While images are relatively rare in academic essays[1], they have become commonplace in PowerPoint presentations, posters,

"We may be cute, but we serve no useful pur pose"

Conversely, carefully selected images used appropriately can quickly illustrate a concept, process, or example that would take many words to explain.

Images can also help to gain and keep the attention of audiences accustomed to visually-based platforms like social media, television, and video games. Used strategically, they can break up visual monotony and increase engagement.

To get the most out of your images, make sure they are well-presented and clear.

Choose quality images. While this requires subjective considerations on your part, avoid images that are out of focus, poorly composed, hard to interpret, or so commonplace that they have become cliché.

Download the correct size and maintain proportionality. Anything beyond a modest increase in size will reduce image resolution and quality. Similarly, changing proportions will introduce distortions into the image.

Create strong colour contrast. If you add text over images, ensure that there is adequate colour contrast so your text is legible in its entirety. This will preclude the use of images that contain both light and dark sections in the areas in which you wish to write.

Captions. Use a caption if it helps to clarify your point, but if you find yourself writing a long explanation search for something more self-explanatory.

If you have a project that would benefit from photos, illustrations, or other visual media, avoid the temptation to simply download or capture the first photo that catches your eye. Not only should photos be directly related to your project, you must also ensure you can use them without breaching someone's copyright.

Downloading and using images without permission from the copyright holder (usually the creator and/or publisher) is often a violation of copyright and could result in legal action.

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[1] Subjects such as art history and media studies that deal with images as core subject matter are important exceptions.

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