I began using Powerpoint 3.0 several years ago after being fed up with printing colored overheads for seminars I was teaching on religion and health. My trusty IIci did a great job on the overheads—they just faded over time and it was always a hassle trying to keep them in order and get them onto the projector at the right time. Then came Microsoft PowerPoint 3.0 to the rescue. While it wasn't exactly a knight in shining armor, it wasn't too hard to learn and was fairly powerful. Using a remote control connected to my PowerBook 160 connected to a video converter, I could display the "slides" on a TV or using a video projector. I even taught Freshman and Sophomore religion using it, and had the students create a class project using the program.

With all the rave reviews in the Macintosh press about Office 98 I decided to take the plunge. Like MS Word 98, it is a big step forward, but is still shackled to see the clumsy Windowsish interface and plagued with what I call "feature regression" in ease of use. I just finished a nine-part series on Angels with a 60–80 slide PowerPoint presentation each evening. While the majority of the content was clipart and either jpegs or picts, I also included QuickTime and MPEG video as well as sound. I haven't used every feature of the program, but feel I know it fairly well.

Klutzy

First, PowerPoint is a memory hog. For a 12 MB file (70 slides), I needed close to 40 MBs allocated to PowerPoint just to present. If I ran out of memory, transitions, builds, graphics, and movies would show with artifacts or not at all. MPEGs were the worst. For my G3 laptop, 96 MBs is barely enough for that size of a presentation, as OS 8.1 with my many extensions easily eats up most of the remainder. (For a 5.8 MB file, I needed about 16–20 MBs to play decently.) Fortunately, the recently available Viewer helps to trim that somewhat, but it still takes a lot of memory. For comparison, I could play a 6 MB file with PowerPoint 3.0 Viewer from my PowerBook 160 with only 14 MBs of onboard RAM. (And that's with system software eating up at least 5–6 MBs, leaving only 8–9 MBs left for playing.)

Second, everywhere you turn, there are dialogue boxes. To create a new slide, the user has to go through a dialogue box specifying which kind of slide you want. To create animation, it's another dialogue box. To Microsoft's credit, it is actually possible to do limited animation with menu-bar buttons (once you figure them out!) and it's also possible to actually turn the "new slide" box off. But it took me 3 months of hassle to finally figure that out. There has got to be an easier way.

hird, as indicated above, keyboard shortcuts are non-existent in key areas. Inserting a picture or movie or sound should be done with a single keystroke. As it is, they are broken up into sounds and movies in one option and pictures in another one. Then under each you have to specify whether from file or clipart. Please. There has to be an easier way. Why not have a Place command like in my Paleolithic copy of PageMaker. One key command will place it all and let the software sort it out (or maybe Windows has a hard time figuring out file types and M$ is letting the user do the work...). Further, when I inserted a picture into a slide, I would need to click on the Draw icon and select the "order" option and choose Send to Back to have a background picture I had just inserted appear as text. Why not have a single keystroke for that?

Fourth, using clipart is slow, even on a speedy G3. Even worse, once you select your piece of art, the catalogue closes, which means the next time you need that piece, or if change your mind, you have to wait precious seconds for it to re-open. Why not have the clipart catalogue able to be left open, like it was in PowerPoint 3.0? RAM is cheap, but time is not.

Fifth, PowerPoint 3.0 had a slider on the left-hand of the document which moved you between slides. The right-hand scrollbar moved you up and down so you could see the entire slide if it or its contents didn't fit entirely on the screen. There is no slider in PowerPoint 98—just a right-hand scrollbar which served for both functions. When I pasted text into a slide which exceeded the slide's show size, to try to see the text which was off the screen, I'd try to scroll down, but if I hadn't clicked in the text area or went too far, I found myself immediately on the next slide. I wasted a lot of time going to the previous slide, clicking on the text, and then scrolling down gently to where it would all appear.

Sixth, in PowerPoint 3.0, it was easy to position the cursor over a bulleted line and move it up or down in the order in which it would appear. The rest of the bulleted items would automatically move to accommodate the change. But in PowerPoint 98, it seems I'm back to

cut and paste.

Seventh, I have an F-key sequence which automatically inserts Bible passages into slides. In version 3.0, I would hit the F-key sequence and then Command-V for Paste and the text would appear formatted as I had designated on the master slide. But PowerPoint 98 refuses to change the text formatting to match the master slide. After a text insert with my F-key, I then have to (1) Change color; (2) Bold; (3) Change size; and (4) Add shadowing. This has been another huge time-waster. It seems that it pastes text from most applications as is, but from Word 98 exactly as the other text on the slide. Go figure.

