Extract from:

Pratt, D.D. (ed.) 2007. *Department of English & Communication Course Notes.* Durban: Durban University of Technology.

GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION

Outcome 4.3: *Students are able to engage in work-related communication genres in graphic mode.*

This section is included in the Communication Theory chapter because it is a type of nonverbal communication. However, it will not be tested as part of Communication Theory (i.e., by definition and application to examples) but in *practical applications* as part of your written and oral assignments. The most effective use of graphic communication is usually in combination with verbal communication (in written or oral mode), and we include use of multimedia, animation and use of virtual space (hyperlinked web pages) as well as physical space (layout) in this section.

Graphic communication communicates information and ideas quickly and effectively using physical space, colour and different dimensions: length, breadth and depth, as well as direction. In the case of multimedia and hypermedia, the use of sound, animation and the extra dimension offered by hyperlinks also contribute to effective communication.

While graphic devices communicate effectively on their own, the most effective kind of communication is provided by combining graphic communication with verbal (oral or written) communication: good student and professional communicators need to learn how to integrate graphic communication with written or oral reports.

Fielding (1997) mentions the following graphic devices:

- Tables
- Graphs
- Diagrams
- Flow charts
- Pictograms
- Cartoons
- Maps

To this list we add use of:

- Digital photographs and video clips
- Multimedia, such as that offered in PowerPoint presentations
- Hypermedia communication, as on web pages on the Internet

The last two can, of course, include all of those devices listed previously, as well as spoken, written and sound texts.

When including graphic devices in spoken or written texts, care should be taken to place or sequence them where they compliment the spoken or written passages they refer to. In the case of written texts, longer tables and graphs are usually attached as Annexures, and only smaller graphics are integrated into the text. The written convention is that Tables are headed with the words "Table" (+ description) placed *above* the table – all other graphics are labelled "Figure" (+ description) *below* the graphic.

EXAMPLES OF GRAPHIC DEVICES:

Tables

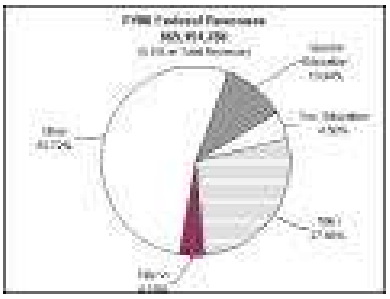
Below is part of a table showing the results of a preliminary questionnaire administered to students who were about to do their Communication course partly online. The table was prepared on a spreadsheet, and gives a quick overview of both the numbers of respondents and the percentage of these giving various responses. This type of table would be included in an Annexure of a written conference paper on the course, to back up the author's conclusions in the actual paper.

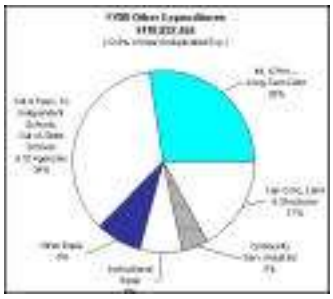
COMM. SKILLS ONLINE PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE 2004

			AN CHEM		CHEM ENG		TOTAL	
Number of respondents:			30		48		78	
1. Professional relevance of a Communication course:	no	1	1	3%	1	2%	2	**3%**
	unsure	2	5	17%	9	19%	14	**18%**
	yes	3	24	80%	38	79%	62	**79%**
2. Used computers before:	yes	1	16	53%	31	65%	47	**60%**
	a few times	2	6	20%	7	15%	13	**17%**
	no	3	8	27%	10	21%	18	**23%**
3. Used the Internet before:	yes	1	2	7%	12	25%	14	**18%**
	few	2	8	27%	16	33%	24	**31%**
	no	3	20	67%	20	42%	40	**51%**

Graphs

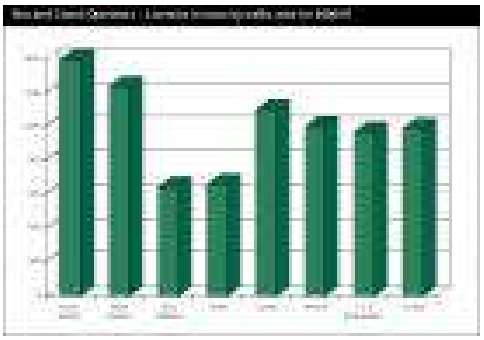
The following figures are area graphs i.e., they use surface area to show proportions), in this case, *pie charts*. They give a very good visual overview of the proportions involved in, for example a budget (a table such as the one shown above would be better for showing the exact figures in a budget).



