How to illustrate texts in easy-to-read language?

Pictures can help you understand the text. Clear pictograms, drawings or photographs help the reader to build up an image of what the text is about more quickly. In addition, well- designed pictures are comprehensible to everyone - even people who do not speak the language. It is therefore important to think about how texts can be supplemented with images when drafting in a language that is easy to understand. In this section, we give tips on how to choose and use illustrations.

Use icons, drawings or photos.

Texts written in easy-to-read language can be illustrated with clear icons, drawings or photos. Icons - simple line drawings - are the most common choice for illustrations because they contain the least distracting details. However, drawings or photographs can also help to understand the text you are reading, but they need to be chosen very carefully. It is true that photographs are usually of specific people, which can give people with disabilities the impression that the text is about one particular person. This is another reason why icons are often chosen when writing in easy-to-understand language - they encourage more generalised thinking. Authors who produce texts in easy-to-read language choose different strategies to illustrate them. Here are some examples. This is how icons have been used to describe the Istanbul Convention in plain language:

Here is an example of how the colour pictures were used to present the project magazine
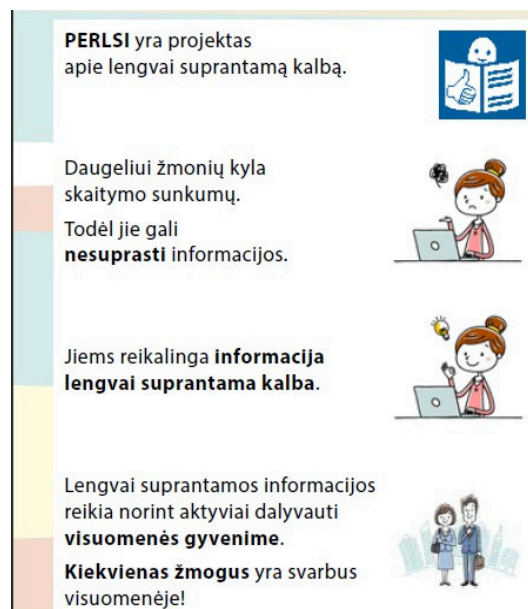

Image: the first issue of Hope magazine ٢٠٢١ (fliphtml٥.com)

Here's an example of how photos were used to create the Health Passport for people with disabilities in Ireland.

Image：https：//inclusionireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/۲۰۲۰/۱۱/health-passport.pdf

So all three types of illustrations are used in practice. As a general rule, it is suggested to be sure to illustrate the first level of texts. In these, the illustrations should explain each idea. In second-level texts, it is sufficient to illustrate each page or paragraph. In level 3 texts, illustrations are possible but not necessary. It is important to note that when writing in easy-to-understand language, it is not advisable to illustrate texts with diagrams, charts or maps. These can be very difficult, if not impossible, for people with intellectual disabilities to understand. Therefore, for example, when referring to places, it is preferable to use photographs rather than maps to represent them. When explaining statistics, show what the statistics are about rather than numbers and graphs.

Use pictures to illustrate specific points.

Pictures are the easiest way to represent objects, people or simple actions. For example, texts written in easy-to-understand language can easily depict people from different professions, such as doctors:

Image： https：//www.learningdisabilityservice-leeds.nhs.uk/easy-on-the-i/image-bank/
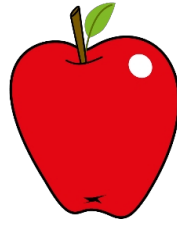
Various objects, such as an apple, are also easy to represent:

