

3.6 Formatting Illustrations

While illustrations are not always necessary, they help the audience visualize and retain information better. You can also use graphics to highlight important information in your documentation, with visual cues such as icons. Whatever your purpose for using graphics, make sure they pertain to the document, and that they are conducive to the procedures you would like the reader to complete.

There are several types of illustrations you can include in your procedures. They include

- Screenshots
- Drawings and Photographs
- Icons
- Graphs and Charts
- Tables

Use the following guidelines when incorporating illustrations into your procedures.

1. Make graphics visible to the audience.
2. Use the graphics to help answer audience questions.
3. Keep graphic styles consistent. Use the same font, arrow and frame styles throughout the document.
4. Do not overdo graphics. Do not use the same graphics over and over again.
5. Label illustrations consistently throughout.
6. Number illustrations sequentially throughout the document. Number tables and figures separately.
7. Position tables and figures consistently throughout the document.
8. Use typographic techniques.
 - a. Make important things larger, darker, central and sharper.
 - b. Align illustrations with the text.
9. Size illustrations correctly.
 - a. Frame the illustration with enough whitespace.
 - b. Make it large enough to show up.
 - c. Keep illustrations within the margins.
 - d. The larger you can make the graphic, the better it is for the audience.
10. Place graphics at the point that they are relevant. For example, if you are writing a step telling the audience to go to a certain screen on their computers, place a screenshot of that screen immediately below the step.

Formatting the elements of your illustrations correctly help the audience use your procedures more effectively. Elements of illustrations include the title, label, placement, rules and lines, size, and colors (see Table 7).

Table 7. How to Format Each Element of the Illustration

Element	How to Format
Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number titles sequentially • List the numbers and titles in the front of the manual • Use boldface titles, sometimes enlarged, in body-text style
Label	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Label components of screens used for presenting overviews and screen objects • Keep captions brief • Make captions terminology consistent with the text
Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set margins for illustrations • Set aside a region for graphics • Always place illustrations as close to and following the text they relate to
Rules and Lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make rules and lines straight and neat • Make rules confirm to the style of headers and other cues • Use rules to indicate hierarchies of information in text • Use grayscale rules when you do not want to waste ink
Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to keep your illustrations on one page • Turn oversized illustrations 90 degrees • Crop pictures for maximum impact • Design a hierarchy of sizes of illustrations and use consistently
Colors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate color schemes to patterns of information • Use a single color for bars along the paper edge for cuing • Avoid “reserved” colors: red for danger, yellow for caution

Source: Barker, Thomas T. *Writing Software Documentation: A Task-Oriented Approach*. Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 19 97.