



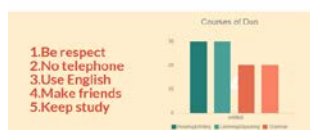
Infographics for Language Teaching and Learning

by [Crystal Bock Thiessen](#)

Used by businesses, news outlets, and even governmental and educational organizations, infographics combine words, numbers, and imagery into visually stimulating and dynamic ways of representing data and information. They can convey message and meaning in a quicker and more efficient manner than text alone when attention is paid to quality and content in their creation (Kos & Sims, 2014). Infographics are engaging to both create and to read, meaning that they're also great for language learning.



Because they incorporate both words and visuals, infographics provide an overlap between linguistic and nonlinguistic communication systems. The more students are able to navigate these systems, the better they are at storing, recalling, and applying new information (Krauss, 2012). Connecting linguistic and social ideas to students' own work within an infographic makes the content more meaningful and personal, thus retaining interest and promoting engagement. Furthermore, combining linguistics and imagery can promote critical thinking and serve as catalysts for verbal and written expression among English language learners (Ewald, n.d).



Because of infographics' increasing familiarity to students and ability to grab and maintain interest, I find that I spend less time promoting buy-in and instead can jump right into utilizing their potential as language learning tools with my students who are learning English.



Creating Infographics

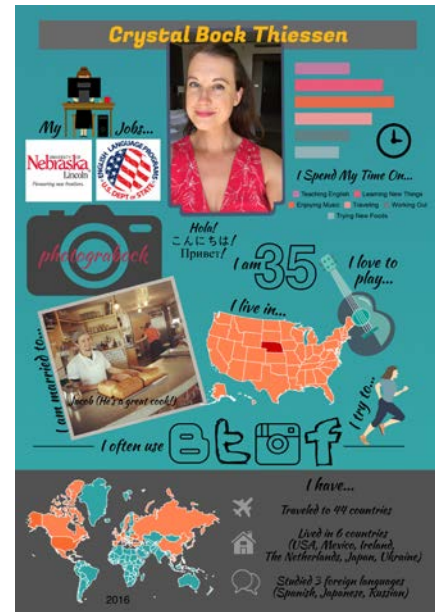
It's important to spend some time looking at infographics and discussing their components before diving into the infographic-making application and the projects. If you are new to designing infographics yourself, Greenfield (2011) has a great article entitled "A Few Rules for Making Homemade Infographics" that is an excellent starting point.



Doing an image search of infographics and having students work in pairs to talk about and write down all of the things they notice that infographics have or do is a great communicative activity and introduction to infographics as a whole. Some of the things the students may notice and that you should talk about as a class are

- color schemes/themes (three to four colors that work together);
- icons (what they are and how they're used);
- images, charts and graphs, background (distracting or enhancing);
- text color(s);
- font usage (with three different fonts being the magic number for variety); and
- layout (negative space, no overcrowding, coherence, and other formatting concerns).

There are plenty of free online infographic generators, but my personal favorite is [Piktochart](#) because of its ease of use and flexibility of customization even in the free version, but others, such as [Visme](#), [Infogr.am](#), and [Venngage](#), will work just as well. No matter which application you choose to use, it's important that you play around with it and make a few infographics yourself before introducing it to your students. You'll want to have some examples to show them (especially if you're doing a specific project) and you'll be better equipped to help them navigate the application themselves.



Infographic Activities for Language Learning



Almost all of the following activities can be modified for various levels and are great for incorporating infographics into your English language classroom and objectives.

Summarizing Reading Assignments

After reading an article, essay, or short story, students can then summarize it using a five-, seven-, or nine-point infographic (depending on the length of the reading). Each point on the infographic will summarize an aspect of the reading by using an icon or image and just a few words (or a short sentence). The 50/50 Rule (see Additional Tips) should apply here, meaning that students will have to have a good grasp of the content to properly convey each part of the summary.

Biographies and Autobiographies

When researching historical or famous people, or when presenting information about themselves, students love to use infographics as a fun way to present the information. You'll want to give the students plenty of time to study examples of biographic infographics online to give them ideas on how they can present information about people. Encourage students to include at least one chart or graph, such as a timeline visualization of how they spend their free time.

Introduction to Research and Research Presentation

Presenting data in a visually stimulating infographic can help to teach students that *how* information is presented is just as important as the actual information itself. Combined with summarizing activities, using infographics can teach, on an introductory level, the ideas behind academic research. In our unit on the environment, for example, I had my low intermediate students each draw an environmental problem out of a hat. The students then had to find three online sources and choose information they wanted to include on their infographic from each one. Once the students had their sources and information, we were then able to work on strategies for simplifying the original copied information into easier summaries in their own words, and then to convey that simplification using the features of an infographic.

