DIFFERENT TYPES OF VISUAL AIDS

There are many different types of visual aids. The following advice will help you make the most of those most commonly used.

POWERPOINT (OR EQUIVALENT)
Microsoft PowerPoint is probably now the most commonly used form of visual aid. Used well, it can really help you in your presentation; used badly, however, it can have the opposite effect. The general principles are:

Do	Don't
use a big enough font (minimum 20pt)	make it so small you can't read it
keep the background simple	use a fussy background image
use animations *when appropriate*	but don't over-do the animation - it gets distracting
make things visual	use endless slides of bulleted lists that all look the same

OVERHEAD PROJECTOR SLIDES/TRANSPARENCIES
Overhead projector slides/transparencies are displayed on the overhead projector (OHP) - a very useful tool found in most lecture and seminar rooms. The OHP projects and enlarges your slides onto a screen or wall without requiring the lights to be dimmed. You can produce your slides in three ways:

- Pre-prepared slides : these can be words or images either hand written/drawn or produced on a computer;
- Spontaneously produced slides: these can be written as you speak to illustrate your points or to record comments from the audience;
- A mixture of each: try adding to pre-prepared slides when making your presentation to show movement, highlight change or signal detailed interrelationships.

Make sure that the text on your slides is large enough to be read from the back of the room. A useful rule of thumb is to use 18 point text if you are producing slides with text on a computer. This should also help reduce the amount of information on each slide. Avoid giving your audience too much text or overly complicated diagrams to read as this limits their ability to listen. Try to avoid lists of abstract words as these can be misleading or uninformative.

WHITE OR BLACK BOARD
White or black boards can be very useful to help explain the sequence of ideas or routines, particularly in the sciences. Use them to clarify your title or to record your key points as you introduce your presentation (this will give you a fixed list to help you recap as you go along). Rather than expecting the audience to follow your spoken description of an experiment or process, write each stage on the board, including any complex terminology or precise references to help your audience take accurate notes. However, once you have written something on the board you will either have to leave it there or rub it off - both can be distracting to your audience. Check to make sure your audience has taken down a reference before rubbing it off - there is nothing more frustrating than not being given enough time! Avoid leaving out of date material from an earlier point of your presentation on the board as this might confuse your audience. If you do need to write 'live', check that your audience can read your writing.

PAPER HANDOUTS
Handouts are incredibly useful. Use a handout if your information is too detailed to fit on a slide or if you want your audience to have a full record of your findings. Consider the merits of passing round your handouts at the beginning, middle and end of a presentation. Given too early and they may prove a distraction. Given too late and your audience may have taken too many unnecessary notes. Given out in the middle and your audience will inevitably read rather than listen. One powerful way of avoiding these pitfalls is to give out incomplete handouts at key stages during your presentation. You can then highlight the missing details vocally, encouraging your audience to fill in the gaps.

FLIP CHART
A flip chart is a large pad of paper on a stand. It is a very useful and flexible way of recording information during your presentation - you can even use pre-prepared sheets for key points. Record information as you go along, keeping one main idea to each sheet. Flip back through the pad to help you recap your main points. Use the turning of a page to show progression from point to point. Remember to make your writing clear and readable and your diagrams as simple as possible.

VIDEO (DVD OR VHS)
Video gives you a chance to show stimulating visual information. Use video to bring movement, pictures and sound into your presentation. Always make sure that the clip is directly relevant to your content. Tell your audience what to look for. Avoid showing any more film than you need.

ARTEFACTS OR PROPS
Sometimes it can be very useful to use artefacts or props when making a presentation (think of the safety routine on an aeroplane when the steward shows you how to use the safety equipment). If you bring an artefact with you, make sure that the object can be seen and be

prepared to pass it round a small group or move to different areas of a large room to help your audience view it in detail. Remember that this will take time and that when an audience is immersed in looking at an object, they will find it hard to listen to your talk. Conceal large props until you need them; they might distract your audience's attention.

USING VISUAL AIDS DURING A PRESENTATION OR TRAINING SESSION

Visual aids can enhance your presentations - they can increase the audience's understanding of your topic, explain points, make an impact and create enthusiasm. It has become more important to make information visual:

"Something is happening. We are becoming a visually mediated society. For many, understanding of the world is being accomplished, not through words, but by reading images" - (*Lester, 2006*)

In this article, we discuss how to use visual aids for presentations or training sessions.

What are 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.

TAILOR TO YOUR AUDIENCE
Choose your visual aids tactically so you appeal to your audience. This means finding images your audience can relate to, images they will find familiar and images they will like. Also think about what style of visual aid is suitable for the audience; is it quite a serious presentation? Can you be humorous? Is it more formal or informal?

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 wait 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

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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.

