

Objects as Visual Aids

Brief: Just as a prop in a stage play can further the action of a drama, an object in a public speaking presentation can help bring a concept to life, adding dimension to a flat, abstract idea.

Learning Objective: Understand when and how to use objects as visual aids.

Key Terms:

- **Demonstration speech:** A type of informative speech intended to teach an audience how to complete a task.
- **Model:** A representation used to explain the workings of an object, system, or event.
- **Props:** Items used in stage plays and similar entertainments to further the action.

Objects

In some cases, it may make sense to use actual objects as visual aids to enhance your presentation. Just as a prop in a stage play can further the action of a drama, an object in a public speaking presentation can help bring a concept to life, adding dimension to a flat, abstract idea.

If your speech involves informing your audience about a reasonably-sized object that you own or can borrow, then including it in your presentation is a no-brainer. For example, if you're giving a speech about wearable technology and own a Fitbit, by all means wear it to your speech and show it to your audience. In this case, seeing a real-life example of wearable technology will help your audience members understand what you're talking about.



A FitBit, an example of wearable technology

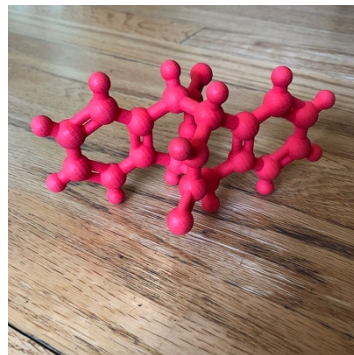
For an object to be effective as a presentation, it—like any other visual aid—must be easily seen and understood by your audience. Unlike a two-dimensional image that can easily be projected and magnified on a screen, a physical object is typically more difficult for audience members to view. When considering using an object as a visual aid, take into consideration the size of the speech venue, as well as the size of your audience. Objects work better in smaller spaces in which the audience has a close-up view of your presentation.

3-D Models

A model is a representation used to explain the workings of an object, system, or event. Though three-dimensional models can be difficult to create or obtain, they can help audience members

understand things that are typically hidden from view (e.g. the human skeletal system); things that are very large (e.g. the solar system); as well as things that are unique, difficult, or impossible to show in real life (e.g. a dinosaur).

Though models can be powerful tools to help the audience understand an unfamiliar or difficult concept, they necessarily warp reality. If you're using a 3D model of a molecule to help the audience understand the structure of a molecule, for example, be sure to point out the ways in which the model differs from the real thing (e.g. in size or complexity).



A 3D model of a molecule

Demonstration Speeches

Objects are often used as visual aids in demonstration speeches. Most how-to speeches use visual examples that show the audience how to move from step to step through a particular process or activity. For example, if you were giving a speech about tying knots, it would be more effective to bring in a rope as a prop than to simply show a photograph or a series of photographs to the audience.

While tying a knot is a relatively straightforward activity, many processes are more complex. If you're demonstrating how to decorate a cake, it would make sense to use objects—a cake, frosting, and cake decorating supplies—to show your audience each of the steps. Decorating a cake from start to finish can be a time-consuming task that requires significant concentration, though, so you probably don't want to show your audience the full process from start to finish. In this case, you could demonstrate the key aspects of the process and then reveal a pre-prepared fully decorated cake at the end of your speech. In any case, you want to make sure that you do not disrupt or derail your speech by being overly ambitious with your speech props.

From Concept to Action

Consider a how-to demonstration that you've watched, either in person, on television, or on YouTube. How did the prop or props enhance the demonstration? And how, if at all, did they detract from the explanation? Was the demonstration relatively straightforward? Or did the speaker have to get creative in order to show a complex task? If so, how?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"ANULAR.jpg." Wikimedia Commons. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ANULAR.jpg>. 5 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 4.0]

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"Adapting to Handouts and Visuals." <https://lumen.instructure.com/courses/218897/pages/linkedtext54281>. 5 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"model." Wiktionary. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/model>. 5 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

"prop." Wiktionary. https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/theatrical_prop. Accessed 1 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

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