Using a template I made that detailed how they were to organize each block of their infographic, students then took their research and transformed it into an original and organized infographic:

Infographic Title Your name (a little smaller)
2–3 facts about the problem (from your research)
2–3 solutions to the problem (from your research)
3 things that we can easily do to help this problem (from your research and experience)
Your three online sources listed (Author name, date, title, website)

Figure 1. Example infographic template for introducing research and poster presentations. Each block on the template corresponds to a different block in the infographic.

Each block of the infographic could then be printed out and connected together to create a long poster, and these posters are what we used to give research poster presentations to peers and other instructors in our department, giving the students a chance to practice speaking about the concepts they researched. (See [Appendix A](#), the Poster Presentation Rubric)

Debate, Analysis, and Comparative Studies

Infographics are a great way to have students map out opposing sides or views on an issue. This is especially helpful when teaching debate because students usually have to prepare for or investigate at least two sides of a particular topic. Alternatively, visually representing comparisons can help students in making connections among certain topics or ideas. The ease with which students can enter data into an infographic application and have it immediately converted into a variety of different charts and graphs makes analyzing data from readings or from student-conducted interviews a lot more interesting and engaging.

Grammar and Idiom Review

Students can work together in groups to make infographics on particular grammar points in class or to illustrate learned idioms, which they can then present to a group or the class as a whole in the role of a teacher. As a teacher yourself, you can also make your own course content-specific infographics to help students with grammatical concepts that may be particularly difficult for them.

Writing Practice and Writing Connections

Although infographics are a highly visual way of communicating ideas, there's no reason why they can't be paired with writing assignments for a truly dynamic learning experience. On the internet, there is an infographic on just about any topic for students to choose and write about. Students can write more formal paragraphs or short essays detailing the information presented in their own infographics. They can also practice summarizing key ideas from their essays by creating an infographic of it as a cover, or by creating an infographic of a classmate's writing, providing great summarizing practice, a key skill that is often difficult for students to grasp in English.



Additional Tips on Using Infographics With Students

- **Teach about the 50/50 Rule:** a successful infographic generally will contain about 50% words and 50% icons/imagery. Have students think about which words and ideas can be represented by icons. Alternatively, cryptic or vague icons will need a few words to fully convey the message.
- **Practice data analysis:** Have students practice analyzing data verbally or in writing from infographics that are already published online or in print. This is especially helpful when introducing or working on research writing.

- **Prepare students properly:** Go through your infographic-making software with students first to familiarize them with all the tools available to them. Students are quick to figure out online applications, but sometimes it helps to get a brief overview of what tools and functions there are before setting them free with it.
- **Use rubrics:** Use rubrics for both student peer-editing ([Appendix B](#)) and for final grading ([Appendix C](#)). For the student peer edits, infographics are brought up on the laptops and are merely viewed from there.
- **Let students practice:** Give students opportunities for practicing before they have to create larger projects. Printables are one-page versions of infographics, which are longer and are usually printed out in blocks. Making “About Me” printables is a great place to start.

References

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- Krauss, J. (2012). Infographics: More than words can say. *Learning & Leading with Technology*, 39(5), 10–14. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ982831.pdf>

Crystal Bock Thiessen graduated with bachelor’s degrees in both photography and Spanish and received her Master’s in TESL from the University of Central Missouri. Professionally, her interests include team-teaching, photography, and video for the language classroom, and language learning through community engagement. Currently, she is an ESL instructor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is also a professional photographer. Combined with her love of travel, she has photographed and visited 46 countries and 29 U.S. states.

Appendix A: Infographic Poster Presentation

Name _____

Infographic	5	4	3	2	1
Color Theme	Uses strong color theme that enhances or further relates to the topic.	Uses good color theme that does not distract from the topic.	Okay use of color theme, but may not suit the topic completely.	Color is somewhat distracting or does not have a theme.	Does not have a coherent color theme and distracts from the topic.
Text	Text is approx. 50%, is in the student's own words, and is simplified.	Text is approx. 50%, some may not be in student's own words or too difficult.	Text is more or less than 50% and/or may not be in student's own words or too difficult.	Text is more or less than 50% and contains many plagiarized segments.	Text is greatly more or less than 50% and is mostly plagiarized.
Graphics	Graphics are approx. 50% and enhance the text and the topic.	Graphics are approx. 50%, but some may not enhance the text or topic.	Graphics are more or less than 50% and/or contain many that do not enhance the text or topic.	Graphics are more or less than 50% and/or do not enhance the text or the topic very well.	Graphics are greatly more or less than 50%, are distracting, and do not enhance the text or topic.
Title/Name	Title is large and easy to read at the top. Student's name is easy to read under the title at the top.	Title is large and easy to read at the top. Name may be somewhat difficult to read or should be a little bigger.	Title is not large and/or is not very easy to read. Name may be somewhat difficult to read or should be a little bigger.	Title is not large and is not easy to read. Name is difficult to read.	Title and/or name are missing from the top.
Sources	At least two sources, with author's name, article title, website, and date all at the bottom.	At least two sources appear at bottom, but may be missing one of the required elements.	At least two sources appear at the bottom, but are not correctly formatted with required elements.	Only has one source at the bottom and/or ONLY gives website addresses.	No sources listed at the bottom of the infographic.

