

USE OF VISUAL AIDS AT TOWN MEETING

Using visual aids can improve any presentation, including one at town meeting. But if overdone or done poorly they can be disastrous. Do *not* feel you must use graphics to support your presentation. Only use them if they will truly enhance your message. Here's why:

It is very difficult to listen to a speaker, read a graphic, and understand the presentation at the same time; over-reliance on graphics is generally a bad idea. While a picture can be worth a thousand words, the right word can be worth a thousand pictures; a short concise summary of the key points will focus the audience's attention.

A slide filled with too many words, on the other hand, does not help your cause. The audience will not be able to read it, likely they will get confused and probably will lose interest. Worst, they will not enjoy the meeting – and that is bad for the whole town.

Following are a few things to keep in mind if you do use graphics in your presentation. Section I outlines the Moderator's requirements which everyone must follow while Section II has suggestions that have proven effective in other town meetings:

I. Requirements for Use of Visual Aids at Town Meeting

If you decide to make a presentation with slides you *must*:

- A. Submit your DRAFT presentation to the Moderator for approval of the format no later than one week before the first day of the meeting.
- B. Submit your FINAL presentation to the Moderator and Town Manager's office with the main motion no later than three business days before the first day of the meeting.
- C. Use Microsoft PowerPoint (preferable) or other format compatible with the Town Manager's office equipment.
- D. Be prepared to speak *without* your visuals. If problems occur, the Moderator may ask you to proceed without your audio-visual assistance.

II. Guidelines for Use of Visual Aids at Town Meeting

Following are *suggestions* to make your PowerPoint more effective at town meeting:

A. Bullets and Information

1. Use a picture, graph, map or table instead of text whenever possible.
2. Keep the text short and concise using the following rules of thumb:
 - a. Only 4 or 5 bullet points per slide
 - b. No more than 6 or 7 lines per slide
 - a. Only 1 level of sub-bullets
 - c. Do not use punctuation – it clutters the slide and is hard on the eyes

Be sure not to cram too much text onto one slide. Unlike a document (such as this one) that you read, a slide is accompanied by audio (you, the speaker) to provide the detail. The preceding bullets were good examples for slides. This bullet is a *bad* one; it is too wordy. [And I just told you something you had already figured out, which is what you do not want to subject your audience to!]

B. Point Settings

Make the settings large – generally, as below:

1. Titles at **36 Point**

2. Text at **28 Point**

C. Font Selection

- a. Serif fonts (such as this) are great for documents, but *not* for presentations.
- b. Use a sans-serif font:
 - a. Arial is often a default in presentation software, but looks very heavy and is difficult to read; you are best to avoid it.
 - b. Verdana and Calibri are both easier to read from a distance.
- c. Use the same font in the entire presentation.

D. Do's and Don't's

1. Only use **bold**, *italics*, and ***bold italics*** sparingly.
2. Don't underline – it slows reading and hinders comprehension.
3. DON'T USE ALL CAPS. IT IS HARD TO READ ---
PLUS IT COMES ACROSS AS IF YOU WERE SHOUTING AT PEOPLE!!!
4. Photos and Other High-Resolution Graphics:

- a. Computers are fast but it can still take a long time to load slides crammed with too many pictures.
 - b. Seconds can feel like minutes, both for the presenter and for the audience.
 - c. Limit yourself to one high-resolution graphic per slide.
 - d. Location maps should be simple and clear.
 - e. Survey maps and architectural plans often have WAY too much information, most of it irrelevant with labels that are too small.
5. Graphs, Tables, and Spreadsheets:
- a. Graphs and tables can be helpful, but keep them simple.
 - b. Avoid spreadsheets; if you must use one, distribute a handout to voters.
6. Timing:
- a. Remember, you have five minutes (unless the Moderator has said otherwise).
 - b. A good rule of thumb is one minute per slide.
 - c. The last slide should sum up your case & ask the voters for your support.

III. Good luck!

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