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Curriculum

Professional Foundations ^

Average: 97.49% v

Week 5 ≡

Improving Charts & Graphs: Position and Format

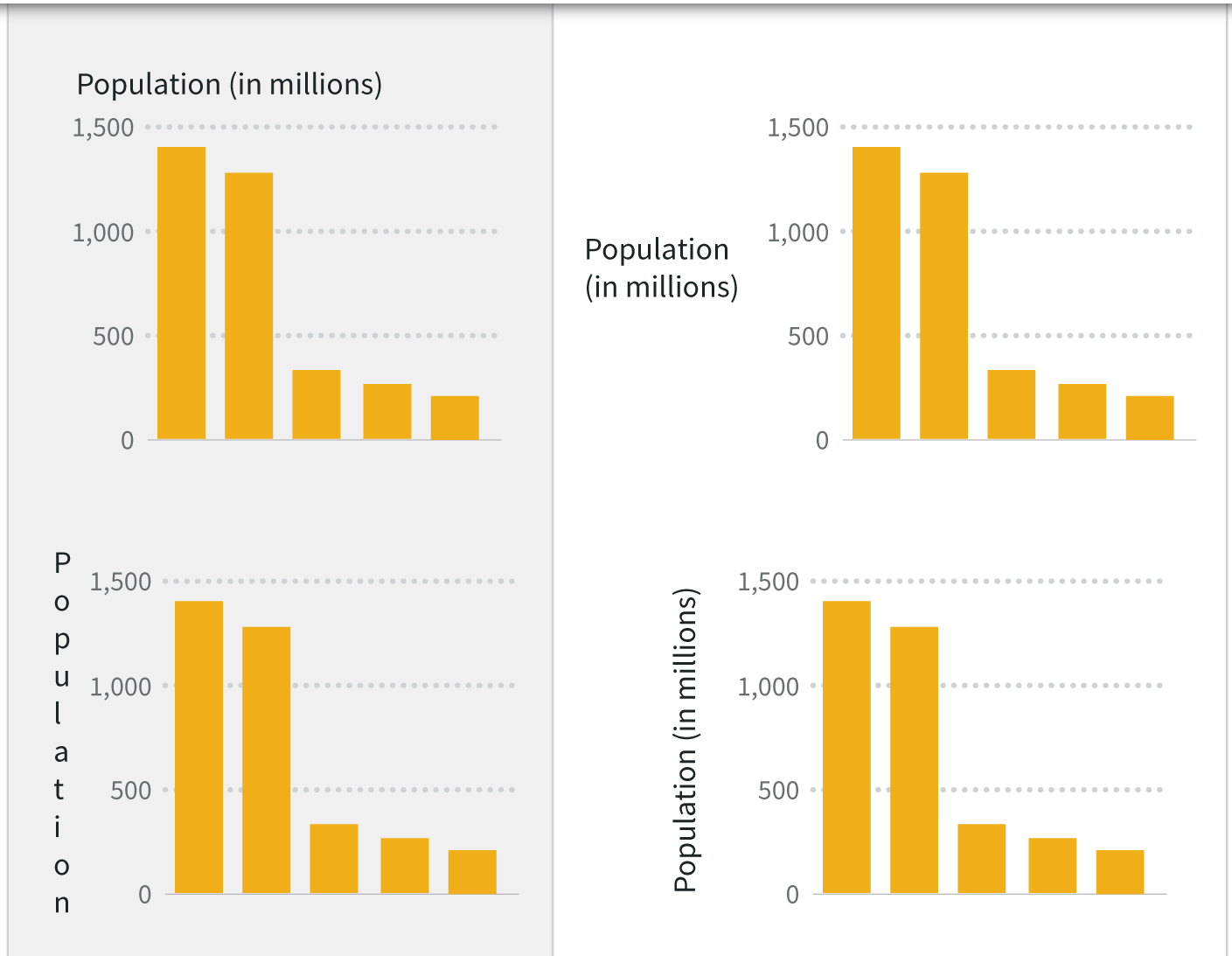
Horizontal axis titles should be aligned parallel to the axis labels. Format them in a font size large enough to read, but not so large that it dominates the graph.

