

Psychology of Data Visualization: Course Overview



Michael Friendly
Psych 6135



<https://friendly.github.io/6135>

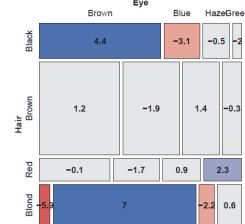
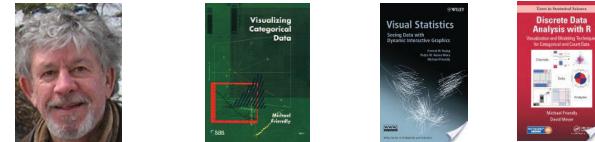
@datavisFriendly



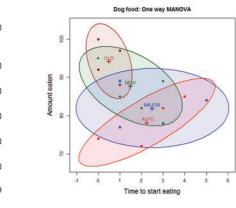
Introducing: me

I wear two hats, both reflected on my license plate:

Statistical graphics developer (categorical & multivariate data analysis)



mosaic plots for frequency tables

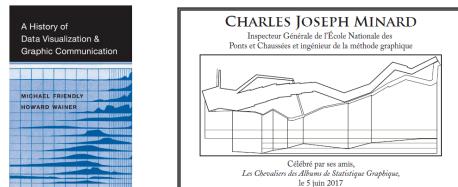


HE plots for MANOVA

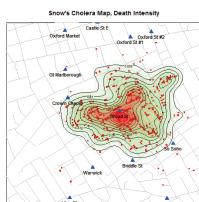
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Introducing: me

History of data visualization: *Les Chevaliers*; Friendly & Wainer (2021)



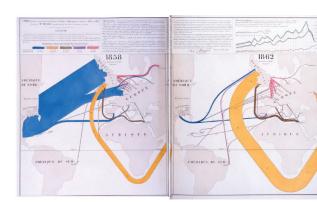
John Snow's map of cholera in London, 1854



original

modern enhancement

C. J. Minard: Flow maps of cotton trade



Visual explanation: What happened in the US Civil War?

Course Topics

- Varieties of information visualization
 - Goals of visualization
 - Survey of graphic forms
- History of information visualization
- Psychological models, theories and results
 - What can people see, understand and remember from data displays?
 - Perceptual aspects, cognitive aspects
- Human factors research: how to tell what works
- Software tools for information visualization (mainly R)
- Visualization in statistics: case studies
 - Categorical data; High-D data; Dynamic and interactive methods

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Your role

- Weekly readings – see the course [web](#) site for updates
- Discussion – no formal grade, but please contribute
- Discussion leader (20%)
 - Each week 1 of you will lead a brief discussion on one of the readings or sub-topics (~ 5-8 min.)
 - Please sign up on the Google sheet, <https://bit.ly/3S6o9pP>
- Class presentation (40%)
 - In the last week, each person will give a ~ 20 min presentation on a topic of research, application or software related to data visualization
- Research proposal (40%)
 - Prepare a brief research proposal on a data visualization topic

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Books & Readings



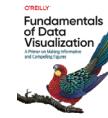
Colin Ware, *Information Visualization, 3rd Ed.*

What perceptual science has to say about data visualization, from a bottom-up perspective
Course notes at: <http://ccom.unh.edu/vislab/VisCourse/index.html>



Alberto Cairo, *The Truthful Art*

Information graphics from a communication perspective
Blog: <http://www.thefunctionalart.com/>



Claus Wilke, *Fundamentals of Data Visualization*

Well thought out, a wide range of topics, good practical advice, lots of examples.
Online version: <https://clauswilke.com/dataviz/>
Course notes: <https://wilkelab.org/SDS375/>



Hadley Wickham, *ggplot2: Elegant graphics for data analysis, 2nd Ed.*

1st Ed: Online, <http://ggplot2.org/book/>
ggplot2 Quick Reference: <http://sape.inf.usi.ch/quick-reference/ggplot2/>
Complete ggplot2 documentation: <http://docs.ggplot2.org/current/>

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More books I like



Tamara Munzner (2014), *Visualization Analysis & Design*

An attractive new book combining computer science and design perspectives
Web page: <http://www.cs.ubc.ca/~tmm/vadbook/> with lots of illustrations & lectures



Manuel Lima, *The Book of Trees: Visualizing branches of knowledge*

A visual delight; an entire history of tree-type diagrams
Blog: <http://www.visualcomplexity.com/vc/blog/>



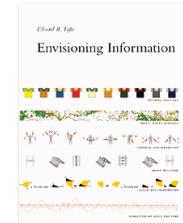
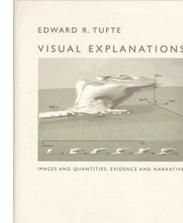
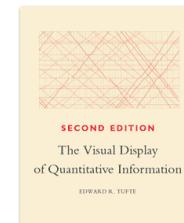
Keiran Healy, *Data Visualization: A Practical Introduction*

An accessible primer on how to create effective graphics from data using ggplot2
Online: <http://socvis.co>

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Tufte Stuff

Four books by Edward Tufte largely defined the landscape for data visualization and information design



Concepts introduced:

- chart junk,
- data-ink ratio,
- small multiples,
- substance takes precedence over visual design

Web site:
<https://www.edwardtufte.com>

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Blogs & Web resources



visual complexity

My web site, <http://datavis.ca>. Contains the [Milestone Project](#) on the history of data vis, [Data Visualization gallery](#), links to books, papers and courses.

Kaiser Fung, <http://junkcharts.typepad.com/>. Fung discusses a variety of data displays and discusses how they can be improved.

Nathan Yau's blog, <http://flowingdata.com>. A large number of blog posts illustrating data visualization methods with tutorials on how to do these with R and other software.

<http://visiphilia.org/>. Statisticians Di Cook and Heike Hofmann from Iowa State University blog about data visualization topics, using R

Manuel Lima's blog, <http://www.visualcomplexity.com/vc/blog/>, with hundreds of projects on all types of visualizations

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Blogs & Web resources

DATA STORIES



KANTAR
Information is Beautiful
Awards



info we trust.



<http://datastori.es/>. A podcast on data visualization with Enrico Bertini and Moritz Stefaner; interviews with over 100 graphic designers & developers.

Annual awards celebrate excellence and beauty in data visualizations, infographics, interactives & information art.
<https://www.informationisbeautifulawards.com>

<https://www.r-bloggers.com/>. A large collection of posts on R news and tutorials by over 750 R bloggers.

Raymond Andrews, <http://infowetrust.com/>. A visual storyteller delights with graphic stories from the history of data visualization

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Psychology facts: Why visualization?

