

## Using Visual Aids to Enhance Your Speech

The purpose of visual aids is to help your listeners better understand your message. Prepare your message, and then choose visual aids to achieve this purpose. Here are some ideas to stimulate your imagination:

### **Potential Visual Aids:**

- +Your Body and what you wear are the most readily available and most used - even when you don't intend to use them as a visual aid.
- + Objects such as sports equipment, tools, pictures, bottles, models, toys, books are great visual aids.
- +Electronic equipment – Equipment for Power Point, overhead projectors, slide projectors, movies.....
- +Charts, graphs, flip charts, poster boards, illustrations

**Visibility** - They are visual aids so be sure that everyone in your audience can see them easily.

Consider:

- +Size of the object and size of your audience
- +Location of the visual aid or screen if using projection equipment
- +Be sure every member of your audience sees the visual at the same time. "Pass around" objects will be too soon for some and too late for others. If each person needs to touch an object, try to provide one for each person or invite them to check out the object after the speech.

### **Ease of understanding.**

- +Be sure that each visual is used when, and only when, appropriate to your words. Keep them from sight of your audience except when they are needed.
- +Keep the number of words on a slide or individual chart to a minimum. No more than 7 words is a good "rule of thumb".
- +Be aware of the impact of colors, the number of colors on a single slide or chart, and the emotional impact of certain colors such as red. Don't overwhelm your audience with color.
- +Also avoid too much action or too many visual stimuli on a single slide, chart, or other illustration.

### **Speak to Your Audience:**

- +Keep your body addressed to your audience when using visual aids. Always avoid turning your back to your listeners.
- +Use gestures to draw your listeners' attention to your visual aid.
- +Don't read the visual to your audience. The visual should enhance your words, not be your words.
- +Your visuals should be prepared well in advance. When the audience is involved (making a list, for example) ask someone else to do the writing so that you can maintain visual contact with your listeners.

### **Know Thy Equipment and When to Use It:**

+A laser pointer can be useful for pointing out specific aspects on a graph, chart, or slide. Use it and then lose it until you need it again. Overuse of a pointer can be a distraction.

- +Practice with your equipment. Make sure you know how to use it and when to use it. Turn it off or otherwise mute it when it is not enhancing your words. Don't compete with your visuals for listeners' attention.
- +If at all possible, bring your own equipment. At the very least get to the site early if you are using someone else's so you can become intimately familiar with it. If someone else will be running the equipment make sure you have your signals straight before your audience arrives.

Remember that visual aids are props that should enhance your listeners' ability to understand and retain your words. Using visuals effectively will require extra practice by the speaker. Practice with your visuals until your timing is impeccable. Perhaps visuals should be called "enhancers" as they add a sense to your presentation.

