

Visual Aids

Visual aids are items of a visual manner, such as graphs, photographs, video clips etc used in addition to spoken information. Visual aids are chosen depending on their purpose, for example, you may want to:

- Summarise information.
- Reduce the amount of spoken words, for example, you may show a graph of your results rather than reading them out.
- Clarify and show examples.
- Create more of an impact, for example, if your presentation is on the health risks of smoking, you may show images of the effects of smoking on the body rather than describing this. You must consider what type of impact you want to make beforehand - do you want the audience to be sad, happy, angry etc?
- Emphasise what you're saying.
- Make a point memorable.
- Enhance your credibility
- Engage the audience and maintain their interest.
- Make something easier for the audience to understand.

Preparation and use of visual aids

Once you have decided that you want to use a visual aid, you must ensure that the audience is able to quickly understand the image - it must be clear. They can be used throughout your speech but try to only use visual aids for essential points as it can be tiring for the audience to skip from one visual to another.

Preparation

- Think about how can a visual aid can support your message. What do you want the audience to do?
- Ensure that your visual aid follows what you're saying or this will confuse the audience.
- Avoid cluttering the image as it may look messy and unclear.
- Visual aids must be clear, concise and of a high quality.
- Keep the style consistent, such as, the same font, colours, positions etc
- Use graphs and charts to present data.
- The audience should not be trying to read and listen at the same time - use visual aids to highlight your points.
- One message per visual aid, for example, on a slide there should only be one key point.
- Use visual aids in moderation - they are additions meant to emphasise and support main points.
- Ensure that your presentation still works without your visual aids in case of technical problems.
- Practice using the visual aids in advance and ask friends and colleagues for feedback. Ask them whether they can clearly see the visual aid and how they interpret it.

During the presentation

- Ensure that the visual aids can be seen by everyone in the audience.
- Face the audience most of the time rather than the image.
- Avoid reading from the visual aid.
- As soon as you show the visual aid the audience's attention will be drawn to it so you must immediately explain it. You will be ignored if you talk about something else.
- Make it clear to the audience why you are using it.
- When you no longer need the visual aid ensure that the audience can't see it.

Types of visual aids

There are a variety of different types of visual aids, you must decide which will suit your presentation and your audience.

➤ *PowerPoint*

Microsoft PowerPoint is widely used for presentations because it's easy to create attractive and professional presentations and it's simple to modify and reorganise content compared to other visual aids. You can **insert a range of visual items** into the slides which will improve the

audience's focus. Also, the audience can generally see slideshows better than other visual aids and you don't have to face away from them. However, your presentation can look unprofessional if this software is used poorly.

Tips:

1. Have a clear and simple background.
2. Avoid using too many different types of fonts or font sizes.
3. Only use animations for a purpose, such as, to reveal the stages of a process, otherwise this can be distracting and look amateurish.
4. Use a large font size - a minimum of 24pt.
5. Use bullet points to summarise key points.
6. Consider providing handouts of diagrams because the audience will find the diagrams easier to read.
7. Avoid putting too much text on a slide.
8. Avoid using red or green text as it's difficult to read.
9. There should only be one key point for each slide.
10. Always have a back-up plan in case there is a technical issue and you cannot show the visuals on the day, for example, bring handouts or a poster.

➤ *Whiteboards*

Whiteboards are great for providing further explanations, such as, showing the order of a process, creating diagrams or explaining complex words or phrases. They're often used to display headings and write down audience suggestions. Whiteboards are also ideal for displaying important information for the entire duration of the presentation, such as, key definitions, because the audience can just glance at the whiteboard for a reminder.

Tips:

- Ensure that enough time has passed for the audience to take notes before rubbing something off of the whiteboard.
- Write concisely to avoid facing away from the audience for too long.
- Handwriting must be large and legible.
- Practice beforehand as you may feel nervous about writing in front of an audience at the time.

➤ *Handouts*

Handouts are papers that contain key information from your presentation or they may provide further information. They prevent you from overwhelming the audience as there will be less information on the slides and therefore less information they need to write down.

Tips:

You must consider when you want to give the audience the handouts:

- If given at the beginning and middle of your presentation the audience may be reading rather than listening to you or they might not pay attention to what you're saying as they already have the information.
- If given at the end of your presentation the audience may be trying to take lots of notes which may reduce the amount of information they are actually understanding.

To manage this, provide the audience with partially completed handouts so they will have to listen to what you're saying to be able to fill in the gaps. Providing the audience with graphs and charts beforehand is also beneficial because the audience will find them easier to read than, for example, from a slide.

➤ *Video clips*

Using videos are a great way to **engage the audience** and increase their interest. Use video to bring motion, images and audio into your presentation.

Tips:

- Ensure that any videos used are relevant to the presentation's content.
- Only show as much of the video as necessary.
- Never show a really long clip.
- Videos can be difficult to fit into the structure of a presentation so ensure that you tell that audience why you're showing them a clip and tell them what to look for.
- Inform the audience how long the video will last.

➤ *Flip chart*

Flip charts offer a low cost and low tech solution to record and convey information as you speak. They're more beneficial for smaller audiences and they are favoured for brainstorming sessions as you can gather ideas easily. Flip charts are also widely used for summarising information and, like with a whiteboard, you can use them to show permanent background information.

Tips:

- Before your presentation, place the flip chart in a location that you can easily access.
- Prepare any sheets you can in advance, even if you can only write down the headings.
- Flip charts can be moved so you can avoid facing away from the audience - stand next to it and continue to face the audience.
- Have only one main idea per sheet.
- Write legibly, largely and in block capitals so it's more visible.
- Check with the audience that they can read the text - do not use a flipchart if there is a large audience.
- Only write in black and blue ink. Red ink is good for circling or underlining.
- Using a pencil write notes to yourself beforehand so you remember what to include - the audience will not see this writing. Also drawing lines in pencil beforehand can keep your handwriting straight.
- Flip back through the sheets to consolidate points.
- Practice writing on the flip chart advance as you may feel nervous at the time of presenting.

➤ *Posters*

Poster boards can be created using a variety of visual devices, such as graphs and images. They're generally quite portable and you can make them as elaborate as you want. However, they can be expensive to produce if the poster is quite complex.

Tips:

- One poster per message or theme
- Use colour
- Use block capitals
- Avoid using posters when presenting to large audiences as they will not be able to see the content

➤ *Product, objects or artefacts*

Objects can be useful tools for making an impact or even for making a dull topic more interesting. Sometimes they'll be needed for technical and practical reasons, such as, showing a model or conducting an experiment.

Tips:

- If you are presenting to a small audience consider passing the object around but provide enough time so they won't have to divide their attention between the object and what you're saying.
- If the audience is large ensure that you move the object around so everyone sees it.
- The audience will be more distracted from what you're saying when they're looking at the object so keep it hidden until the right time and provide the background information before revealing it.
- Explain why you're using the object.
- If you are conducting an experiment or demonstration, move slowly with exaggerated movements so the audience can follow. Also explain precisely what's going on.