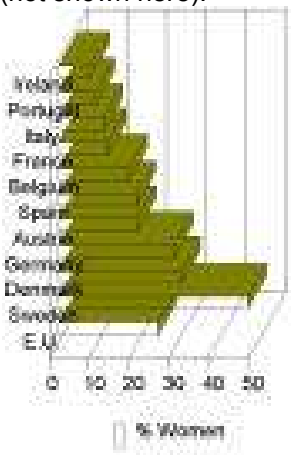


Note how essential **verbal text** is to make sense of what the graphs are showing – if the reader cannot see the text he/she cannot tell what the graphs are actually *about*.

Below are two examples of *bar graphs* (both horizontal and vertical). They are good for showing separate bits of information and comparing amounts. The bars in bar graphs are very useful as they can be broken down into further categories (not shown here).

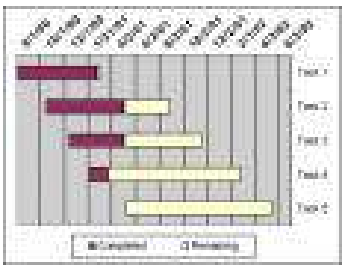


Vertical bar graph

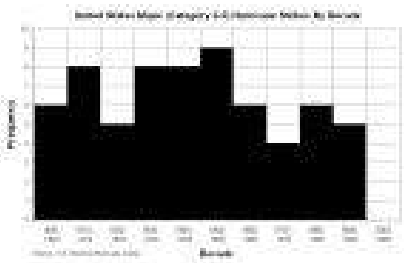


Horizontal bar graph

Gantt charts (on the left hand side below) are types of bar graphs which are often used to show when each stage of a project starts and finishes, i.e., they are useful for overall coordination of a project. The *histogram* form of the graph (on the right) is generally used to show frequency of occurrence, such as rainfall, earthquakes, or even the KZN sardine run.

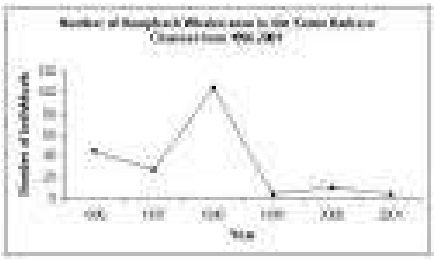


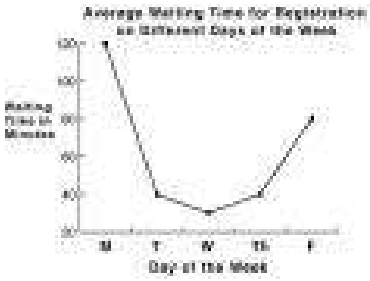
Gantt chart



Histogram

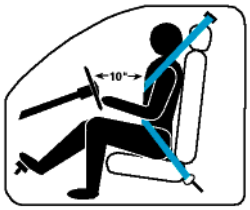
Graphs can also be drawn as *line graphs*, as in the examples below. Line graphs are useful; for showing trends.



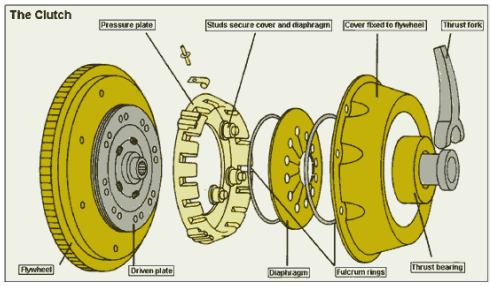


Diagrams

Diagrams are an essential part of technical communication in explaining how mechanisms, artefacts, instruments or processes work. They can range from simple line drawings to elaborate illustrations, and, as Fielding points out (1997:390), can show details or views which could not be taken with a camera. The third example of a diagram given below is actually also a *flow chart* illustrating the food chain in a wetlands area.