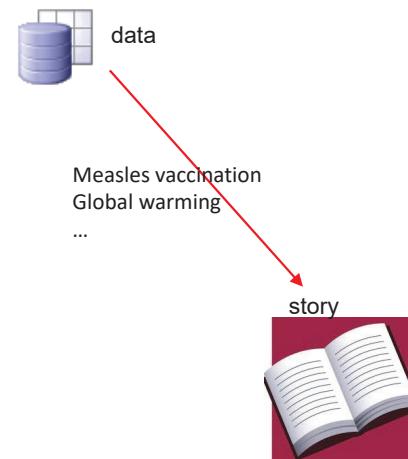
- ~90% of information about the environment is received through the eyes.
- ~50% of our brain neurons are involved in the processing of visual information.
- The presence of pictures increases desire to read the text by ~80%.
- We remember 10% of what we heard, 20% of what's read, and 80% of what's seen!
- People perceive 70% of the information if there are no illustrations. Add pictures there — the figure will increase up to 95%.

McLeod, S. A. (2018). Visual perception theory. Simply Psychology. www.simplypsychology.org/perception-theories.html

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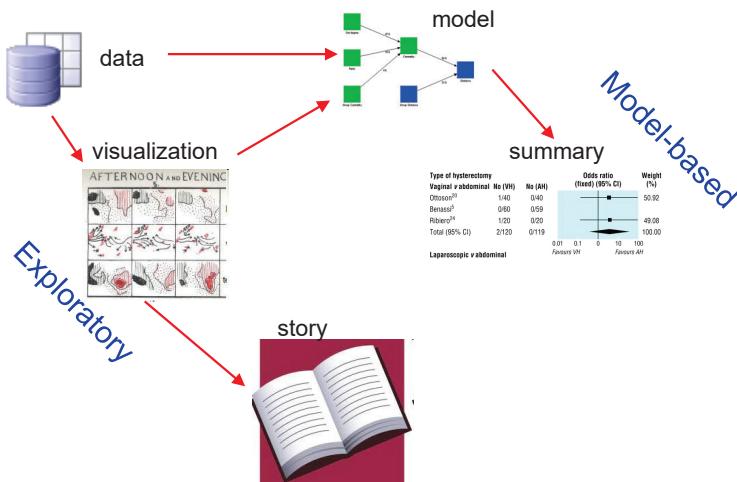
Data, pictures, models & stories

Goal: Tell a credible story about some real data problem



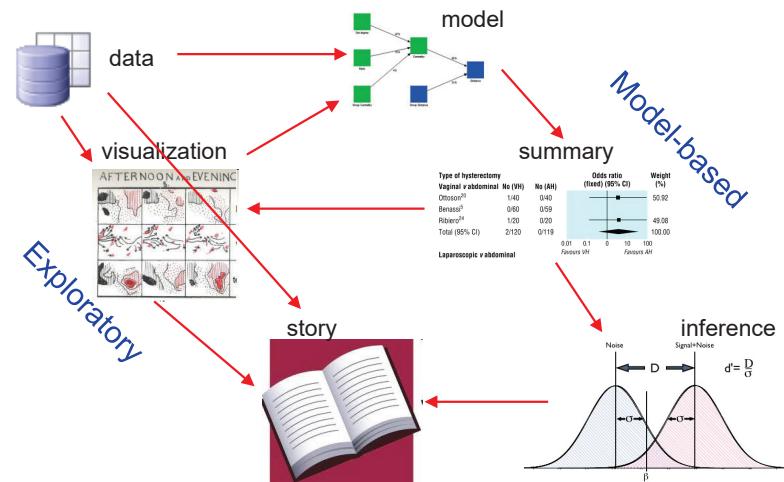
Data, pictures, models & stories

Two paths to enlightenment



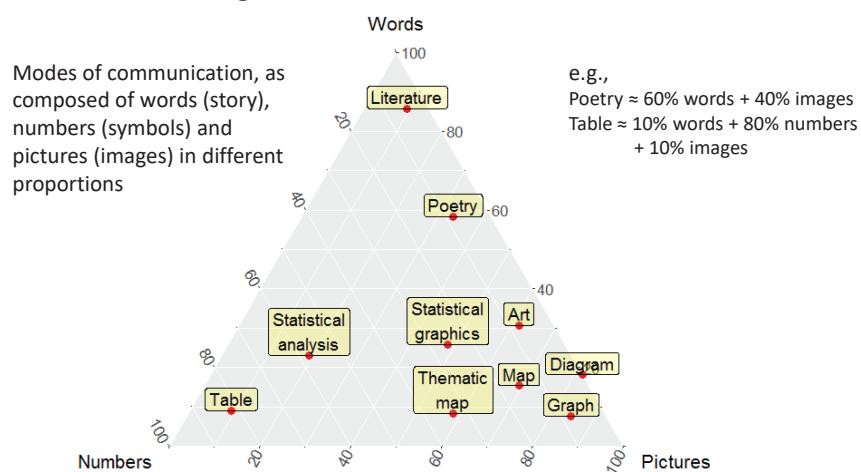
Data, pictures, models & stories

Now, tell the story!



