

## Presentation Pointers – part two

### Visual Aid

I promised you a mini-series on different skills to practice for your presentations. Eye contact, our first topic, is very important to both the speaker and the audience. So is the use of visual aid in your presentation.

Visual aid can manifest itself in many varieties, but basically, it involves any item that the presenter holds up or uses as illustration to give the audience a visual reference to the topic. It can be a lap book, poster, or drawing, a power point slide, a costume, or a concrete object. (Remember Andrew Moore's soccer ball to show how big a whale's eye is?) Visual aid dramatically enhances a presentation because it adds the visual component to the auditory component and more deeply engages the audience. It can also greatly assist the speaker in remembering the components of the presentation in a way that is much more subtle than notes. However, there are some important considerations to make when using visual aid.

**Your visual aid must be visible.** Nothing is more frustrating than a pencil drawn word that the audience can't read, or a pet turtle that only the front row can see! Instead of an audience, you get a mob pushing up to get a better look! Make sure that any lettering on your visual aid is big enough for the audience to read, or that your object is one (like the soccer ball) that is big enough for everyone to see when you hold it up.

**Your visual aid must be something you can manage while speaking.** Your visual aid can easily become a distraction if it keeps falling over behind you, if you have to juggle it around, or if it moves in unpredictable ways. Practice with the visual aid. Practice holding it up and make sure that your arm isn't going to get too tired halfway through the presentation. Try different ways of propping it up or sticking it to the wall behind you until you are certain it will do what you want it to do – stay put. If you are using a power point, practice with your slides so you can move smoothly through your presentation. If you have a large visual aid, make sure you have help ahead of presentation time in holding it. If you are wearing a costume, make sure you can move easily in it and it isn't going to unravel in the middle of your talk. You don't want your audience to remember only your fumbling efforts to wrestle with a visual aid. You want them to remember your presentation! The visual aid should add to, not take away from the presentation.

**Your visual aid should be simple.** Don't let your visual aid become something that the reader has to focus on instead of your presentation. If there is too much writing or too many parts that engage the audience, you will lose their attention as they try to read every word on the visual aid. If you do have more text than is easily read in a quick glance, give your audience a brief 'tour' of your visual aid. Point to a section and say, "Here I've explained....." or "This

paragraph tells about....” and give your audience the opportunity to look more closely following the presentation. This would cover both the pet turtle in his box and the great lap book that is full of information.

**Your visual aid should be appealing.** Again, you want to enhance your presentation. You’ve put effort into what you have to say, so put the same effort into the visual aid you use to help you say it! Make it neat. Make it colorful. Make it easy to understand. Remember the Emig’s rainforest project? They did a beautiful job on their visual aid and it was a delightful addition to a great presentation.

**Never hide behind your visual aid.** The presenter should always be the focal point in a presentation. If you are hiding behind your visual aid, you are much more difficult to understand, and your audience is less engaged. Besides, you should be maintaining your eye contact! I recently attended an Eagle Scout Court of Honor, where the State Representative presented the new Eagle Scout with a flag flown over the State Capital Building in Richmond in his honor. However, as he held up the paper certifying the flag’s authenticity and making his comments to the audience, he held it right in front of the scout’s face! Our photos are almost comical! This is another area where practice really counts. Get feedback from your family about how your visual aid looks before you actually use it. Make sure those kind of blunders don’t occur in your presentation.

Okay, now go get those costumes and posters and let’s keep working on powerful presentation skills. See you on Presentation Day!

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