Visual Aid Design

2019-09-12

Note: A version of the activity used in this lesson was presented at the 2018 Southern States Communication Association Conference. See it here!

Course(s) Used:

- Public Speaking
- Science and Technical Communication

Goals and Objectives:

- Students can identify fundamentals of good slide design.
- Students can identify the problems with the typical topic phrase and bullet list presentation aid.
- Students are able to use the assertion-evidence structure effectively.

Rationale: Many students have difficulty using visual aids properly. Most students have been exposed to poor-quality topic and bullet list visual aids throughout their entire time in education. This lesson walks students at the 100 level through the process of designing effective slides using visual forms of different evidence.

Materials Needed

Materials:

- Slides Against Humanity decks
- One deck with blanks
- One deck with answers

Technology:

- Computer Lab

Outline of the Lesson

1. Review of previous session's content
2. Lesson opening
3. Typesetting
    1. Colors
    2. Size
    3. Fonts

    4. Font effects (shadow, bold, etc.)
    5. No text should ever be longer than two lines.
4. Effects[1]
    1. Slide Transitions
    2. Sounds
    3. Animations
5. The **Topic Phrase and Bullet List Structure is Bad**
6. The **Assertion-evidence Structure is Good!**
    1. Full-sentence assertion paired with visual evidence.
    2. Improved audience understanding of the topic[2]
    3. **Improved *presenter* understanding** of the topic[3]
    4. Types of visual evidence
        1. Photographs, Images, Recordings (that is, things)
        2. Graphs, Charts, Diagrams (numbers, presented visually)
        3. Direct quotes (peoples' words)[4]
        4. Stories/Narratives[5]
        5. Visual evidence **must be cited visually**
7. Hands-on group work: Slides Against Humanity[6]
    1. Separate student into two groups.
    2. Deal out cards to students
        - Group A gets cards from the deck with blanks
        - Group B gets cards from the answer deck
    3. Create pairs of students, one from group A and one from group B.
    4. The students combine their cards to get a full-sentence assertion
    5. Students work together in pairs to create three content slides that provide visual evidence for assertions which support their claim.
        - Students use an image as visual evidence
        - Students use a chart or graph as visual evidence
        - Students use a brief direct quotation as visual evidence
    6. Students present the slides that they have created
    7. Debrief the activity
8. Lesson closing

Limitations

This lesson requires student access to online resources and personal computers. Strategic grouping may be necessary for improved peer mentoring.

[1] Effects should only be used in your visual aid if they *add meaning* to the presentation.

[2] Garner, J. K., & Alley, M. P. (2013). How the Design of Presentation Slides Affects Audience Comprehension: A Case for the Assertion–Evidence Approach. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, *29*(6), 1564–1579.

[3] Garner, J. K., & Alley, M. P. (2016). Slide Structure Can Influence the Presenter's Understanding of the Presentation's Content. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, *32*(1), 39–54.

[4] Quotations are only visual evidence if they actually *are evidence for* the claim you are making. Quotes that are pretty neat and kind-of related are not evidence. You should avoid using quotes like those in the body of your presentation.

[5] When stories/narratives are used as examples, they typically are supported by multiple slides, often with other forms of visual evidence (pictures, charts, quotations, etc.).

[6] This original teaching activity was presented at the 2018 Southern States Communication Association Conference. See more information here!

Variations and Accommodations

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities. Students for whom technology usage will present an unreasonable burden may be accommodated on an individual basis. Students may be placed in groups strategically if needed.