

# Bar Charts in ggplot2

*true*

2019-03-08

## Contents

1	Background	1
2	Introduction	1
3	Our Data	2
4	Bar charts where the height of the bars is the number of observations in each category.	2
4.1	Stacked Bar Chart . . . . .	3
4.2	Add Labels . . . . .	3
5	Bar charts where the height of the bars is the average value of the y variable for that category.	4
5.1	What About a Line Chart? . . . . .	4
6	Bar charts where the height of the bars is the actual value of the y variable for that category.	5
7	Thinking Through The Issue	6
8	Of Course The Problem Wouldn't Come Up If We Had Different Data, Without Those Duplicate $x$ Observations	6
8.1	And Then A Bar Chart Is Easy . . . . .	6
8.2	A Line Chart Is Easy Too . . . . .	7
9	And Then There Are Pie Charts	7
9.1	Pie Chart With Better Colors . . . . .	8
10	Bar Chart With Better Colors	9
11	More Examples	9

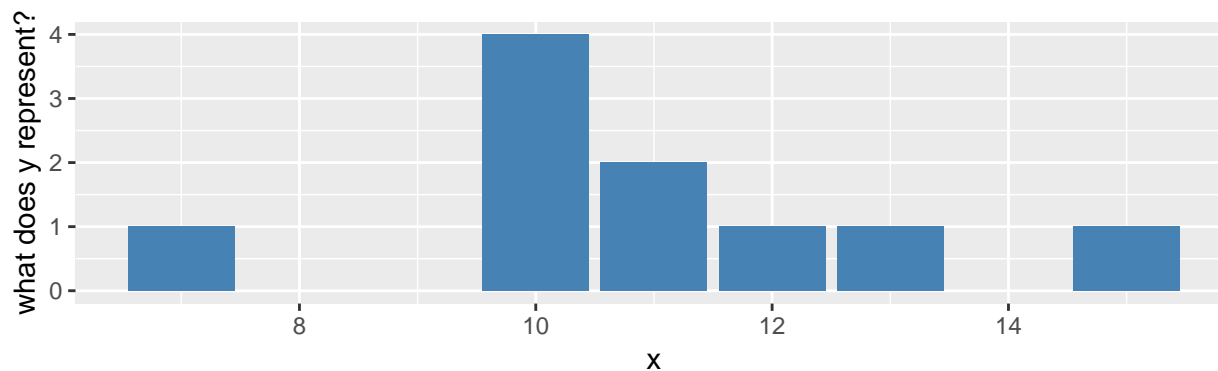
## 1 Background

While `ggplot2`, and the ideas of an underlying “*grammar of graphics*”, make some kinds of graphing easier, `ggplot2` can make other types of graphing more difficult.

One often tricky type of graph is the bar chart. I have come to think that part of the difficulty with thinking about bar charts in `ggplot2` is that sometimes **three very different types of bar charts look similar**.

## 2 Introduction

Many bar charts look **something like** the bar chart below.



However, there are actually three slightly separate underlying “*grammars of graphics*” that might underlie a bar chart:

1. Bar charts where the height of the bars is the **number of observations** in each category.
2. Bar charts where the height of the bars is the **average value of the y variable** for that category.
3. Bar charts where the height of the bars is the **actual value of the y variable** for that **individual observation**.

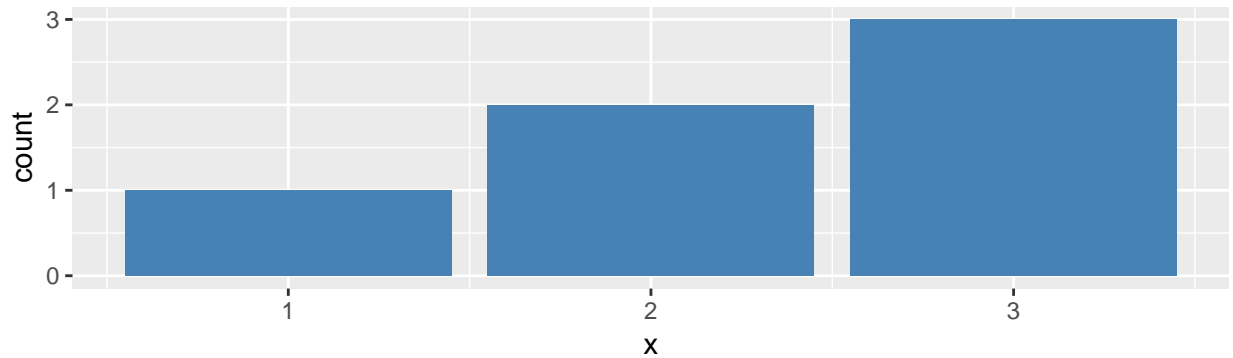
Let’s look at each situation in turn, since each situation demands a slightly different syntax.

