

## Chapter 10. Interactivity

Now that you're an old pro at data updates, transitions, and motion, let's incorporate true interactivity.

### Binding Event Listeners

Say *what?* I know, I know: First, we bound *data*, which was weird enough. And now I'm talking about binding *event listeners*? (This is how JavaScript earned its reputation for being such a strange language.)

As explained in [Chapter 9](#), JavaScript uses an *event model* in which “events” are triggered by things happening, such as new input from the user, provided via a keyboard, mouse, or touch screen. Most of the time, events are being triggered constantly, left and right—it's just that nobody is *listening* for them, so they are ignored.

To make our pieces interactive, we define chunks of code that *listen* for specific events being triggered on specific DOM elements. In [Chapter 9](#), we used the following code:

```
d3.select("p")
  .on("click", function() {
    //Do something on click
  });
```

This *binds* an *event listener* to the `p` paragraph element. The listener happens to be listening for the `click` event, which is the JavaScript event triggered when the user clicks the mouse *on that p element*. (D3 doesn't use custom event names, although you can define your own. For the sake of supporting existing standards, D3 recognizes all the standard JavaScript events, such as `mouseover` and `click`. The events supported vary somewhat by browser. Peter-Paul Koch's [event compatibility tables](#) are a useful reference.)

This gets at one of the nuances of JavaScript's event model, which is that events don't happen in a vacuum. Rather, they are always *called on* a specific element. So the code just shown isn't activated whenever *any* click occurs; it is run just when a click occurs *on the p element*.

You could achieve all this with raw JavaScript, but D3's `on()` method is a handy way to quickly bind event listeners to D3 selections. As you can see, `on()` takes two arguments: the event name, and an anonymous function to be executed when the event is triggered on the selected element.

Making your visualization interactive is a simple, two-step process that includes:

1. Binding event listeners
2. Defining the behavior

### Introducing Behaviors

Let's start by working with an earlier, static version of our bar chart. See sample code `01_start.html`.

The example code binds an event on only one element: `p`. This is an unusual usage for `on()`. More commonly, you will want to bind event listeners to more than one element at a time, such as to *all* of the visual elements in your visualization. Fortunately, that is very easy to do. Instead of using `select()` to select only one element, use `selectAll()` to select multiple elements and pass that selection to `on()`.

You can even bind those event listeners right at the moment when you first create elements. For example, here is our existing code that creates our bar chart's `rects`, to which I've simply tacked on `on()`:

```
//Create bars
svg.selectAll("rect")
  .data(dataset)
  .enter()
  .append("rect")
  ... //Set attributes (omitted here)
  .on("click", function(d) {
    //This will run whenever any bar is clicked
  });
```

When defining the anonymous function, you can reference `d`, or `d` and `i`, or neither, just as you've seen throughout D3. And then whatever code you put between the function's brackets will execute on click.

This is a quick and easy way to verify your data values, for example:

```
.on("click", function(d) {
  console.log(d);
});
```

Try that code by running *02\_click.html*, open the JavaScript console, and click on some bars. When you click on each bar, you should see that bar's data value printed to the console. Nice!

## Hover to Highlight

Highlighting elements in response to mouse interaction is a common way to make your visualization feel more responsive, and it can help users navigate and focus on the data of interest.

A simple hover effect can be achieved with CSS alone—no JavaScript required! The CSS pseudoclass selector `:hover` can be used in combination with any other selector to select, well, that same thing, but when the mouse is hovering *over* the element. Here, we select all SVG `rects` and set their fill to orange (see [Figure 10-1](#)):

```
rect:hover {
  fill: orange;
}
```

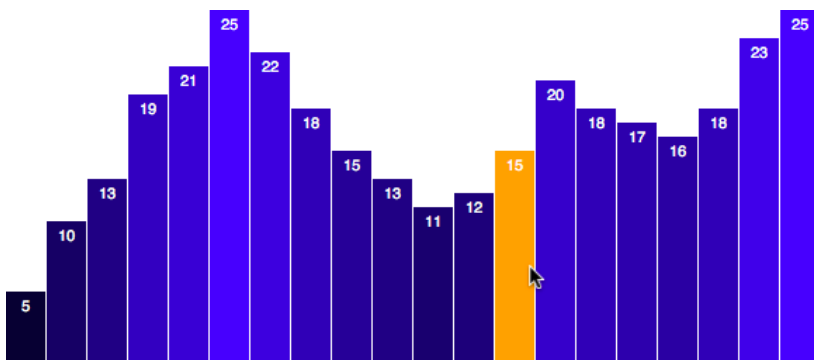


Figure 10-1. A simple CSS-only mouse hover effect

See *03\_hover.html*, and try it out yourself.

CSS hover styling is fast and easy, but limited. There's only so much you can achieve with `:hover`. Fortunately, recent browsers support applying the new CSS3 transitions on SVG elements. Try adding this above the `rect:hover` rule in that example:

```
rect {  
  -moz-transition: all 0.3s;  
  -o-transition: all 0.3s;  
  -webkit-transition: all 0.3s;  
  transition: all 0.3s;  
}
```

This tells browsers (including Mozilla, Opera, and Webkit-based browsers) to apply a 0.2-second transition to any changes to the `rect` elements. Run that, and you'll see that the blue/orange switch no longer happens instantly, but smoothly, over a brief 0.2-second period. Nice!

