

Using visual aids

This guide will help you use visual aids in your oral presentations to achieve the best impact. Your visual aids should be clear and concise, providing a stimulating addition to your spoken word.

Other useful guides: *Planning an effective presentation*

Introduction

Visual aids can be a very powerful tool to enhance the impact of your presentations. Words and images presented in different formats can appeal directly to your audience's imagination, adding power to your spoken words.

Think of using visual aids for the following reasons:

- if they will save words.
- don't describe your results - show them;
- if their impact would be greater than the spoken word
- don't describe an image - show it.

Think about using a variety of different visual images. Try using photographs, tables, diagrams, charts, drawings, key words, or video sequences. Be creative and deliberate in your choice of images to achieve the most impact.

Think of your next presentation. How can you display your material visually? What techniques might help you present your argument or results in a stimulating way? What might add emphasis to your spoken words?

When to use visual aids

Words and images can be used throughout your presentation from the introduction to the conclusion. However, remember to restrict their use to key moments in your presentation; an over use of visual aids can be hard to follow.

Think about using visual aids at the following times:

Introduction

- display the title of your presentation;
- define particular technical terms or units;
- indicate a structure to your presentation by listing your main points;
- display an image which encapsulates your theme(s);
- highlight a question you intend answering during the course of your presentation;

Main points

- highlight new points with an appropriate image or phrase;
- support technical information with clearly displayed data;
- indicate sequence by linking points together;
- offer evidence from your research to support your argument;

Conclusion

- summarise your main points on a slide;
- present your conclusion in a succinct phrase or image;

- display your key references to allow your audience to read more on your topic.

Different types of visual aids

There are many different types of visual aids. The following advice will help you make the most of those most commonly used.

PowerPoint (or equivalent)

Microsoft PowerPoint is probably now the most commonly used form of visual aid. Used well, it can really help you in your presentation; used badly, however, it can have the opposite effect. The general principles are:

Do	Don't
use a big enough font (minimum 20pt)	make it so small you can't read it
keep the background simple	use a fussy background image
use animations <i>when appropriate</i>	but don't over-do the animation - it gets distracting
make things visual	use endless slides of bulleted lists that all look the same

For more detailed guidance see the [Using PowerPoint](#) study guide

Overhead projector slides/transparencies

Overhead projector slides/transparencies are displayed on the overhead projector (OHP) — a very useful tool found in most lecture and seminar rooms. The OHP projects and enlarges your slides onto a screen or wall without requiring the lights to be dimmed. You can produce your slides in three ways:

- **pre-prepared slides** : these can be words or images either hand written/drawn or produced on a computer;
- **spontaneously produced slides**: these can be written as you speak to illustrate your points or to record comments from the audience;
- **a mixture of each**: try adding to pre-prepared slides when making your presentation to show movement, highlight change or signal detailed interrelationships.

Make sure that the text on your slides is large enough to be read from the back of the room. A useful rule of thumb is to use 18 point text if you are producing slides with text on a computer. This should also help reduce the amount of information on each slide. Avoid giving your audience too much text or overly complicated diagrams to read as this limits their ability to listen. Try to avoid lists of abstract words as these can be misleading or uninformative.

White or black board

White or black boards can be very useful to help explain the sequence of ideas or routines, particularly in the sciences. Use them to clarify your title or to record your key points as you introduce your presentation (this will give you a fixed list to help you recap as you go along). Rather than expecting the audience to follow your spoken description of an experiment or process, write each stage on the board, including any complex terminology or precise references to help your audience take accurate notes. However, once you have written something on the board you will either have to leave it there or rub it off - both can be distracting to your audience. Check to make sure your audience has taken down a reference before rubbing it off - there is nothing more frustrating than not

being given enough time! Avoid leaving out of date material from an earlier point of your presentation on the board as this might confuse your audience. If you do need to write 'live', check that your audience can read your writing.

Paper handouts

Handouts are incredibly useful. Use a handout if your information is too detailed to fit on a slide or if you want your audience to have a full record of your findings. Consider the merits of passing round your handouts at the beginning, middle and end of a presentation. Given too early and they may prove a distraction. Given too late and your audience may have taken too many unnecessary notes. Given out in the middle and your audience will inevitably read rather than listen. One powerful way of avoiding these pitfalls is to give out incomplete handouts at key stages during your presentation. You can then highlight the missing details vocally, encouraging your audience to fill in the gaps.

