



# HOW TO MAKE AN INFOGRAPHIC FOR FREE WITH POWERPOINT

by Saikat Basu

# How to Make an Infographic for Free with PowerPoint

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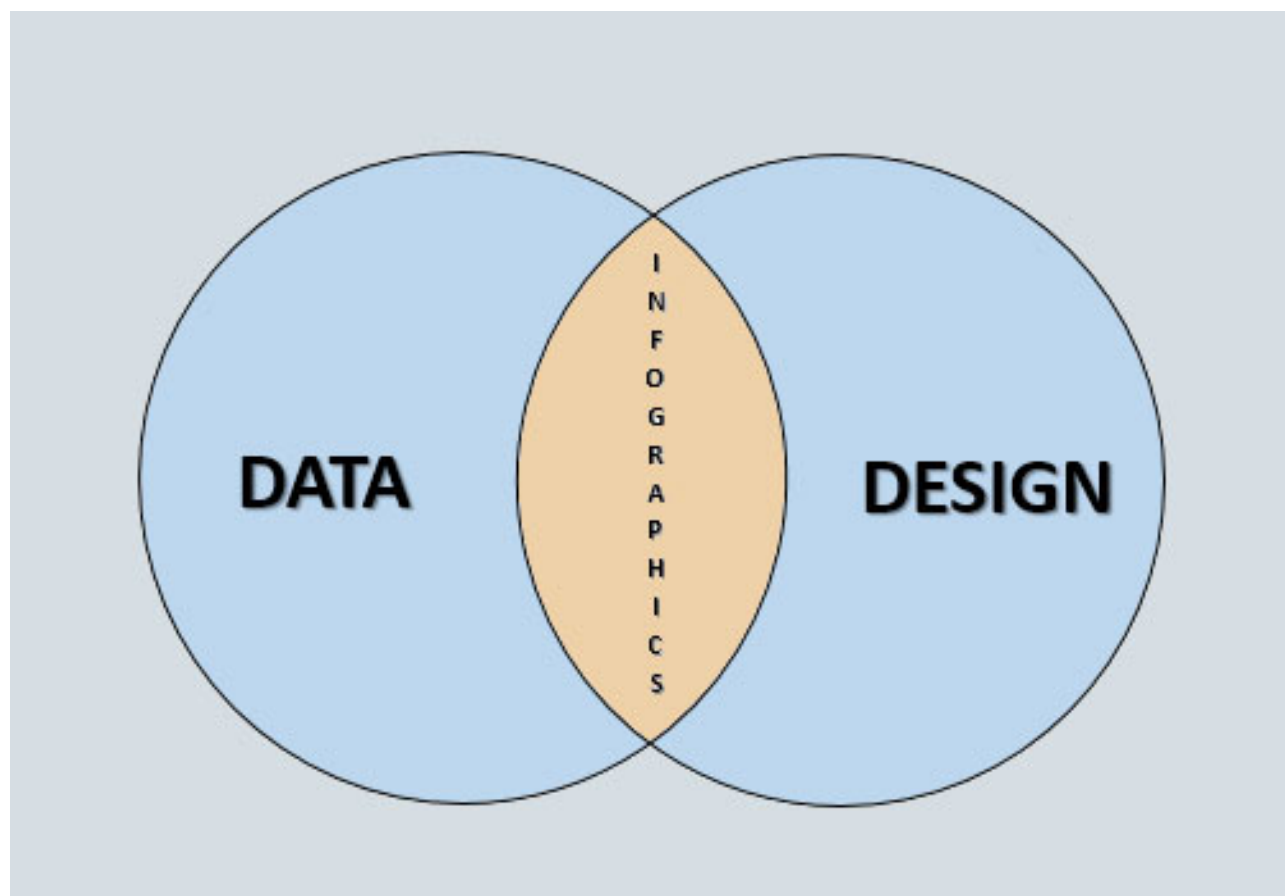
A UFO hovering over a stadium is an unforgettable memory. Observing this scene as a 9-year old, while sitting glued to the flickering TV screen as the 1984 Summer Olympics came to a close, that memory stuck with me for life.

Thirty-one years later I still remember the “alien spaceship” from Hollywood. My memory isn’t so great, but give me a nice visual and I will hold on to it. Science says that’s true for you as well. It isn’t a mind-blowing fact as most of our brain is devoted to vision and all things visual. The second we wake up the neurons get busy processing all that the eyes see. It is a blindingly fast process too as [R.S. Fixot](#) (PDF Paper) said back in 1957. In short,

*“Vision rules.”*

Keeping the crown is a full-time job as our brain has to process a lot of visuals every second. Perhaps, more so today thanks to the social Web and our FOMO (fear of missing out) enslavement. But in this visual melee lies the opportunity – the space to tell your story with great pictures.

Show, impress, and persuade with an **infographic**.



Infographics are the most widespread data visualization tools that combine the best of data with design. There’s nothing like cold hard data to drive any truth home. There’s nothing like well-designed graphics to burn a fact into your memory. And you don’t need a PhD in [Data Science](#) to make your first one.

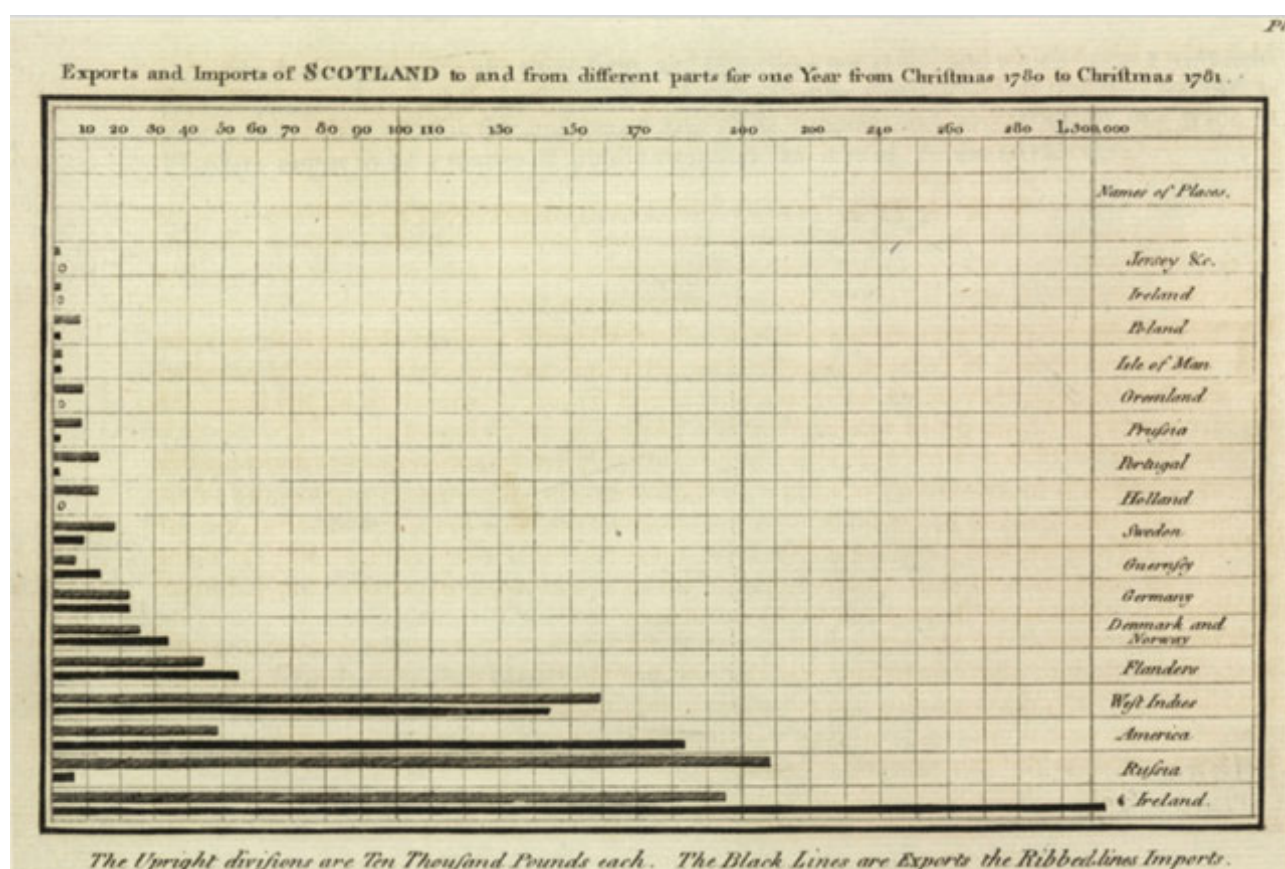
Companies of all hues are using the power of visualization with both static and interactive infographics. The New York Times and USA Today use infographics in a big way. NASA has kept a corner for public domain infographics just for you. [PepsiCo](#) uses it for year-end disclosures. So, what’s stopping you?

# What Is an Infographic?

A picture that speaks a thousand words.

That's the shortest way to explain an infographic. In other words, it is a visualization of data or ideas that tries to explain complex information clearly and quickly. It is the simplest form of data visualization or information design, a field that is snowballing along with information overload.