Words, numbers and pictures

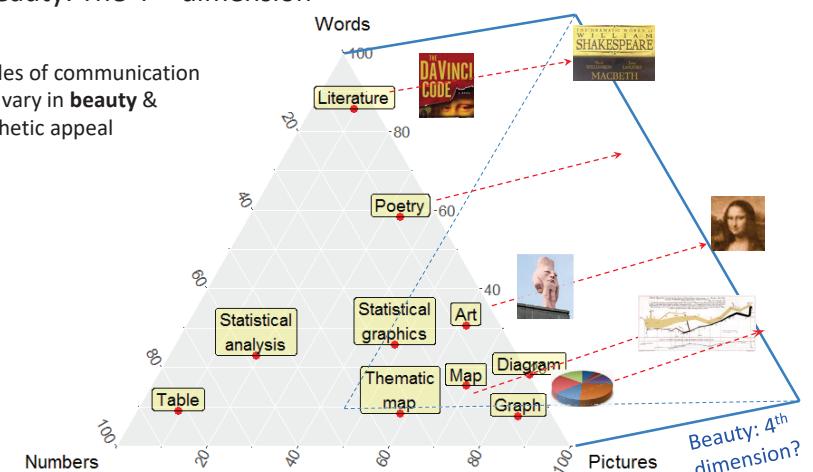
Pictures and images in a wider context



Words, numbers and pictures

Beauty: The 4th dimension

Modes of communication also vary in **beauty** & aesthetic appeal

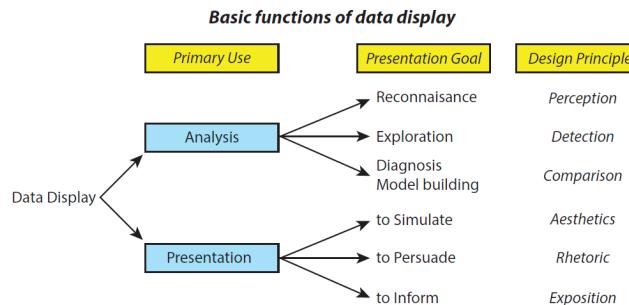


Roles of graphics in communication

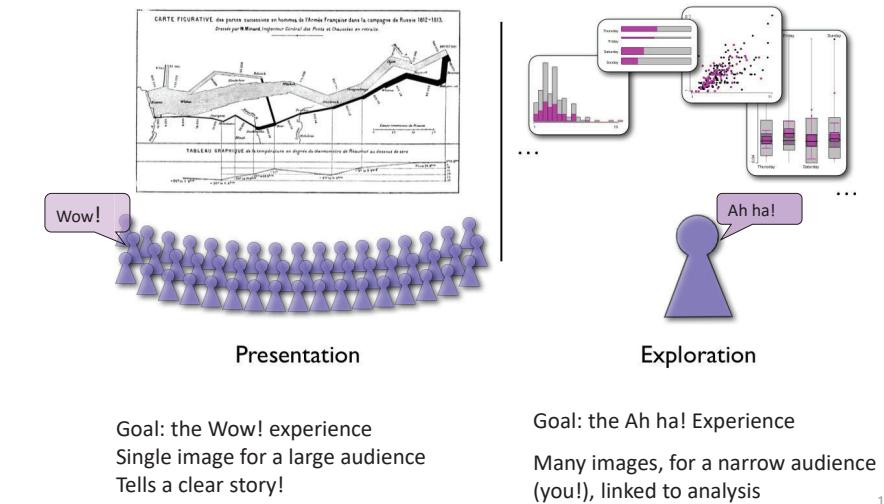
- Graphs (& tables) are forms of communication:
 - What is the audience?
 - What is the message?

Analysis graphs: design to see patterns, trends, aid the process of data description, interpretation

Presentation graphs: design to attract attention, make a point, illustrate a conclusion



Different graphs for different purposes

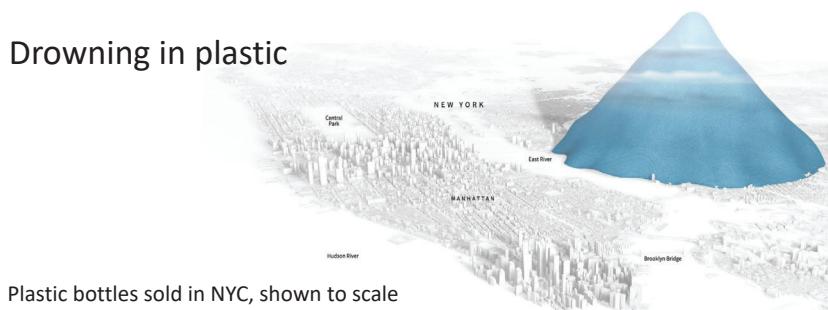


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Infographics

The best infographics tell a story, using numbers, but shown visually

Drowning in plastic



From: <https://graphics.reuters.com/ENVIRONMENT-PLASTIC/0100B275155/index.html>

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Powerful graphs: Measles and vaccines

Visualizing the impact of health policy interventions

In 2015 Tynan DeBold & Dov Friedman in the *Wall Street Journal* show the effect of the introduction of vaccination programs in the US states on disease incidence, using color-coded heat maps for a variety of diseases

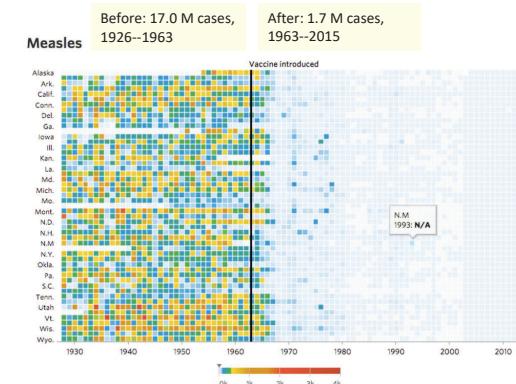
Measles was decimated!

The message hits you between the eyes!

Powerful graphs make comparison easy

In 2014, vaccination rates declined and measles re-emerged in those areas

Effective graphs can cure ignorance, but not stupidity.



Source: <http://graphics.wsj.com/infectious-diseases-and-vaccines/>

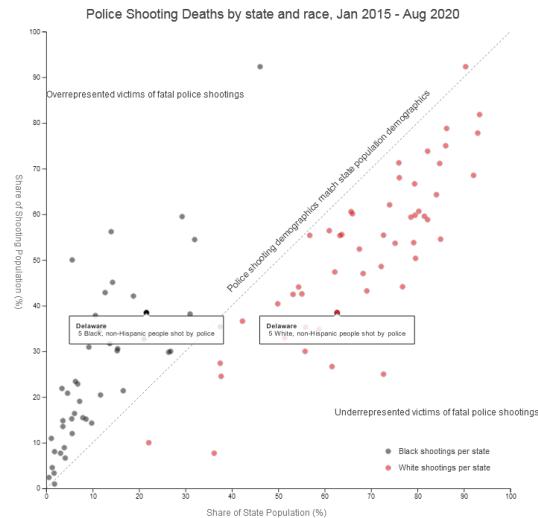
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Police shooting deaths

Analysis of Washington Post database on 5500 police shooting deaths for Blacks vs. Whites

Plotting % of shooting vs. % of pop shows a clear & disturbing pattern

Annotations help to tell the story



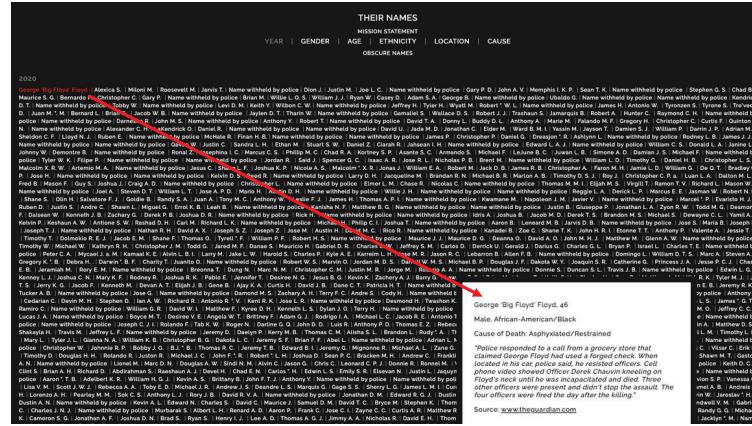
From: <https://medium.com/two-n/visualizing-wapos-police-shooting-dataset-3792593f6be>

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Their names: Interactive graphic

As powerful as Yad Vashem & the Washington D.C. Vietnam memorial, this list of 28,000 US fatal encounters with police commands attention.

