

An Overview of Presentation Aids

Brief: Presentation aids are used to help audiences understand and process information.

Learning Objective: Identify the purpose of presentation aids.

Key Terms:

- Auditory learners: People who learn best by listening to lectures and discussions.
- Kinesthetic learners: People who learn best by doing.
- Mixed modality presentations: Presentations that use more than one learning mode.
- Visual learners: People who learn best by seeing visual aids that use methods other than words, such as graphs, charts, diagrams, and symbols.

Mixed Modality Presentations

Have you ever heard someone identify themselves as a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner? According to the Fleming VAK model, visual learners prefer seeing visual aids that use methods other than words, such as graphs, charts, diagrams, and symbols; auditory learners prefer listening to lectures and discussions; and kinesthetic learners prefer learning via experience and active exploration of the world.

The concept of learning styles is extremely popular, leading many people to think their identified preferred learning style is the only way that they should receive information and learn. In fact, while we all have perceptual preferences, studies suggest that learners receive, retain, and recall more information when they process new information with all of their senses. Evidence suggests that students benefit most from what are referred to as mixed modality presentations, such as those that use both auditory and visual techniques.

While listening to a public speech is necessarily an auditory experience, you can transform your presentation into a mixed modality presentation by incorporating presentation aids. Learning theory—and our own anecdotal evidence—suggests that presentation aids can add interest and depth to a public speech.

Understand Presentation Aids

Presentation aids help audiences understand and process information by adding complementary modalities to the auditory experience of hearing the public speaker's voice. They can come in a variety of forms, including auditory (e.g. a music recording), tactile (e.g. an object passed around the audience), and visual (e.g. a graph displayed on a screen). Though public speakers use a diverse array of presentation aids, the following instruction will focus on visual aids, as they are the most commonly used in public speaking presentations.

The Purpose of Visual Aids

As a public speaker, you will have a wide variety of visual aids to choose from. However, before you consider which visual aid will best help you achieve your goals, it's important to think carefully about the general purpose of a visual aid.

A visual aid should clarify, support, or amplify a key point or sub-point without repeating your speech content. A visual aid shouldn't contain unique, key information that should belong in your speech. For example, if you include important statistical evidence in your visual aid but fail to mention it in your speech, your audience may overlook it. On the other hand, a visual aid shouldn't contain extraneous, tangential information either. If your visual aid contains non-essential information, it can distract the audience from paying attention to the vital information contained within your speech.



Steve Jobs presenting the iPhone 4 in 2010 with the use of a large visual aid

When to Use Visual Aids

In order to keep the audience focused, you only want to present visual aids when you're talking about them. In addition, you only want to use visual aids when you want your audience to focus their attention on them. Though this may seem obvious, it's easy to overwhelm the audience. For example, if you're sharing an emotional personal narrative, you want to hold your audience's full attention until you complete your story. If you show compelling photographs while you're in the middle of telling your story, you may draw your audience's attention too far from your narrative, having the opposite desired effect.

From Concept to Action

Set aside some time to conduct a review of a speech outline you're currently developing. Keeping in mind what you know about the purpose and timing of visual aids, mark two or three sub-points in your outline that could benefit from the use of visual aids. Make some initial notes about how you think visual aids could enhance your presentation.

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Steve Jobs iPhone 4 presentation.jpg." Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Steve_Jobs_iPhone_4_presentation.jpg. Accessed 5 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Choosing the Right Visual Aid." Lumen Learning. <https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54328>. Accessed 5 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"Learning styles." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_styles. Accessed 5 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"Visual learning." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visual_learning. Accessed 5 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]