

This guide looks at the second element of delivering a presentation successfully: creating effective visual aids, usually in the form of slides. Visual aids provide an effective way of enhancing the spoken element of your presentation. Good visual aids will complement the content of your presentation rather than distract the audience from it. These aids usually take the form of slides and are often created in Microsoft PowerPoint. Another popular choice of software for creating visual aids is Prezi. The principles contained in this guide can be applied to both, but its focus will be on using PowerPoint.

Visual aids (slides): Purpose and Principles

The purpose of visual aids or slides is to enhance the spoken content of your presentation. Effective slides will sharpen the meaning and clarity of what you are saying. Ineffective slides will distract your audience or, worse still, undermine the impact of your argument. With this in mind, when creating slides, you need to ensure they are relevant to the spoken content, visual, and that they have impact.

Relevance

Since the purpose of visual aids is to complement the spoken element of your presentation, it is important to ensure that the slides correspond to what you are saying as you move through your presentation. If the slides and spoken element fall out of sync, you will confuse your audience and undermine the impact of your argument. There is more chance of this happening if you add lots of information to each slide. Thus, try to keep the content of slides as brief and to the point as possible.

Visual

Whether you are using PowerPoint or Prezi, the slides you create should include images and graphics rather than text. As their name suggests, visual aids should be *visual*. Lots of speakers make the common mistake of simply filling slides with bullet points that closely reflect the spoken element of their presentations. But in order to enhance the impact of your argument and the points you are making, your slides need to be accessible. Accessibility is achieved by using

graphics or images to express your argument. This is not to say that text shouldn't be used; but ideally there should be an imbalance in favour of graphics or images. When adding text, try to include only keywords to focus the attention of the audience.

Impact

In order to achieve impact, slides need to be designed effectively. We've already mentioned accessibility; accessibility is heightened through the design of your slides. When creating your slides, consider the following design features:

1. Colour scheme
Use complementary colours (for fonts and background) that make your slides easier to read. Generally, lighter colours are used for backgrounds and darker colours for fonts.
2. Font
Not all fonts are easy to read on projector screens. Sans serif fonts are generally used on slides because they are easier to read, but you might like to use a pair of complementary fonts. Also consider the size of your fonts: what looks good on your monitor may not look as good on a projector screen.
3. Use of graphics and images
Use graphics or images as the centrepiece of a slide as often as possible. Smart Art, which is built into PowerPoint, offers an easy way of expressing information graphically (Prezi also offers some functions relating to graphics). A list of bullet points, for example, may be expressed more effectively through a table, or by using shapes.

A final point when designing your slides is to be *consistent*: for example, don't change font half way through because this will probably distract your audience!

Summary

Think creatively when designing visual aids: try to express your points through graphics rather than words.