Are infographics a recent social media phenomenon? Not really, because since the first cave man scratched the rocky wall, we have been using pictures to convey thoughts. In fact, this [Gizmodo article](#) shows us remarkable similarities between infographics done 230 years back and those we do today.



We talk about brilliant presentations that can turn boring communication into interactive conversation. Infographics serve the same purpose, but with some differences. At the center of every good presentation is the presenter. The presenter tells the story to his audience and the pictures or data on the slides play a supporting role.

An infographic - static or interactive - has to do all the storytelling on its own. Here, both the pictures and the data have to come together and show the viewer at a glance what it's all about. You can get away with a bad graphic in a presentation - it is hara-kiri in an infographic.



# The Benefits of Infographics for the Office Worker

Make information more interesting.

In a TED talk about the beauty of data visualization, writer and designer David McCandless said that good information design can make us change the way we see the world.

*“And if you’re navigating a dense information jungle, coming across a beautiful graphic or a lovely data visualization, it’s a relief, it’s like coming across a clearing in the jungle.”*

Watch: [The beauty of data visualization - David McCandless](#)

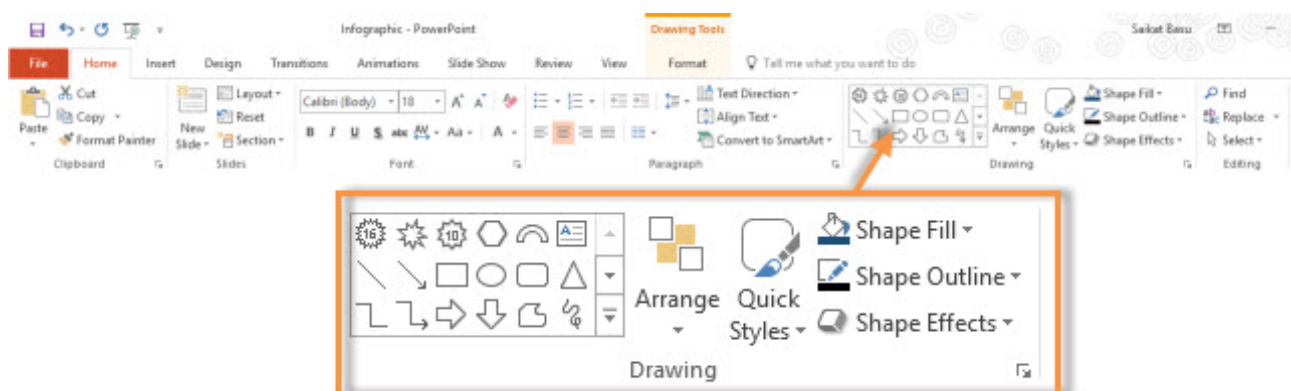
If that’s not reason enough, here are a few more examples:

- Tell an inspiring brand story.
- Use an infographic to guide new employees.
- Turn a boring market survey into an eye-catching infographic.
- Make an infographic to explain a complex procedure to customers.
- Define your company’s mission statement visually with an infographic.
- Turn a company-wide memo into an inspiring infographic.

## But Why Use PowerPoint to Make an Infographic?

PowerPoint is **an odd choice** for an infographic tool. But to get over that doubt, just realize that it is more than a presentation tool. It is an adept graphics editor. It is the industry standard tool for creating presentations – both static and interactive. Presentations share the common bond of telling stories through data. Beyond boring presentations, [PowerPoint can be put to a lot of creative uses](#), and it is universal as it piggybacks on more than a billion installs of Microsoft Office. You are paying for it in a way.

There are many good [online infographics creators](#) and free infographic templates available online, but with PowerPoint you have hands-on control. As we will see below, you can **use the PowerPoint Drawing tools** to create simple icons and shapes. The simple tools in PowerPoint help anyone break through the creative handicaps of the mind.



Creating infographics isn’t easy. But a simple tool like PowerPoint makes it easier to start your first one from scratch. And hey, trying out some infographic skills will also make you a better presenter in the long run. That could be a career changing skill and easily transferable from your current job to the next one.

To sum up:

- It is available.
- It is easy to learn.
- It improves your presentation creativity.
- It will make it easier to jump to a more advanced infographic tool.
- A variety of infographic templates are also available for PowerPoint.

## Choosing Your First Infographic

Data and design meet in an infographic. This article merely focuses on the use of simple graphic elements to create the individual components of an infographic. Please refer to the section **Learn More About Infographics** below to get an idea about the whole process that goes into an infographic – from conception to distribution.

To make the process easier to understand (or call me lazy), I am taking a publicly available infographic and attempting to duplicate it with the building blocks available in PowerPoint. The actual infographic on [Email Self-Defense](#) has been sourced from Wikimedia Commons.



We will use some of the same processes that went into [creating a custom PDF template with PowerPoint](#) a few months back.

Reasons for choosing this infographic:

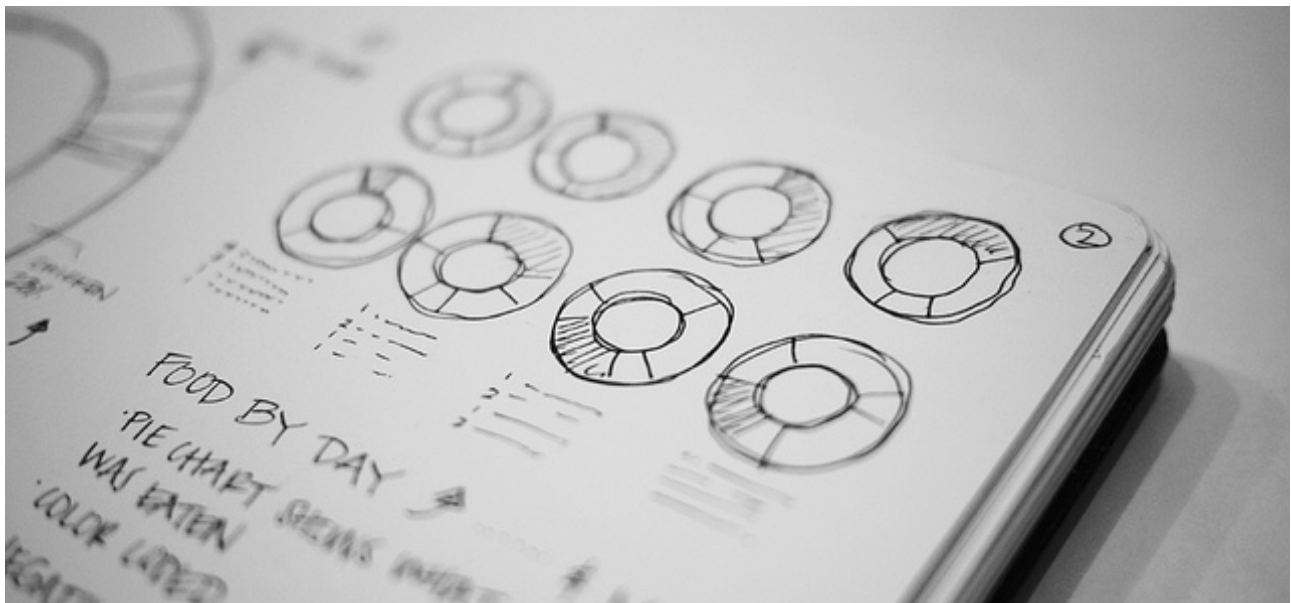
1. The infographic has a good balance of graphics and text.
2. Most of the graphical elements are easily replicated in PowerPoint.
3. Some of the graphics required also expose the limitations of PowerPoint.

## Launch PowerPoint to Begin Your First Infographic

The first visual difference between a presentation and an infographic is the size of the document. A presentation is wider than it is taller. Presentation slides have a common aspect ratio of 4:3 or 16:9. Infographics usually have a height that's more than twice the width, though that can differ according to the data and the media chosen for its display.

### Set Up Your Canvas

The first design decision you will have to make is set up your infographic for the data and design that will go into it. It is always better to sketch your idea on paper before you even launch PowerPoint. [Wireframing](#) it is even better. The size of your infographic will depend on the presentation medium and the blueprint you have sketched.



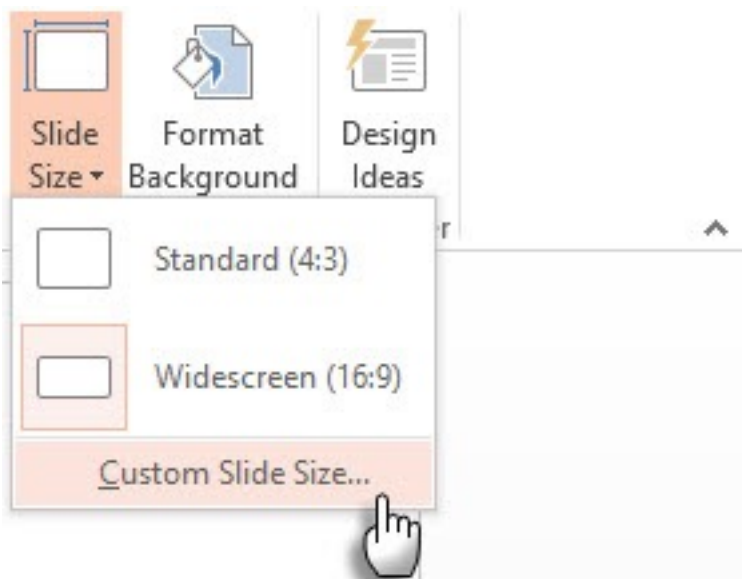
An infographic for display on Pinterest (600 pixel width to infinite pixel long) will have a different size than an offline educational poster. Infographics can be inserted in any media like a company newsletter or even a small business card. Design them in such a way that they are flexible and can be viewed on almost any platform.