### 3 Our Data

x	y
1	10
2	5
2	9
3	8
3	9
3	10

### 4 Bar charts where the height of the bars is the number of observations in each category.

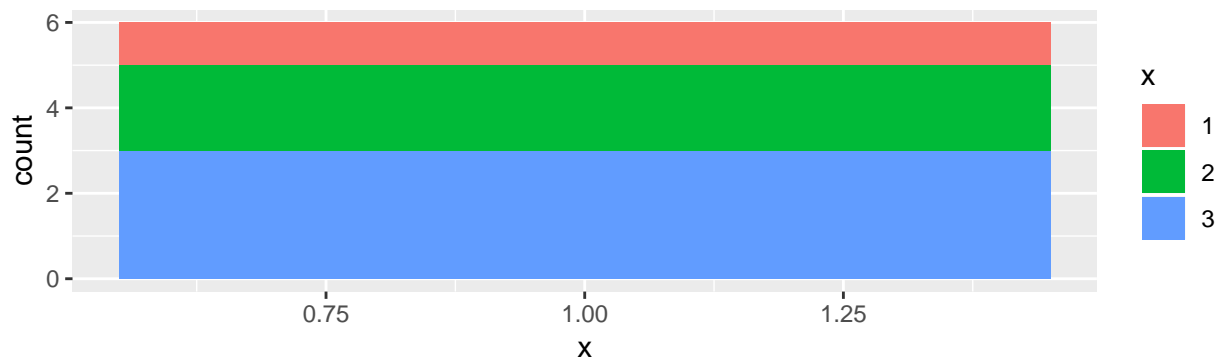
```
library(ggplot2)
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x)) + # 'aesthetic' only includes x
  geom_bar(fill = "steelblue") # using bars to graph
```



## 4.1 Stacked Bar Chart

A simple change to the above aesthetic yields a stacked bar chart. Note that *fill* now becomes part of the *aesthetic* so that color fill differentiates the parts of the bar.

