How to Format Figures in the American University Thesis and Dissertation Template
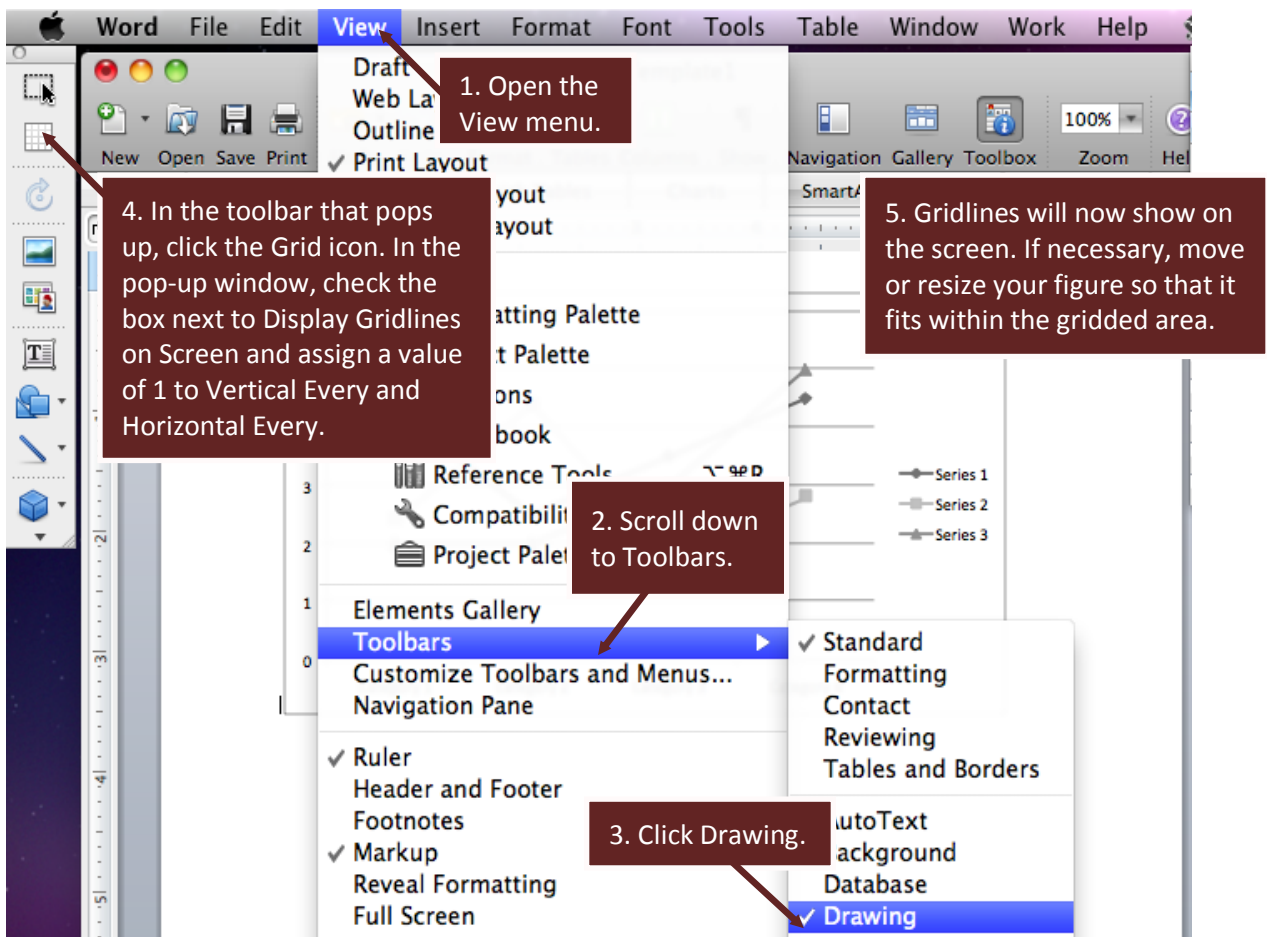
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Inserting Preexisting Figures

Inserting figures is usually an easy process. Just copy and paste the photo image, chart, graph, or other illustration into the template. Then check to make sure your image fits within the page margins.

Color and Grayscale in Figures

You are allowed to use color in your thesis or dissertation. However, because color reproduces poorly in microfilm and often in print copy as well, it is helpful to your readers to ensure that figures are understandable in grayscale. Choose colors that convert well to grayscale, or be proactive on the issue by using grayscale yourself. The examples below show how you can use grayscale effectively in your images, charts, and graphs.