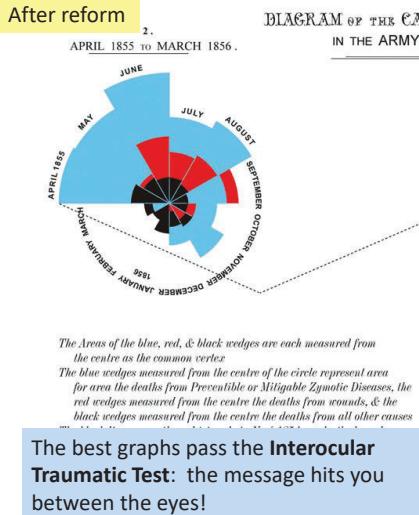
Each one is linked to a story or description. Classified by {Gender, Age, Cause}



<https://theirnames.org/>

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Presentation graph: Nightingale (1857)

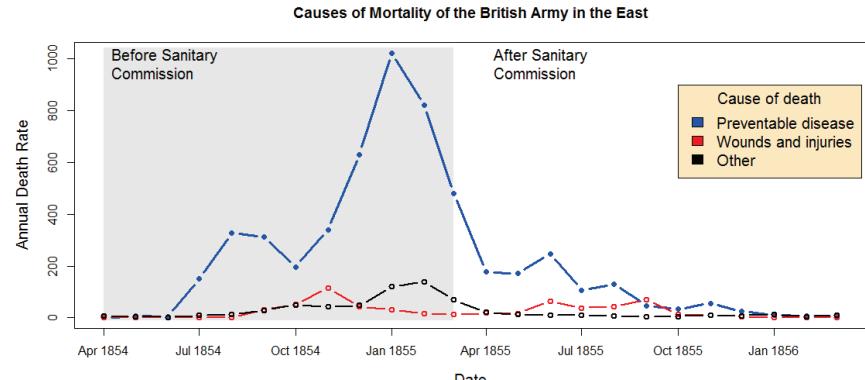


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Data graph: Nightingale (1857)

The same, as a data graph, using time-series line plots

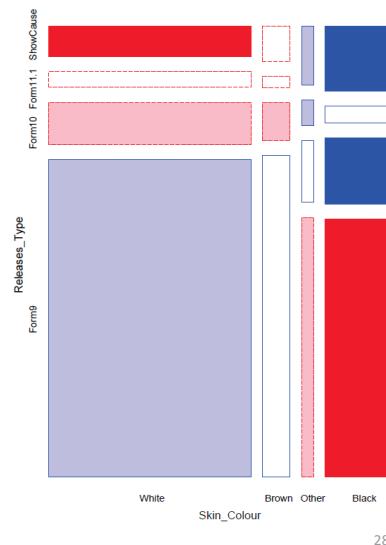
Many statisticians might prefer this today, but it doesn't draw attention or interest as Flo's original did. **It likely would not have roused British Parliament to act!**



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Racial profiling: Analysis graph

- Toronto Star (2002) study of police actions on a charge of simple possession of marijuana
 - release with a summons (Form 9) vs. hold for bail (Show cause)
 - Evidence for racial bias?
- First graph: mosaic display
 - area ~ frequency
 - shading: ~ residual
 - Obs > Expected in blue
 - Obs < Expected in red



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Racial profiling: The process

How to communicate these results most effectively?

- What is the message? What features are directly comprehensible to the audience?

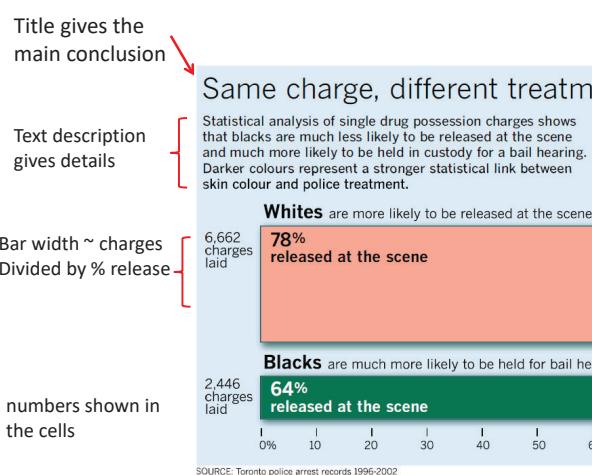


Man behind the numbers

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Racial profiling: Presentation graphic

Together, we created this (nearly) self-explaining infographic



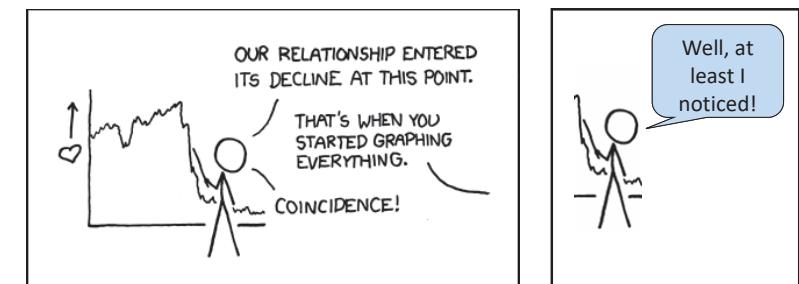
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Why plot your data?

Graphs help us to see

patterns, trends, anomalies and other features

not otherwise easily apparent from numerical summaries.

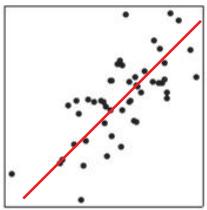


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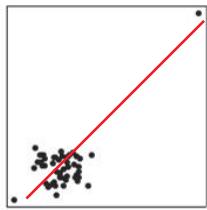
Why plot your data?

Three data sets with exactly the same bivariate summary statistics:

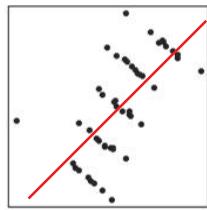
- Same correlations, linear regression lines, etc
- Indistinguishable from standard printed output
- Totally different interpretations!



