



# Practical AI

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# Disclaimer

We will focus on **structured data**.

Unstructured data, like text, images and videos, are usually handled by specialised models.

We will discuss them in future lectures.



The background features a large, irregularly shaped central circle filled with a dark green-to-purple gradient. This circle is surrounded by a white, textured border that resembles a splash or a torn paper effect. Small, scattered colored dots (green, blue, purple) are visible around the perimeter.

# Data Exploration



# The Grammar of Datasets

**Variable:** a property that can be measured.

**Value:** the state of a variable when the measurement happens.

**Observation** (or sample or data point): the set of values of several variables measured in similar conditions.

**Dataset:** a set of observations about a process.



# A Dataset

Diagram illustrating a dataset structure:

- Observation** points to the second row of the table.
- Variable** points to the **price** column.
- Value** points to the **ideal** entry in the **cut** column of the second row.

| ID | price | carat | cut   | clarity |
|----|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| 1  | 5000  | 2.32  | ideal | SI1     |
| 2  | 3242  | 1.32  | fair  | SI2     |
| 3  | 1098  | 0.53  | good  | VS2     |
| 4  | 3624  | 1.45  | fair  | VS1     |
| 5  | 863   | 0.48  | ideal | SI1     |



# Samples in a Dataset

In most datasets, samples are generally assumed to be **independent**, although this is **rarely entirely true** in real-world scenarios. Consequently, the order of the samples does not typically matter.

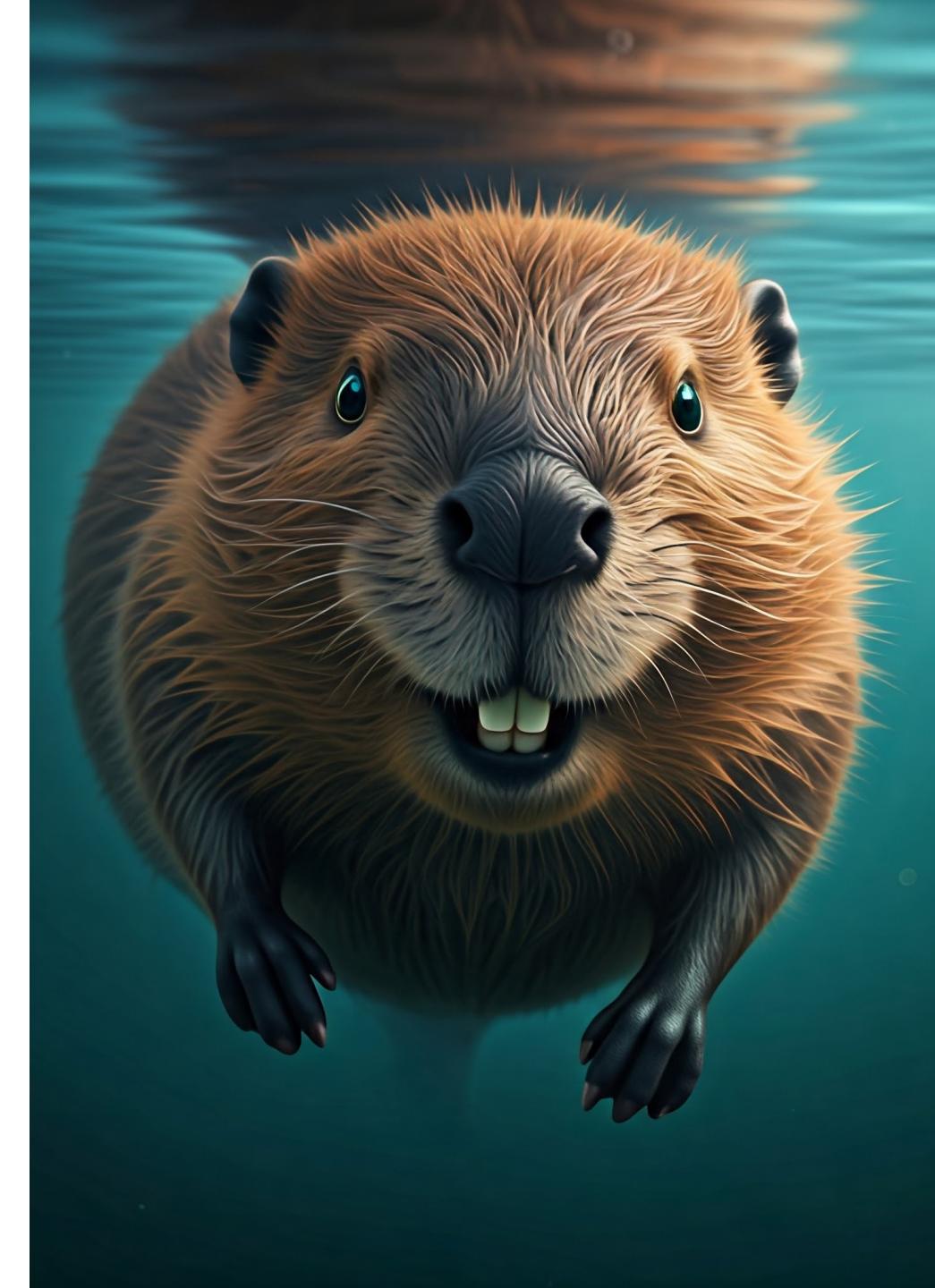
When the order of the samples is important and each sample is associated with a timestamp, the data constitutes a **time series**.

Time series will not be discussed in detail in this class.

# Time Series

Time series are both fascinating and important for businesses.

If you're interested in learning more, a great book to start with is [Forecasting: Principles and Practice](#) (3rd ed) by Rob J. Hyndman and George Athanasopoulos.





# Types of Variables

**Nominal (Categorical)**: categorical data with no natural ordering (e.g. hair colour).

Operations:  $=, \neq$

**Ordinal (Categorical)**: categorical data with a natural ordering (e.g. grades).

Operations:  $=, \neq, >, <$

**Interval (Numerical)**: numerical data with an arbitrary position of zero (e.g. Celsius degrees).

Operations:  $=, \neq, >, <, -$

**Ratio (Numerical)**: numerical data with a meaningful zero (e.g. Kelvin).

Operations:  $=, \neq, >, <, -, \div$

# Discussion

You have a dataset,  
like the one shown in  
the previous slide.

What would you do?





# You Have a Dataset. Now What?

1. **Look** at the data.
2. **Understand** what each variable means.
3. Look for **missing data** / unreasonable values.
4. Perform **univariate** analysis – look at each variable alone with statistics and charts.
5. Perform **multivariate** analysis – look at the interaction between variables with statistics and charts.
6. Understand how to **handle missing data** and outliers.
7. Document and **report** your findings – or you will forget and regret it.



# Data Exploration vs Presentation

**Data Exploration:** you search for insights to understand the process you are analysing.



**Data Presentation:** you want to prove a point to your audience.





# Why Data Exploration?

People are very good at **detecting patterns**.

Data exploration alone can **solve most problem statements**, saving the time, effort, and resources to build and maintain expensive models.

Even when a model must be built, insights from data exploration can suggest:

- Which variables to include
- How to transform variables
- Which aspect to investigate with subject matter experts



# Summary Statistics

The most common summary statistics for nominal and ordinal variables are:

- **Mode:** the most frequently occurring category
- **Gini Index:**  $G = 1 - \sum_i f_i^2$ , where  $f_i$  is defined below. The Gini index reaches its minimum value when all frequencies are identical, indicating maximum homogeneity. Conversely, it equals 1 when one category has a frequency of 1, while all others are 0.

The most informative computation we can perform is determining the **distribution**, specifically the frequency  $f_i$  of each category  $i$ .

Yet, the distribution is not a scalar.



# Summary Statistics

The most common summary statistics for **interval and ratio** variables are:

- **Mean:**  $\bar{x} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N x_i$  the arithmetic average of the data values.
- **Median:** the middle value when the data is sorted in order. It is less sensitive to outliers than the mean.
- **Standard Deviation:**  $\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N (x_i - \bar{x})^2}$ , the square root of the variance. It provides a measure of spread in the same units as the data.
- **Quantiles:** values below which a certain fraction of data falls (e.g., 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75)

Again, the most informative quantity is the full distribution of the data.

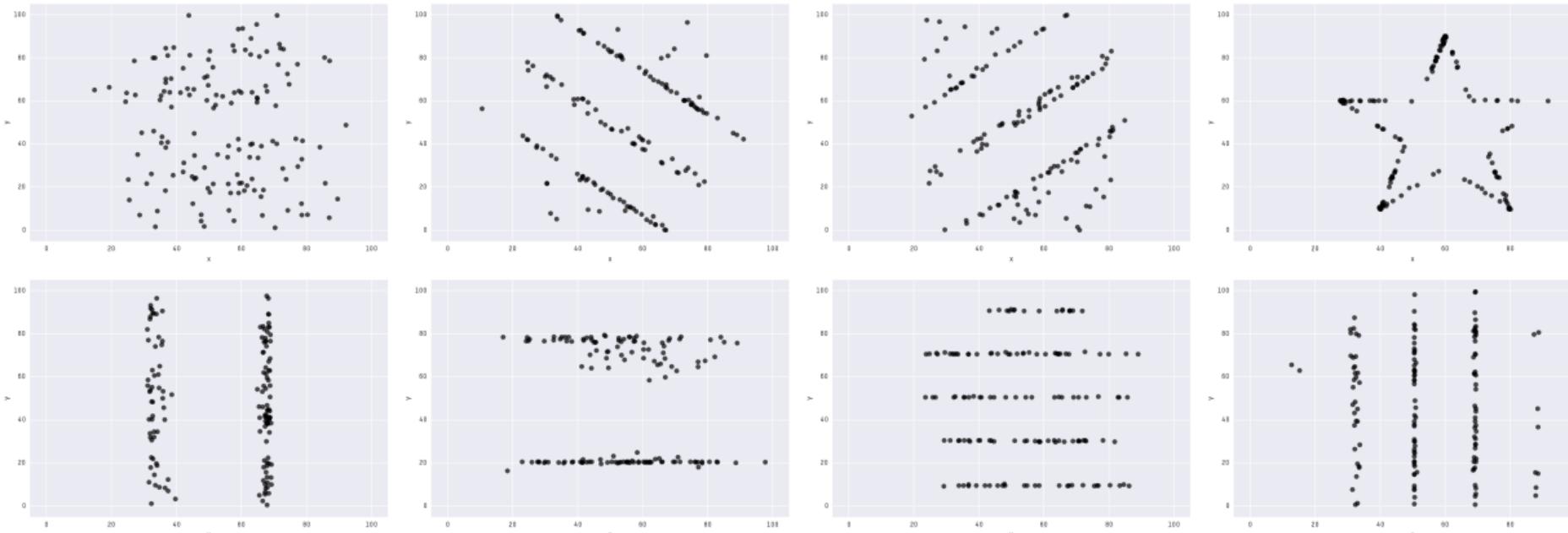




# Should You Trust Stats?



X Mean: 54.26  
Y Mean: 47.83  
X SD : 16.76  
Y SD : 26.93  
Corr. : -0.06





# Summary Stats

# Plots



# Data Visualization

Data Visualization is a critical skill in Data Science and Machine Learning.  
Arguably, it is becoming a critical skill for every professional.

