

## Effective Symbol Use

## Help Sheet 22

It's very easy to add symbols to support words using **Writing with Symbols 2000 (WWS2000)** but just typing doesn't make an effective and useful document without first giving the matter some thought. **Widgit Rebus Symbols** are used with every age group, at different levels of ability, and so not all are necessarily appropriate for every person.

They are designed to give personalized support to those at different stages of literacy, and a person with Severe Learning Difficulties will require a different wordlist and layout to a person learning English as a second language, to a person with Dyslexia, to an Autistic user and so on...

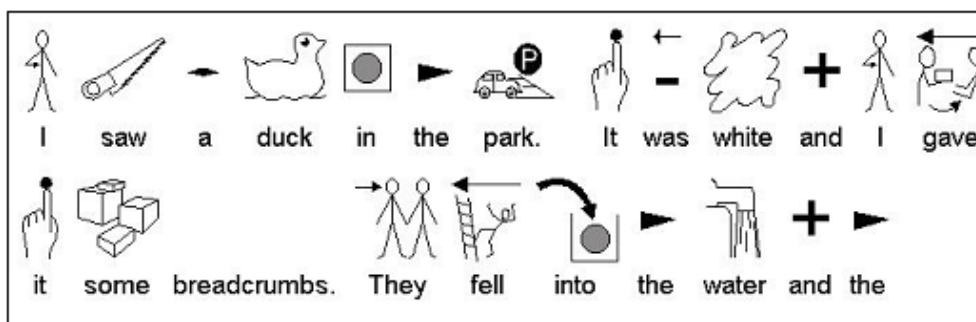
Symbols differ from pictures in that they have grammatical and visual structure that directly supports words and phrases. So far from just adding pictures to words, you are learning to change what is written and link your words to correct symbols to ensure that the information you create really is inclusive and accessible.

This leaflet has been written to help those creating symbol-supported materials, and to give helpful hints to look at symbols, layout and phrasing. It can be used just as a reference for general principles, or worked through as a tutorial.

Try copying the example below if you want to work along, then learn how to look at supported text in a new way, by amending it as you read through.

1. **Never just type** – The example below is misleading to someone who cannot read English text. It uses the wrong meanings for some words and is cluttered. A Learning Disabled user is more likely to throw this away than try to make sense of it, as it looks confusing with unrecognizable symbols.

### First Try:



Think about the wording of each sentence carefully, and imagine what it would look like in symbols. Only include relevant, key symbols that support the text.

2. **Think about the wordlist and symbol level** – Widgit Rebus Symbols have three levels:

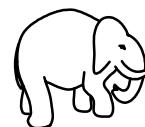
- 1<sup>st</sup> level (nouns, symbols that don't have to be learned)



(mobile phone)



(toothbrush)

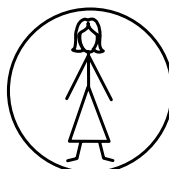


(elephant)

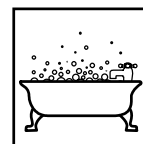
- 2<sup>nd</sup> level (verbs, tenses, jobs, buildings, symbols that require some learning of visual structure – e.g. a circle indicates 'belonging to me', therefore a woman in a circle is Mum)



(magician)



(mother)



(bathroom)

- 3<sup>rd</sup> level (abstract symbols, pronouns, conjunctions, comparisons, superlatives, irregular verbs – more difficult parts of speech used in complex sentence structure)



(but)



(whose)



(sometime)

**The Widgit Rebus wordlists that come as part of WWS2000 has different levels of wordlist. You can choose the one with the most appropriate level of grammar.**