1. Simple Diagram

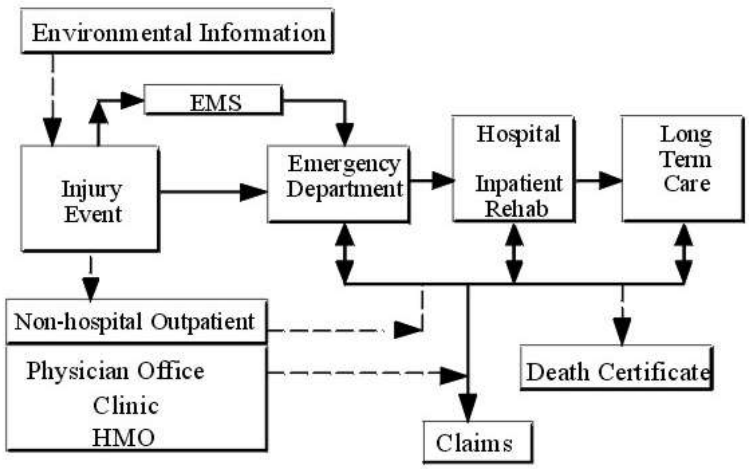


2. Technical diagram

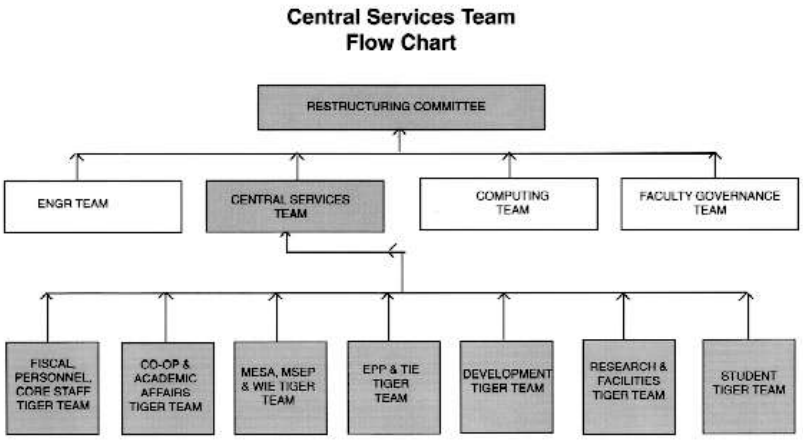
3. Flow chart diagram

Flow charts

Flow charts are useful for showing how processes operate (as in the first example, which shows the stages involved in dealing with motor vehicle accidents) or hierarchies in management (as in the second example, which shows how various teams are organised, and who is accountable to whom).



Flow chart showing procedures



Flow chart showing hierarchical chain of command

Pictograms

Pictograms are simplified images used internationally to communicate basic instructions such as where to find rest rooms, travel or tourist information, or safety warnings (such as danger, high voltage, or poison). They are useful because they communicate across different languages at a global level. They are learned culturally though, and it must not be assumed that they have universal meaning. For example, the outline of a little green man running will not automatically be understood as indicating a fire exit in all cultures, particularly people in rural or remote areas. See how many of the meanings of the pictograms below you can define correctly without looking at the labels.

Some of the more common pictograms used internationally

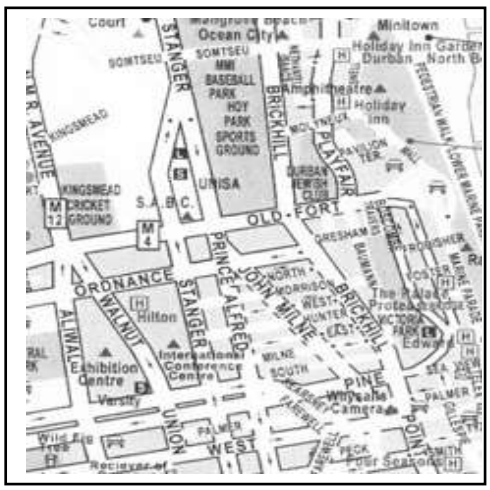
Cartoons

Most of us connect cartoons with entertainment, but they can also be used to illustrate a point, to teach, or to make a social comment. They are extremely effective as illustrations, because people enjoy humour and are more inclined to look at a cartoon than a serious diagram. During a speech, illustrations in the form of cartoons can add a bit of light relief. The following example shows the lighter side of pictograms:

Maps

Most of us learned how to use maps in Geography at school, and can follow directions on regional or street maps such as those shown below:

Map of KwaZulu-Natal



Section of street map of Durban

Digital photographs and video clips

Digital photographs and video clips can be downloaded from the Internet even if you do not have a camera, and can be used in a variety of types of electronic communication: digital images can also be printed out or copied on to thermal transparencies to illustrate typed reports or talks.

Multimedia

Use of multimedia is best illustrated by presentation programs such as PowerPoint, which have become very easy to use, and enable the user to combine voice, image, sound and movement to communicate very effectively. However, when communicating to a medium-to-large group, you will need a laptop and data projector, which puts multimedia communication out of the reach of most students, unless they can arrange to bring a computer and to book a data projector from the Audio Visual Department.

Hypermedia

The Internet not only uses multimedia to communicate electronically to almost any place in the world nearly instantaneously, but also uses virtual space to communicate along different dimensions. Hyperlinks enable people browsing the Internet to access information in many different "directions" in cyberspace. Below is a typical web page which uses text, layout, colour, animation, sound and hyperlinks to communicate information, much of which is grasped very quickly as a gestalt. We obviously cannot represent on paper more than a fraction of the communication devices used in the example below. Tim Berners-Lee, who invented the Internet, designed it so that it would bring together the sum total of all human knowledge: it is thus not only a multifaceted communication medium, but an excellent context for learning.