However, data visualization is not easy.

It is highly recommended to read these articles:

- S. Leo, [Mistakes, we've drawn a few](#)
- E. Fabbiani, [The traps of data visualization](#)
- C. O. Wilke, [Fundamentals of data visualization \[chap. 1\]](#)

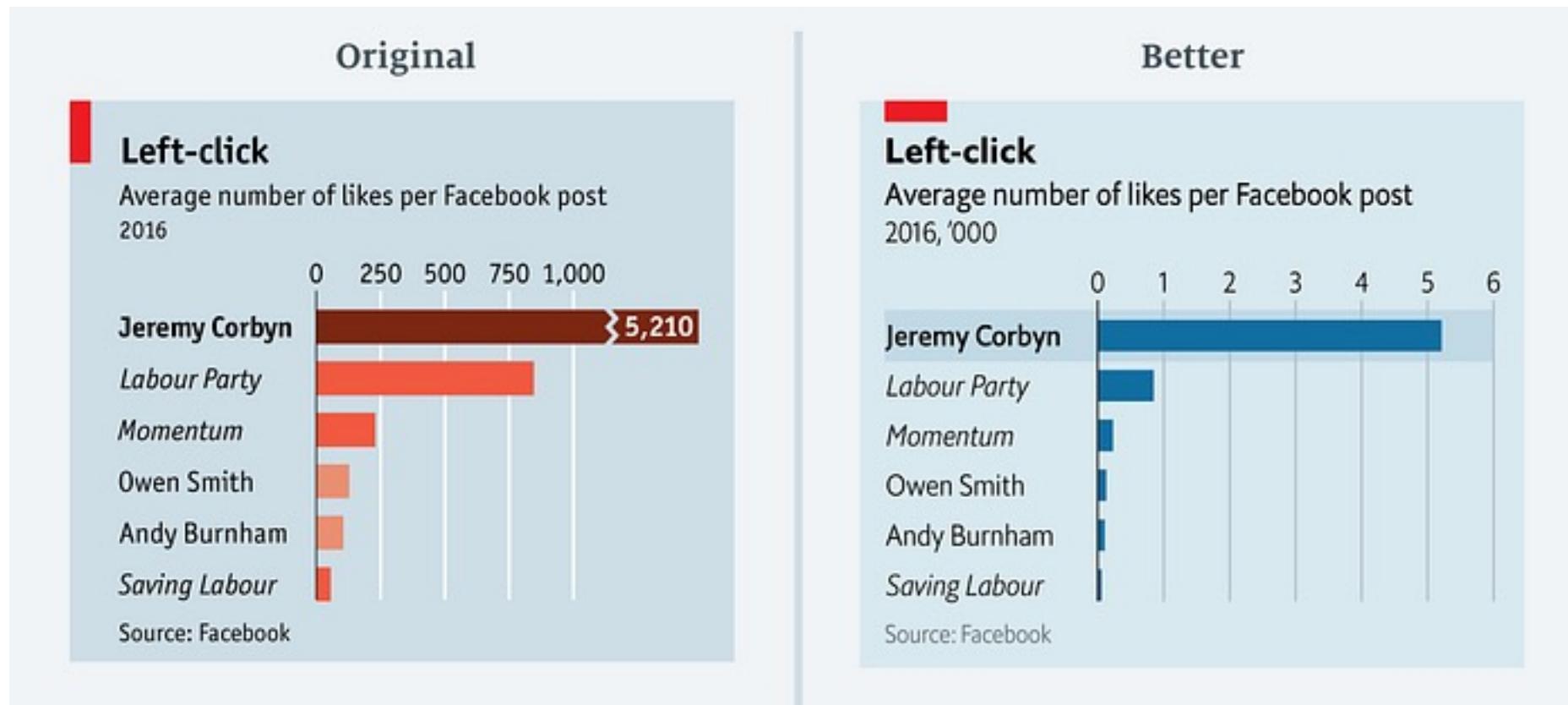
# Discussion

Let's discuss and  
criticise some  
visualizations!



