Graphics and when not to use images*

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Abstract

Graphics and when not to use images

1 Graphics for Blackboard

There are two main types of graphics you may want to use in your course:
1) a banner and
2) those that help to illustrate points in the content of your lessons.
Banner
A banner is an image that can appear on your course opening page. A banner can:

- establish identity
- achieve a unified look
- aid the user's ability to recognize and navigate through your site

For example, here is a sample banner created by Distance Education.

Figure 1

*Version 1.3: Jul 25, 2008 4:03 pm -0500
†http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/

You may not think a visual cue such as a banner is valuable, but think what it would be like if all of our road signs looked exactly alike. From a distance you recognize immediately from both the shape and color of a sign what's coming up in the roadway. If stops, yields, and other signals were placed on signs of exactly the same shape and colors, you would not be able to determine what was required of you as quickly! Think of your course banner as a roadsign for your course.

Illustrative Graphics

The second type of graphics you will probably use in your course are illustrative. Occasionally you will find it necessary to demonstrate points both visually as well as verbally. Illustrations, graphs, maps, diagrams, and photographs are among the kinds of illustrative matter you can use to help students understand important points in your lessons.

When Not to Use Illustrative Graphics

Do not use graphics for the sole purpose of putting an image on the page. Some pages of your lesson don't need them, and your students will be confused to see an image that doesn't bear any relationship with the content (unless it's part of the design template). So, use common sense and be purposeful with your image choices. If an image is the best way to get a point across, then it's a good idea to put it in the lesson.

Rules of Thumb

When looking for illustrative graphics, be sure that you:

- Select graphics that will illustrate your points well.
- Select images that are saved in file formats specifically for the Web (.gif or .jpg).
- Use small versions or "thumbnails" on a lesson page and link to larger or more detailed versions on a separate page.
- Obtain necessary permission to use copyrighted materials.

Dr. Ruth Clark[1] uses empirical evidence to discuss the impact of visuals on learning in her book e-Learning and the Science of Instruction[2] . While relevant visuals can improve learning up to 90%, ineffective visuals often serve no useful instructional purpose and can actually impair learning. So, extraneous, decorative graphics should be avoided, even if the graphic is interesting to look at.

Two research based scenarios regarding graphics that Dr. Clark recommends do improve learning are:

Multimedia Principle - use words and graphics rather than words alone. Based on cognitive theory and research, including relevant, related written or spoken text and explanative graphics will promote learning. (Clark, p. 51)

Contiguity Principle - Place corresponding words and graphics near each other. When applying the Multimedia Principle, have as little physical separation between the text and the graphic as possible. (Clark, p. 67)

Where to Get Graphics

There are several ways to get graphics for your course. We are going to discuss:

- Making your own.
- Find them in a copyright free digital collection on the Web
- Creative Commons
- Copyrighted images

Making Your Own Graphics

We all have different talents, skills, and interests. Some of you may already have experience creating graphics using design software or have used digital cameras and photo editing software to create and manipulate photographs. If so, you may be comfortable preparing graphics for your lessons. Your #1 goal should be to create a graphic of the highest quality and lowest file size possible. Use the following guidelines when creating your own graphics to accomplish this:

[1] http://www.clarktraining.com/

[2] http://www.amazon.com/e-Learning-Science-Instruction-Guidelines-Multimedia/dp/0787986836/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1215
1

1. Use JPEG file format for saving photographs or images with a wide range of colors. This will allow you to get the highest quality and smallest file size.
2. Use GIF file format for images that use just a few colors or have large areas of flat colors. For these kinds of images, GIF will be much smaller and just as high quality.
3. Crop unnecessary white space or borders around an image. These areas just take up space.
4. Save the image at the size you will use within the page. Do not specify image size in the Web page editor or HTML. Allowing the browser to resize the image will result in poor quality and longer download time.
5. Save images using a resolution no higher than 72 ppi. Monitors will not display resolutions any greater, so if you save at a higher resolution, you're wasting space.

Not everyone has the time or inclination to make their own graphics, please continue to find out how to use digital collections on the Web.

Find images in a copyright free digital collection on the Web

Digital image collections on the Web are becoming more commonplace and covering a wide range of subjects. Images in these collections fall into two categories:

- images in the public domain
- images that are copyright protected

Images in the Public Domain

Images in the public domain are the easiest to work with because you don't have to worry about crediting a source or violating copyright. However, such images can be difficult to find. Please go to the Conclusion, and then Public Domain Images to access a few digital libraries that contain images in the public domain.

Creative Commons

In addition to these collections, you may find collections that other instructors or researchers in your own field have assembled and will allow you to use for teaching purposes. A common copyright license applied to such images is called Creative Commons[3] (CC). The Creative Commons is a non-profit organization devoted to expanding the range of creative work available for others legally to build upon and share. It enables copyright holders to grant some of their rights to the public while retaining others through a variety of licensing and contract schemes including dedication to the public domain or open content licensing terms. The intention is to avoid the problems current copyright laws create for the sharing of information. For more information on Creative Commons and finding materials in various collections, see Creative Commons in Education from Infinite Thinking[4] .

Copyrighted Images

If you want to use an image that is protected by copyright, your options are to obtain permission from the copyright holder or justify use under the TEACH Act[5] or Fair Use Guidelines. If you want to use an image that is copyrighted, you must investigate whether or not it may be used by applying the guidelines set forth in the TEACH Act. It is important to become familiar with these guidelines.

Some images can be licensed for a fee. Most commonly you will find such images in stock photo collections, such as Fotosearch[6] . Additionally, newspaper or periodical publishing houses will allow you to use their images for a fee. Often you must contact their rights and reproductions departments for a price quote.

[3] http://creativecommons.org/
[4] http://www.infinitethinking.org/2007/02/creative-commons-in-education.html
[5] http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/scc/legislative/teachkit/overview.html
[6] http://www.fotosearch.com/