SymbolGo

abc

by Commtap

Supporting speech, language and communication in the classroom
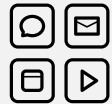
Contents

Overview

In this pack, we cover:

Signs of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

Impacts on children and young people with SLCN

Impacts on those who teach them

How using symbols can help

How to add symbols to lesson materials without it being a chore

Using symbols in teaching

The SymbolGo package

Spotting speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN)

Speech, language, and communication needs

Children and young people with these needs may experience

Difficulties understanding what people are saying.

Difficulties expressing what they want to.

Difficulties with interactions and forming friendships.

Being twice as likely to be unemployed as an adult.

More mental health problems.

Being more likely to end up in the criminal justice system.

Lower academic attainment.

What you might see

Children and young people affected by these difficulties may:

Show signs of anxiety or frustration.

Be disengaged.

Often seek reassurance.

Find it difficult to recall information.

Find it difficult to talk about things that have happened.

Be quiet.

Struggle to access learning activities.

How many children and young people in your class could have SLCN?

Research commissioned by Speech and Language UK (2023) indicates that 1 in 5 children and young people struggle with talking and/or understanding words. What about in your class?

- Look at the table on the next page.

- Think about how many children and young people in your class

  are in each box.

- Some may fit into more than one box.

SLCN – speech, language and communication needs

| Non-verbal sign	Comprehension checking	Interactions, comprehension	Recall of learning	Interactions, speaking	Tasks
Disengaged	Rarely/never asks for repetition and evidence student not understanding	Nearly always has difficulties answering questions	Unable to recall key information in current lesson	Uses inconsistent or incomplete responses	Hesitates in starting or completing tasks
Signs of anxiety	Frequently asks for repetition	Frequent misunderstandings (with staff or peers)	Unable to recall key information from previous lessons	Quiet, rarely interacts with teacher or peers	Copies what peers say or do without fully understanding
Signs of frustration		Never volunteers answers to questions		Avoids interaction with peers	Copies peers' work, or often seeks help from peers
Avoids eye contact		Occasional misunderstandings		Reduced participation in class	Often asks for reassurance
No signs of frustration	Occasionally asks for repetition	Able to negotiate with peers	Recalls key information from current lesson	Interacts with peers	Helps peers
Engaged, attentive	Rarely/never asks for repetition and evidence that they are understanding	Always able to answer questions	Recalls key information from previous lessons	Confident in interactions with peers	Can carry out tasks fully independently

What the boxes suggest

Red boxes: strong indicators of language or communication difficulties.
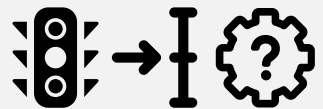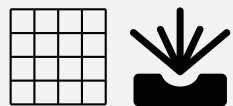
Amber boxes: language or communication difficulties *may* exist.
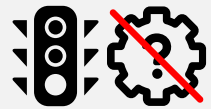
Green boxes: language or communication difficulties probably unlikely.
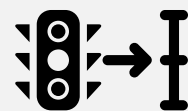
Impacts on teachers

Including children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs in lessons can present challenges.
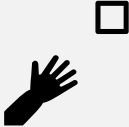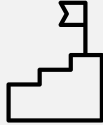The following grid lays out some key negative impacts.
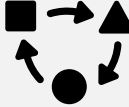
Red boxes: high impact.

Amber boxes: medium impact.

Green boxes: low/no impact.

Think of an individual lesson. Which boxes would you circle? Is it more red, amber, or green? Does it mirror how you feel?

Demands from students for individual attention	Lesson flow	Academic achievement	Adapting lessons to different learning needs	Class and behaviour management	Maintaining engagement
Several students require significant amounts of individualised time	Frequent interruptions to lesson flow	Several students struggling with assessments - one or more of them unexpectedly	Extensive amount of extra time required to adapt lessons	Frequent problems	Several students not engaging with most or all aspects of lessons
A few students require individualised time		Several students struggling with assessments	Significant extra time required to adapt lessons	Some problems	Several students not engaging with some aspects of the lessons
One or two students require individualised time	Occasional interruptions to lesson flow	Some students struggling with assessments	Some extra time required to adapt lessons	Occasional problems	One or two students not engaging with some aspects of the lessons
No or very little additional individualised time required	No or very few interruptions to lesson flow	Most or all students have few or no difficulties with assessments	Little or no extra time required to adapt lessons	No or very few problems	Most or all students engaging with most aspects of the lessons
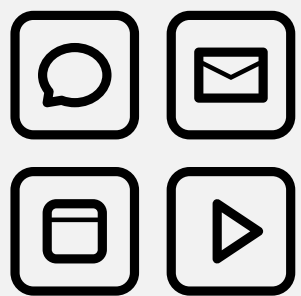
Symbols

What are symbols

A symbol is a picture which represents a concept.

