

Images as Visual Aids

Brief: When carefully selected, images—including photographs and illustrations—can be powerful tools to illustrate or emphasize a point.

Learning Objective: Understand when and how to use images as visual aids.

Key Terms:

- **Medium:** A format for communicating or presenting information.

Photographs

Displaying a photograph or a series of photographs is an excellent way to illustrate or emphasize a point. For example, if you're giving a speech about the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, it would make sense to show photographs that underscore the impact of the storm. This will help audience members who did not personally experience the storm understand its severity.

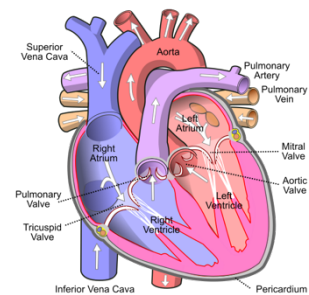


A photograph showing storm damage two months after Hurricane Katrina

In addition to allowing audience members to view a passed moment in history or far off places, photographs allow audience members to see objects that cannot be viewed in person, for legal reasons or otherwise. For example, if you're giving a speech about illicit drugs, you certainly shouldn't bring them to your presentation, but you can show photographs so that your audience members understand what you're talking about.

Illustrations

While illustrations can be more difficult to create or obtain, they're useful when photographs are logistically difficult or impossible to take. They're also useful when photographs do not show exactly what you want to explain. For example, if you're giving a speech about the human heart, you could show a photograph, but it would be difficult for the audience to see all of its different parts. It would be more useful (and less disturbing!) to show a diagram instead.



A diagram of the human heart

Think Critically About Images

In the era of Instagram, we're inundated with photographs and other images. It's worth taking a step back to think critically about the images that we create, as well as the images that we view online. Thinking critically about images can help you select photographs and other images that send the message that you intend.

In his book *Visual Communication: Images with Messages*, Paul Martin Lester outlines six perspectives to consider when analyzing an image:

- (1) Personal: This is a “gut reaction” to the image.
- (2) Historical: This relates to the history of the medium (e.g. the history of photograph). Each medium has changed over time (e.g. with the development of new technology). Understanding the history of the medium can help you understand the image.
- (3) Technical: This relates to the particulars of how the image is produced and presented.
- (4) Ethical: This relates to the ethics or morals of the person who produces the image, the subject of the image, and the viewer of the image.
- (5) Cultural: This relates to the image's cultural significance, including its use of symbols.
- (6) Critical: Unlike the personal, “gut reaction,” this is a more reasoned response to the image based on a studied perspective that takes into a consideration a wide range of issues.

By using Lester's model (or any other model that gets you to look at images more critically), you can select more intentional, powerful, and responsible images, contributing to a more successful speech presentation.

From Concept to Action

Select any image, either printed or online. What is your “gut reaction” to the image? After articulating your initial response, analyze the image taking into consideration at least two additional perspectives outlined above. By thinking critically about the image, what more do you have to say about it?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

“Diagram of the human heart (cropped).svg.” Wikimedia Commons.
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diagram_of_the_human_heart_\(cropped\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diagram_of_the_human_heart_(cropped).svg). Accessed 6 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WiltonWarringtonNovByLondonBreech.jpg>. Accessed 6 June 2019. [GNU Free Documentation License]

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"Visual communication." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visual_communication. Accessed 6 June 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

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Lester, Paul Martin. *Visual Communication: Images with Messages*, 7th Edition. Cengage Learning, 2018.