Standard data



$r=0$ but + 2 outliers



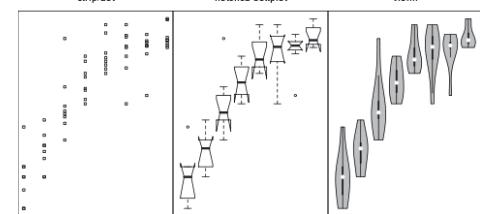
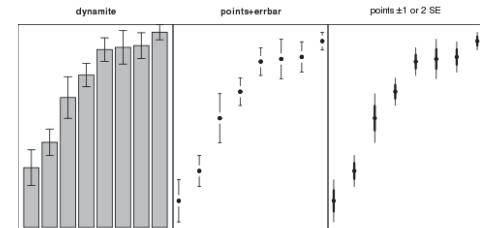
Lurking variable?

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Comparing groups: Analysis vs. Presentation graphs

Six different graphs for comparing groups in a one-way design

- which group means differ?
- equal variability?
- distribution shape?
- what do error bars mean?
- unusual observations?



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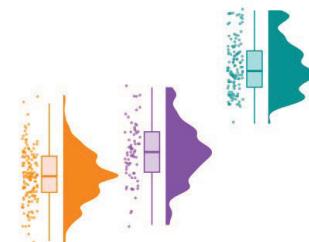
Never use dynamite plots

Always explain what error bars mean

Consider tradeoff between
summarization & exposure



Dynamite plots –
barcharts with error
bars provide little
useful information



Boxplots, violin
plots show the
important features

- Center
- Spread
- Shape

 Dot plots show the
data

Graphic: Cedric Scherer (@CedScherer)

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Presentation: Turning tables into graphs

Table 2 from Stevens (2006): Determinants of Authoritarian Aggression

Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Constant	.41 (.93)
Countries	
Argentina	1.31 (.33) *** B.M
Chile	.93 (.32) *** B.M
Colombia	1.46 (.33) *** B.M
Mexico	.07 (.32) A.C.O.S.V
Venezuela	.96 (.37) *** B.M
Threat	
Retrospective egocentric economic perceptions	-.20 (.13)
Prospective egocentric economic perceptions	-.22 (.12) *
Retrospective sociotropic economic perceptions	-.21 (.12) *
Prospective sociotropic economic perceptions	-.32 (.12) **
Ideological Distance from president	
Ideology	
Ideology	.23 (.07) ***
Individual Differences	
Age	.00 (.01)
Female	-.03 (.21)
Education	.13 (.14)
Academic Sector	.15 (.29)
Business Sector	.31 (.26)
Government Sector	-.10 (.27)
R ²	.15
Adjusted R ²	.12
n	500

***p < .01, **p < .05, *p < .10 (two-tailed)

A Coefficient is significantly different from Argentina's at p < .05;

B Coefficient is significantly different from Brazil's at p < .05;

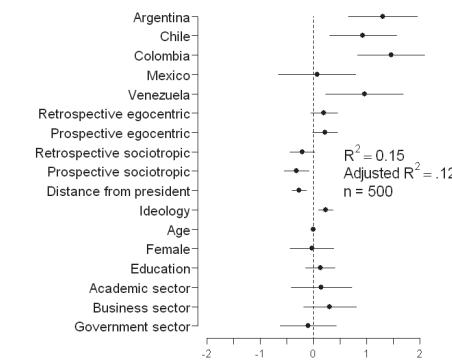
CH Coefficient is significantly different from Chile's at p < .05;

CO Coefficient is significantly different from Colombia's at p < .05;

M Coefficient is significantly different from Mexico's at p < .05;

V Coefficient is significantly different from Venezuela's at p < .05;

Graphs of model coefficients are often clearer than
tables



From: Kastellec & Leoni, 2007. "Using Graphs Instead of Tables in Political Science." *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (4): 755–71.

See: The R dotwhisker pkg, <https://fsoil.org/dotwhisker/>

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Semi-graphic tables

Tables can be made more visual by including mini-graphics in some table cells
The original idea—sparklines (Tufte), is now more general

A good solution for the [Table 1 problem](#) – description of your sample

[13]:	index	id	name	line	bar	tristate	box
0	1	Oli Bob					
1	2	Mary May					
2	3	Christine Lobowski					
3	4	Brendon Philips					
4	5	Margret Marmajuke					
5	6	Frank Harbours					
6	7	Jamie Newhart					
7	8	Gemma Jane					
8	9	Emily Sykes					
9	10	James Newman					

Image from: <https://discourse.holoviz.org/t/add-sparkline-formatters-to-tabulator/3197>

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Graphs & Information design

- Graphs & info displays should be viewed in relation to communication goals & audience
- Some criteria for assessing:
 - **comprehensibility:** does it make information as easy to understand as possible?
 - **attention:** does the audience take notice?
 - **aesthetics:** is it visually appealing?
 - **memorability:** will they remember it?
 - **behavior:** does it result in some desired action?

From: Ben Jones, To Optimize or to Satisfice in Data Visualization? <https://dataremixed.com/2016/01/optimize-or-satisfice-in-dataviz/>

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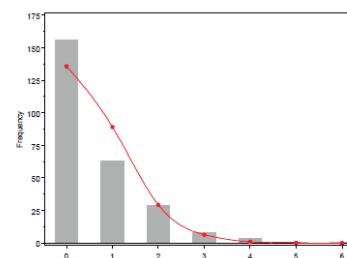
Effective data display

- Make the data stand out
 - Fill the data region (axes, ranges)
 - Use visually distinct symbols (shape, color) for different groups
 - Avoid chart junk, heavy grid lines that detract from the data
- Facilitate comparison
 - Emphasize the important comparisons visually
 - Side-by-side easier than in separate panels
 - “data” vs. a “standard” easier against a horizontal line
 - Show uncertainty where possible
- Effect ordering
 - For variables and unordered factors, arrange them according to the **effects** to be seen

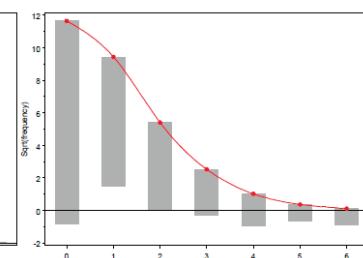
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Make visual comparisons easy

- Visual grouping— connect with lines, make key comparisons contiguous
- Baselines— compare **data** to **model** against a line, preferably horizontal
- Frequencies often better plotted on a square-root scale