KEY POINTS FOR USING VISUAL AIDS

1. Try to find out what the presentation room is like beforehand, such as, the layout of the room, the equipment etc, so you can see if your visual aids are appropriate and whether they will work there but always have a contingency plan regardless. Also remember that the audience should be able to understand an image almost immediately.
2. Practice: Before your presentation, ensure that you practice with your visual aids so you know how to operate the equipment. If something goes wrong you'll have a better chance of solving the problem.
3. Use colour: Research suggests that using colour increases people's motivation to read and their enthusiasm for a presentation. Software like PowerPoint is great for producing colour visuals. Using the colour wheel can help when choosing your presentation's colours:
   - Colours opposite each other in the wheel are complementary and they create contrast. Using complementary colours makes your text more readable.
   - Colours next to each other are analogous and they are harmonious. Using analogous colours makes your presentation more unified.
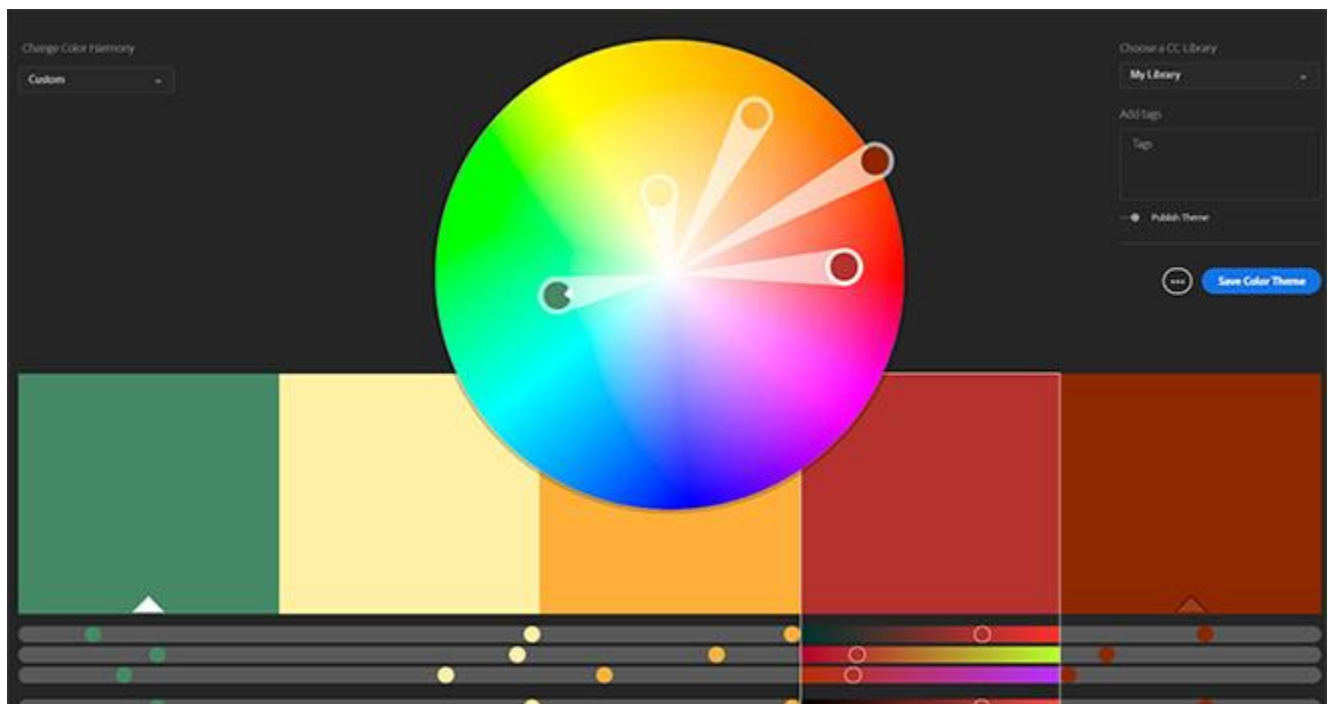
The Adobe colour wheel, which helps you pick complementary colours for your presentation design.

4. Avoid using too many colours in your presentation as this can look cluttered and unprofessional and keep your colour themes continuous, for example, if you highlight all the key words on one slide in blue, continue to do this throughout the presentation. Also be careful with colour associations, for example, in many cultures red is linked to danger. Try to represent your words and topics with colours that make sense and are appropriate. Many people are blue-green or red-green colour-blind so avoid putting these colours next to each other's in, for example, a graph. If you cannot avoid placing these colours next to each other then use text to clearly label items.

5. Evidence: Research suggests that information displayed visually is well remembered: "retention of information three days after a meeting or other event is six times greater when information is presented by visual and oral means than when the information is presented by the spoken word alone." (U.S. Department of Labor OSHA Office of Training and Education, 1996). There is also significant evidence suggesting that most learning occurs visually - some researchers suggest that 83% of human learning happens visually. The psychologist Bruner conducted multiple studies which suggest that people remember 80% of what they see and do, 20% of what they read and only 10% of what they hear.

IN SUMMARY
Visual aids are worth including in your presentations because they can help you explain information more coherently which makes presenting easier for you and learning easier for the audience. They also help add variety to your presentation thus making it more interesting for the audience. If the audience understand what you're saying and they are more engaged, they're more likely to be persuaded by you.