You can illustrate simple emotions such as sadness:
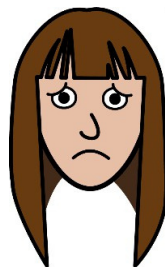
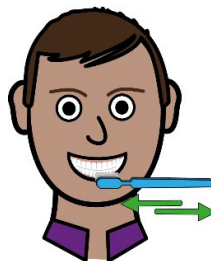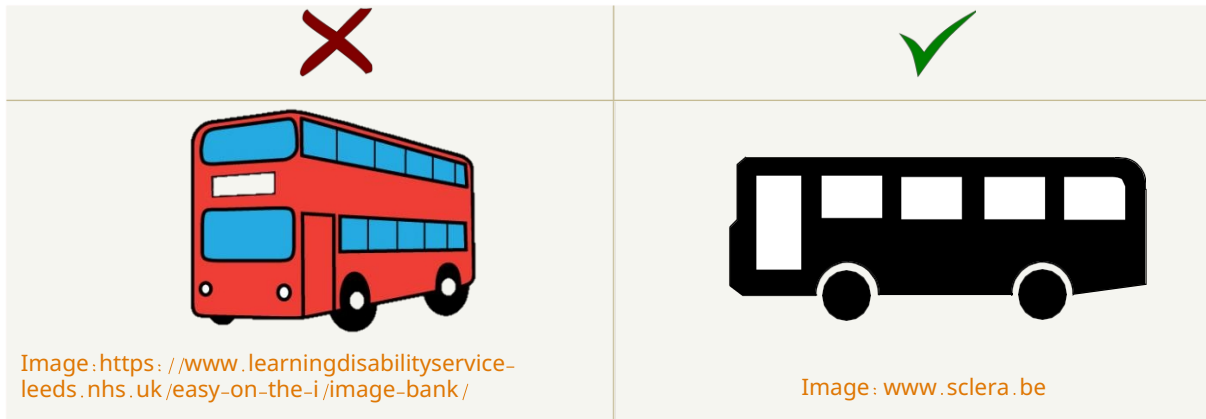Pictures can illustrate simple actions such as brushing your teeth:

If the texts are more complex, conveying more abstract ideas, the ideas themselves should be refined to make them more concrete, with examples and then illustrations.

Think about your readers when choosing your images.

Like the text itself, the images should be appropriate to the age and cultural background of the target group. For example, the use of children's images should be avoided when writing for adults. Also try to take into account what is common in the culture of the people who will read the texts.

For example, to illustrate a bus in a text that is easy to understand in Lithuanian, you should not use a picture of a bus that is typical of Great Britain and is harder for Lithuanians to recognise.

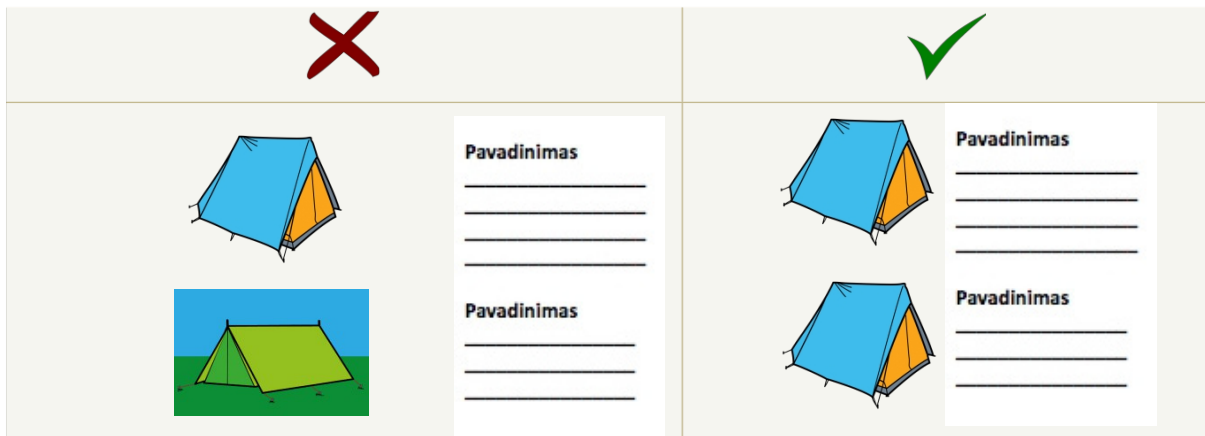| ✕	✓
Image：https：//www.learningdisabilityservice-leeds.nhs.uk/easy-on-the-i/image-bank/	Image：www.sclera.be

Use the same style of images in the same text.

When producing a single text in a language that is easy to read, it would be best to use the same style of illustrations. You should first decide whether you will use photographs, cartoons or icons. If possible, choose one of the ways of illustrating the text. And then try to use photographs or pictures of a similar style. Of course, sometimes you may not have the resources to do this, so be very careful to combine several images of similar styles.

Illustrate one thing with the same picture.