Standard histogram with fit

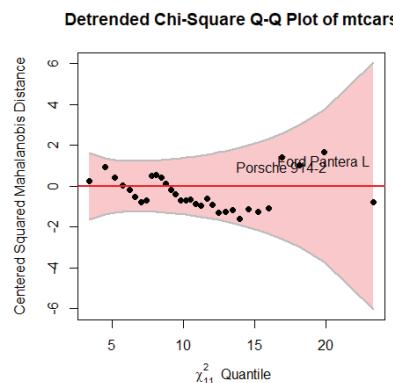
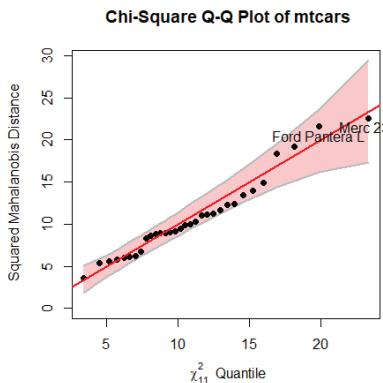


Suspended rootogram

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Make visual comparisons easy

QQ plots assess the degree to which data follows a particular distribution (normal, χ^2)
 The reference line of equality is usually a 45° line
 It is easier to see any departure in relation to a horizontal line at 0

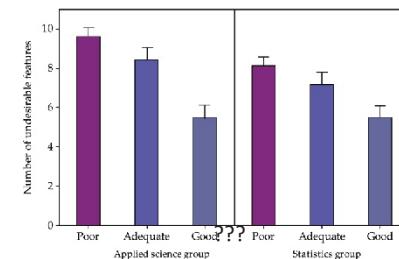


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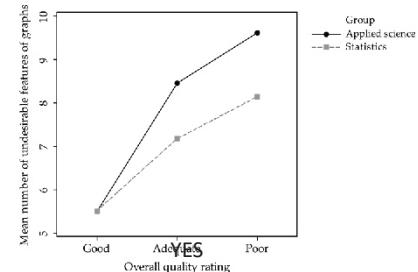
Make comparisons direct

- Use points not bars
- Connect similar by lines
- Same panel rather than different panels

Is there evidence of an interaction here?



Published in: Ian Gordon; Sue Finch; *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics* 2015, 24, 1210-1229.
 DOI: 10.1080/10618600.2014.989324
 Copyright © 2015 American Statistical Association, Institute of Mathematical Statistics, and Interface Foundation of North America

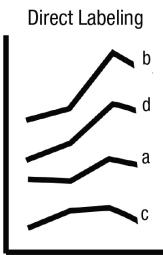


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Direct labels vs. legends

Direct labels for points, lines and regions are usually easier and faster than legends

- Give the names of the four groups shown in the line graph at left in top-to-bottom order.
 (Answer: b, d, a, c)
- Now do the same for the graphs using color or shape legends
- You need to look back and forth between the graph and legend



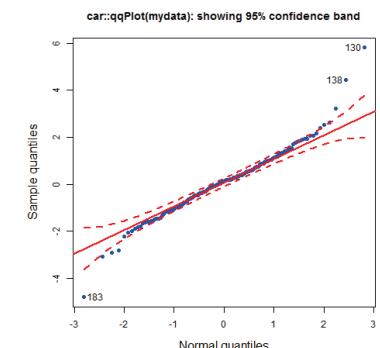
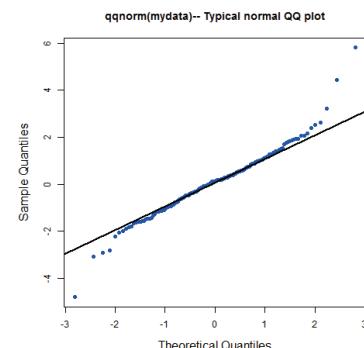
Source: Franconeri et al. DOI:
[10.1177/15291006211051956](https://doi.org/10.1177/15291006211051956)

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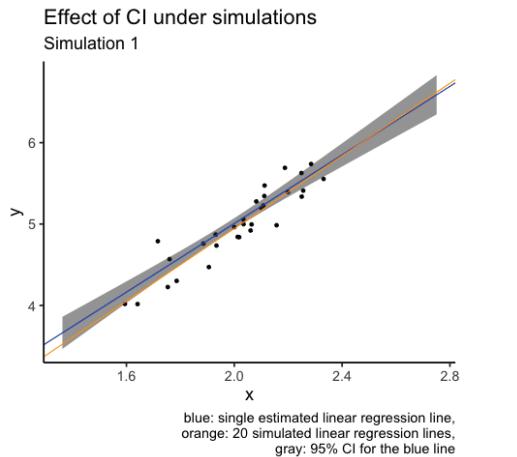
Visualizing uncertainty

- Standard plots of observed vs. predicted lack a basis for assessment of uncertainty
- Confidence envelopes indicate extent of deviation
- Identify "noteworthy" observations to track them down

Example: Normal QQ plots used to assess normality of data



Uncertainty: Theory & simulation



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Effect ordering

- Information presentation is always ordered
 - in time or sequence (a talk or written paper)
 - in space (table or graph)
 - Constraints of time & space are dominant— can conceal or reveal the important message
- Effect ordering for data display
 - Sort the data by the effects to be seen
 - Order the data to facilitate the task at hand
 - lookup – find a value
 - comparison – which is greater?
 - detection – find patterns, trends, anomalies

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Effect order failure: the *Challenger* disaster

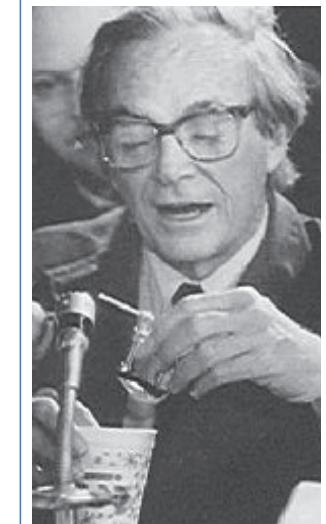
- Few events in history provide as compelling illustration of importance of appropriate ordering and display of information
 - On January 28, 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded on take-off.
 - The cause was later determined to be that rubber O-rings failed due to cold weather
- Tables and charts presented to NASA by Thiokol engineers showed data from prior launches ordered by time (launch number), rather than by temperature—the crucial factor.
- The engineers' charts were also remarkable for information obfuscation: “erosion depth” (O-ring damage), “blow-by” (soot on O-rings), ...

