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CREATING AND PRESENTING VISUAL AIDS EFFECTIVELY

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The article focuses on making well-designed and well-presented visual aids. It also presents “signpost” phrases to refer to visual aids.

Introduction. English is now an international language. It no longer “belongs” to the British and Americans. That is why there are a lot of international conferences that are held in English. Giving a scientific presentation at a conference can help you in different ways, for instance you can gain visibility and inform others of the results you have achieved. This also increases your chances of getting feedback on your work, establishing new contacts and getting more funds for your future investigations.

For learners of English, however, making a presentation in English can be difficult and demanding. The presenter needs certain communication skills and language knowledge such as structuring information, using an appropriate style of language, using visual aids, and adopting the right body language. A thoroughly prepared speech together with effective visual aids makes your presentation successful. The given article contains “rules” for designing and using visual aids. We also dwell on “signpost” phrases to refer to graphs and charts.

Choosing a title slide. The title of your presentation is like an advertisement. You want as many people as possible to get interested in it, so it should not be too technical or too generic. Consider not using the title of your paper as the title of your presentation. An interesting title is more likely to attract people to your presentation, and titles of papers and theses are rarely designed to attract the attention of an audience. There is no standard way to make up a title slide, but most presenters prioritize information by using different font sizes. But for sure you should give the most space for the two most important elements — the title and your name. There are other things that some presenters include, for example the name and date of the conference, co-authors, their supervisor. But the more information you have on your title slide the more it will detract away from the most important things: your title and your name [1].

Presenting concise and relevant slides to justify any point you make. The audience does not need to see, or hear about, all the data you have collected. The data needs editing so that you only present concise and relevant evidence to justify any point you make. Slides should be clear with minimal detail and entertaining images. They should attract attention, entertain your listeners (in a way that is relevant to your topic) and interact with them. For example, a slide should make an explanation less complicated and quicker, or it should help people to visualize and recall something better or make something abstract become more concrete. If a potential slide does not do any of the above, then you probably don't need to create it. You do not need a slide for every point you make. Every slide should have a purpose and its purpose must be clear not just to you but also to the audience. When thinking of titles for your slides you should try to avoid words that give no real information such as “activity”, “investigation”, “overview”.

Writing and editing the text of the slides. Your aim should be for the audience to quickly assimilate the information on your slides and then focus on you. The less text there is, the quicker the audience will focus on what you are saying. You will also be less tempted to “read” your slides. The main task of your slides is to help the audience understand the topic. Your slides are prompts for you so that you would not forget what to say next. In order to fulfil these points you should have just one main idea or result per slide. Thus any bullets, data, or graphics on the slide should be in support of this main idea. Avoid complete sentences, by simplifying and cutting you will have much cleaner slides. The audience will then spend more time listening to you, and less time reading your slides. You will be able to give more detail when talking through the slide. You can use complete sentences for a specific purpose, for example to emphasize a particular point, explain a difficult one, or give a quotation. There should not be too much text in the slide itself. You need a slide to draw the audience's attention to your most important points. Try to reduce any overlap between what you say and what your slides “say”, it should only come when you actually start commenting on it. You should never read your slides, there is absolutely no advantage for either you or the audience, particularly as people read at different speeds and most will not be synchronized with your speech. References to other authors' works, legislation and manufacturer's instructions are generally not necessary on slides. Keep quotations short. Usually there is no need to quote the full text. You can either paraphrase a quotation using your own words; or you can cut the parts. You should show only those graphs, tables, and diagrams that you will actually talk about. If you do not need to talk about them, you could probably cut them. Avoid visuals that force you to look at the screen. When you talk while looking at the screen you lose audience's attention and also your voice is much more difficult to hear [1].

Checking grammar and spelling in your presentation is essential when you have finished creating your slides. If you make mistakes in your English when you talk, the majority of your audience will probably not care or even notice. However, they may notice written mistakes. Don't be creative with your English, write only what you are 100% is correct. Always remember, the less text you have, the more evident any grammar or spelling mistakes are. Most often people make mistakes in the use of articles (*a, an, the*) and try to be very attentive with spelling. Unfortunately when you become very familiar with your slides it becomes almost impossible for you to notice spelling mistakes. Presentation software does not always manage to highlight incorrect spellings and sometimes no spell check system would have found mistakes in some words that you write, because two variants of spelling can be correct and possible but with entirely different meanings, for example "*Heart/ Hearth*", "*Easter/ Eastern*" [2].

