

# [Staffordshire university ­ module title: visual communication module](https://assignbuster.com/staffordshire-university-module-title-visual-communication-module/)

Staffordshire University­Module Title: Visual Communication  ModuleCode: GRAPH40087 Semioticians claim that successfuland effective visual communication is said to produce a “ unity in meaning”. Explain what this means and relate it to the process of ‘ problem solving’ orfinding a ‘ visual solution’. By Matthew Hill Date: 14.

12. 17 Word Count: 949 words Tutor: Lucas Swann In this essay, I am going to explain how successful andeffective visual communication can produce a unity in meaning and how itrelates to the process of finding a visual solution. In order to answer the question I must first look at thebasic foundations of semiotics and what different types of sign exist.

There aretwo parts of signs originally depicted, the signifier which is the form of the sign, and then the signified which is the thing that is being represented by thesignifier. The viewer needs to be able to link the two parts in order for it tobe a successful sign and this linkage is what Charles Sanders Peirce describedas the third part of signage. However, the main point of the sign is the firsttwo as a sign cannot exist without them; the third is only how it is perceived. As Steven Bradley, a designer and author, writes “ Signs cantake many forms.

They can be words, numbers, sounds, photographs, paintings, androad sings among and more” (Bradley, 2016) this shows that from a brief analysisof the types of signs that exist you can concur that there are many differenttypes of visual communication, some more effective than others but I willdiscuss that further into the essay. Despite the many existing types they canstill all be placed into three distinct categories, these being icons, indexes, and symbols. To briefly summarise them; an icon is a direct visual resemblance, for example, a photograph, of the signified item, an index is casually linked, forexample, a fingerprint to represent a human, and finally a symbol has no visualconnection to the signifier only a cultural agreement to its meaning, forexample, a dove to represent peace.

Out of the three, the icon is the mosteffective as it is the literal resemblance of the signifier and therefore willproduce a greater unity in meaning across different than the others as littleto no cultural learning needs to take place to understand the idea. A unity in meaning is the same understanding of somethingacross different groups and cultures, for example, a red traffic light meaningstop. This is a perfect example of a successful piece of visual communicationas it has provided a visual solution for the problem of needing a sign torepresent a halt in the movement of traffic. As John Storey wrote “ Semioticsmakes us aware that the cultural values with which we make sense of the worldare a tissue of conventions that have been handed down from generation togeneration by the members of the culture of which we are a part” (Storey, 19960) this explains that our acquired understanding of language is developedfrom our community and accumulated family knowledge, therefore, we are onlyable to interpret what we already know in terms of language and would be unableto recognise signs with foreign concepts. This, therefore, highlights thecritical importance of a successful sign being able to convey a unity in meaningto get across its message to the audience.

Visual problem solving is finding the right language tocommunicate with an audience, in terms of semiotics this would be somethingthat applies to all the different groups that would need to be catered for sowould need to have a unity in meaning throughout the entire audience to besuccessful. A sign must therefore not only have a cultured understanding but abasic human instinct to really get across its message. Following naturalcultured instincts such as red for danger means that there is no communicationbarrier for the sign and the viewer which is vital for the sign to beeffective. As a language is a system of signs it means that sign must be compatibleto fit with the viewer’s language which again will derive from the culturedinstincts. Saussure wrote about the “ role of signs as part of social life”(Saussure, 1916) which shows how pivotal sign communication is to the viewerand reinforces the point of how critical it is for the sign to fit with the viewer’slanguage. In addition to this, Saussure is communicating his consideration ofhow the cultured understand from the viewers social life impacts theirunderstanding of signs, for example how an inside joke is only understood bypeople in the group it was created in, the same works for signs, a person couldassociate a certain sign with a meaning purely based on their social influencesand those very influences are able to change the meaning of a sign. Reverting backto the question, a sign is again successful if it can fit in with the instinctualunderstandings of signs that the viewer has in order for the signs perceived meaningnot to be susceptible to change.

Overall it is clear that for a sign to be successful itabsolutely must fit in with the cultured understanding of the viewer andreflect a meaning that can be understood across different cultures and groups sothat the interpretation of the sign is a shared meaning. If the shared meaningis achieved then the sign can solve the problem that it was intended for ameans of communication or a visual solution. While the theory of semiotics hasonly been around in its modern form for around one hundred years, its thoughtprocess can be seen throughout time in the form of cave paintings and othervisual ideas intended to tell stories or simply have a single meaning. This iswhy we are able to understand those signs despite the cultural and age differences, purely down to the cultured understandings that have been passed down fromgeneration to generation.     Bibliography Bradley, Steven (2016): Icon, Index, and Symbol — Three Categories ofSignsStorey, John (Ed.

) (1996): What is Cultural Studies? London: ArnoldSaussure, Ferdinand de (19161974): Course in General Linguistics (trans. Wade Baskin). London: Fo­­­ntana/Collins