, after a lot of evidence, into a complex and/or controversial thesis statement. A process like builds helps the reader gradually accept a level of complexity and/or controversy that is true but maybe unpalatable to non-specialist audiences. Acknowledging and using this technique may be helpful for students from cultural backgrounds that dissuade making complex or controversial statements without data. These students can build up from less controversial thesis statements to more controversial thesis statements. (Keep in mind, Asian students may have a lower threshold for controversy.)

| | Default PowerPoint | PowerPoint Builds | Board Work | Notes from Reading | Academic Writing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Showing Everything at Once | Yes | No | No | Sometimes | No |
| Revealing Facts Slowly | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |

Figure 5: Everything at once vs. Revealing facts slowly in different academic formats

From the presenter's standpoint PowerPoint slides at first glance seem to offer presenters what Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) call "immediacy," a term that describes a media – such as PowerPoint – making its own presence ignored and what it presents as reality. In other words, the audience should be able to understand everything at once since with PowerPoint audience members can dispense with the time-consuming process of reading books or charts. While PowerPoint is commonly used and readers can see the medium when projected on the wall, it erases some of its own process or orientation. In fact, PowerPoint can be changed to appear just like a photo or movie projected on the wall rather than a PowerPoint presentation, thus erasing the presence of itself as a medium or software. As Tufte (2003) correctly states, what the presenter and audience are often left with is "chart junk," overly complex charts that nobody really understands.

Builds may prevent PowerPoint from turning into "chart junk" because they are based on techniques that predate PowerPoint and are more compatible with logical structures than other PowerPoint techniques such as bullet points. These are low-tech methods that both teachers and serious students have done. Builds are a digital representation of the low-tech process of slowly writing charts on white boards and chalk boards. It is difficult to write quickly on a white board or chalk board.

The use of builds for notetaking potentially disrupts overwhelming information. In notetaking people write about what they are reading in notes and have chance to pause and write down their thoughts about books, or indeed write about how what they are reading links to other relevant writings. Accordingly, academic notes slow down reading, making it easier to understand. And perhaps the fact that books do not have immediacy that obscures their process of communication (see Bolter and Grusin 2000) makes it more likely that the reader can recognize how books and articles communicate and how that influences the reader's reactions and thoughts, unlike PowerPoint.

This is possible because books, even though they may look like a giant amount of text, actually use a structure much like builds. Books and journal articles, when following a certain structure, release ideas in a slow way. For example, structured articles and books move from questions to hypotheses to thesis statements to sign-posts which reiterate the thesis statement. Indeed paragraphs as smaller units contain a topic sentence, based on the thesis statement. The concluding paragraph usually restates the thesis statement. Therefore, information is not given all at once, as in immediacy, but the reader is forced to pause for one reason or another. The pauses show a common feature in both builds and books.

Some students may want to present in a non-Western presentation style depending on their situation. Builds also benefit students that will not present in a Western context. Since builds release information more slowly, in lieu of a thesis statement, they may make it easier to understand large amounts of data because the audience has more time to process information than in presentations where the thesis statement often comes at the end, if at all. Thus, builds help focus on logic within a summary. This does two things. First, it makes

it easier for a non-Asian audience to understand what is being said. Second, it may make it possible for a student to see the logic in their summary and construct a thesis statement in the future.

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