

Akuro Limited - Teaching Aids

There are many different ways in which a trainer can make the learning experience more interesting and memorable for learners. One technique is to use teaching aids. These are things used in the classroom to aid teaching and training. They fall into two main categories: visual aids such as overheads; and interactive tools such as a video programme or resource pack. It is good to bear in mind that too much material and too many different themes can serve to confuse the class. It is best to stick to a few techniques and, perhaps, follow one theme, example or case study.

Visual aids

Visual aids are visual representations which support presentations in the form of text, cartoons, graphs, illustrations, photographs. These can be OHP transparencies, handouts, flipcharts, posters, objects etc. They help to break up the monotony, providing a visual stimulant to reinforce what the learners are hearing.

The three main techniques for this use projection onto a large screen that everyone in the class can see. The oldest is using a photographic slide projector. The more modern and flexible overhead projector enables presenters to design their own text as well as pictorial illustrations. The most high-tech version is the use of a data projector, a computer and presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint.

When selecting your visual aid technology be aware of your audience's expectations. Photographic slide presentations are probably only suitable in specialised subject areas such as preservation and conservation.

With overhead projection the look of the presentation can be very professional as well as allowing individual tailoring that may keep the audience's attention. Certain audiences may expect presentation software but this option can be perceived as "flashy" and is often very similar visually to every other speakers' presentations which can make it monotonous.

Photographic slides

Depending on the subject matter of your presentation, it may be appropriate to use photo transparencies. These need special equipment — a projector and a carousel, usually with a trigger mechanism to allow you to move to the next slide. The slides are loaded into the carousel, the first slide is projected at the appropriate time and the rest in sequence either manually by an operator (who may or may not be the presenter) or automatically by the speaker with a remote control. As with any visual aid relying on technology, it is vital to make sure the equipment is working before the presentation begins. Depending on how reliable your computer technology is, it may be more efficient to scan the slides and incorporate them into a PowerPoint or similar presentation.

Overheads

Overheads are also known as OHPs, slides and transparencies. They are pictures or writing printed, written or drawn onto a sheet of acetate. This can be placed on the bed of an overhead projector and via light and magnification technology an image is projected onto a white wall or screen.

OHPs can be a very robust and resilient form of visual aid as the technology is cheaper, less prone to break-down and glitches than computer technology, and as you can write on blank transparencies, can be very responsive to classroom needs as when the trainer wants to elaborate on something or groups want a visual aid to feed back to class. They are also more flexible as you can change the order, and add or drop slides during a presentation according to need.

You should always test the equipment before you start your presentation. The focus may need adjusting, or the position of the projector or the screen. You should also assess the best place to stand so that everyone can see both you and the screen.

There are some helpful rules to follow when developing and using overheads to support your lectures and presentations:

- Don't have too much information on a slide
- Use a large font size (ideally at least 20pt), and a font that is easy to read
- Using pictures, cartoons, your own illustrations, photos and diagrams is good as it breaks up the monotony of reading and listening. They can also be amusing. If you can't find anything else, clip art is a useful resource
- Studies show that participants pay more attention to colour overheads
- Time your overheads well — if the class is copying you need to leave them up long enough
- Don't click swiftly through your overheads like a photo slide show
- Don't be afraid to elaborate while the OHP is up
- If there is a pause without an OHP to show, switch off machine as the blank screen is annoying and the noise of the fan can be distracting
- Try not to turn to the screen to indicate detail on the projected image, use a pointer on the OHP itself and face your audience
- Try to ensure that the OHP projector is situated where you can use it without blocking the audience's view

Presentation software

Presentation software is a special computer programme which allows you to design a format, draft text and include illustrations which can then be projected and magnified onto a screen for the class to watch while the speaker makes his/her presentation. The equipment configuration varies but usually there is a desktop computer or laptop linked to a data projector. There can sometimes be issues of compatibility with the computer equipment if the laptop is a different age from the projector, for example. It is important to test the equipment before starting the presentation. Although when first beginning to use powerpoint the technical expertise required to connect the equipment and bring up the image can seem rather beyond you, after a while you get to understand the tricks to set yourself up and to solve problems.

The software will also generate a variety of documents that can be used as handouts or as the basis for annotated speakers notes. It is advisable to attend training to learn how to develop computerised presentations. The training will cover how to design the layout, select fonts, insert illustrations, draft text and specify the speed and delivery of the text on the screen. When developing presentations you can select from a broad range of backgrounds, fonts, styles and formats. The software, particularly Microsoft PowerPoint, provides some of these and you can also customise to use company logos or personal favourite clip art, etc. Unless you have access to designer input, it is best to keep computer-based presentations as simple as possible. One big advantage of computer-based presentations over the other two techniques is that you can change the presentation very easily and there is no need to change a hard copy unless you are providing the software generated handouts.

Look at the tips provided for OHP design above for guidelines to help produce effective and professional presentations.

Objects, pictures or documentation which are handed around the class but which do not constitute a handout

It can be useful to circulate objects around the class to illustrate a point the speaker is making. Examples of this technique are:

- Mouldy records (sealed in a plastic bag) in a preservation management class
- An old hard drive in a digital records management class

A similar technique is to circulate examples of documentation when either there is either too much or it is inappropriate to make copies for everyone. Photos, catalogues and books also lend themselves to this treatment.

Remember that individuals will be focusing on the circulated item at different times and may miss some of the accompanying lecture — it can be more effective to leave them out for students to examine during a break.

Other teaching aids

There are many different types of teaching aids and it is possible that you will invent a few unique kinds of your own. The examples given here are intended as an introduction rather than an exhaustive list.

Resource packs and handbooks

A resource pack is a collection of documents which supports the teaching or training. It is best to present them in a labelled folder. A handbook is also a collection of supporting documents but the material is bound together in a book. They are both integrated and comprehensive so that the learner has all the materials together. It differs from a set of handouts in that the material is all given out at once, usually at the beginning of the training. It may also contain information on subjects not covered in the classroom sessions.

Videos, DVDs and audio tapes

Videos, DVDs and audio tapes can be useful ways of reinforcing, introducing or filling in detail on the subject being taught. These can be shown to the class as substitute for a lecture or presentation and used exactly the same way with the participants free to take notes as they choose. They can also be used more interactively as follows:

- they can be used in conjunction with an exercise sheet which requires the class to fill in details from the visual/aural experience
- time is allowed for discussion before and/or after the showing

Document cleaning packs

A document cleaning pack containing a mask, rubber gloves, plastic eraser, paint brush, duster etc. can be used to demonstrate simple document cleaning techniques.

Role-playing

Role-playing is where members of the class are given a part or character to play in a fictional situation. This can be completely free-form where everyone can invent their view-point for themselves. It can be more effective if the trainer devises a detailed script. The objective is for the class to think about the subject in a real life situation and is particularly effective if focused on areas of conflict within and between teams for example relationships between archivists / records managers and IT specialists.

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