

Pictogram

A **pictogram**, also called a **pictogramme**, **pictograph**, or simply *picto*,^[1] and in computer usage an icon, is an ideogram that conveys its meaning through its pictorial resemblance to a physical object. Pictographs are often used in writing and graphic systems in which the characters are to a considerable extent pictorial in appearance. A pictogram may also be used in subjects such as leisure, tourism, and geography

Pictography is a form of writing which uses representational, pictorial drawings, similarly to cuneiform and, to some extent, hieroglyphic writing, which also uses drawings as phonetic letters or determinative rhymes. Some pictograms, such as Hazards pictograms, are elements of formal languages

Pictograph has a rather different meaning in the field of prehistoric art, including recent art by traditional societies and then means art painted on rock surfaces, as opposed to petroglyphs; the latter are carved or incised. Such images may or may not be considered pictograms in the general sense.

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Historical

Early written symbols were based on pictographs (pictures which resemble what they signify) and ideograms (symbols which represent ideas). Ancient Sumerian, Egyptian, and Chinese civilizations began to adapt such symbols to represent concepts, developing them into logographic writing systems. Pictographs are still in use as the main medium of written communication in some non-literate cultures in Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. Pictographs are often used as simple, pictorial, representational symbols by most contemporary cultures.

Pictographs can be considered an art form, or can be considered a written language and are designated as such in Pre-Columbian art, Native American art, Ancient Mesopotamia and Painting in the Americas before Colonization. One example of many is the Rock art of the Chumash people, part of the Native American history of California. In 2011, UNESCO's World Heritage List added "Petroglyph Complexes of the Mongolian Altai, Mongolia"^[3] to celebrate the importance of the pictograms engraved in rocks.



Ojibwa pictographs on cliff-face at Agawa Rock, Lake Superior Provincial Park



Several prehistoric engravings can be found around La Silla Observatory.^[2]

Some scientists in the field of neuropsychiatry and neuropsychology, such as Prof. Dr. Mario Christian Meyer, are studying the symbolic meaning of indigenous pictograms and petroglyphs,^[4] aiming to create new ways of communication between native people and modern scientists to safeguard and valorize their cultural diversity.^[5]

Modern uses

An early modern example of the extensive use of pictographs may be seen in the map in the London suburban timetables of the London and North Eastern Railway, 1936-1947, designed by George Dow, in which a variety of pictographs was used to indicate facilities available at or near each station. Pictographs remain in common use today, serving as pictorial, representational signs, instructions, or statistical diagrams. Because of their graphical nature and fairly realistic style, they are widely used to indicate public toilets, or places such as airports and train stations.

Pictographic writing as a modernist poetic technique is credited to Ezra Pound, though French surrealists accurately credit the Pacific Northwest American Indians of Alaska who introduced writing, viatotem poles, to North America^[6]

Contemporary artist Xu Bing created Book from the Ground, a universal language made up of pictograms collected from around the world. A Book from the Ground

chat program has been exhibited in museums and galleries internationally

Pictograms are used in many areas of modern life for commodity purposes, often as a formal language (see the In mathematics section).

In mathematics

In statistics, pictograms are charts in which icons represent numbers to make it more interesting and easier to understand. A key is often included to indicate what each icon represents. All icons must be of the same size, but a fraction of an icon can be used to show the respective fraction of that amount.^[7]

For example, the following table:

Day	Letters sent
Monday	10
Tuesday	17
Wednesday	29
Thursday	41
Friday	18

can be graphed as follows:

Day	Letters sent
Monday	
Tuesday	 
Wednesday	  
Thursday	   
Friday	 

Key:  = 10 letters

As the values are rounded to the nearest 5 letters, the second icon on Tuesday is the left half of the original.

