Using Visual Aids: Being Strategic and Smart

Some presentation situations require that you design and use visual aids in order to help you convey your ideas. There are many important considerations when thinking about visual aids, but a few major ones include:

- Will a visual aid enhance your presentation? If not, don't use one.
- What content in your presentation will be especially well served by visual aids? (Statistics, processes, and complex objects may require visual representation in order for the audience to be able to understand them.)
- What kind of visual aid is appropriate for the presentation context? (Is there PowerPoint technology available? Will passing around a fragile item be risky? Will the audience be able to see this chart?)
- What information is crucial to include on the visual aid itself, and what information should be supplied orally by you? You always should explain your visual aid to your audience, rather than letting it speak for you.

The following reading provides guidelines for selecting, designing and presenting various types of visual aids. It is an excerpt from: Beebe, S.A., & Beebe, S.J. (2007). *Public speaking handbook* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

CHAPTER

Designing and Using Presentation Aids

The soul never thinks without a picture.
—Aristotle

razier walked to the front of the class and dramatically pulled a two-foot papier-mâché model of a cockroach out of a sack. He attached a string to the "bug" and suspended it from the ceiling. Then he began his speech about how to rid a home of pests. The trouble was, no one listened to Frazier's message. His audience was obsessed with the creature dangling in midair.

The intention was good, but the execution was bad. Frazier had failed to use his presentation aid effectively. Presentation aids—especially visual aids—are powerful tools. They can help communicate your ideas with greater clarity and impact than can words alone, but they can also overwhelm your speech. For maximum effectiveness, follow the guidelines described in this chapter.

A **presentation aid** is any object that reinforces your point visually so that your audience can better understand it. Charts, photographs, posters, drawings, graphs, slides, movies, and videos are just some of the types of presentation aids that we will discuss. Some of these, such as movies and videos, call on sound as well as sight to help you make your point.

In this chapter, we look at presentation aids as an important communication tool and also examine several kinds. Toward the end of the chapter, we suggest guidelines for using presentation aids in your speeches.

16.a The Value of Presentation Aids

Presentation aids are invaluable to an audience-centered speaker. They help your audience understand and remember your message, communicate the organization of your ideas, gain and maintain attention, and illustrate a sequence of events or procedures.[1]

PRESENTATION AIDS ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING

Of your five senses, you learn more from sight than from all the others combined. In fact, it has been estimated that more than 80 percent of all information comes to you through sight.[2] To many people, seeing is believing. We are a visually oriented society. For example, most of us learn the news by seeing it presented on TV. Because your au-

dience is accustomed to visual reinforcement, it is wise to consider how you can increase their understanding of your speech by using presentation aids.

For example, President George W. Bush often speaks against a backdrop inscribed with the theme of the day, such as "A Better America," "Working toward Independence," or "Corporate Responsibility."[3]

PRESENTATION AIDS ENHANCE MEMORY

Your audience will not only have an improved understanding of your speech, but will also better remember what you say as a result of visual reinforcement.[4] It is well known that you remember most what you understand best. Researchers estimate that you remember 10 percent of what you read, 20 percent of what you hear, 30 percent of what you see, and 50 percent of what you simultaneously hear and see. For example, in your speech about the languages spoken in Africa, your audience is more likely to remember words in Arabic, Swahili, and Hausa if you display the words visually, rather than just say them.

PRESENTATION AIDS HELP LISTENERS ORGANIZE IDEAS

Most listeners need help understanding the structure of a speech. Even if you clearly lay out your major points, use effective internal summaries, and make clear transition statements, your listeners will welcome additional help. Listing major ideas on a chart, a poster, or an overhead transparency can add clarity to your talk and help your audience grasp your main ideas. Visually presenting your major ideas during your introduction, for example, can help your audience follow them as you bring them into the body of your speech. You can display key ideas during your conclusion to help summarize your message succinctly.

PRESENTATION AIDS HELP GAIN AND MAINTAIN ATTENTION

Keshia began her speech about poverty in the United States by showing a photo of the face of an undernourished child. She immediately had the attention of her audience. Chuck began his speech with the flash of his camera to introduce his photography lecture. He certainly alerted his audience at that point. Midway through her speech about the lyrics in rap music, Tomoko not only spoke the words but also displayed a giant poster of the song lyrics so that her audience could read the words and sing along. Presentation aids not only grab the attention of your listeners but also keep their interest when words alone might not.

PRESENTATION AIDS HELP ILLUSTRATE A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS OR PROCEDURES

If your purpose is to inform an audience about a process—how to do something or how something functions—you can do this best through actual demonstrations or with a series of visuals. Whether your objective is instructing people on how to make a soufflé or how to build a greenhouse, demonstrating the step-by-step procedures helps your audience understand them.[5] If you wish to explain how hydroelectric power is generated, a series of diagrams can help your listeners understand and visualize the process.

When demonstrating how to make something, such as your prize-winning cinnamon rolls, you can prepare an example of each step of the process ahead of time and show the audience each example as you describe the relevant step; for example, you might have the dough already mixed and ready to demonstrate how you sprinkle on the cinnamon. A climax to your speech could be to unveil a finished pan of rolls still warm from the oven. If time does not permit you to demonstrate how to prepare your rolls, you could have on hand a series of diagrams and photographs to illustrate each step of the procedure.

Today's audiences expect visual support. Contemporary audiences are quite different from those over a century ago when Thomas Edison invented the kinetoscope, a precursor of the movie camera. Edison said, "When we started out it took the average audience a long time to assimilate each image. They weren't trained to visualize more than one thought at a time."[6] Times have changed. The predominance of visual images—on TV, in movies, on the Internet, and even on our phones—attests to how central images are in the communication of information to modern audiences.

QUICK CHECK: *The Value of Presentation Aids*

- They help your audience understand your message.
- They help your audience remember your message.
- They communicate the organization of your message.
- They gain and maintain audience attention.
- They illustrate a sequence of events or procedures.

