

Incorporating Visual Aids

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to use visual aids effectively in your presentation. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Role of Visual Aids

Almost all presentations can be enhanced by the effective use of visual aids. These can include handouts, PowerPoint slides, and many other types of props.

Visual aids are an important nonverbal aspect of your speech that you can control. Once you have chosen a topic, you need to consider how you are going to show your audience what you are talking about.



HINT

Consider how you can express yourself visually, providing common references, illustrations, and images that lead the audience to understand your point or issue.

Visual aids accomplish several goals:

- Making your speech more interesting
- Enhancing your credibility as a speaker
- Serving as guides to transitions, helping the audience stay on track
- Communicating complex or intriguing information in a short period of time
- Reinforcing your verbal message
- Helping the audience use and retain the information

2. Purpose of Visual Aids

Your audience naturally will want to know why you are presenting the visual aid. The purpose for each visual aid should be clear, and almost speak for itself. If you can't quickly grasp the purpose of a visual aid in a speech, you have to honestly consider whether it should be used in the first place.

The following chart demonstrates two of the most common purposes of visual aids.

Purpose	Explanation	Applied Example
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Emphasis	This use of a visual aid can effectively highlight key words, ideas, or relationships for the audience.	If you want to emphasize a trend between two related issues, such as socioeconomic status and educational attainment, a line graph might show effectively how, as socioeconomic status rises, educational attainment also rises.
Support	This use of a visual aid can back up an assertion or argument that you make with evidence.	To support your argument about the relationship between socioeconomic status and educational attainment, you might include on a slide, "According to the U.S. Department of Education Study no. 12345," or even use an image of the Department of Education webpage projected on a large screen. You might also consider showing similar studies in graphic form, illustrating similarities across a wide range of research.

No matter what your purpose for using it is, you must ensure that your visual aid is clear.



BIG IDEA

Visual aids can significantly develop the message of a speech, but they must be used for a specific purpose that the audience can easily recognize.

3. Methods and Materials



THINK ABOUT IT

If you have been asked to give a presentation on a new product idea that a team within your organization is considering, how might you approach the challenge? You may consider a chronological organization pattern, starting with background, current market, and a trend analysis of what is to come— fair enough, but how will you make it vivid for your audience?

How to represent information visually is a significant challenge, and you have several options.

However, all visual aids should meet the following criteria:

- Big: They should be legible for everyone, and should be "back row certified."
- Clear: Your audience should "get it" the first time they see it.
- Simple: They should serve to simplify the concepts they illustrate.
- Consistent: They should reinforce continuity by using the same visual style.

IN CONTEXT

You may choose to use a chart or diagram to show a timeline of events to date, from the first meeting about the proposed product to the results from the latest focus group. This timeline may work for you, but let's say you would like to get into the actual decision-making process that motivated your team to design the product with specific features in the first place. You may decide to use decision trees (or tree diagrams) showing the variables and products in place at the beginning of your discussions, and how each decision led to the next, bringing you to the decision-making point where you are today.

To complement this comprehensive guide and help make a transition to current content areas of

questions, you may use a bar or pie graph to show the percentage of competing products in the market. If you have access to the Internet and a projector, you may use a topographical map showing a three-dimensional rendering of the local areas most likely to find your product attractive. Then you may show a comparable graph illustrating the distribution of products and their relative degree of market penetration.

Finally, you may move to the issue of results, and present the audience with a model of your product and one from a competitor, asking which they prefer. The object may be just the visual aid you need to make your point and reinforce the residual message. When we can see, feel, touch, or be in close proximity to an object, it often has a greater impact. In a world of digital images and special effects, objects presented in real time can still have a positive effect on the audience.

You will want to give some thought to how to portray your chart, graph, or object when it's time to use your visual aids. The chalk or white board is a common way of presenting visual aids, but it can get messy. Many times, there is a better way to display your visual aid.

3a. Handouts and Displays

Flip charts on a pedestal can serve to show a series of steps or break a chart down into its basic components. A poster board is another common way of organizing your visual aids before a speech, but given its often one-time use, it is losing out to the computer screen. It is, however, portable and allows you a large "blank page" with which to express your ideas.

Handouts may also serve to communicate complex or detailed information to the audience, but be careful never to break handout rule number one: Never give handouts to the audience at the beginning of your speech.

Where do you want the audience to look— at you or at the handout? Many novice speakers might be tempted to say the handout, but you will no doubt recognize how that diverts and divides the audience's attention. People will often listen to the words from the handout in their minds and tune you out.



If you need to use a handout, state at the beginning of the speech that you will be providing one at the conclusion of your presentation. This will alleviate the audience's worry about capturing all your content by taking notes, and keep their attention focused on you while you speak.

3b. Technology

Transparencies and slides have been replaced by computer-generated slide show programs like PowerPoint by Microsoft, which we will discuss in greater detail later.



Technology: Apply Your Skill

You have been assigned a project by your supervisor. You need to present some survey results to your team. How would you select the best medium to share your data? Strong technology skills will allow you to both know what your options are and select the best tool for the job.