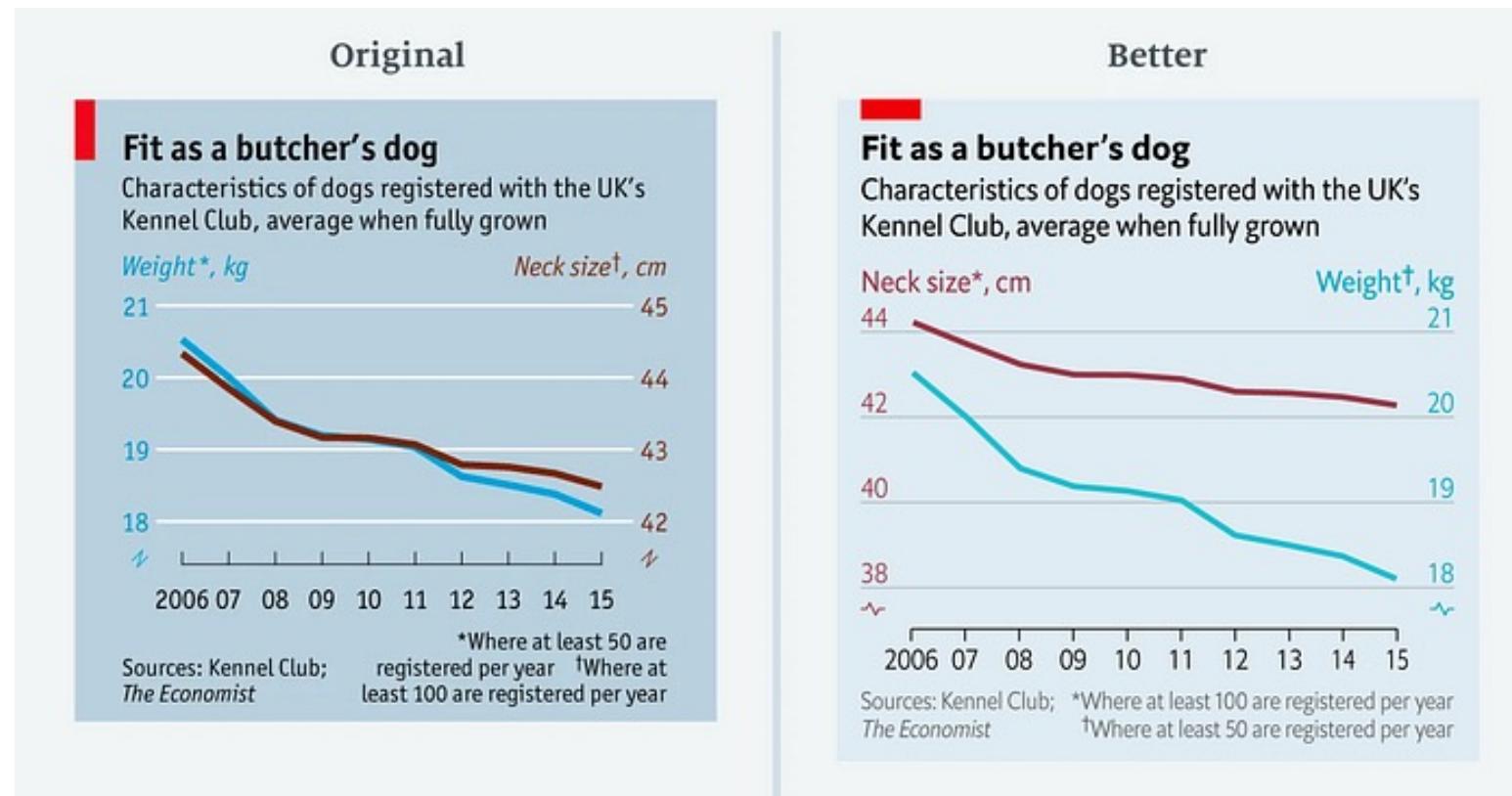


# From Sarah Leo, The Economist



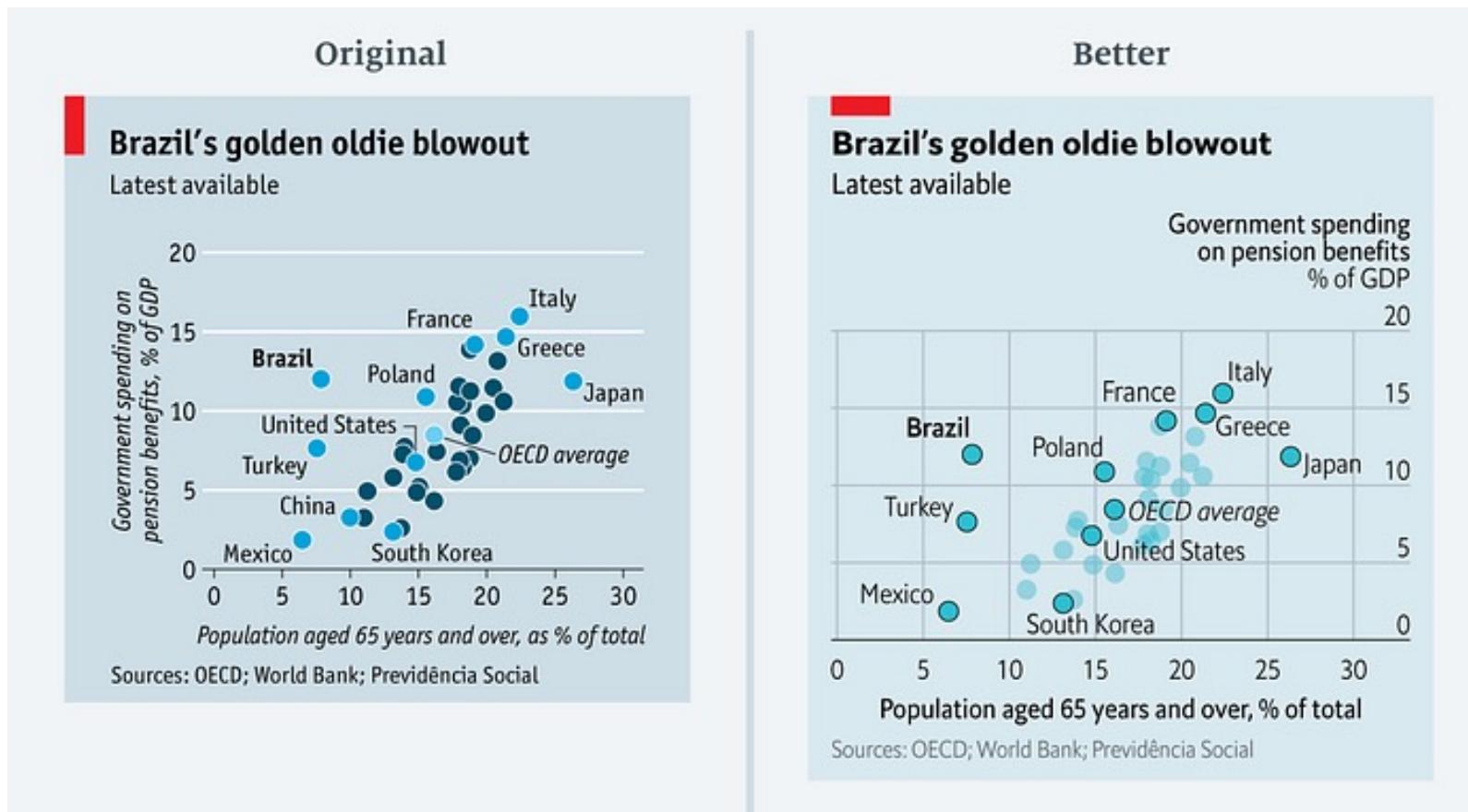


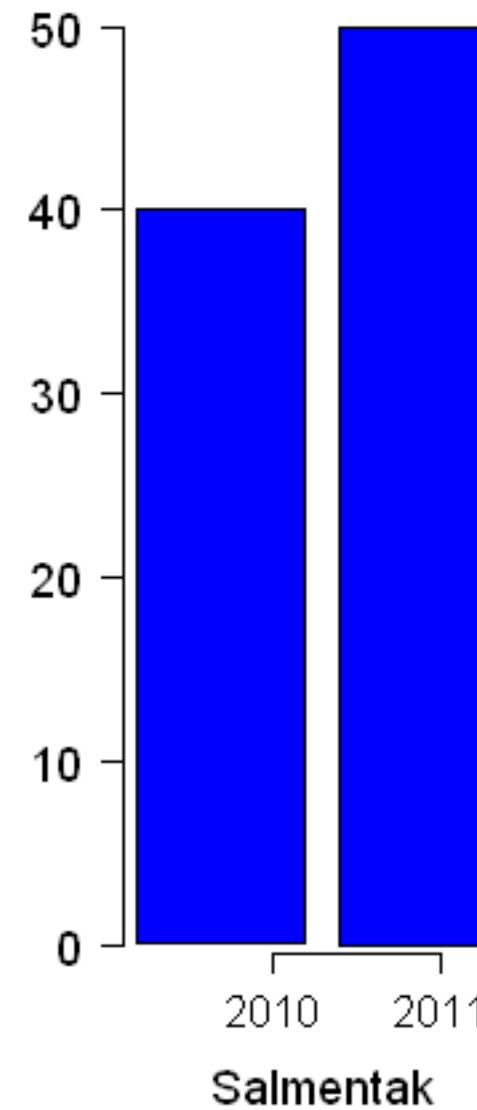
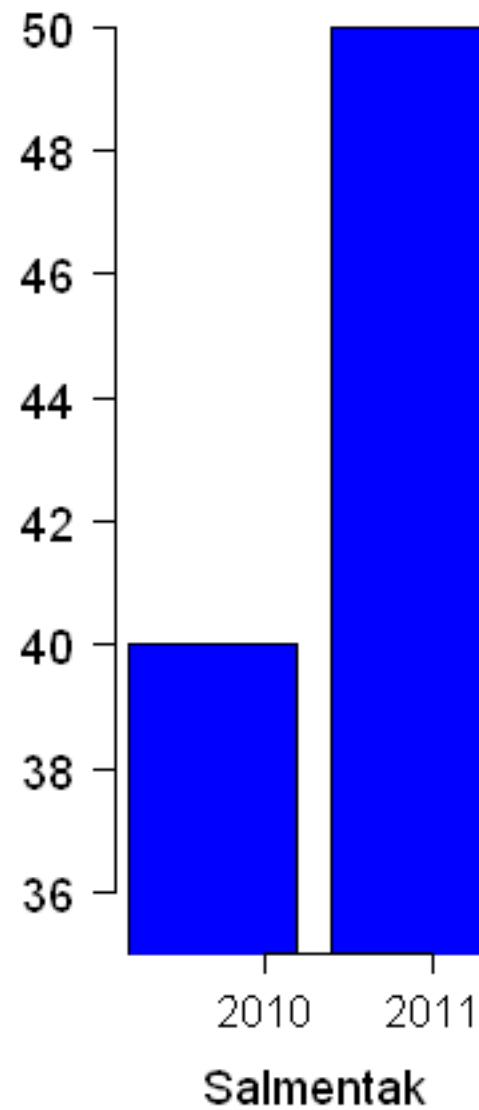
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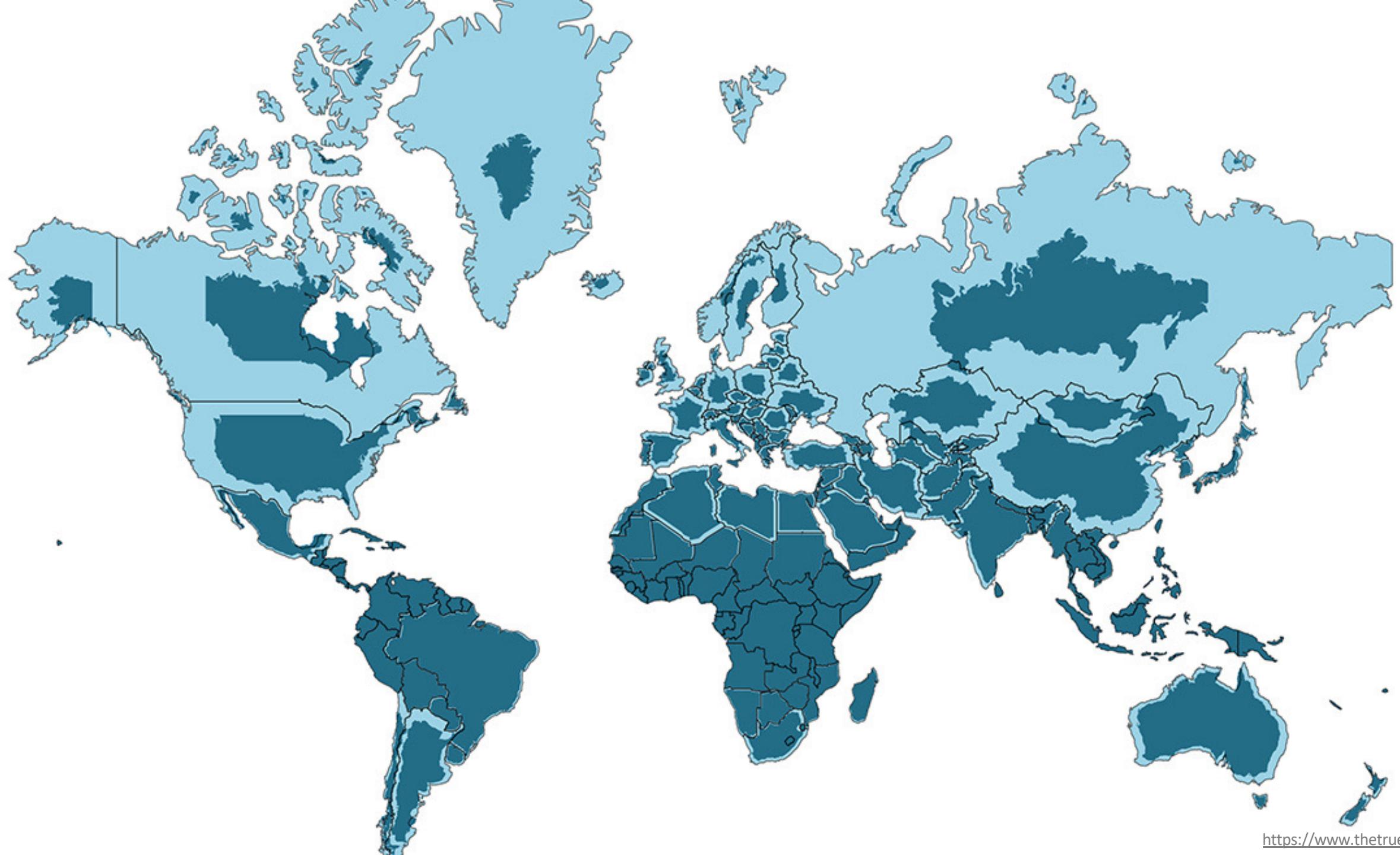




# From Sarah Leo, The Economist









# What is Data Visualization?

Data visualization is the **graphical representation** of information and data.

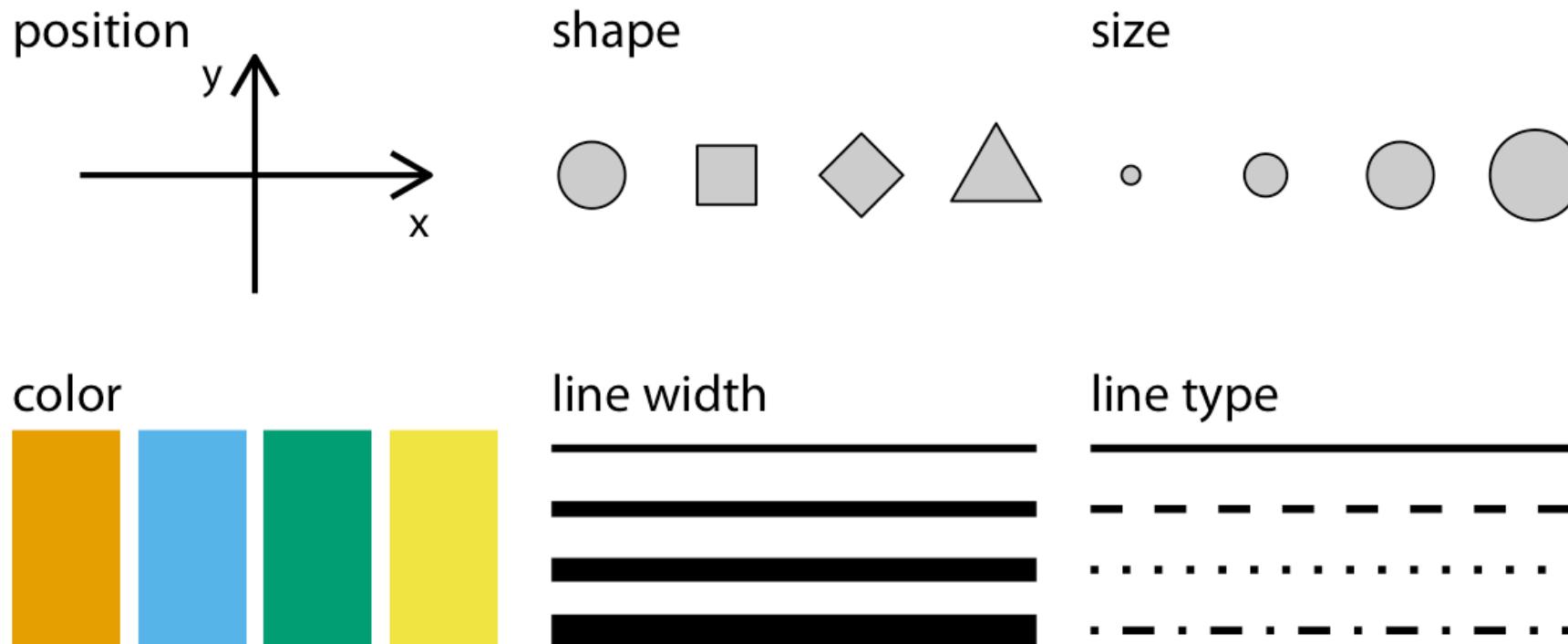
By using visual elements like charts, graphs, and maps, data visualization tools provide an accessible way to see and understand trends, outliers, and patterns in data.