Eighth, and this is highly frustrating, try to select just a portion of a word to copy or delete. If you try to select more than one word and a part of a word, PowerPoint automatically selects the entire word for you. (This is another flaw in Word 98 as well.) For instance, if I'm trying to delete a portion out of the middle of a short paragraph, and wanting to turn one sentence into two, I will select the useless portion up to the first letter in the first word of the second sentence I want to make. Then I will type a period, then a space, and finally the first letter of the next sentence capitalized. Microsoft's choice to try to second guess the user here is maddening. Yes, I know you can choose Preferences under the Tools Menu and then choose Edit and uncheck Automatic Word Selection, but it took me months to find that out. Further, it still doesn't work when you double-click on a word you want to start your deletion with (it's easier to double-click anywhere on a word than to precisely place the cursor!) and try to drag from there.

Ninth, the manual is wimpy. Wait, ...did I just say that? About Microsoft!?? Anyway, to be fair, I love the fact that it came with an easy-to-read, short, friendly manual. (160 pages versus 3.0's 678 pages)The problem is that it doesn't cover vital issues like how to transfer files between PowerPoint 98 on a Mac and PowerPoint 97 on a PC. Microsoft, you're on the right track here—keep it simple—just don't leave out the essentials.

Finally, the interface isn't Macintosh. It's a hybrid between the Mac and Windows. The icons are tiny and confusing. Things don't work the way you expect them to. The one redeeming value on the interface is that it is very similar to Word 98's (which is just as bad) and that it has the same little ugly popup text boxes that tell you what a button does. To describe the interface, the words "ugly," "muddy," and "confusing" come to mind rather than "simple", "intuitive" and "elegant". While you're trying to find a document within the program using its Find feature, it will say "Press Esc to Stop." Picky, yes, but that's just one glaring omission. Fortunately Command-Period will work—but they won't tell you that. And further, while it is nice to be able to move the toolbars around, it has been difficult for me to get them where I want them. Often they will jump elsewhere or leave large gaps between themselves.

udo's

Having said all that, I'm still using Powerpoint 98 and don't intend to switch. Here's why.

It's stable. I have presented under a variety of different circumstances and only once on my 603e machine with not enough memory did I experience a crash.

It can import a wide variety of graphics, sounds, and movies. In fact it even imported a movie that latest version of MoviePlayer couldn't handle. I was impressed.

It is fairly easy to animate and control virtually ever item on a slide. You can even have a movie play while you're animating other objects on-demand. And the automating is fairly easy in spite of the incessant multi-layered dialogue boxes.

he ubiquitous assistant (I've chosen Fido) is very nice and I have to say, actually fairly helpful.

he slide transitions are very spartan, but hey, simpler is better. However, the text and object animations are very slick. My only wish was for a scrolling text animation.

The graphics editing tools are nice. The Recoloring, Flip, and Rotation commands are great—I just wish they'd work with more than just clipart (JPEGs/PICTs). It was also nice to be able to lighten and darken a picture. It's fast on a 603e (225MHz) and a G3, and the graphics snap onto the screen rapidly.

When scrolling through a presentation in slide mode, it gives you the slide title in text form. When in Outline mode, clicking on any portion of the outline brings up a small window with a picture of that slide.

t seems to be very cross-platform. I emailed an Office 98 file (created on a Mac) to a friend who read it on her PC running Office 97 (I had to save it as a 4.0 file since that seems to be the equivalent to Office 97). Multiple animations on a single slide did not come through but everything else came through just fine, after I got the hang of saving it and sending it. The only negative was that the WordArt did not come through. (I'm guessing that if she'd have had Office 97 for Windows the presentation would have played fairly flawlessly.) If a friend has an earlier version of PowerPoint, you are able to save it in that version, though you may lose features available in the current version. Remember that a separate application handles file-conversions and to allocate enough memory to that translator. I didn't even know such a beast existed until I tried out MS tech support (hey, an answer within 12 hours wasn't bad!) who told me about the PP Translator 8–4 that needed to have up to 10 MB of RAM allocated to it through the Get Info command.(They're in the Translators folder which is in the Office Folder in MS Office.)

Balloon help works! If I'd have found that sooner, it would have been a big help figuring out

all those tiny buttons.

It is somewhat customizable. One can add new commands to the pull-down menus or menu-bars and choose which toolbars to use or move them around at will (even though when doing so I often had a hard time placing them precisely or eliminating large spaces). Macros are another experience. I've used an early version of a Macro-maker (for Word 4.0D) and found it fairly intuitive. This was not. I futzed with it for well over an hour and finally decided I needed programming experience. Oh well.

And finally, it's cheap. Well, if you can get education pricing. As I recall, education pricing for an upgrade is not much over $30. Pricing in the latest MacConnection is $129.95 for an upgrade or $359.95 for a first-time buyer. Would I pay $130 for an upgrade? Probably if there were no other options. It is fast, powerful, and stable. Now if only it were easier to use!

My wish list for the next version is to remedy the above 10 points in addition to providing a transparency option so graphics with solid backgrounds can appear as if they didn't have a background. And puhlease…make it more Mac-like.