

How diagrams, charts and other visuals can enhance your essay

Sometimes writing an essay can seem like a very dull task. As a student no doubt your focus will be on how boring this task is for *you*, the author, and how much you don't want to complete the task in hand. But part of writing a good essay is in thinking about how the reader will react to the essay too. If you are finding the essay dull, then there is a fairly strong possibility that the individual tasked with reading the essay will share your view. As a student you will want to depict your essay in the best possible light; after all it is a reflection of you. Part of this means ensuring that your essay isn't too boring for the reader; a challenge which may seem difficult if you personally find the subject matter or the question that the essay is discussing to be of no real interest.

However, there are some easy ways to help break up the monotony of an essay, and this is through the use of visual material. Not only does the addition of visual material make the essay writing a little more interesting for you to complete, but it also makes your essay appear more attractive...and thus more interesting and enjoyable for your teacher or examiner to read.

Of course, not all essays lend themselves to having pictures, diagrams and charts added into them. A standard length essay that is looking to compare two literary pieces or poems may not for example warrant the introduction of a graph or two. But longer explorations into literature might for example be able to carry a visual timeline, a compare and contrast summary box, even an image or two of the authors or books being discussed.

Tables, figures and charts tend to be or more use in essays that are focused on science-based subjects; mathematics, economics, manufacturing, engineering, biology, physics and chemistry. Figures and tables are particularly useful when it comes to displaying large amounts of information which is discussed within the body of the essay. In addition, graphs can be used to show trends, discontinuous variables and proportion. Tables and figures break up the flow of text, whereas graphs are great for adding a little bit of colour and design into an essay – they are all also very helpful in conveying an argument or piece of evidence concisely. Be careful to ensure that the information you present in your tables and graphs is easy to interpret and read however – the last thing you want to do is confuse the reader!

Including relevant illustrations in essays, reports and dissertations can help you communicate a large amount of information in a short space; very handy for sticking to that all important word limit! You do not have to be an artist to produce good illustrations for course work or to help support an essay. Do remember however that all illustrations should be neat, large, and appear close to where they are discussed in the text. Ensure that you title and number each of your illustrations within your essay to help the reader tie up discussion within the text to the illustration itself.

If you don't fancy getting artistic, relevant photographs or scanned images can be useful to illustrate the following; field sites, equipment, experiments and different subject matters. Site photographs which are being compared should have consistent features (eg sea/shore) on the same sides. Photographs must be of good quality and should really only be used sparingly – don't fill the entire essay with different photographs, no matter how much it breaks up the monotony of blocks of text. Remember too that any photographs you choose to use should be annotated with titles, labelling and scale bar.