Here are some symbols for "represent" from the SymbolGo Noun Project icon set. Note, different symbols for different meanings:

Represent (for example to represent a client)

Represent (for example to represent a group)

Represent (for example to represent a number)

How symbols help

Symbols ...

- Are another way of showing meaning – supporting text.

- Support the memory effect for visually presented information.

- Help students to focus on key information when used selectively.

- Support teachers to emphasise key messages.

- Enable differentiation – more complex text/language for most, with symbols highlighting key points giving access to struggling students.

- Provide a visual summary of key learning points for everyone.

Benefits of using symbols to support lesson content

Benefits for children and young people

Helps children and young people to

Engage actively with lessons.

Better understand language.

Improve recall of learning.

Speak with confidence.

Develop independence.
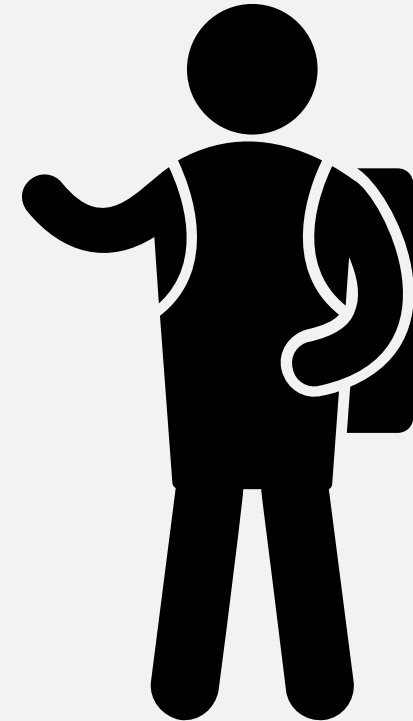
Benefits for teachers

Helps teachers to

Maintain lesson flow.

Spend less time on lesson differentiation.

Engage more students.

Reduce time spent managing behaviour.

Improve student learning.

Benefits for schools

Helps schools and colleges to

Reduce reliance on external services, prioritising them for students with the greatest need.

Minimize time students spend out of class for additional support.

Meet SEND obligations by ensuring access to a broad curriculum (SEND Code of Practice, Equality Act).

Create a better environment for all.

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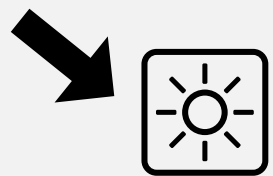
SymbolGo

What is SymbolGo

The SymbolGo package includes:

Software to make it easy to add picture symbols to lessons – the Commtap Symboliser for PowerPoint.

Tens of thousands of symbols.

Support for your school or college, including coaching for one or more key members of staff.
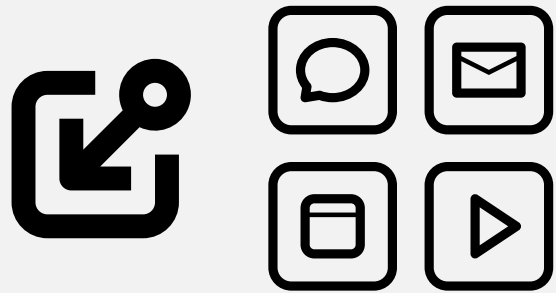
Adding symbols to lessons

