DOUGLASCOLLEGE

Learning Centre

USING VISUALS IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Visuals can be extremely useful for oral presentations. Visuals can include photographs, cartoons, diagrams, video, graphs/charts and written words. They can:

- Help you to engage your listeners
- Clarify the organization of your presentation
- Emphasize the main points of your presentation
- Help listeners understand you better
- Reduce your feelings of nervousness.

Visuals can be a problem as well as an asset. Visuals can distract your audience from what you are saying. You can also get too focused on your visuals and spend your time looking at them instead of looking at your audience. For these reasons, it's good to keep your visuals out of sight except when they are needed in the presentation. Another risk is that you try to get your visuals to make your presentation for you. Visuals need to augment your verbal presentation of ideas, not replace it.

Visuals can come in many forms. Different kinds of visual material and tips for making them most productive for your presentation are discussed below.

Overhead Transparencies

- You can photocopy a paper copy onto a transparency. Alternatively, you can write directly on the transparency using special transparency pens. Both transparencies and transparency pens are for sale in the college bookstore.
- When you put words on transparencies, be sure they are big enough for your audience to read – 16 pt font is generally a minimum size. For ease of reading, use Arial font and use both upper and lower case letters, not just caps or just lower case.
- Don't put too many ideas or too many words on a transparency. A good rule of thumb is to limit a transparency to 6 lines of text and 6 words per line.
- Transparencies are slippery, so number them in case you drop them.
- All classrooms in the college should have overhead projectors in them. Before your presentation, check to make sure the projector works and practice using it. While presenting, be careful not to stand between the projector and the screen.
- You can gradually reveal information on a transparency by covering some material with a piece of paper.

- If you want to point to things on your transparencies, put a pen on the transparency pointing to the desired information. If you use your finger and you are nervous, your shaking finger is magnified for your audience.

PowerPoint Slides

PowerPoint slides are created on the computer using a Microsoft program called PowerPoint. With PowerPoint slides, you should follow the same principle of limiting the number of words and lines per slide that are discussed above in relation to overhead transparencies. (For more on PowerPoint, see Learning Centre handout RS8.31 Creating a PowerPoint Presentation.)

An important concern about using PowerPoint is that it is easy to let PowerPoint take over the presentation instead of augmenting it. For this reason, if you can, avoid using PowerPoint for your first few oral presentations. If you must use PowerPoint, limit yourself to a few slides only.

Video/Film

Use video or film very sparingly. It must not make your presentation for you. You need to make all your points yourself. The video/film should only be used to augment or illustrate a point.
- If your classroom does not have the equipment you need, borrow it from the Audio Visual Equipment desk in the Library. Reserve your equipment ahead of time.
- Always preview the video or film ahead of time. Some material sounds perfect according to its description in the catalogue but may not be a good fit for your presentation.
- Use short segments only (preferably under 2 minutes).
- Be sure any segment you use is really relevant to your point.
- You need to both introduce and follow up on any segment you use. Before you show it, make clear why you are showing it and what you hope your listeners will get out of it. After showing the clip, discuss how it relates to your point.

Whiteboard or Flipchart

- Practice ahead; make sure you write big enough for everyone to read.
- Write main ideas only.
- Give some thought ahead of time to how you want to organize the information on the board or on the flipchart sheets. If you start in the wrong place on the whiteboard and you have quite a lot to write, you can end up in a mess.
- Don't record a lot of information on the board ahead of time; listeners may focus on what you've written instead of on what you are saying.
- If there is discussion, record audience ideas as well as your own.
- Your classroom should have a whiteboard and your instructor should have pens for you to use.
- Flipcharts and flipchart paper can be borrowed from the Audio Visual Equipment desk in the Library. Be sure to use pens that are thick enough for all to read.

Handouts

- Simple handouts can be given before or during the presentation. More detailed ones should be given out only after the presentation is over. Otherwise, your listeners may get distracted and focus on reading instead of on you.
- Handouts should not have too much text on them. Include headings and plenty of white space. Densely packed handouts are not very inviting.

Other related Learning Centre handouts:
RS8.10   Preparing for an Oral Presentation
RS8.20   Organizing an Oral Presentation
RS8.40   Dealing with Nervousness in Oral Presentations