

CAAM 600: Writing the CAAM Master's Thesis

Evaluating Visuals: A Checklist

Note: You cannot simply copy a visual from the text for a slide, which must be simplified. A reader can study the text; a listener sees a slide only briefly. The term “visual” refers to slides or to text illustrations. Examples include tables, charts, graphs, diagrams, photographs, micrographs, schematics, blots, and so on.

___ 1. All information in the visual is accurate.

___ 2. The visual illustrates something important to your argument.

(A visual should contain all necessary, but no unnecessary, material. Check any chart or figure you have taken from another source—you may not need everything there and should adapt it rather than copy it as a whole. Or you may need to add to it. Put nothing in a slide that you don't talk about. Put enough information in a text visual so that a reader gets the main ideas just from the visuals and captions.)

___ 3. The font size is large enough and is suitable for the kind of visual.

(This means ALL words or symbols, whether read on a page or on a slide. Use a serif font such as Times New Roman for text visuals, **sans serif such as Arial** for slides. Check that all axes and symbols are readable; be aware that visuals downloaded from the Internet often transmit poorly. For slides use 36-44 point for titles, 24 and up for bulleted lists, and 18-20 for captions.)

___ 4. The visual doesn't look cluttered; proportions are pleasing; it is easy to read.

(If it looks too dense, remove some items or divide the material into two visuals.)

___ 5. Slide and text titles use key words or phrases rather than complete sentences.

(Use a phrase for the title of a text visual, but complete sentences in the caption.)

___ 6. The visual doesn't try to show too much material.

(If you have a line diagram showing six contrasting symbols, they will overlap or be too crowded so that interpretation is next to impossible. Even four or five symbols may be confusing. Don't try to show too many types of information in a single visual. And don't compensate by dividing the material into two or three tiny visuals on the same slide!)

___ 7. If a legend is necessary, it is large enough, is placed for easy reference, and clearly identifies the symbols.

___ 8. The symbols are easy to differentiate in a line graph; in a bar graph, the bars are not 3-D and those that stand out contain the most important information. The symbols and bars are easily differentiated, even when printed in gray scale.

____ 9. Both axes are accurately and legibly labeled.

____ 10. The scale is the same on all visuals showing comparisons.

____ 11. The title is informative. The caption on a text visual gives enough information so that we know what to notice and is sufficiently complete that a reader doesn't have to refer to the text.

____ 12. Colors contrast sufficiently and transmit well.

(Red looks good in written text but will not show up at the back of a large room. Colors of the same intensity, such as dark blue and dark green or yellow and pale blue will not contrast sufficiently, either in text visuals or in slides. In slides, make certain that there is sufficient contrast between words and background. When choosing colors for your slides, remember that colors sometimes transmit differently when on screen and that colors that work in text won't always transmit well. Remember, too, that many men are red/green colorblind.)

____ 13. All sources are cited whether in text or on a slide.

(In the text, place the citation in parentheses at the end of the caption and inside the period. If you have changed what was in the source, identify it as "Adapted from..." On a slide the font size of the citation does not need to be readable from the back of the room; in the text, it must be readable and is the same size as the caption.)