

The STORYTELLING with DATA PROCESS

When you find yourself needing to communicate with data, read the following for a reminder of the main lessons covered in and some thought starters to reflect on for the project you face. Each of these corresponds to a chapter of the same number in *storytelling with data: let's practice!*

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND the CONTEXT

Who is your audience? What motivates them? What do you want to communicate to them? Articulate your Big Idea. The Big Idea has three components, it (1) articulates your point of view, (2) conveys what's at stake, and (3) is a complete sentence. Create a storyboard of the components you'll cover. Determine what order will work best; arrange sticky notes to create the desired narrative flow. You now have a plan of attack to follow. Get client or stakeholder input at this point if possible.

What do you want to communicate? Identify your point and how you can show your data in a way that will be easy for your audience to understand. This often means iterating and looking at your data a number of different ways to find the graph that will help you create that magical "ah ha" moment. Draw it! Consider what tools and other resources you have at your disposal to realize your drawing and then create it. Ask for feedback from others to learn whether your visual is serving its intended purpose or give you pointers on where to iterate.

STEP 2: CHOOSE an APPROPRIATE VISUAL

STEP 3: ELIMINATE CLUTTER

Is there anything that isn't adding value? Identify unnecessary elements and remove them. Reduce cognitive burden by connecting related things, maintaining white space, cleanly aligning elements, and avoiding diagonal components. Use visual contrast sparingly and strategically: don't let your message get lost in the clutter!

Where do you want your audience to look? Determine how you can draw your audience's attention to what you want them to see through position, size, and color. Use color sparingly and strategically, considering tone, brand, and colorblindness. Employ the "Where are your eyes drawn?" test to understand whether you're using preattentive attributes effectively.

STEP 4: DRAW ATTENTION

STEP 5: THINK LIKE a DESIGNER

Words help data make sense. Clearly title and label graphs and axes and employ a takeaway title to answer the question, "So what?" Create visual hierarchy of elements to ease the processing and make it clear how to interact with your visual communications. Pay attention to details: don't let minor issues distract from your credibility of message. Make your visual designs accessible. Spend time on the finer details of your design: your audience will appreciate it, heightening the odds for successful communication.

Refer back to your Big Idea: create a pithy, repeatable phrase from it. Revisit your storyboard and arrange the components of your story along the narrative arc. What is the tension? How can your audience act to resolve it? Where and how does data fit into the narrative? How will your materials for a live presentation vary from those that are sent out to be consumed on their own? Create a data story that captures your audience's attention, drives a robust discussion, and influences action!

STEP 6: TELL a STORY