

Sources of visual images to make information easier to understand

There are different types of visual images, such as symbols, line drawings and photographs, which you can use to make information easier to understand. Some people might find a particular kind of image more useful than others, or one set preferable to another. This may be influenced by cultural concerns.

Some people use a specific symbol system as part of their personal communication. For these people that symbol set is their written language, so they may not understand another symbol set. Symbol systems commonly used in the UK include Bliss, Mayer Johnson Picture Communication Symbols, Widgit Literacy Symbols and Dynasyms.

You may prefer to develop your own set for your whole organisation to use. Bear in mind, however, that other organisations in your area may use different sets of images. (Imagine how confusing you would find it if some places used Western European script, and some used Cyrillic.) Finding out what symbols other organisations in your area use may save you time, and will make things easier for people with communication support needs.

We have listed some sources of visual images below. Please note that some of these originated in the USA.

Remember that how you use the images is important (see the resource section in 'Graphic design and accessibility') and that it is also important to make sure you simplify the text before adding pictures.



Bonnington Symbol System (BSS)

Follow the link to Tom Orr Accessibility.
Tom Orr can design symbols
On request, and has over 2,000 BSS
symbols in stock. A small range of these
have been used in these templates.
Tel: 0776 161 7340
www.tomorraccessibility.co.uk



Somerset Total Communication (STC)

STC produces a 'Simple Symbols' CD of over 4,000 symbols. Available from:
Somerset Total Communication
c/o Resources for Learning,
Parkway, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 4RL
Tel: 01278 444949
Email: stc@somerset.gov.uk



AIGA

A set of 50 American disability access symbols that can be used to promote And publicise accessibility.
For more information see:
www.aiga.org/content.cfm/symbol-signs



Mayer Johnston Picture Communication Symbols (PCS)

Printed materials supported by this symbol set can be produced using symbol processing software, for example Boardmaker or Communicate: In Print. The core set of about 3500 black and white or coloured symbols can be extended to about 8000 by purchasing addendums. These can be combined or modified for custom purposes.
For more information see:
www.widgit.com
www.inclusive.co.uk



Change Picture Banks

CD-ROMs containing 100s of black-on-white line drawings. These include packs relating specifically to Health and Housing. Individual pictures and 'picture bundles' (sets of about 50 images pulled together by topic) also available. Cost varies.
For more information see:
www.changepeople.co.uk



Photosymbols 3

A set of more than 3,000 photos featuring people with learning disabilities. Backgrounds are removed to aid clarity. You can nominate a client-led organisation to receive a free edition.

For more information, see:

www.photosymbols.com



Hemera Images

Commercial source of about 100,000 high quality photo images.

For more information see:

www.hemera.com



Punchstock

Over 2 million royalty-free photos and illustrations.

www.punchstock.com



Valuing People

Clipart collection with emphasis on images for Government departments' easy read documents. Rates vary, but some free clipart available.

For more information see:

www.inspiredservices.org.uk



Google Images

Contains images in various formats from all over the Web. Click on the image to open the website it exists on. You can click again to enlarge it, and copy and paste into your document. You may need to adjust the size. Be aware that many of the images on the Web are copyright of their owners and you may be breaking the law by using them. If in doubt, ask. Go to

www.google.co.uk and click on 'images'.



Digital photography

Probably the most versatile way of producing high quality, locally recognisable images. It is important to gain informed consent before using images of people, especially children. Worth buying image-editing software so that you can modify images to suit, such as Adobe Photoshop, Corel (Jasc) Paint Shop Pro or, for simple changes, try MS Photo Editor (free with MS Office).

Thanks to Elspeth McLean and Eugene Kelly of the Glasgow Learning Disability Partnership for their advice and suggestions for this section.