The maximum slide size in PowerPoint is **56" by 56"**. That's good enough for a poster, and enough room for you to create your infographic. The most common size is A4 (8.27 × 11.69 inches) and some office printers will let you print at a larger 11.69 × 16.54 inches. For the purpose of this article, let's assume your infographic will go into a blog post and will be displayed on a standard screen.



Start with a blank slide and change the orientation to **Portrait**.

Change the size of the slide. Go to **Design > Slide Size > Custom Slide Size**.



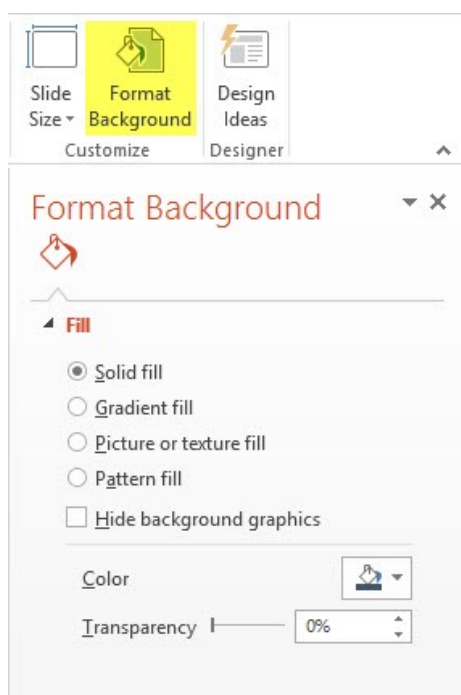
I used a size of **11 x 17 inches**. This is fine for the data on email self-defense.

## Color Your Background

White backgrounds are not always ideal for online infographics as you may want to make it stand out from the rest of the webpage which is usually white. You may want to use a light neutral background or go for a dark background and make the elements pop out. Again, this is a design decision which involves a bit of [color psychology](#).

Go to **Ribbon > Design > Format Background**.

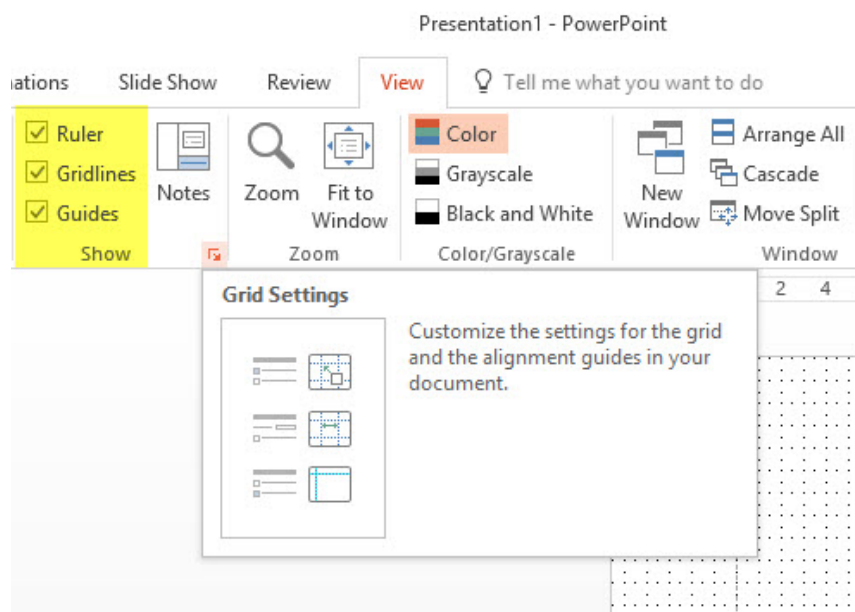
We are not going to color the background here because the infographic will be divided into individual sections, each with its own color.



## Use Gridlines and Guides

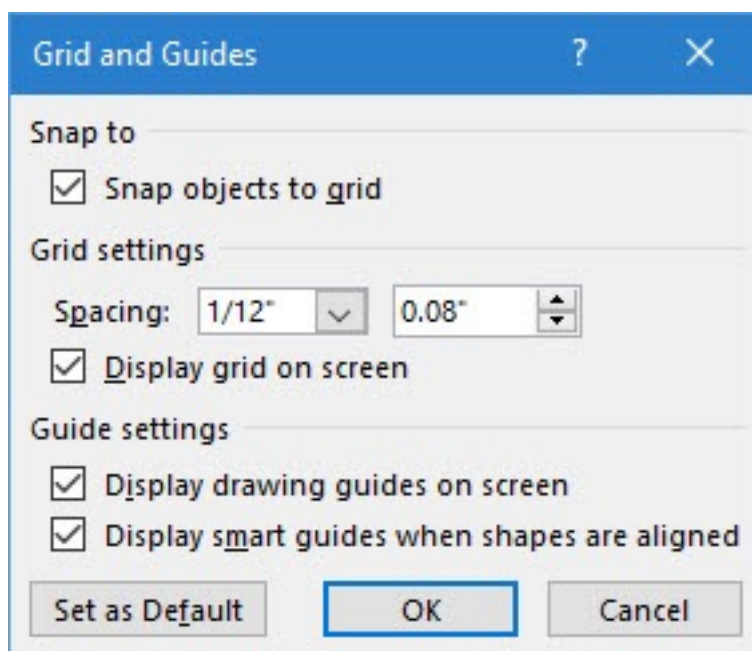
Rulers, Gridlines, and Guides are **three features you should enable** immediately. They help you align your graphic objects more precisely and snap slide objects in place. The ruler helps you measure distances between objects on the screen. Guides are the feature you will turn to for aligning objects vertically or horizontally. Use it with the ruler.

Go to **Ribbon > View** and check **Rulers**, **Gridlines**, and **Guides**. To hide them, deselect the checkboxes.



**Shortcut Tip:** To toggle the visibility of the guides, use the keyboard shortcut **ALT + F9**. Toggle the visibility of the gridlines with **SHIFT + F9**.

To customize the gridlines further, open the **Grid and Guides** settings.



The **Snap objects to grid** setting positions shapes or objects at any nearest intersection of the grid. You can also draw in straight lines when you draw a freeform shape.

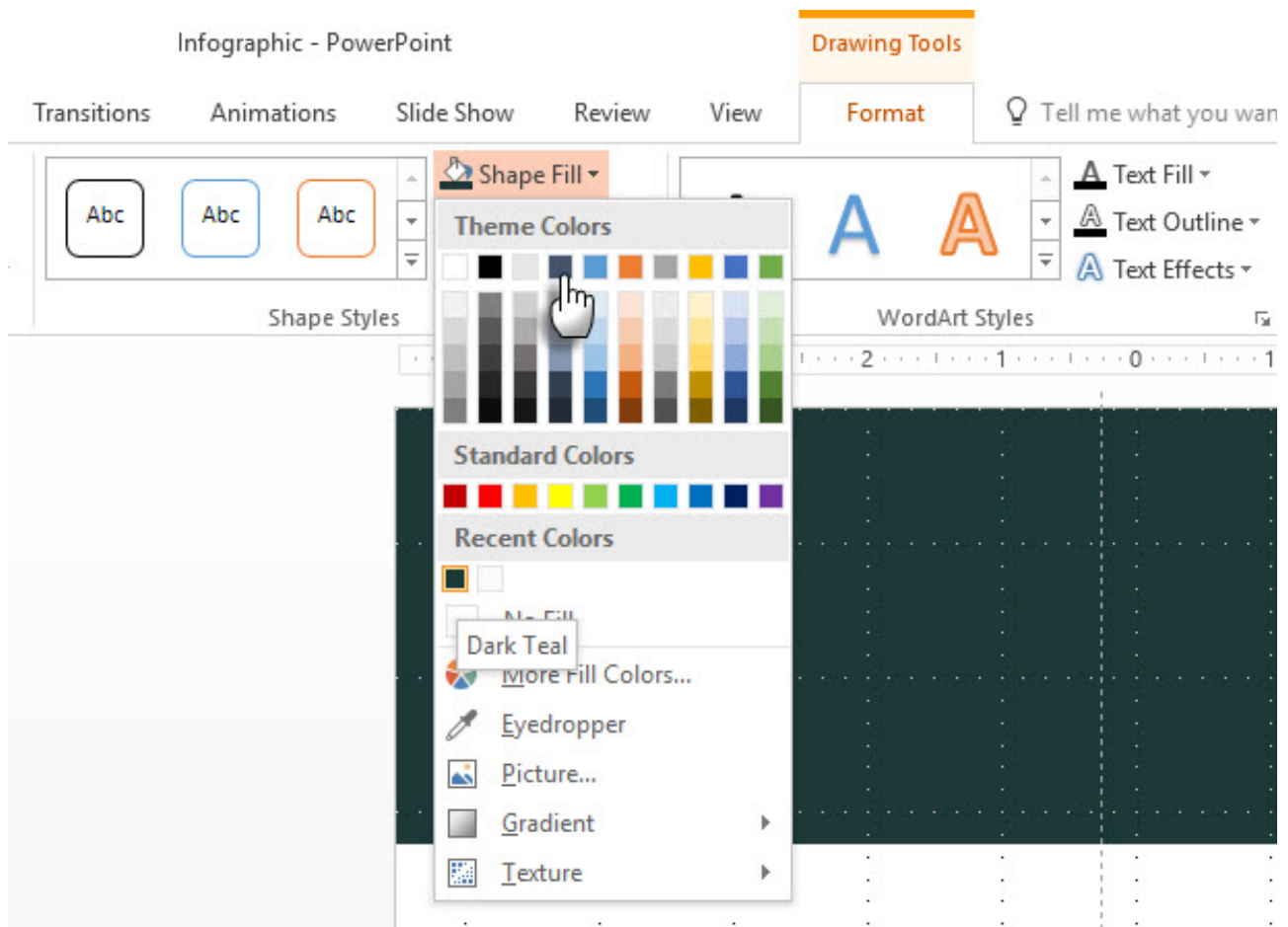
**Shortcut Tip:** To temporarily override the snap to options, hold down **ALT** while you drag the shape or object.