How to Grayscale an Image

If your figure is an image, you can quickly grayscale it as follows:
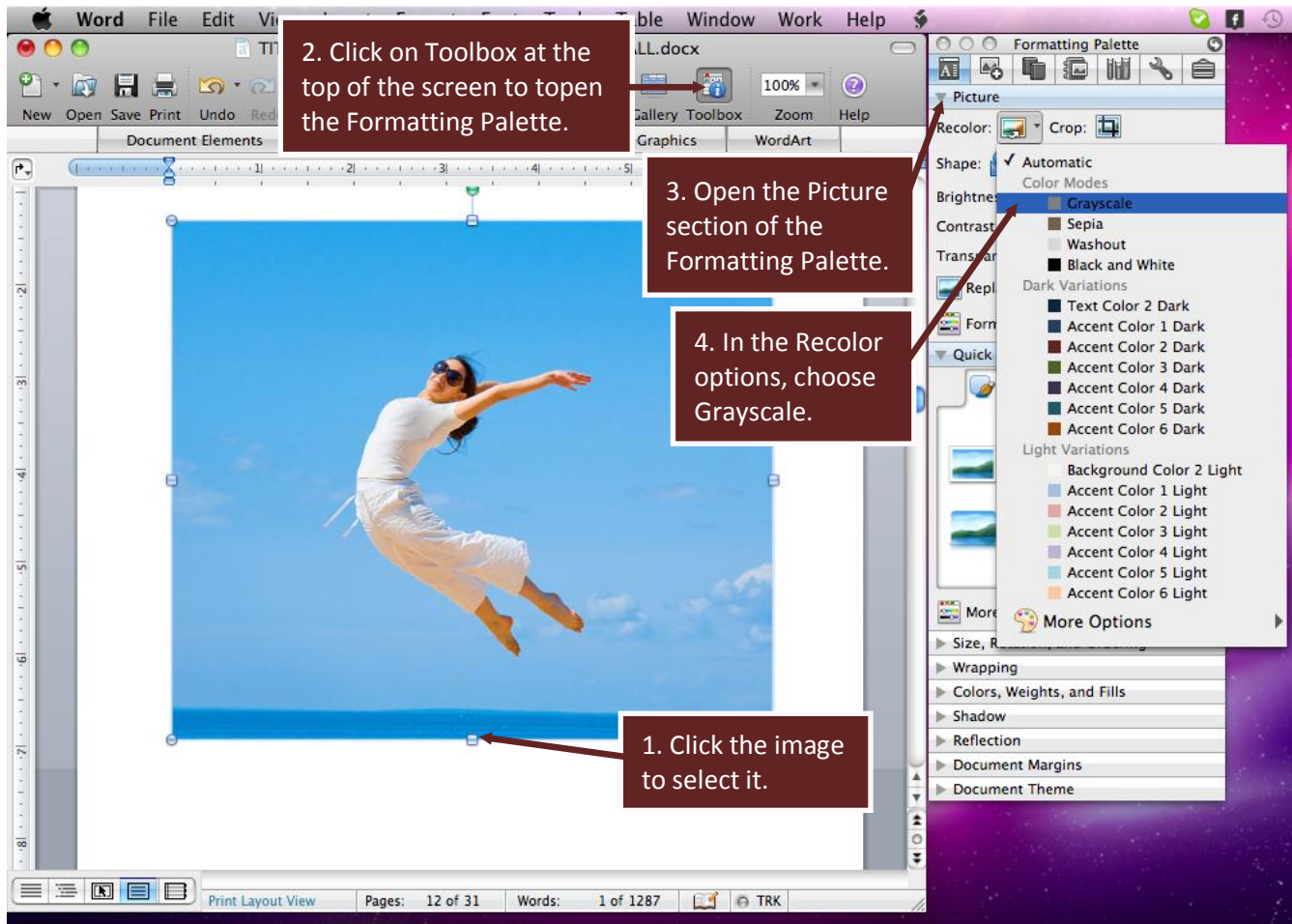
How to Grayscale a Chart or Graph

You can grayscale a chart or graph by using the Chart Styles in the Formatting Palette.

2. In the Chart Style section of the Formatting Palette, choose a grayscale option.

1. Click the edge of the figure to select the entire figure (a border usually appears).

In the case of line graphs, it also helps to pick shapes that are easily distinguishable from one another even in small sizes.

When to Use Color

Of course, in some instances, color is indeed important or even essential to understand the material in a figure.

In this figure, the apple colors represent two choices, but the difference is not clear in grayscale.

