Chart formatting checklist

- Size your charts to fit neatly within the margins of your document. Usually this will be A4 portrait format. Excel is able to produce legible but more compact graphs than you can draw by hand. Unless your chart (or table) is very large and/or complicated you should not need to switch to landscape format.

- Cut and paste from Excel. Experiment with the various paste options to find out which works best.

- Just because Excel lets you do it does not mean that it is good.

- Just because Excel does not do it does not mean that you should not.

- Ensure that you make appropriate use of space. The purpose of a figure is to display its data effectively. This requires that the plot area is large relative to the chart area. [In Figure X, under Task 3, the plot area is the bit shaded pale yellow – for illustrative purposes.] Get rid of 'dead' areas that do nothing for your data.

- Ensure that you format and label your axes appropriately. Include suitable axis labels and titles. Do you need units? For example, $ or £? ^{o}C or ^{o}F? The combination of axis labels, axis titles and figure caption (see below) should include everything that is required to make sense of your graph.

- Does your chart need a legend (key)? If so, how best to format and position it to make the most appropriate use of space?

- Is your chart legible? On screen? When printed? Be especially careful if designing charts in colour, but printing in black and white.

- Academic convention for figures in reports, published papers, textbooks, etc. is to use a figure caption positioned below the chart (add it in Word), rather than to use a chart title (as Excel likes to do).

- Try not to split a chart from its figure caption. You can always add an instruction in your report text such as "See Figure 2, next page" if your chart does not fit where you most want it to go.

- Anyone who writes "a graph to show..." in their caption will be taken out and shot. Of course it's a graph to show something!

- Spell-check!

- IF YOU CAN TIDY SOMETHING UP, DO SO.