



## 4-H Communication Fact Sheet 7.0

# Preparing and Using Visual Aids

Visual aids such as posters, electronic slides, charts, models and photos can help an audience understand and remember what a presenter is telling them. Visuals should have a **definite purpose** and be used only if they make the presentation more effective. They can help you remember what to do and say next, and are preferred to notes.

There are many types of visuals: posters, models, illustrations, scale drawings, photographs, electronic slides (such as PowerPoint), flannel boards and flip charts.

Visuals should:

- serve as a guide in the presentation;
- add interest to the title, topic or ideas presented;
- focus and hold audience attention;
- emphasize key points;
- clarify a complicated process or procedure;
- show comparisons;
- summarize main thoughts.

Visuals may frustrate as well as educate. Before you decide to use a visual, ask if it:

- serves a purpose in the presentation,
- attracts attention,
- is simple and neat,
- is easy to use,
- fits smoothly into the presentation,
- gives only one main idea.

Practice is essential to using visual aids effectively. It is the only way to develop the necessary skills for handling visuals. You'll soon discover it's easier to give a public presentation with them than without them.

## Guidelines for lettering

1. Letters 1¾ inch high can be read from 25 feet.
2. Letters 2½ inches high can be read from 30 to 50 feet.
3. Title letters should be about 4 inches tall.

4. Use a combination of capital and lower-case letters for ease of reading.
5. Simple block letters are the easiest to read.
6. Tall, skinny letters and short, squatty, heavy letters are hard to read.
7. Bold or heavy-lined letters are preferred to letters with thin, light lines.
8. A different color may be used to emphasize a special word or phrase.
9. Colors of letters should **not** be mixed within the same word or phrase.
10. Vary letter style to emphasize a word, but don't use more than two different types of letters or fonts per poster or electronic presentation.
11. A high degree of contrast between background and message is important. Use dark colors on light backgrounds and light colors on dark backgrounds.
12. Display electronic presentations on a screen or light-colored wall. Make sure the projector is far enough back to project to a large enough size for everyone to easily read the slides.

## Guidelines for posters

1. Poster boards should be large enough to be seen at a distance — at least 22" × 28" in size and legible at 30 feet.
2. Print letters on a background with considerable contrast for ease in reading. Keep letters simple and large enough to be easily read.
3. Space letters on poster boards by the "eye" and not by ruler.
4. If using stencils, fill in stencils so lettering does not appear spotty.
5. Allow 3 or more inches for a margin on the top and sides and slightly more on the bottom.
6. When posters contain both illustrations and lettering, one should dominate.

- Use key words, phrases and concepts — not complete sentences. Using bullets is one way to accomplish this.
- Maintain eye contact with the audience. Audiences are easily bored if you just read your slides.
- Quotes may be written and read in their entirety.
- Blend a photo, chart or graph with minimal text.
- Leave ample borders all around the slide, especially at the bottom, which can be hard for the audience to see.
- Try not to use white for the background color. It is harsh on the eye. When projected, colors tend to lighten in appearance.
- Choose colors that can be seen with the lights on during the presentation. You want the audience to be able to see you during the presentation.
- Test contrasting colors by projecting them on a screen or wall to see if the colors complement each other and you can easily read the text. If not, change the background or text color.
- Stick with one background color during the presentation for consistency and to minimize distractions.
- Make sure the text on the slide is large enough to read from the back of the room — generally a 28- to 34-point font. Bold letters aid visibility.
- Don't mix more than two fonts in a slide, and pick a font that can be easily read. *An ornate script font is not easy for the audience to read.*
- Try using upper and lower case lettering. All CAPITALS tend to shout at the audience and are more difficult to read. Use italics and underlining sparingly — only for special emphasis.
- Limit photos or other images to two or three per slide. Otherwise, they are too small to be seen.
- Resist the temptation to use PowerPoint's many special effects and transition features. They can distract the audience.
- If you use special effects and transitions, keep them simple, to a minimum and consistent. Don't use multiple special effects in your slides.
- Slides should be shown for about 30 to 60 seconds.
- Avoid spending a long time on the same slide.
- Check all slides for spelling and formatting errors.

## Equipment success

The success of your presentation depends on:

1. Bringing the right equipment for the presentation.
2. Your skill in using this equipment.

Check your planning outline for equipment you will need. For example, you might need a blender for a cooking demonstration. Choose equipment that is best for the job. Some locations may not work well for all types of presentations. Therefore, you may have to adjust your presentation. Have equipment in good working condition. Practice so you will show skill in using the equipment. Above all, plan for the unexpected.

- Electronic slides are an alternative to posters. As with posters, slides are meant to complement your presentation, not overpower it. Remember, less is more with PowerPoint.

## Using electronic equipment

If you are using a laptop and a projector, make sure the computer and projector will synchronize. Don't forget an extension cord, two-prong grounding adapter and power strip. Do not assume that the extension office will provide a computer, projector and screen for your presentation.

If you want to use electronic slides (such as a PowerPoint presentation), prepare in advance so you have the right equipment and that all the equipment works together. Otherwise, you may not have any visuals for your presentation.

If you are planning to show a DVD or video clip, make sure it will play on the computer you will be using. If you won't be using your own computer, don't forget to copy your electronic slides, video clips and other material onto a flash drive. It's a good idea to have the presentation backed up on a flash drive in case you have technical problems. In addition, if you plan to use a Web site during your presentation, make sure the room is wired for the Internet or the facility has wireless access to the Internet. This requires planning and prior communication — don't wait until the day of the presentation.

In the event you are planning to use a TV or a monitor with a DVD player, make sure the TV or monitor is big enough for everyone to see. A rule of thumb is to have a 25-inch screen for an audience of 25 people. If the screen is not large enough, consider using a computer and projector so the images can be made large enough for everyone to easily see.