Additionally, it provides an excellent way for employees or managers to present data to non-technical audiences without confusion.



# What is Data Visualization?

All data visualizations map data values into quantifiable features of the resulting graphic. We refer to these features as **aesthetics**.





# Mapping Numerical Variables

1. Position



2. Length



3. Angle/Slope



4. Area



5. Volume



6. Colour/Density





# Mapping Numerical Variables

1. Position



2. Length



3. Angle/Slope



4. Area



5. Volume



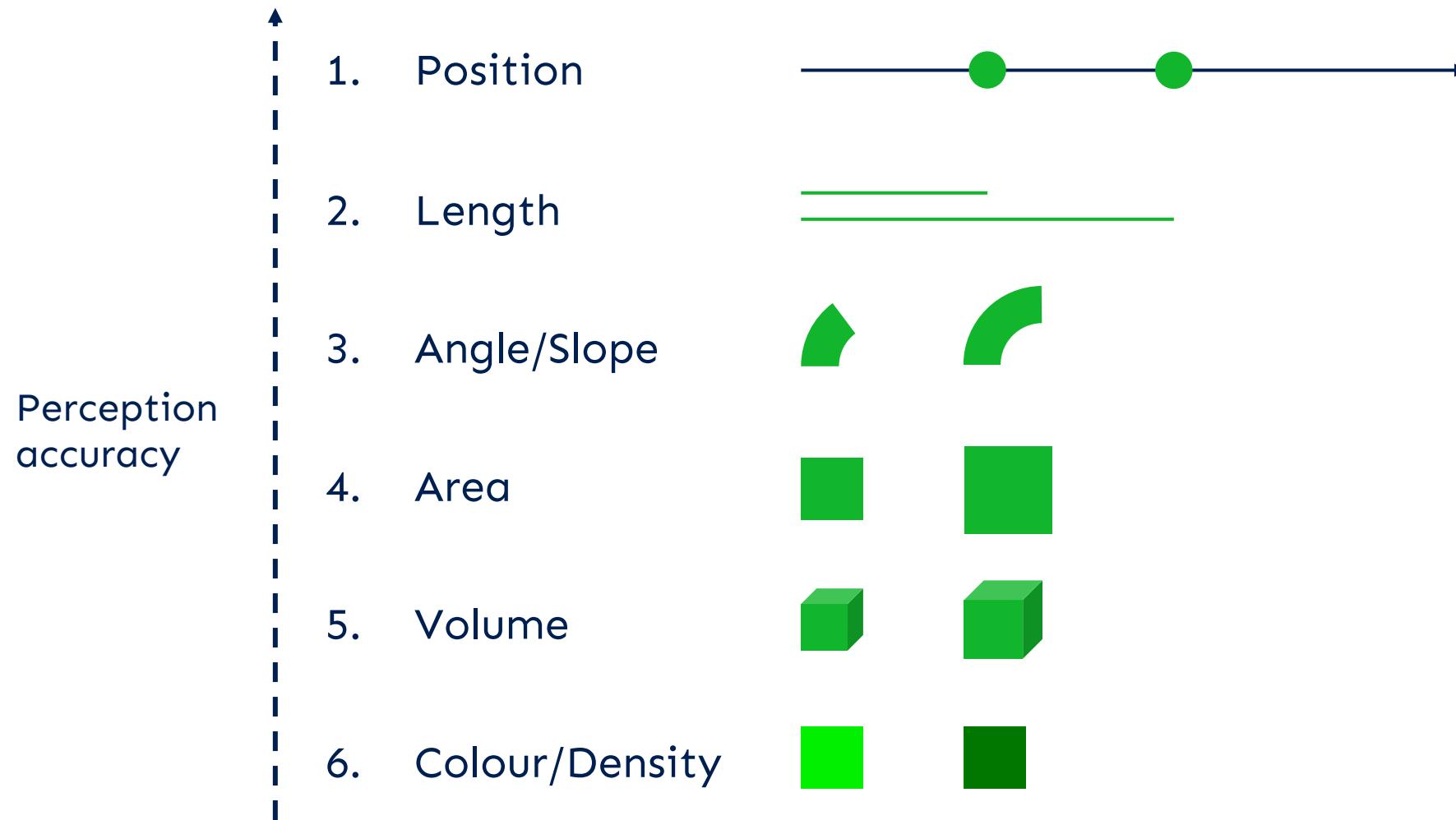
6. Colour/Density



In all the examples, the ratio is 2:1.  
What is the **easiest** representation to understand?



# Mapping Numerical Variables





# Mapping Variables

| Perception accuracy | Quantitative | Ordinal     | Nominal     |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1                   | Position     | Position    | Position    |
| 2                   | Length       | Density     | Hue         |
| 3                   | Angle        | Saturation  | Texture     |
| 4                   | Slope        | Hue         | Connection  |
| 5                   | Area         | Texture     | Containment |
| 6                   | Volume       | Connection  | Density     |
| 7                   | Saturation   | Containment | Saturation  |
| 8                   | Hue          | Length      | Shape       |
| 9                   |              | Angle       | Length      |
| 10                  |              | Slope       | Angle       |
| 11                  |              | Area        | Slope       |
| 12                  |              | Volume      | Area        |
| 13                  |              |             | Volume      |



# Mapping Variables

| Perception accuracy | Quantitative | Ordinal     | Nominal     |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1                   | Position     | Position    | Position    |
| 2                   | Length       | Density     | Hue         |
| 3                   | Angle        | Saturation  | Texture     |
| 4                   | Slope        | Hue         | Connection  |
| 5                   | Area         | Texture     | Containment |
| 6                   | Volume       | Connection  | Density     |
| 7                   | Saturation   | Containment | Saturation  |
| 8                   | Hue          | Length      | Shape       |
| 9                   |              | Angle       | Length      |
| 10                  |              | Slope       | Angle       |
| 11                  |              | Area        | Slope       |
| 12                  |              | Volume      | Area        |
| 13                  |              |             | Volume      |



# Plotting 1D Data

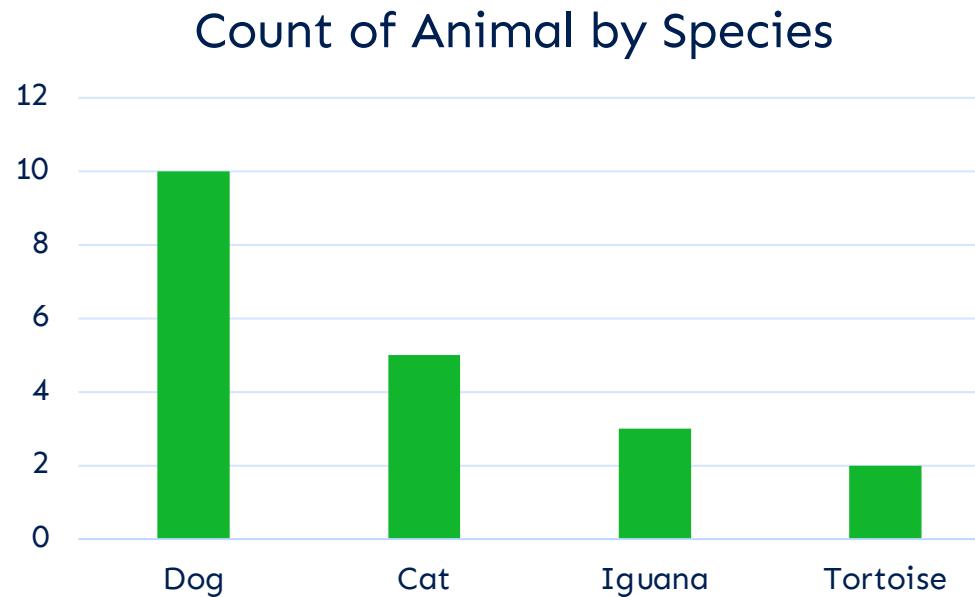
With one-dimensional data (single variables), the **distribution** is the most informative visualization.

For categorical data, the distribution represents the count or proportion of samples in each category.

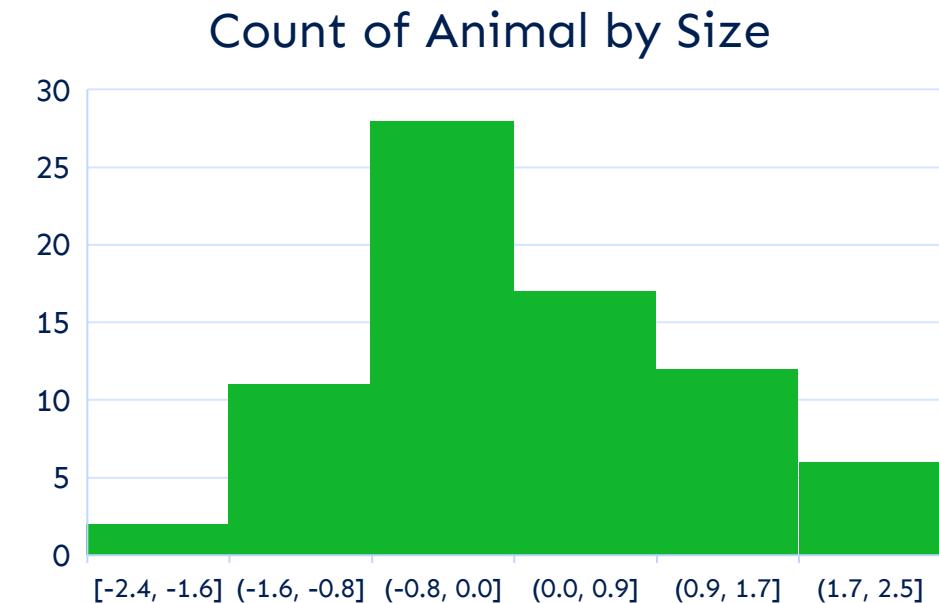
For numerical data, the distribution represents the count or proportion of samples within specific intervals.



# Bar Charts and Histograms



Bar chart for categorical variables. Uses both length and position as aesthetics.



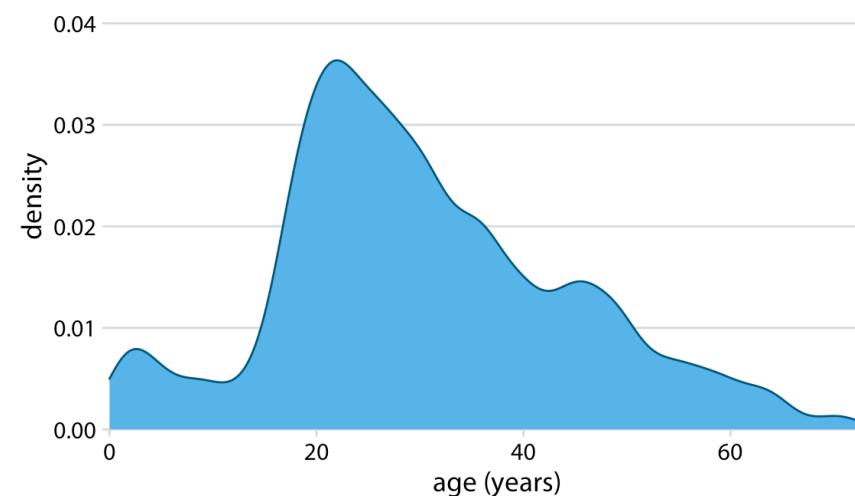
Histogram for numerical variables. Uses both length and position as aesthetics.