16.b Types of Presentation Aids

The first question many students ask when they learn they are required to use presentation aids is, "What type of presentation aid should I use?" We will discuss various kinds, grouped into classes: three-dimensional, two-dimensional, audiovisual, and computer generated.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL PRESENTATION AIDS

Three-dimensional presentation aids used to illustrate a talk include objects, models, and people.

Objects You have played the trombone since you were in fifth grade, so you decide to give an informative speech about the history and function of this instrument. Your trombone is an obvious presentation aid, which you can show to your audience as you talk about how it works. Perhaps you might play a few measures to demonstrate its sound and your talent.

Objects add interest because they are tangible. They can be touched, smelled, heard, and even tasted, as well as seen. Objects are real, and audiences like the real thing. If you use an object to illustrate an idea, make sure that you can handle the object with ease. If an object is too large, it can be unwieldy and difficult to show. Tiny objects can only be seen close up. It will be impossible for your listeners to see the detail on your antique thimble, the intricate needlework on your cross-stitch sampler, or the attention to detail in your miniature log cabin. Other objects can be dangerous to handle. One speaker, for example, attempted a demonstration of how to string an archery bow. He made his audience extremely uncomfortable when his almost-strung bow flew over the heads of his listeners. He certainly got their attention, but he lost his credibility.

Models If you cannot bring the object you would like to show your audience, consider showing them a **model**. You cannot bring a World War II fighter plane to class, so buy or build a scale model instead. To illustrate a lecture about human anatomy, one student brought a plastic model of a skeleton. An actual human skeleton would have been difficult to get and carry to class. Similarly, most colleges and universities do not allow firearms on campus. A drawing that shows the features of a gun is much safer than a real gun as a presentation aid. If you need to show the movable parts of a gun, perhaps a papier-mâché, plastic, or wood model would serve. Make sure, however, that any model you use is large enough to be seen by all members of your audience.

People At least since Ronald Reagan, U.S. presidents have often used people as visual aids during their State of the Union addresses—usually relating a poignant story and then asking the protagonist of the story, seated in the balcony, to stand and be recognized. One speechwriter noted that George W. Bush used this strategy to especially good effect, finding it "a way of coming down from the stage, as it were, and mingling with the crowd."[7]

In classroom speeches, too, people can serve as presentation aids. For example, Amelia wanted to illustrate an intricate Latin folk dance, so she arranged to have a dancer attend her speech to demonstrate the dance.

Using people to illustrate your message can be tricky, however. It is usually unwise to ask for spur-of-the-moment help from volunteers while you are delivering your speech. Instead, choose a trusted friend or colleague, and do so before your presentation so that you can fully inform him or her about what needs to be done. Rehearse your speech using your living presentation aid.

Also, it is distracting to have your support person stand beside you doing nothing. If you don't need the person to demonstrate something during your opening remarks, wait and introduce the person to your audience when needed.

Finally, do not allow your assistants to run away with the show. For example, don't let your dancer perform longer than necessary to illustrate your point about technique.

Nor should you permit your models to prance about too provocatively while displaying your dress designs. And don't allow your buddy to throw you when you demonstrate the wrestling hold that made you the district wrestling champ. Remember, your presentation aids are always subordinate to your speech. You must remain in control.

Generally, *you* can serve as a presentation aid to demonstrate or illustrate major points. If you are talking about tennis, you might bring your racquet to class so that you can illustrate your superb backhand or simply show novices the proper way to hold it. If you are a nurse or an emergency room technician giving a talk about medical procedures, by all means wear your uniform to establish your credibility.

TWO-DIMENSIONAL PRESENTATION AIDS

Although three-dimensional objects, models, and people can be used to illustrate a talk, the most common presentation aids are two-dimensional: drawings, photographs, slides, maps, graphs, charts, flipcharts, chalkboards, and overhead transparencies. Today, you can use computer software to generate many of these forms, as we will discuss later.

Drawings Drawings are popular and often-used presentation aids because they are easy and inexpensive to make. Drawings can be tailored to your specific needs. To illustrate the functions of the human brain, for example, one student traced an outline of the brain and labeled it with large block letters to indicate where brain functions are located. Another student wanted to show the different sizes and shapes of leaves of trees in the area, so she drew enlarged pictures of the leaves, using appropriate shades of green.

You don't have to be a master artist to develop effective drawings. As a rule, large and simple line drawings are more effective for stage presentations than are detailed images. If you have absolutely no faith in your artistic skill, you can probably find a friend or relative who can help you prepare a useful drawing, or you may be able to use computer software to generate simple line drawings.

Photographs Photographs can be used to show objects or places that cannot be illustrated with drawings or that an audience cannot view directly. The problem with photos, however, is that they are usually too small to be seen clearly from a distance. Passing a photograph among your listeners is not a good idea either; it creates competition for your audience's attention.

The only way to be sure that a printed photograph will be effective as a presentation aid for a large audience is to enlarge it. Some photo shops will produce poster-size color laser photocopies at a modest cost. You can also take a picture of your photograph with slide film and project the image onto a large screen. Or, using a scanner or digital camera, you can incorporate your image into a computer program such as PowerPoint and project your image using a TV monitor or video projection system. Later in the chapter we will discuss using computer images in your speeches.

Slides Because of the increased use of computer-graphics programs such as PowerPoint®, fewer speakers are using slides. However, slides can help illustrate your talk if you have access to a screen and a slide projector. Charts and graphs that you develop on a computer can be made into slides. Automatic programming and remote-control

features on many modern projectors help you change from one slide to the next without relying on anyone else for help. And audiences generally enjoy illustrated talks, which have an inherent attention factor that a speaker can use to advantage.

Working with slides can also present problems. Projector bulbs can burn out, and slides can jam in the projector. Moreover, with the lights out, you are less able to receive nonverbal feedback, and you cannot maintain eye contact with your audience.

