Making the Most of Visual Aids

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Visual aids encourage students to make associations between pieces of information, soak up chunks of course content quickly, and function as a memory aid. Here are three strategies for using visual aids without sacrificing course content.

Sharing Intent

Directly communicate to students what we hope for them to see (or interpret) based on the lesson at hand. For example, it's useful to help students explore why the visual was selected and what the key characteristics of it are, and to identify the non-essential elements of it. Also, specify what we intend for the students to know after examining it.

Activating Discussion

Promote a conversation about how the visual helps in processing the course content. For example, ask students to share how the visual reinforces—or challenges—what they previously learned about?relevant vocabulary terms. To increase students'?processing?opportunities, use a think-aloud ↗ to get students talking about what makes a visual useful vs. the qualities that seem less important to understanding the theme or central message of the graphic or its connection to other content.

Creating Visual Aids as a Class

Involving students in the design of visual aids fosters buy-in and learning ownership, but initially, students may hesitate to create their own visuals and take on the designer role.

Establishing design parameters for students should help. For example, limit their format options by specifying the type of graphic organizer or chart they can use, and provide time to discuss what kinds of visuals would potentially work best based on the content at hand.

It's not enough for a visual to capture attention—it should help students become more engaged. Aligning visual aids with course content is a deliberate process. With appropriate attention, we can ensure that our visual aids are windows to our lessons' purpose and construction.

Source: Edutopia ↗