Flip chart

A flip chart is a large pad of paper on a stand. It is a very useful and flexible way of recording information during your presentation — you can even use pre-prepared sheets for key points. Record information as you go along, keeping one main idea to each sheet. Flip back through the pad to help you recap your main points. Use the turning of a page to show progression from point to point. Remember to make your writing clear and readable and your diagrams as simple as possible.

Video

Video gives you a chance to show stimulating visual information. Use video to bring movement, pictures and sound into your presentation. Always make sure that the clip is directly relevant to your content. Tell your audience what to look for. Avoid showing any more film than you need.

Artefacts or props.

Sometimes it can be very useful to use artefacts or props when making a presentation (think of the safety routine on an aeroplane when the steward shows you how to use the safety equipment). If you bring an artefact with you, make sure that the object can be seen and be prepared to pass it round a small group or move to different areas of a large room to help your audience view it in detail. Remember that this will take time and that when an audience is immersed in looking at an object, they will find it hard to listen to your talk. Conceal large props until you need them; they might distract your audience's attention.

Designing visual aids

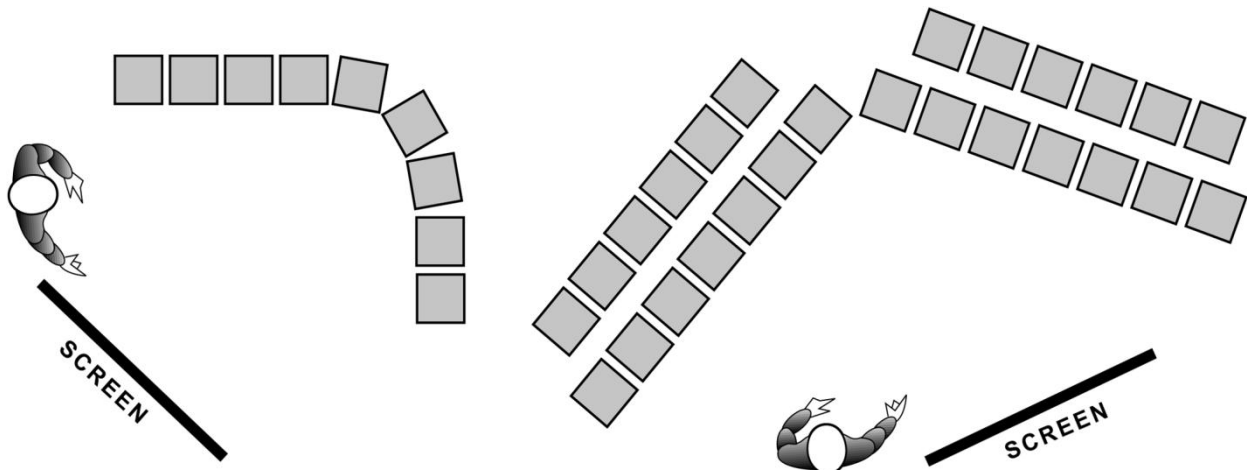
There are many different rules for designing visual aids, some of which will apply directly to different kinds of equipment. In general, sticking to the following guidelines will produce high quality visual images:

- use one simple idea for each visual;
- make the text and diagrams clear and readable;
- avoid cluttering the image;
- keep your images consistent (use the same font, titles, lay out etc. for each image);
- make sure your images are of a high quality (check for spelling and other errors).

Always remember that an audience should be able to understand a visual image in a matter of seconds.

Room layout

Remember that your audience needs to be able to see you as well as your visual aids. Try to involve every member of your audience by changing the layout of your room. Below are some suggested layouts to help maximise contact between you, your audience and your visual aids.



1. Speaking to small audiences

2. Speaking to larger audiences

Try these arrangements in different settings. Use them to create different atmospheres; for example, an intimate setting might suggest an informal tone, whilst placing yourself at a distance might suggest a more formal relationship.

And finally ... practice

Always check your equipment to make sure that it:

- works;
- is a tool you are familiar with (How do you access the slides? How do you change the pad? Should you use permanent or waterproof pens?).

There is nothing worse than a presenter struggling with their visual aids. Be familiar enough with your tools to ensure that you won't be thrown if something goes wrong. A confident use of visual aids will help marry them to your spoken presentation helping them become part of an impressive performance.

Summary

Use visual aids to display complex information clearly and introduce variety into your delivery technique. Make sure that you are familiar with the equipment required to create and display visual aids, and deploy visual aids creatively in your presentations mixing techniques and media to create an impact.

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