In this figure, if the author is comparing color tones, the color would be essential to the idea.
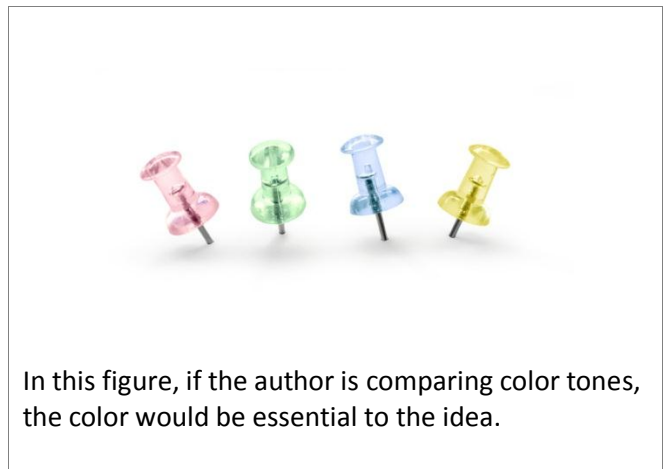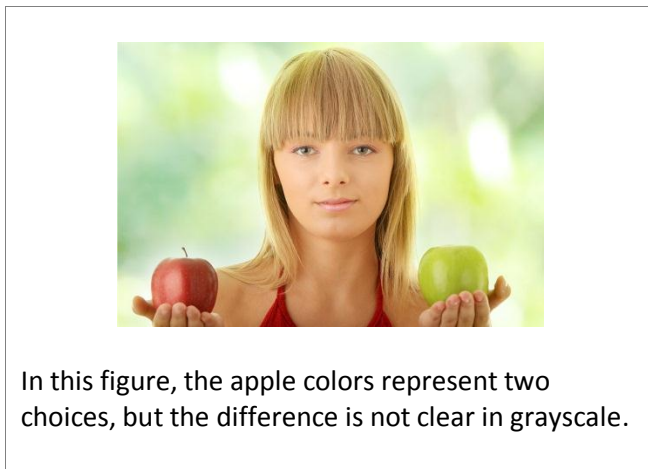
In these cases, be descriptive in the figure captions so that even readers of grayscale versions of the thesis or dissertation can understand the meaning.

Figure Captions

Apply the Figure Caption style to automatically single space the caption, reduce the font size, and ensure that the caption will be included when you generate your List of Illustrations. If you want your captions to display in 12 pt font, click the Toolbox icon at the top of the screen to open the Formatting Palette, then scroll down to the Figure style in the Styles section, click the drop down arrow, choose Modify, and change the font size to 12 pt. All captions in the document will then display in 12 pt.

2. Apply the Figure Caption style from the Formatting options at the top of the screen (if you can't see it, open the View Menu, scroll down to Toolbars, and choose Formatting).

3. You can also apply styles from the Formatting Palette.

4. Follow your discipline's style guide for use of italics and other issues.

1. Highlight the caption.

Figure 1. In both APA and Turabian styles, figure captions are placed beneath the figures. In both styles, each figure must be specifically referenced by its number in the text before it can be presented.

Checking Figures for Clarity

It is always a good idea to look at your figures at 100% zoom in your window because they can sometimes look clear at a smaller view but become fuzzy at regular resolution. Look for the view percentage at the top right of your window and set it to 100%.
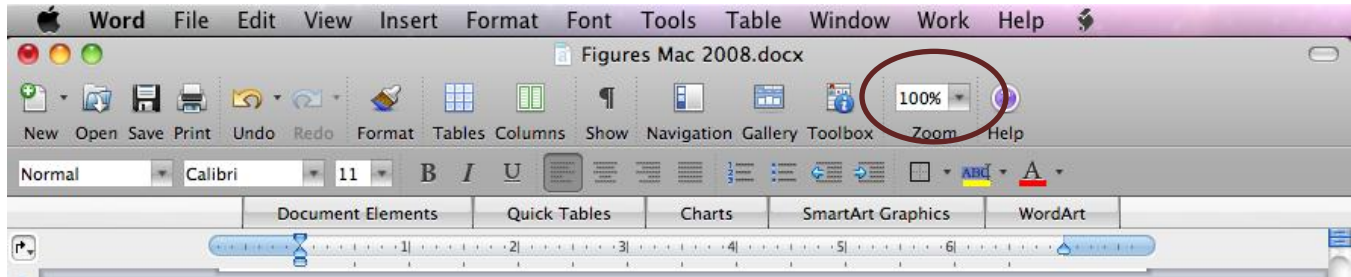
Also, try to make your figures directly within the document for optimum clarity. If you are converting or copying and pasting figures multiple times, they will likely become fuzzy and perhaps even unreadable when printed.

Additional Figure Issues

There are many other issues related to images, charts, graphs, and other illustrations. Consult your discipline's preferred style guide to ensure proper formatting of your illustrations.