Launch	Date	Cross Sectional View			Top View		
		Tension	Actual	Nominal	Length	Total Wall	Cocking
		(in.)	(in.)	(in.)	(in.)	(in.)	(deg)
E1A LH Caster Field*	22A	None	None	0.280	None	None	35° - 65°
E1C LH Forward Field**	22A	None	None	0.280	4.25	4	130
S1C LH Forward Field***	15A	0.010	0.010	0.280	12.25	58.75	354
S1C LH Center Field (pri)*	15B	0.038	139.0	0.280	29.50	29.50	354
S1C LH Center Field (sec)**	15B	None	45.0	0.280	None	None	354
A1B RH Forward Field	13B	0.028	110.0	0.280	3.00	None	275
A1B LH Aft Field*	11A	None	None	0.280	None	None	**
A1B RH Forward Field	10A	0.040	217.0	0.280	3.00	14.50	305
STS-2 RH Aft Field	2B	0.053	116.0	0.280	--	--	90

46

Visual explanation: Physics

- NASA appointed members of the Rogers Commission to investigate the cause of the disaster
- the noted physicist Richard Feynman discovered the cause: at low temperature, O-rings became brittle and were subject to failure
- in his testimony, he demonstrated the effect by plunging a rubber O-ring into a cup of ice water



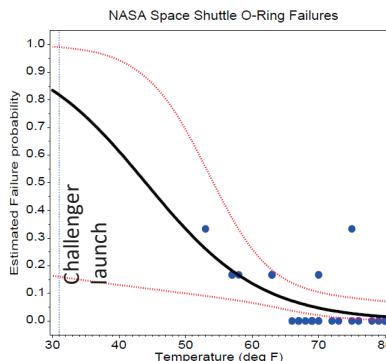
47

Visual explanation: Graphics

- Subsequent statistical analysis showed the relationship between launch temperature and O-ring failures
- As Tufte (1997) notes: the fatal flaw was in the **ordering** of the data.

The graph shown here is the result of a statistical model fit to the data

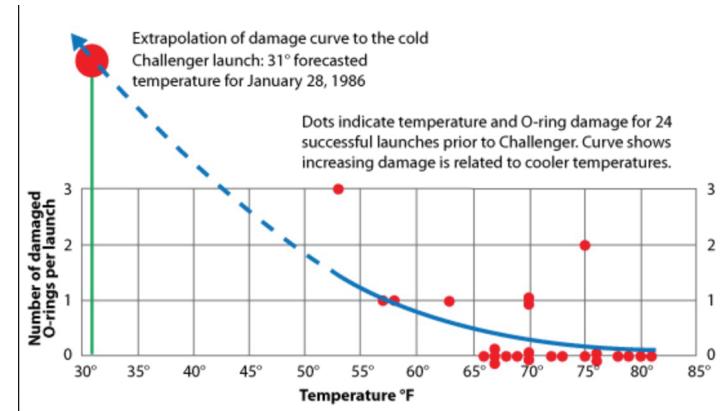
- The **thick** line shows the predicted value of failure vs. temperature
- The **red** dotted lines show uncertainty of the predicted values



48

Presentation graphic

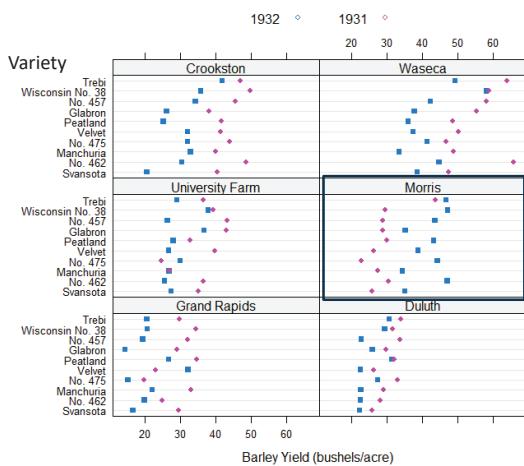
A presentation version of the previous graph alters the scales and describes the story in text annotations



49

Graphic displays: Main effect ordering

- To see trends, patterns, anomalies: **Sort unordered factors by means or medians**



Data on barley yields
10 varieties x 6 sites x 2 years

3-way dot plot, sorted by main effect means

- Which site has the highest yield?
- Which variety is highest on average?
- Which site stands out in pattern over year?

50

Tabular displays: Main effect ordering

- Tables are often presented with rows/cols ordered **alphabetically**
 - good for lookup
 - bad for seeing patterns, trends, anomalies

Table 1: Average Barley Yields (rounded), Means by Site and Variety

Variety	Site						Mean
	Crookston	Duluth	Grand Rapids	Morris	University Farm	Waseca	
Glabron	32	28	22	32	40	46	33.3
Manchuria	36	26	28	31	27	41	31.5
No. 457	40	28	26	36	35	50	35.8
No. 462	40	25	22	39	31	55	35.4
No. 475	38	30	17	33	27	44	31.8
Peatland	33	32	31	37	30	42	34.2
Svansota	31	24	23	30	31	43	30.4
Trebi	44	32	25	45	33	57	39.4
Velvet	37	24	28	32	33	44	33.1
Wisconsin No. 38	43	30	28	38	39	58	39.4
Mean	37.4	28.0	24.9	35.4	32.7	48.1	34.4

51

Tabular displays: Main effect ordering

- Better: sort rows/cols by means/medians
- Shade cells according to residual from additive model

Table 2: Average Barley Yields, sorted by Mean, shaded by residual from the model Yield = Variety + Site

Variety	Site					Mean	
	Grand Rapids	Duluth	University Farm	Morris	Crookston		
Svansota	23	24	31	30	31	43	30.4
Manchuria	28	26	27	31	36	41	31.5
No. 475	17	30	27	33	38	44	31.8
Velvet	28	24	33	32	37	44	33.1
Glabron	22	28	40	32	32	46	33.3
Peatland	31	32	30	37	33	42	34.2
No. 462	22	25	31	39	40	55	35.4
No. 457	26	28	35	36	40	50	35.8
Wisconsin No. 38	28	30	39	38	43	58	39.4
Trebi	25	32	33	45	44	57	39.4
Mean	24.9	28.0	32.7	35.4	37.4	48.1	34.4

