I have written a significant chunk of this book while seated in the same chair. I have begun with Chapter 1 and have written most of the book in order. I am a creature of habit and I am most comfortable when there is order to the things I do. I don’t view this as unusual—most people display this same tendency in one or more areas of their lives.

We’re a race of linear thinkers and most of our presentations reflect that. We start at the first slide, end with the last slide, and expect to advance in order. This is not broken and I’m not here to try to fix it. However, leaving that mindset, even temporarily, stands as one of the biggest improvements you can make as a presentation professional.

This chapter is all about how you can breathe life, flexibility, and creativity into your presentations by thinking in a non-linear way. This is an impossibly vast topic—about which entire books have been written—and we’ll get to fifth gear in a hurry. I will be speaking to you as if you are an advanced user who knows his or her way around the program. Seat belts optional yet recommended…
Click Here, Go There

The irony is not lost on me that we will work through these non-linear topics in a very linear way. The path to excellence might be circular, but the path to learning it goes in a straight line. Here are the topics we’ll be discussing:

- Moving at will to a specific slide
- Jumping to a different presentation
- Opening a non-PowerPoint document
- Creating a menu-driven interface within PowerPoint
- And in the next chapter, using Zoom, Office 365’s answer to Prezi. We save this for last not because it is least important; in fact, it might be the most impactful. We want you to first understand core fundamentals of hyperlinking and techniques that work in any version of the software. Then we’ll cover the cool new stuff.

The classic example to illustrate the idea of non-linear navigation is the presentation that runs long. I’m sure this has never happened to you, but you’ve no doubt been in the audience when a presenter, we’ll call her Kathleen, allows a midway Q&A session to run long and now finds herself with five minutes left and three complete ideas yet to explore. So what does she do? She flies through her slides so she can get to her final idea, which promises to crystallize everything she has tried to say across her first 45 minutes.

Will you remember Kathleen’s dramatic and powerful close when you drive home that afternoon? Not likely—instead, you’ll remember all the content she dismissed as just a bunch of slide junk while she whizzed through it. You might even wonder about a slide that looked pretty good as it flashed before your eyes, because that’s the way we humans are: we’re more interested in what we can’t have than what we can.

Your first impression is likely to be of a person who did not completely have her act together. She became imprisoned by her own linear thinking and she paid for it.

At the core of the solution is your understanding of the basics of hyperlinking. As with a web page that offers you a way to jump somewhere else, a presentation can be programmed with this same intelligence. It’s done through the Action Settings dialog, a powerful set of controls that has earned a spot on my QAT, as discussed in the last chapter.

Any element that can sit on a slide can be programmed as a hyperlink, and Figure 22.1 shows the list of choices for standard hyperlinking. When running a presentation (i.e., when in Show mode), clicking an object
programmed with a hyperlink will cause you to switfly move to the location you have set.

If Kathleen had programmed a hyperlink to her concluding slides, her audience might have never noticed that she was running long or had to skip over a few dozen slides. Granted, Kathleen would have needed access to her computer so that she could click on the hyperlink, or in the alternative been using a wireless remote that has cursor and click control. But in either case, this would prove many times cleaner than having to motor through a few dozen slides and apologize for all the presumably good material she was depriving her audience of.

You can grasp the basics of this in minutes with a new presentation by creating a second slide, drawing a simple rectangle on the first slide, and using the Action Settings dialog to assign a hyperlink to that rectangle to take you to a different slide. Press F5 and hover your mouse over the rectangle—you’ll see the cursor change to a pointing finger. Click once and off you go.

Among the many implications that will likely come to mind immediately, one of them has to be that you don’t want to create a bunch of stray rectangles on your slides. And what good is placing a rectangle on any one slide
when the whole idea is that you don’t know where you’ll be when you might need to make a jump. You need a more global solution.

The folks at Anthem Blue Cross wrestled with this a few years ago with their introduction of a Consumer Driven Health Plan (CDHP) membership model. Figure 22.2 shows the deck that they designed for this rollout, and while they were not sure how long this would all take, they knew for certain that they needed 10 minutes before the wrapup to discuss and show the suite of online services for customers. Figure 22.2 shows the Online Tools section to begin at Slide 18. Here is what they did:

1. From Slide Master view, they went to the main slide master (as opposed to one of the layouts) and selected one of the two logos lower-right in the footer.

