Designing Visual Research Presentations

Why use visuals?
Visual aids can be used to:

- organize your presentation
- provide interest and motivation for your viewers
- increase retention of information and learning
- save instructional time and preparation time because they can be reused
- aid communication
- explain the relationships of parts to the whole
- clarify something difficult, complicated or very large
- stress important points

Key principles
Apply the following six principles to the design of your visuals.

- **Chunk information** – put similar materials together in manageable, sensible chunks. If information must be split over a number of slides or screens, consider reducing the size of the chunks you have.

- **Organize the content** – use basic principles such as simple to complex, known to unknown, knowledge to application. Position any image as close to the relevant content as possible.

- **Relevance** – be sure that the information or visual that you are using is relevant to the topic. Be able to give a rational reason for something to be in the visual. Just because the technology exists isn’t a good enough reason to use a visual. Over-use of bulleted slides is a common student complaint.

- **Importance** – place the most important information early in your slides or visuals. Call attention to it in some way. Be sure it really is an important idea to include.

- **Appropriateness** – consider the audience receiving the information and the material being presented.

- **Visual effectiveness** – keep your visuals simple so that they have the most impact.
Making your visuals effective

Use the following checklist to ensure your PowerPoint slides are effective.

Content

I have:

☐ Carefully chosen the material and included essential details only
☐ Presented only one main idea per visual
☐ Obtained permission to reproduce copyrighted material

Format

I have:

☐ Oriented the visuals to be wide (landscape) rather than tall (portrait)
☐ Used the template where possible (for consistency)
☐ Placed the most important points at the top left
☐ Used plenty of white or blank space, especially around images
☐ Presented numeric data in graph form with very clear formats

Text

I have:

☐ Used simple, clear language
☐ Used key phrases rather than long sentences
☐ Used no more than six (6) short lines per slide
☐ Used no more than six (6) words per line
☐ Considered using a series of slides rather than a single one containing more than 36 words
☐ Used upper- and lower-case text, not all capitals
☐ Used a simple and consistent font throughout
☐ Limited each slide to two different font types
☐ Used different font sizes for emphasis and contrast
☐ Used bullets as anchor points
Graphics
I have:
- Used graphics rather than text whenever possible
- Chosen simple, clear images
- Labeled all important parts of each graphic
- Shown a scale if the size of an object is hard to gauge
- Avoided showing only part of an object
- Used clip art sparingly

Color
I have:
- Used color sparingly to highlight key features
- Used colors that are clearly visible and readable
- Limited meaningful color coding to five colors
- Used strongly contrasted colors rather than similar ones
- Used color for separating, defining, and associating information

Background (PowerPoint slides)
I have:
- Chosen a background to enhance information, not overpower
- Reserved multicolor or complicated backgrounds for text slides only
- Used a consistent background throughout the presentation
- Selected a light or dark background, based on the amount of light in the room
  
  (light backgrounds and dark text in well-lit rooms; dark backgrounds and light text in rooms with lots of lighting control)

Transitions (PowerPoint slides)
I have:
- Avoided using a different transition for every slide
- Set the transition speed to fast to give my presentation a snappier feel and pace
Sound and animation

I have:

☐ Used special effects sparingly for maximum impact
☐ Used sounds to serve a specific purpose – to complement information

Principles of Design

Rhythm - the pattern created by repeating varied elements.
Unity - the relationship among the elements so that they look like they belong together
Balance - the equal distribution of visual weight in a formal (symmetrical) or informal asymmetrical or diagonal) orientation
Emphasis - the attention drawn to a single element
Simplicity - the presentation of fewer elements, limited verbal content, simple lettering, and bold drawing.

Guidelines for Legibility and Readability

Legibility is the speed and ease with which individual letters can be recognized.
Readability is the speed and ease with which words can be read; readability is dependent upon legibility.

Designing Research Posters

Size and orientation

- Start is with a 48" x 36" poster
- Landscape orientation
- This is the most common size poster used at conferences

Successful poster designs

- Should be readable from at least 8- to 10-feet away
- Titles are short and draw interest
- Text is clear and to the point
- Word count of about 300 to 800 words
- Effective use of graphics, color and fonts
- Consistent and clean layout