Tips for Using Visual Aids in Your Speech

Sometimes it is easier to forget about visual aids than prepare them. It's hard enough work writing your speech let alone having to produce a multi-media extravaganza to push home your point – right?

However for a lot of speeches, using visual aids will not only enhance your presentation, but also help you to remember key points and keep you and your audience focused. Visual aids or 'props' can be as small or large as you want. They can vary in their simplicity or complexity and how much a part of your speech they are used for – it's up to you. Here are some tips for successful use of visual aids in your presentation:

1. Any props should be visually stimulating and supportive of the topic you are speaking on.

2. If using pictures on your slides, fill up the whole screen with the illustration.

3. Don't pack the slide with wordy paragraphs and information. Break your data down into bullet points.

4. Check with the teacher what visual aids are available for your presentation. Ensure everything is present and working before you begin your speech.

5. Make sure every member of the audience can see the visual aids.

6. When you use the visual aid, ensure the audience's attention is focused on it. When you have made each particular point, take the visual away and re-focus them back on you.

7. If you have trouble remembering your speech, use your visual aids as memory joggers.

8. Visual aids aren't just overheads and slides. They can be noisemakers, costumes and tricks. Visual aids can be used to induce a laugh, stimulate the audience or make a passionate point. Select your 'alternative props' with care.

9. When you reveal your visual aid, make sure you continue speaking to the audience not to the prop.

10. Handouts are also considered visual aids. Determine the correct time to give them out. You want your audience to be focused on your words, not reading and discussing elements of the handout during your speech.

Visual aids will support your argument and increase the audience's understanding of the main points. This is because the mind better remembers picture information rather than word information. A visual presentation will enhance your credibility and it may even help you with your nerves. If you have a visual aid to focus on, rather than your shaking hands, your fears will be forgotten as you take the audience through the points on the screen. As with any part of public speaking, practice using your visual aids well before the day of your presentation.

Posters

Posters are prepared graphic devices that can be made of a variety of materials and media - photographs, diagrams, graphs, word messages, or a combination of these. Posters work best in smaller audience sizes.

- Posters are **permanent** and **portable**.
- Posters can be **simple** or very **elaborate**.
- Posters can be used **alone** or **in a series** to tell a story.

Limitations:

- Posters tend to contain too much detail.
- Transporting them can be difficult.
- The more elaborate posters require extensive preparation and can be quite costly.

When preparing posters:

- **Each poster should contain one message** or theme.
- Words, charts, diagrams, and other symbols must be penned in a large enough size to be seen by everyone in the room.
- **Use all capital letters**, and do not slant or italicize letters.
- **Use and vary the color.** Also, check from a distance to make sure the color works well and is not distracting.

Use PowerPoint with care. With the advent of high tech tools today, it is easy to turn to presentation programs like PowerPoint, use the templates, and voila! you have your whole presentation on slides. Yes, I have experienced many well executed and exciting presentations where the speaker made excellent use of this approach. I have also experienced more presentations where the speaker depended upon his/her slides for the whole presentation. They were loaded with too much information or too many animated distractions for us to understand what the speaker wanted us to take away from the presentation. Also, if you depend for your whole presentation on PowerPoint, that will be the day when something goes wrong and it doesn't work. **Always have a backup plan!**

Practice, practice, practice with your visuals. Besides the initial preparation of the visuals, spend many hours before your presentation practicing the use of your visual aids. The added anxiety of the actual presentation can add to making us appear unfamiliar or "klutzy" which will be distracting. Being ready will make visual aids fun and invigorating for both you and your participants.

Go for it!