2. They then went to Insert | Actions | Hyperlink To | Slide and chose the transition slide entitled Online Tools.
Because this logo is on the slide master, it will appear on practically every slide in the deck, the only exceptions being layouts that have been specifically designed with different backgrounds. Therefore, from just about any slide in the deck, when the presenting team sees that they are nearing the 10-minutes-left mark, they can wrap up their particular topic, click the logo bottom-right, and off they go: “With our remaining time, we would like to show you the online tools that are at your disposal as a CDHP member…”

Hyperlinks never get lost
Hyperlinks jump to specific slides in a presentation and it is important to note how PowerPoint identifies the slide. When you create a hyperlink, you identify the destination by its content, not by its position in the slide deck.

You are not creating a hyperlink to whatever slide happens to be the fourth in the deck; you identify a specific slide. If you were to move that slide to a different place in the deck, the hyperlink would find it just fine.

And while you identify a slide by its content, PowerPoint understands that you might change the slide’s content. You can rewrite the title, change out all of the text, convert it to a chart layout, or remove all content entirely—PowerPoint will still keep track of where the hyperlink is supposed to take you.

Getting Back
In Anthem’s case, the presenting team only needed to make a one-way trip: they needed to get to Online Tools at 10 minutes before conclusion and then they would be done. But let’s say that you need access to a particular slide and you need the flexibility of being able to return to where you were afterward. For this, you need to create the equivalent of a web browser’s Back button, and the Hyperlink choice of Last Slide Viewed (visible in Figure 22.1) would get that done. It wouldn’t matter where you were when you made the jump—your personal Back button would take you back.

In the case of the Anthem slide, it was essential that we program the Back button in two different places: on the main slide master and also on the New Section layout. Jumping to the Online Tools section would take you to a slide using the New Section layout, where there were different icons along the bottom. The jump back would have failed had we not also programmed it onto that layout.

Roadmaps
We know many accomplished presenters who place their hyperlinks directly on the slide, in plain view of the audience, where they will never forget
about them. For times when you want your audience members to see that you are making a turn onto a different street, a visible hyperlink is perfect. When I present on this topic, one of my main slides looks like Figure 22.4. The bar below each number and description leads to an example and I can decide if and when to show that example.

In this case, the hyperlinks are integrated into the slide design, but I know presenters who don’t bother to do that; they just create a circle with the word “Example” in it and float it on the slide. Many presenters have no reticence about showing their inner workings to their audiences, and I count myself among them. This just says to your audience that you have given considerable thought to how you want to approach a topic. It says that you are organized.

Secret passages

Invisible hyperlinks are equally handy for those times when it is not essential that your audience members follow how you get to a certain place. This is how the folks at Anthem jumped to the Online Tools section without anyone noticing how far off schedule they were.

A hidden hyperlink can take one of two forms: 1) an object that is almost literally invisible, devoid of fill or outline; or 2) an object that is part of the slide design. We favor the second approach, as it is all too easy to forget the location or even the existence of invisible objects.

For this reason, it is typical for my templates—ones I create for my own purposes or for my clients—to include small elements along the bottom. Across a four-day conference, it is likely that I will program all four of the
small squares in Figure 22.4, and the Anthem logos are equally well suited to those tasks. This is why I no longer push back when corporate clients inform me that every slide in the deck will contain branding and don't waste any breath trying to change that. No problem, I think to myself, I'll just program those otherwise useless baubles with intelligent jumps.

Creating A Smart Menu

The basic concept of a hyperlink really takes off when you consider the flexibility it could bring to a presentation that has multiple and distinct topics. Let’s return to Anthem—Figure 22.5 provides another Slide Sorter view into the deck, but this time the view has been enhanced with the addition of Sections. This next exercise does not require the inclusion of PowerPoint Sections (stay tuned, though, because ones in the next chapter do)—it is just helpful to see how these slides are broken up.

Figure 22.5
This slide deck has five distinct sections: an intro, the four topics, and a conclusion. What if you wanted more flexibility in how you navigated these sections?
Drilling down, the first element we would like you to regard is the Agenda slide in the second position in the deck. This slide introduces the four topics that make up this presentation.

The most common way to work with a slide like this is to repeat it throughout the slide deck, right before each of the topics. This is clumsy, requiring that you manage changes made to the slide across all of the copies. Furthermore, a repeating agenda slide does not contribute to non-linear navigation, so all in all, repeating an unadorned agenda slide is not very clean.