If you have used one image to illustrate an object, person or action, then use the same image throughout the text to illustrate that object, person or action. For example, if you have used one image to illustrate a tent, do not use another image to illustrate it; choose one illustration.
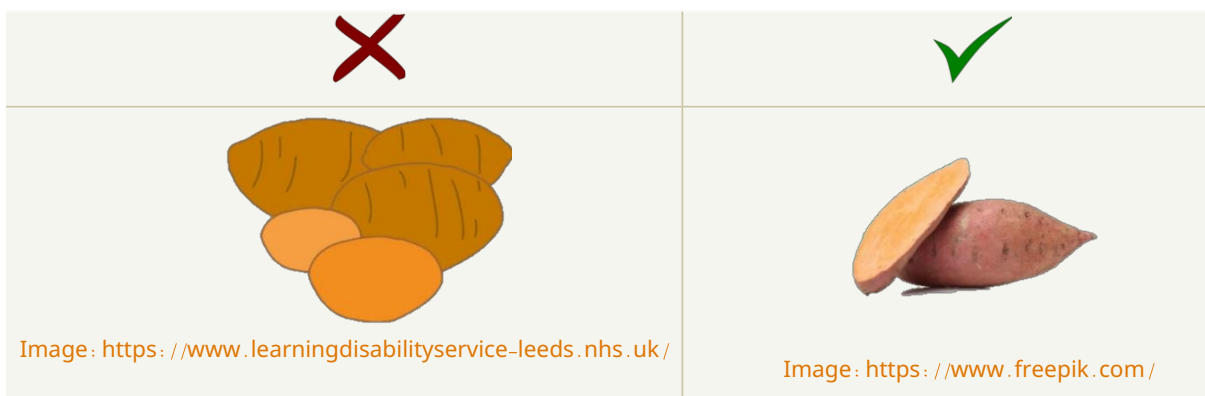
Images：https：//www.learningdisabilityservice-leeds.nhs.uk/，https：//arasaac.org/
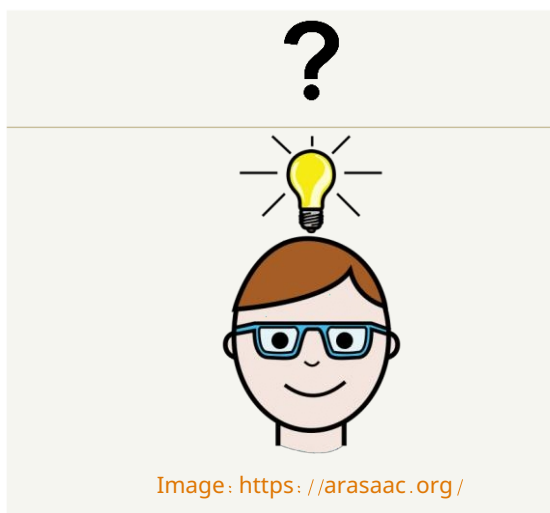
Conversely, always use different images to represent different things. Within the same text, the same image cannot be used to illustrate different objects or actions.

Use clear images.

It is veryimportant that when you look at a picture, it is immediately clear what it shows. For example, it can be difficult to identify a little-known item, such as a sweet potato, in a drawn picture. In this case, it is better to use a picture of a vegetable.

Image：https：//www.learningdisabilityservice-leeds.nhs.uk/

Image：https：//www.freepik.com/

Illustrating abstract concepts is even more difficult. For example, the symbol of an idea - a light bulb - may not be clear to everyone. Such images need to be tested with the target group to see if they understand the content of the illustration.
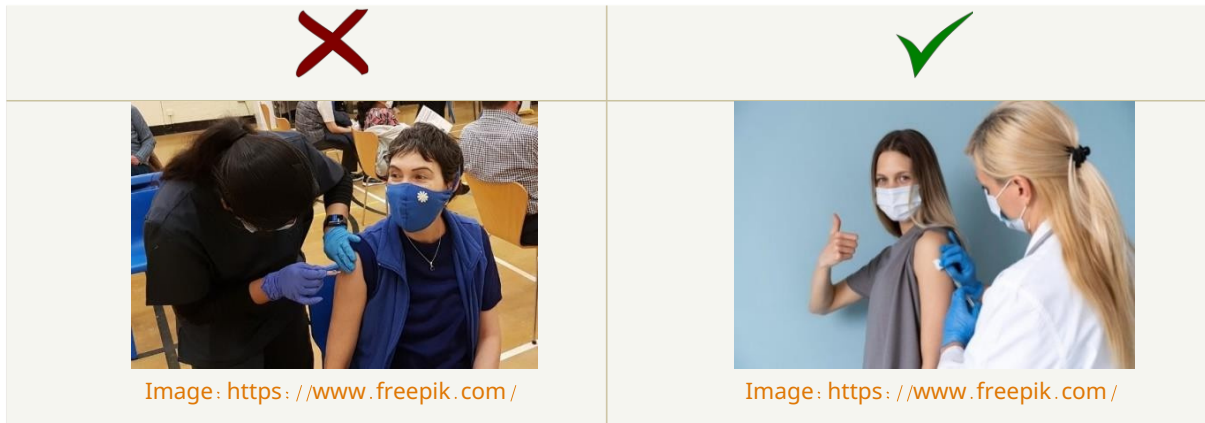