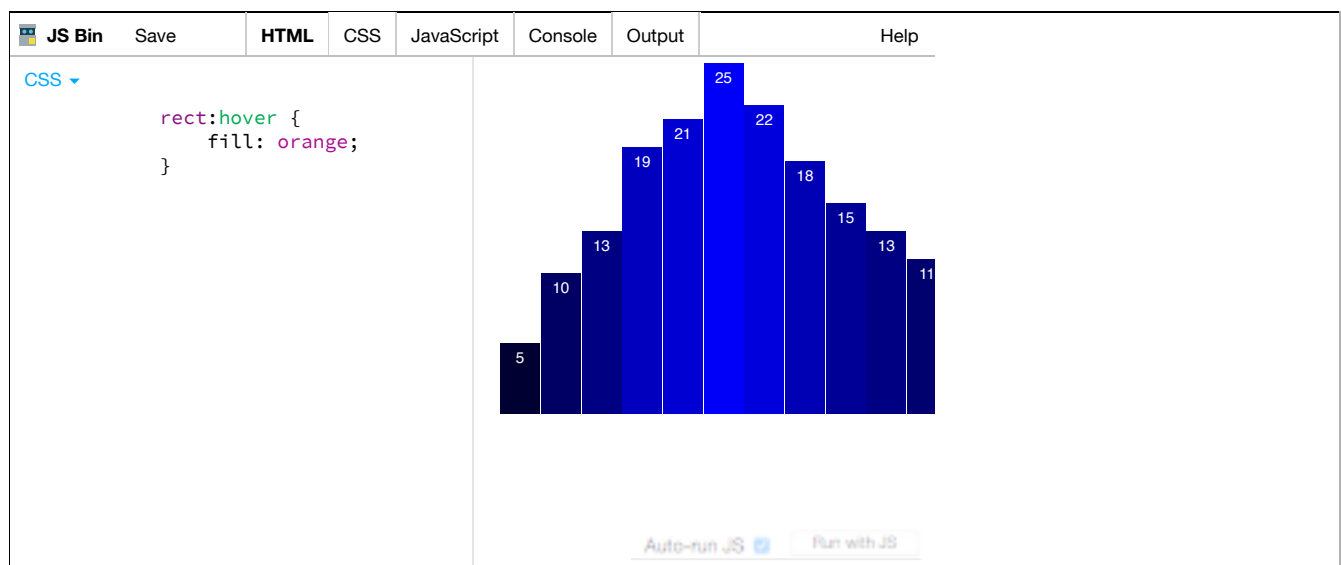
Try It Now!

Add the following lines of code above the `rect:hover` rule in the CSS panel below:

```
rect {  
  -moz-transition: all 0.3s;  
  -o-transition: all 0.3s;  
  -webkit-transition: all 0.3s;  
  transition: all 0.3s;  
}
```

Then hover over the bars in the output at right, and note the smooth transitions

[Open in new window](#)



Yet these transitions can also be managed using JavaScript and D3, for additional control and coordination with other parts of our visualization. Luckily for us, D3 handles all the hassle of transitions for us, so working with JavaScript is not so bad. Let's re-create the orange hover effect without CSS.

Instead of referencing the `click` event, as we did earlier, we can call `on( )` with `mouseover`, the JavaScript event equivalent of CSS's `hover`:

```
.on("mouseover", function() {
    //Do something on mouseover of any bar
});
```

Now we want to set the `fill` of *this* bar (the one on which the `mouseover` event is triggered) to orange. Yet we are operating in the context of an anonymous function—how could we possibly select the same element on which the event was just triggered?

The answer is *this*. No, sorry, I mean `this`. Just select `this`, and set its `fill` to orange:

```
.on("mouseover", function() {
    d3.select(this)
      .attr("fill", "orange");
});
```

Another reason “real” programmers hate JavaScript is because of its notoriously wishy washy use of the keyword `this`. In other languages, the meaning of `this` is very clearly defined; not so in JavaScript. (jQuery fans are used to this debate.)

For our purposes, here is all you need to know:

- Context is important.
- Within anonymous functions, D3 automatically sets the context of `this` so it references “the current element upon which we are acting.”

The end result is that, when we hand off anonymous functions to any of D3’s methods, we can reference `this` when trying to act on the current element.

Indeed, you can see this (ha!) in action in `04_mouseover.html` ([Figure 10-2](#)).

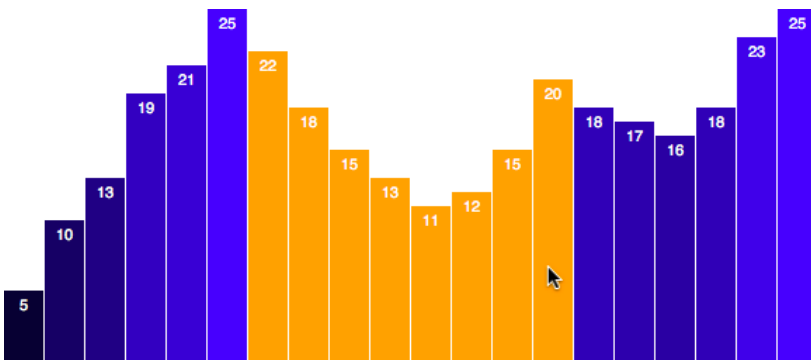


Figure 10-2. Using D3 to set an orange fill on mouseover

Move the mouse over a `rect`, the event listener for that `rect` is triggered, that same `rect` is selected (as `this`), and then its `fill` is set to orange.

[Figure 10-2](#) looks good, but we should probably restore each bar’s original color once the hover is over, meaning on `mouseout`:

```
.on("mouseout", function(d) {
    d3.select(this)
      .attr("fill", "rgb(0, 0, " + (d * 10) + ")");
});
```

Perfect! Try it yourself in *05\_mouseout.html*. See [Figure 10-3](#).

