

Consider Visual Aids for Your Informative Speech

Brief: When used appropriately, visual aids can help your audience better understand and pay attention to your main points.

Learning Objective: Apply best practices for using effective visual aids.

Key Terms:

- **Visual Aid:** Visual representation of main points, such as digital slides, posters, objects, or paper handouts, used to supplement oral presentations.

Best Practices for Using Visual Aids

Visual aids, such as digital slides, posters, objects, or paper handouts, are essential to helping your audience better understand and pay attention to your main points. However, it's important to use visual aids in a manner that won't distract from your overall presentation.

Visual Aids Should be Easily Seen by the Audience

Presentation aids must be accessible for every audience member. If those in the back of the room cannot see or otherwise experience a presentation aid, then it is counterproductive to use it. Graphic elements in presentation aids must be large enough to read, just as audio must be loud and clear enough to hear.

Visual Aids Should be Aesthetically Pleasing

The design of your presentation should not detract from the content of your speech. Keep your digital slide presentations simple so people can focus on the content rather than on the animation, colors, or decorative borders. No matter what type of visual aid you're using, have reasons for all the decisions you make. Your audience should perceive your visual aids as carefully planned and executed elements of your speech.

Visual Aids Should Make it Easier to Understand Main Points

If your digital slides or paper handouts have too much extraneous information, your audience may not be able to understand the takeaway message of the presentation. Show your visual aid to someone unfamiliar with your presentation and see if they can decipher your main point. If they cannot determine the key point, check to see if you can eliminate unessential information and revise accordingly.

Visual Aids Should Supplement Your Presentation

Visual aids are useful to help the audience better understand your topic if they are used as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, your presentation. Don't load your digital slide with words and read them verbatim. Instead, enhance your spoken words through supplemental diagrams, graphs, charts, and summaries.

Common Mistakes when Using Visual Aids

Visual Aids Should NOT Include Inconsistency in Color Scheme or Theme

If your visual aid contains inconsistencies in color scheme or theme, the audience may become confused because color change is often used to indicate a change in topic. Consistency in theme and color will help coordinate all of the information and will help your audience understand your main points and sub-points as they relate to each other.

Visual Aids Should NOT Include Small or Complicated Font or Overwhelming Text and Graphics

Avoid using a small font to be sure your audience, even those sitting at the back of the room, can read your visual aids. A general rule of thumb is to make sure that all digital slides use at least 18-point font. Additionally, you should avoid overwhelming text and graphics that are likely to distract from the main topics and points of your presentation.

Visual Aids Should NOT Include Too Many Digital Slides

Try to keep the number of digital slides or visual aids in your presentation to a minimum. Use no more than one slide for every 30 seconds to a minute of your presentation.

Visual Aids Should NOT Include Distracting Animations or Noises

Distracting animations or noises will, inevitably, take the focus of the audience away from your presentation.

From Concept to Action

Show your visual aids to someone unfamiliar with your presentation. Show them only one slide or handout at a time and see if they can decipher your main point. Ask them for constructive feedback. Revise accordingly.

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Do's of Using Visual Aids." Lumen Learning. <https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54339>. Accessed 15 December 2018. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

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