Presentation	5	4	3	2	1
Eye Contact and Posture	Stands up straight, looks relaxed and confident. Establishes eye contact with listeners.	Stands up straight and establishes eye contact with listeners, but does not appear confident or relaxed.	Usually stands up straight and/or sometimes establishes eye contact with listeners.	Sometimes stands up straight and sometimes establishes eye contact with listeners.	Slouches and/or does not look at listeners. Does not seem engaged or interested in topic.
Gestures and Attitude	Facial expressions and body language generate a strong interest and enthusiasm about the topic in	Facial expressions and body language sometimes generate a	Facial expressions and body language are used to try to generate	Facial expressions and body language are very unnatural	Very little use of facial expressions or body language. Did not generate much

	others.	strong interest and enthusiasm about the topic in others.	enthusiasm, but they appear forced or overly practiced	and/or forced.	interest in topic being presented.
Information	Speech content is interesting, informative, and easy to understand. Well-rehearsed. Does a good job of teaching us about the topic.	Speech content is usually interesting—could use more variety, examples, ways to teach the students, etc. Well-rehearsed.	Speech content is somewhat interesting or somewhat difficult to understand. Needs more practice.	Speech content is not interesting or is incomplete, or it is quite difficult to understand. Needs to practice.	Speech content is incomplete, poorly edited, and/or uninteresting. Not rehearsed.
Dress	Business attire, very professional look.	Casual business attire.	Casual business attire, but wore sneakers or jeans.	Somewhat casual business with sneakers and jeans.	General attire not appropriate for audience (jeans, t-shirt, shorts).
Comprehension	Speaks clearly and distinctly all the time with little to no mispronunciation.	Speaks clearly and distinctly all of the time with a few mispronunciations.	Speech is mainly clear, but pronunciation problems impede understanding from time to time.	Speech is partially clear at times and not clear at others.	Often mumbles or can not be understood OR pronunciation causes difficulties for the listener.

Total ____ / 50

Comments:

Appendix B: Infographic Peer Editing Sheet

This is a peer-edit sheet for: _____ (name of person on whose infographic you are commenting)

Information

- | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|---------------------|
| 1. Is there a clear, large, and easy-to-read title at the top? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 2. Is the presenter's name clear and easy to read under the title? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 3. Does the presenter give 3–5 interesting facts? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 4. Does the presenter give 3–5 effects of this problem? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 5. Does the presenter give 3–5 solutions for this problem? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 6. Does the presenter list 2–3 sources in the correct format? | Yes | No | I don't know |

Suggestions/ideas/comments about the presenter's infographic information:

Color, graphics, design

- | | | | |
|---|------------|-----------|---------------------|
| 1. Does the presenter use a nice background that adds to his/her topic? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 2. Is all of the text large and easy to read (especially with colors)? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 3. Does the presenter use 50% text and 50% graphics/images? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 4. Does the presenter use a good color theme for his/her topic? | Yes | No | I don't know |

Suggestions/ideas/comments about the presenter's infographic color, graphics, and design:

Grammar and spelling

- | | | | |
|---|------------|-----------|---------------------|
| 1. Does the author have grammar with no mistakes? | Yes | No | I don't know |
| 2. Does the author have NO spelling mistakes? | Yes | No | I don't know |

Suggestions/ideas/comments about the presenter's infographic grammar and spelling:

Appendix C: Infographic

Name _____

	5	4	3	2	1
Color theme	Uses strong color theme that enhances or further relates to the topic.	Uses good color theme that does not distract from the topic.	Okay use of color theme, but may not suit the topic completely.	Color is somewhat distracting or does not have a theme.	Does not have a coherent color theme and distracts from the topic.
Text	Text is approx. 50%, is in the student's own words, and is simplified.	Text is approx. 50%, some may not be in student's own words or too difficult.	Text is more or less than 50% and/or may not be in student's own words or too difficult.	Text is more or less than 50% and contains many plagiarized segments.	Text is greatly more or less than 50% and is mostly plagiarized.
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Title/Name	Title is large and easy to read at the top. Student's name is easy to read under the title at the top.	Title is large and easy to read at the top. Name may be somewhat difficult to read or should be a little bigger.	Title is not large and/or is not very easy to read. Name may be somewhat difficult to read or should be a little bigger.	Title is not large and is not easy to read. Name is difficult to read.	Title and/or name are missing from the top.
Sources	At least two sources, with author's name, article title, website, and date all at the bottom.	At least two sources appear at bottom, but may be missing one of the required elements.	At least two sources appear at the bottom, but are not correctly formatted with required elements.	Only has one source at the bottom and/or ONLY gives website addresses.	No sources listed at the bottom of the infographic.
					Total _____ / 25

Additional Comments: