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Understanding Your Target Audience

To ensure that you develop the best visualization for your target audience, you need to ask three questions: Who? What? And How?

Perhaps the most important of these questions is "Who?"

Your visualization should be designed to communicate a specific message to your audience. You need to know who your audience is, and who it is not.

Is the audience your colleagues or collaborators? Stakeholders? Clients or customers? What is your relationship with the audience? Are they peers? Are they senior staff members? Do you know them? Do have a working relationship with them? What do they know? What do they not know? And, perhaps most importantly, what do they want to know?

Your answers to these questions can help you determine the amount of detail to include and the language to use. The same graph might not work for everyone. In other words, you might need to customize your message for different audiences.

For example, if your audience is your team members, and you want to show the yield over time for the two processes discussed in the previous video, you might use a simple line graph with very few customizations or details.

However, if your audience is your project sponsor, and you are reporting on how the yield has changed as a result of changing the supplier, you might show a different graph.

For example, you might use a slope graph with some customizations. This slope graph shows the average percent yield for the two processes before and after the supplier was changed. The averages are the end points of each line.

As you have learned, there are many graphical options available. The type of graph you use depends on the type of data and the number of variables that you have, but it also depends on the message and your audience.

Note that, in future lessons, you learn more formal statistical tools that might be more appropriate for answering questions like, "Has the yield improved?"

The question "What?" refers to the purpose of the visualization.

What do you want the audience to know? What is the key message you want to communicate? What is the desired effect or the expected outcome?

To evaluate how well you have answered these questions, you should try to put yourself in the position of your audience.

Take a step back, and ask yourself these questions:

Why should I care about this graph? What does the graph tell me? What does the graph not tell me? What questions does this graph prompt, in my mind, that I should address?

You might also want to share the graph with a colleague for a new set of eyes and a fresh perspective. You might be too close to the problem, and the data, to know whether your intended message is being effectively communicated.

The question "How?" relates to how your audience will receive the visualization. There are two aspects to this question: the communication channel that you will use to share the visualization, and the form the visualization will take.

Some typical communication channels are email, reports, blogs, webinars, and live presentations.

And some common forms or formats are static images, animated GIFs, recorded videos, interactive web reports, and dashboards.

Static images are often shared in emails, reports, or blogs. In webinars and live presentations, you can often use interactive visualizations or dashboards.

The use of interactive visualizations and dashboards isn't limited to webinars and presentations. They can be shared with other users who have access to the statistical software, or with anyone who has access to the web.

As an oversimplification, consider two ends of a continuum. On one end, your audience is remote, and you will send them a static image or report. On the other end, you are presenting to a live audience using an interactive visualization.

The amount of supporting detail you need to provide depends largely on which end of the continuum you fall on.

If your audience will view a static graph, you need to provide sufficient details and background information directly on the visualization.

If both the visualization and the discussion are interactive, you can include fewer details on the visualization itself.

Note that you learn about different methods for sharing your visualizations and other analysis results in the next lesson.

In this video, you've learned the importance of understanding your intended audience.

To make sure a visualization is effective at delivering your message, you need to understand who your audience is, what you want your audience to know or do, and how your audience will see or receive the visualization.

In the upcoming videos, you learn how to customize or enhance your graphics to better deliver your message to your customer.

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