

IMPROVING SLIDE SHOW VISUALS¹

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Abstract: There has been an increased demand upon the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency's Audio-visual Department to produce various types of title and graphic slides. Several inexpensive and efficient methods for making attractive and informative slide graphics have been developed. Using very simple techniques and equipment, it is possible to produce multi-colored slides from black and white art work; captioned slides that are professional and extremely informative, and several other variations of the same. Combined, these visual aids can create a slide presentation that will rival high-priced production companies.

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“We’re going to have a slide show!”

How many times have you heard that and wanted to get up and sneak out of the room? The multi-million dollar movies of today have spoiled everyone. The thought of having to watch a slide show with no moving pictures or no talking people is almost horrifying.

In spite of this, the slide program is still the simplest, most cost efficient method of entertaining and informing an audience. The evolution of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency's slide shows has led to the use of some inexpensive methods to dress up the programs, therefore, holding the audience's attention longer while simultaneously educating them.

METHODS AND RESULTS

Most audio-visual departments already have the basic equipment needed to accomplish this. Of course a 35 mm camera is the most important. A macro lens is very useful but the same results can be accomplished using bellows or extension tubes. The camera should also have a double exposure capability. A copy stand with lights is necessary as is a slide duplicator, which can vary from the expensive models to the units that attach directly to a 35 mm camera. A basic pack of color printing filters is helpful, although we will not be discussing any color printing. These filters are used over the camera lens to create virtually any color imaginable. While it is not a mandatory piece of equipment, an offset camera is useful for making high contrast ortholith film negatives and positives. If an offset camera is not available, similar results can be obtained with a 35 mm camera using a high contrast ortholith film. (It may be necessary to run test rolls to determine the proper exposure and development that will yield an extremely dense negative which is mandatory.) Also, it is necessary to have something to typeset copy with.

The first method, black copy on a colored background, is very simple. The original art work (graph, table, etc.) begins as black copy typeset on white paper. If this is photographed directly, the resulting white slides will be quite boring and can even be harmful to the eyes if projected in a dark room. To overcome this, simply insert a color filter over the camera lens before the exposure. The result will, of course, be black copy over a colored background. Colors can be varied at will, and should anyone get tired of the tables or graphs, they will probably continue watching just to see what color might come up next.

¹This paper was presented in conjunction with slides to provide visual examples of the steps involved. Without these visuals, some steps may not be as clear as others. If further clarification is necessary, please contact the author.

There are several variations to this method. The filters can be placed directly over the copy and overlapped in selected spots to emphasize certain points of interest or to combine two or more colors on one slide. If the filters are placed directly over the copy, care must be taken to avoid glare off the glossy surface. This can be prevented by using a lens shade, turning off the overhead lights, or by using polarizing filters over the copy lights.

The second method is known as a color addition technique. The basic art work again begins as black on white and rather than having black copy on a colored background we want colored copy on a colored background. This is where the double exposure capability of the camera is used. The first exposure is made of the copy through a colored filter. The copy is then replaced with a plain white card and a second exposure is made of the plain white surface through a different colored filter. The result is one color of letters on a different colored background. By varying filters and exposure, the possible color combinations are unlimited.

The third method is captioned slides (words over a photograph). Captioned slides are very useful for titles and for emphasizing points of interest. The simplest way to accomplish this is to place small plastic letters over a photographic print and shoot. This is very useful in its place but sometimes does not look very professional. There are variations such as using three-dimensional letters with strong shadows to give depth to your titles or props can be added to dress up the photograph. This like all of the other methods, is limited only by imagination.

Another method of doing captioned slides that this department has found to be very successful is a burn-in technique. By doing a double exposure on the slide duplicator, the caption is actually burned into the slide. To begin, the copy is typeset onto a clean sheet of paper. With proper planning, several pieces of copy can be arranged onto one sheet for several different slides to save film. The copy is then photographed with the offset camera using high contrast ortholith film, yielding an extremely dense black negative with clear copy. The original slide that has been chosen is placed on the slide duplicator and shot at the proper exposure. It is best to choose a slide that has a solid colored area (such as sky) to burn a caption in. With experience, it is easy to tell which slides will work well and which ones won't. After the original has been properly exposed, it is replaced with the ortholith negative that is totally black except for the clear letters. This is double exposed onto the original and burns-in white letters from whatever copy appears on the negative. With proper pre-planning, the copy can be typeset to wrap around the subject.

In some cases, especially nighttime shots, the white burned-in letters will be unattractive. In these cases a color filter can be placed between the light source and the negative when burning-in the copy, yielding colored letters rather than the blaring white. This is especially useful when letters can actually be color-coordinated with a particular scene. It is even quite simple to do triple exposures and create a combination of photographs with a caption or title.

The same ortholith negative film can be used to shoot art work which can in turn be photographed using color filters resulting in striking color art work against a dense black background. In this case, dust spots on the negative can be very distracting but can easily be eliminated by painting out with opaque black.

Problems to watch for when doing the captions include not using a light or broken background to burn-in on; being careful not to place the caption over the subject in the photograph, and not overexposing the copy which creates a halo effect around the letters.

The next method is really just a variation or an addition to the ones already mentioned. It involves using masks to enhance what already appears in the original photograph. A standard example would, of course, be a mask around a pretty girl that implies the audience is looking through a pair of binoculars.

For example, slide graphics were being made on the Southeastern Vital Statistics Survey. Several maps of the Southeast were outlined, and filled in with solid black. The copy was typeset above and below each map. This was shot with the ortholith film yielding a clear map of the Southeast and clear copy. This was then overlayed on a photograph and shot. The result is a photograph inside the Southeast states with whatever copy the particular photograph relates to.

Again, there is a tremendous number of variations to this technique that can greatly enhance any slide presentation. The offset camera operator can reverse his process and yield a positive film image (black letters on a clear base) that can be overlayed on a photograph to produce black letters on the slide. An added benefit to this method is that it is much easier to position copy precisely.

All of the methods previously mentioned can be further enhanced by using different film types. One such method is to use a negative color film such as Kodacolor II. The result will be a pastel colored, low contrast negative. Another unique result can be obtained by using Ektachrome film and C-41 processing (normally used only for color negative films) to obtain a very colorful high contrast negative image. A third variation involves using Ektachrome daylight film under tungsten copy lights. The resulting slides will have a very warm color rendition which is usually more pleasing than a normal color balance.

The most important thing to remember when trying these methods is not to limit yourself, and to keep records so that if one method works well, it can be easily repeated.

DISCUSSION

“Don’t overdo a good thing!”

It’s very possible to overdo the title and captioned slides and achieve the exact monotony you were trying to escape. Save the graphics for special points you wish to emphasize and as always, use good quality slides in your programs.

Also, beware of the increased demand for your services that often follow a well-produced program. Reiterate to your co-workers that sufficient time for pre-planning is the key to obtaining a successful final product.

The uses for graphics are numerous. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency is using them at public meetings, sportsmen’s clubs, in-house meetings and before legislative committees.

While the success of any plan depends upon the soundness of that plan, it is very possible that its success or failure will depend on how well it is presented to the powers-that-be. Your slide programs will represent an integral part of that presentation.

For additional information the following references are suggested:

Audio-visual Notes

Kodak Periodicals, Numbers T-91-9-1, T-91-9-2, T-91-9-3

Planning and Producing Slide Programs

Kodak Publication Number S-30

Reverse-Text slides

Kodak Publication Number S-26