# Area Charts and KDE

You can use **area charts** with Kernel Density Estimation for 1D numerical data.

They use the same aesthetics and convey the same information as histograms and are as effective as histograms.

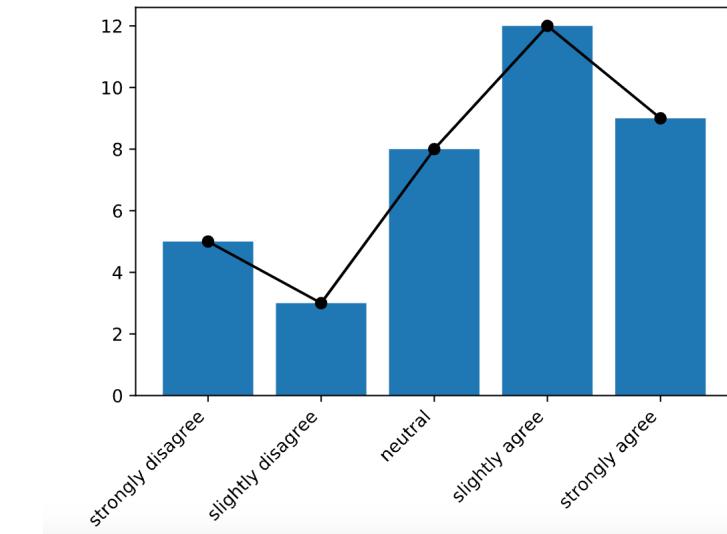
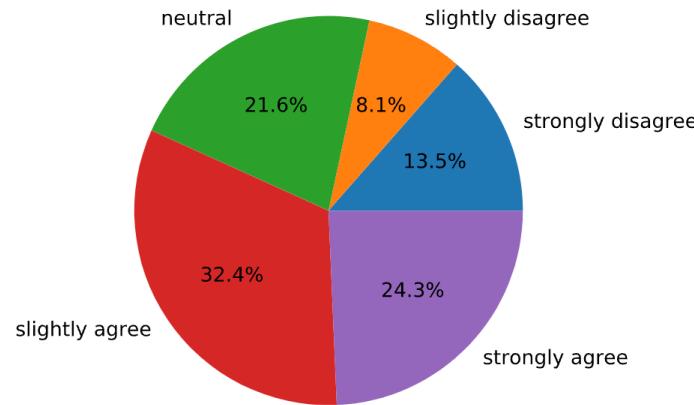


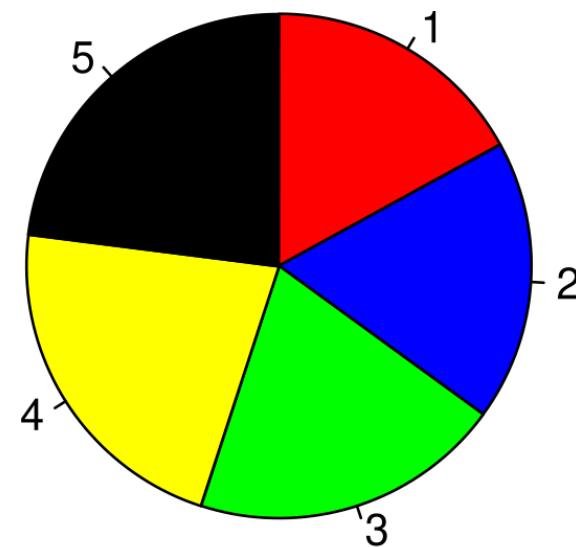
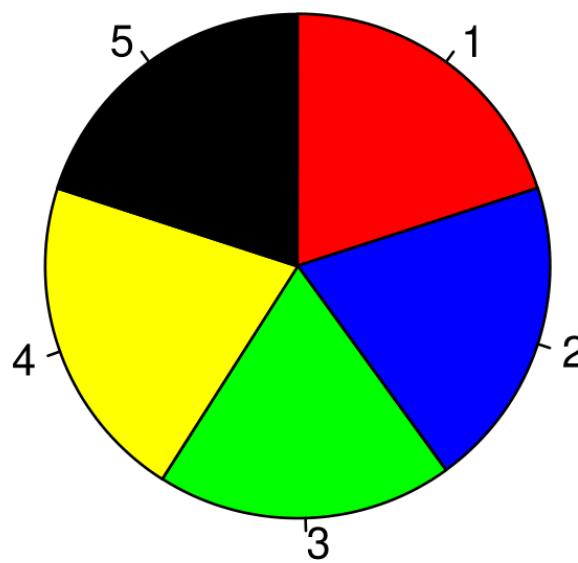
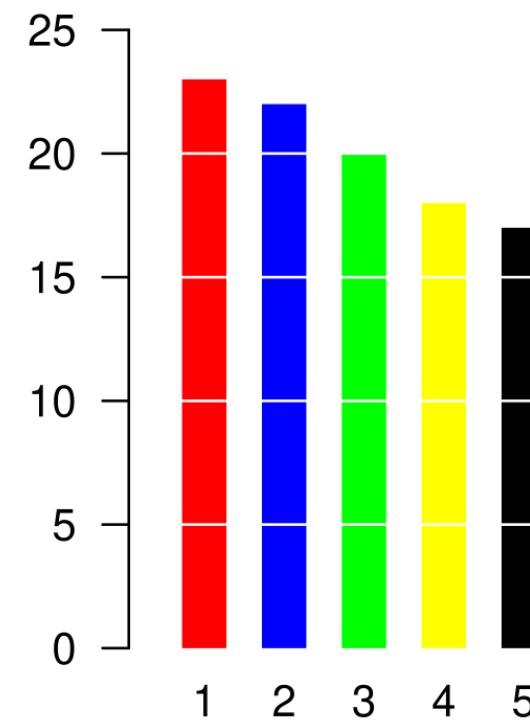
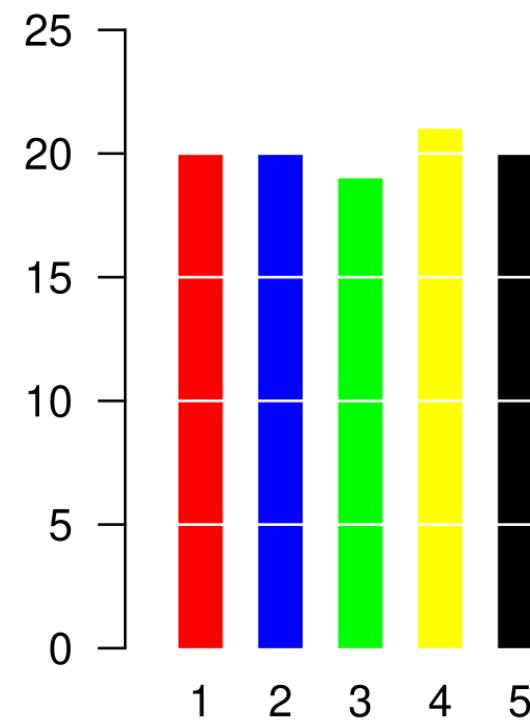
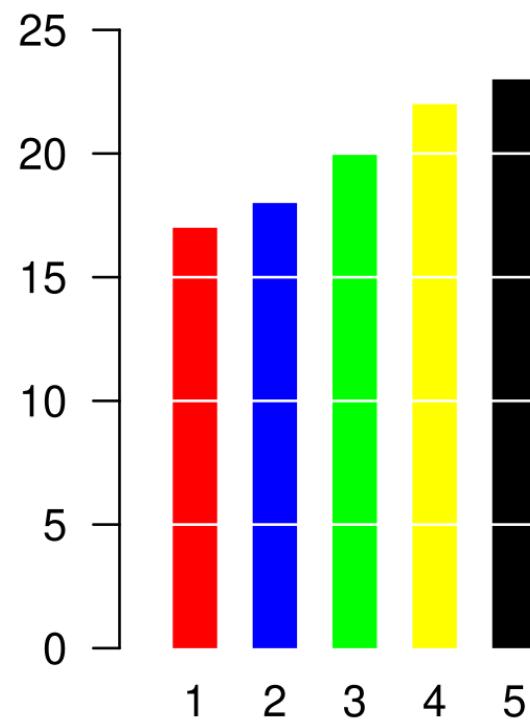
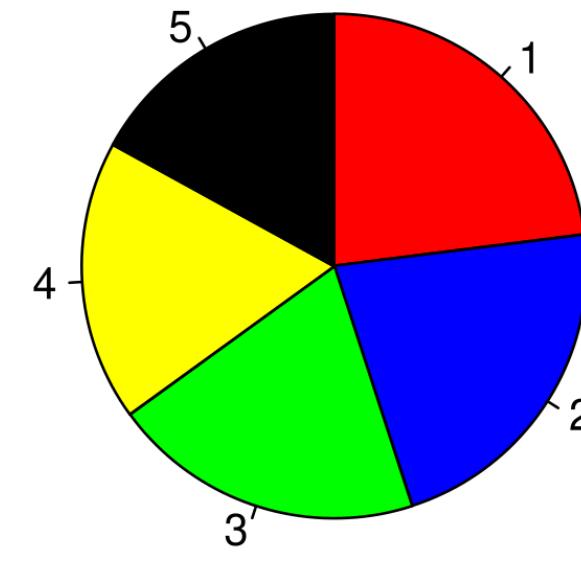


# Do not...

**Use pie charts.** They are always worse than bar charts in conveying the same information.

**Add lines** on top of histograms or bar charts. They are useless at best, when not plain misleading.



**A****B****C**



# Plotting 2D Data

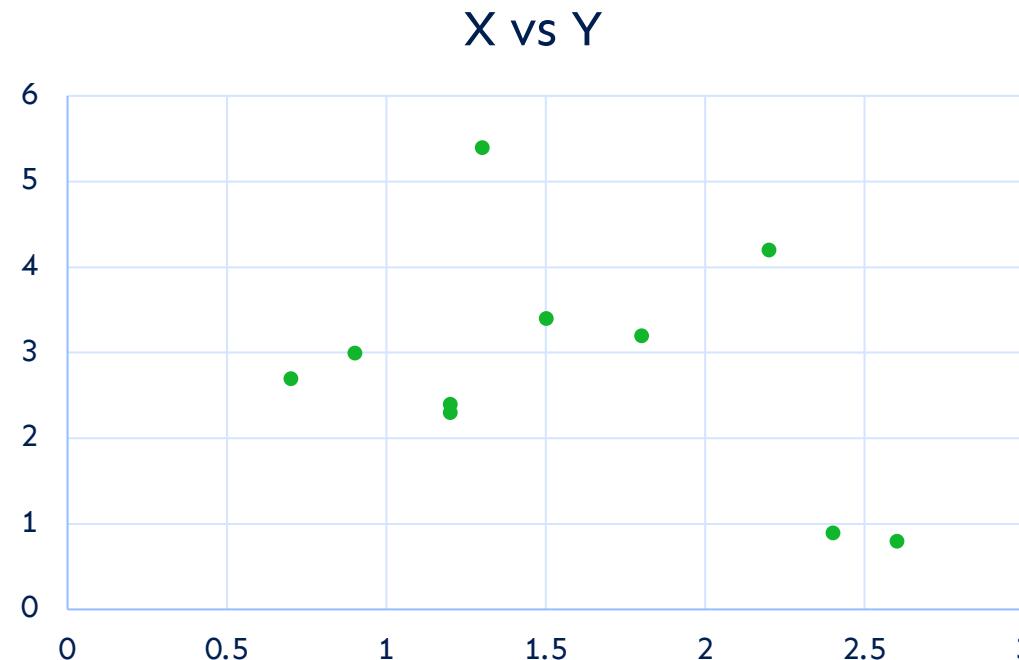
With two-dimensional data, various plots are available, depending on the types of variables:

- **Numerical vs. Numerical:** To visualize joint distributions, a scatter plot is typically the best choice.
- **Numerical or Ordinal vs. Date:** To show trends over time, a line or area chart is ideal.
- **Numerical vs. Categorical:** To examine the distribution of the numerical variable conditioned on the categorical variable, use a box plot or violin plot.
- **Categorical vs. Categorical:** To visualize the joint distribution, a heatmap is most effective.