"Signpost" phrases to refer to graphs and charts. It is important, when using visual aids, to refer to them appropriately and to use the correct language. Try to keep the colloquial style in your speech. It will be much easier for you to talk during your presentation if you talk as you normally do in everyday life. It will be natural for you and will sound natural to the audience. So ask yourself if this is something that a person would say in an ordinary conversation. If it isn't, you should change it. Don't speak too fast or too much. If you speak too fast, it becomes difficult for the audience to understand what you are saying. And the impression may be that if you are presenting information very fast then it is not particularly important. Do not talk continuously, make sure you pause frequently. Stop talking for between one and three seconds not only between slides, but also when giving explanations. The audience needs to have some time to absorb what you are telling them, and they need a rest from hearing new information and your voice. If the sound of your voice never changes or you have a very repetitive intonation the audience will lose essential clues for understanding what you are saying. You need to vary your speed, loudness and pitch. You can vary these factors to show the audience what is particularly important about what you are saying. If you don't sound interested in what you are saying, the audience will not be interested either [3].

Besides photographs, pictures and drawings a speaker may use graphs, tables, bar charts, pie charts, flow charts, diagrams, organigrams to illustrate the presentation. You can use linking phrases to introduce a visual, to explain a visual and to highlight information. Examples of language to refer to visual aids are given below.

Making initial reference to the diagram

Here you can see ...

I have included this chart because ...

This is a detail from the previous figure ...

This should give you a clearer picture of ...

Take/Have a look at this slide in more detail ...

I'd like you to look at this transparency/graph/table/pie chart/flow chart/bar chart/ diagram/chart

This table shows/represents ...

Let me show you ...

But a closer look shows ...

Could you look at your handouts ...

The next slide/picture/graph shows ...

This diagram illustrates ...

Indicating what part of the diagram you want them to focus on

Basically what I want to highlight is ...

I really just want you to focus on ...

You can ignore/Don't worry about this part here.

As you can see from this pie chart the biggest segment represents...

I'd like to draw your attention to ...

Now I'd like you to have a look at the red segment showing ...

I'd like to point out that ...

You can see that different colours have been used to indicate ...

This diagram is rather complex, but the only thing I want you to notice is ...

Explaining what you have done to simplify a diagram

For the ease of presentation, I have only included essential information.

For the sake of simplicity, I have reduced all the numbers to whole numbers.

This is an extremely simplified view of the situation, but it is enough to illustrate that ...

In reality this table should also include other factors, but I have just chosen these two key points.

This is obviously not an exact/accurate picture of the real situation, but it should give you an idea of ...

I have left a lot of detail out, but in any case this should help you to ...

Explaining the lines, curves, arrows

On the "x" axis is ... On the "y" axis we have ...

I chose these values for the axes because ...

In this diagram, double circles mean that ... whereas black circles mean ...

dashed lines mean ... continuous lines mean ...

Time is represented by a dotted line.

Dashed lines correspond to ... whereas zig-zag lines mean ...

The thin dashed gray line indicates that ...

These dotted curves are supposed to represent ...

The solid curve is ...

These horizontal arrows indicate ...

There is a slight/gradual/sharp decrease in ...

The curve rises rapidly, then reaches a peak, and then forms a plateau.

As you can see, this wavy curve has a series of peaks and troughs.

Explaining positions

on the left is ... on the left side here ...

in the middle ...

here, at the top ...

down in this section ...

over here is a ...

the upper/lower section ...

Using the most appropriate phrase will give you confidence when you move from slide to slide and topic to topic. Linking words and phrases will make your presentation sound logical.

Conclusion. Research has shown that of all the information the mind stores, 75% is received visually, 13% through hearing, and 12% through smell, taste, and touch [1, p. 81]. So if you want your report to be understood and absorbed, your presentation should have a strict structure and clear attractive informative slides. Visual aids improve learning, retention and understanding. Effective visual aids make a successful presentation.

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