Extra buttons in PowerPoint for adding symbols – the Commtap Symboliser for PowerPoint
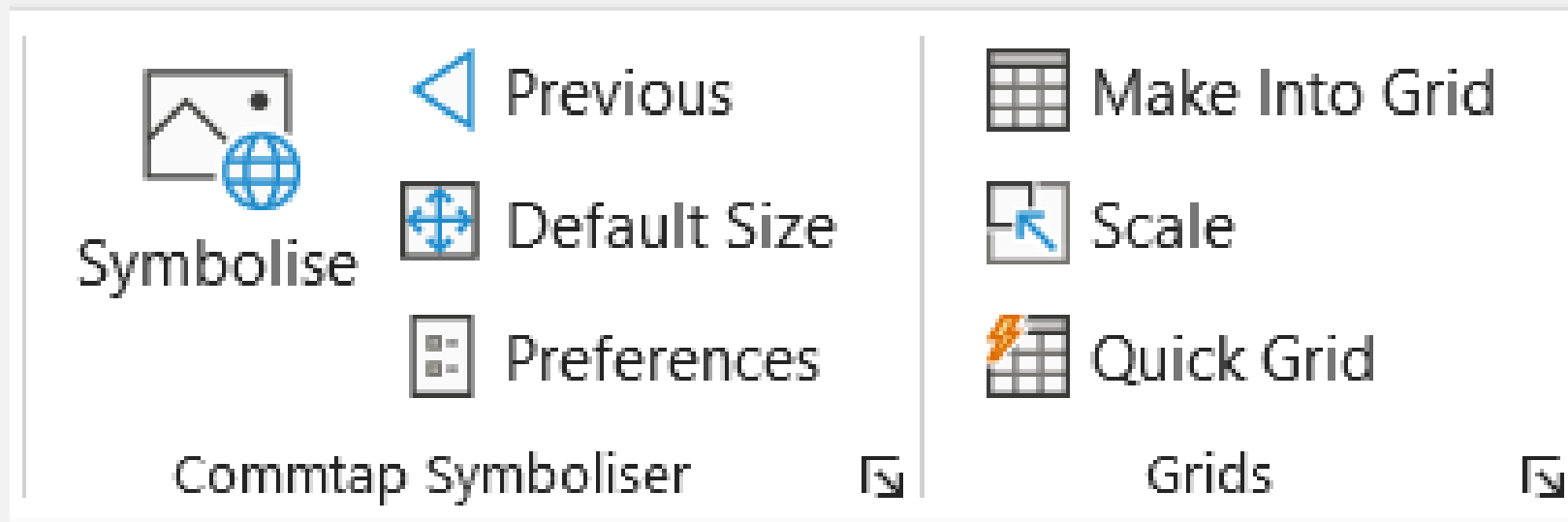
📝 *Write some text in PowerPoint:*

The Egyptians were skilled farmers and invented tools and technology to allow them to produce food that a great civilisation would need.

Click on a key word in the text, and then click "Symbolise"
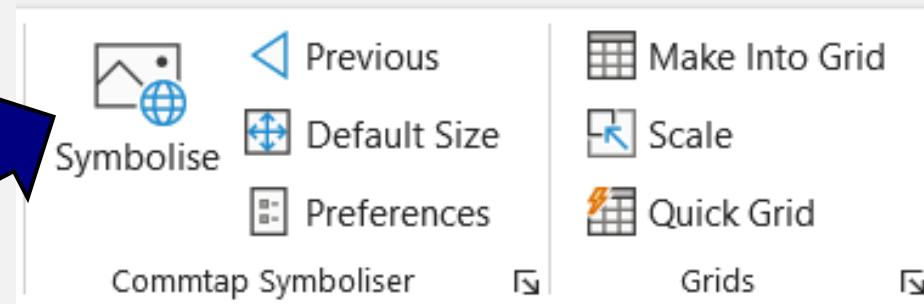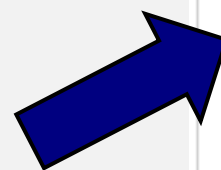
The Egyptians were skilled farmers and invented tools and technology to allow them to produce food that a great civilisation would need.
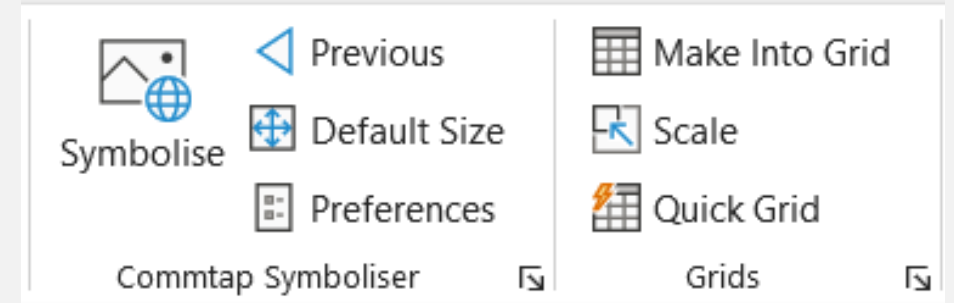
The Egyptians were skilled farmers and invented tools and technology to allow them to produce food that a great civilisation would need.

