

Humans are visual animals. Research has shown that we learn and recall information that is presented as pictures more easily than when the same information is presented as words.

This idea has even been given its own title – the ‘picture superiority effect’ – otherwise known as ‘a picture paints a thousand words’.

What is an infographic?

Infographics are graphical representations of information that engage the audience and help them to understand complex concepts. They go beyond a simple diagram to present a narrative or process.

When should I use an infographic?

If effective, infographics can engage audiences more than text explanations.

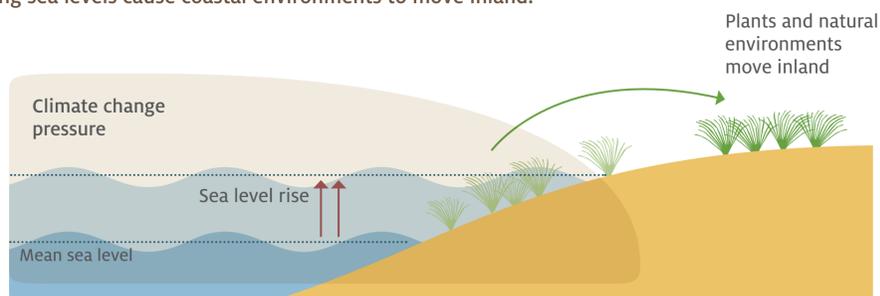
If you find yourself saying:

- I need to explain how this process works
- I need my readers to really understand this idea
- I have some interesting data but a graph is not conveying the interesting story.
- I need my readers to see the most important feature at a glance

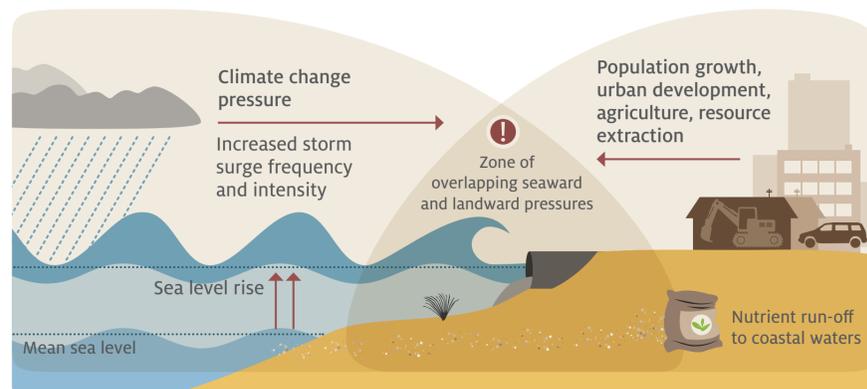
an infographic might be your answer.

Sea level rise and urban development are squeezing coastal environments

Rising sea levels cause coastal environments to move inland.



Where there is human activity and development close to the coast, coastal habitats are ‘squeezed’ between seaward and landward pressures.



This has negative impacts for our coastal environments:



Decrease in water quality



Loss of biodiversity (e.g. mangroves and saltmarsh)



Loss of habitat (e.g. nesting sites for turtles or migratory birds)

Getting it right

Creating an infographic involves:

research and analysis – first, we want to understand the information and the audience. We read and analyse background material, talk to the client and workshop ideas between our editing and design teams

the story – second, we think about what to say. What is most important to convey? We develop the key message and narrative, and refine these in consultation with the client

the visuals – then we develop compelling images to support and explain the story, drawing on principles of visual communication

the release – when the infographic is ready to go out to the audience, we edit and produce final files which can then be used as part of a website, presentation or document.

Getting it wrong

Making an infographic is not the same as making an effective infographic.

Features of poor infographics include:

- **too much** going on – infographics are about conveying a message; they can't reflect real life with all its details. Focus on the key message; leave out smaller details and simplify complex ideas
- **too much text** – if the audience has to read large blocks of text, this reduces the impact of the overall message. Keep it short and to the point
- one infographic where **several are needed** – an infographic with too many ideas can be confusing. Break down complex ideas into separate panels, or even separate infographics, to improve understanding
- trying to be **too close** to real life – sometimes authors want the icons or graphics to look exactly like ‘the real thing’. But audiences can often more quickly and readily recognise a cartoon icon of an object than a real-life drawing of the same object. Use simple, immediately recognisable icons
- an infographic that **isn't an infographic** – dot points with icons is not an infographic. Use infographics to convey a narrative or process, not just a list.

Tips

- Decide on **one clear message** for the infographic. You should be able to sum this up in one sentence.
- **Cut out** non-essential details.
- **Test** the infographic with expert and non-expert audiences. The expert audience can identify what's wrong or missing; the non-expert audience can tell you if it's understandable.