Giving a slide lecture, therefore, requires considerable preparation. First, be sure the slides are right side up and in the order in which you want to show them during your speech. Second, know in which direction the slide carousel moves as it feeds the projector so that you will know how to load it. Third, know how to operate the programming feature or the remote-control switch so that you can move back and forth among your slides.

Maps Most maps are designed to be read from a distance of no more than two feet. As with photographs, the details on most maps won't be visible to your audience. You could use a large map, however, to show general features of an area. Or you can use a magnified version of your map. Certain copiers can enlarge images as much as 200 percent. It is possible, using a color laser copier, to enlarge a standard map of Europe enough for listeners in the last row to see the general features of the continent. Using a black marker, one speaker highlighted the borders on a map of Europe to indicate the countries she had visited the previous summer (see Figure 16.1). She used a green marker to show the general path of her journey.

Graphs A graph is a pictorial representation of statistical data in an easy-to-understand format. Because statistics are abstract summaries of many examples, most listeners find that graphs help make the data more concrete. Graphs are particularly effective in showing overall trends and relationships among data. The four most common types of graphs are bar graphs, pie graphs, line graphs, and picture graphs. Many of today's computer presentation programs can easily convert statistics into visual form.

- **Bar graphs.** A bar graph uses flat areas—bars—of various lengths to represent information. The bar graph in Figure 16.2 clearly shows the number of people who work from home. This graph makes the information clear and immediately visible to an audience. By comparison, words and numbers are more difficult to assimilate, especially in something as ephemeral as a speech.
- **Pie graphs.** A pie graph shows the general distribution of data. The pie graph in Figure 16.3, on page 328, shows what people would do if they had three extra hours of free time. Pie graphs are especially useful in helping your listeners to see quickly how data are distributed in a given category or area.
- **Line graphs.** Line graphs show relationships between two or more variables. Like bar graphs, line graphs organize statistical data to show overall trends (Figure 16.4, page 328). A line graph can cover a greater span of time or numbers than a bar graph without looking cluttered or confusing. As with other types of presentation aids, a simple line graph communicates better than a cluttered one.
- **Picture graphs.** In place of either a line or a bar, you can use pictures to represent the data you are summarizing (Figure 16.5, page 329). Picture graphs look

FIGURE 16.1 A map can be an effective visual aid, especially if the speaker personalizes it by highlighting the relevant information.

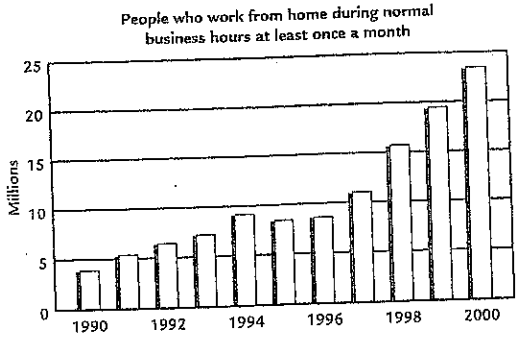

FIGURE 16.2 Bar graphs can help summarize statistical information clearly so that the information is immediately visible to your audience.
Source: Joanne H. Pratt Associates.

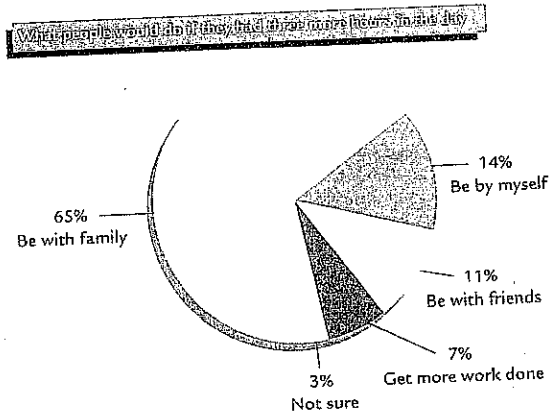

FIGURE 16.3 A pie graph shows general distribution of data.

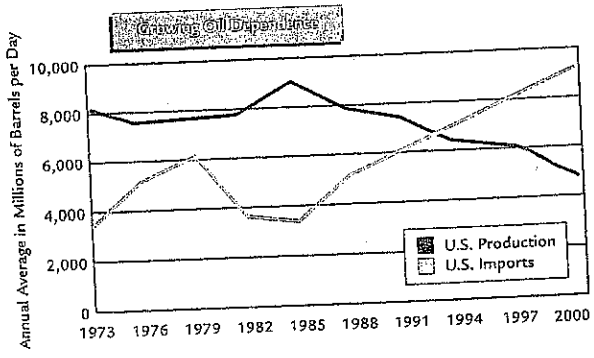

FIGURE 16.4 Line graphs show relationships between two or more variables.

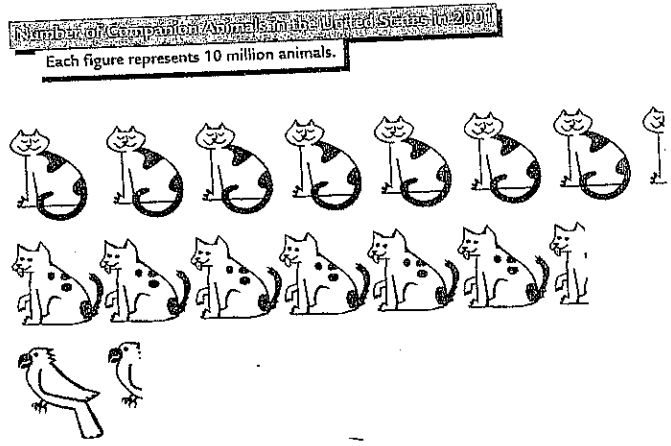

FIGURE 16.5 Consider adding visual symbols to enhance your presentation of statistics.

somewhat less formal and less intimidating than other kinds of graphs. One of the advantages of picture graphs is that they use few words or labels, which makes them easier for your audience to read.