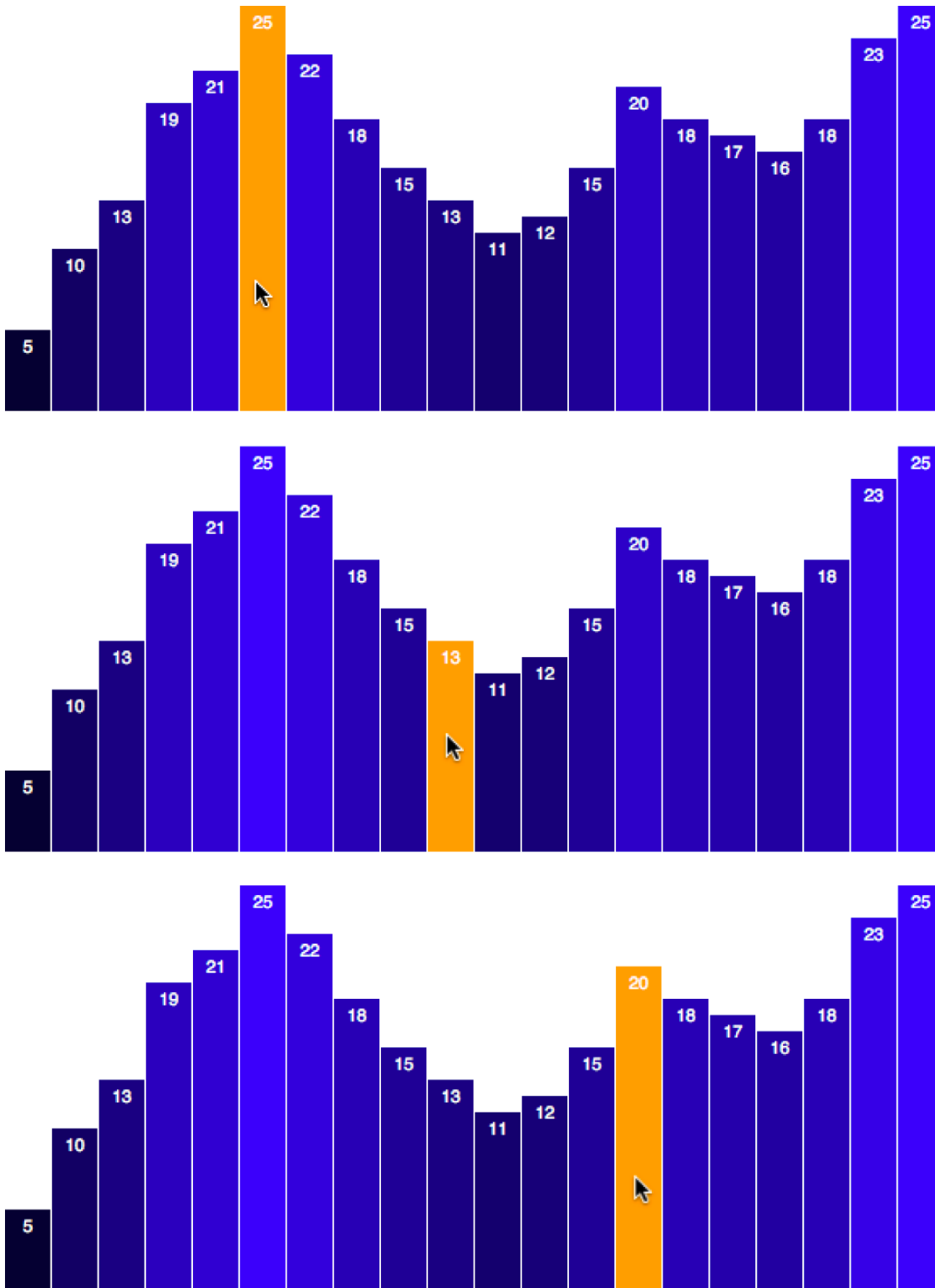


Figure 10-3. Moving the mouse left to right, with fills set on `mouseover` and `mouseout`

I am really excited to have accomplished in eight lines of JavaScript what I did originally with CSS in only three! (Not!)

Actually, what I *am* excited about is to now make the outbound transition silky smooth (see [Figure 10-4](#)). As you remember from [Chapter 9](#), accomplishing that involves adding only two lines of code, for `transition()` and `duration()`:

```
.on("mouseout", function(d) {
```

```
d3.select(this)
  .transition()
  .duration(250)
  .attr("fill", "rgb(0, 0, " + (d * 10) + ")");
});
```

Try that out in *o6\_smoother.html*.

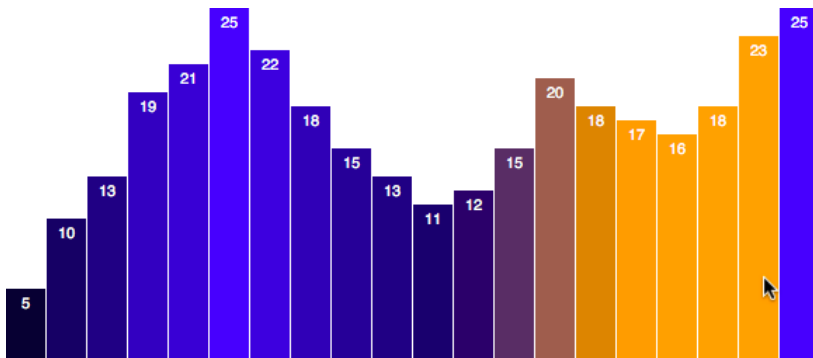
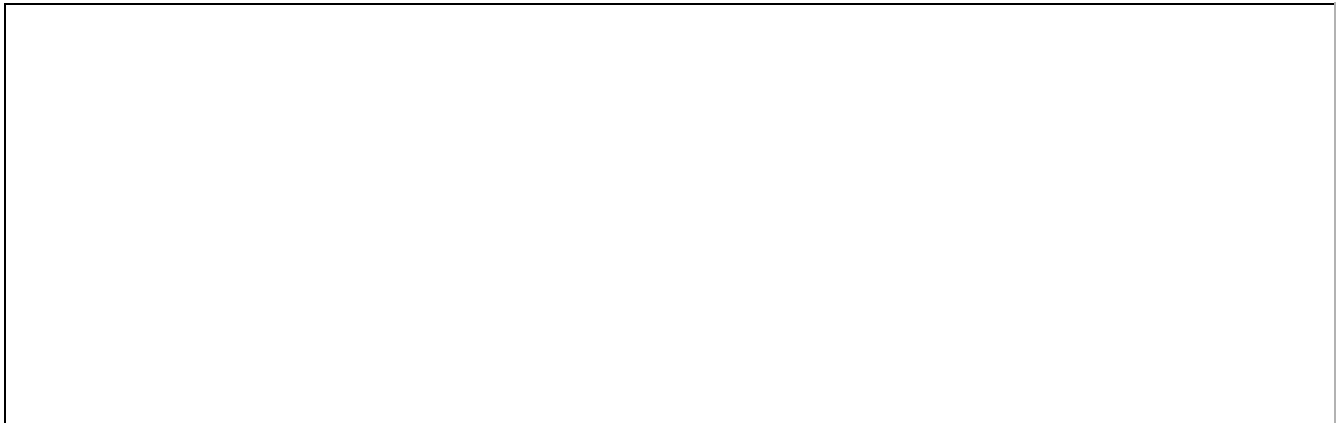


Figure 10-4. Moving the mouse left to right (Smooth Operator Edition)

Try It Now!

