Presentation Aids

In many respects, speeches are no longer what they used to be. Sure, they still have the same general formats, structures, and purposes, but the manner with which people deliver them has changed substantially in recent years. Up until recently, speakers would stand in front of an audience and detail their main points. If the speech was complicated, then the audience just had to pay really close attention. Today, however, we have means speakers can use to take complicated materials and make them more understandable through visual representations. These presentation aids fundamentally transformed professions in which speaking is an essential part of the job, such as teaching. Today's advanced digital and multimedia platforms provide great assistance to speakers, but they must be used properly.

In this chapter, we will address presentation aids, or as they are more commonly called, visual aids, and explain how to properly use them in your speech. We will first go over traditional types of aids, before moving on to more advanced technological types. Finally, we will provide guidelines for implementing and using these aids within your speech so that they help, not hurt, your presentation.

Traditional Aids

Presentation aids come in a variety of different forms, but each has its purpose. Today, we focus more on PowerPoint™, Prezi™, Keynote™, and other digital means for aiding a presentation; however, much of what appears in these platforms is merely a digital representation of basic traditional presentation aids. In this section, we will discuss five of these traditional aids, which have been used for many years. We call them traditional presentation aids because they do not necessarily appear in electronic forms. For instance, for many years transparencies were used by both professors and students when providing information such as graphs of data. Transparencies may be moving toward extinction, but graphs are not. So, here we will explain the traditional ways of visually depicting complicated information so that you may then incorporate them into a multimedia presentation.

Models

The first type of traditional aid we will go over is a **model**, which is a three-dimensional representation of an actual object. To be effective, models need to be made to scale so that the audience gets an idea of what they are looking at and how it might function in its actual environment. Science teachers often use a scale model of human organs, such as the brain or heart. Museums and students at science fairs create models of the solar system, with the sun in the center and the planets represented in their proper positions. These visual representations show how things are represented in space while allowing the audience to see them in a reasonable size. It would be very hard, for example, for a speaker to use a model of the heart at its actual size when speaking to an audience of fifty, so they create a model to scale to enable everyone to see it.

Charts

Models are not the only traditional form of presentation aid useful to speakers. A more common example is a chart, such as a frequency table. **Charts** allow you to visually depict summaries of numeric data for an audience. For example, if a manager is briefing his superiors on how productive different geographic regions have been in terms of sales, he might construct a chart that depicts sales for each region of the country and rank them from highest to lowest earnings. Charts help audiences quickly identify key points about data that would normally take a longer time to explain.

Graphs

One specific type of chart that speakers often rely on is a graph. **Graphs** help illustrate how numerical data relate to one another. Statistics are helpful if the audience can understand them, and graphs illustrate the impact and relationship of numerical information. Graphs also come in many forms, and you should choose the one that best illustrates your information to the audience in an uncomplicated way.

Briefly, let's examine the three types of graphs that are most commonly used as presentation aids. First, there are **line graphs**, which use lines drawn along two axes to show growth, loss, or flat developments over time (see Figure 16.1).
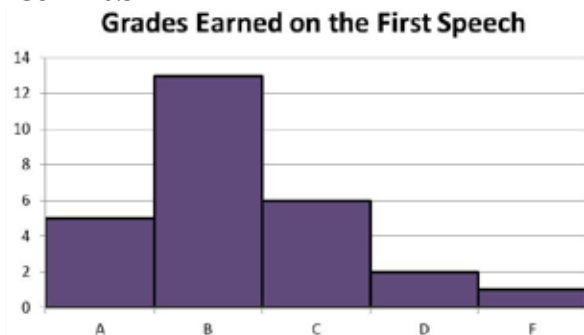
FIGURE 16.1

Sales by Region by Quarter
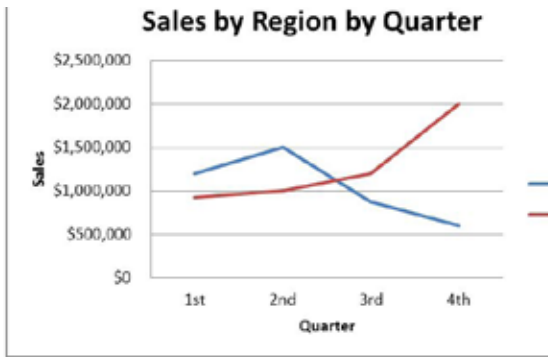
Next, there are **bar graphs**, which also show two axes, but the bars run either horizontally or vertically to represent total achievement. For example, the vertical axis can be years, while the horizontal axis represents profit for a business in millions of dollars. The bars extend up for each year to the total profit achieved in that year (see Figure 16.2).

FIGURE 16.2

US Gross Domestic Product
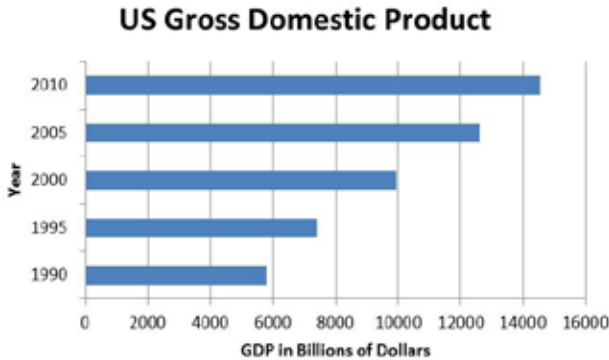
The third type of graph is a **histogram**, which is similar in appearance to a bar graph. A histogram is a visual representation of a frequency table in which the categories are placed on the horizontal axis, while vertical bars are used to represent the number (or frequency) of individuals that fit into that category. Histograms are usually used when data is continuous, so the categories on the horizontal axis represent an interval of scores that make up that category. For example, you might use a histogram to represent the grades that were earned on the first speech in class. Grade categories (A, B, C, etc.) would be shown on the horizontal axis, and the height of the vertical bar would represent the number of people who earned a specific grade (see Figure 16.3).

FIGURE 16.3

Grades Earned on the First Speech

Finally, we have **pie graphs**, which are circles that are "sliced" apart to represent percentages of the total "pie" for particular groups or categories (see Figure 16.4).

FIGURE 16.4

Favorite Types of Pie

Chocolate 23%

Apple 35%

Lemon 9%

Pumpkin 14%

Cherry 19%
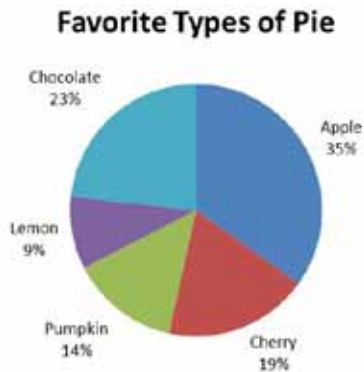
There are several types of graphs from which you may choose, and you select the one that best represents your point.

Objects

The fourth type of traditional presentation aid we will detail is an object. An **object** differs from a model in that it is the actual thing being discussed and not a representation of it constructed to scale. Objects are useful presentation aids for speakers who seek to demonstrate something to an audience. Think about the now-infamous infomercials for the cleaning product called a Sham Wow™. The speaker used the actual product in a demonstration for the audience while explaining how and why it operated. Objects should be used only when they are of a reasonable and accessible size, as you do not want to carry around large bulky items. There are also some types of objects that you are not allowed to bring into a classroom, including weapons, alcohol, illegal substances, and live animals. In those instances, you should simply use a model or a picture.

Photographs

The fifth and last type of traditional presentation aid is a **photograph**. Today's digital cameras and cellular phones allow you instant access to an image. There is a vast assortment of photographs available on the Internet. Photos allow the audience to experience the event, action, or person in a real-life context. They can also generate an emotional response from the audience, thus enhancing your appeal.

Traditional speaking aids have been around for a while, but with technological advances, speakers now have a variety of options available. In the next section, we will discuss how technology has enhanced our delivery options with presentation aids.

Technological Aids

Technology has enhanced our ability to make presentations and changed the manner we can use to deliver traditional presentation aids. Now we can provide video and audio technology with our presentation, thus making it even more dynamic. It is important to remember, however, that these technological tools, although exciting and attractive, do not substitute for, and should not overshadow, your speech. In this section, we will discuss how video and audio can enhance a speech, as well as provide you with tips for constructing effective slideshow presentations using PowerPoint™, Keynote™, Prezi™, or other similar programs.

Video

Video can be very effective in short bursts, but you must remember that you are giving a speech and the video is an aid, not your entire speech. Frankly, the video should not be a large part of your presentation. Pre-recorded videos, YouTube clips, or other such videos should be used to help an audience understand a point you are making, not be employed just to fill the time. They also require that you explain where the video came from and how it is relevant to the point under discussion. Without the explanation, the audience will feel the video clip was used simply to add time, and they will not understand its connection to the speech topic.

There are numerous times when a brief video clip would help to enhance a speech. In a demonstration speech, a presenter may find a video explaining how to use a particular tool or accomplish a specific task. In persuasive speaking, videos may be helpful to enhance testimonial evidence by allowing the audience to see the people as they endorse a product. Regardless of what you are trying to accomplish by showing the video, do not comment while the video is playing; let the audience focus their attention on the medium. If

you need to explain something happening in the video, then pause it to do so. This ensures that the audience stays focused on the message and not the presentation aid.

Audio

In addition to video, audio also can be a good supplement to a speech, but, like video, it has some limitations. Audio clips allow an audience to hear expert and peer testimony straight from the source, rather than paraphrased or quoted by you. Audio also can help provide sound effects that illustrate key sounds in a speech that you cannot deliver on your own. For example, an engineer could explain how to identify when a machine is stalling due to a malfunctioning piece of equipment by providing the particular sound it makes.

Audio is, however, not usually used on its own. In fact, you should always ask yourself if the audio clip you intend to play for the audience helps them understand something more clearly. If it does, then you are using it appropriately, but if it does not, then you should not incorporate it into your presentation. In any event, technologies such as audio and video can be combined with the more traditional presentation aids we discussed earlier.

