How to Read Visual Aids

0:00 Owl: Welcome to How to Read Visual Aids, an instructional video on reading comprehension brought to you by the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab.

0:19 Are you having trouble understanding visual aids?

0:22 Well, you’re not alone!

0:24 Don’t fret. Let’s talk about what visual aids are and how to read them.

0:30 Visual aids are images or graphics used to display information.

0:35 Visual aids can be found in just about every kind of print and electronic media.

0:40 They can appear within the body of the text, in boxes or sidebars, or in appendices.

0:46 Each visual aid has a title and caption with a brief explanation.

0:51 They are often referred to as “tables” or “figures” and numbered to keep track of them.

0:58 There are several types of common visual aids.

1:01 They are tables, graphs, charts, diagrams, maps, pictures, and photographs.

1:14 Let’s take a closer look at each one of these to see how they work.

1:18 Tables are text-based graphics that display information using words and numbers arranged in columns and rows.

1:25 For example, in this table, the first column lists bone classifications, while the first row looks at just one type of bone classification—long bones.

1:37 Graphs display information on a grid using an x/y axis.

1:42 There are different types of graphs, such as line graphs and bar graphs.

1:46 Here’s an example of a line graph.

1:49 The x-axis is the horizontal axis.

1:52 In this case, it measures age in years.

1:55 The y-axis is the vertical axis.

1:58 In this case, it measures bone mass in grams.

2:01 By following the two lines, you can find out the bone mass for males and females at different ages.

2:07 For instance, the average bone mass of a 30-year-old male is 1500 grams, whereas the average bone mass of a 30-year-old female is just under 1250 grams.

2:20 Charts use shapes to convey information, such as percentages, timelines, or processes.

2:27 There are different types of charts, such as pie charts and flow charts.

2:31 Here’s an example of a pie chart.

2:33 This pie chart shows the different types of video game players by age group, broken down by percentage.

2:39 For instance, the ‘Under 18 Years’ group is only 27%, while the ‘18-35 Years’ group is 29%.
Diagrams are schematic drawings that show how something works, such as a physical structure, a process, or even a concept.

For instance, this diagram shows the structure of spongy bone.

Maps are used to describe a territory or identify a location.

There are different kinds of pictures that can be used as visual aids, such as political cartoons and drawings of people, places, things, and events.

Here’s an example of a British eighteenth-century political cartoon by James Gillray that you might find in a history textbook.

Gillray satirizes the decline in manners brought about by the French Revolution.

The cartoon depicts a deposed aristocrat bowing humbly and saying, “I am your very humble servant,” while the revolutionary rudely replies, “Kiss my butt.”

Finally, photographs are also used as visual aids to convey information about people, places, things, and events.

The types and uses of photos can vary greatly because of the different types of devices used to take them, such as cameras, telescopes, microscopes, and even MRI machines.

Here’s an example of a micrograph of cells and tissue in the human body.

The different parts are labeled for clarity.

I hope I’ve given you a better sense of what visual aids are and how they work.

By understanding visual aids, you can greatly improve your comprehension of the many different kinds of texts that use them.

Thanks for listening to this instructional video on How to Read Visual Aids!

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