Mastering [the most useful Microsoft Office keyboard shortcuts](#) is always a good investment because it will save you time in the long term.

## Start Building Custom Infographic Elements

PowerPoint has all the tools necessary to create simple infographic elements. Let's take the original infographic as an inspiration and see how can you duplicate the text and objects with the drawing tools available on the Ribbon.

The teal colored background is a rectangle shape drawn with a colorless border and snapped to the edges of the slide (thanks to Snap to Grid).



Adding text is the easy part.

You can use the choice of fonts available on your PC or download from the many font libraries available on the Web. Sites like [FontSquirrel](#) have an extensive collection of free and commercial fonts. And don't forget open font treasure trove of [Google Fonts](#). The art is in pairing fonts well so that the information stands out on the page. Canva has [an excellent tutorial on combining fonts](#) well.

# EMAIL SELF-DEFENSE

Bulk surveillance violates our fundamental rights and makes free speech risky.  
But we're far from helpless to do something about it.

In brief:

- Keep text to a minimum.
- Choose clean and readable fonts.
- Choose two or three standard fonts.
- Choose to highlight with different font sizes and colors.

The next section is also created with a rectangle shape and colored with a lighter shade of teal.

Now, comes the tricky part of adding graphical shapes to your infographic. You can follow two approaches here. We will discuss both.

## Download Icon Shapes from Free Resources

Turn to the Web and its cache of free resources. Icons or icon sets can be downloaded as PNG or vector files and easily customized in PowerPoint. These free and commercial icon websites should give you the building blocks for the idea you want to visualize.

Presentation expert Dave Paradi [recommends vector icons](#). Paraphrasing his advice:

*"Vector icons work better than PNG images. PNG icons with a transparent background are workable if you don't need to resize, edit, or recolor them. Resizing a PNG icon makes it fuzzy and you can't separate the pieces of the icon to make changes."*

Find vector icons. Vector files store information on the lines or shapes of the icon. You can resize and change the shape without a drop in quality. You can separate the shapes and edit them. Vector files are far less common than image files.

Read through the *Using vector icons in PowerPoint* section in his article.

Here are some sources for icon files of both types:

- [Dry Icons](#)
- [Icon Finder](#)
- [Icon Monster](#)
- [The Noun Project](#)
- [Icon Store](#)
- [Free Icons](#)

The Noun Project is my favorite and with the introduction of their [graphic asset manager](#) it got even better. It's also a great place to look at the examples and [learn a bit more icon design](#).

Do remember that some icon files might require attribution.

## Make Custom Graphics from Scratch

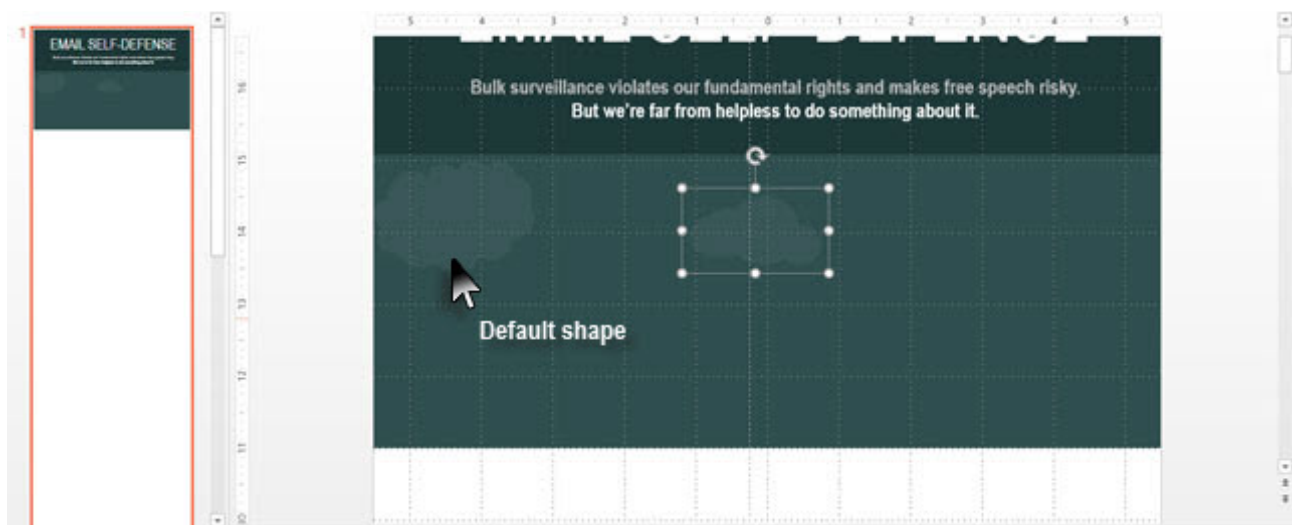
For the graphically inclined, this part of the process is fun. The fun has to be tinged with patience as it can take some time to create each individual graphic. The benefit is that you can directly create editable vector shapes. Here are three simple skills you have to learn:

1. Combine simple shapes to create the basic graphics.
2. Use Merge Shapes on the basic ones to create tailor-made complex shapes.
3. Format them with colors, 3D effects, and shadows for the finishing touch.

This [Microsoft Blog post](#) introduces you to the process of making your own custom shapes in PowerPoint.

## Draw the Clouds

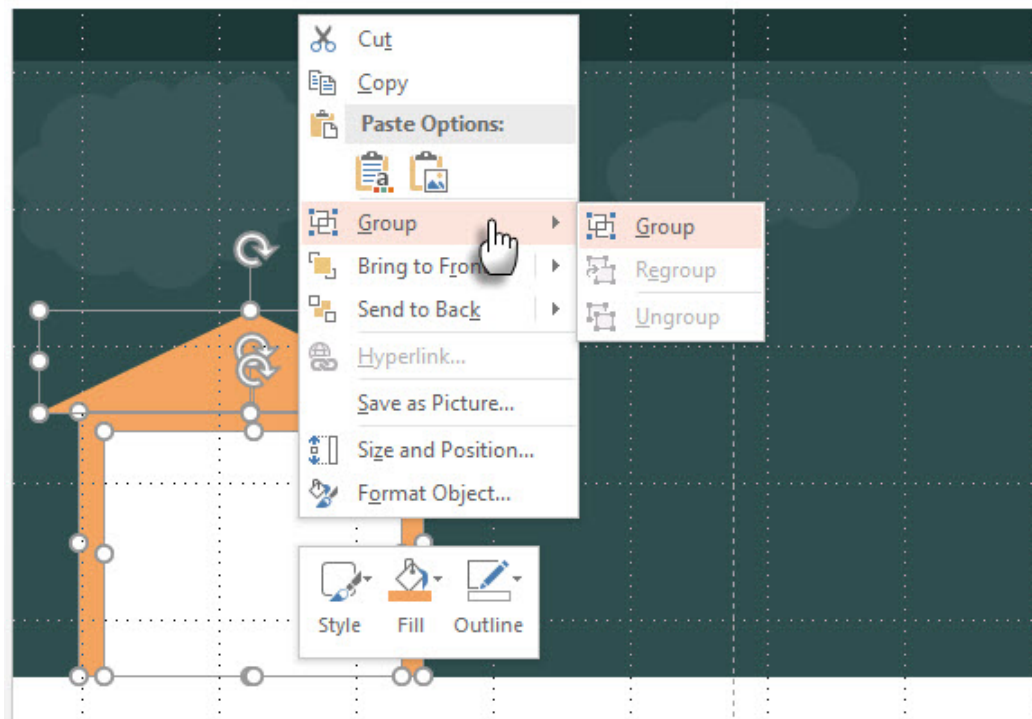
Though PowerPoint has a shape for a cloud, it may not be what you want. In the screenshot below, the cloud on the left is the default PowerPoint shape and the one on the right has been made with four circles grouped together. You can also make one with the free form Scribble shape. Use a **Shape Fill** and choose **No Outline**.





