

PRESENTATION VISUAL AIDS

Visual aids can be of great assistance when giving a presentation. They add a new dimension, and can be more powerful than using words alone. Visual aids can be used at any point of your presentation: it's up to you to decide when the best point is. Below are a few of the more popular aids to consider. Most of those listed would be used most effectively in conjunction with a PowerPoint presentation.

■ PowerPoint (or equivalent)

This is possibly the most popular visual aid, hence it's dealt with in detail in “**Tips for creating an effective PowerPoint presentation**” in this series.

■ White/blackboard

If you have a white- or blackboard in the room in which you'll be presenting, this can be an effective means by which to clarify a sequence of points, for example, if you're describing a process or the stages of an experiment. As you describe each part, you can visual your words. What's advantageous about such a medium is that you can rub sections off as necessary (as well as being environmentally friendly). However, if members of your audience are making notes, make sure they have enough time to do so before deleting anything. And, as a couple of last points: make sure your writing is legible, and write in as straight a line as you can.

■ Flipchart

A flipchart can be used in a similar way to a white- or blackboard. A major advantage is that you can pre-prepare sheets for any key points you want to make. You can also flip backwards and forwards to recap as needed.

■ Handouts

Handouts are useful if you want to provide additional information that wouldn't fit in the time you have to present. You don't necessarily have to give your handout out at the beginning of your presentation – you might find that it makes more sense to provide it in the middle or at the end. Bear in mind: handing it out too early or in the middle of your presentation might be distracting; while, by handing it out at the end, your audience might not bother to look at it at all.

When you provide your handout will also dictate its design. If you give it out at the beginning of your presentation then you might want to consider providing space in which your listeners can take notes. If you give it out at the end, then you could provide a more comprehensive report of your presentation.

Remember that a handout doesn't equate to a print out of your slides!

■ Film

A film clip is a great way of explaining a particular point. It could be your own footage – for example, part of your experiment – or someone else's. Make sure that it's relevant, and only show as much as you need to make your point. Be careful regarding time – for instance, if you're only allowed 20 minutes for your presentation, don't show a clip that lasts 10 minutes.

■ Props

Another way to chop and change your presentation is by using a prop. For example, you could bring in an artifact, a piece of equipment, or a sample. Make sure it's large enough to be viewed from the front, and robust enough to be passed around your audience. As with handouts, think about when would be the best time to pass it out – remember that when a member of your audience is holding and inspecting it, they're attention will be drawn away from what you're saying.