

7.2 Graphics Guidelines

Effective graphics and multimedia elements can greatly enhance the attractiveness and usability of a Web site. Users can benefit from the effective use of graphics on a Web page. Best practices for graphics support learning, aid understanding and promote user satisfaction.

7.2.1 General Graphics Guidelines

- **Ensure that graphics do not significantly slow the page load time.** Images should be compressed to the smallest possible file size to facilitate fast download times while retaining optimal image quality.
- **Use graphics and multimedia in a meaningful way.**
 - Ensure there is a definable reason for every graphic and multimedia element on the Web site.
 - Emulate real-world objects in images, where possible.
 - Design graphics that convey quantitative information for quick understanding.
 - Make sure users will obtain value from all graphics.
- **Test graphics and multimedia to ensure that they convey what they are intended to convey.** User testing and feedback should be used to ensure that the entire Web site functions as intended. This is especially true of graphics and multimedia and images used to facilitate learning.
- **Provide appropriate introductions and overviews for graphics and multimedia.** This sets the stage for the usefulness of the graphics.
- **Use thumbnail images to preview a set of larger images,** such as in a photo gallery.
- **Limit the use of graphics that take up most or all of the area “above the fold.”** Main page content should be at least partially visible without scrolling.
- **Include text equivalents for all graphical elements.** Alternate text for images (by using the ALT property) allows all users (including those with visual impairments) to understand meanings and descriptions of pictures.
- **When using background images, be sure to select simple textures that do not interfere with the text and additional page elements.** Any background image should enhance the readability and understandability of the page, not detract from it.
- **Provide labels for clickable images.** Make sure users understand what links are accessed by clicking on graphics.
- **Include actual data with information graphics such as charts and graphs.** When using graphics, make sure users are presented all the information. For example, place actual values on bar graphs.
- **Avoid the use of unsolicited animations.** Animations can draw users' attention away from your content and make it difficult for them to read anything else on a Web site. This includes animated gifs, banner ads, and flash animations.
- **Never display unsolicited graphic pop-ups.** Pop-ups are disturbing to the user's train of thought and lead to dissatisfaction and errors.
- **Do not overuse photographs of people on a Web site.** The value of using photos of people on Web sites is mixed. Sometimes they enhance the effectiveness of sites but

often equally detract from effectiveness.

- **Never require users to scroll to see all of a graphic.** Graphics should be small enough to display fully on one screen.
- **Do not use graphics that look like banner ads or gratuitous decorations.** Any image should enhance the readability and understandability of the page, not detract from it or be confused with ads and fluff.

7.2.2 Graphic Styleguide

Photography & Illustration style

When photography is incorporated into a design, Georgia and its related subject matter should always be portrayed in a positive light. Images should be of high quality and have clearly recognizable subject matter.

Photos

Photos selected should exhibit realistic coloring, contrast, and image quality. Professional photography is best.

Show the diversity of the state's heritage, culture, regions and resources when displaying landscapes or outdoor photography. Avoid displaying portraits where possible. People should appear happy, active, and friendly where portraits are used. Be sure that all people in your photos have signed a consent form allowing their likeness to be used.

Illustration and Clip Art

Similarly, illustrations should be professional, clean, and simple. Illustrations should follow a standard style throughout your website, rather than changing between multiple styles. Some good examples of consistent illustration styles can be found in the [Wall Street Journal's "hedcuts"](#) and [A List Apart's article illustrations](#).

Use of illustrations known as **clip art** is strongly discouraged. Typically visitors associate clip art as childish or silly. As they often come prepackaged with word processor software (such as Microsoft Word), they are often used in a non-professional manner and so the subconscious association with that style is that the writer who chose the clip art is unprofessional.

Clip Art Examples:

Positive Imagery:



Negative Imagery:

Avoid images of subject matter with negative connotations.





Icons

Icons should also maintain stylistic consistency throughout your website. They should be clean and simple, while still getting across a clear meaning.



