

Visual Aids and Speaking Tips for Program Presenters

Visual aids should support and enhance the message you are trying to deliver, not impede or upstage it. Visual aids should demonstrate relationships, emphasize ideas, and clarify structure more quickly and more clearly than presenting without them. The suggestions here will help make your presentation a success

1. Make Visual Aids Legible

No matter how much time and money you've put into the production of your visual aids, it's wasted if your audience can't read them. If it's important enough to be a visual, it's important enough to be legible. No one in your audience will complain if the lettering is too big; but they will if it's too small. You should never have to say "I know you can't see this, but" Please respect your audience by using quality visual aids. To ensure that your visual aids will be legible:

- Use 24-point type for lettering done in ALL CAPITALS and 32-point for lettering in Capitals and Lowercase
- Use a sans serif typeface such as Helvetica, Arial, or Universal.
- Do not crowd too much information on a slide.

2. Keep Visual Aids Simple

Visual aids used in a presentation must be twice as simple and four times as bold as those used in a written report. Be brutal with details:

- Round off numbers; cut decimal places.
- Use a scale along either the horizontal or vertical axis of a graph, bar chart, or column chart instead of numbers at the ends of the bars or columns.
- Substitute symbols for words: \$ is better than "dollars"; % is better than "percent."
- Abbreviate where possible without creating confusion.
- Delete footnotes; introduce the information as part of what you say if it's important enough to mention.
- Omit lines that detract: avoid underlines, excessive grid rulings, unnecessary outlines, and company logos.
- Choose a background and graphics that are consistent with your message, and then use them consistently. Many of the templates available in presentation software programs are not appropriate for business or technical presentations. Using too many different backgrounds is distracting and detracts from your message.
- Use "special effects" (such as flying graphics and multiple transitions per slide) sparingly to avoid distracting the audience from your message. Minimizing transitions within a slide is important if someone else will be advancing your slides for you.
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3. Use Text Visuals Sparingly

Avoid using filling slides with text that you then use as cue cards or crutches for what you're going to say. Put that text in the notes you'll refer to as you speak. Use very short text visuals only to structure a complex concept or to emphasize groups of ideas, such as 3 conclusions, 4 recommendations, and 5 next steps.

4. Don't Use Slides to Evade Time Limits

Each speaker has a limited amount of time; time limits should be respected for the sake of other speakers and the audience. Count on needing 3-4 minutes per slide, using the tips outlined in this document. Don't try to cram more information on each slide to get more information across. This will only extend the presentation and violate the time limit without improving communication.

5. Use Color with Purpose

Color is not merely a decoration. It can be used to enhance the effectiveness of your presentation, for example:

- To emphasize a trend line, a component, a row of data, a title;
- To identify a recurring theme throughout the presentation (display related data in the same color);
- To distinguish actual from projected, one trend from another;
- To symbolize the meaning of a word ("losses" in red, "Go" in green);
- Use contrasting colors – dark lettering on a light background is most readable. Avoid pastels;
- Strong visual contrast is critical – many people have trouble distinguishing between closely related colors; many people cannot easily distinguish red and green;
- Too many colors in a single visual will reduce contrast and legibility. Generally, use no more than four colors in a single visual.

Speaking Tips

Talk to Your Audience, Don't Read Them a Paper

Think of this as a communication with your audience, rather than a presentation to the audience. Spend more time with the audience than with your paper: make eye contact with people around the room. Speak clearly and avoid monotone. Let your confidence, conviction, and enthusiasm show.

Be Natural, Not Perfect

Don't be afraid to make mistakes, to say the wrong thing at the wrong time, to forget an important point, or to have no answer for a question. Mistakes are unavoidable; suffering is optional. Better to be your comfortable best self than try to be perfect.

Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse

Rehearse before the presentation—during it is too late. Time your presentation to keep within your allotted time! Help the presiding officer, yourself, and your audience by sticking to your allotted speaking time (generally 20 minutes-15 for presentation, 5 for questions).

Encourage Questions

Be glad your audience is asking questions; it shows they're paying attention.

- Be patient and listen to the question without stepping on the questioner's words.
- Pause before responding; don't rush your answer. Make the questioner feel that the question was important enough for you to think about an answer.
- Repeat the question into the microphone so that everyone in the room knows what it is.
- Answer only the question that's been asked—no more and no less.
- Make eye contact with others in the room, not only the person who asked the question.

Seek Feedback

Ask for feedback on your visual aids and presentation style from the session moderator, committee members, audiovisual technician, or TRB staff.

Humor

Humor can be an effective tool for establishing rapport with your audience or making a point. Humor can do more harm than good, however, if it offends or denigrates others. Any joke you tell should be in good taste and appropriate for the topic. Your presentation should be remembered for the information it conveys, rather than for the jokes it contains.