Get Comfortable with Visual Aids

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Visual aids help an audience understand and remember what they hear; they are a valuable tool for speakers. The most popular visual aids are computer-based visuals, overhead transparencies, flip charts, whiteboards and props.

The type of visual aid you choose depends on several factors, including the information you wish to display and the size of the audience. Visuals must be appropriate for your message and the audience, and be displayed correctly with ease and confidence.

OBJECTIVES:

- Select visual aids that are appropriate for your message and the audience.
- Use visual aids correctly with ease and confidence.

Time: Five to seven minutes

Projects 2 and 7 mentioned visual aids as one type of support material for a speech. Because people remember best what they simultaneously see and hear, visual aids are powerful tools for a speaker.
They offer five benefits:

1. **They increase understanding.** Ours is a visual age. Most of what we learn is ingested through our eyes - not our ears. Visual aids help you convey messages in the dimension best suited to clear understanding.

2. **They save time.** Information presented visually is received and processed by the brain faster than a verbal message. Visual aids are especially useful in helping people quickly understand complex or abstract ideas.

3. **They enhance retention.** People remember an average of just 10 percent of a spoken message a week after it is presented. However, they remember up to two thirds of what they both see and hear.

4. **They promote attentiveness.** People think much faster than you speak, so their minds tend to wander during a speech. Visuals help keep them focused on your message; they also add variety and interest to a presentation.

5. **They help control nervousness.** Displaying visual aids gives you purposeful physical activity that lets your body process nervous energy without distracting the audience.

Selecting the Right Visual Aid

The most common visual aids are computer-based aids, overhead transparencies, flip charts, whiteboards and props. Your choice for a particular speech depends on several factors, including:

- The information you wish to convey

- The size of the audience

- The equipment available to you

- The time available to prepare visuals

- The amount of money you can afford to spend

Computer-based visuals. The technology for computer-based visual presentations is rapidly changing. Using a laptop computer, presentation software, a screen and other equipment, you can produce and display dramatic visual aids, including animation and simulations. Computer-based visuals are becoming the standard for most presentations. They can be used for large and small audiences and can convey simple as well as complex information. If you use a remote control, you can change the visuals while walking about the room, giving you more freedom of movement. However, the equipment needed can be expensive to purchase or rent and, like most electronic equipment, sensitive. Plan to devote plenty of time to creating the visuals in advance, to making

sure all of the electronic components work together and to rehearsing with them. Have a backup plan in case technical problems occur during the presentation.

Overhead transparencies. While not as high-tech as computer-based visuals and clumsy to use, overhead transparencies work well for small audiences and are inexpensive to make. They require only a projector and a screen to use, and many meeting facilities have the equipment available for a small fee. Transparencies can easily be produced on a computer and printed on a laser printer or copy machine. You also can write on the transparencies as you speak and use colored markers on them.

Flip Charts. Flip charts are used for small group trainings or briefings and for brainstorming sessions. They are great for recording audience responses, but you can also use them to display information. You can prepare flip chart pages in advance, but you have the flexibility to add to them as you speak. Write on every second or third page - so succeeding visuals won't show through - using colorful crayons or markers. During your presentation you can then tear pages from the pad and tape them to the wall for display.

Whiteboards. These are available in many meeting rooms. They are useful for small audiences, allowing you to display simple lists, graphs and diagrams and to record audience responses. However, they require thorough cleaning before each use and you can't save the material on the board unless you transcribe it to a computer or paper.

Props. A prop is an object that contributes to your speech. It can be a book, a ball, a tool, a model or any other item that helps you make your point or helps the audience to better understand and remember your message. You may need a table to place a prop on when you are not using it, and perhaps a cloth to cover the prop from view until you need it.

When to Use Them

Visual aids are intended to complement a presentation, not to be the presentation. Charts, graphs, diagrams, models, pictures and printed words can stimulate your audience and increase their retention of your material. But you don't need a visual aid for every sentence you say or every point you make. If you emphasize everything, then nothing seems important! You should use them only:

- **To reinforce** a **main point.** A visual aid tells the audience that what you just said, or are about to say, is important and something they should remember.
- **To enhance understanding/remembrance of complex material.** Visual aids help the audience understand things such as relationships, construction and statistics.
- **To save time.** Sometimes the same message is communicated faster and better through visuals rather than spoken words.

Some people use visual aids as prompts for their presentations, relying on them as notes. Visual aids do not replace preparation. You still must be so thoroughly familiar with your presentation that you can give it even without using visual aids.

Design Guidelines

To be effective, visual aids should be easy to read and understand as well as pleasing to view. Whatever types of aids you are creating or using, consider the following guidelines:

- **Make them visible.** Everyone in the room must be able to see your visual aid. Use the largest possible lettering and both upper and lower cases. Use blank space to make text stand out.

