I propose to research visual ethics, specifically ethical considerations for the use of illustrations with graphics in technical documents.

Dragga and Voss (2001, 272) argue that technical communicators by training “are in a unique position to help raise the level of ethics in the visual display of technical information.” They note that technical communicators frequently characterize their field as a humanistic field and that their training in rhetoric… They argue that technical communicators have an obligation to humanize the impersonal depiction of human suffering provided in typical graphics.

Edward Tufte (1983) argues that any information not central to the graphing of data detracts from the graphic. Consequently, adding clip art or illustrations to graphics in attempt to humanize those graphics detracts from the clarity of those graphics.

In my research report for Technical Communication (Eng 271), I will argue a middle position: that the rhetorical purpose of the document and the relationship of the graphics to the text may determine the appropriateness the of the kind of humanizing illustrations that Dragga and Voss describe.

Problems to be investigated

I will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the crux of the debate over the use of illustrations with graphics?
   1.1 Graphics should be objective; they should not distort information
   1.2 Graphics should be humane.
2. How does the relationship between the graphic and text affect how we should present a graphic?
3. How does the rhetorical purpose for a document affect how we should present a graphic?
My report then will consist of three major sections: 1) background issues in the use of graphics, 2) the relationship of graphics to text, and 3) the relationship of rhetorical purpose for a document to the use of graphics in that document.

**Methods of research**

The list of works cited in the Voss and Dragga “Cruel Pies” article served as the starting point for my research.

I consulted with Kellian Clink, an MSU reference librarian, who directed me to the following resources:

- **English – Technical Communication: Articles**
- **IngentaConnect**

In addition, I conducted the following searches of the databases for technical communicators:

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I will use the documentation style used in *Technical Communication*. The following sources appear particularly useful:

I plan to (phone) interview Sam Dragga, coauthor of the “Cruel Pies” article, professor of English at Texas Tech University. I also plan to (phone) interview Peter Singer, …

**Timetable**

I will provide the following deliverables:

- progress report –
- draft –
- final draft – January 30, 2015

**Request for approval**

Please…