# Visual Content is a Learning Preference

Based on recent research and cognitive theory, we highly encourage the use of graphics (charts, images, and photographs) in conjunction with words to explain a key concept or idea, instead of text alone. The rationale is simple. Students are more likely to engage and understand when a supporting image is provided. The image also attends to the brain's need when associating content and moving it to long-term memory and later recall. It engages two mental channels by representing content in words and graphics and making the connections.
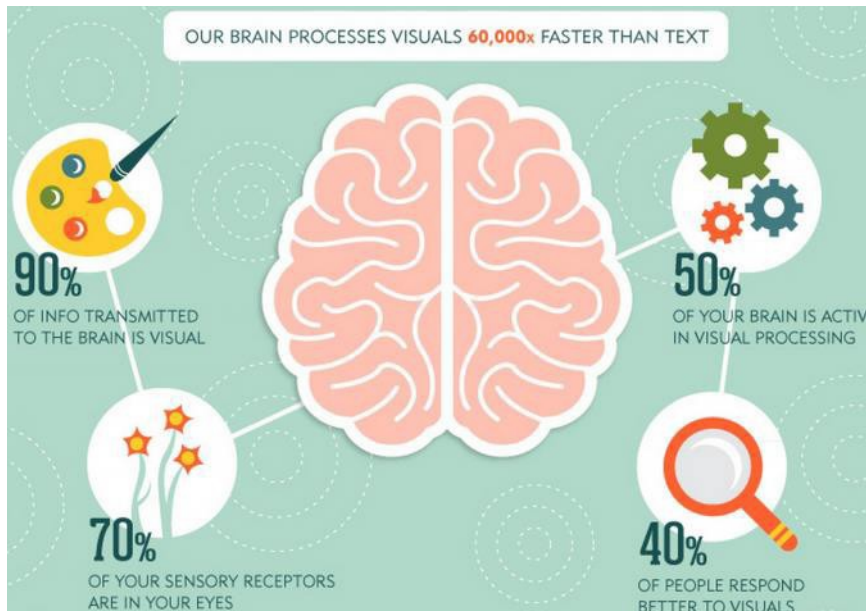


*Figure 1. What does this visual convey to you?*

In short, use graphics that support learning. When using visual materials, decorative or aesthetic aims are not the objective—learning is. There are other guiding principles to consider the use of graphics in the e-learning environment, one of which is the Contiguity Principle. There is empirical evidence that states learning occurs when text and graphics are integrated in the same location as opposed to being located in different locations. In short, something is lost when supporting graphics are separated from their text-based explanation.

Lastly, considering the contemporary learner's preference, graphics should be incorporated across the learning materials. In fact, evidence should be found in each learning module.
Several guiding principles will help with this area:

1.    Graphics are useful to explain difficult concepts, ideas, or procedures
2.    Remember to address course quality when selecting graphics
3.    All graphics must be relevant to course content and learning objectives
4.    All graphics must contribute to learning (Does not play a role in content aesthetics)