Labels and Titles

2 min

A good title is one of the best and fastest tools for making a more understandable visualization. Lots of confusion can be saved with a descriptive title.

If the graph doesn't have a good title (or even a title!), viewers have to do more legwork to first figure out what each axis measures and then what the data points show.

The title can be a question that visualization answers, like, "Who speaks more in Disney movies, male or female characters?"

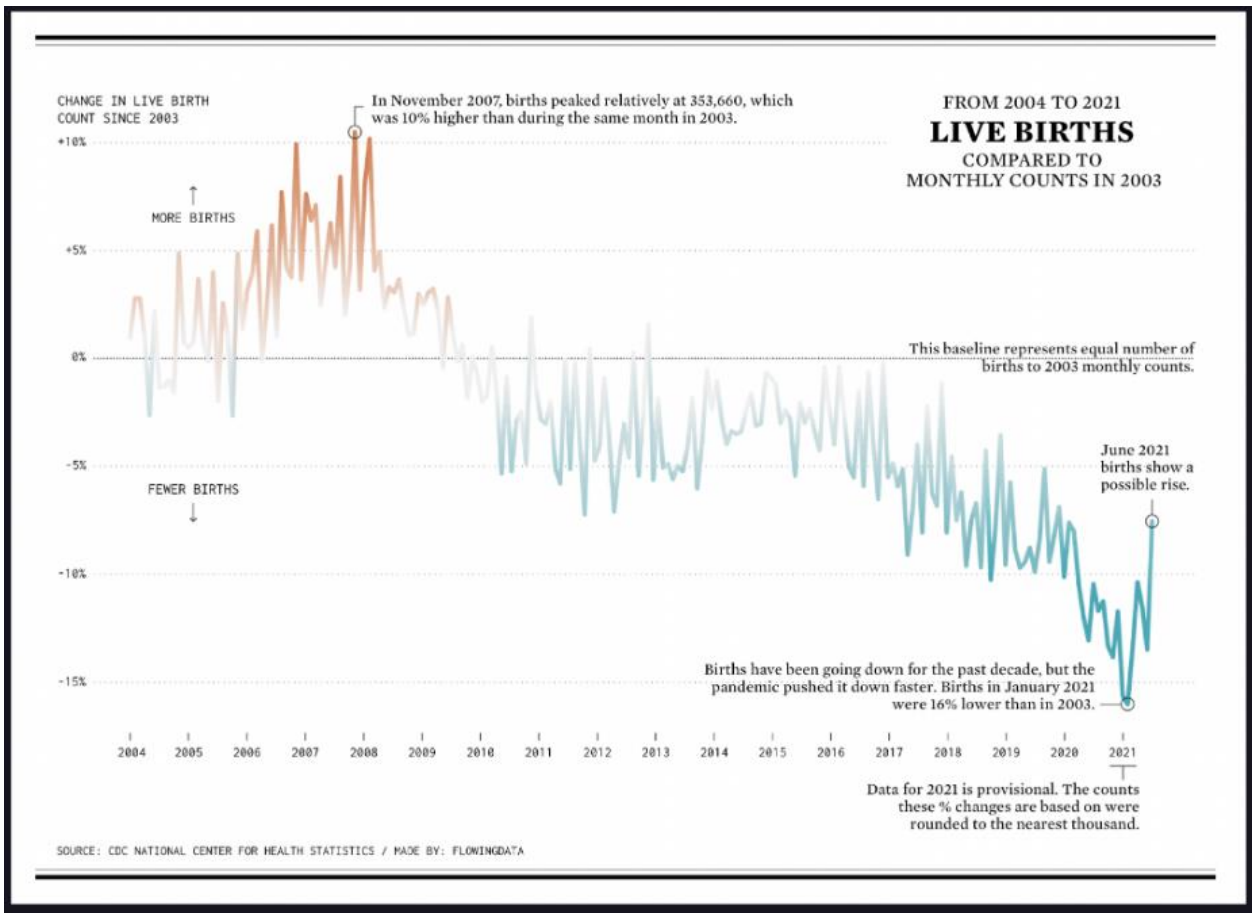
Titles can also be a statement of what the visualization shows, like "Comparing denim inseam lengths through the decades" or "Millennials really do spend more on rent than on avocados" or "The effect of hunger on mood level."

Like a good title, annotations on a graph also help the viewer to understand what's going on. Annotations are perfect for calling out points of interest, explaining outliers, or including background information that a viewer won't necessarily know from just looking at the graph.

Check out this *Live Births* graph from FlowingData to see how much value the annotations add. They…

- add detail to the highest and lowest points on the graph
- explain what the 0% baseline means
- provide a caveat for the 2021 data
- reinforce in words that the percents on the y-axis show "more births" and "fewer births"

Just a few lines of thoughtful annotation here and there give the audience so much more ability to interpret the graph at a deeper level!


CHANGE IN LIVE BIRTH COUNT SINCE 2003
In November 2007, births peaked relatively at 353,660, which was 10% higher than during the same month in 2003.
FROM 2004 TO 2021
LIVE BIRTHS
COMPARED TO MONTHLY COUNTS IN 2003
+10%
MORE BIRTHS
+5%
0%
This baseline represents equal number of births to 2003 monthly counts.
-5%
FEWER BIRTHS
June 2021 births show a possible rise.
-10%
-15%
Births have been going down for the past decade, but the pandemic pushed it down faster. Births in January 2021 were 16% lower than in 2003.
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
Data for 2021 is provisional. The counts these % changes are based on were rounded to the nearest thousand.
SOURCE: CDC NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS / MADE BY: FLOWINGDATA