Using Images in Instructional Materials to Promote Memory, Processing and Understanding

When using digital materials to present or share information with students, do not overlook the relative ease with which you can incorporate images into the digital resource and why this is so very important. Any time you think of research, pre-writing or conceptual organization and predict "who will be left out", it often relates to barriers to fluent information processing. This barrier can cause some students to not process the text instructions and not focus on the content that they have the ability to understand and act upon to learn. Other times, students struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary with procedures at the expense of working and organizing their knowledge.

One important support from a UDL perspective is to provide options for information processing and non-linguistic complements to text. Most often, you can find some representation of a concept in the online search engines to build into a digital resource pretty quickly. It does not need to be a perfect representation. For some students, the image will function as the non-linguistic "anchor in the storm" of ideas, procedures, directions and distractions. For this purpose it is consistency that matters more than the perfect representation of the concept. Students who need to be challenged or have time to do so can work on locating images to represent concepts non-linguistically in shared digital materials for the entire class. The support of the images can extend to paper when printed or during group presentations in presentation mode.

Images can allow students to process the concept in a non-linguistic way and establish complementary and stronger mental associations. In most situations, we want these instructions and guides to be processed fluently like road signs when we are driving. Pairing text with some consistent images in digital materials can be done quickly and help accomplish this. Be thoughtful about using images. Do not clutter your digital materials with excessive images. However, if there are concepts, sequences or vocabulary that seem to require a lot of verbal redirection or clarification, those are usually good candidates for providing a consistent image as a non-linguistic representation.