# Scatter Plots

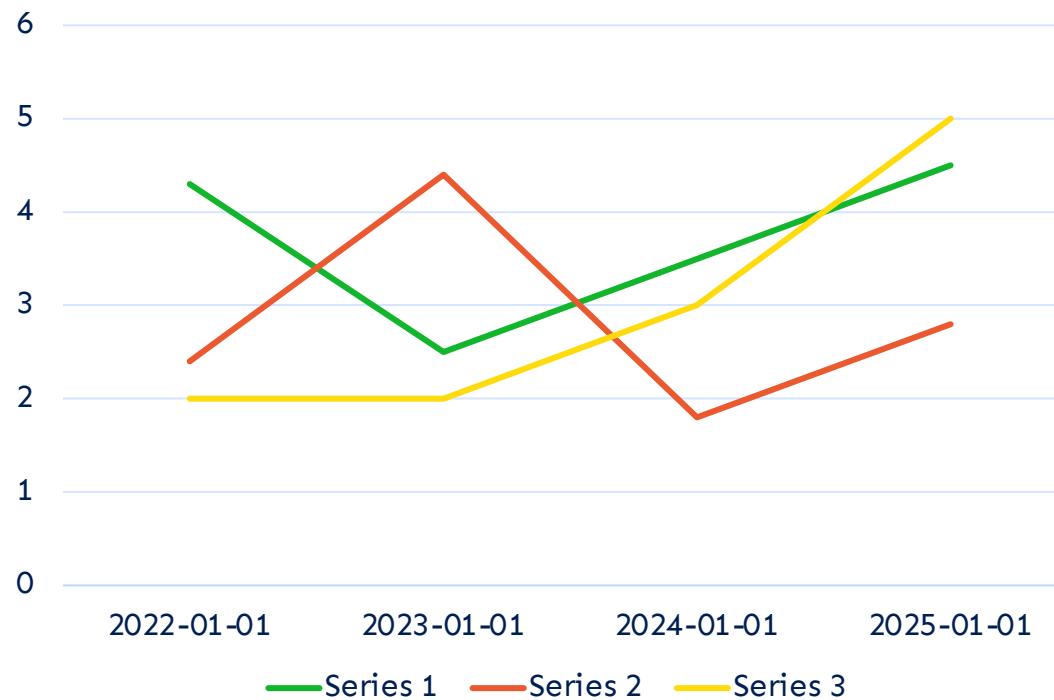
Scatter plots use position as the aesthetic for both variables. They are highly effective for exploring **joint patterns** and can incorporate **additional aesthetics**, such as colour, to represent more variables, including categorical ones.





# Line Charts

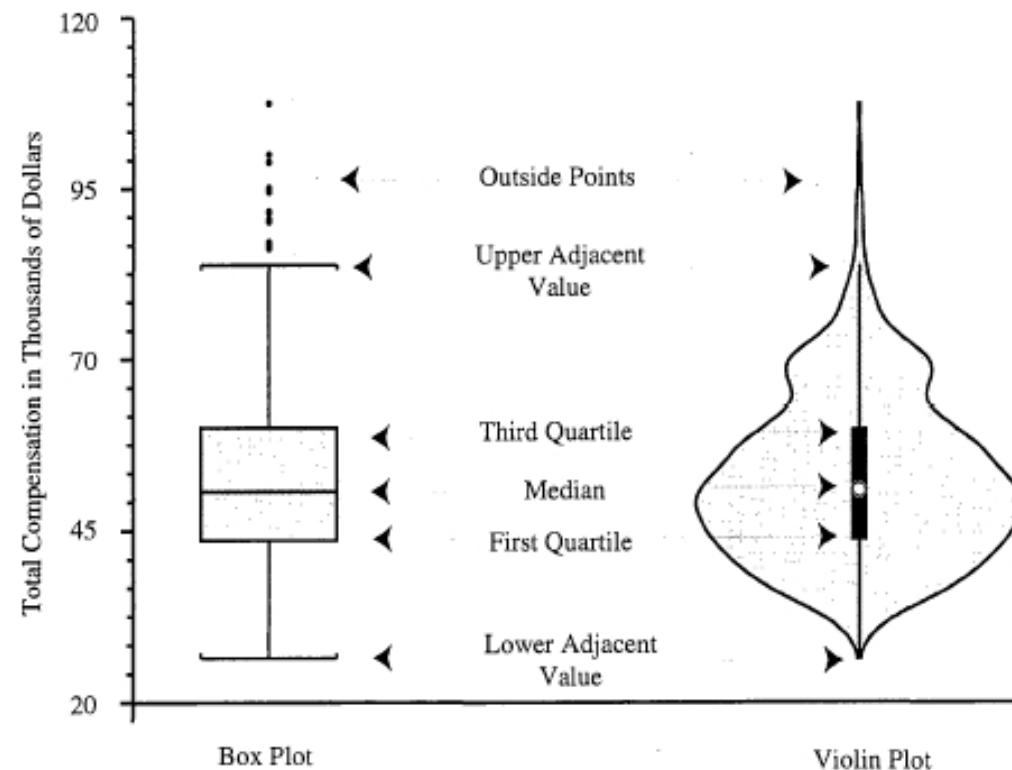
Line charts should only be used when a variable represents **dates or another sequence**. An additional categorical variable can be included using colour or line type.





# Box and Violin Plots

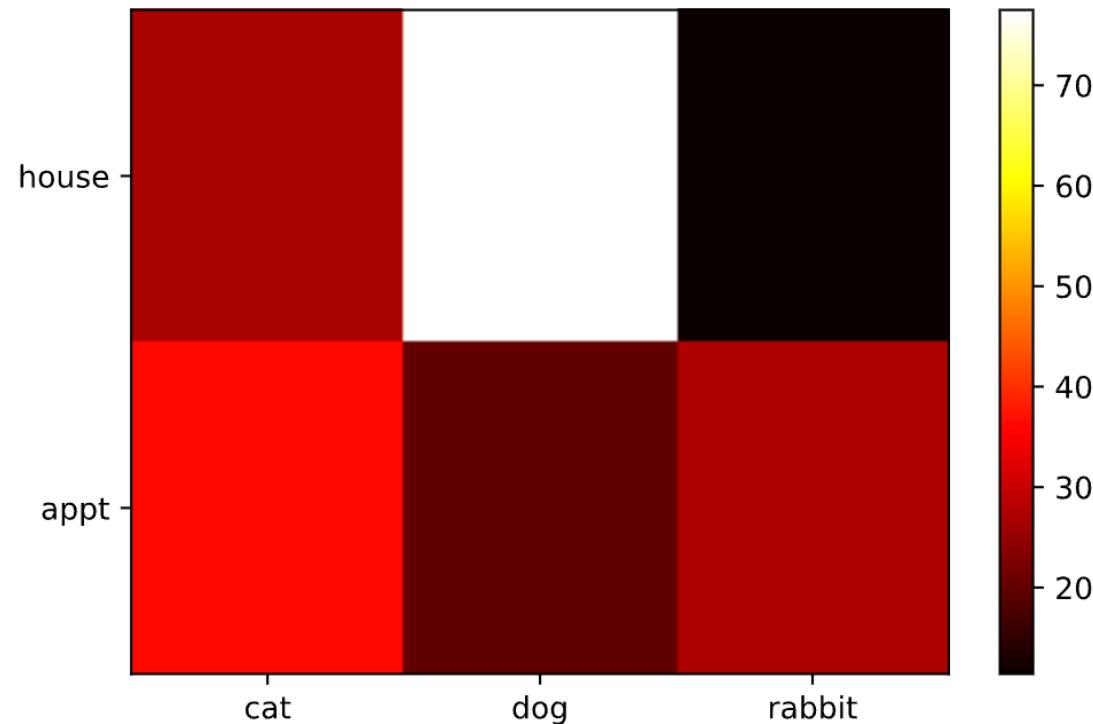
Both box plots and violin plots depict the distribution of a numeric variable across categories of a categorical variable. However, **violin plots are typically more informative** as they display the full distribution.





# Heatmaps

Heatmaps display the **joint distribution** of two categorical variables, using colour to represent the count or frequency of each category pair. Colour is utilized because the position is already assigned to the variables.



