8.5: Guidelines for graphics: a final review

Keep the following in mind as you consider possible visual enhancements to your report:

- Use graphics to supplement or clarify information provided within the body of your report.
- Make sure your graphics are appropriate to your audience, subject matter, and purpose.
- Discuss graphics in nearby text preceding the graphic. Don’t just insert a graphic in your report unexplained. Orient readers to the graphic; explain its basic meaning, easily done in introductory and follow-up sentences before and after your graphic.
- Intersperse graphics and text on the same page. Don’t put graphics on pages by themselves; ideally, no visual should take up more than one-third of any page in your report.
- Use figure numbers and titles for graphics. Additionally, include identifying detail within the graphics such as illustration labels, axis labels, keys, and so on.
- Make sure graphics fit within normal margins. Leave at least one blank line above and below graphics.
- Place graphics as near to the point in the text where they are relevant as is reasonable. However, if a graphic does not fit properly on one page, indicate that it appears on the next page and put it at the top of the next, continuing with regular text on the preceding page. Don’t leave half a page blank just to keep a graphic near the text it is associated with.
- Cite all images that you create from any source material. You should do this in your introductory sentences before the visual as well as include a citation, if relevant, at the bottom of the visual. See samples above.
- Cite any images you use created by another writer which you include in your report. While it is perfectly legal to borrow graphics—to trace, photocopy, scan, or extract subsets of data from them, you are obligated to accurately cite your sources for graphics just as you are for the words you borrow.

This chapter was derived by Annemarie Hamlin, Chris Rubio, and Michele DeSilva, Central Oregon Community College, from Online Technical Writing by David McMurrey – CC: BY 4.0