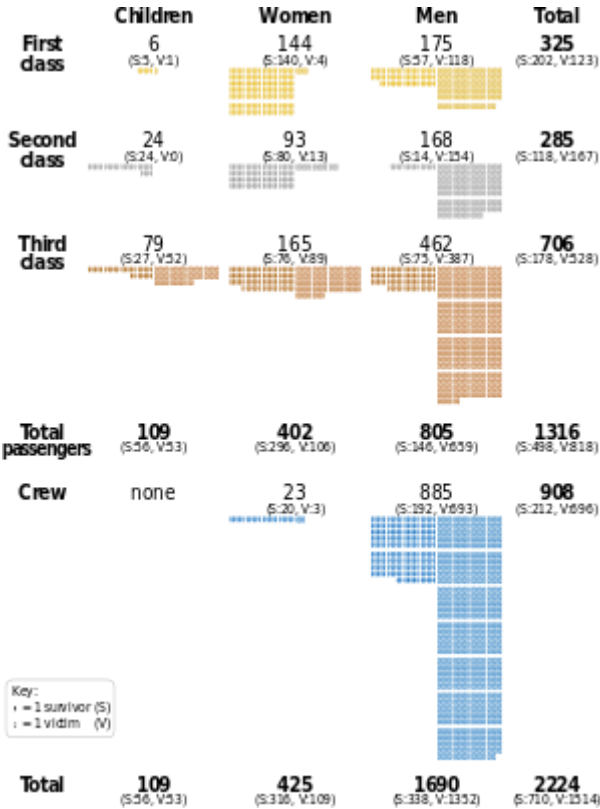
Standardization

Pictographs can often transcend languages in that they can communicate to speakers of a number of tongues and language families equally effectively, even if the languages and cultures are completely different. This is why road signs and similar pictographic material are often applied as global standards expected to be understood by nearly all.

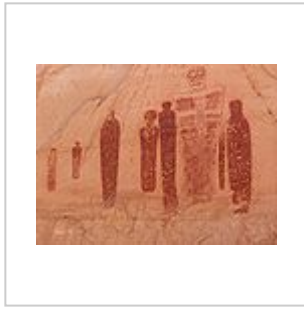
A standard set of pictographs was defined in the international standard ISO 7001: Public Information Symbols. Other common sets of pictographs are the laundry symbols used on clothing tags and the chemical hazard symbolsas standardized by the GHS system.

Pictograms have been popularized in use on the web and in software, better known as "icons" displayed on a computer screen in order to help user navigate a computer system or mobile device.

Image gallery



A compound pictogram showing the breakdown of the survivors and deaths of the maiden voyage of the RMS Titanic by class and age/gender



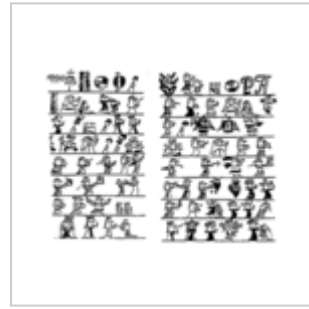
Native American Pictographs from the Great Gallery, Horseshoe Canyon, Canyonlands National Park



This sign in the US warns that a stop sign is ahead.



Sample National Park Service pictographs



Pictograph from 1510 telling a story of coming of missionaries to Hispaniola



Olympic village pictogram at the 1972 Munich Olympics



British Rail passenger safety pictographs at the end of the platform at Meols railway station



The top traffic sign warns people of horses and riders.



Water, rabbit, deer pictographs on a replica of an Aztec Stone of the Sun

See also

- List of symbols
- List of writing systems(sublist for those using pictograms)
- Emoticon
- Emoji
- Icon (computing)
- Ideogram
- Stick figure
- In art:
 - List of Stone Age art
 - Crop art
 - Pecked curvilinear nucleated
- Petroform
- Petroglyph
- Rebus
- Rock art
- Rock art of the Chumash people
- Yakima Indian Painted Rocks

Notes

1. Gove, Philip Babcock. (1993). Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged. Merriam-Webster Inc. ISBN 0-87779-201-1
2. "Signatures from the Past"(<https://www.eso.org/public/images/potw1705a/>). *www.eso.org*. Retrieved 30 January 2017.
3. Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. "Petroglyphic Complexes of the Mongolian Altai"(<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1382>). *whc.unesco.org*
4. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000678/067843.pdf>
5. http://www.pisad.bio.br/artigos/amazonupclose_outoftheforest.pdf
6. Reed 2003, p. xix
7. "Understanding pictograms"(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/factsheet/m37grap-e3-f-pictograms>) *www.bbc.co.uk*.

References

- [Reed, Ishmael](#) (2003). *From Totems to Hip-Hop: A Multicultural Anthology of Poetry Across the Americas, 1900-2002*, Ishmael Reed, ed. ISBN [1-56025-458-0](#)

External links

- [Pictogram & Communication: About 1,500 practical pictograms based on Design principles of pictorial symbols for communication support](#)(JIS T 0103:2005)
 - [CAPL:The Culturally Authentic Pictorial Lexicon](#), photographic illustrations of objects for multiple languages
 - [Pictogram Encyclopedia](#), The collection site of more than 500 pictograms, Pictograms are categorized, and easy to find unique pictogram
 - [Pictopen](#) - Modern Pictographic Witing
 - [NounProject](#) - Free Pictograms under open licences
 - [Modern Pictograms](#)- Explore word and pictogram relationships
 - [Wolfram|Alpha](#) - Number to pictogram translator
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