Using Noun Project Icons
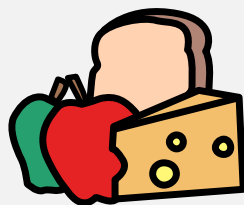
The Egyptians were skilled farmers and invented tools and technology to allow them to produce food that a great civilisation would need.
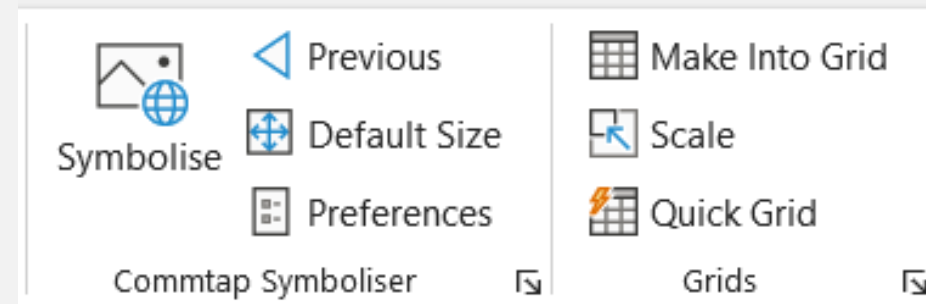
Using PCS Symbols (Tobii Dynavox)

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Key principles
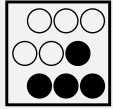
Add only a small number of symbols to support selected key concepts
- Don't try and add symbols for everything as this will overwhelm students.

Group symbols above blocks of text
- They should stand for something in their own right.
- It makes it easier to refer to them.
- Symbols scattered around the text are harder to process.

Always refer to the symbols when teaching
- This helps students understand what they stand for and reinforces learning.
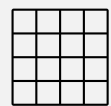
⊞ Get a grid of all the symbols used in a lesson
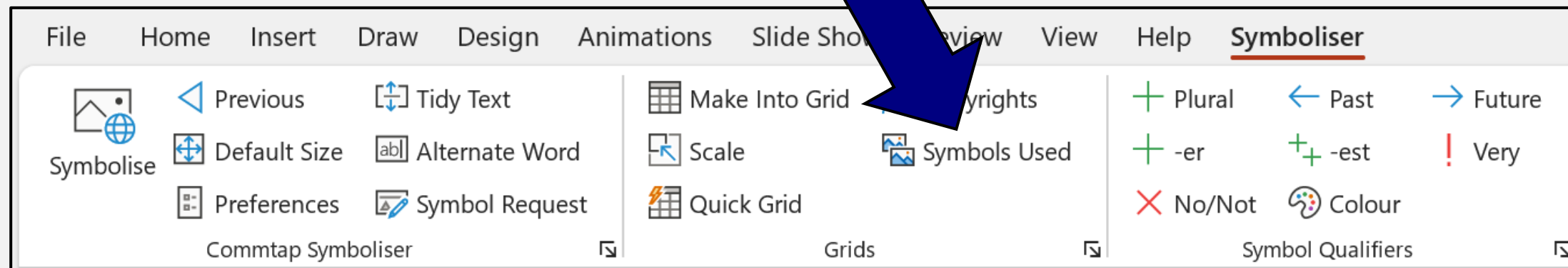
| civilisation | egyptians | food |
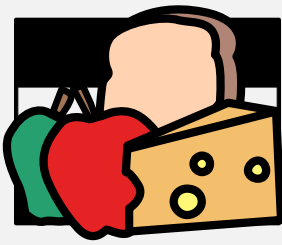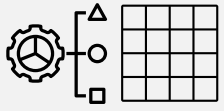
Uses for symbol grids

To prompt all students when they are doing written work.

To support communication between students with language difficulties and their peers and teaching staff.

To boost students' confidence in whole-class discussions.

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Teaching

Teach your lesson

Teach your lesson in the usual way.

Draw attention to the relevant symbols as you teach.

The Commtap Symboliser

At the heart of SymbolGo is the Commtap Symboliser for PowerPoint which makes it easy to add symbols to your materials.

It works in PowerPoint for Windows.

You can share and open the documents with other software, for example Google Docs, Google Slides, PowerPoint on the web.
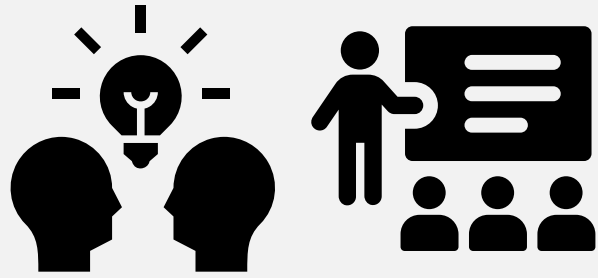
Coaching and training

Coaching and training

To ensure teachers get the most out of using the Symboliser and symbols, the SymbolGo package includes the symboliser software plus:

- Online training webinars for all staff.

