Storytelling with Data

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If you want to do better storytelling with data and you also want to create better data visualization that leads to better understanding from people and potentially some actionable insights, then **communication skills** and **storytelling** are the two things that you should learn before joining real working environment.

1. Understand the Context

Focus on **explanatory analysis** (not exploratory analysis) and communication.

For me, understanding the context is all about being empathetic to the situational needs of your audience in the form of business context. You have to really put yourself into their shoes to see where they're coming from and try your best to answer their questions with storytelling.

How to turn your data into information that can be consumed by an audience. Below are a brief overview of what it looks like:

- **Who** am I communicating to?
- **What** do I want my audience to know or do?
- **How** can I use data to help make my point?

2. Choose an Effective Visual

Nowadays, there are so many types of graphs overflowing in common business settings, but only **minority** of them will only suit the **majority** of your needs.

In fact, you might not even need graphs to display your data in certain cases — just a simple text will work.

Therefore, choosing an effective visual is nothing but being selective of the visuals that you choose. Some commonly used visuals in business settings include simple text, tables, heatmap, point and line graphs, bars, as well as areas.

3. Eliminate Clutter

Very often we're so in love with our self-created visuals, only to realize (or maybe not) that there are so many visual elements in a single graph which occupy space but don't increase understanding of our audience.

> *Humans' brains have a finite amount of mental processing power*

Clutter only makes visuals more complicated and hard to understand and thus, audience's attention might wander off without us noticing, simply because we're in a state of **self-deception** that our graph works just as it is meant to be.

Remember the work - Every visual element should fulfil the purpose of serving the needs of audience.

4. Draw attention where you want it

Once we have chosen an effective visual and removed all unnecessary clutter, this is the point where we need to figure out how to draw our audience's attention.

To draw our audience's attention is to understand how they see and interact with our visual communications, often subconsciously.

5. Think like a Designer

Think of your data visualizations as your products. By crafting your own visuals — Voilà! Now you become a designer. Great. Let's move on.

Thinking like a designer in different lens is being well aware of how data visualizations communicate with your audience and how the audience interacts with your visuals. The interaction between these two points is what makes an excellent piece of data visualization.

6. Tell a Story

Here comes the storytelling part in the last step.

Imagine you have just watched a great and captivating movie with an excellent storyline. You got attracted by the story that took your on a memorable journey and eventually evoked an emotional response from you. Few months or even one year later, you could still remember the storyline vividly.

Personally, I like to watch movies as I believe that movies are the reflection of our life, perhaps in a more exaggerated narrative manner — but lessons remain the same.

Use stories to engage our audience emotionally in a way that goes beyond what facts can do. Keep it simple, Be authentic, Don't communicate for yourself, **communicate for your audience instead**. The story is not for you, **the story is for them.**

7. Final Thoughts

At the end of the day, insights obtained from data are always the same provided the insights are correct. But, what makes the insights different is the impact and actionable plans derived from the insights and this difference boils down to how you communicate your data insights through great storytelling.