Charts Charts summarize and present a great deal of information in a small amount of space. They have several advantages. They are easy to use, reuse, and enlarge. They can also be displayed in a variety of ways. You can use a flipchart, a poster, or an overhead projector, which can project a giant image of your chart on a screen. As with all other presentation aids, charts must be simple. Do not try to put too much information on one chart.

The key to developing effective charts is to prepare the lettering of the words and phrases you use very carefully. If the chart contains too much information, audience members may feel it is too complicated and ignore it. If your chart looks cramped or crowded, divide the information into several charts and display each as needed. Do not handwrite the chart; a hand-lettered chart may seem unprofessional. Consider using a computer that has the software capability to prepare large charts or graphs. Make sure your letters are large enough to be seen clearly in the back row. Use simple words or phrases, and eliminate unnecessary words.

Flipcharts Flipcharts are often used in business presentations and training sessions. A flipchart is a large pad of paper resting on an easel. You can either prepare your visual aids before your speech or draw on the paper while speaking. Flipcharts are easy to use. During your presentation, you need only flip the page to reveal your next visual. Flipcharts are best used when you have brief information to display or when you want to summarize comments from audience members during a presentation.

Most experienced flipchart users recommend that you use lined paper to keep your words and drawings neat and well organized. Another suggestion is to pencil in speaking notes on the chart that only you can see. Brief notes on a flipchart are easier to use than notes on cards or a clipboard. If you do use notes, however, be sure that they are few and brief; using too many notes will tempt you to read rather than have eye contact with your audience.

Chalkboards and Whiteboards Chalkboards and whiteboards are often used to offer visual support for spoken words. Chalkboards and whiteboards have several advantages: They are inexpensive, simple to use, and low-tech, so you don't need to worry about extension cords or special training.

Many public-speaking teachers discourage overuse of chalkboards, however. Why? When you write on the board, you have your back to your audience; you do not have eye contact! Some speakers try to avoid that problem by writing on the board before their speech starts. But listeners often look at the visual rather than listen. Also, chalkboards and whiteboards, which have been around for a long time, are not particularly effective at getting or holding audience attention. Use a board only for brief phrases or for very simple line diagrams that can be drawn in just a few seconds.

Overhead Transparencies An overhead projector projects images drawn on clear sheets of plastic, called *transparencies,* onto a screen so that the images can be seen by a large group. Although computer-generated presentations are replacing overheads in many settings, overhead projectors remain popular because they have several advantages. They allow you to maintain eye contact with your audience, yet still see your visual. Unlike a traditional slide projector, the overhead doesn't require that you turn off the lights in the room to ensure that the projected image is visible. You may wish to dim the lights a bit, but most images can be seen clearly in normal room light. Overhead projectors also permit you to prepare your transparency ahead of time and to mark on it during your presentation. If you do write during your speech, limit yourself to a few short words or to underlining key phrases.

AUDIOVISUAL AIDS

Perhaps the most exciting presentation aids are those that join sound and sight to communicate ideas. You are probably familiar with movies, videotapes, CD-ROMs, and DVDs, as well as with audio aids such as tapes and compact disks. Now you can consider these familiar media in a new context. Instead of being passively entertained or instructed by them, you may use them actively to support your ideas.

Videotapes and Movies With the ready availability of video cassette recorders (VCRs) and cameras, more public speakers are using videotapes to help communicate their ideas by showing brief scenes from a rented movie, excerpts from training videos, or custom-made videos. High-quality VCRs permit stop-action, freeze-frame viewing, and some have a slow-motion function. You can also play and replay a scene several times if you want your audience to watch subtle movement or action.

A 25-inch screen is generally visible to an audience of twenty-five or thirty people. For larger audiences, you will need several TV monitors or a large projection TV system. You can use a large-screen video projector to display your video. Or, if one is available, you could use a liquid crystal display (LCD) panel connected to an overhead projector to project your image.

HOW TO: *Use an Overhead Projector*

- If possible, practice with the overhead projector in the room in which you will be delivering your speech. That way you can be certain that the projector is the proper distance from the screen and that your image will be large enough to be seen.
- When you are not showing a visual, turn the overhead projector off so it does not detract from your speech.
- Do not put too much information on one transparency. Use no more than seven lines on one sheet. Do not use a full page of typewritten material as a transparency.
- Align the projector so that the head beams the image directly onto the screen. If the image is too low, it will get projected up and suffer a distortion called a *keystone effect,* which makes the image seem larger at the top and smaller at the bottom. Besides making sure the projector is properly aligned, you can tilt the projector screen forward if it is mounted high on a wall.
- When you use an overhead projector, you may need to increase the volume of your voice. The fan's motor, which keeps the high-intensity projector bulb cool, can be noisy.
- When developing your transparency, consider using a large type size. Using 18-point, 24-point, or even larger type will make your words easier to read. Because most students develop written materials using a computer, it is very easy simply to increase the size of the type, even if it means putting your information on more than one transparency. Bigger is better.
- Reveal one line of text at a time by blocking out the text below it with a sheet of paper. This helps hold the audience's interest.
- If possible, leave the bottom fourth of your transparency blank. Images projected low on the screen often are not visible to audience members in the back.
- Consider using color. Colored acetate sheets are available from most bookstores. You can also use different colors of markers to highlight key points.
- For ease of handling, place the transparency in a cardboard frame. These are available wherever acetate sheets are sold. A frame lessens the likelihood that transparencies will stick together or become torn along the edges.

Before you decide to use a movie, however, think about whether it will really enhance your speech. Although movies can dramatically capture and hold your audience's attention, they are not really designed as supporting material for a speech. Usually, they are conceived as self-contained packages, and unless you show only short excerpts, they can quickly overwhelm your speech. Of course, if you are a skilled moviemaker, you will probably have enough control over your medium to tame it and make it serve your purpose. Be sure to rehearse with the equipment until you can handle it smoothly.