## Draw the Houses

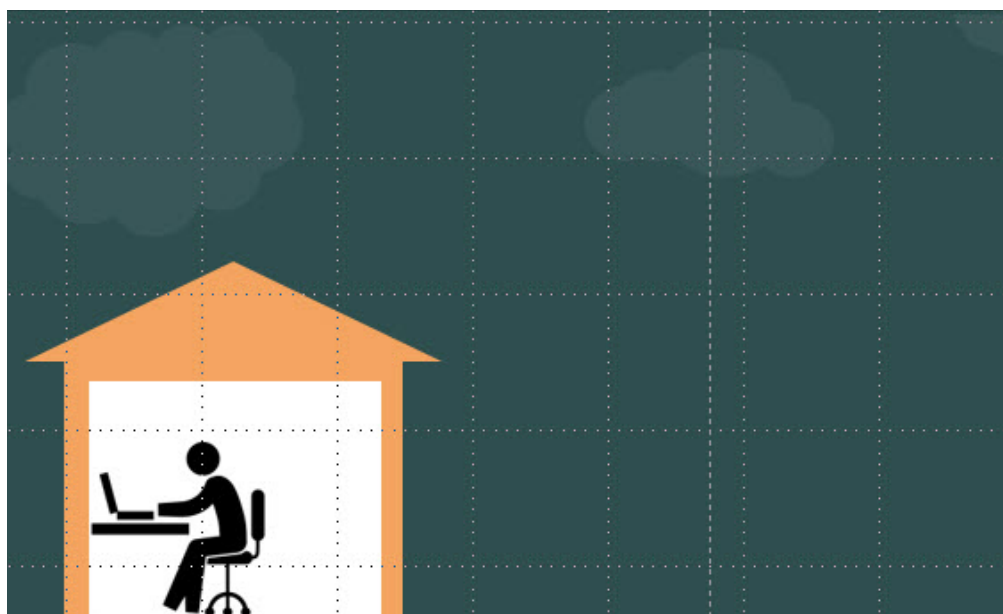
Drawing symmetrical structures is easier in PowerPoint. Again, the trick of combining simple shapes is useful. As you can see, it only takes two rectangle shapes and a triangle perched on top of it.



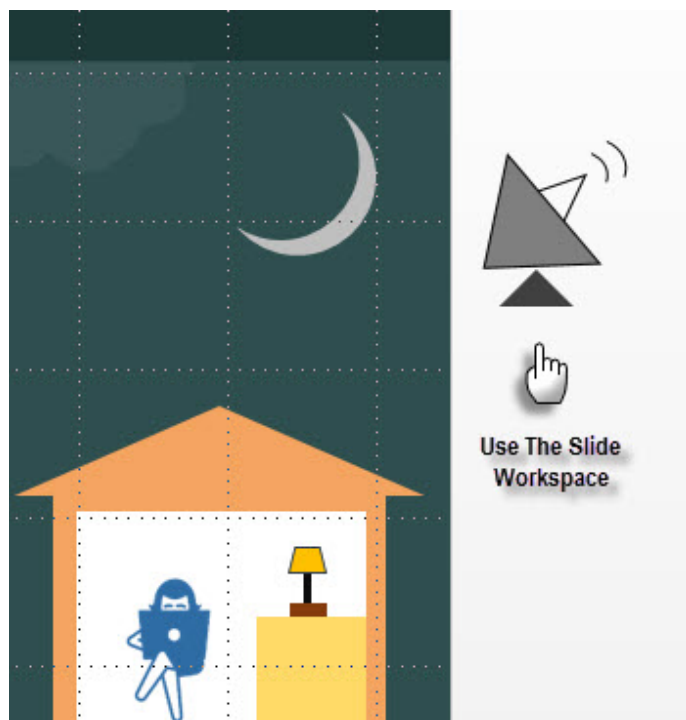
Group the shapes together when it is complete.

## Draw the People

Drawing shapes representing man, woman, or population is one of the most common tasks when you want to show a human statistic. Most times, you can borrow an icon from some of the sites mentioned above and use them without compromising your message or your time. In this case, I sourced an icon of [a man sitting with a laptop](#) from The Noun Project.

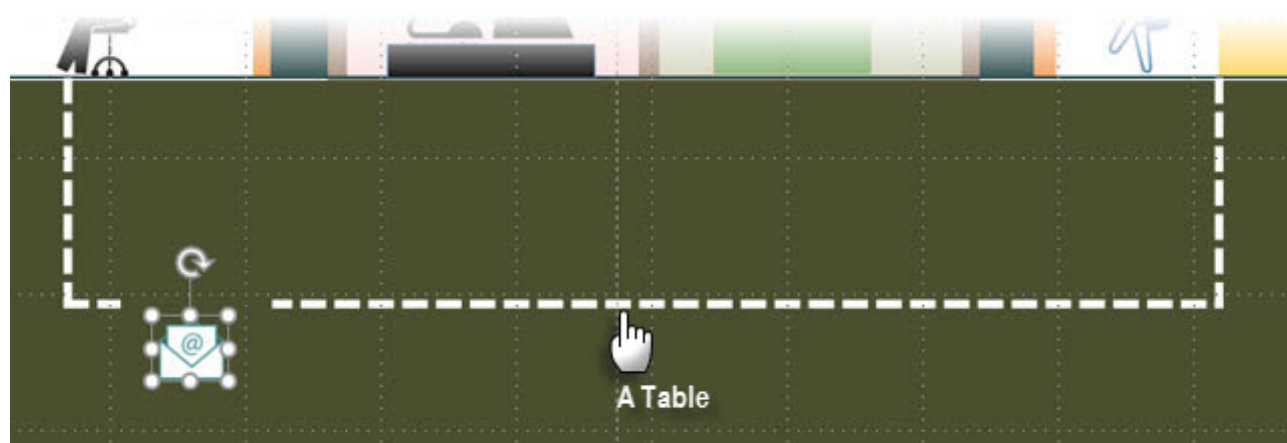


Another way to draw your objects is to use the slide workspace (blank area surrounding the slide). For example, I drew a simple “radar” by combining triangles, grouped them, and then dragged them to their position on the infographic.

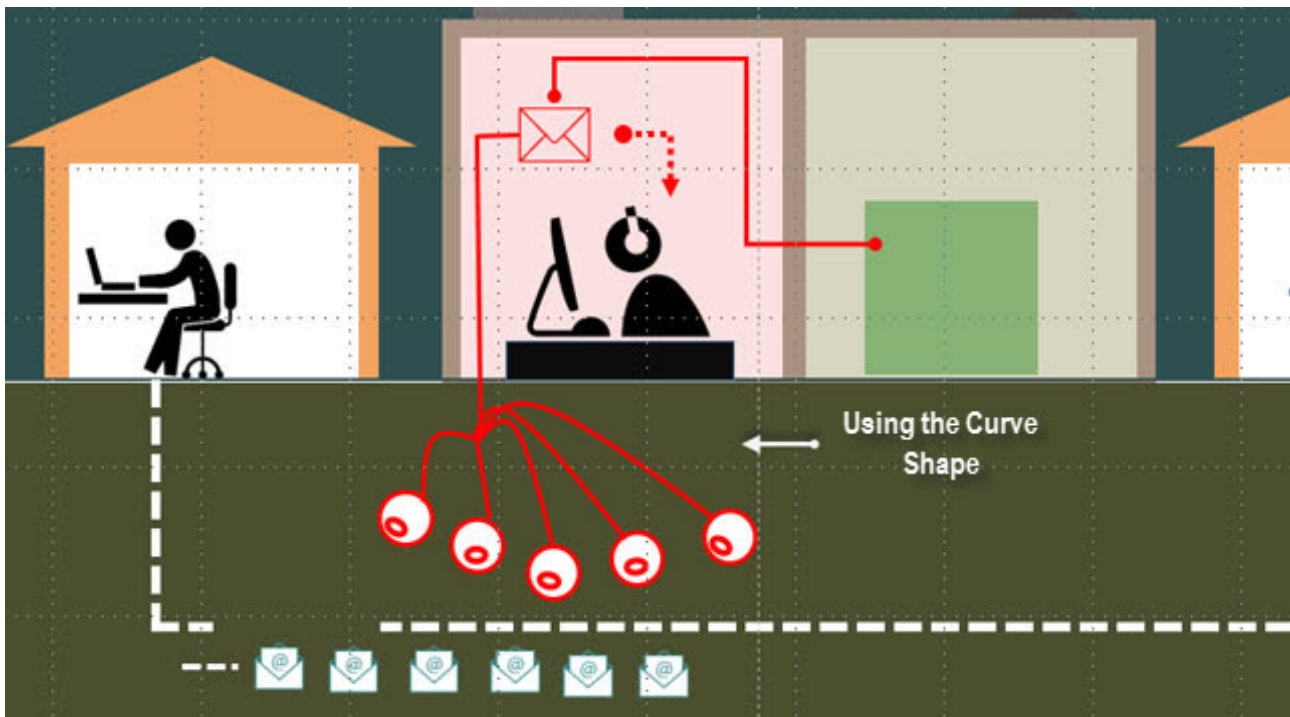


Take advantage of the graphic fonts, which come with Windows. [Webdings](#) and [Wingdings](#) could be your source for simple symbols. For example, I used the Wingdings character that looks like an envelope.

