

VISUAL AIDS

Use of visual aids and computer presentations can enhance your credibility and persuasion, increase audience interest, focus audience attention and help retention of key points/contents. The exact opposite is also true when visual aids and computer presentations are used poorly.

What is a visual aid?

Visual aids can range from photographs, maps, slides, overheads, flip charts, physical objects and computer presentations using software such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Apple Keynote. Visual aids can:

- say what words can't
- show abstract concepts
- add variety
- keep your audience interested

Can you achieve your purpose without visual aids?

Determine if you really need visual aids. A good speaker doesn't use visual aids or software just for the novelty of it or to meet expectations. Visual aids should increase the audience's understanding of the material – not diminish it.

Speak to your audience – not the visual aid

The PowerPoint screen, overhead projector, poster can't hear you. You should keep your eye contact directed towards the audience instead of the visual aids. As a speaker, you cannot interact with the audience when they are looking in another direction. This commonly occurs when visual aids are used instead of note cards. You are unable to maintain eye contact with your audience, you can appear unprepared and are inarticulate in vocal delivery. Remember that the spoken word remains the most important component of your presentation.

Using Visual Aids

Consider the layout of the room including lighting and plan the positioning of any equipment to the best advantage. Visual images are of little use if the audience cannot clearly see them.

Keep diagrams simple. Use colour to clarify, emphasise and add impact. Do not display an image until you are ready to use it. Do not leave it displayed when it is no longer needed. Unless an image is immediately obvious, give your audience time to understand it. Introduce it and, if necessary, explain it. Then use it to make your point.

If you're using a physical object, it should be large enough for the audience to see and small enough to handle easily. If it is to be shown for more than a few seconds, place it on a high table or stand for it to be seen.

Electronic Presentations

- Portable – can go just about anywhere you or the audience goes
- Can be stored on a laptop, memory stick or even e mailed to a venue
- Offers great display and design options, e.g. animation, colour, sound
- Can include a notes feature that lets you add talking points that only you can see
- Can be operated from the laptop so that you can remain facing the audience
- Can be used in a “presenter” mode so that notes can be seen on the monitor which the audience does not see. This eliminates the need for separate notes being hand held

In electronic presentations, the display of text alone is boring. Text should be brief to have maximum impact. The audience should not be reading all the time. Too much information will result in that outcome. Use “build” up techniques where appropriate. Never stand up in front of an audience and read slides and make sure you do not keep walking in front of any displayed images.

Ensure that you are familiar with the use of any software and computer hardware, laptops. Consider carrying spare equipment or, at the very least, electrical cable long enough to reach electric sockets in the room.

While visual aids can be exciting for both the audience and yourself, you should never plan beyond your technological capabilities. Always know what technology will be available to use at a presentation destination. Even then, have a backup plan!

Supplement, do not supplant, a speech with visual aids. Do not allow visual aids to overwhelm the speech itself. Visual aids are not crutches to lean on, but rather lampposts to illuminate!