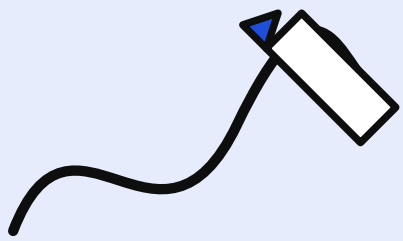
Discipline

Illustration

Creates images with a purpose: to inform, explain, comment, tell a story or persuade, in books, the press, brands or products.

In Spanish
Ilustración

Origin
Classification by purpose: Male (2007)



What it deals with

Some ideas are better explained with an image than with words, and some things a photo can’t show.

Principles

Inform
Explain what something is like or how it works.

Tell
Narrate stories, fictional or real.

Persuade and comment
Convince or give an opinion with images.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this
Before drawing, define what the image has to do: explain, tell or convince.

✗ Avoid
Using an illustration only to decorate when it could explain.

👁 Don’t fall for it
An image can be misread too: test it with the people who will see it.

Especialidades



Specialty

Scientific illustration

Draws living things, objects, and processes accurately so they can be studied, compared, and explained.



Specialty

Picturebook

Designs books in which text, pictures, and page turns tell the story together.

Concepts

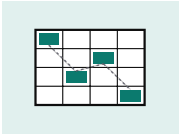


Concept

Text/image interaction

Words and pictures can say the same thing, complete each other, or contradict each other.

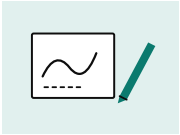
Methods and tools



Method

Morphological analysis

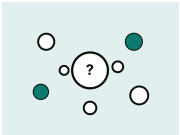
Breaking a problem into parts, listing options for each and combining them to find ideas.



Method

Sketching

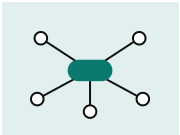
Drawing ideas quickly and cheaply to think them through and share them.



Method

Brainstorming

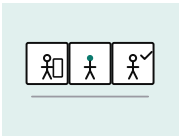
Generating many ideas as a group without judging them until the end.



Method

Mind map

Opening up a central topic into branches of related ideas.



Method

Storyboard

Telling in panels how someone uses a product or a service.

Connections

Related to

- Comic contracts
- Art direction
- Poster design
- Information design
- Graphic design
- Motion design

Authors and works

2007	**Alan Male**	Classified illustration by its purpose: informing, commenting, narrating, persuading and giving identity.

Sources

Original sources

- Male, A. (2007). Illustration: A theoretical and contextual perspective. AVA Publishing.
- Clarke, S. (2019). The illustrator as visual problem solver: A deconstruction of conceptual strategies for the contemporary illustrator. In A. Male (Ed.), A companion to illustration: Art and theory (pp. 199–228). Wiley Blackwell. View source (https://repository.falmouth.ac.uk/2891/)

Last reviewed: October 29, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.