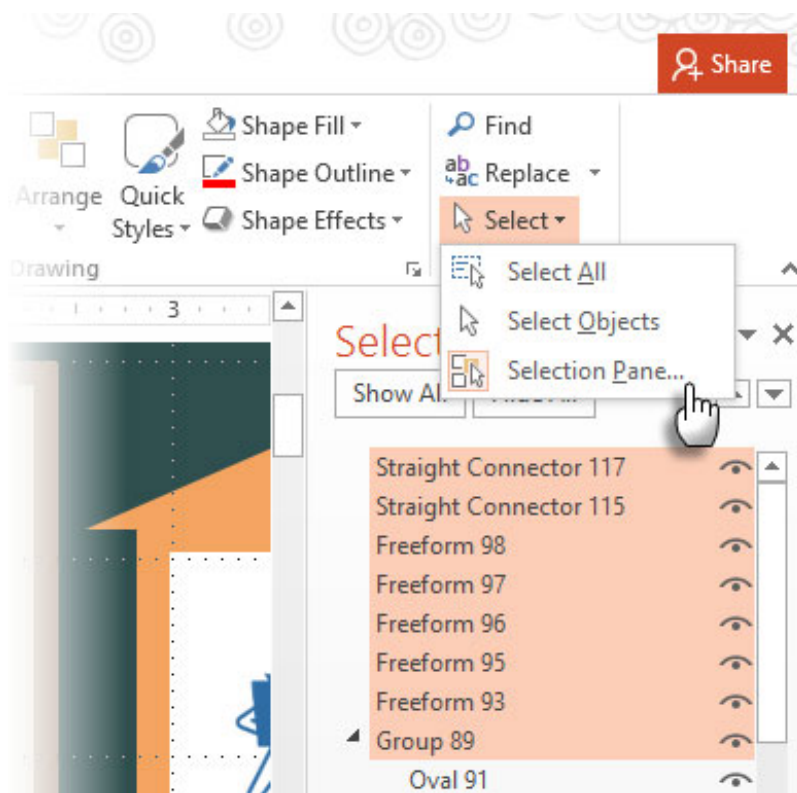
Similarly, you can use tables to detail some things. For example, the vulnerable email security layer in dotted white was made with a single cell table and three borders. I then masked out a small portion with a background colored shape.



Complicated lines and shapes can be drawn with the **curve** option in Drawing Shapes palette. A close approximation was possible in this case.



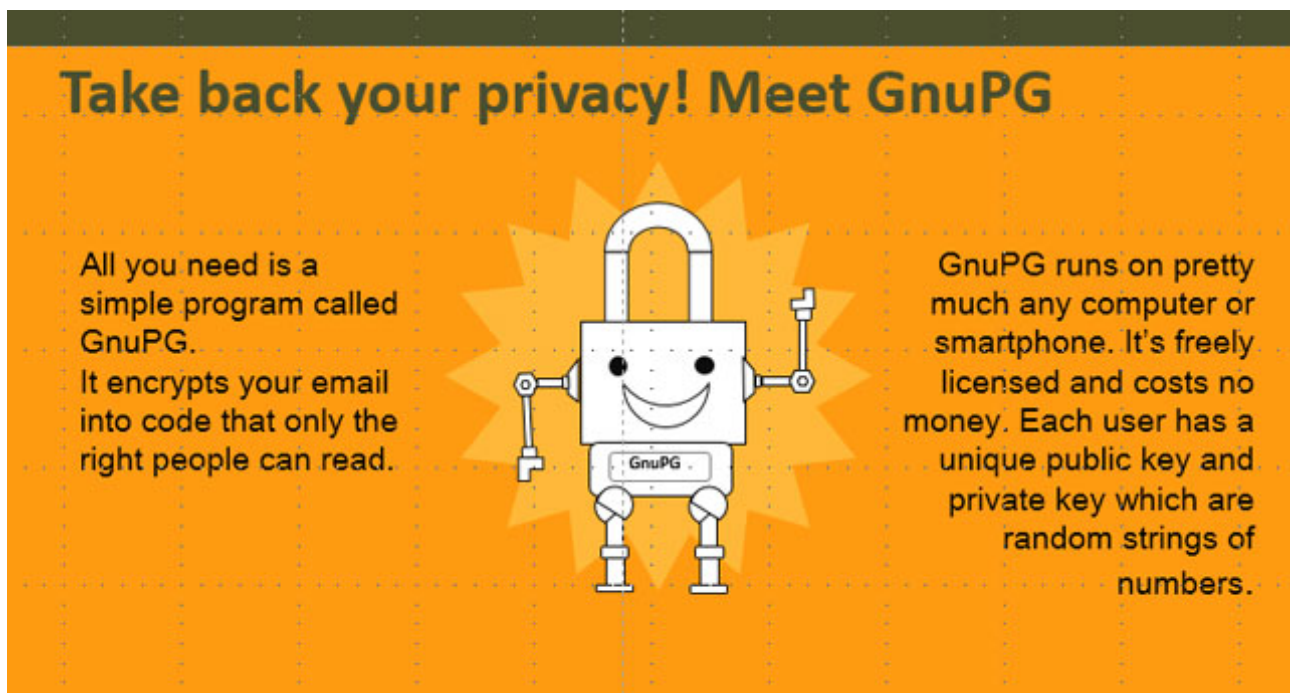
**Tip:** Use the **Selection Pane** when you need to group many objects that are close to one another. Go to **Home > Editing > Select > Selection Pane**.



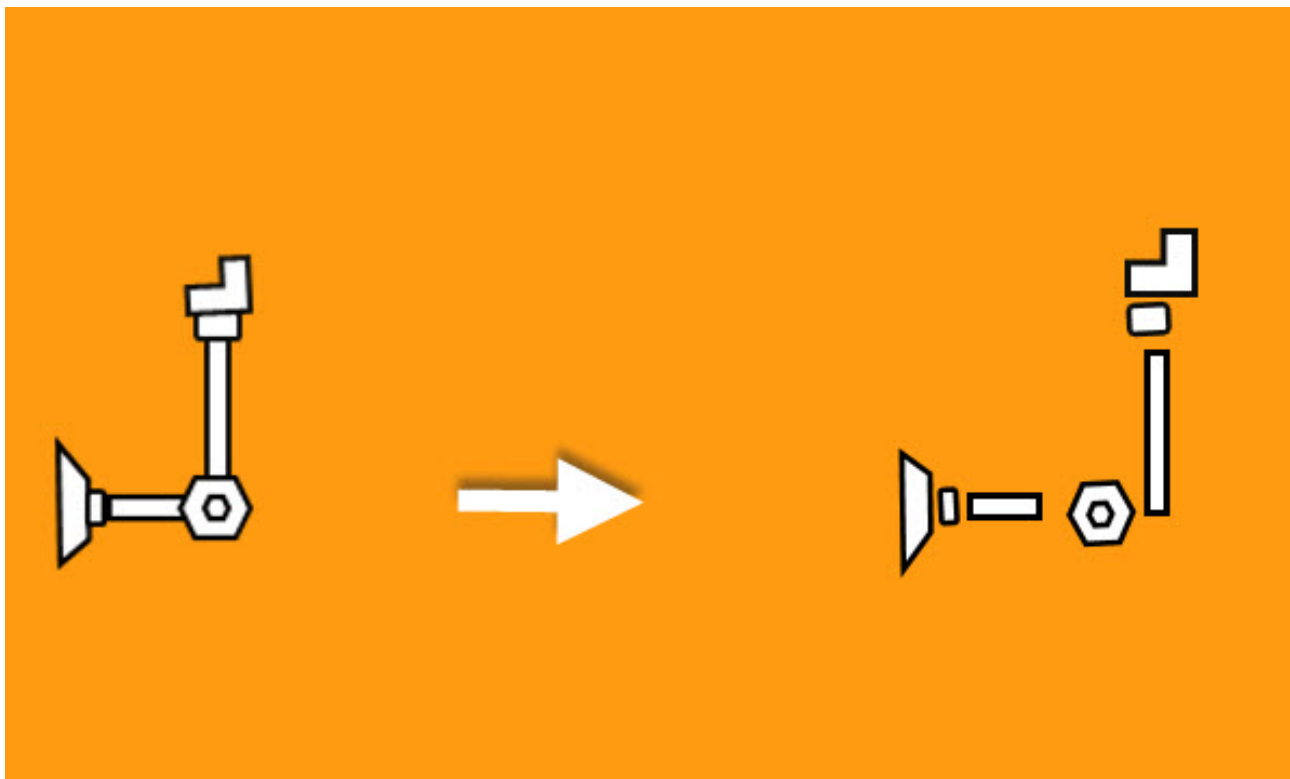
When you want to finetune the height and width of any object, use the **Size and Position** dialog box, which is available with a right click. This allows you to make small changes without disturbing the position of grouped objects.