Image: https://arasaac.org/

You can add a caption below the image.

To clarify the meaning of a picture, you can add a caption - a sentence explaining what is happening in the picture. This sentence can be the same as a sentence that is used in the text itself, in easy-to-read language.

Choose images with few details.

It is important that the images you use to draft your texts in easy-to-read language do not contain too much detail. Choose images that show only the object or action referred to at a particular point in the text. Consider that readers may not be able to distinguish between the background of an image and the foreground, which contains the most important information. So, where possible, use images with a monochrome background in easy-to-read language. For example, compare two pictures showing the vaccination process.

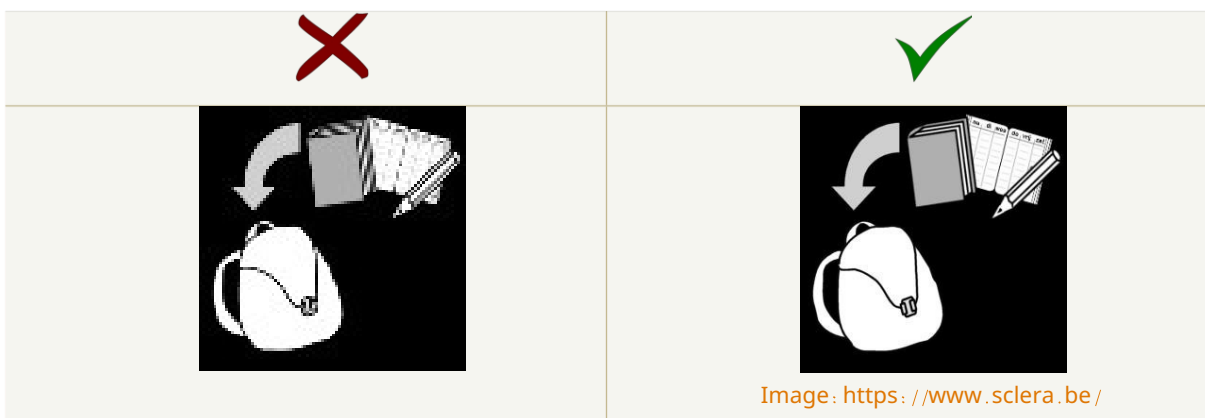| ✗	✓
Image：https：//www.freepik.com/	Image：https：//www.freepik.com/

In the photo on the left, we are distracted by the background - chairs and other people. On the right of the photo, there is nothing in the background, so there is nothing in the foreground. When choosing both painted pictures and photographs, it is a good idea to look for backgrounds that are solid and not cluttered with details.

Use images that are fully consistent with the content of the text.