These programs can be very helpful in presenting visual information, but because computers and projectors sometimes break down and fail to work as planned, you need a Plan B.

➔ **EXAMPLE** You may arrive at your destination and find the equipment is no longer available, is incompatible with your media storage device, or is simply not working, but the show must go on.

Having a backup plan, such as your visuals printed on transparencies, will ensure you are prepared should these unexpected equipment or interface compatibility problems arise.

Video clips, such as those you might find on YouTube, can also be effective visual aids. However, as with handouts, there is one concern: You don't want the audience to want to watch the video more than they want to tune into your presentation.

How do you prevent this? Keep the clip short and make sure it reinforces the central message of your presentation, and always stop speaking before the audience stops listening. The same holds true for the mesmerizing force of moving images on a screen.

People are naturally attracted to them and will get "sucked into" your video example rather quickly. Be a good editor, introduce the clip and state what will happen out loud, point out a key aspect of it to the audience while it plays (overlap), and then make a clear transitional statement as you turn it off.



Transitions are often the hardest part of any speech as the audience can get off track, and video clips are one of the most challenging visual aids you can choose because of their power to attract attention. Use that power wisely.

4. Using PowerPoint as a Visual Aid

PowerPoint is a slideware program that you have no doubt seen used in class, presentations at work, or perhaps used yourself to support a presentation. PowerPoint and similar slideware programs provide templates for creating electronic slides to present visual information to the audience, reinforcing the verbal message.

You'll be able to import, or cut and paste, words from text files, images, or video clips to create slides to represent your ideas. You can even incorporate web links. When using any software program, it's always a good idea to experiment with it long before you intend to use it, explore its many options and functions, and see how it can be an effective tool for you.

When using PowerPoint, there are several important factors to consider:

1. **Your role:** What is the most important visual aid? The answer is you, the speaker. You will facilitate the discussion, give life to the information, and help the audience correlate the content to your goal or purpose. PowerPoint should support you in your presentation, rather than the other way around. Just as there is a number one rule for handouts, there is also one for PowerPoints: Do not use PowerPoints as a read-aloud script for your speech.
2. **Images:** Images will allow you to show graphs and charts and illustrate relationships that words may only approach in terms of communication, but your verbal support of the visual images will make all the difference. Dense pictures or complicated graphics will confuse more than clarify. Choose clear images that have an immediate connection to both your content and the audience, tailored to their specific

needs.

3. **Text:** Consider only key words that can be easily read to accompany your pictures. Do not use full sentences; instead, try to keep each slide to a total word count of less than 10 words. Using key words provides support for your verbal discussion, guiding you as well as your audience. The key words can serve as signposts or signal words related to key ideas.
4. **Color:** When considering your choice of colors to use, legibility must be your priority. Contrast can help the audience read your key terms more easily. Consider repetition of color, from your graphics to your text, to help unify each slide. Colors should be used thoughtfully and sparingly to make a better impact.

5. Other Helpful Hints

As we've discussed, visual aids can be a powerful tool when used effectively, but can also run the risk of dominating your presentation. As a speaker with strong **technology skills**, you will need to consider your audience and how the portrayal of images, text, graphics, animated sequences, or sound files will contribute to or detract from your presentation.

Here is a brief list of hints to keep in mind as you prepare your presentation:

- Keep visual aids simple.
- Use one key idea per slide.
- Avoid clutter, noise, and overwhelming slides.
- Use large, bold fonts that the audience can read from at least 20 feet away.
- Use contrasting colors to create a dynamic effect.
- Use analogous colors to unify your presentation.
- Use clip art with permission and sparingly.
- Edit and proofread each slide with care and caution.
- Make copies of your visuals available as handouts after your presentation.
- Check the presentation room beforehand.
- With a presentation involving technology, have a backup plan.

Becoming proficient at using visual aids takes time and practice. The more you practice before your speech, the more comfortable you will be with your visual aids and the role they serve in illustrating your message. Giving thought to where to place visual aids before speaking helps, but when the time comes to actually give your speech, make sure you reassess your plans and ensure that they work for the audience as they should. Speaking to a visual aid (or reading it to the audience) is not an effective strategy. Know your material well enough that you refer to your visual aids, not rely on them.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about best practices for incorporating visual aids into a presentation. The **role of visual aids** is to increase your audience's interest and their understanding and retention of your message. They often serve the **purpose** of emphasizing or supporting your main points.

When selecting visual aids for your presentation, there are numerous **methods and materials** to consider. As with the message itself, you want to ensure that your choice of aids is appropriate for the

context and audience. Any visual aid should be big (legible), clear, simple, and consistent, whether you are using a **handout or display**, transparencies, slides, video clips that rely on **technology**, or **PowerPoint as a visual aid**. Finally, you learned a list of **other helpful hints** for creating effective visual aids that can enhance your presentation.

Best of luck in your learning!

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