- Coaching for key members of staff so that they can support colleagues in their use of symbols.

Training webinars

Webinars introduce teachers to using symbols and enable them to start using them in lessons.

We cover:

- Reasons for using symbols.
- What symbols are and what they do.
- What and how much to symbolise.
- Examples.
- Using the symboliser.
- Next steps.

Coaching

Online coaching is designed to help teachers use symbols effectively and to support other teachers in their school/college. The coaching is aimed at a small group of teachers who can then support other members of staff.

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Coaching part 1: supporting a teacher's own use of symbols

- Three sessions – one session per week.

- 45 minutes – 1 hour in length.

- Participants talk through or show examples of how they have used symbols in their teaching.

- We explore what went well, any difficulties that came up, and aspects participants would like to get better at.

Coaching part 2: support for coaching of other members of a team

- Introductory session – 1 hour in length.
- Three further sessions – one session per week – 45 minutes to 1 hour in length.

- Once a teacher is confident in their own use of symbols, this coaching helps them support other members of their team to use symbols.
- This helps maximise the benefits of symbols for students and to ensure a consistent approach.

Symboliser features

Symboliser buttons in PowerPoint – 1

Adding symbols

	Symbolise – Adds symbols for the currently selected words. Continue clicking for any alternatives. Click in a word, or select several words, then click on this button.
	Previous – Goes back to the previous symbol shown for the currently selected word.
	Default Size – Sets size of subsequent symbols to be that of the currently selected image/shape.
	Preferences – Choose symbol sets, add your own images, choose where symbols appear in relation to text, help.
	Tidy Text – Re-aligns symbols to the selected text box (according to what is set in "Preferences").
	Alternate Word – When you symbolise a word, have symbols for a different word also appear – for example "Rover" bringing up symbols for "dog".
	Symbol Request – Make a request for a symbol that you can't find.

Creating grids

	Symbols Used – Creates a grid of all the symbols (with or without text) you have used in a document. Great for supporting those who struggle with lesson content.

Symboliser buttons in PowerPoint – 2

Creating grids – additional options

⊞	**Make Into Grid** – for making fancy grids: select one or more shapes and create a grid from them.
⬓	**Scale** – Select a set of shapes and text (such as a grid) and scale them proportionately.
⚡⊞	**Quick Grid** – Makes a grid of cells which takes up an entire slide.
⧉	**Copyrights** – Shows copyright information for any symbols used from an online symbol set.

Symbol qualifiers

+ +₊ ✕ ← → !	Click on a symbol, or a word that has a symbol, choose a qualifier to appear next to the symbol to alter its meaning (plural, comparative, superlative, emphasis, past, future, negative).

🎨	**Colour** – Use to change the colour of the qualifiers.

Comments and next steps

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What people have said

- Symbols give children more confidence – one child who would never volunteer anything in class answered a question at length *(teacher)*

- Using symbols helps to keep focused on the key words that you want the students to learn; it's a good way to communicate to the students what you expect when providing scaffolding for their written work *(teacher)*

- It makes it easier *(school student)*

- It helps me to remember *(school student)*

Next steps
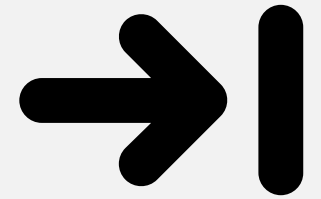
Try out the software:

symboliser.commtap.org/download

Join a webinar to find out more:

symbolgo.com/events/category/webinars

SymbolGo website:

symbolgo.com

References
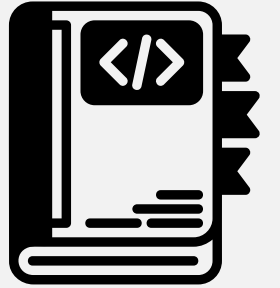
Speech and Language UK (2023) "Listening to unheard children" https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Listening-to-unheard-children-report-FINAL.pdf
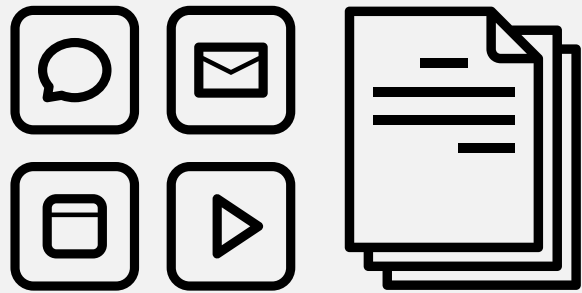
Symbols used in this pack