CDs One technology finding its way into classrooms, corporate meetings, training sessions, and lecture halls is the compact disk, or CD. CDs can include words, images, and audio or video clips. The files on CDs are read by the CD drive in a personal computer and can be displayed by linking the computer to a large-screen video projector or an LCD panel connected to an overhead projector. All the information can be retrieved instantly because it is stored digitally; one disk can contain hundreds of images, sound bites, or an entire encyclopedia.

While giving a lecture about Elizabeth Cady Stanton, you could click the computer mouse a couple of times to project her picture or hear an actress read one of her speeches. Or, if you want your audience to hear the dramatic opening four notes of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, you can click the mouse to retrieve his famous "Da, da, da, daaaaah" while simultaneously showing Beethoven's music manuscript in his own handwriting. A CD's key advantage is the ease and speed with which a speaker can retrieve audio or visual information. Increasingly, information that is stored on CDs is also available on the Internet.

Digital Video Disks (DVDs) Because you can stop and start a digital video disk, or DVD, at a precise place, you can be confident that your movie or video will start exactly where you want it to start when you are ready to show it to an audience. Now that DVD recorders are readily available, it's easy to use DVDs to record video images and audio clips to support speech ideas. But because newer DVD recorders may use a format that is not compatible with DVD players that are even a couple of years old, it would be wise to be certain that your self-recorded DVD will be usable on the equipment that will be available when you deliver your presentation. You may, for example, have recorded something using a DVD-RW format, and the DVD player may only play DVD-R or DVD+RW. It pays to double-check the compatibility of the equipment well in advance of your presentation.

Audio Aids Tapes or audio compact disks (CDs) can complement a visual display—you might play a tape or CD recording of a few measures of Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* to illustrate a point. While showing slides of her recent Caribbean vacation, a student used a recording of steel drum music as a soft introductory background for her talk. Another student interviewed students on campus about local parking problems. Rather than reading quotes from irate drivers who couldn't find a place to park, he played a few excerpts of taped interviews.

Probably the easiest and least expensive audio aid to use is a tape recorder that uses cassettes. It is small enough to handle easily, can be held up to a microphone to amplify

the sound for a large audience, and can be cued to start exactly where you want it to. Mini CD recorders can record either voices or music; their small size makes them easy to handle, and the digital quality produces crystal-clear sound.

A compact disk has excellent fidelity, and it can be cued to start at a certain passage. Some CD players need a separate amplifier and speakers to take full advantage of the improved sound quality. But an average-size "boom box" will do the job nicely unless you have a very large audience. A CD burner permits you to record selected tracks of music either from another CD or from music you legally download from the Internet.

As with movies and videos, use audio aids sparingly. You do not want your speech's electronic soundtrack to interfere with your message.

COMPUTER-GENERATED PRESENTATION AIDS

Computer-generated graphics are images, words, charts, and graphs designed and presented with a computer and graphics software. Although computer-generated graphics can be overused and can distract from your message if used improperly, they open up professional-looking possibilities for illustrating your speech.

Using a presentation program such as PowerPoint, you can design and create complete presentation aids on your personal computer. You can then use the computer to display the presentation aid to your audience by connecting it to a special projector. You can run the program manually using a mouse (some computers are even equipped with a wireless mouse) or the keyboard to advance the images as you speak, or you can set the program to run automatically. Even if you don't have access to a computer to use for your presentation, you can create the graphic images you need using a computer at a commercial copy center or campus computer lab and then transfer the images to slides or overhead transparencies. Or you can print the images on paper and develop dazzling posters to display on an easel.

16.c Guidelines for Developing Presentation Aids

The following guidelines offer commonsense and research-based strategies that can help you prepare effective presentation aids for your speeches.[8]

ALLOW PLENTY OF TIME TO PREPARE YOUR PRESENTATION AIDS

Prepare your presentation aids well in advance of your speaking date so that you can make them as attractive and polished-looking as possible. Avoid late-night, last-minute construction of your presentation aids. A sloppy, amateurish presentation aid will convey the impression that you are not a credible speaker, even if you have spent many hours preparing the verbal part of your speech. If you haven't used computer-generated graphics before, don't expect to whip out the software manual and produce profes-

sional-looking images the night before your presentation. Focus your final hours on rehearsing, not on learning a computer program.

MAKE THEM EASY TO SEE

Without a doubt, the most violated principle of using presentation aids in public speaking is "Make it big!" Countless speeches have been accompanied by a chart or graph that contains writing too small to read, an overhead projector image not large enough to be legible, or a graph on a flipchart that simply can't be deciphered from the back row.

Make your presentation aid large enough to be seen by all in your audience; write big or use a font that even those in the back of the room will be able to read easily.

KEEP THEM SIMPLE

Simple presentation aids usually communicate best. Resist trying to make your visuals complicated. Indeed, *any* complexity is too much. Words should be limited to key words or phrases. Lengthy dissertations on poster board or an overhead transparency usually do more harm than good.

Presentation aids *support* your message; they are not your message. Or, as CEO John W. Roe wisely expressed, "Visual aids should be made to steer, not to row."[9] What are techniques for keeping your visual message simple? Consider these ideas:

- Use no more than seven lines of text on any single visual.
- Use bullet points in parallel structure (such as beginning each bulleted phrase with the same word, as we are doing in this list).
- Use the heading of each slide to summarize the essential point of the visual; if listeners only read the headings of your visuals, they should still be able to follow the key points of the story you're telling.[10]

If your presentation contains dry or complex information that might be tedious to absorb in large amounts, consider breaking up the pace by using drawings or pictures instead of text on some of your presentation aids. Your audience will find your presentation more understandable and enjoyable if you vary the types of graphics that you show. However, when you incorporate a drawing or picture into your presentation, be careful to ensure that the image you display complements the mental image created by your spoken words.

GROUP RELATED ELEMENTS INTO VISUAL UNITS

By grouping related points, you can help your audience grasp key concepts and understand relationships as you convey information. Grouping points frees up space. This space, in turn, highlights the text blocks and also provides a resting place for the eye.

