

Enhancing Your Message with Flip Charts

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Flipcharts have long been the hands-down favorite of many trainers, educators and presenters when presenting to smaller groups (maximum of 40-50 in a smaller room). They are versatile, simple to set up and use, convenient for capturing items quickly, require no cords or electrical outlets, are relatively inexpensive compared to other visual aids and can be used virtually anywhere. In using flipcharts, gone is the worry and expense of having to carry an overhead projector, bulbs, extension cords, screens, and other accessories. You do not even have to supply an easel to use them. With masking tape, straight pins, and/or clips, nearly any wall surface can be utilized as a writing surface. As a result, virtually any large room or open space can be turned into an ideal presenters' forum.

The Value of Flip Charts

Like many other visual aids, flip charts can enhance your content delivery by providing a convenient and versatile surface on which you can deliver your message. By using words and graphics on a written surface, you make your message more appealing to your audience, appeal to visual learners and aid retention. The key is to practice with and easel and flip chart pad before using it in front of an audience.

The main reason for using flip charts, of course, is that they help the presenter communicate better. Research done by the Wharton School of Business to determine the effectiveness of using visual aids when presenting, found that using visuals in a presentation can cut meeting time by 24%. Here's what they found:

- When visuals were used, audience members perceived presenters to be more effective. Some comments following presentations were "*better prepared*," "*more concise*," "*clearer*," and "*more interesting*."
- Following a visually supported presentation, 64% of participants were able to make a decision. Those in the non-visual group took longer to make a decision.
- Of those audience members in a visual presentation, 79% reached consensus, compared to 58% in a group with no visual support.
- Of the participants in the visual presentation, 67% found the presenter convincing, compared to 50% in the group without visual support.

General Tips for Use

Flipcharts are inexpensive, yet effective training aids for small groups (depending on room configuration). They provide an easy way to capture key thoughts or to highlight information in small group settings. Some tips for using flipcharts are:

- Make sure the easel is locked into position and balanced.
- Place the easel so that ceiling lighting shines onto the front of the page and does not come from behind where it can cast a shadow and make viewing difficult.

- Don't write on the flipchart and talk at the same time. Write first; then face the attendees and talk.
- Stand to the right side of the easel as you face your audience if you're right-handed; stand to the left side, if left-handed. This allows you to face your attendees and easily turn to capture key discussion points on paper with your writing hand while turning pages with your free hand.
- Don't block your attendees' view when pointing to pre-printed information on the flipchart.
- When not writing, PUT THE MARKER DOWN!!! Playing with it or using as a pointer can be distracting and communicate nervousness.
- Leave a sheet of blank paper between each sheet of text to prevent attendees from "previewing" the next page as you discuss the current one. It also prevents damage to the next printed page should your marker "bleed" through.
- Use large pointers made of wooden dowel rods with a black tip (available at craft, teacher, and home supply stores). You can also use arrows cut out of poster or other heavy colored paper or other props.
- If appropriate, tear off sheets and tape them to walls for future referral.
- Put two-inch strips of masking tape on the side or rear of the easel for use in posting torn pages.
- Consider putting tabs (e.g. a strip of tape attached to the back of the sheet, then folded forward attached to the front edge of the page) on pre-written pages to ease in topic identification. You can then number or label topics on the tabs for easy location when needed. The tabs allow you to quickly refer back to a page later in your presentation and to turn them. An option to tape is to use the clear colored stick on strips produced by 3M. Reference the colors in your lesson plan or notes so that you can easily find a desired page.
- Always have extra markers and pads of paper available.
- You may want to write comments or key ideas lightly in pencil in the upper corner of the pages. This allows you to unobtrusively refer to them, as you appear to be looking at the flipchart topics. Your attendees will never know you "cheated" since they can't see the remarks from a distance!

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