If you are thinking ahead, you might rightly conclude that you could create hyperlinks on this slide to the four topics. That would provide you with the flexibility to move to each of those topics any time you wanted.

True, but as you begin to use it, you would quickly find shortcomings with this simple strategy:

- Once you jump into a topic, you would need to return to the agenda when you have exhausted that topic. You could certainly create a hyperlink to take you back to the menu, but that would amount to a lot of clicking that would require that you stay close to the computer.

- Furthermore, when would you click it? You would have to remember when one topic is over. Or you would need to place a visible reminder on the last slide of the topic to return to the agenda. Not impossible, just not convenient.

- There would probably be some concluding slides after all four topics. How would you get to them?

These criticisms are not show-stoppers, and implementing these strategies would provide more flexible navigation through your topics than doing nothing. The better approach is to have this slide function, not just as an
agenda, but as a menu, and the following exercise infuses the agenda with additional intelligence, using a technique that works in any version of PowerPoint released since 2003.

**Linking to custom shows**

Discussed in both Chapters 10 and 12, a custom show is a subset of slides that you define within a deck. One of the most powerful combinations available to the non-linear thinker is the marriage between hyperlinks and custom shows. With these two features working together, you can create a menu-driven slide deck that provides you with excellent navigation and ease of operation.

Before we step through this, please return to Figure 22.5 and note that all of the slides in the four main sections of this deck are hidden. Under a normal journey through this deck, they would not appear at all. You'll see why as we build it.

1. Go to Slide Show | Custom Slide Show and open the Custom Shows dialog. Using the basic control of this function, make a custom show for the slides that make up the Membership section, five slides in all:

   ![Custom Show Dialog](image)

   2. Continue with the other three until all four custom shows are created. Take care to add the slides in order, as the Custom Show function does not order slides. You can create a custom show from any sequence of slides in your deck, in any order, any quantity. When you are done, you should have four custom shows created:

   ![Custom Shows](image)

   3. Go to the Agenda slide and click the CDHP Membership rectangle.
4. Go to Insert | Action | Hyperlink To, and choose Custom Show from the drop-down menu.

5. Choose Membership and check Show and Return.

Clicking the Show and Return checkbox is vital as it ensures that when the custom show is finished, you are returned to the main show. (Without it, you just get dumped out into the interface.) This is what returns you to the menu automatically, without your having to remember to do it manually.

Once the other three are created, your Agenda slide is ready to function like an interface, and you can drive it for yourself by downloading and opening hyperlinks.pptx. Click any one of the four sections that you want, run through them, and when you are done, watch yourself get deposited right back on the Agenda slide.

With this technique, you can be uniquely responsive to the needs of your audience. If the guy you are pitching to is running short on time and wants to know about Consumer Engagement first, no problem—it’s just a click away. If you are running short and you need to skip over that section and go straight to Online Tools, just click that one.

When it is time to wrap up and go to your conclusion, you need only advance forward from the Agenda slide. PowerPoint will skip over all of the hidden slides and find the first non-hidden one.

There are two caveats with this technique:

- We chose to hide all of the content slides, but you don’t have to. If you keep them all unhidden, then you can work the deck in either manner: in linear fashion or as a menu. But if you are working through the deck
linearly (I think that’s a word), you would need to return to the menu manually in order to jump to a different section. For that, you would need to have a button programmed to jump you back to the menu or simply remember that it is Slide No. 2 and press 2 and Enter on your keyboard.

Custom shows are not defined as ranges of slides; in other words, if you were to add a slide in the middle of the Membership section, it would not automatically be added to that custom show. You would need to return to the Custom Show dialog, open the Membership custom show, and add that new slide to it in the proper sequence.

Here is a popular variation of this strategy: 1) make the concluding slide hidden and create access to it via a hyperlink; and 2) Set the slide show to repeat on a loop. This way, any inadvertent clicks of the mouse would be ignored (or more accurately, would take you to the end which would automatically loop back to the beginning). When it is time to end, you click the hyperlink to the concluding slide. You can experiment with that using the hyperlinks.pptx file.

Navigating Outside a Presentation

With the basic hyperlinking engine, you can seamlessly integrate content from outside of the current PowerPoint file. You can create the following types of links:

To other presentation files
Link to another presentation and it begins playing without delay or prompting. When that show ends, you are returned back to the show you were originally in and the slide you were originally on.

