**Plot Checklist**

* Do I know the data subjects(audience) ?
* Do I understand the requirements and the value it must add ?
* Did I choose an appropriate graph that can convey the right intent ?
* Do I have to add any interactiveness to the graph ?
* Can I layer or separate the information ?
* Can I maximize the data density ?
* Is the graph telling the truth ?
* Are colors used appropriately in graph ?
* Do I need to remove any chart junk ?
* Is any scale distorted or missed ?
* Did the visualization, maximize the data to ink ratio ?
* Is pixel quality of the graph good enough ?

**Guidelines Reference:** <https://stephanieevergreen.com/updated-data-visualization-checklist/>

**Text –** minimize text

**Short descriptive title is left-justified in upper left corner**

Short titles enable readers to comprehend takeaway messages even while quickly skimming the graph.

**Text size is hierarchical and readable**

Titles are in a larger size than subtitles or annotations, which are larger than labels, which are larger than axis labels, which are larger than source information. The smallest text - axis labels - are at least 9-point font size on paper, at least 20 on screen.

**Text is horizontal**

Titles, subtitles, annotations, and data labels are horizontal (not vertical or diagonal). Line labels and axis labels can deviate from this rule and still receive full points. Consider switching graph orientation (e.g., from column to bar chart) to make text horizontal.

**Data are labeled directly**

Position data labels near the data rather than in a separate legend (e.g., on top of or next to bars and next to lines). Eliminate/embed legends when possible because eye movement back and forth between the legend and the data can interrupt the brain’s attempts to interpret the graph.

**Labels are used sparingly**

Focus attention by removing the redundancy. For example, in line charts, label every other year on an axis. Do not add numeric labels \*and\* use a y-axis scale, since this is redundant.

**Arrangement –** thoughtful arrangement of visual makes it easier for audience to interpret

**Proportions are accurate**

A viewer should be able measure the length or area of the graph with a ruler and find that it matches the relationship in the underlying data. Y-axis scales should be appropriate. Bar charts start axes at 0. Other graphs can have a minimum and maximum scale that reflects what should be an accurate interpretation of the data (e.g., the stock market ticker should not start at 0 or we won’t see a meaningful pattern).

**Data are intentionally ordered**

Data should be displayed in an order that makes logical sense to the viewer. Data may be ordered by frequency counts (e.g., from greatest to least for nominal categories), by groupings or bins (e.g., histograms), by time period (e.g., line charts), alphabetically, etc. Use an order that supports interpretation of the data.

**Graph is two-dimensional**

Avoid three-dimensional displays, bevels, and other distortions.

**Color –** thoughtful use of colors

**Color scheme is intentional**

Colors should represent brand or other intentional choice, not default color schemes. Use your organization’s colors or your client’s colors. Work with online tools to identify brand colors and others that are compatible.

**Color is used to highlight key patterns**

Action colors should guide the viewer to key parts of the display. Less important, supporting, or comparison data should be a muted color, like gray.

**Color is legible when printed in black and white**

When printed or photocopied in black and white, the viewer should still be able to see patterns in the data.

**Color is legible for people with colorblindness**

Avoid red-green and yellow-blue combinations when those colors touch one another. Avoid using red to mean bad and green to mean good in the same chart.

**Text sufficiently contrasts background**

Black/very dark text against a white/transparent background is easiest to read.

**Excessive lines— gridlines, borders, tick marks, and axes**

can add clutter or noise to a graph, so eliminate them whenever they aren’t useful for interpreting the data.

**Lines –** reduce chart junk

**Gridlines, if present, are muted**

Color should be faint gray, not black. Full points if no gridlines are used. Gridlines, even muted, should not be used when the graph includes numeric labels on each data point.

**Graph does not have border line**

Graph should bleed into the surrounding page or slide rather than being contained by a border.

**Axes do not have unnecessary tick marks or axis lines**

Tick marks can be useful in line graphs (to demarcate each point in time along the y-axis) but are unnecessary in most other graph types. Remove axes lines whenever possible.

**Graph has one horizontal and one vertical axis**

Viewers can best interpret one x- and one y-axis. Don’t add a second y-axis. Try a connected scatter plot or two graphs, side by side, instead. (A secondary axis used to hack new graph types is ok, so long as viewers aren’t being asked to interpret a second y-axis.)

**Overall –** only include visuals that are necessary

**Graph highlights significant finding or conclusion**

Graphs should have a "so what?" – either a practical or statistical significance (or both) to warrant their presence. For example, contextualized or comparison data help the viewer understand the significance of the data and give the graph more interpretive power.

**The type of graph is appropriate for data**

Data are displayed using a graph type appropriate for the relationship within the data. For example, change over time is displayed as a line graph, area chart, slope graph, or dot plot.

**Graph has appropriate level of precision**

Use a level of precision that meets your audiences’ needs. Few numeric labels need decimal places, unless you are speaking with academic peers. Charts intended for public consumption rarely need p values listed.

**Individual chart elements work together to reinforce the overarching takeaway message**

Choices about graph type, text, arrangement, color, and lines should reinforce the same takeaway message.