The alignment you choose for your text and images also affects the open space on the visual aid and directs the reader's gaze. Alignment can be flush left, flush right, or centered. Centered alignment is often effective for titles, but centered body text can

look ragged and disorderly. A flush left or flush right alignment makes the text look crisp and allows the eye to flow easily from point to point.

ESTABLISH A CONSISTENT GRAPHIC THEME

Choose a basic design and color scheme and use it throughout your presentation. If you are designing a series of graphics, try to repeat a word, a symbol, styles, or a font throughout the presentation to convey a sense of unity. To carry out a consistent theme, choose a symbol other than a round bullet to use for emphasis, maintain a consistent color scheme, and use consistent spacing.

Repetition, however, can be boring, so you may want to vary your visuals a little, but keep in mind that a consistent theme will help your audience process and remember complex information.

CHOOSE A TYPEFACE WITH CARE

Although software packages vary, generally you'll be able to choose from among dozens of typefaces and fonts. A typeface is a set of fonts that have common characteristics; the typeface Helvetica, for example, comes in a variety of sizes and styles, including roman, italic, and boldface. Each typeface has a name, and typefaces vary in weight and spacing. A font is a collection of all uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers, symbols, and punctuation of a particular typeface size. For example, 9-point Helvetica bold, 12-point Helvetica, and 16-point Palatino italic are all examples of fonts.

Make an informed choice rather than just using a typeface because it strikes your fancy at the moment. Graphic designers divide typefaces into four different classes: serif, sans serif, script, and decorative. You'll see each of these classes illustrated in Figure 16.6. Serif typefaces, like the ones you are reading in this book, are easier to read

Serif

Times New Roman
Bookman Old Style
Americana
Garamond

Sans Serif

Arial
Franklin Gothic Book
Tahoma
Century Gothic

Script

Ashley Script MT
Freestyle
Brush Script
School Script

Decorative

Whimsy
CRITTER

FIGURE 16.6 Classes of Typefaces and Examples

for longer passages because the little lines at the top and bottom of the letters (called *serifs*) help guide the eye from one letter to the next. Sans serif typefaces (*sans* means "without") do not have the extra lines. Script typefaces are designed to look like handwriting, but they should be used sparingly because they are harder to read than serif and sans serif type. And use decorative typefaces only when you want to communicate a particular tone or mood. Regardless of which typeface or font you use, don't use more than one or two typefaces on a single visual; if you do use two, designers suggest they should be from different font categories.

Of course, designers do sometimes violate these guidelines to achieve special effects. There is no law that says you cannot use a serif typeface in a title and a sans serif typeface in the text. Just be sure that your audience will be able to read and understand your message.

VARY FONTS AND FONT SIZES WITH CARE

A font is a typeface of a particular size and style. Font size is measured in points; a point is 1/72 of an inch. The larger the point size, the larger the letters. It is easy to get carried away by all of the possibilities, but if you combine typefaces carelessly, you will soon discover that your choices conflict instead of complement one another. The strategies discussed below should help you avoid conflict in your design.

You also need to think about readability when you decide what size to use for the various elements in your graphics. Your visuals must be big enough to be seen by people in the back row of your audience. How big is big enough? Microsoft offers some general guidelines for visual aids. They recommend using 44-point type for titles, 32-point type for subtitles or for text if there is no subtitle, and 28-point type for the text if there is also a subtitle. The Microsoft designers reason that it is better for a presentation aid to be too big than too small. If you are not sure your font is large enough, try looking at your visual aid in the setting where you will be making your presentation. Figure 16.7 illustrates a range of point sizes.

Avoid using all uppercase letters for emphasis, except in short titles. Longer stretches of text in all caps are hard to read, because our eyes are accustomed to seeing contrasting letter shapes. When we read, we recognize not only the individual letters, but also the shapes of the words. For example, when you drive along a highway, you can probably recognize the words on the sign for your exit long before you are close enough to make out the individual letters because you recognize the shape of the words.

USE COLOR TO CREATE A MOOD AND SUSTAIN ATTENTION

Graphic designers have long known that warm colors (oranges and reds) communicate excitement and interest (which is why most fast-food restaurant chains use red, yellow, and orange in their color schemes; they literally want to make you hungry and catch your attention). Cooler colors such as green and blue have a more calming effect on viewers. Warm colors tend to come forward and jump out at the viewer, whereas cool

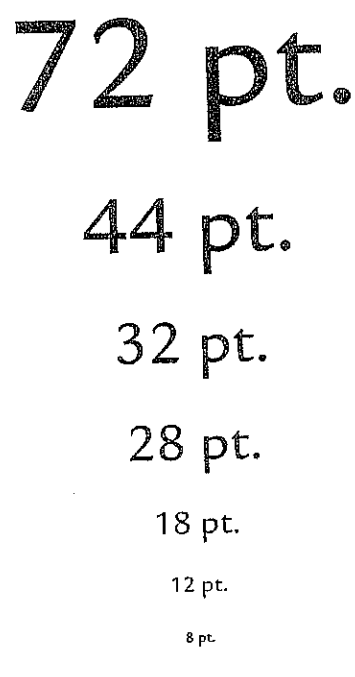

FIGURE 16.7 Point Sizes

colors recede into the background. What are the implications of the power of color to communicate? Consider using warm colors for positive messages (for example, "Profits are up") and cooler colors for more negative messages ("We're losing money").

Avoid Conflicting Colors It is also important to choose colors for backgrounds and text or graphics that contrast with one another but do not conflict. The use of yellow against a blue background is effective; the colors are contrasting yet harmonious. The use of purple against a blue background, on the other hand, is not effective because both colors are dark and the purple letters do not stand out from the background.

Be cautious about using green and red combinations in your visual aids. Some of your audience members may have a type of color blindness that makes these two colors indistinguishable. Even for those without color blindness, this combination is not effective. Red type against a green background is difficult to read. The colors are not harmonious and do not contrast effectively, making the text and graphics hard on the eyes.