Generated using the "Symbols Used" button
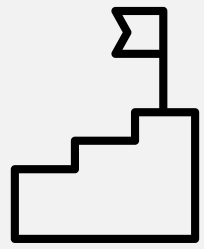
academic	access	achievement	adapt	adding	amber	attention
behaviour management	benefits	better	civilisation	civilisation	class	coaching
comments	commtap	communication	comprehension	concept	confidence	criminal justice
demand	differentiation	difficulties	disengaged	egyptians	egyptians	emphasise
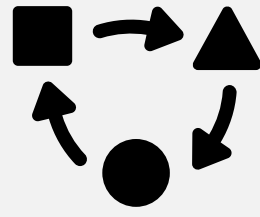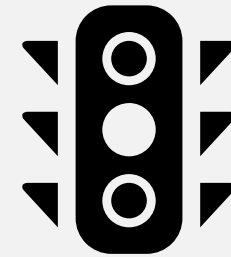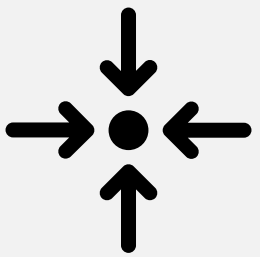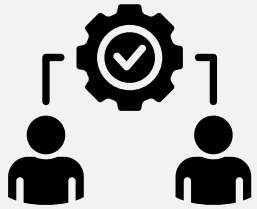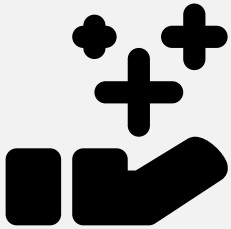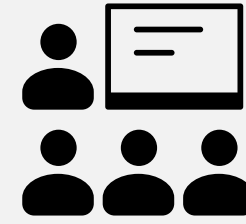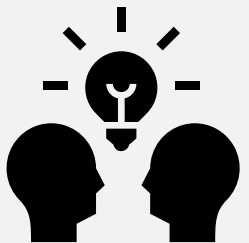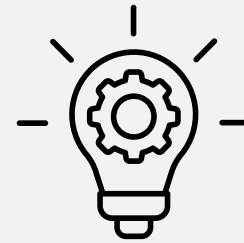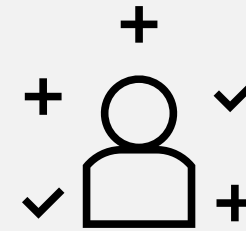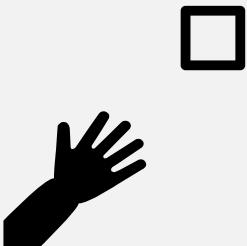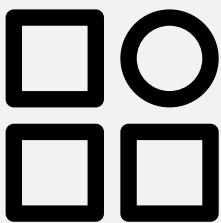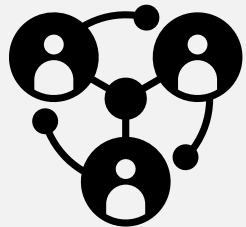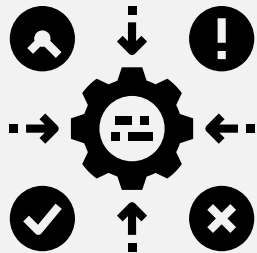
engage	engagement	environment	features	few	flow	focus
food	food	frustration	google	green	grid	high
impact	impacts	improve	independence	interaction	introduce	learning