## Meet a Complex Shape Called “GnuPG”

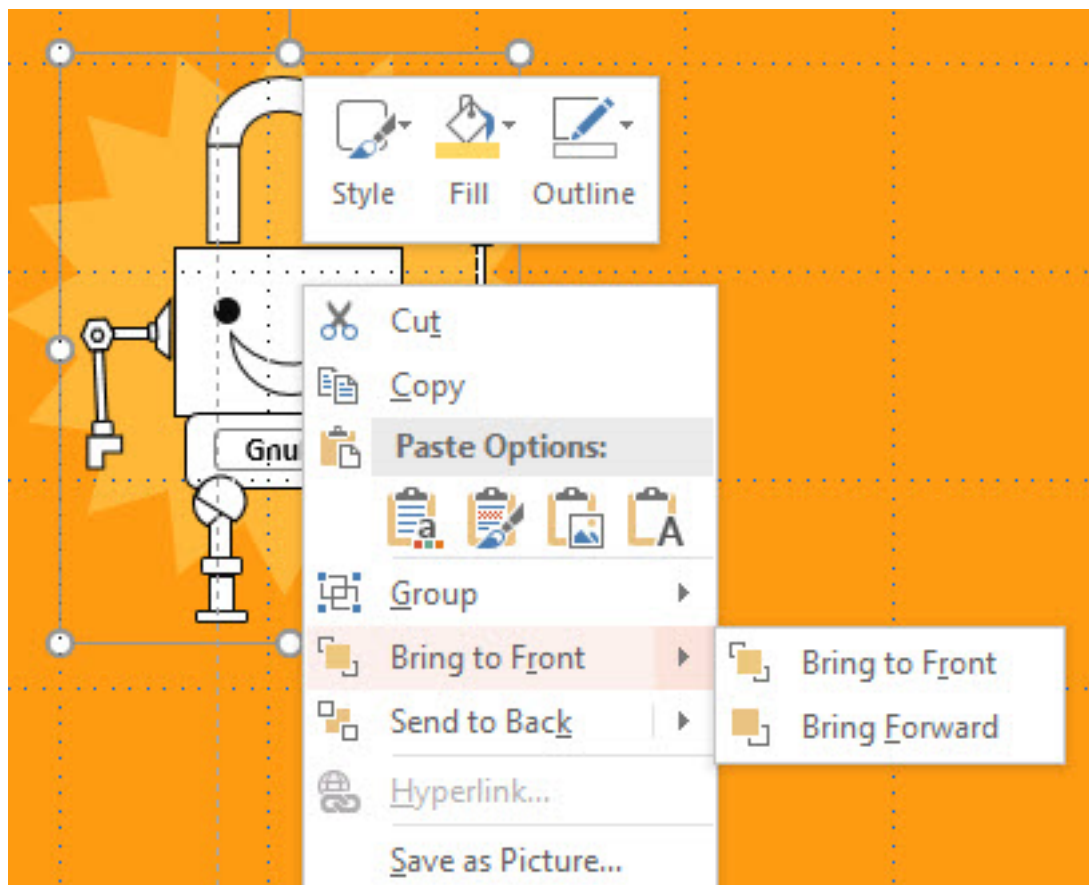


GnuPG is a more complex object than any of the others we have attempted before. But it is a symmetrical shape and as such can be made by combining the different shapes available. For example - these shapes went into creating one of the hands.



The other hand is just a copy of the first but rotated and twisted in another direction. Use the **Group** command to keep all the different parts together. The star highlight behind the robot is a multi-point shape positioned behind the robot and formatted with a semi-transparent color. Use these command groups to change the order of the different layers.



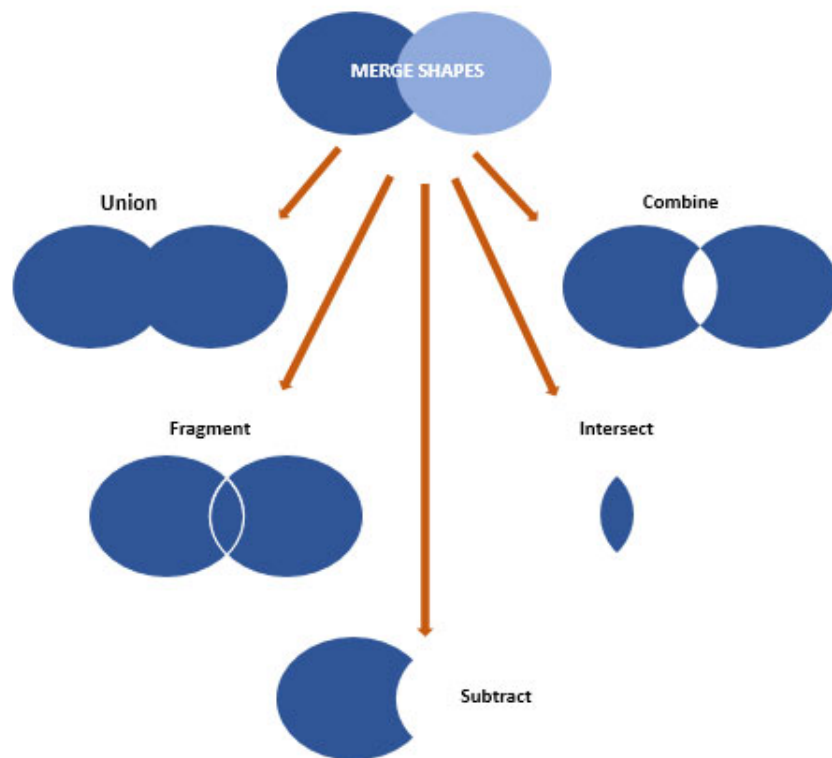


## Combine Shapes to Create a Custom Shape

GnuPG was made by combining a few symmetrical elements. Shapes can get even more complicated, and often the shape you want may seem beyond the reach of PowerPoint. For example – the graphics for the Public and Private keys. There is no single shape in the PowerPoint palette that can make that in a few clicks.

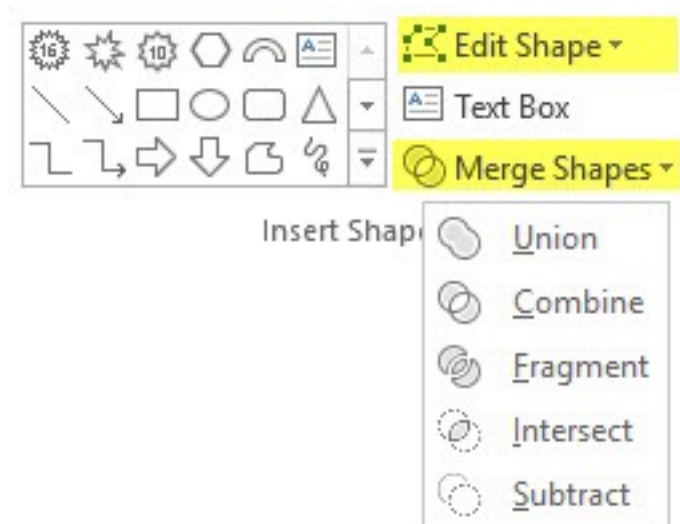


But worry not because PowerPoint has five commands that help you merge two or more shapes in different ways and make new dynamic shapes. The graphic below is self-explanatory:



Select the shapes to merge.

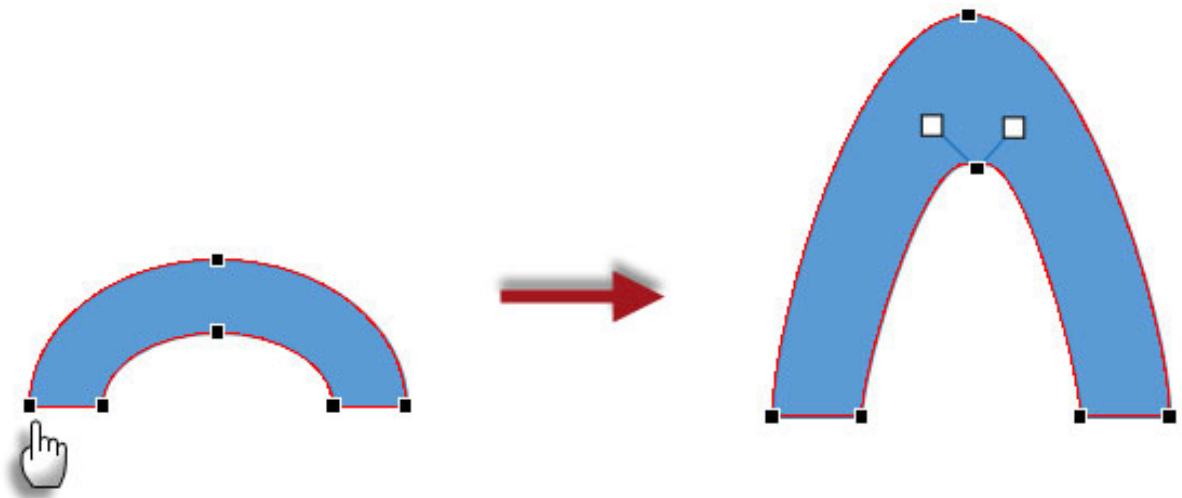
On the **Drawing Tools** Format tab, click **Merge Shapes**, and then pick one of the options from the dropdown.