To a web page
Click on a URL link and that page opens in the default browser, as defined by your system. The presentation remains running underneath and you can Alt+Tab to it anytime, or just close the browser window.

To any document
Any file that you can double-click on in a My Computer window can be linked to from within PowerPoint.

To an application
With one backdoor maneuver, you can call up any Windows application without actually opening a document.
You already know how to do all of those things, because the Insert Action dialog box has choices for each of them. As easily as you hyperlink to a slide or to a custom show, you can also hyperlink to a different slide deck, a website, or just about any file on your computer. The Action Settings dialog has choices for Run Program, and if you change the extension filter from Programs (*.exe) to All Files (*.*), you can almost literally open any file on your network that has a defined file association.

Once you leave PowerPoint, you won’t return as smoothly as you do if you are running another slide deck; you’ll have to Alt+Tab back when you are done. Other than that unavoidable speed bump, however, the operation is quite seamless.

**Are you pro-choice or pro-freedom?**

There are two factors that take this discussion deeper, the first being how you activate a hyperlink. Few things in the presentation business are more satisfying than watching an accomplished presenter who is adept with a wireless remote and has designed a presentation to take advantage of it. He can be all the way across the room and still command the screen. She can work the crowd, knowing just when to send her audience’s attention back to a slide.

At the same time, there is quite a rush in creating a rich presentation that is full of hyperlinks and flexible navigation. Click here and go there. Click there and go here.

Hyperlinking is at its most flexible when you are able to move your mouse to objects and click them. You have as many choices as you have programmed onto a slide and you make the choice during the course of your presentation. I’m going to coin a term for this action: mouse-centric navigation.

On the other hand, hyperlinking is at its most seamless when you can simply click Advance on your remote and be taken places. You make all your choices ahead of time and you advance in a linear fashion through the presentation, but with the techniques discussed in this chapter, the places you can go in that straight line can be exceptionally inventive. Here’s another made-up term: remote-centric navigation.

Work the room or work the computer? Which approach is better? Are you pro-choice (mouse-centric) or pro-freedom (remote-centric)?

That question has no right answer and we’re not interested in establishing one. Our interest is in helping you determine when to adopt each strategy and ensuring that you get maximum value out of whichever one you choose.
In the previous section, we created mouse-centric navigation in the form of a custom menu. Now let’s look at remote-centric navigation and maximizing its use requires familiarity with a technique that most Windows users do not explore:

**Inserting Objects**

An inserted object (or OLE object, for the Object Linking and Embedding engine) is different from an imported graphic or a hyperlink. An object represents the contents of a different file and it can be integrated with a slide deck in a unique way.

If you have never worked with OLE objects, you’ll appreciate a simple example, so let’s say that in a presentation that you’re giving about home mortgage refinancing, you want to show a chart of interest payments. Of course, you could simply build the chart on a slide in your main deck, but the information changes constantly and you expect to use that data in several different presentations. When the data changes, you don’t want to open every presentation that uses that chart and edit it over and over again; you want to be able to update a single file, call it payments.pptx file. Here is how you would establish this relationship:

1. Decide on the time in your current presentation when you want to show the chart. In this example, we want it to appear after the third bullet on this slide.

2. Animate the bullets with a fade, all four set to start After Previous.

3. Go to Insert | Object, click Create from File, and click Browse to find the file payments.pptx (which is available as a download, but it’s really nothing more than a generic chart in a one-slide deck—create any file to follow along here).
4. Locate the file and then check Link.

The Result section of this dialog is quite helpful. In this case, it verifies that you are creating the equivalent of a shortcut on your Desktop: an icon or thumbnail that represents a file. If you leave Link unchecked, then PowerPoint takes the contents of the file and stuffs it into a container in the current file. This is useful if you are sending the file off to someone else or posting it for distribution (all data is in one file), but not desirable if you want one dynamic file to be pushed out to several presentations.

With Display as Icon unchecked, PowerPoint creates a thumbnail of the first slide in the file and shows that on the slide. With it checked, the object is represented by an icon. This is a matter of preference, as the behavior of the object is unchanged.

5. Click OK and note the thumbnail appearing in the middle of your slide.

This strange thumbnail is confusing to people working with objects for the first time. Hang in there with us.
6. Size the thumbnail down and move it down and inbetween the third and fourth bullets. This is optional—you could place it anywhere, including off the slide—I’m just suggesting that it sit in a place representative of when it will make its appearance.