less	low	managing	meaning	medium	memory	mental health
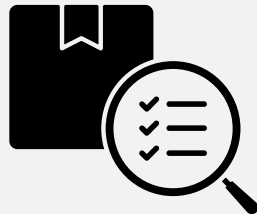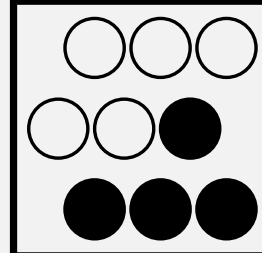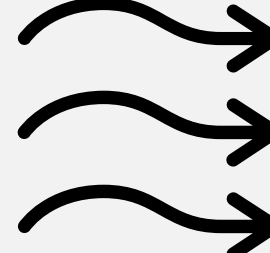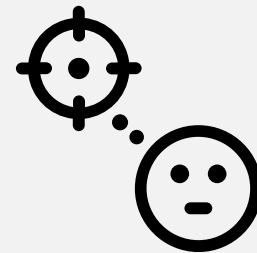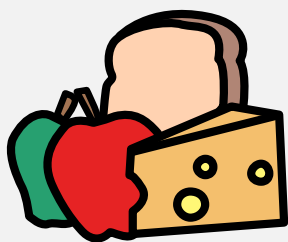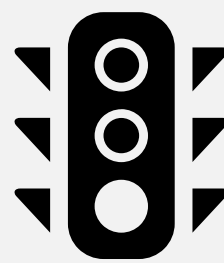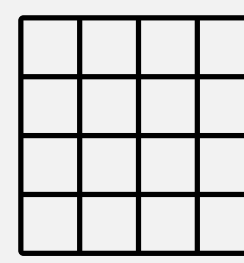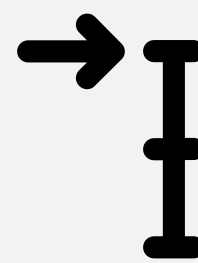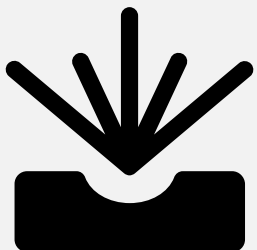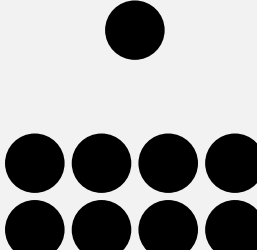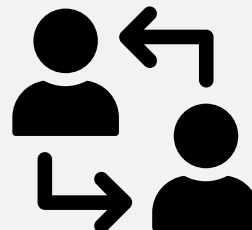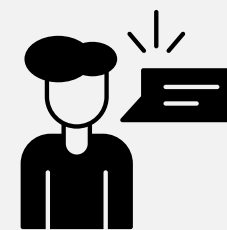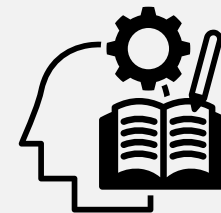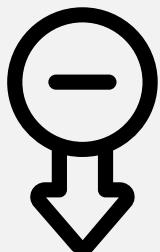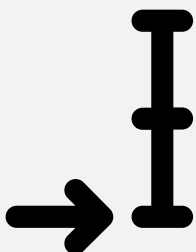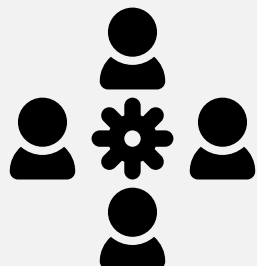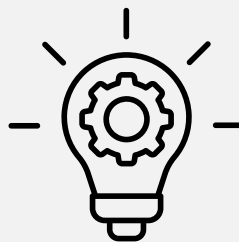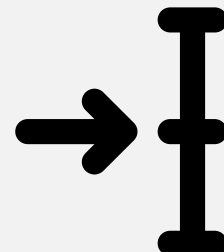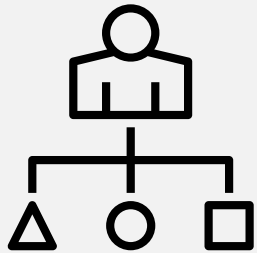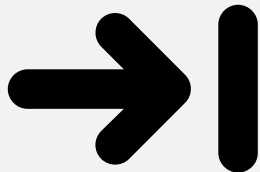
