How to Use Images Effectively in Presentation Slides

We all know that images on slides are a good thing. The Pictorial Superiority Effect tells us that people respond to and understand images much faster than text and have a much higher retention rate for images than for text.[1] One picture on a slide can be worth 10 lines of 24-point text.

But presenters tend to misuse images. There's a sense that any image you've downloaded from Google, no matter how tangential, poorly executed, pixelated, or inadequately licensed, will improve your slide.

Not so.

Images require the same attention to principles of good design and communication as the other elements of your presentation. Better to go without a visual than to insert poorly chosen, distracting images.

Principles for using images in presentations

1. Fairness is a salient issue: beware of using images in a way that seems to reveal bias. On the following page is a table that details some potential pitfalls.

2. Copyright law pertains to images, even when using them for educational purposes. Use the guide on pages 4-5 to find images you have permission to use; you may be surprised at the number of available images.

3. Images work best when they speak directly to the point you are making. You are asking your audience to harmonize a) the words they hear you say, b) the text they are reading, and c) the images they are seeing, and that is hard cognitive work. Try not to distract them with an unintentional game of "Which of these is not like the others?"

4. As you think about the visual metaphors that will support your presentation, avoid clichés of judicial education. Go beyond the third row of images that come up on a Google search. Trust us on this: another gavel, scales of justice, judge in robes, or magnifying glass will have little positive impact.

This is a visual cliché.

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[1] "Items studied as pictures are better remembered than items studied as words even when test items are presented as words." https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885201409000471; Also see *Brain Rules*, John Medina: "Hear a piece of information, and three days later you'll remember 10% of it. Add a picture and you'll remember 65%."

5. Choose high quality images with artistic merit, whether photographs or drawings. Cheesy clip art may be free, but you often get what you pay for. Poor quality communicates triviality.

6. Consider filling the screen with the image, without text. Just the image. It can be intriguing and arouse curiosity for what you'll say next. Or it can be the punchline or the answer to a question you ask. Below are two examples.
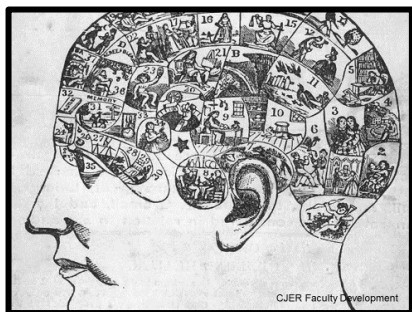
As you speak, the image will act as a visual anchor. After you speak, it will act as a visual summary. When you use text with an image, try a key word or short headline. If you use an image that doesn't fill the screen, consider putting a border around it, to add a more coherent feel to the design.

7. We are skeptical about inserting a cartoon. First, is it adding educational value? Second, do you have permission to use it? Third, can you make it big enough to see the details that make it relevant? Specifically, can you read the caption? (You may need to crop the original caption and add it back in as a text box, to ensure that it is legible.)

8. Images that look sharp on your computer screen can look grainy and pixelated when projected. When using Google image search, hover your courser over a thumbnail image in your search results, and look for the pixel dimensions. Choose those that have one dimension of at least 1,000 pixels. Alternately, set the search settings for size "Large." On pages 4-5 we discuss how to search for images on Google. If you have the image you want, but it is too small, you can sometimes do a reverse image search to find a higher resolution version of the same image.

Fairness Considerations When Using Images In Presentations	
People	• Try to use a diverse selection of people in photographs. • When you use photos of people, avoid reinforcing a stereotype. • If you're illustrating negative behavior, it is often best to use silhouettes or stick figures.
Animals	• Avoid using animals in place of people in ways that might reinforce stereotypes.
Crime-Related Objects	• Be careful not to place pictures of crime-related objects in a context that would draw a stereotypical connection, for example, associating people of color with guns.
Groups of People	• Pay attention to the activities of the group, and whether they reinforce stereotypical roles, such as a female director of HR or a male representative of IT. • Additionally, if a group of people from diverse settings are pictured together, pay attention to who is in the front and the center and who is set off to the side or in the back. Placement can communicate marginalization. Consider having multiple pictures that vary who is in the front and center.
Courtrooms, Courthouses or Judges	• Avoid consistently depicting the judge and the attorneys in the courtroom as Caucasian males, or the courtroom clerk as a woman and the bailiff as a man. • Avoid consistently depicting the defendant as a person of color or male. • Avoid consistently depicting a female/male spousal relationship in a family-court-related courtroom picture.

How to Find Free Images You Have Permission to Use

For free licensed images (if you have access to a paid image service, you may use that, too, of course), we recommend two methods:

- *Use Google Image Search with a usage filter set for "free to use or share" or "free to use, share or modify."*
- *Use aggregating sites that offer free and licensed images.*

1. **Set the "usage" filter in Google Image Advanced Search to "free to use or share" or "free to use, share or modify."**

    Follow these instructions from Google Help to find images, text, and videos you can reuse:
    ⇒ Go to Advanced Image Search for images or Advanced Search for anything else.
    ⇒ In the "all these words" box, type what you want to find.
    ⇒ In the "Usage rights" section, use the drop-down to choose what kind of license you want the content to have.

    Note: Before reusing content, make sure that its license is legitimate and check the exact terms of reuse.

    Types of usage rights:
    - "Free to use or share:" Allows you to copy or redistribute content if the content remains unchanged.
    - "Free to use, share or modify:" Allows you to copy, modify, or redistribute in ways specified in the license.
    - "Commercially:" If you want content for commercial use, be sure to select an option that includes the word "commercially."

Note: You can also narrow your search by image size, and see only the images that are big enough to project without pixelation. Choose "Large" in the "image size" window.

Alternately, while developing slides in PowerPoint, you can browse and insert online images directly. The software uses the Bing search engine, and the results are licensed under the Creative Commons license.
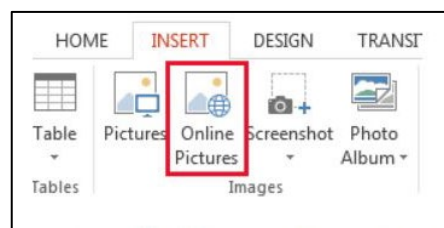
2. **Visit these websites and download free licensed images.** (Sometimes these sites shunt you to images for sale; make sure the images are free.)

•   Our go-to sites:
https://www.pexels.com/
https://pixabay.com/

•   More for exploring:
https://unsplash.com/
https://burst.shopify.com/
https://skitterphoto.com/
https://www.sitebuilderreport.com/stock-up
https://www.freevector.com/
https://www.freepik.com/

•   Plus, any image created by the federal government is in the public domain. You can find links to all federal government image archives (like NASA and National Parks) here:
https://guides.library.upenn.edu/c.php?g=475958&p=3255326