

Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy Series



This handout provides you with a guide to resources that will help you create powerful and effective presentations using PowerPoint or Keynote presentation software.

Overview: What are Visual Rhetoric and Visual Literacy?

The simplest definition for visual rhetoric is how/why visual images communicate meaning. Note that visual rhetoric is not just about superior design and aesthetics but also about how culture and meaning are reflected, communicated, and altered by images. Visual literacy involves all the processes of knowing and responding to a visual image, as well as all the thought that might go into constructing or manipulating an image.

What is involved in really “seeing” a picture or an image?



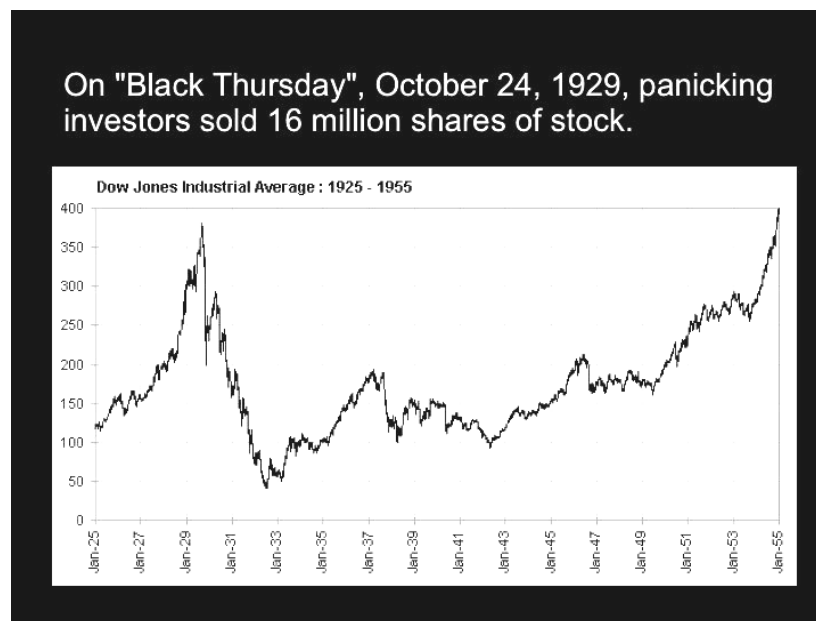
Perceptual processes, time, movement, and memory in the act of seeing are important. The circumstances in which the image is situated—as well as any animation between picture and text—are also worth noting as you consider visual rhetoric. An image should help your message, not hinder it.

What kind of presentations do you create?

Do you inform and motivate your audience or do you put them to sleep? Most of us want to put together presentations that captivate and educate. In order to do that, we need to use supporting technology appropriately. Software like Microsoft's PowerPoint and Mac's Keynote give us the ability to create a visual accompaniment to any presentation fairly easily and effectively. However, it is important to use these resources rhetorically—with a clear strategy that keeps in mind what we want to communicate to our audience and how they are likely to respond that goal. When we use a visual medium like PowerPoint or Keynote slides, we must make, as one blog article states, “careful efforts to craft a story and create supporting visuals that focus on our audience's needs in a clear and meaningful way.”¹

PowerPoint and Keynote Presentations function in two ways:

1) They provide *visual reinforcement* and clarification to a “spoken word” presentation. They do not replace the speaker on the platform, nor should they compete for attention. They should complement all that is being said and provide a way to bring forward key terms, main points, and effective illustrations for concepts being explained verbally. They should NOT detract from the speaker's prepared lecture/speech. They should NOT be the speaker's talking points merely pasted onto a slide. Effective presentations do NOT involve speakers turning their backs to the audience and reading from the slides. Here's an example of a single slide that is meant simply to complement the spoken word:



2) They function as a *visual presentation* unaccompanied by a verbal presentation or additional lecture materials. Presentations designed in this way might be uploaded to a website, or sent to a colleague or group of colleagues with whom one is unable to speak personally. Such presentations also can be used in

¹From Garr Reynolds' blog article, [What Is Good PowerPoint Design?](#) Be sure to read this whole article for an excellent discussion of design accompanied by many examples of effectively designed PowerPoint slides.

contexts such as conferences and trade shows, where passers-by stop to watch the presentation in order to be better informed about a book, product, company, theory, or concept.

A strong example of a PowerPoint presentation designed with the second function in mind (a stand-alone presentation), but providing excellent design information for any kind of PowerPoint or Keynote presentation can be accessed at: www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/templates/presentations.ppt

Note: Regardless of the presentation venue, it is important that as a public speaker, you recognize the two distinct forms/functions of presentations above and that you prepare the presentation most appropriate for your circumstances and your audience.

How do I actually create a PowerPoint Presentation?

If you've never created a PowerPoint Presentation before, follow this link for the basics:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUqIDs5MZxM>

The Purdue Online Writing Lab has another excellent discussion of how to create a presentation at:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/ppt/20071016123141_686.ppt.

George Mason University offers a quick list of "Do's and Don'ts" at:

<http://mason.gmu.edu/~7Emontecin/powerpoint.html>.

For an example of a PowerPoint presentation that combines visual images with a spoken text to good effect, consider Doug Wall's deconstruction of "authenticity":

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.1/disputatio/walls/index.htm>

Additional Resources for Presentations

- One source for Software ideas for the Mac is <http://www.pure-mac.com/presentation.html>
- If you create a lot of presentations, it might be worth investing in a CD or DVD that can give you hundreds of options for backgrounds, themes, photos, etc. One source you can check out is [Digital Juice](#), a provider of royalty-free professional animations, stock footage, music, layered graphics, clip art, and templates.
- One other PowerPoint on creating PowerPoint presentations can be accessed at: <http://www.irc.gmu.edu/scampbel/aagee/aagee.html>

Handouts in the Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy Series

Overview: Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy

Writing about Comics and Graphic Novels

Writing about Film

Writing about Paintings

Writing about Photography

Writing with Maps

Using PowerPoint and Keynote Effectively

Creating Scientific Poster Presentations

Crafting and Evaluating Web Sites