Hover over the bars below, and note the smooth transitions.

[Open in new window](#)



### Pointer Events on Overlapping Elements

Mouse events are triggered only on elements with pixels that can be “touched” by the mouse. If two elements overlap, and the mouse moves over the element that is “on top” (in other words, closer to the front), then the `mouseover` event will be triggered on the frontmost element, and *not* on the element behind it.

You can see this in *o6\_smoother.html*. Mouse over any bar, and then move your pointer directly above one of the value labels. You’ll see the bar fade back from orange to blue. The `text` elements are in front of the bars, so mousing over a label involves also *mousing out* of the `rect` behind it. This is counterintuitive because, visually, we haven’t left the `rect` at all, but as far as JavaScript is concerned, we have.

Remember that in SVG, elements placed later in the DOM are rendered visually “in front” of earlier elements. (See the section “Layering and Drawing Order” in [Chapter 3](#).)

In many cases, you might want mouse events on some elements (such as our value labels) to be ignored.

Luckily, this is as easy as applying one line of CSS to the elements you wish to have ignored:

```
pointer-events: none;
```

This magically tells the browser “Hey, this element shouldn’t trigger any pointer events (such as `click`, `mouseover`, or `mouseout`), so just behave as if this element isn’t here.” It lets events pass through to the next element below it.

Use normal CSS selectors to target the appropriate elements. For example, this would apply that to all SVG text elements:

```
svg text {  
    pointer-events: none;  
}
```

Or, instead of including this in a stylesheet, you could specify the CSS with D3 directly when you create the text element, for example:

```
svg.append("text")  
    ... //other stuff here  
    .style("pointer-events", "none");
```

## Grouping SVG Elements

Note that `g` group elements *do not*, by themselves, trigger any mouse events. The reason for this is that `g` elements have no pixels! Only their enclosed elements—like `rects`, `circles`, and `text` elements—have pixels.

You can still bind event listeners to `g` elements. Just keep in mind that the elements within that `g` will then behave as a group. For example, if *any* of the enclosed elements are clicked or moused over, then the listener function will be activated.

This technique can be quite useful when you have several visual elements that should all act in concert. In our bar chart, for example, we could group `rect` and `text` elements each into their own groups. The element hierarchy currently looks like this:

```
svg  
  rect  
  rect  
  rect  
  ...  
  text  
  text  
  text  
  ...
```

After grouping elements, it could look like this:

```
svg  
  g  
    rect
```

```

        text
      g
        rect
        text
    ...

```

Instead of worrying about `pointer-events` and which element is on top, we just bind the event listener to the whole group. So clicking on some `text` will trigger the same code as clicking on a `rect` because they're both in the same group.

Even better, throw an invisible `rect` with a `fill` of `none` and `pointer-events` value of `all` on the top of each group. Even though the `rect` is invisible, it will still trigger mouse events, so you could have the `rect` span the whole height of the chart. The net effect is that mousing *anywhere* in that column—even in “empty” whitespace above a short blue bar—would trigger the highlight effect.

## Click to Sort

Interactive visualization is most powerful when it can provide different *views* of the data, empowering the user to explore the information from different angles.

The ability to *sort* data is extremely important. And yes, as you just guessed, D3 makes it very easy to sort elements.

Continuing with the bar chart, let's add an event listener for the `click` event, to which we bind an anonymous function that, in turn, will call a new function of our own creation, `sortBars()`.

```

...
.on("click", function() {
    sortBars();
});

```

For simplicity, we are binding this to every bar, but of course you could bind this instead to a button or any other element, inside or outside of the SVG image.

At the end of the code, let's define this new function and store it in `sortBars`:

```

var sortBars = function() {

    svg.selectAll("rect")
        .sort(function(a, b) {
            return d3.ascending(a, b);
        })
        .transition()
        .duration(1000)
        .attr("x", function(d, i) {
            return xScale(i);
        });

};

```



You can see this code in `07_sort.html` and the result in [Figure 10-5](#). Try clicking any of the bars, and watch them reorganize.

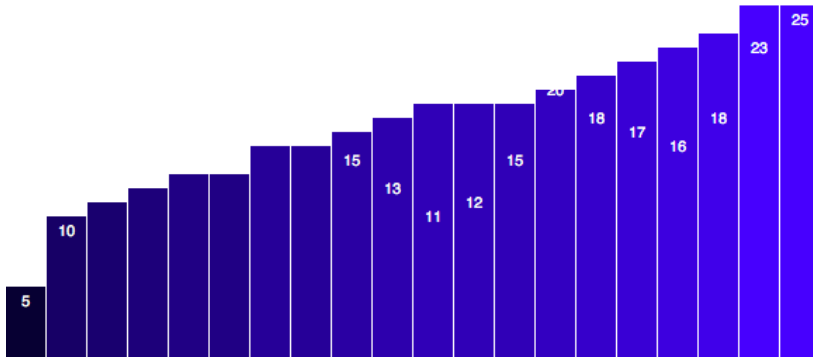


Figure 10-5. The view after click-to-sort

When `sortBars()` is called, first we reselect all the `rects`. Then we use D3's handy `sort()` method, which reorders elements based on their bound data values. `sort()` needs to know how to decide which elements come first, and which later, so we pass into it a *comparator* function.

Unlike our anonymous functions so far, the comparator doesn't take `d` (the current datum) or `i` (the current index). Instead, it is passed *two values*, `a` and `b`, which represent the data values of two different elements. (You could name them anything else; `a` and `b` are just the convention.) The comparator will be called on every pair of elements in our array, comparing `a` to `b`, until, in the end, all the array elements are sorted per whatever rules we specify.

We specify *how* `a` and `b` should be compared within the comparator. Thankfully, D3 also provides a handful of comparison functions that spare us from writing more JavaScript. Here, we use `d3.ascending()`, into which both `a` and `b` are passed. Whichever one is bigger comes out the winner. And `sort()` loops through all the data values in this way until it has all the elements, er, sorted out. (Note that `d3.ascending` works well in this case, because our values are numbers. Comparing strings of text is a whole other can of worms.)

Finally, our new order in place, we initiate a transition, set a duration of one second, and then calculate the new `x` position for each `rect`. (This `attr` code is just copied from when we created the `rects` initially.)

This works swimmingly, except for two catches.

