



On Call

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For content questions contact: Marcia Latta
Communications Consultant
(503) 580-2612.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at
(800) 562-8927 or
(360) 493-9231.

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Washington State
School Directors'
Association
221 College Street N.E.
Olympia, WA 98516

Communicating through images

Improving your effectiveness through photos, charts, and infographics

People have used images to communicate since cavemen first painted hunting scenes on cave walls. And with good reason. Humans are hardwired to process images quickly and easily. In fact, our brains process images astoundingly faster than written words — 60,000 times faster, according to popular estimates (<http://bit.ly/2SEu97H>). Almost 50 percent of our brains are involved in visual processing. In addition, people retain information better when they see it in a visual format.

A preference for images isn't simply a byproduct of our technology-driven, social media-focused world. It's part of who we are. So here are a few tips on using images to better engage your audiences and enhance your communications.

Building your visual toolbox

Images can be a vital way of breaking up text, drawing in readers, and helping to tell your story. However, as with any task, knowing the best tool for the job is key. Below are a variety of image-based tools and a little bit about when and how to use each one.

Photographs

As educators, we all know the power and impact of a photo. A great photograph of a child at play or in the classroom can be a hugely effective way of bringing readers in and helping them connect with your message. Whether you are featuring photos on your school website, district bond materials, or in a parent newsletter, good quality photographs of your students should be a regular part of your district communications.

Photos set the tone and convey emotion. They can create a sense of community and make readers feel a part of your school or district. While there are lots of great stock photos out there, whenever possible, use photos of your students. Investing in a good quality camera, or hiring a photographer, can result in wonderfully personal images that will resonate with your audiences.

Illustrations

As with photos, illustrations can be a wonderful way to complement and enhance your communications. Illustrations can be particularly effective when you have a specific visual need and you don't have a photo that does the job. Whether you are including an illustration of a proposed new school or featuring goofy caricatures of teachers on an awards event program, illustrations can enhance your communications.

Chart and graphs

Charts and graphs — pie charts, bar graphs, line charts, flowcharts, or organizational charts — are a staple of meetings, presentations, and annual reports. These handy tools can be

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of immense value for a wide range of communication, from websites to fliers, and with a wide range of audiences, from board members to parents. Charts and graphs allow us to communicate data in a visual manner and can help our audience understand, retain, and access key pieces of information more readily. However, in order for the chart or graph to be an effective communication tool, we need to keep its content focused and clear. A reader should be able to glance at the graphic and quickly understand its key takeaways.

Infographics

Infographics have gained popularity in recent years as an effective and versatile visual communication tool. An infographic is a representation of information in a graphic format. It is a mix of graphics (icons, drawings, symbols, etc.) and text. Infographics are designed to make complex information easy to understand, and they work well with how our brains process information. People use infographics to communicate key messages, present data in a clear and compelling format, point out patterns or trends in data, and create visual timelines, among other uses.

A good infographic needs three things: the data, clear organization, and proper use of visual elements such as images and fonts. Infographics are most effective when they are simple and don't contain too much information in one graphic. Remember, you are providing a break from text-heavy content. White space and a balance of text and graphics are key. Generally, an infographic will be most effective when it focuses on one key message, not multiple messages. For some examples of how infographics are used in education, visit: www.easel.ly/blog/10-great-examples-of-using-infographics-for-education/.

Using images to tell your story

A picture or graphic can be powerful, but only when it helps to tell your story. As with anything you are communicating, make sure you have a clear and compelling message. What is it you are trying to get across? Why should your audience care? How does this image help you paint that picture and tell that story? Visual communication tools can be a great way to cut through big blocks of text, simplify complex information or bring data to life. Once you have identified the story you want to tell, infographics and other visual tools can help you draw readers to the key messages and highlight important takeaways. By effectively using visual communication tools, you can boost engagement with your content, improve absorption and retention of your information, and make your communications more effective and impactful.

Additional resources:

- **Five easy steps for using images to communicate information**
<https://blog.tbhcreative.com/2016/02/using-images-to-communicate-information.html>
- **How to Communicate Better with Infographics**
www.easel.ly/blog/communicate-better-infographics
- **Building an Infographic**
www.easel.ly/blog/the-13-step-guide-to-building-an-infographic-2/
- **5 simple ways to use infographics in your communications that will make people pay attention**
www.stonesoupcreative.com/5-simple-ways-use-infographics-communications-will-make-people-pay-attention