It is very important that the images correspond to the content of the text in easy-to-read language. Images that do not convey the same message as the text will confuse readers.
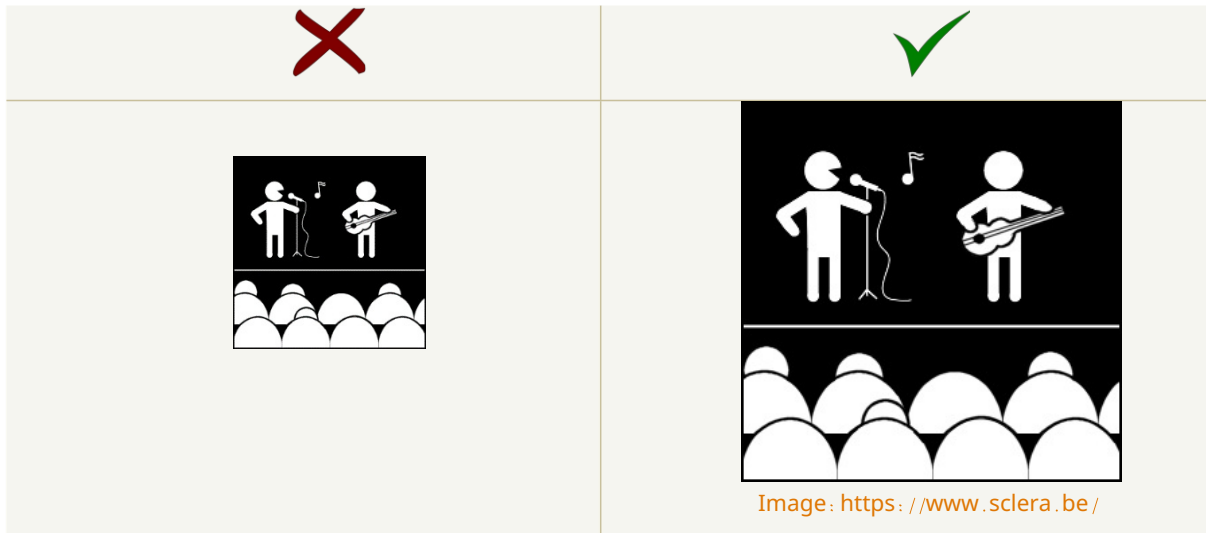
Use high quality images.

The quality of the images used to illustrate the texts in easy-to-read language must be high. That is, they must be blur-free and easy to see. If you use free or paid image databases, you should first download them to the device you are using and then upload them to the document. Otherwise, if you copy an image directly from an image database, you may end
up with a small image that, when enlarged, will have a blurred appearance.

✗	✓
	Image：https：//www.sclera.be/

Choose the right image size.

Thephotoor image accompanying your text must be large enough. That is, the illustrations should be of a size that makes it easy to see the important elements of the picture or photo.

Image：https：//www.sclera.be/

Don't overload the images with colour.

If you want to illustrate the text with colour images in easy-to-read language, think carefully about whether the colours will distract and disturb the reader. It is also worth considering whether texts with pictures will be printed in black and white. If so, check that the image will remain clear after printing. However, both colour pictures and colour photographs are not a bad choice for writing texts in easy-to-understand language. They will help to make the text easier to understand, provided that you do not use too much colour and that you think about how the text will be used later.
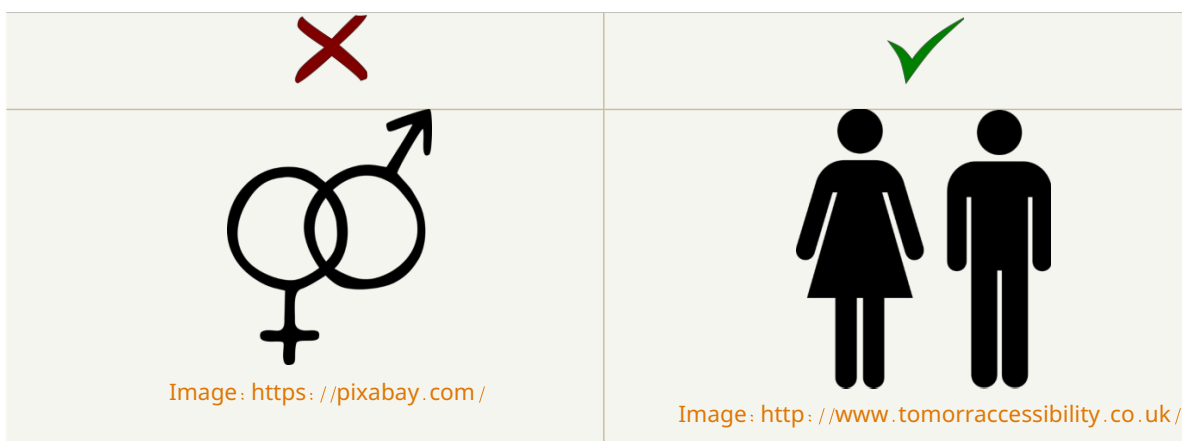

Image：https：//www.freepik.com/   Image：https：//www.freepik.com/

Add additional characters to the images where necessary.

