

Storytelling in Data Visualizations

Narrative Structure

General Idea

Traditional storytelling follows a narrative structure with a beginning, middle, and end, guiding the audience through the story.

Application to Data Visualization

Beginning

Introduction/Context: Start by setting the stage for your data. This could involve providing context about why the data matters, framing the problem, or presenting a key question that the data will answer.

Example for Beginning

In an interactive dashboard on climate change, the introduction could show the baseline data for global temperatures over the past century, framing the context for the more detailed exploration that follows.

Middle

Exploration/Conflict: This is where the main analysis happens. Highlight key trends, comparisons, and outliers that reveal the conflict or challenge within the data.

Example for Middle

Allow users to explore how different regions have experienced temperature changes over time, highlighting areas with the most dramatic changes.

End

Conclusion/Resolution: Conclude with a synthesis of the findings, showing the implications or suggesting actions based on the data. This is the resolution where the story wraps up.

Example for End

Summarize the impact of rising temperatures on specific regions and propose possible solutions or actions.

Characters

General Idea

Characters are the agents that drive the story forward. They are what the audience connects with emotionally.

Application to Data Visualization

Option 1

Characters can be represented by the entities (*Data Points*) in your data, such as people, companies, countries, or products.

Example for Option 1

In an interactive visualization about global poverty, the characters could be different countries or demographic groups, with the data telling their story of progress or struggle over time.

Option 2

The *user* interacting with the visualization can also be a character, especially in personalized visualizations that adapt based on the user’s inputs.

Example for Option 2

In a health-related interactive visualization, users could enter their own data (like age or lifestyle habits) to see how it compares to larger trends, making the story personal to them.

Conflict & Resolution

General Idea

Conflict is what makes a story compelling; it’s the challenge or problem that the characters must overcome. The resolution is the conclusion of the story, where the conflict is resolved, and the story reaches its end.

Application to Data Visualization

Conflict

Conflicts can be represented by challenges or problems highlighted by the data (*Data-Driven Conflict*), such as trends that indicate a looming crisis, disparities that need addressing, or risks that require mitigation.

Example for Conflict

In a business dashboard, a conflict could be revealed through declining sales in a key market, prompting the user to explore the reasons behind the drop.

Option 1 for Resolution

Synthesis of Insights: The resolution is often a key insight or takeaway that the user arrives at after interacting with the data.

Example for Option 1 for Resolution

After exploring different scenarios in a financial planning tool, the resolution might be a recommended investment strategy tailored to the user’s goals.

Option 2 for Resolution

Call to Action: Resolutions can also involve a call to action, urging users to take specific steps based on the insights gained.

Example for Option 2 for Resolution

A visualization on climate change might conclude with actionable steps users can take to reduce their carbon footprint.

Theme

General Idea

The theme is the underlying message or main idea that the story conveys.

Application to Data Visualization

Option 1 for Theme

Central Message: The theme could be the central insight or takeaway that the visualization aims to communicate, such as the importance of sustainability, the urgency of a public health issue, or the benefits of innovation.

Example for Option 1 for Theme

A visualization showing the long-term benefits of renewable energy investments might have a theme of sustainability and economic resilience.

Option 2 for Theme

Visual Consistency: The theme can also be reflected in the visual design, ensuring that colours, typography, and interaction elements all support the overarching message.

Example for Option 2 for Theme

A visualization focused on health disparities might use a sober, muted colour palette to emphasize the seriousness of the issue.