



VIDEOCONFERENCE
PLANNING AND
PREPARING
YOUR VISUAL
MATERIALS

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Ontario's Distance Education & Training Network
Le réseau d'éducation et de formation à distance de l'Ontario

PLANNING AND PREPARING YOUR VISUAL MATERIALS

Videoconferencing is a medium ideally suited for very extensive use of visual materials. The equipment is often far better in many respects than that found in most traditional classrooms. Typical facilities include:

- A document camera (often called an Elmo projector) for displaying overhead-type graphics, information from books, photographs, or even small objects
- A computer link for displaying presentations, spreadsheets, etc.
- A video recorder
- A whiteboard or flip chart

These visual displays help students follow the lesson, provide or emphasize the structure or outline of a presentation, as well as aid in the identification of key points. New terms and their definitions can be presented visually to insure clarity and proper spelling. And, of course, providing information in both oral and visual form gives students twice the exposure to the information, and in at least one form that is likely to be their dominant or preferred learning mode.

Some courses or topics may not immediately suggest visual components, but there are generally a variety of possibilities even for “text only” topics. Ideas for graphic representations of text material include the following:

- Outline of major points covered or about to be covered
- List of key terms and definitions
- Proper spelling of names and places
- Representations of classifications such as hierarchies, taxonomies, flow charts of procedures
- Enumeration of ordered steps in a procedure
- Comparative lists of pros and cons, advantages or disadvantages, etc.

Presenting Visual Text

The following guidelines are provided to assist you in presenting visual text effectively:

- **The size of print is important.** Instructors may not know the number of students that will be present at a particular site, so planning for the usual maximum of 10 to 12 is prudent. This means that not all students can possibly be in a front row, and visual materials must be prepared to be easily visible from as much as 15 feet away.
- **Simpler is better.** Choose a bold font of at least 36 points in a clean, crisp style. Avoid script fonts (cursive writing) or serif fonts (ones that have extra “feet” on the tops or bottoms of letters). The two bottom samples below (Fig. 1) are more crisp and will be easier to read than the top two.
- **Light text on a dark background is easier to read.** If a visual is to be transmitted by live camera from the document camera, then black print can be used, preferably on a pastel blue or green rather than the stark, reflective white of normal paper.
- **Visuals should always be produced in a horizontal orientation.** The aspect ratio on most tablets and television screens is 3 units high to 4 units wide. This is almost exactly the ratio of an 8½” by 11” sheet of paper on its side.

Fig. 1

36 pt. Script Font

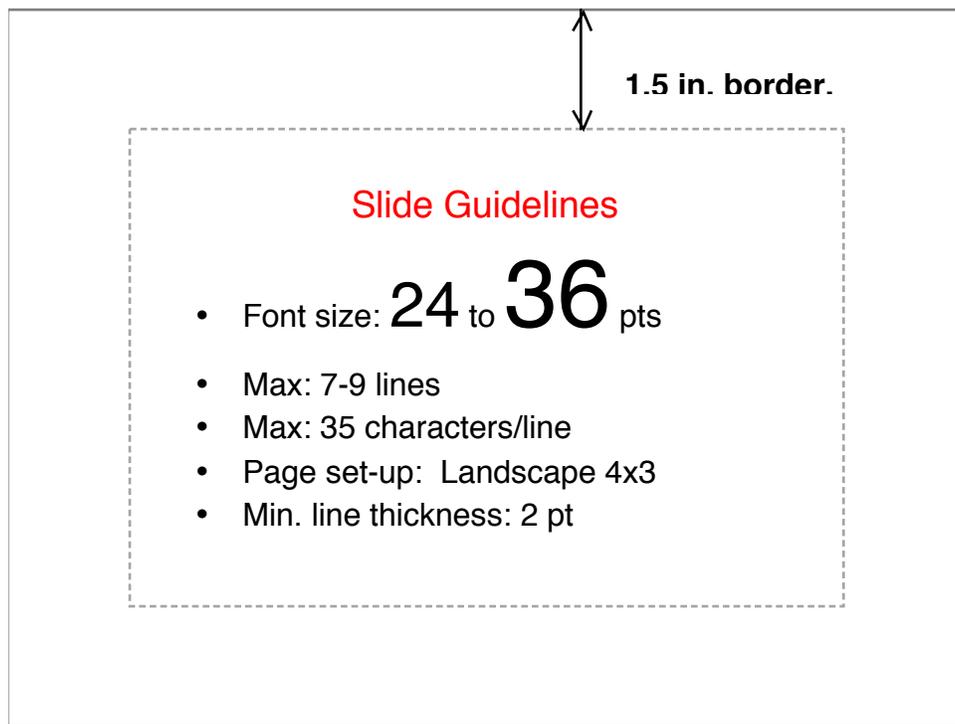
36 pt. Serif Font

36 pt. Sans-Serif Font

36 pt. Sans-Serif Font

- **Be generous with space around the edges of visuals.** It is recommended to leave a blank area of at least 1.5 inches around your slides (see Fig. 2).
- **Use bold text, capitals, italics, or colour for occasional emphasis.** Avoid underlining as it generally makes words somewhat harder to read. Special effects should be used sparingly to avoid visual chaos. If everything is emphasized, in effect, nothing is emphasized.
- **Use bullets or icons of various styles to emphasize points:** arrows for directions, check marks for check lists, a key for a key point, etc.
- **Limit the amount of wording on a slide.** A good guideline to follow is to have a maximum of 7-9 lines per slide, and no more than 35 characters/line.
- **Be consistent** in the font used as well as the colour of print and background unless there is a very specific reason to alter it. Unnecessary variations are more likely to be distracting than helpful. Consistency will also eliminate any need to adjust the document camera focus or zoom while your class is underway.
- **Use summarizing key words and phrases rather than complete sentences.** It is the idea that should be the focus. This also eliminates the need for most punctuation which is somewhat difficult to see.
- **Screen displays should be balanced, attractive, uncluttered, and varied in style** throughout a presentation. Intersperse text screens with graphs or photographs, etc.

Fig. 2



- **Choose colours that go well together** but generally avoid bright reds, pinks, or orange which tend to appear blurred. Bright colours may be effective for occasional attention grabbers, but very bright backgrounds can be jarring. Light coloured text on a dark background (blue or black) works well.
- **Double and triple check for spelling and grammar errors.** Nothing is apt to decrease a presenter's credibility faster than letting some slip through.
- **Be sure graphics are relevant.** Those that are only marginally related to a topic can add confusion rather than clarity. Graphic screen design, like that of text, should be simple and easy to read from the furthest point a student is likely to be seated. Create titles for graphs or charts that are short enough to use large text. Try to do the same for the labels on vertical and horizontal graph dimensions.
- **Allow time for participants to thoroughly examine the materials.** Pause when you show items either on the document camera or in front of the video camera. A document camera is often used to display graphics, artwork, slide shows and teaching examples.

Tip: Use colour to code information: green for a “safe” procedure and yellow for a “risky” one, for example.

Resources

Videoconferencing. 1997. Contact North.

A Guide to Videoconferencing. Tokyo
Development Learning Center.
[http://www.jointokyo.org/en/services/video_
conferencing](http://www.jointokyo.org/en/services/video_conferencing)
accessed on March 27, 2012

Videoconferencing Guide for Faculty. Lakehead
University.
<http://cedl.lakeheadu.ca>
accessed on March 27, 2012

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