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = 1, # x is 1
           fill = factor(x))) + # fill is x as a factor
geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
scale_fill_discrete(name = "x") # modify name of legend
```

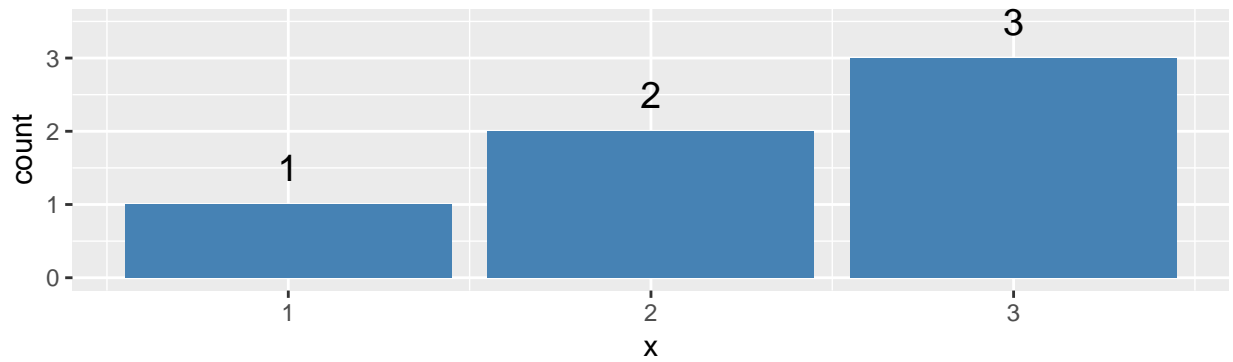


We then return to an unstacked bar chart to consider the syntax for adding labels.

## 4.2 Add Labels

Adding labels requires adding an extra geom, `geom_text`. We have to add a new, non-intuitive aesthetic to `geom_text` to tell it where the labels are located, and that they represent the count of observations in each category.

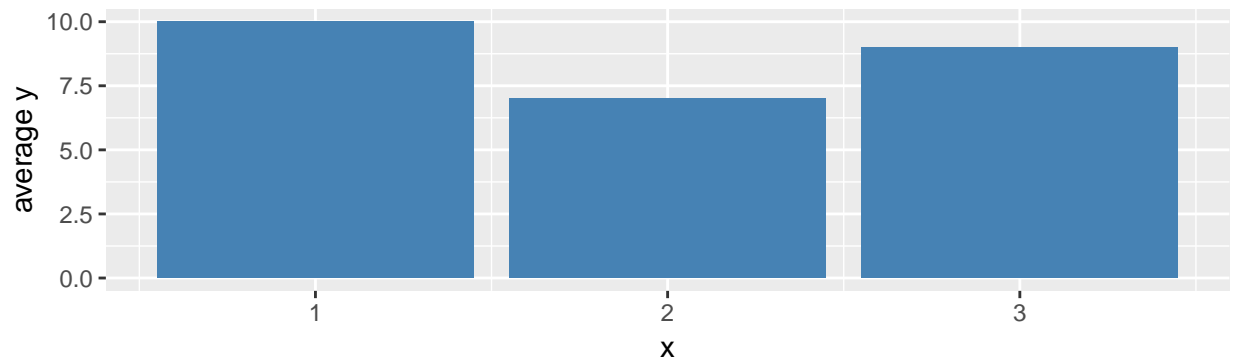
```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x)) + # 'aesthetic' only includes x
geom_bar(fill = "steelblue") + # using bars to graph
geom_text(stat = "count",
          aes(label = ..count.., # text of the label
              y = ..count.. + .5), # location of the label
          size = 5) # size of the label
```



5 Bar charts where the height of the bars is the average value of the y variable for that category.

```
library(ggplot2)

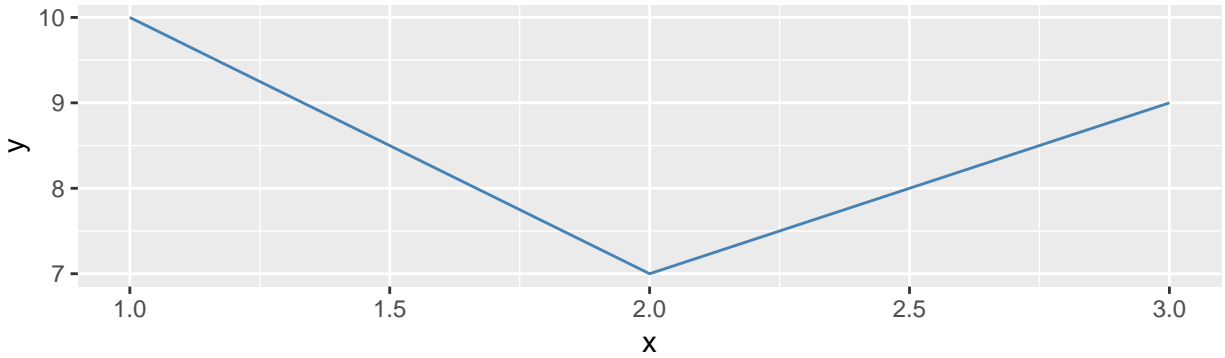
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x, # 'aesthetic' includes x
           y = y)) + # and y
  stat_summary(fun.y = mean, # summarizing y
              geom = "bar", # with bars
              fill = "steelblue") +
  labs(y = "average y")
```



### 5.1 What About a Line Chart?

A line chart requires the addition of `group` to the aesthetic, and the use of a different geometry.

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x,
           y = y,
           group = 1)) + # add 'group'
  stat_summary(geom = "line", # with line
              fun.y = mean,
              color = "steelblue")
```