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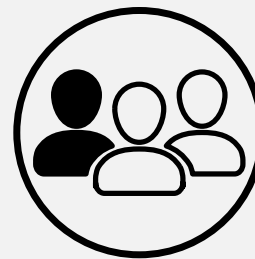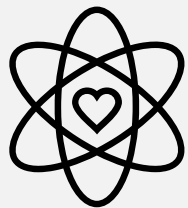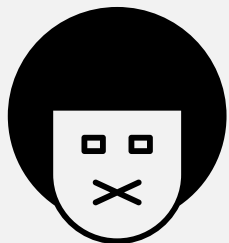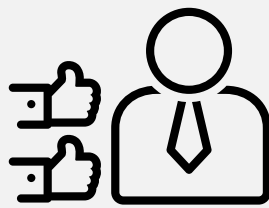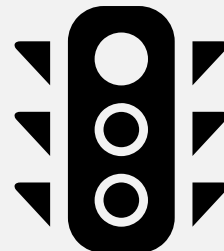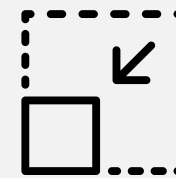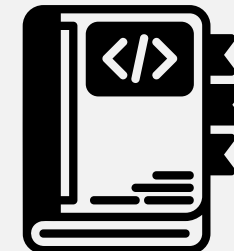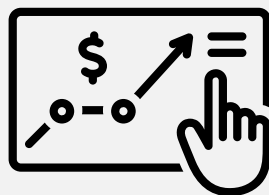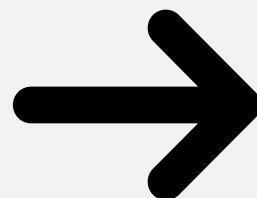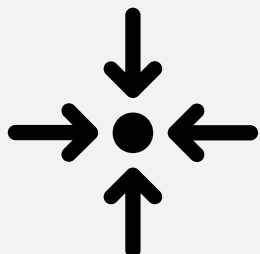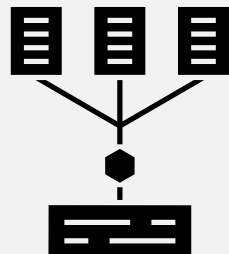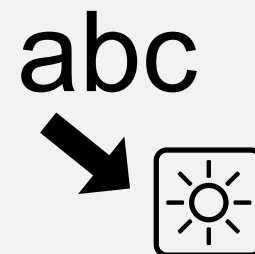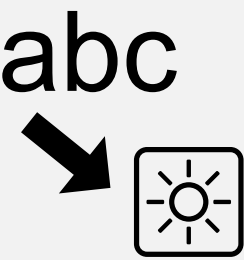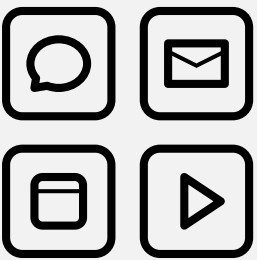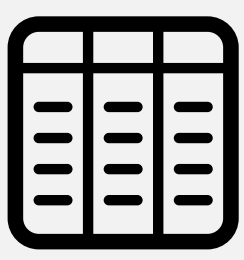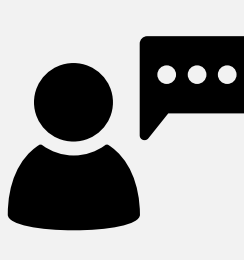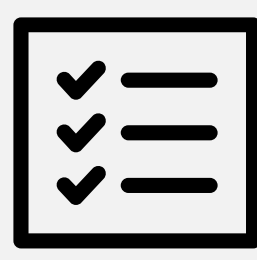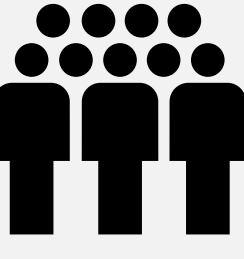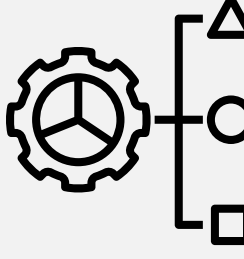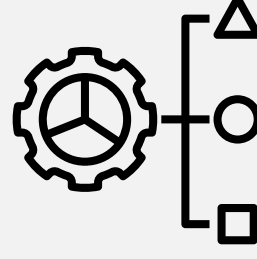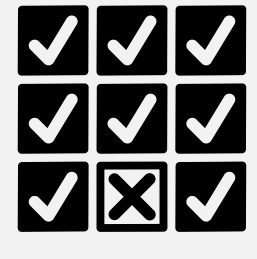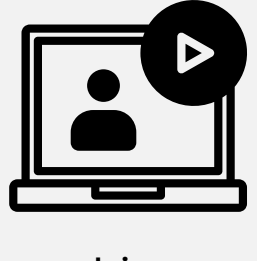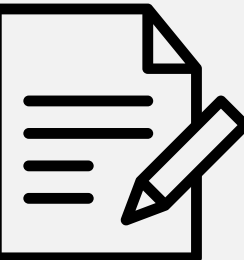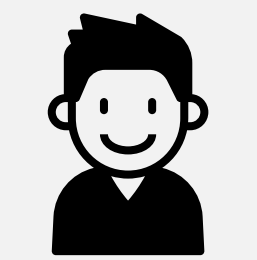
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team	training	understand	use	uses	usual	web
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written	young					