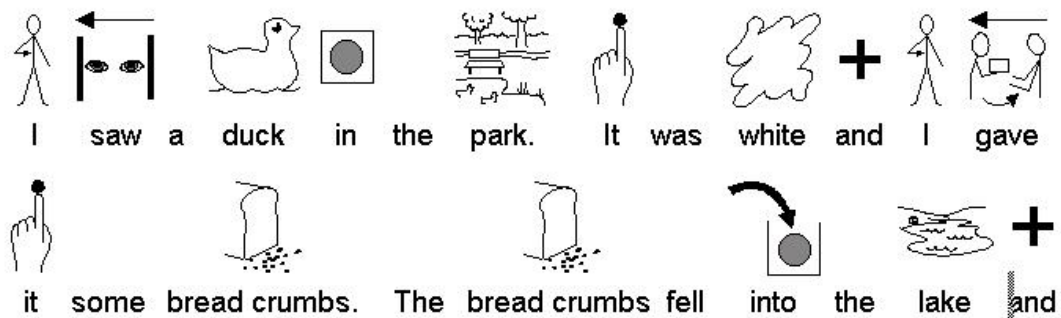
**Widgit A** contains every single Widgit Rebus image, **Widgit A +SS** contains the science and sexual symbols as well, **Widgit B** is much easier. The **PCS** lists tend towards more illustrative images, and are particularly suitable for communication books and for beginner readers or writers.

To change the wordlist in a WWS2000 document or grid, select 'Wordlists' from the menu bar, and click 'replace wordlist'.

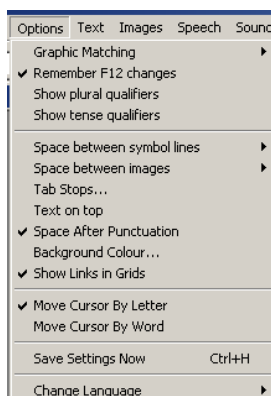
- **If you're not sure and want to know more, read 'Introduction to Symbols', distributed free in the UK by Widgit Software Ltd.**
3. **Change the wordlist to suit the user** – Click on 'wordlists' in the top menu bar, click 'replace wordlists', now choose the best one and click 'OK'. In the example we are using, **Widgit A** is being used.

4. **Remove symbols that make no sense to the user** - Turn off symbols by pressing F12, or write a different word that makes more sense – e.g. 'lake' instead of 'water'. Keep testing symbols with the users and you'll soon get a feel for what is understood and by whom. If you like a certain symbol, you can rename it permanently in your wordlist. (*Saving your wordlists changes*)
5. **Make sure the illustration has the right concept** – If left uncorrected, the wrong meaning can be very confusing as in 'saw' and 'park' in the example above. Find alternative symbols for the word by pressing F12. You can set up your wordlists so that the most commonly used symbols appear first. (*Saving F12 changes*)
6. **Now your writing should look more like this:**

Better:



7. **Next, make sure each sentence begins on a new line** – If you cannot understand full stops, you have no idea where one sentence ends and the next begins. Seeing complete sentences is a good way to begin to make sense of sentence structure, with objects, subjects and verbs more easily seen. It is good to repeat words if you can.
8. **Remove pronouns and replace the symbol with the noun to which it refers.** – Pronouns can be very difficult to understand, and it is always good to repeat an image. In this way, there are fewer symbols to comprehend, and the subject of each sentence is clearer. In this example, 'it' has been replaced with the 'duck' for visual repetition and easier comprehension.
9. **Remove symbols that have back arrows as qualifiers to show past tense** – arrows can add visual clutter if they are not understood. From the Options menu (version 2.6) make sure that Show Plural Qualifiers and Show Tense qualifiers are not ticked as you require.



10. Your piece should now look more like this:

Much clearer:

I saw a duck in the park.

The duck was white.

I gave the duck bread crumbs.

11. **Increase the spacing for visual clarity.** Version 2.6 users can click 'options' on the menu bar, then look at the alternatives for 'space between symbol lines' and 'space between symbol images'

**A good rule of thumb is to have no more than six lines to a page, and no more than six symbols per line.**

12. **Evenly space the symbols.** Users can sometimes feel as if they are 'missing out' if there are many words without symbols attached, and this is also wasting space on your page.

Some WWS2000 users simplify the text enough to put one simple symbol with each and every word. If users have a higher verbal than written vocabulary, then decide which words and phrases belong with each symbol, then press F11 under the relevant symbols, and retype as shown in the example below.

I saw a duck in the park.

The duck was white.

I gave the duck bread crumbs.

Every word or short phrase will now have relevant and meaningful symbols attached to it, presented to symbol users in a clear and obvious way.

Importantly, the material you have created will be pitched at the right level for the group or individual you are working with, which will enable them to understand, refer to and remember more of its content and message.