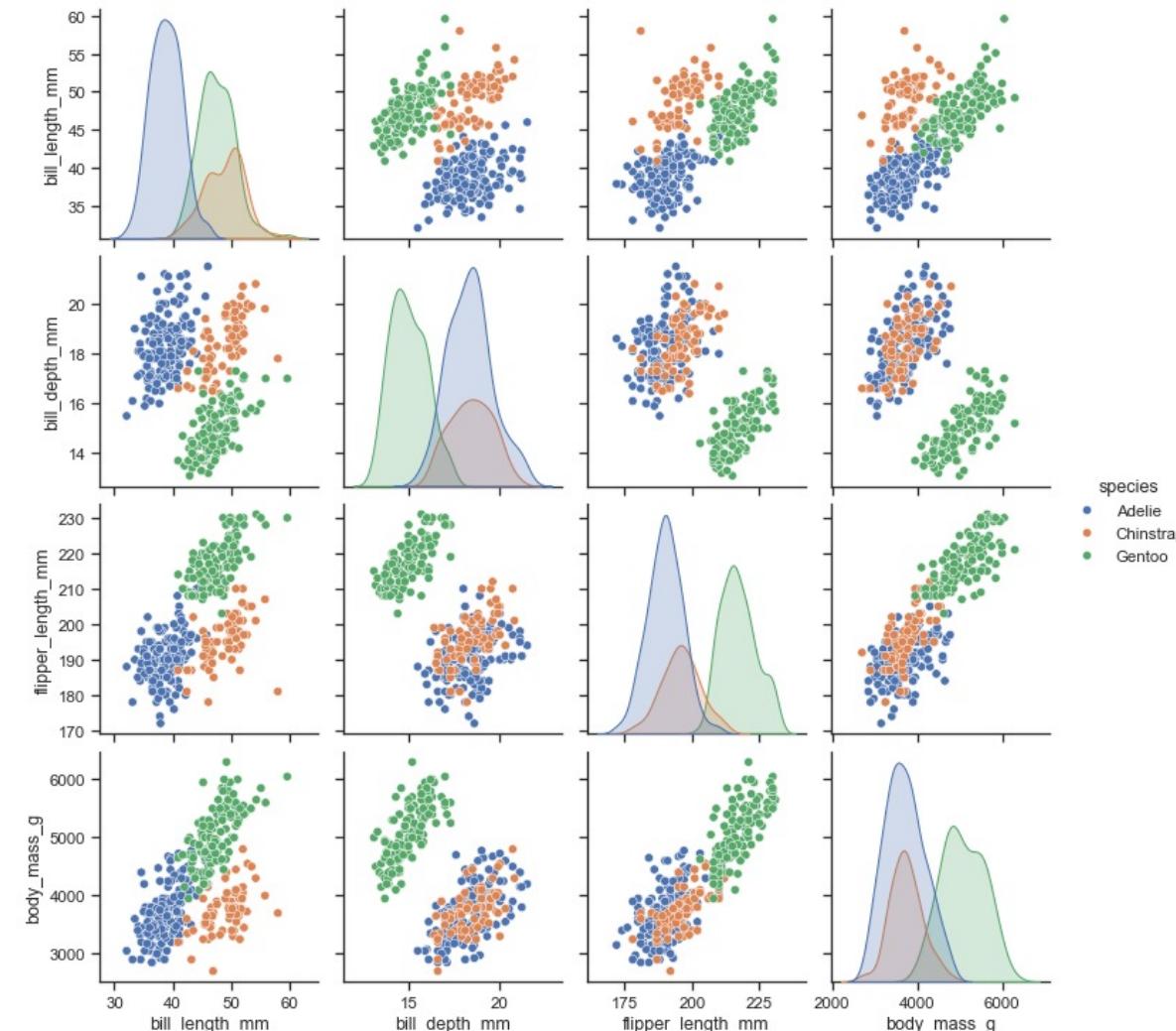


# Plotting Higher-Dimensional Data

3D scatter plots, line charts, and surfaces are often difficult to interpret and **should be avoided**.

Additional variables can be incorporated into 2D charts using colour or **other visual aesthetics**.

Alternatively, multiple charts can be created and arranged spatially, such as with scatterplot matrices.



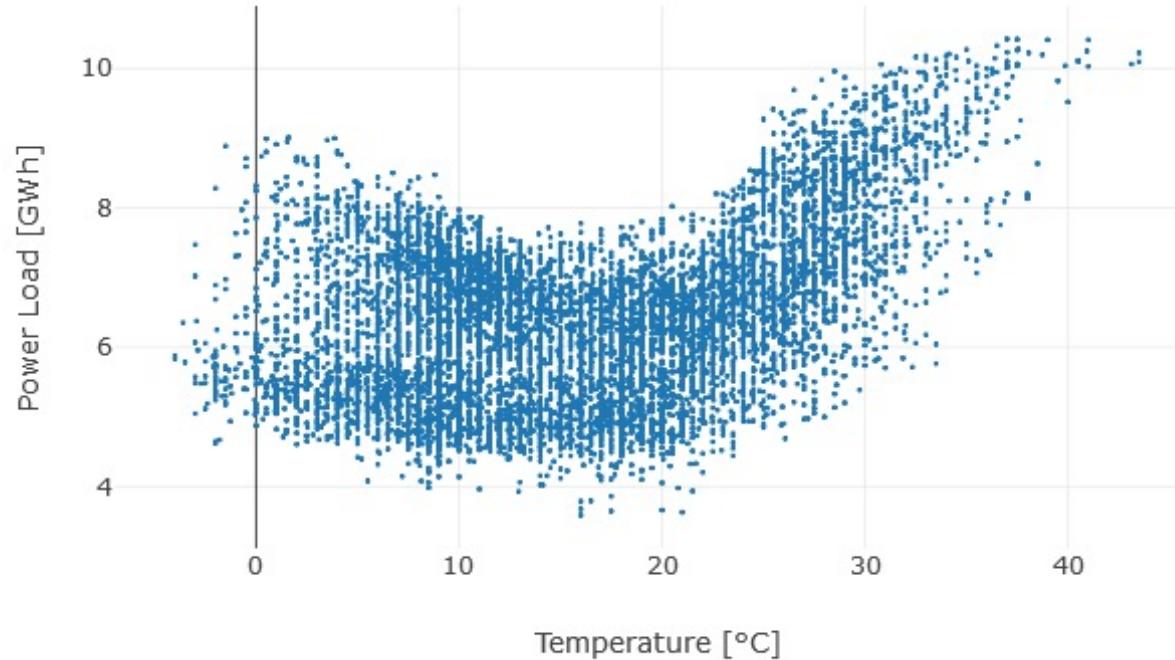
# Discussion

Let's draw some insights from a chart!





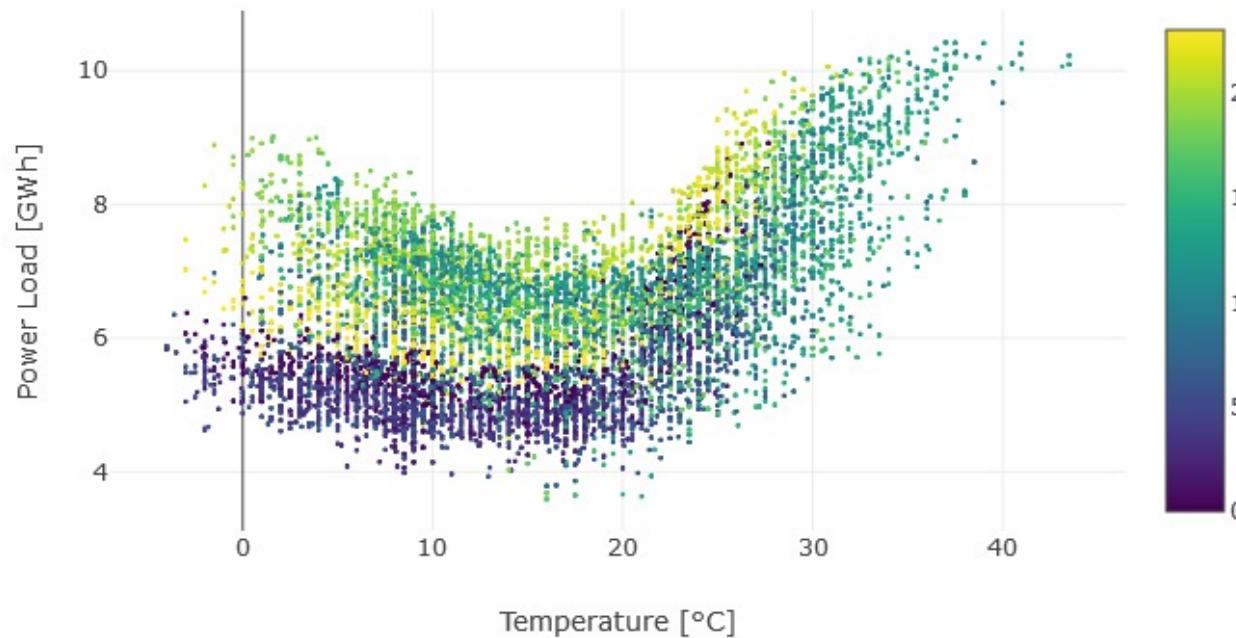
# Power Load vs Temperature



Hourly power load in Greece vs average temperature.



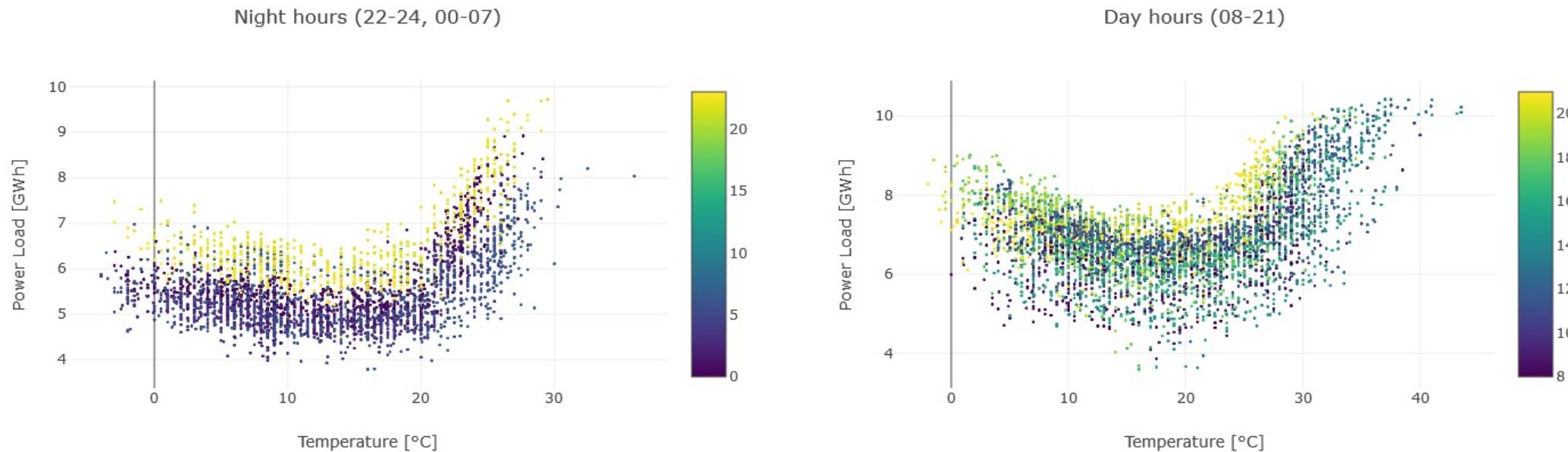
# Power Load vs Temperature



Power load in Greece vs average temperature – the colour represents the hour of the day.



# Power Load vs Temperature



Power load in Greece vs average temperature – the colour represents the hour of the day.

# Data Cleaning



**Tidy datasets are all alike,  
but every messy dataset is  
messy in its own way.**

Hadley Wickham



# Issues to Address

- Bad formatting
- Multiple variables in a single column
- Duplicated values
- Unrealistic values
- Wrong strings for categorical variables
- Outliers
- Missing values (and their placeholders)



# Bad Formatting

Managing multiple tables in an Excel workbook can be challenging, as most libraries are designed to read only one table per sheet.

## Solution

To simplify this process, consider reformatting the workbook to ensure each sheet contains only one table.

Alternatively, you can just avoid Excel altogether.