## 6 Bar charts where the height of the bars is the actual value of the $y$ variable for that category.

Here is where things get complicated. We try something we've tried before, but now adding  $y$  to the aesthetic.

```
library(ggplot2)

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
      aes(x = x, # 'aesthetic' includes x
          y = y)) + # and y
  geom_bar()
```

This generates the following error message:

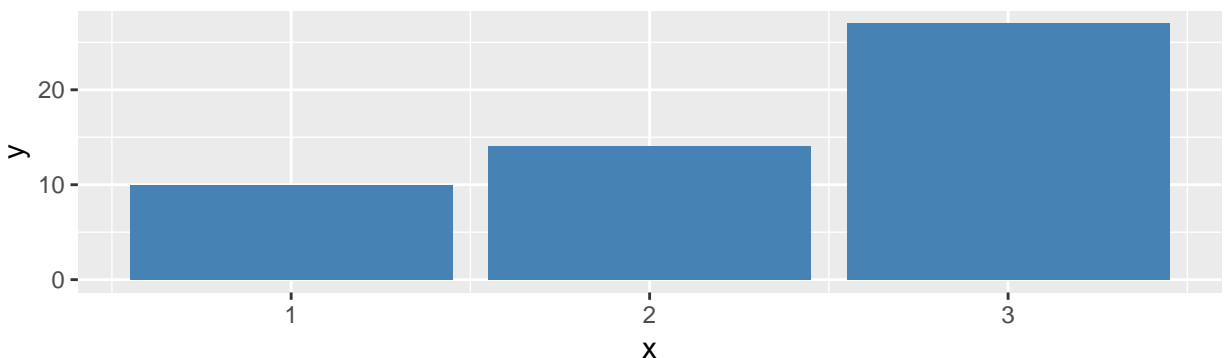
Error: stat\_count() must not be used with a y aesthetic.

The reason that we are getting this error is that, by default, `geom_bar()` is trying to **count up** the number of  $x$  values, and in **counting up** the number of  $x$  values, `geom_bar()` does not know what to do with the  $y$  value.

So we change this...

```
library(ggplot2)

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
      aes(x = x, # 'aesthetic' includes x
          y = y)) + # and y
  geom_bar(stat = "identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
          fill = "steelblue")
```



If we go back and look at our data, we remember that we have some duplicate  $x$ 's,

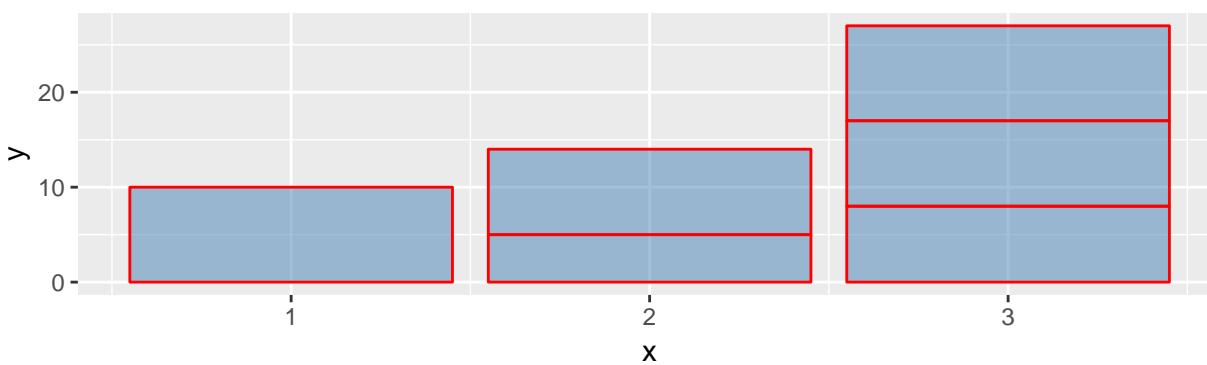
1, 2, 2, 3, 3 and 3

so some of the bars are actually **over-printing**.

We can see this if we make the bars semi-transparent, and outline the bars with a different color.