First, you'll notice that we haven't accounted for the value labels yet, so they didn't slide into place along with the bars. (I leave that to you as an exercise.)

Second, you might observe that if you mouse over some bars *while* the transition is occurring, those bars don't fall properly into place (see [Figure 10-6](#)).

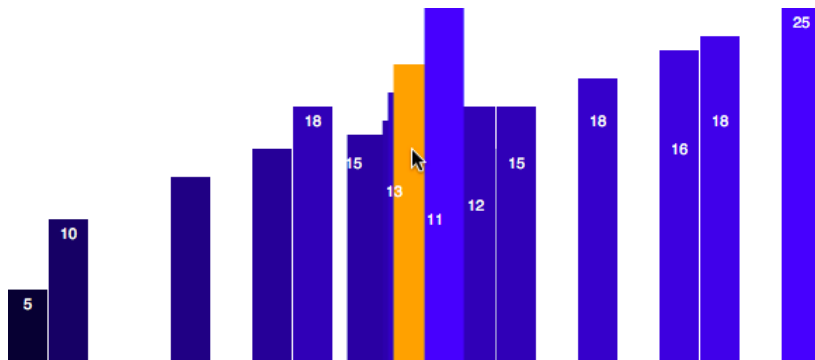


Figure 10-6. Transitions, interrupted

Yeeesh, that doesn't look good.

Remember from [Chapter 9](#) that newer transitions interrupt and override older transitions. Clicking the bars initiates one transition. Immediately mousing over a bar interrupts that initial transition in order to run the `mouseover` highlight transition we specified earlier. The end result is that those moused-over bars never make it to their final destinations.

But don't worry. This example is just a good argument for keeping hover effects in CSS, while letting D3 and JavaScript manage the more visually intensive actions.

In `o8_sort_hover.html`, I've restored the CSS-only highlight and removed the `mouseover` and `mouseout` event listeners, so this transition conflict no longer occurs. (The only downside is we no longer have those smooth orange-to-blue fades.)

So far, this sort only goes one direction. Let's revise this so a second click triggers a re-sort, placing the bars in descending order.

To remember the current state of the chart, we'll need a Boolean variable:

```
var sortOrder = false;
```

Then, in the `sortBars()` function, we should flip the value of `sortOrder`, so if it starts out `true`, it is changed to `false`, and vice versa:

```
var sortBars = function() {

    //Flip value of sortOrder
    sortOrder = !sortOrder;

    ...
}
```

Down in the comparator function, we can add a bit of logic to say *if* `sortOrder` is `true`, then go ahead and sort the bars in *ascending* order. Otherwise, use *descending* order:

```
svg.selectAll("rect")
    .sort(function(a, b) {
        if (sortOrder) {
            return d3.ascending(a, b);
        } else {
            return d3.descending(a, b);
        }
    });
```

```

    }
  })
  ...

```

Give that a shot in *09\_resort.html*. Now each time you click, the sort order reverses, as shown in [Figure 10-7](#).

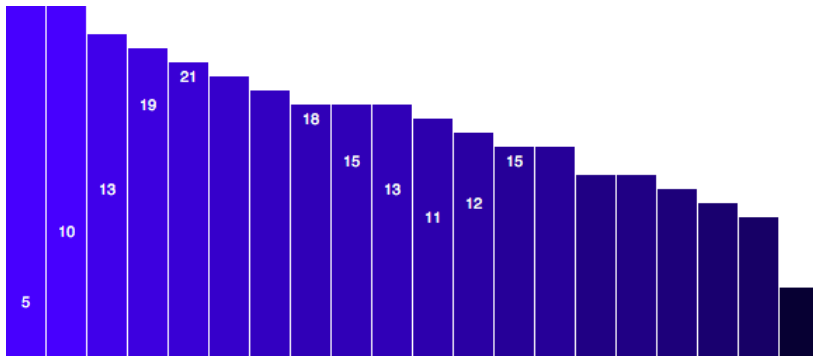


Figure 10-7. The second sort, now in descending order

One more thing would make this really nice: a per-element delay. (Remember that whole “object constancy” thing?)

As you know, to do that, we just add a simple `delay()` statement after `transition()`:

```

...
.transition()
.delay(function(d, i) {
    return i * 50;
})
.duration(1000)
...

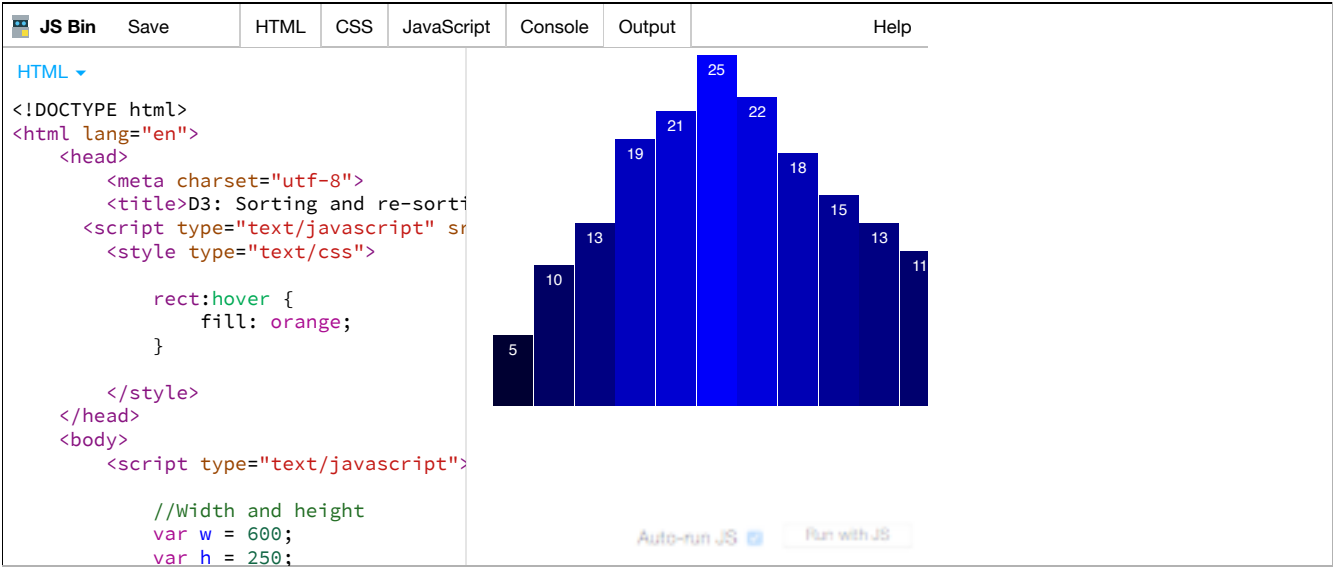
```

Now take a look at *10\_delay.html*, in which you can easily follow individual bars with your eyes as they move left and right during each sort.