Slideshow Presentations

In the last twenty years, presentation software has been readily available for students, professors, and professionals to use when delivering remarks. You can now choose from PowerPoint™, Keynote™, Prezi™, and several other platforms to create a dynamic and colorful slideshow.

We first discuss a mistake that many novices make when creating slideshows: wordiness. In essence, placing too many words on slides turns them into giant note cards that are then read to and by the audience. This design is unprofessional and defeats the purpose of visual aids by distracting the audience from your speech. Remember, these are *presentation aids*, not your entire presentation. Professors are often guilty of this approach. Think of teachers you might have had who put their entire lecture on PowerPoint slides. We would wager you paid more attention to writing down what was on the slide than listening to and understanding what the instructors were saying. Salespeople are also often guilty of putting too much information on slides for sales presentations.

Embedding Video and Audio

You may want to embed video or audio into your speech. Embedding a video allows you to save the video directly in your slideshow program so you do not have to link to an external Web site, such as YouTube, to show the video clip. Most presentation software programs allow you to do this, but you should practice to make sure it works the way you want it to. This is especially important if you will be using a different computer during your presentation since there are occasional compatibility problems among operating systems or software. Another option for displaying video is to link directly to the URL on an overhead slide. The problem with this approach is that the Internet might be down and you will not be able to access the link. Whenever possible, it is a good idea to embed the video in the slide and include the URL in the notes field so that you have a backup option for showing the video.

Color Schemes

Slideshow presentation programs have a myriad of color selections from which you may choose. It is important to be aware, however, that not all color schemes go well together. Color can help your audience focus on a specific item on the slide, and it also can contribute to the mood or emotional dimensions of your speech. There are three significant areas for which you choose color applications on slides: background, borders, and lettering. It is important that the lettering be visible, so do not choose the same or similar color for the background and borders. If you are using a dark background, use light colored text, and vice versa.

One simple color scheme to use is black and white, but these colors do not generate much energy. Certain topics lend themselves to a particular color palette. For example, a speech about breast cancer might use pink, while one about communism might use red. Whichever color pattern you use, realize that what you see on your computer monitor may not look the same as what you will see in a classroom on a giant overhead monitor. To avoid this potentially catastrophic problem, test your color pattern in advance.

Animation

Many slideshow programs now allow for rudimentary forms of animation. Animation can be clever, but it can also be distracting and even cause headaches and nervousness in your audience. Having spinning pinwheels and stars fading in and out may be creative, but do not assume that it makes your speech better. If you use animation, make sure it is fleeting and does not run throughout your speech. For example, you might have a key word quickly fly into place or use animation to highlight a specific part of a diagram. After it has served its purpose, you should disengage the animation and focus upon the remaining portion of your speech. If used correctly, animation can help bring something to the audience's attention, but it also can distract from your speech.

Dos and Don'ts of Slideshow Usage

Constructing a slideshow can seem like you are writing a whole new presentation. Developing the slides also can become a distraction when preparing to speak because it is a uniquely creative endeavor that taps into our desire to invent things. Table 16.1 provides a list of dos and dont's for creating a slideshow.

TABLE 16.1

Dos and Don'ts of Slideshow Usage	
Do	**Don't**
• Prepare slides carefully • Make sure slides are of the proper size • Practice with your slides • Ensure slides are visually pleasing • Have a backup plan • Ensure slides are relevant • Refer to slides when discussing them	• Use if unnecessary • Speak to the aid • Look too much at the aid • Trust technology • Use slides as note cards • Use as an outline • Depend upon them too much

As you can see, regardless of their format, presentation aids can assist you with your speech's success if used properly. In the final section, we will provide you with some basic guidelines to consider when preparing presentation aids. Realize that each speaking situation has its own opportunities and challenges, so what works in one speech does not automatically work in another.

Guidelines for Using Presentation Aids

There are several things you should think about when considering presentation aids. First, they should be used to help you accomplish the goals of your speech. They should help the audience understand complicated evidence, testimony, or arguments. They should not be used as a form of window dressing, nor should they be a distraction to you or the audience.

The type of presentation aid you use depends upon what your topic is and what you want your audience to retain. Research has shown that presentation aids help the audience remember certain aspects of your speech, but not the whole thing. Besides, you want the content of your speech, not the actual aids you used, to be the takeaway for an audience.

The next thing to consider is how to deliver a speech with presentation aids. When speaking, your focus should always be your audience; do not turn and talk to the aid. Speak to the audience as if the aid were not there, and if you need to mention it to the audience, then do so when discussing the points you wish to make. Remove each aid you use as soon as you are finished so that your audience is not distracted. One helpful way to do this with slideshows is to insert blank slides at points where you know the aid is not needed. This is much better than placing an unnecessary visual in view of the audience.

Finally, practice your speech with the presentation aids. You need to appear comfortable handling them and transitioning between slides, and to do this requires practice. This also creates the impression that the aids are extensions of you and your content, and not a distinctly separate element of the talk.