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x,
           y = y)) + # 'aesthetic' only includes x
  geom_bar(stat="identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
          fill = "steelblue", # fill
          color = "red", # outline
          alpha = .5) # transparency
```



## 7 Thinking Through The Issue

What is the solution? We may want to go back and look at our data to ensure that if we are using the actual  $y$  value for the height of the bars that we do **not** have duplicate values of  $x$  in our data.

**Or**, we may want to have the bars represent the **average value of  $y$**  rather than the **actual values of  $y$** , as we did in one of the examples above.

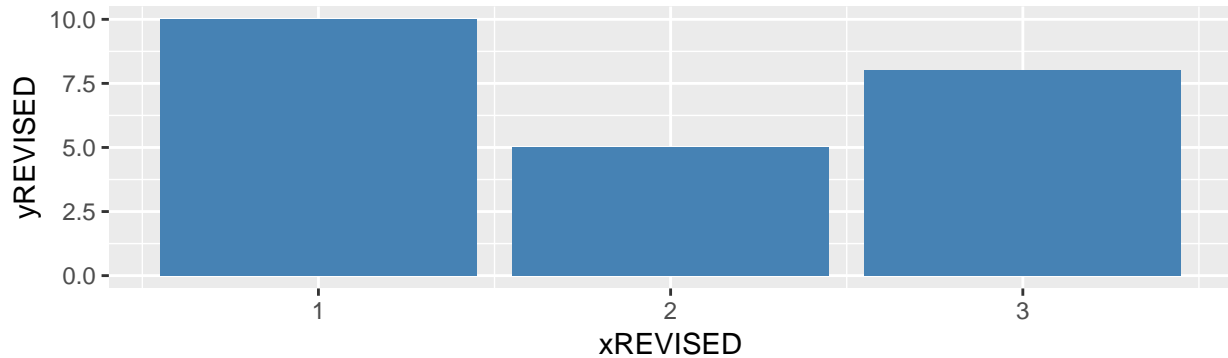
## 8 Of Course The Problem Wouldn't Come Up If We Had Different Data, Without Those Duplicate $x$ Observations

xREVISED	yREVISED
1	10
2	5
3	8

### 8.1 And Then A Bar Chart Is Easy

```
library(ggplot2)
```

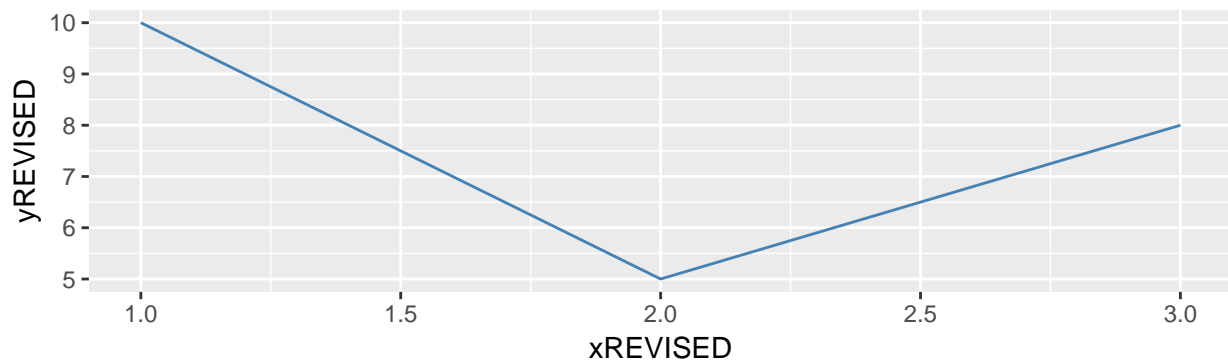
```
ggplot(mydataREVISED, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = xREVISED, # 'aesthetic' includes x
           y = yREVISED)) + # and y
  geom_bar(stat = "identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
          fill = "steelblue")
```



## 8.2 A Line Chart Is Easy Too

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
ggplot(mydataREVISED, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = xREVISED, # 'aesthetic' includes x
           y = yREVISED)) + # and y
  geom_line(stat = "identity", # use ACTUAL y for bar height
          color = "steelblue")
```



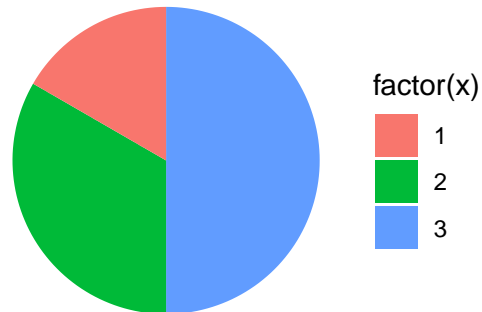
## 9 And Then There Are Pie Charts

In some ways it is confusing, and in some ways it is helpful, that according to the underlying *grammar of graphics* in `ggplot2`, pie charts can be seen as **bar charts that use polar coordinates**. With that in mind, we take some of our earlier code, and add `coord_polar()`.