### Exercise

Add JS code in the panel at left so that the labels sort along with the bars, and check the results in the output panel at right.

[Open in new window](#)



## Tooltips

In interactive visualizations, tooltips are small overlays that present data values. In many cases, it's not necessary to label every individual data value in the default view, but that level of detail should still be accessible to users. That's where tooltips come in.

In this section, I present three different methods to constructing tooltips with D3, ranging from the simplest to the most complex.

### Default Browser Tooltips

These should be your first stop. A quick-and-dirty, functional but not pretty option, default browser tooltips are usually those ugly yellow boxes you see floating over content when you hold your mouse still for too long. These are very easy to make, and the browser manages the placements for you, but you have zero control over how they look—that's also set by the browser.

[Figure 10-8](#) shows our bar chart, with value labels removed, and default browser tooltips implemented. The tooltips show up after hovering the mouse over any bar for a few seconds.

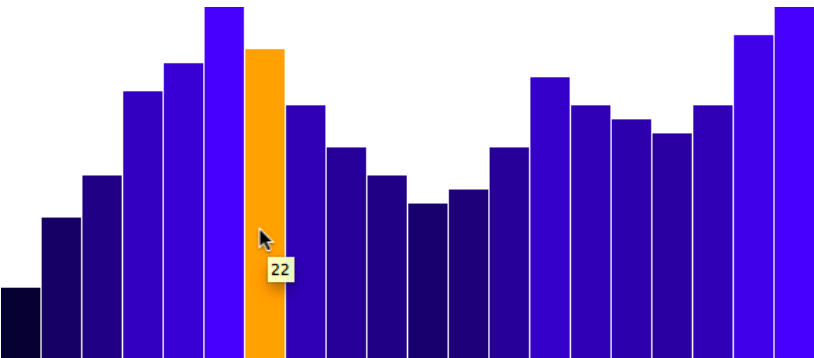


Figure 10-8. A ridiculously simple default browser tooltip, as seen in Safari

See [11\\_browser\\_tooltip.html](#) for the code and a demo. To make these tooltips, simply inject a `title` element into whatever element should have the tooltip applied. For example, after we create all those `rects`:

```
svg.selectAll("rect")
```

```
.data(dataset)
.enter()
.append("rect")
...
```

we can just tack on to the end of that chain:

```
.append("title")
.text(function(d) {
    return d;
});
```

`append()` creates the new `title` element, and then `text()` sets its content to `d`, the bound value.

We could make this text a little less spare by prefixing it with something (see [Figure 10-9](#)):

```
.append("title")
.text(function(d) {
    return "This value is " + d;
});
```

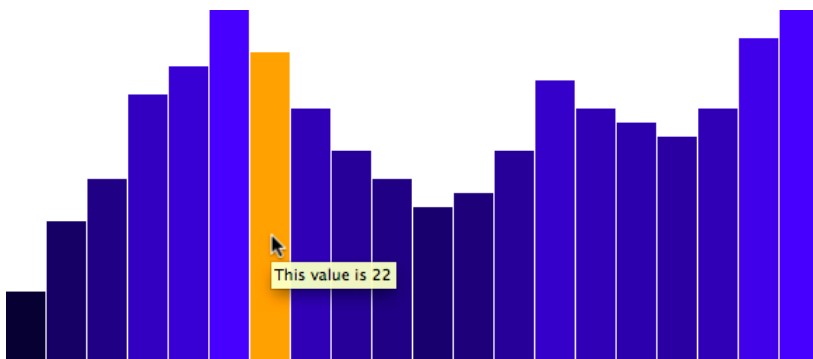


Figure 10-9. A default browser tooltip, with a prefix added

See *12\_browser\_tooltip\_text.html* for that code.

Try It Now!

Hover over the bars in the graph to see corresponding tooltips.

[Open in new window](#)



## SVG Element Tooltips

For more visual control over your tooltips, code them as SVG elements.

As usual, there are many different approaches you could take. I'll suggest adding event listeners, so on each `mouseover`, a new value label is created, and on `mouseout` it is destroyed. (Another idea would be to pregenerate all the labels, but then just show or hide them based on mouse hover status. Or just stick with one label, but show or hide it and change its position as needed.)

Back to the bars we go. We'll add back in a `mouseover` event listener, in which we first get the `x` and `y` values for the current element (`this`, remember?). We'll need this information to know where to place the new tooltip, so it appears nicely "on top of" the bar that's triggering the rollover.

When we retrieve those values, we wrap them in `parseFloat()`, which is a JavaScript function for "Hey, even if this information is a string of text, please convert it to a floating point number for me."

Lastly, I'm adding a bit to both the `x` and `y` values, to center the new tooltips near the top of any given bar:

```
.on("mouseover", function(d) {  
  
  //Get this bar's x/y values, then augment for the tooltip  
  var xPosition = parseFloat(d3.select(this).attr("x")) + xScale.rangeBand() / 2;  
  var yPosition = parseFloat(d3.select(this).attr("y")) + 14;
```

That's the hard part. Now all we do is create the tooltip as a simple `text` element, in this case, but of course you could add a background `rect` or do anything else here for visual effect:

```
//Create the tooltip label  
svg.append("text")  
  .attr("id", "tooltip")  
  .attr("x", xPosition)  
  .attr("y", yPosition)  
  .attr("text-anchor", "middle")  
  .attr("font-family", "sans-serif")  
  .attr("font-size", "11px")  
  .attr("font-weight", "bold")  
  .attr("fill", "black")  
  .text(d);  
  
})
```

Yes, this is based on our earlier value label code, simply adapted slightly. Note that the `x` and `y` attributes are set to the new position values we just calculated, and the actual text content of the label is set to `d`, the datum passed into the event listener function.