Finding pre-prepared and suitable images for a text in an easy-to-read language is not easy. Sometimes you have to spend a lot of time and be creative. It is always worth considering whether you can add some details to an existing image to make the image and its idea clearer. Arrows, thumbs pointing up or down, clouds to convey thoughts or words, and other signs that are recognisable to the reading group can help.
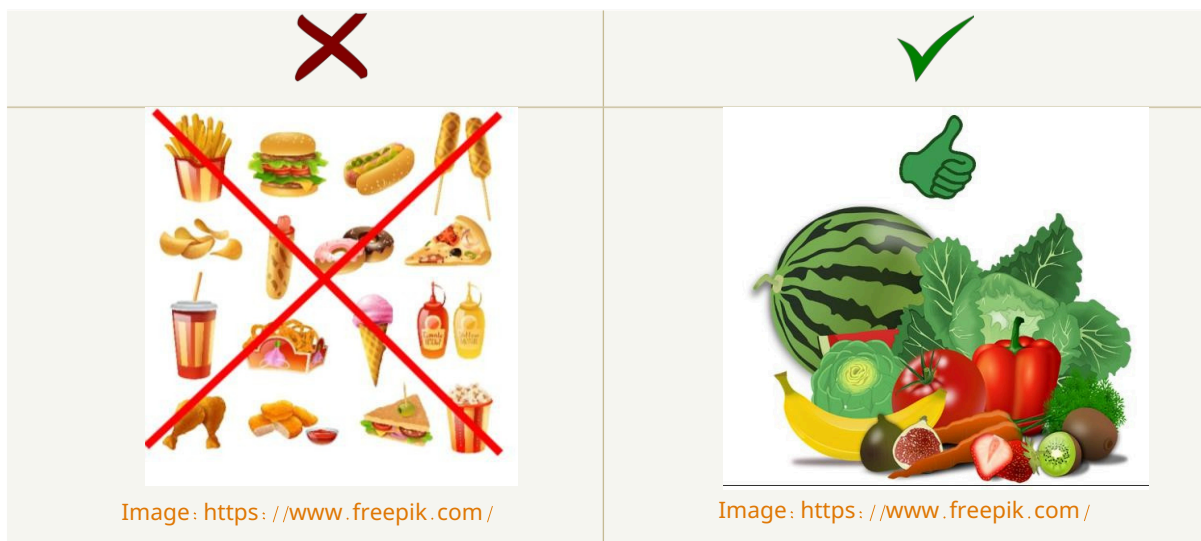

Image：https：//www.freepik.com/

Replace conventional symbols with more specific images.

As already mentioned, understanding abstract symbols can be difficult for people with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, as with the information itself, images need to be made more concrete in easy-to-read language texts.

Image：https：//pixabay.com/

Image：http：//www.tomorraccessibility.co.uk/

Illustrate what needs to be done, not what shouldn't be done.

As with the text itself, when drafting certain instructions, the pictures should represent what readers are expected to do, not what they are told not to do or what is not appropriate.

Image：https：//www.freepik.com/

Image：https：//www.freepik.com/

Line up the images on one side of the document.

It is important to think carefully not only about which images to use in easy-to-read language texts, but also about where to place them in the document. It is important that the images do not interfere with the text itself or interfere with the reading of the text. In most cases, when writing in plain language, leave about 8 centimetres on the left or right hand side of the document. The images are placed on the chosen side. It is not recommended to place images above or around the text. It is even worse to use a picture as a background to the text.

Get permission to use images.

It is important to follow basic ethical principles when drafting texts in easy-to-read language. If you use free image databases, please read the rules on the use of images. You will usually be asked to indicate the source of the images. If you find a suitable image on the internet, but the website does not say whether you are free to use it, ask the creators of the web page. Also, if you use photos taken in your own environment, make sure that the people who are featured in the photo agree to the photos being made public. In most cases, you will have to give the source or author of each image (unless the images are your own drawings or photos you have taken). Although you will often be asked to give the source where possible next to the image itself, this should be avoided in plain language. Extra text (and often unreadable text, as website addresses are not meant to be read) will certainly complicate your document. In this case, all the technical information about the document, together with a list of image sources, should simply be placed on the last page.