

Use effective illustrations



1. Keep illustrations relevant

Does your illustration or story fit with your point or overall theme? Is it appropriate?

Hint: If you enjoy telling the story to friends and family, it is likely more suited for the dinner table than for your other audience.

4. Use examples

Will your examples cause undue embarrassment to any in your audience or family members? Are there elements that might be sensitive or cruel?

Hint: An example, much like an illustration, should be relevant.

2. Fit your audience

Will you have to explain terms? Provide additional background information? Will your illustration make sense to everyone present?

Hint: If explanations are needed, you will lose your audience.

5. Use rhetorical questions

What are some thought-provoking questions you could intersperse with your story, illustration or example? Will any questions cause your audience discomfort?

Hint: If any of your questions will detract from the point, sound condescending, or cause uneasiness, do not use them.

3. Keep them simple

Can you explain the illustration in a few seconds? Are there unnecessary parts of the story you can eliminate?

Hint: If you cannot relate the story in under 60 seconds, it is too long.

6. Use similes and metaphors

Does your story use similes or metaphors? Can you incorporate these?

Hint: A simile or metaphor can make your illustration powerful and create a lasting image. Choose something everyone can relate to.

Final hint: Following your speech or discussion, if your audience is focused on your illustration but cannot remember why it was mentioned, or you have more attention on your story than the theme of your speech, you might consider adjusting your illustration or removing it altogether before your next presentation.

Prepare your illustration



Choose your illustration/story.

Write down the point or theme it ties into.



Think of your audience and write down why they will understand it.



Write out your illustration and cross out unnecessary points, superfluous words and adjectives, and overblown opinions. Stick to the facts. Read it aloud and time yourself. If it is over 60 seconds, edit more.



Use a simile or metaphor to make your illustration more powerful and help your audience remember your point without detracting from your message.



Review your examples. If you are mentioning specific people, ask them how they feel about it. If your example is aimed directly at people, a particular group, or a country, consider how your delivery might seem so as not to cause embarrassment, or worse.

Write down rhetorical questions to stir the emotions of your audience. “Do you think...?” “Did you know...?” “Why do you think...?” are effective in keeping their attention.