Also note that I assigned this next `text` element an ID of `tooltip`. This is so we can easily select (and delete!) the element when we're done with it—on `mouseout`:

```
.on("mouseout", function() {
```

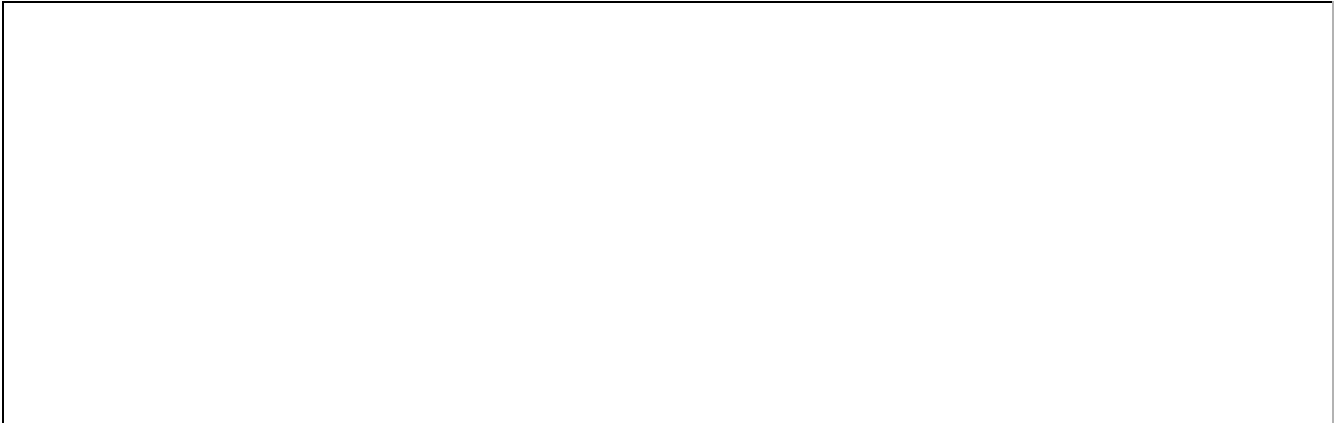
```
//Remove the tooltip  
d3.select("#tooltip").remove();  
  
})
```

Test out the code in *13\_svg\_tooltip.html*.

Try It Now!

Hover over the bars in the graph to see the custom tooltips.

[Open in new window](#)



As you can see in [Figure 10-10](#), you have much more visual control when using SVG elements as tooltips, but they are a little more time-consuming to set up. And of course, you can get much fancier than this simple example.

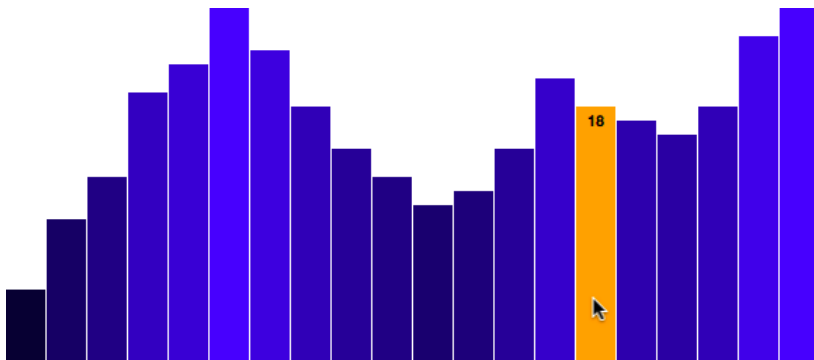


Figure 10-10. An SVG element tooltip

## HTML div Tooltips

A similar approach can be used with HTML `div` elements as tooltips. You might consider using a `div` when:

- You want to achieve a visual effect that isn't possible or well-supported with SVG (such as CSS drop shadows)
- You need the tooltips to extend beyond the frame of the SVG image

See [Figures 10-11](#) and [10-12](#) for examples.

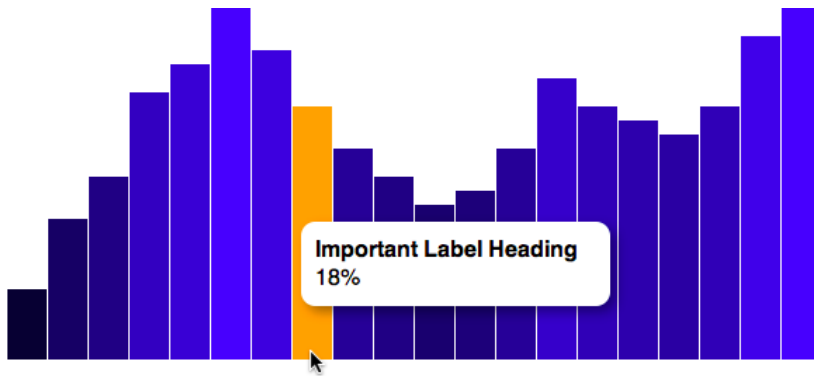


Figure 10-11. An HTML div tooltip

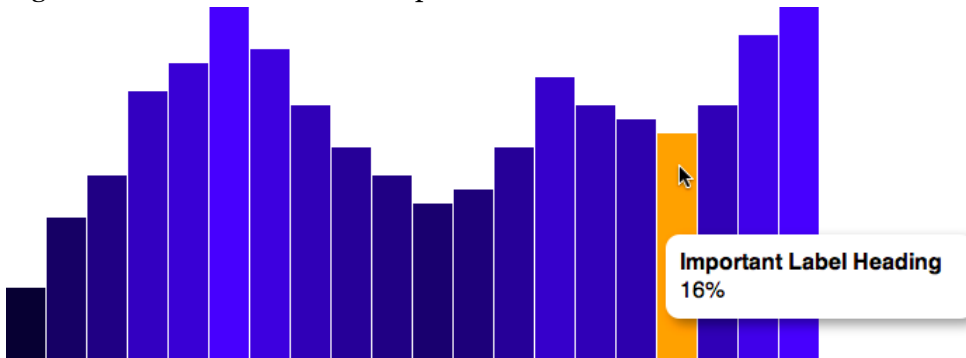


Figure 10-12. An HTML div tooltip, overlapping the bounds of the SVG image beneath

Again, there are many ways to do this, but I like to make a hidden div in my HTML that gets populated with the data value, and is then unhidden when triggered. You can follow along with the final code in *14\_div\_tooltip.html*.

