What is instructional media?

Any method of communicating information from instructor to student is an instructional medium. Currently popular examples include whiteboards, overhead transparencies, slides, video, projected computer images and standing at the front of a room talking in a loud voice. Instructional media is also known as audiovisual media or AV.

Do I have to use a variety of instructional media?

No. People have changed the world using nothing more than their own loud voices and a few hand gestures.

Should I use a variety of instructional media?

Probably. Research has consistently shown that a diverse group of students will retain more of the information presented if it is presented through diverse media. Multiple channels of delivery improve the chance of successful communication. Some concepts are easier to convey graphically than verbally. Some students learn better through non-verbal means. Some promotion and tenure committees are attracted by bright, shiny objects and jazzy sound effects.

What is the key to successful use of instructional media?

Have fun. If you have fun using instructional media, you will continue to use it. If you don't have fun, you will stop using it. The more experience you have using instructional media, the easier it will be to apply it as a teaching tool.

How can I have fun with instructional media?

Plan ahead. The first time you use any unfamiliar technology it can be frustrating. If the frustrating moment comes while a classroom full of students is waiting impatiently for the show to begin, it becomes a nightmare. Try the technology out in advance. Get comfortable with it, both with the software and the hardware you will actually be using during your presentation. Then, when you know you can make it work, try it out in front of the class. Oh, and have a fallback plan, just in case things don't work. You should know how you will get to work if your car doesn't start in the morning. And you should know what you will do with the class if the projector doesn't come on.

Where can I learn about instructional media?

-Ask someone in your department who already uses media to help you. Perhaps the people in your department are not instructional media specialists. But they are specialists in teaching in your subject area. They may have experience with what works in your field. They may know
which media work well in the classrooms you will be using. They may know which file cabinet
drawer the extension cord is stored in, or which corner of the department's projector you have to
tap gently three times to get that annoying hum to go away. And their offices are not far from
yours. If you get one of those colleagues who despises all damned gadgets, go ask someone
else. Perhaps the Luddite will see you doing something effective with instructional media next
year and you will be the one giving advice.

-Ask the instructional media equipment manager in your building or department. Not all buildings
or departments have such a person, but many do.
- Ask someone at one of the instructional media related services on campus. The Information
Technology Center, www.montana.edu/wwwitc/, is in charge of smart podiums with computers,
video players and projectors in many of the larger classrooms. The Burns Telecommunication
Center, btc.montana.edu/, provides media training, including WebCT to put your course online.
The Media Service, www.homepage.montana.edu/~iedbf/MediaSrv/, provides equipment,
assistance, and answers to AV questions.
- Thumb through a book on the subject. Try "Instructional Media and Technologies for Learning"
by Robert Heinich, Michael Molenda, James D. Russell and Sharon E. Smaldino. Or "Planning,
Producing, and Using Instructional Media" by Jerrold E. Kemp and Don C. Smellie. Things
change fast in the AV business, so get the latest edition, which for both of these works is the
seventh. Copies are available in the Teachers' Resource Center and in the Instructional Media
Lab, both in Reid Hall.
- Browse the web. This is the only place you will find information which is really up to date. A nice
starting point is the "Related Links:" button on this page.