Design for Contrast If you're designing overheads, consider using dark text on a light background. You might use black, dark blue, or dark red text that would stand out crisply from a white, light gray, or light yellow background. Each color would be distinctive and would provide excellent contrast for high readability. If your visual aids will be computer-generated and projected as slides, on an LCD, or through another projection system, light text on a dark background will produce better results. Yellow and white text on a black, dark blue, or dark green background will produce the contrast you need for an attention-getting presentation.

Attractive and harmonious color combinations will get and hold your listeners' attention. But resist the temptation to use too many colors. Two different colors of text on one background color should be sufficient. To unify your presentation, consider using the same color for all of your backgrounds, and then vary the complementary colors you use for the text. For example, if you choose dark green for your background color, you could use white, yellow, and a very light gray for text. Save your most dramatic color contrasts for the most important point.

USE BLACK AND WHITE EFFECTIVELY

If your budget or equipment limits you to black and white presentation aids, you can still use contrast to create attractive graphics. By choosing contrasting typefaces, spacing text widely or more compactly, using larger or smaller text, and using both bold and lightface text, you can create differences in textual color.

DON'T DETRACT FROM THE MESSAGE

Presentation graphics should be simple and uncluttered. As you begin to work with sophisticated layout and design tools, you may be tempted to load up your graphics with fancy fonts, clip art, and outlandish colors. Resist that temptation. Such visuals can quickly become distracting and hard to read. Instead of supporting your presentation, they will actually confuse your audience and detract from your message.

Each element in your visual aid should serve a clear and specific purpose that is appropriate to your audience, topic, and setting.

SHOW NUMERICAL DATA GRAPHICALLY

If you need to supply complex numerical data or information to illustrate a point or provide essential background information to your listeners, consider showing this information graphically. A well-drawn graph can often convey the information that you wish to present without requiring your audience to absorb and interpret complex numerical data.

HOW TO: ***Select the Right Presentation Aids***

- Consider your audience. Factors such as audience size dictate the size of the visual you select. If you have a large audience, do not choose a presentation aid unless everyone can see it clearly. The age, interests, and attitudes of your audience also affect your selection of audiovisual support.
- Think of your speech objective. Don't select a presentation aid until you have decided on the purpose of your speech.
- Take into account your own skill and experience. Use only equipment with which you are comfortable or have had practical experience.
- Know the room in which you will speak. If the room has large windows with no shades and no other way to dim the lights, do not consider using visuals that require a darkened room.

The type of data you have and the message that you wish to convey will help you determine which type of graph is the most appropriate for your purposes. If your audience requires detailed numerical information in addition to what you present in your graphs, consider supplying it in a handout that they will be able to study in detail at their leisure.

16.d Guidelines for Using Presentation Aids

Now that we have offered strategies for developing effective presentation aids, here are some tips to help you use them for maximum audience impact.

DO NOT USE DANGEROUS OR ILLEGAL PRESENTATION AIDS

Earlier, we described a speaker who accidentally caused an archery bow to fly over the heads of his startled audience. Not only did he lose credibility because he was not able to string the bow successfully, he also endangered his audience. Dangerous or illegal presentation aids may either shock your audience or physically endanger them. These types of aids will also detract from your message. They are never worth the risk of a ruined speech or an injured audience member. If your speech seems to call for a dangerous or illegal object or substance, substitute a model, picture, chart, or other representational device.

REHEARSE WITH YOUR PRESENTATION AIDS

Jane nervously approached her speech teacher ten minutes before class. She wondered whether class could start immediately, because her presentation aid was melting. She had planned to explain how to get various stains out of clothing, and her first demon-

stration would show how to remove chewing gum. But she had forgotten the gum, so she had to ask for a volunteer from the audience to spit out his gum, so she could use it in her demonstration. The ice she had brought to rub on the sticky gum had by this time melted. All she could do was dribble some lukewarm water on the gummed-up cloth in a valiant but unsuccessful effort to demonstrate her cleaning method. It didn't work. To make matters worse, when she tried to set her poster in the chalkboard tray, it kept falling to the floor. She ended up embarrassed and on the edge of tears. It was obvious that she had not rehearsed with her presentation aids.

Unlike Jane, Marti knew she had an important presentation the next day, and she was well prepared. Because she was going to use PowerPoint computer graphics in her presentation, she carefully developed each visual to coordinate with her talk. She rehearsed her speech in the same room in which she would be speaking; she also practiced her presentation using the same computer that she would use for her speech. She competently sailed through her presentation without a hitch. Although the unexpected can always happen, Marti's thorough preparation and rehearsal boosted both her confidence and her credibility with her listeners.

Your appearance before your audience should not be the first time you deliver your speech while holding up your chart, turning on the overhead projector, operating the slide projector, or using the flipchart. Practice with your presentation aids until you feel at ease with them.

MAKE EYE CONTACT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE, NOT WITH YOUR PRESENTATION AIDS

You may be tempted to talk to your presentation aid rather than to your audience. Your focus, however, should remain on your audience. Of course, you will need to glance at your visual to make sure that it isn't upside down or that it is the proper one. But do not face it while giving your talk. Keep looking your audience in the eye.

EXPLAIN YOUR PRESENTATION AIDS

Some speakers believe that they need not explain a presentation aid. They think it's enough just to show it to their audience. Resist this approach. When you exhibit your chart showing the overall decline in the stock market, tell your audience what point you are trying to make.

Visual support performs the same function as verbal support. It helps you communicate an idea. Make sure that your audience knows what that idea is. Don't just unceremoniously announce, "Here are the recent statistics on birth rates in the United States" and hold up your visual without further explanation. Tell the audience how to interpret the data. Always set your visuals in a verbal context.

DO NOT PASS OBJECTS AMONG MEMBERS OF YOUR AUDIENCE

You realize that your marble collection will be too small to see, so you decide to pass some of your most stunning marbles around while you talk. Bad idea. While you are excitedly describing some of your cat's-eye marbles, you have provided a distraction for your audience. People will be more interested in seeing and touching your marbles than in hearing you talk about them.

