



# Designing Effective Presentations with Visual Aids

## Academic Speaking – Visual Aids

For many people, giving a presentation in English is a difficult and nerve-wracking experience. In addition to speaking, some sort of visual aid is typically expected. This visual aid will help listeners follow the general form of your presentation, and give them some cues in order to stay engaged and present throughout. Visual aids are most commonly presented in slides using a program such as PowerPoint, which must be thoughtful and strategic in order to have them aid in your presentation.

### Do's and Don'ts of Visual Aids

The key word in the term 'Visual Aid' is most certainly *aid*. Aid, as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary, is 'providing what is useful or necessary in achieving an end.' It is important to note that the idea is to give the listening of your presentation things that are *useful* and *necessary*, but not *all* of the information in your presentation. The majority of the information needs to come from *you*, not your visual aids.

#### 1. Style

**DO:** Choose an appealing and attractive style for your presentation

**DON'T:** Use colors or fonts that are garish or over-the-top.

Remember, your visual aid is there as a secondary item to you, the speaker. For this reason, your presentation style should be minimalist, attractive, and subdued.



## 2. Animations and Sounds

**DO:** Use limited or no animations when presenting new information and only use sounds when absolutely necessary.

**DON'T:** Have animations that are extremely active, distracting, or take time away from the presentation of the material. Sounds should only come from dedicated media such as videos.

Again, your materials are there as a secondary source of information. The more that things dance around on the slides behind you, the less that your audience will be focused on you, the speaker!

## 3. Information

**DO:** Present only small bits of information in as few words as possible

**DON'T:** Write long sentences or complete paragraphs with information

This tip has two functions. The first is that slides full of information will naturally attract your audience to read the contents of your slide instead of focus on you as the source of information. The second is that the more information that you stuff into a slide, the smaller your font must be. This, therefore, will cause your audience to either work very hard to read your slide, or worse, completely ignore your visual aids.

## 4. Delivery

**DO:** Present the materials of your presentation nearly independent of your visual aids

**DON'T:** Read directly from your visual aids during your presentations

This tip goes hand-in-hand with the previous one, in that you should only have as much information as necessary on your slides. If you write complete sentences or paragraphs, you will be tempted to simply read the information directly from your slides, which will cause the audience to ignore you and read from the slides. In order to be seen as an authority on the information you are providing, you need it to come from you, not your presentation.

## 5. Graphs and Charts

**DO:** Be thoughtful in how you present information in graphs and charts

**DON'T:** Try to cram multiple tables with information onto the same slide.

If the audience must struggle to glean information from a table, graph or chart that is on your slides, they will most certainly stop listening to you immediately. If you must present multiple tables or charts, or they are complicated with plenty of information, it might be better to print them and hand them out to the audience.



In essence, the best rule to follow when creating visual aids would be to KEEP IT SIMPLE. You as the speaker are the most important part of the lecture, so do not do anything to distract from that point and keep the listeners engaged on YOU.