

ASTD TechKnowledge® Conference & Exposition

VISUAL DESIGN TIPS

Whether visual aids show what something looks like, show how to do something, clarify relationships, or show how something is organized, they should all be created using the following general design principles:

- **Layout.** Layout continuity from frame to frame conveys a sense of completeness in any presentation. Headings, subheadings, and logos should show up in the same spot on each frame. Margins, type-faces, type sizes, and colors should be consistent with graphics located in the same general position on each frame. The use of lines, boxes, borders, and open space also should be consistent throughout a presentation.
- **Format.** The type of format used in a visual aid must be well-suited to the point that the trainer is trying to illustrate. Typical choices for computer-generated graphics include text slides, bar charts, tables, area or line graphs, pie charts, organization charts, and diagrams.

The format of the visual aids will convey a certain mood and tone, which the presenter should consider when deciding on the use of color, typeface, clip art, or other aspects of graphic design and style.

Following are some general guidelines and design parameters for each type of graphic:

- **Text slides.** These highlight key points or reinforce what the presenter is saying. Text slides should be short and to the point, including only key words and phrases for visual reinforcement. Each frame should contain only one idea, and bullet points should express a single thought in each line.

Text must be no smaller than 14 point to be legible. Sans-serif typefaces such as Helvetica are most readable; serif faces (e.g., Times Roman), italics, and script tend to be too busy for use in presentations.

- **Tables.** These show exact data values. Tables should contain only necessary information, and large numbers should be rounded off to increase comprehension.
- **Pie charts.** Use these to show data as a percentage of a whole. The chart should be divided into a maximum of five sections; small sections can be combined into a section labeled “other.”
- **Bar charts.** These show the relationship between parts or variables, often over a period of time. No more than three or four bars (or series of bars) should appear on a single frame.

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- **Area graphics.** Use large areas of color to show the relationship between different sets of data, such as changes in volume or time
- **Line graphs.** These illustrate changes over a period of time or emphasize overall trends. A maximum of four or five lines can be used on each chart.
- **Organization charts.** Illustrate structure or work flow using these charts. But keep them simple, and be concise with labeling.
- **Diagrams.** Use these to show structures, relationships, or concepts that cannot be expressed with a statistical chart (e.g., maps).

These design tips were excerpted from “From Pencil to PC” by Carolyn Dickson and Bill Van Nostran (*Technical Training*, October 1997).