7. With the object selected, go to Animations | Add Animation, and note a new option at the bottom of the list: OLE Action Verbs. This awkwardly-named choice refers to ways in which you can place an inserted object into the animation stream. Choose it to reach this dialog box:

![Add OLE Action Verb dialog box](image)

The purpose of this animation is not to determine how the object makes its appearance on the slide. This animation determines what the object does when its turn comes around.

8. Click Show.

9. Verify that the animation will start On Click.

10. Move it in between the bullets so that it is fourth in line.

![Animation Pane](image)

PowerPoint initially named this object Object 1; I renamed it to Payment Chart using the Selection and Visibility pane.
11. Unless you want the thumbnail to show on the slide during your presentation, double-click the object’s occurrence in the Animation task pane, check Hide Before this Action, and set After Animation to Hide After Animation.

In other words, when this slide is being shown (as opposed to being edited), the thumbnail will not appear until its turn comes up in the animation stream, and then it will immediately hide afterward. This step can be avoided altogether simply by dragging the thumbnail off the slide—it will still show when its turn comes around.

Here is a play-by-play of this slide in action: 1) The title and first three bullets appear; 2) You advance once and the payments.pptx slide show promptly appears; 3) You advance through it, and when it ends, you find yourself right back where you were, with the fourth bullet automatically appearing.

Audience members have no idea that you ran a secondary presentation file. They just know that a relevant set of data appeared on screen to help them understand the question of interest for a refinance.

Thanks to the ability to place the linked object in the animation sequence, this is by far the most elegant technique for running a secondary presentation within a primary presentation. If you know when and where you want it to run, you can reduce the task down to a single click of a wireless remote or mouse. No other technique approaches this level of simplicity:

- If you created a standard hyperlink to the presentation, you would have to use your mouse to click on the hyperlinked object, requiring you or someone to be at the computer or use of a sophisticated remote.

- If you chose to embed the presentation instead of keeping it externally linked, you would have to re-insert the file as an object anytime changes were made to it.
By hiding the thumbnail or by dragging it off the slide, you make the transition completely seamless to your audience members. If instead you wanted to create a visual cue for the jump to a secondary presentation, you could choose to show the thumbnail on the slide. And if you did that, you might want to add a conventional animation to it, so that it would fade onto the slide at the right time.

**Caveat Linker**

Linking to outside content carries with it the extra requirement that the file, in this case payments.pptx, must continue to reside where you first told PowerPoint to look for it. Otherwise, you'll get yelled at and the OLE object will not open to show its content. The safest course of action is to place all linked files in the same folder as the .pptx file that contains the links. PowerPoint will always look there before pronouncing a link dead.

Also, each time you open a file that contains a link, you'll be warned about a “potential security concern,” and asked whether you want to update the presentation with current data. If you made changes to it recently, click Update Links. Otherwise, you can safely click Cancel.

This technique would most definitely be the wrong approach to take were you intending to distribute and share these slides with others who were not well versed in OLE practice.

On the other hand, advanced users can have a field day. At the Summit a few years ago, we showed how four people, in different locations and working on separate slide decks, could all access a slide deck that lived in a Dropbox folder in the cloud. As a fifth person made changes to the deck in the cloud, the four decks promptly updated. It induced several oohs and ahhs from the room.

**Trainer Heaven**

The techniques uncovered in this chapter can be put to great effect in countless situations. Of all the strategies discussed throughout this book, the ones in this chapter carry the greatest potential of taking you to an altogether different level of proficiency as a presenter and as a content creator.

And if I had to identify one group in particular that would benefit the most, it would be those who use PowerPoint as a training tool and those whom they teach. The demands put upon students learning from a PowerPoint presentation are higher than with an audience listening to a sales pitch or a keynote address. They need to pay closer attention to details, they usually take many more notes, they are often following along
with their own notebooks, and if they are learning a software program, they are likely watching smaller elements on screen, like icons, tools, and menus.

As the trainer, this increases your burden, also. You have to minimize extraneous screen activity, avoid being herky-jerky with the mouse, and eliminate unnecessary dialog boxes and windows that are not relevant to the task.

You can achieve all of that with effective use of hyperlinks, linked objects that automatically open data files, visual cues, and interactive menus. These are the ingredients to a cleaner and more enjoyable experience, both for you and for your students.

Stick around—the next chapter might blow your mind with a new PowerPoint feature that kicks hyperlinking up into the stratosphere.