



Visual Aids

Handouts

- Handouts really shouldn't be used as visual aids unless you intend for your audience to interact with them during your speech. One example of this might be having your audience complete a questionnaire before you speak to get them thinking about the subject.
- If you use handouts for your speech, be careful about when you hand them out. Your audience's immediate attention will go to the handout, and they will tune you out. If you really need to give a handout in the middle of your speech, plan to pause until their attention can be regained.
- If your handouts give information that you cannot cover in the speech—such as a list of Web sites for more information—give them out once you're done.

Posters

- Pictures and text on a poster should be large enough for an audience in back of your venue to see.
- Limit text and graphics as much as possible. The more "white" space the better.
- Be sure that you actually refer to the poster during your speech. If you never point to it or even look at it during your speech, it will only be a distraction to the audience.
- Avoid using your poster as your outline or notes. Once your audience keys into the fact that your visual aid is the basic structure of your speech, they may become bored.

Props

- Artifacts such as a golf club to demonstrate a putting technique or a pair of spoons to show your audience how to get started playing them as an instrument can be very effective as visual aids.
- Be sure to actually use the prop during your speech; otherwise, your audience will be left wondering why you brought it in.
- Practice your speech using your prop(s) several times so that you create the muscle memory that will make that part of your speech completely natural even though you may be nervous.

Software Presentations

- Avoid bullet points at all costs. When you use bullets, they basically become the outline or notes of your speech. And if you read them to your audience, they will catch on quickly and stop listening. This is known as "death by Powerpoint" for a reason.
- Use the software to present visual information. Don't use slides to present your main points—these should be obvious from your actual speech.
- Use no more than five slides for a 10-minute presentation.
- Make sure each slide has lots of "white" space.
- Sound is fine, but make sure it doesn't drown you out as you speak.
- Graphics and text should be large enough for people in the back to see. All text should be in 18-point font or larger, depending on the font.
- Be sure to practice with the software a few times while giving your speech.
- Your software program may not be compatible with the technology available, or you may find the technology isn't working on the day of your speech. Have a back up plan!

What to Avoid

A visual aid that...

- Seems to have no purpose to your presentation.
- Can't be seen from a distance.
- Is too full of information or lacks "white" space.
- Appears messy.
- Contains obvious errors.
- Is so fundamental to your speech, you can't give the presentation without it.
- Might be offensive to the audience.