- **Limit each visual to only one main thought or point.** More than one point distracts the audience.

- **Use no more than six lines of text and no more** than six **words per line per** visual. This keeps the text big enough for the audience to read.

- **Keep them simple.** Avoid cluttering a visual aid with too much artwork or fancy graphics. Your audience should be able to quickly grasp the visual aid's point.

- **Use color carefully.** Colors add interest and improve retention. Choose colors that enhance readability. For example, black letters on a dark blue background are difficult to read. Avoid using too many colors; two or three are enough.

- **Make them consistent.** Including some consistent design elements, such as font, colors and/or artwork, will make your visual aids more pleasing to the eye.

- **Use different types of aids.** Variety adds interest. If you're giving a presentation with computer-based visuals, for example, follow a bar chart with a text visual or a diagram.

Proofread all visuals for spelling and grammar. If your visual is a graph, table, chart or diagram, be sure to title it so the audience knows what it is.

Display Tips

Using visual aids successfully requires practice. Displaying them too soon, too late or too quickly will decrease their impact. Consider these tips:

1. **Display a visual just before you are ready to talk about it.** Your audience will look at a visual the moment you display it. Pause, giving the audience time to read and comprehend it, then begin discussing the point.
2. **Maintain eye contact** with the audience as you display the visual. Don't talk to the screen or flip chart or read from it.
3. **Display it long enough.** Show the visual as long as it takes you to discuss the point it makes, then remove it. If you are using an overhead projector, display black or opaque transparencies between visuals to avoid showing a bright white screen. Don't continue to show a visual after you have moved on to a new point.
4. **Don't block the visual.** The entire audience must be able to see it. If you're projecting a visual onto a screen or using a flip chart, stand off to the left side. To point out something on the screen or chart, use your left hand or a pointer. If you're holding an object for the audience to see, display it to the left or right of your body.
5. **Don't write as you speak.** If you're writing on a flip chart or overhead transparency, pause as you write. Then turn back to the audience and begin to speak.
6. **Display the correct visual.** If you forget part of your presentation or present material out of sequence, you may unwittingly display the wrong visual. If possible, before you display a visual, check that it is the correct one.
7. **Have them ready.** Before your presentation, check the room to make sure listeners will have clear views of your visual aids. Put them in place and ready for use. Double-check any electronic equipment to make sure it is functioning.
8. **Rehearse.** Practice with your visuals until you can display them smoothly and confidently.

Have a Backup Plan

If you are using computer-based visuals, an overhead projector or other electronic equipment, be prepared for technical failures. If something goes wrong, keep speaking and don't waste the audience's time while you try to replace a burned-out light bulb or change a cable. If necessary or appropriate, have paper copies of your visuals ready to distribute to the audience.

Your Assignment

This project focuses on visual aids. You are to:

- Select a speech subject that allows you to use two or more visual aids.

- Select visual aids that are appropriate for your message and the audience.

- Display the visual aids correctly with ease and confidence.

Be sure to incorporate what you learned in previous projects about purpose, organization, word usage, body language, vocal variety and research and use appropriate suggestions from the evaluations you received. Review the Speaker's Checklist in Project 1 as you prepare your speech. You may want to read the book *The Toastmasters International Guide to Powerful Audio/Visual Presentations* (Catalog No. B97) for more information on using visual aids.

Evaluation Guide for

Get Comfortable with Visual Aids

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date_____

NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR: *The speaker is to present a speech that uses two or more visual aids. The visual aids selected must be appropriate for the message and audience, and be displayed correctly with ease and confidence. The speaker is to incorporate what he or she has learned in previous projects about purpose, organization, word usage, body language and vocal variety. The speaker also is to use appropriate suggestions from the evaluations received and thoroughly research the subject. Please complete this evaluation form by checking the appropriate column for each item. Add comments for items where special praise is warranted or where you can offer specific suggestions for improvement.*

	EXCELLENT	SATISFACTORY	COULD IMPROVE	COMMENTS/ SUGGESTIONS
• Were the visual aids appropriate for the speech and message?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did each visual aid help you to understand and remember the speaker's point?	_____	_____	_____	
• Was each visual aid clearly visible?	_____	_____	_____	
• If the speaker used computer-based visuals or overhead transparencies, was each visual easy to read and well-designed?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use the visual aids smoothly and with confidence?	_____	_____	_____	
• How clear was the speaker's purpose?	_____	_____	_____	
• Did the speaker use body language to reinforce the message?	_____	_____	_____	
• Was the speaker's word choice effective and appropriate?	_____	_____	_____	
• Was the speech well-researched?	_____	_____	_____	

• What could the speaker have done differently to make the speech more effective?

• What did you like about the speech?