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet titled "Data\_Extracts\_MARA\_Table (1).xlsx - Read-Only". The spreadsheet contains two distinct tables. The first table, located in rows 1 through 13, has columns labeled A through T. It includes a header row with "Total Rowcount" and "Filled Value Filled %", and data rows for various fields like MATNR, ERSDA, LVORM, PSTAT, MTART, MATKL, MEINS, CUOBF, MFRNR, MFRPN, and BMATN. The second table, located in rows 14 through 22, also has columns A through T and includes data rows for fields like MVAL, SPAR, SEST, CONS, ZSTR, ZSTD, and others. The Excel ribbon at the top shows the "Home" tab selected, and the status bar at the bottom indicates "Ready".

|    | A              | B                     | C        | D | E | F     | G     | H        | I          | J | K     | L     | M        | N          | O     | P     | Q        | R          | S | T |
|----|----------------|-----------------------|----------|---|---|-------|-------|----------|------------|---|-------|-------|----------|------------|-------|-------|----------|------------|---|---|
| 1  | Total Rowcount | 87507                 |          |   |   | FIELD | Label | GroupCou | Percentage |   | FIELD | Label | GroupCou | Percentage | FIELD | Label | GroupCou | Percentage |   |   |
| 2  | FIELDS         | Filled Value Filled % |          |   |   | MTART | MVAL  | 1716     | 1.96       |   | MATKL | 001   | 4        | 0.00       | MEINS | LB    | 56       | 0.06       |   |   |
| 3  | MATNR          | 87507                 | 100      |   |   | MTART | SPAR  | 38586    | 44.09      |   | MATKL | 0045  | 5        | 0.01       | MEINS | EA    | 45176    | 51.63      |   |   |
| 4  | ERSDA          | 87507                 | 100      |   |   | MTART | SEST  | 13696    | 15.65      |   | MATKL | 010   | 6        | 0.01       | MEINS | DR    | 239      | 0.27       |   |   |
| 5  | LVORM          | 18775                 | 21.45543 |   |   | MTART | CONS  | 1443     | 1.65       |   | MATKL | 003   | 4        | 0.00       | MEINS | IBC   | 19       | 0.02       |   |   |
| 6  | PSTAT          | 87507                 | 100      |   |   | MTART | ZSTR  | 16529    | 18.89      |   | MATKL | 311   | 9        | 0.01       | MEINS | LOT   | 254      | 0.29       |   |   |
| 7  | MTART          | 87507                 | 100      |   |   | MTART | ZSTD  | 15537    | 17.76      |   | MATKL | 002   | 1        | 0.00       | MEINS | FT    | 1040     | 1.19       |   |   |
| 8  | MATKL          | 86623                 | 98.9898  |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 349   | 16       | 0.02       | MEINS | KI    | 1        | 0.00       |   |   |
| 9  | MEINS          | 87507                 | 100      |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 313   | 21       | 0.02       | MEINS | UNT   | 2        | 0.00       |   |   |
| 10 | CUOBF          | 87507                 | 100      |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 351   | 3        | 0.00       | MEINS | SET   | 2215     | 3.67       |   |   |
| 11 | MFRNR          | 0                     | 0        |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 301   | 2        | 0.00       | MEINS | FT3   | 55       | 0.06       |   |   |
| 12 | MFRPN          | 0                     | 0        |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 352   | 22       | 0.03       | MEINS | ST    | 33887    | 38.72      |   |   |
| 13 | BMATN          | 0                     | 0        |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 300   | 4        | 0.00       | MEINS | PAA   | 335      | 0.38       |   |   |
| 14 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 314   | 8        | 0.01       | MEINS | ROL   | 68       | 0.08       |   |   |
| 15 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 321   | 4        | 0.00       | MEINS | LG    | 147      | 0.17       |   |   |
| 16 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 327   | 2        | 0.00       | MEINS | M3    | 25       | 0.03       |   |   |
| 17 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 316   | 2        | 0.00       | MEINS | KG    | 22       | 0.03       |   |   |
| 18 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 333   | 4        | 0.00       | MEINS | M     | 404      | 0.46       |   |   |
| 19 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | 354   | 1        | 0.00       | MEINS | TIN   | 62       | 0.07       |   |   |
| 20 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | M_EP  | 184      | 0.21       | MEINS | BX    | 561      | 0.64       |   |   |
| 21 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | M_LWB | 2111     | 2.41       | MEINS | CM    | 30       | 0.03       |   |   |
| 22 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | M_DF  | 2858     | 3.27       | MEINS | L     | 51       | 0.04       |   |   |
| 23 |                |                       |          |   |   |       |       |          |            |   | MATKL | M_EM  | 204      | 0.22       | MEINS | PAK   | 542      | 0.62       |   |   |



# Multiple Variables in a Column

Condensing multiple variables into a single column can complicate processing and lead to information loss.

## Solution

Process the value to map each variable to a single column.

|   | A             | B                                   |
|---|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Name          | Address                             |
| 2 | Paolo Rossi   | Piazza Affari 1, Milano, Italy      |
| 3 | Mario Bianchi | Corso Venezia 1, Milano, Italy      |
| 4 | Bruno Neri    | Corso Buenos Aires 1, Milano, Italy |
| 5 |               |                                     |



# Duplicated Values

Datasets often include a primary key, a variable designed to uniquely identify each sample, such as a person's tax code, a user's email, or a timestamp in a time series.

Errors and poor validation can result in duplicate keys.

|   | A           | B              | C      |
|---|-------------|----------------|--------|
| 1 | Company VAT | Revenue        | EBITDA |
| 2 | 01234567891 | € 1,000,000.00 | 2%     |
| 3 | 01234567892 | € 1,500,000.00 | 3%     |
| 4 | 01234567893 | € 2,000,000.00 | 6%     |
| 5 | 01234567891 | € 1,100,000.00 | 10%    |

## Solution

Remove one of the duplicate samples, using a context-dependent rule to determine which to keep.



# Unrealistic Values

By "unrealistic" values, we refer to those that cannot be correct, as recording them would be impossible.

These values often result from errors in the recording or data collection process.

## Solution

Treat the value as missing and use one of the techniques outlined in the following slides.

|   | A          | B       | C           |
|---|------------|---------|-------------|
| 1 | Date       | City    | Temperature |
| 2 | 2024-07-01 | Palermo | 33.00       |
| 3 | 2024-07-02 | Palermo | 35.00       |
| 4 | 2024-07-03 | Palermo | -3.00       |
| 5 | 2024-07-04 | Palermo | 24.00       |



# Wrong Strings for Categorical

The data collection process often stores categorical values as strings, which can lead to the same category being represented by different strings.

## Solution

Identify all strings representing the same category and replace them with the correct one.

|   | A      | B           | C      |
|---|--------|-------------|--------|
| 1 | Dog ID | Race        | Weight |
| 2 |        | 1 chihuahua | 3.50   |
| 3 |        | 2 chiwawa   | 3.65   |
| 4 |        | 3 chihuaua  | 3.44   |
| 5 |        | 4 chihuahua | 3.23   |
| 6 |        | 5 chihuahua | 3.32   |

# Missing Data

Handling missing data is a fascinating and challenging topic. We will only discuss the most basic techniques.

More advanced methods are available both in the literature and in python packages.





# Missing Data

Types of missing data:

- **Missing Completely at Random:** there is no pattern in missing value (e.g. measurement errors due to random noise in a sensor)
- **Missing at Random:** the pattern of missing value only depends on known variables (e.g. in a survey, sex is recorded, and men are more likely to refuse to answer another question)
- **Missing not at Random:** the pattern of missing value depends on the variable where the missing data appear (e.g. people with higher income are more likely to refuse to report their income)

It is usually very hard, if not impossible, to prove that values are missing at random.



# Dropping Missing Data?

**Missing Completely at Random:** can be safely dropped.

**Missing at Random:** can be dropped if all the variables related to missing values are considered.

**Missing not at Random:** informative, should not be dropped.

The ratio of missing data in each variable is an important factor to consider when deciding whether to discard missing data. If the dataset is large, dropping the missing data is often the easiest and safest approach. However, if data is scarce, this method could be risky.



# Imputing Missing Data

- **Mean / Mode imputation:** replacing the missing values with the mean or mode. It is easy, but it modifies the distribution of the variable and the joint distribution with other variables.
- **Similarity-based imputation:** replacing the missing value with a value from a similar sample. This method is particularly suitable for data missing at random, but it relies on a well-defined measure of similarity, which can often be challenging to determine.
- **Model-based imputation:** replacing missing values with predictions generated by a model using the available variables. This approach is well-suited for data missing at random but depends on the quality and accuracy of the model used for imputation.



# Not Imputing Missing Data

For categorical variables, a **new category** labelled "MISSING" can be created. For numerical variables, a new Boolean variable indicating whether the original variable is missing (1 if missing) can be added.

However, many modern training algorithms, particularly tree-based models, **can handle missing values directly**.

When the model supports missing values, they should not be imputed.

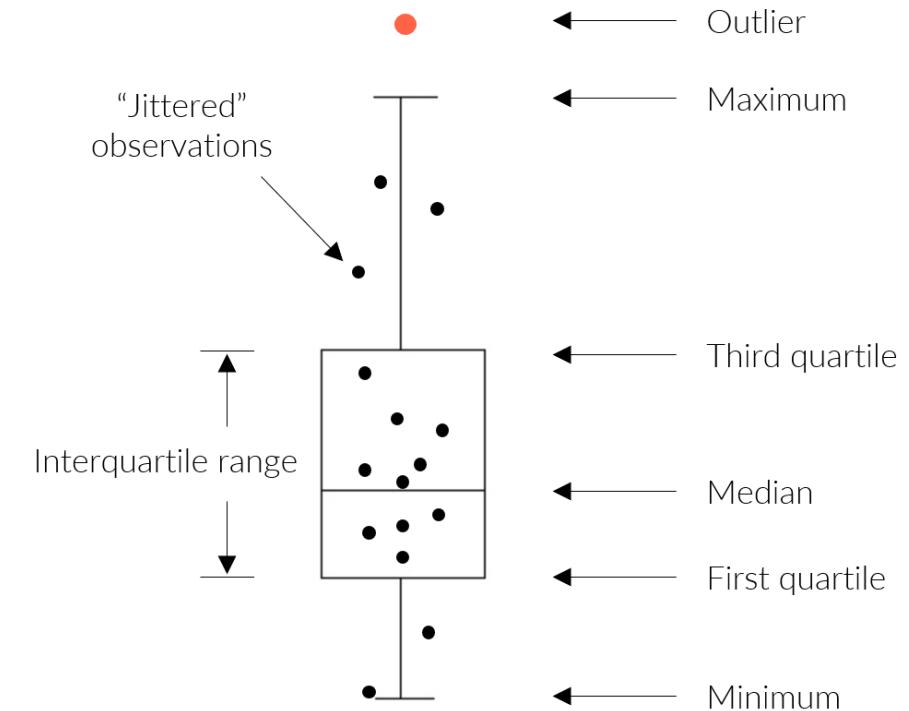


# Outliers

An outlier is a value that falls outside the distribution of the rest of the data.

Outliers may result from data collection errors, but they can also represent legitimate values.

For example, rogue waves are outliers in wave height, and market crashes are outliers in stock returns. Such values **should not be excluded** from your analysis.





# Handling Outliers

If outliers result from errors in the data collection process, they should be **treated as unrealistic or missing values**.

If they are legitimate values, the following approaches can be considered:

- **Exclude** them from the dataset if the goal is to prevent the model from learning from such samples.
- **Clip** them to a maximum or minimum value, with thresholds determined by the variable's distribution.
- **Leave them unchanged** if the intention is for the model to learn from them. In some cases, it may be more effective to develop specialized models to handle extreme situations.



# colab

[Open notebook in Colab](#)

# Exam Simulation!

This session **will not be graded**, and the difficulty level may not be comparable to that of the exam.

Take the Simulation:

<https://forms.gle/JL2U9UBRZMUHeVP4A>





The End