Shadows, Textures, and Gradient Effects

The use of graphical effects, such as textures, gradients, and drop shadows are strongly discouraged.

Though effects such as textures, gradients, and drop shadows can add dimension, they can also have a bad connection with how web graphics were treated in late 90s and early 2000s. As such, they should be used sparingly and with great care.

Incorrect use of drop shadows:



Appropriate drop shadows:



Incorrect use of texture:



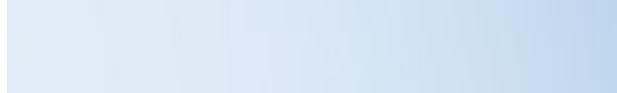
Appropriate use of texture:



Incorrect use of gradient:



Appropriate gradient:



Buttons and Starbursts

Note: for this section, buttons refer to clickable graphics that are meant to link to a product, a service, or another website. We are not referring to form buttons (such as "Submit" buttons).

The use of button graphics is highly discouraged, as they tend to detract from the design of the page.

- DO NOT apply a bevel or emboss effect to a logo to “buttonize” the logo. The beveling and embossing effects often used in creating buttons can also have a bad connection with how web graphics were treated in late 90s an early 2000s, and as a result come across as unprofessional.
- DO NOT use starburst effects. They are associated with businesses selling services, and can detract from the overall design of the page.

example of a beveled button:



example of a starburst:



When a series of logos are grouped together on your page (as in the below examples of groups of buttons and starbursts), they can draw attention from the rest of the content on your page, and become distracting. Their purpose can also be very confusing to visitors. Are you listing a group of sponsors or advertisers? What do these logos have in common?

Not recommended:

Not recommended:

Employment Spotlight



Accepting Applications!
Click here for details

Are they sponsors? No. They are companies who are hiring right now. Would you know that by looking at them?



These buttons are so highly stylized with the heavy bevel effect that the actual logos become secondary. The words under "SHBP" in the second button are almost illegible.

If it is necessary to list a group of agencies, programs, or services together, we recommend listing them as text links with a heading that explains the grouping. A small graphic icon to the left of the text links may also be appropriate, but again, any graphic effects should be used with care.

Recommended:

Online Resources

- [Crime Statistics](#)
- [Sex Offenders](#)
- [Unsolved Cases](#)

Public Disclosure



Financial Disclosure Reports

Information about the source, type, amount, or value of the incomes of representatives, officers, and candidates.



Foreign Travel Reports

Information about certain expenditures for all official foreign travel by representatives and staff.



Gifts and Travel Filings

Information about travel-related expenses incurred by representatives who are reimbursed by nongovernment sources.

State Seal

Due to the complexity of the state seal, it does not render well at a small size on a web browser. As a result, we do not recommend using the state seal in place of an agency-specific logo. A state seal does not need to be present on a website to make it official.

[\[Link to high res state seal\]](#)

7.2.3 Image Rights and Copyright

It is important that you have the rights and permission to use any and all graphics on your site. There are a number of websites that offer free stock photography. Be sure that you know the terms and conditions of free stock photos before using them. (Some have limits or restrictions on how their images can be used).

If you cannot find what you need from free stock photography, consider paying for an appropriate stock image, or paying a professional to take the appropriate photos.

Stock Photo Resources

- Picture Georgia: images.itt.state.ga.us (Free from the Georgia Department of Economic Development)
- Stock XCHNG: sxc.hu (Free, with links to paid images)
- Dreamstime: www.dreamstime.com/ (Mostly paid, some free)
- iStockPhoto: istockphoto.com (paid)

7.2.4 Definitions

clip art - ready-made pieces of printed or computerized graphic art, such as illustrations, borders, and backgrounds, that can be electronically copied and used to decorate a document.

icon - a stylized symbol representing a service or functionality that is recognizable by most users. Icons are created to exist along with explanatory text.