You can also take a basic shape then use **Edit Points** to tweak the shape into something else.

Double-click the shape to change.

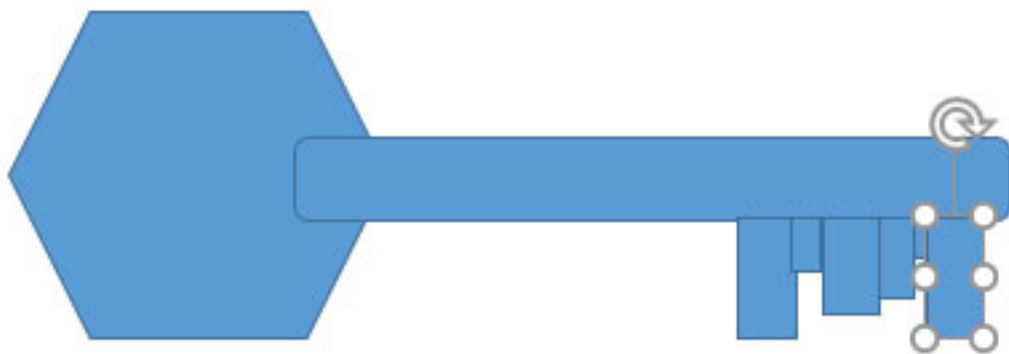
Under **Drawing Tools Format** tab, click **Insert Shapes > Edit Shape > Edit Points**.



Drag the black edit points to change the shape. Use the white square edit points to change the curvature of the line between two black edit points. Add any color or fills after you have finished the shape.

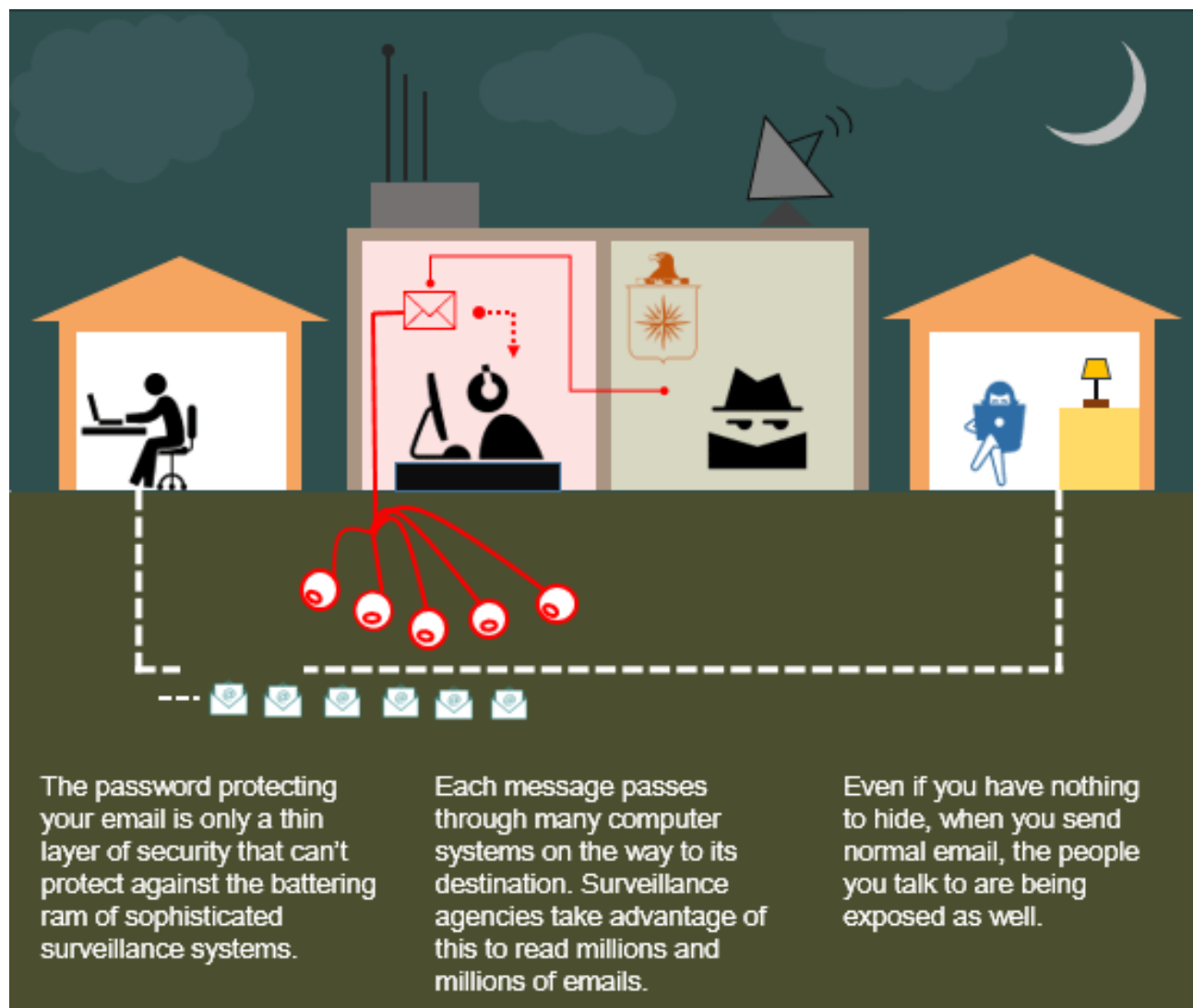
## Let's Turn a Custom Shape into the Graphic of a Key

Take several basic shapes like a hexagon and rectangles to make the silhouette of the key. Merge them using **Union** to create the body of the key. You can also use **Edit Points** to finetune the shape of the key.



Use **Format Shape** to give the finishing touches to the key.

And So It Continues...



Let's stop here. By now you have a basic idea of how to use PowerPoint's toolsets and create simple infographics. Many of the objects you create will be reusable in different parts of the infographic. You can also keep them all saved in a special "Library" PPT file for reuse in other infographics.

And you can make your own PowerPoint infographic templates around common themes and use them with necessary information.

# Expanding Your Infographic Designing Toolkit

Of course, PowerPoint has its limitations and there's a certain point where you will hit the wall. But that obstacle could also be an opportunity to expand your skills with other industry standard tools for infographics. You can go the old school way with Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop, which have steep learning curves and costs. There are also lesser known tools like [SmartDraw](#) and [Inkscape](#), among the many.

Quora.com has a good discussion thread on software you can use for creating infographics.

But as the choices get more confusing, circle back to the core of an infographic. The data. With the right data and an accurate idea of what you want to highlight, picking the ideal tool becomes easier. Here again, something nimble like PowerPoint could help you get your toes wet.

## Learn More About Infographics

This article is an attempt to creatively use PowerPoint for making quick (but complete) infographics. I leave it to these online resources to introduce you to the art of making infographics:

- [Lynda.com: Infographics Training Tutorials](#)
- [Infographic How to: Data, Design, Distribute](#)
- [How It's Made: Learn How to Create Your Own Infographic with Designer Mike Wirth](#)
- [Kathy Schrock's Guide to Everything](#)
- [Tuts+ Infographic Tutorials](#)

Watch: [How I create an infographic](#)



# Have You Tried Making an Infographic?

The first self-evaluation you can do right now is by asking yourself this simple question – *Do I love data?*

If the answer is “yes”, you have come to the right show. Now, it’s only a matter of picking the right tool, investing some time in design theory, and sharpening your visual thinking skills. And don’t worry, it doesn’t have to be Microsoft PowerPoint. It can be anything that makes you appreciate the process behind making beautiful infographics. I am sure over time your designs will get better and your logical sense of information along with it.

**Has your information design enthusiasm peaked by now? Have you started your journey of making beautiful infographics, yet? What are the tools you are using? Have you tried Microsoft PowerPoint?**

Image Credit: [Lauren Manning](#) (Flickr); Icons from The Noun Project: [Worker](#) by Juan Pablo Bravo; [Laptop](#) by Hans Gerhard Meier; [User](#) by Luis Prado; [Email](#) by Lorena Salagre; [CIA](#) by Luke Anthony Firth; [Spy](#) by Dan Hetteix.

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