

Picture Superiority Effect

Pictures are remembered better than words.¹

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and it turns out that in most cases, this is true. Pictures are generally more easily recognized and recalled than words, although memory for pictures and words together is superior to memory for words alone or pictures alone. For example, instructional materials and technical manuals that present textual information accompanied by supporting pictures enable information recall that is better than that produced by either the text or pictures alone. The picture superiority effect is commonly used in instructional design, advertising, technical writing, and other design contexts requiring easy and accurate recall of information.²

When information recall is measured immediately after the presentation of a series of pictures or words, recall performance for pictures and words is equal. The picture superiority effect applies only when people are asked to recall something after more than thirty seconds from the time of exposure. The picture superiority effect is strongest when the pictures represent common, concrete things versus abstract things, such as a picture of a flag versus a picture depicting the concept of freedom, and when pictures are distinct from one another, such as a mix of objects versus objects of a single type.

The picture superiority effect advantage increases further when people are casually exposed to information and the exposure time is limited. For example, an advertisement for a clock repair shop that includes a picture of a clock will be better recalled than the same advertisement without the picture. People not interested in clock repair who see the advertisement with the picture will also be better able to recall the brand if the need for clock repair service arises at a later time. The strength of the picture superiority effect diminishes as the information becomes more complex. For example, people are able to recall events from a story presented as a silent movie as well as events from the same story read as text.³

Use the picture superiority effect to improve the recognition and recall of key information. Use pictures and words together, and ensure that they reinforce the same information for optimal effect. Pictures and words that conflict create interference and dramatically inhibit recall. Consider the inclusion of meaningful pictures in advertising campaigns when possible, especially when the goal is to build company and product brand awareness.

See also Advance Organizer, Iconic Representation, Serial Position Effects, and von Restorff Effect.

¹ Also known as *pictorial superiority effect*.

² The seminal work on the picture superiority effect is “Why Are Pictures Easier to Recall than Words?” by Allan Paivio, T. B. Rogers, and Padric C. Smythe, *Psychonomic Science*, 1968, vol. 11(4), p. 137–138.

³ See, for example, “Conditions for a Picture-Superiority Effect on Consumer Memory” by Terry L. Childers and Michael J. Houston, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1984, vol. 11, p. 643–654.

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454 Main St.....295-555-5034
NEW HORIZONS WELLNESS CENTER
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we make housecalls

family owned and operated since 1905

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We can fix them all!
call for a free estimate

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It's time to call us!

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First Aid for your
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6263 W. Amherst Parkway, Ste. 1011.....295-555-5042
DUFFY'S CLOCKS 811 Main St.....782-555-4100
IN THE NICK OF TIME 2020 Louisiana.....295-555-6423
JASON'S CLOCKS AND MORE
4241 Warm Springs, Ste. 252.....295-555-6423
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Professional sales and repair
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Megan's Watch Shop

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Allie's Antiques

Clock Repair and Maintenance
We buy and sell vintage timepieces

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Gifts • Hand Painted Ceramics
Collectibles • Glassware

The most unique selection in town

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MAIN STREET CLOCKS 123 Main.....295-555-1210
MOM'S CLOCK REPAIR AND GIFT SHOP.....782-555-0914
NEAT CLOCKS AND SNACKS.....295-555-1555
125 Squirrel Nut Highway.....782-555-0111
NEW AND OLD TIMEPIECES AND GIFTS
6100 W. Alabama Parkway, Ste. 1919.....295-555-5099
PERFECT TIMING CLOCKS AND GIFTS
899 W. Appleway Rd.....782-555-7010
PETE'S FABULOUS CLOCKS 911 Main St.....295-555-4122
QUICK CLOCKS.....295-555-4129
QUICK CLOCKWORK 1239 Shepherd.....295-555-4199
QUICK FIX 1344 Kirby.....782-555-5676
QUICK REPAIRS.....782-555-8901
QUIRKY GIFTS AND CLOCKS.....295-555-5032
RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER
8913 W. Angleton Highway.....782-555-7001
RIGHT ON TIME 123 Creekbend.....295-555-1818
RIGHTEDUS REPAIRS
6261 Willowbend Ave. West, Ste. 1001.....782-555-8123
STUCK ON CLOCKS 812 Maple St.....295-555-5044
SUSIE Q CLOCKS 4 U 1001 Taco Rd.....295-555-0011
TIC TOC.....295-555-5566
901 W. Ruskoff.....782-555-3001
204 East Butler.....782-555-3001
TIME'S A WASTIN'.....782-555-7033
8943 W. Apple Valley Way.....782-555-8897
TINA'S GIFTS THEY WILL LOVE
1011 Highway 2011 West.....295-555-6423
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Clocks—Retail

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- * If we don't have it...we'll get it *
- * We repair clocks and watches *

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All Major Credit Cards Accepted

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JENNIFER LYNNE'S GIFTS AND MORE
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HELM VINTAGE TIMEPIECES 455 Jane.....295-555-5522
KIP'S WONDERFUL CLOCKS & GIFTS 2300 E. Beavis.....782-555-3322
OLIVIA'S GIFTS 300 West Belfort.....295-555-1122
YE OLDE CLOCKS AND GIFTS 2020 West Ave.....295-555-4111

Advertisements with text and pictures are more likely to be looked at and recalled than advertisements with text only. This superiority of pictures over text is even stronger when the page is quickly scanned rather than read.