There's some debate over whether or not vertical axis labels should be aligned parallel to the axis or not. On the one hand, aligning the text vertically makes it very clear that it's directly associated with the vertical axis. There's often more room to write the axis title text if it's rotated at a 90-degree angle. On the other hand, humans are not very good at reading vertical text, and readers may find themselves squinting and turning their heads to understand the chart. If you have enough room and the axis title text is short, consider keeping the text level instead of rotating it.

We've also included two examples below that show what to avoid when placing your vertical axis titles.



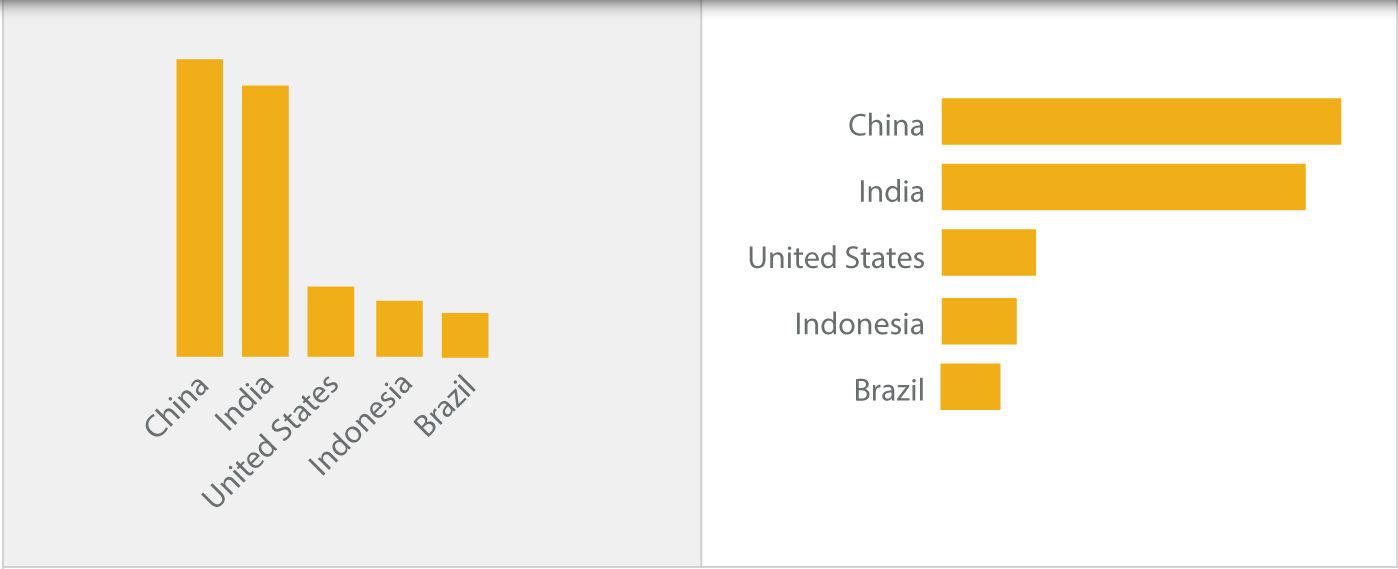
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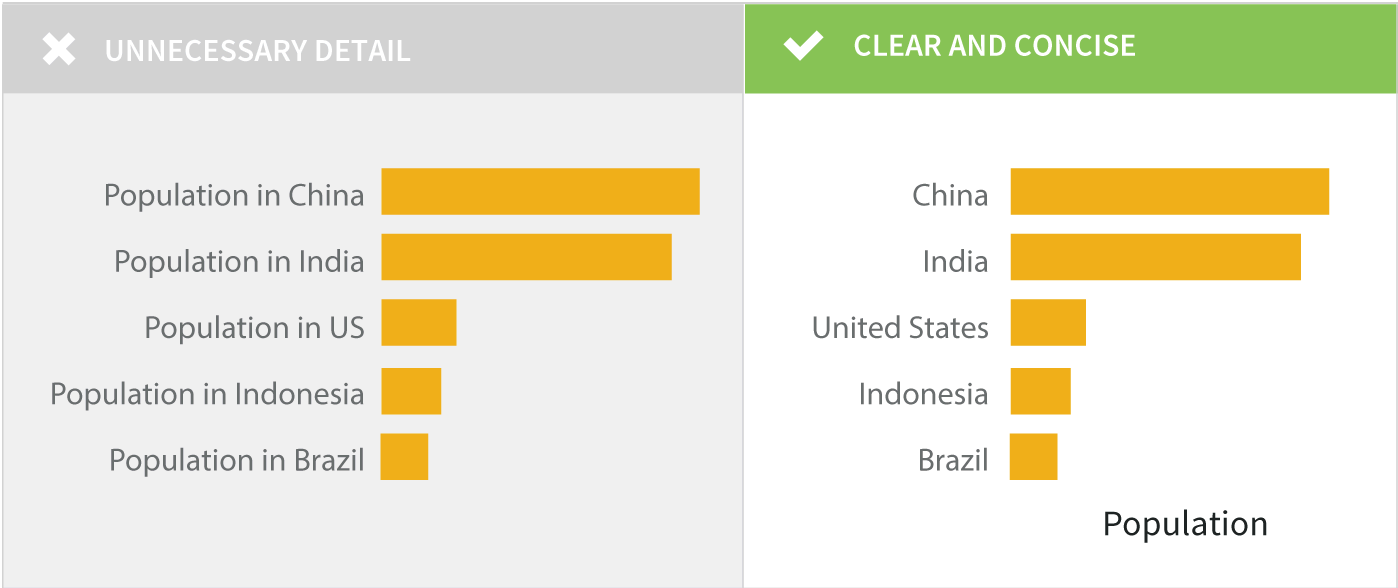
Individual category labels should be clearly marked too. Make sure any words and numbers are easy to read: your reader should not have to play contortionist games with his or her neck to get a good look at what you're trying to share in your graph. A few tricks for formatting your axis labels:

- Where possible, avoid rotating text on an angle, which is often used in vertical bar charts to force long text labels to fit but is difficult to read. If you find yourself with a horizontal axis using rotated, dense labels, try changing your chart type to a horizontal bar which will make the labels easier to read.

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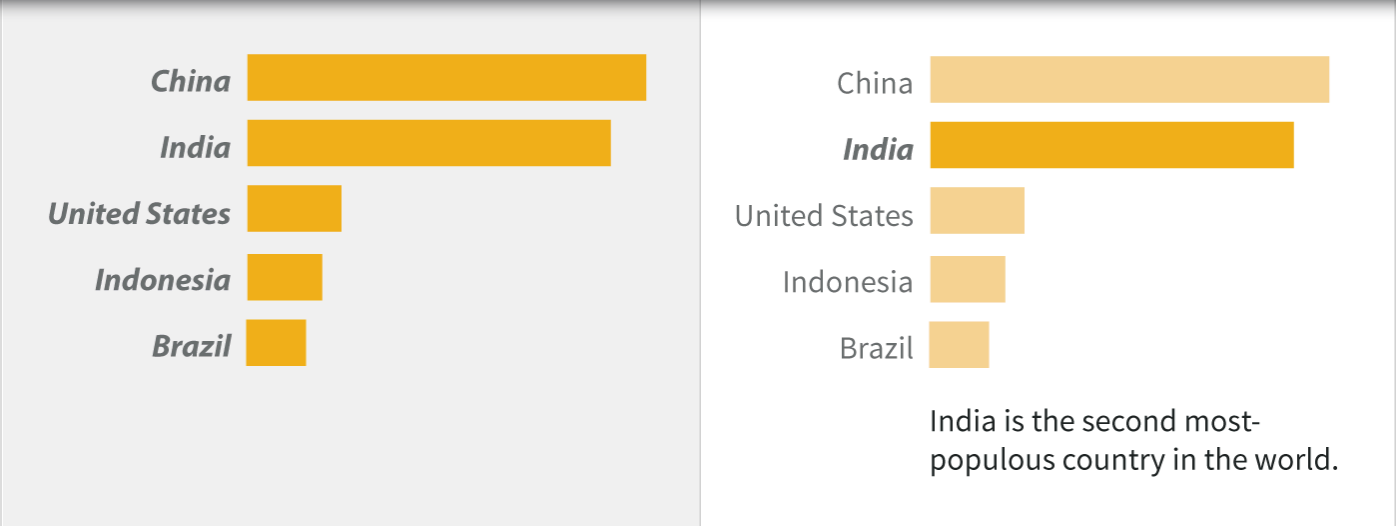


- Simplify your labels. Even if your data were originally formatted with long strings of text for each category you’re trying to display, think about what you can simplify without losing meaning.



- Use boldface text and italics sparingly and only where they have meaning. For example, you might use boldface for a category label for a data point you’re highlighting.

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