In the code below, I need to ensure that `ggplot2` sees *x* as a **factor**, and to use *x* as a **fill**. **Fill** is a crucial piece of information in a pie chart.

```
library(ggplot2)
```

```
ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
      aes(x = 1,
          fill = factor(x))) + # x is now the fill
geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
coord_polar(theta = "y") + # polar coordinates
theme_void() # get rid of distracting numbers
```



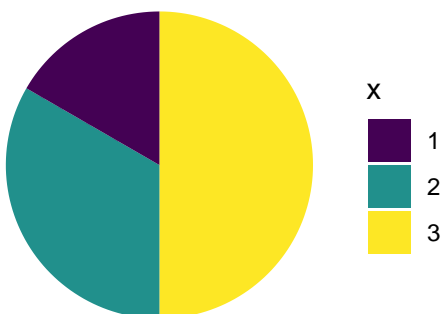
Unfortunately, pie charts are deprecated in some circles, so support for pie charts is not very strong in `ggplot`. It is certainly possible to create a pie chart in `ggplot`, but adding labels to a pie chart ends up being very very difficult.

## 9.1 Pie Chart With Better Colors

```
library(ggplot2)

library(viridis) # wonderful colors

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
      aes(x = 1,
          fill = factor(x))) +
geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
coord_polar(theta = "y") + # polar coordinates
scale_fill_viridis(discrete = TRUE,
                   name = "x") + # name for legend
theme_void()
```





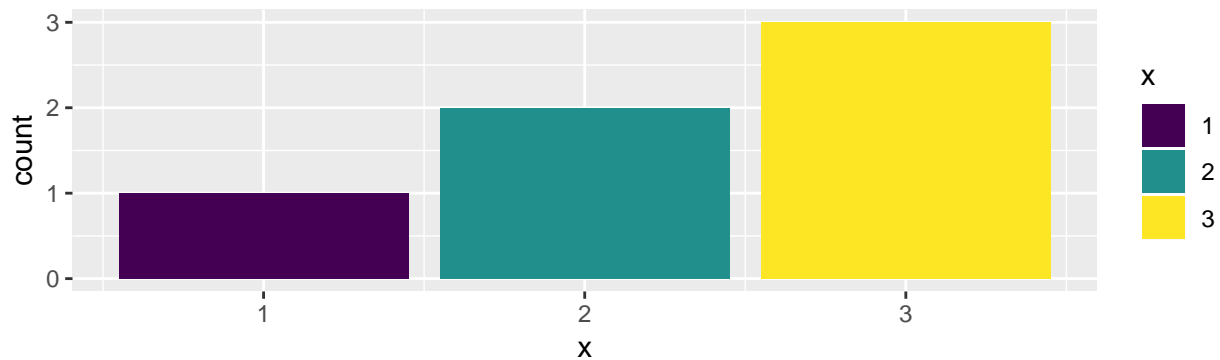
## 10 Bar Chart With Better Colors

Up until now, we have had a *minimalist* vision of bar charts, where every bar is the same color, because color would not add **additional information**, over and above the information contained in the position on the  $x$  axis. However, for the sake of design, we may also choose to add some color to our bar charts. `ggthemes`, `ggthemr` and `viridis` are all ways of adding color to `ggplot` graphs.

```
library(ggplot2)

library(viridis) # wonderful colors

ggplot(mydata, # the data that I am using
       aes(x = x, # x is on the x axis
           fill = factor(x))) + # x is also a factor for fill
  geom_bar() + # using bars to graph
  scale_fill_viridis(discrete = TRUE,
                    name = "x")
```



## 11 More Examples

More examples can be found [here](#)