The div itself could be created dynamically with D3, but I like to just type it in by hand:

```
<div id="tooltip" class="hidden">
  <p><strong>Important Label Heading</strong></p>
  <p><span id="value">100</span>%</p>
</div>
```

Now it's going to need some special CSS styling rules:

```
#tooltip {
  position: absolute;
  width: 200px;
  height: auto;
  padding: 10px;
  background-color: white;
  -webkit-border-radius: 10px;
  -moz-border-radius: 10px;
  border-radius: 10px;
  -webkit-box-shadow: 4px 4px 10px rgba(0, 0, 0, 0.4);
  -moz-box-shadow: 4px 4px 10px rgba(0, 0, 0, 0.4);
  box-shadow: 4px 4px 10px rgba(0, 0, 0, 0.4);
  pointer-events: none;
}
```



```
#tooltip.hidden {
    display: none;
}

#tooltip p {
    margin: 0;
    font-family: sans-serif;
    font-size: 16px;
    line-height: 20px;
}
```

Note in particular that its `position` is `absolute`, so we can control exactly where it should appear on the page. I've also added some fancy rounded corners and a drop shadow. Plus, `pointer-events: none` ensures that mousing over the tooltip itself won't trigger a `mouseout` event on the bars, thereby hiding the tooltip. (Try the code without this line, and you'll see what I mean.) Lastly, when the tooltip is given a class of `hidden`, it is not displayed.

I made some modifications to the `mouseover` function, so the `div` is roughly centered vertically against its triggering bar. The revised code now also sets the tooltip's `left` and `top` position per CSS layout requirements, sets the text content of the `#value` span to `d`, and then—now that everything is in place—removes the `hidden` class, making the tooltip visible:

```
.on("mouseover", function(d) {

    //Get this bar's x/y values, then augment for the tooltip
    var xPosition = parseFloat(d3.select(this).attr("x")) + xScale.rangeBand() / 2;
    var yPosition = parseFloat(d3.select(this).attr("y")) / 2 + h / 2;

    //Update the tooltip position and value
    d3.select("#tooltip")
        .style("left", xPosition + "px")
        .style("top", yPosition + "px")
        .select("#value")
        .text(d);

    //Show the tooltip
    d3.select("#tooltip").classed("hidden", false);

})
```

Hiding the tooltip on `mouseout` is much easier; simply add on the `hidden` class:

```
.on("mouseout", function() {

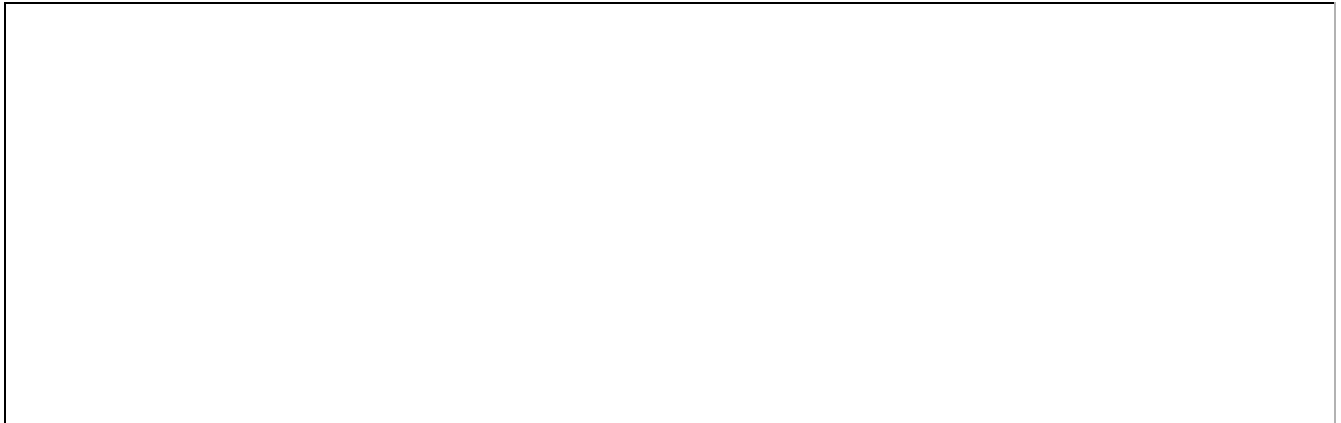
    //Hide the tooltip
    d3.select("#tooltip").classed("hidden", true);

})
```

Try It Now!

Hover over the bars in the graph to see the custom `<div>` tooltips.

[Open in new window](#)



The layout of this simple example works well, but in a real-world situation, the D3 chart would be just one of many other elements on the page. As you probably know, perfecting HTML/CSS layouts can be a challenge, and this is the biggest hassle of getting HTML elements to interact properly with an SVG chart. It can help to put both the tooltip `div` and SVG chart within the same enclosing element (like a container `div`), so then you only have to worry about relative positions. [d3.mouse](#) can be used to get mouse coordinates relative to any other element on the page, and can be useful in cases when you need to position non-SVG elements in relationship to the mouse.

## Consideration for Touch Devices

The browsers on most popular touch devices—such as iOS and Android devices—automatically translate touch events into mouse events, for JavaScript purposes. So a tap on an element is interpreted by the browser as a `click` event. This means that, for the most part, your code that was crafted for mouse interfaces will also work just fine for touch-based interfaces.

The primary exception to this is multitouch, which is not automatically handled by D3. There's no easy answer on how to handle multitouch interactions yet, but D3 *does* track the touches for you (although it's up to you to decide how to use them). See the API reference for [d3.touches](#).

## Moving Forward

Congratulations! You now have all the basics of D3 under your cap. You are a pro at binding data, generating and styling elements based on that data, implementing scales and drawing axes, and modifying your creations with new data, animated transitions, and interactivity. What more could you ask for?

How about layouts and geomaps? The next two chapters will dive into these more advanced topics, but—be warned—without the same level of detail as the prior chapters. Now that you know the basics, you don't need every little thing spelled out. Here we go!

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