What can you do if your object is too small to be seen without passing it around? If no other speaker follows your speech, you can invite audience members to come up and see your object when your speech is over. If your audience is only two or three rows deep, you can even hold up the object and move in close to the audience to show it while you maintain control.

USE ANIMALS WITH CAUTION

Most actors are unwilling to work with animals—and for good reason. At best, they may steal the show. And most often, they are unpredictable. You may think you have the smartest, best-trained dog in the world, but you really do not know how your dog will react to a strange environment and an unfamiliar audience. The risk of having an animal detract from your speech may be too great to make planning a speech around one worthwhile.

A zealous student at a midwestern university a few years ago decided to give a speech on cattle. What better presentation aid, he thought, than a cow? He brought the cow to campus and led her up several flights of stairs to his classroom. The speech in fact went well. But the student had neglected to consider one significant problem: Cows will go up stairs but not down them.

Another student had a handsome, well-trained German shepherd guard dog. The class was enjoying his speech and his demonstrations of the dog's prowess until the professor from the next classroom poked his head in the door to ask for some chalk. The dog lunged, snarling and with teeth bared, at the unsuspecting professor. Fortunately, he missed—but the speech was concluded prematurely. These and other examples emphasize our point: Use animals with care, if at all.

USE HANDOUTS EFFECTIVELY

Many speech instructors believe that you should not distribute handouts during a speech. Handing out papers during your presentation will only distract your audience. However, many audiences in business and other types of organizations expect a summary of your key ideas in written form. If you do find it necessary to use written material to reinforce your presentation, keep the following suggestions in mind.

- Don't distribute your handout during the presentation unless your listeners must refer to the material while you're talking about it. Do not distribute handouts that have only a marginal relevance to your verbal message. They will defeat your purpose.
- If you do need to distribute a handout and you see that your listeners are giving the written material more attention than they are giving you, tell them where in the handout you want them to focus. For example, you could say, "I see that many of you are interested in the second and third pages of the report. I'll discuss those

items in just a few moments. I'd like to talk about a few examples before we get to page 2."

- After distributing your handouts, tell audience members to keep the material face down until you're ready to talk about the material; this will help listeners not be tempted to peek at your handout instead of keeping their focus on you and your message.
- Make sure you clearly number the pages on your handout material. This will make it easy for you to direct audience members to specific pages in your handouts.
- To make sure your listeners know what page of your handouts you want them to focus on, prepare overhead transparencies of each page of your handout. You'll be able to display the specific page you're talking about. Even if the words are too small for audience members to read, they will be able to glance up and see what page you're on if they miss your verbal description of where you are in the material. With a transparency you can also quickly point to the paragraph or chart on the page you want them to focus on. It's not a good idea, however, to economize by only displaying material designed to be used as handouts on an overhead projector and not providing handouts. The print will undoubtedly be too small to be seen clearly.
- If your listeners do not need the information during your presentation, tell them that you will distribute a summary of the key ideas at the end of your talk. Your handout might refer to the specific action you want your audience to take, as well as summarize the key information you have discussed.

TIME THE USE OF VISUALS TO CONTROL YOUR AUDIENCE'S ATTENTION

A skillful speaker knows when to show a supporting visual and when to put it away. For example, it's not wise to begin your speech with all your charts, graphs, and drawings in full view unless you are going to refer to them in your opening remarks. Time the display of your visuals to coincide with your discussion of the information contained in them.

Jessica was extremely proud of the huge replica of the human mouth that she had constructed to illustrate her talk on the proper way to brush one's teeth. It stood over two feet tall and was painted pink and white. It was a true work of art. As she began her speech, she set her mouth model in full view of the audience. She opened her speech with a brief history of dentistry in America. But her listeners never heard a word. Instead, they were fascinated by the model. Jessica would have done better to cover her presentation with a cloth and then dramatically reveal it when she wanted to illustrate proper tooth brushing.

Here are a few more suggestions for timing your presentation aids.

- Remove your presentation aid when you move to your next point, unless the information it contains will also help you communicate your next idea.

- Have your overhead transparency already in place on the projector. When you are ready to show your visual, simply turn on the projector to reveal your drawing. Change to a new visual as you make your next point. Turn the projector off when you are finished with your visual support.
- Consider asking someone beforehand to help you hold your presentation aid, turn the pages of your flipchart, or change the slides on the projector. Make sure you rehearse with your assistant so that all goes smoothly during your presentation.

USE TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY

You may be tempted to use some of the new technologies we have described because of their novelty rather than because of their value in helping you communicate your message. Most of them, however, are expensive. And some novice speakers are tempted to overuse presentation aids simply because they can quickly produce eye-catching visuals. Resist this temptation. Also consider that many classrooms and lecture rooms are not equipped with the necessary hardware. And realize that to project images from large-screen projectors or LCD panels, you may have to dim the lights or turn the overhead lights completely off. As we have noted, when you use audiovisual equipment that requires a dark room, you lose vital visual contact with your listeners.

REMEMBER MURPHY'S LAW

According to Murphy's Law, if something can go wrong, it will. When you use presentation aids, you increase the chances that problems or snags will develop when you present your speech. The chart may fall off the easel, you may not find any chalk, or the bulb in the overhead projector may burn out. We are not saying that you should be a pessimist, just that you should have backup supplies and a backup plan in case your best-laid plans go awry.

HOW TO: *Use Presentation Aids Effectively*

- Rehearse with your presentation aids until you feel at ease with them.
- Make eye contact with the audience, not with your presentation aid.
- Explain your presentation aids; always set your visuals in a verbal context.
- Do not pass objects among members of your audience
- Use animals with caution.
- Use handouts effectively.
- Time the use of your visuals to control your audience's attention.
- Use technology effectively.
- Remember Murphy's Law.