52

Tabular displays: Main effect ordering

Yield difference, $\Delta y_{ij} = 1931 - 1932$ by Variety & Site

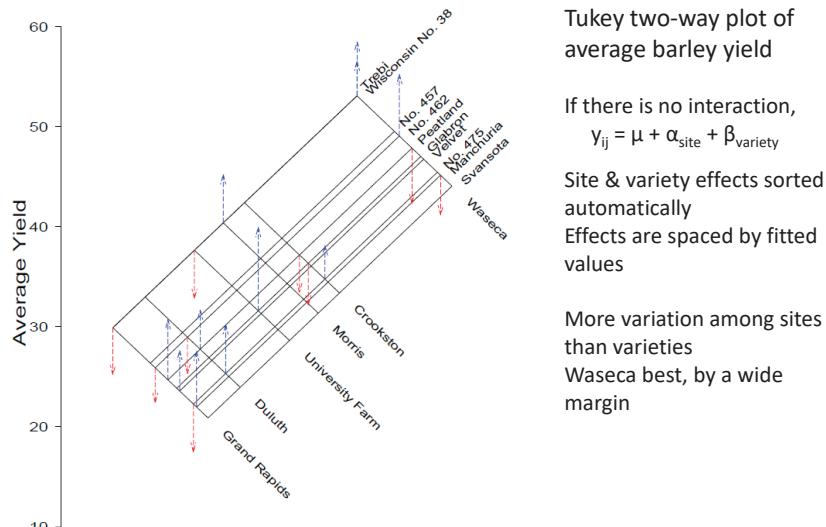
- Ordered: by row and column means; shaded: by value ($|\Delta y_{ij}| > \{2,3\} \times \sigma(\Delta y_{ij})$)
- What features stand out?

Table 3: Yield Differences, 1931-1932, sorted by mean difference, and shaded by value

Variety	Site						Mean
	Morris	Duluth	University Farm	Grand Rapids	Waseca	Crookston	
No. 475	-22	6	-5	4	6	12	0.1
Wisconsin No. 38	-18	2	1	14	1	14	2.4
Velvet	-13	4	13	-9	13	9	2.9
Peatland	-13	1	5	8	13	16	4.8
Manchuria	-7	6	0	11	15	7	5.5
Trebi	-3	3	7	9	15	5	6.1
Svansota	-9	3	8	13	9	20	7.3
No. 462	-17	6	11	5	21	18	7.4
Glabron	-6	4	6	15	17	12	8.0
No. 457	-15	11	17	13	16	11	8.8
Mean	-12.2	4.6	6.3	8.2	12.5	12.5	5.3

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Graphical display: Two-way tables



54

Multivariate data: correlation ordering

- Arrange **variables** so that:
 - Similar variables are contiguous
 - Ordered to show patterns of relations
- Arrange **observations** so that:
 - Similar variables are contiguous
 - Ordered to show patterns of relations

55

Correlation matrices

Baseball data: Batting, fielding and (log) Salary

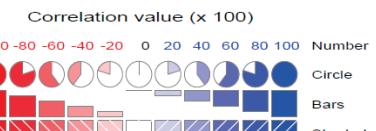
Nobody wants to see all those decimals

	Assists	Atbat	Errors	Hits	Homer	logSal	Putouts	RBI	Runs	Walks	Years
Assists	1.0000	0.3421	0.70350	0.3040	-0.16160	0.0500	-0.0434	0.0629	0.179	0.1025	-0.0851
Atbat	0.3421	1.0000	0.32558	0.9640	0.55510	0.4149	0.3096	0.7960	0.900	0.6244	0.0127
Errors	0.7035	0.3256	1.00000	0.2799	-0.00974	-0.0208	0.0753	0.1502	0.193	0.0819	-0.1565
Hits	0.3040	0.9640	0.27988	1.0000	0.53063	0.4496	0.2997	0.7885	0.911	0.5873	0.0186
Homer	-0.1616	0.5551	-0.00974	0.5306	1.00000	0.3398	0.2509	0.8491	0.631	0.4405	0.1135
logSal	0.0500	0.4149	-0.02081	0.4496	0.3398	1.0000	0.2245	0.4441	0.426	0.4324	0.5374
Putouts	-0.0434	0.3096	0.0753	0.2997	0.25093	0.2245	1.0000	0.3121	0.271	0.2809	-0.0200
RBI	0.0629	0.7960	0.15015	0.7885	0.84911	0.4441	0.3121	1.0000	0.779	0.5695	0.1297
Runs	0.1793	0.8998	0.19261	0.9106	0.63108	0.4256	0.2712	0.7787	1.000	0.6970	-0.0120
Walks	0.1025	0.6244	0.08194	0.5873	0.44045	0.4324	0.2809	0.5695	0.697	1.0000	0.1348
Years	-0.0851	0.0127	-0.15651	0.0186	0.11349	0.5374	-0.0200	0.1297	-0.012	0.1348	1.0000

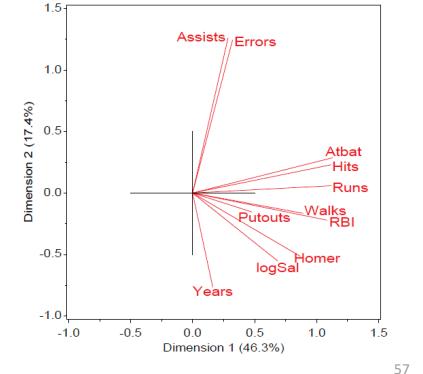
If you are going to present the numbers, round a lot

	Assists	Atbat	Errors	Hits	Homer	logSal	Putouts	RBI	Runs	Walks	Years
Assists	100	34	70	30	-16	5	-4	6	18	10	-9
Atbat	34	100	33	96	56	41	31	80	90	62	1
Errors	70	33	100	28	-1	-2	8	15	19	8	-16
Hits	30	96	28	100	53	45	30	79	91	59	2
Homer	-16	56	-1	53	100	34	25	85	63	44	11
logSal	5	41	-2	45	34	100	22	44	43	43	54
Putouts	-4	31	8	30	25	22	100	31	27	28	-2
RBI	6	80	15	79	85	44	31	100	78	57	13
Runs	18	90	19	91	63	43	27	78	100	70	-1
Walks	10	62	8	59	44	43	28	57	70	100	13
Years	-9	1	-16	2	11	54	-2	13	-1	13	100

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Rendering: a correlation value can be displayed in different ways, for different tasks

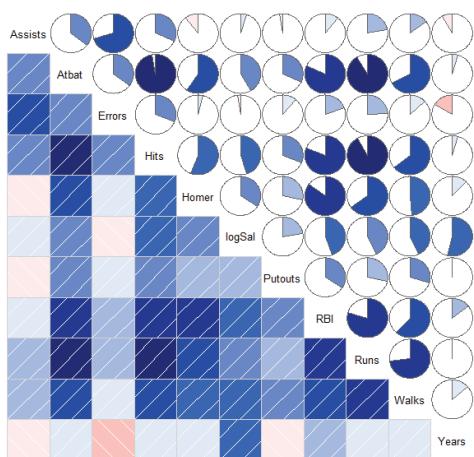


Friendly (2002), Corrgrams: Exploratory displays for correlation matrices, American Statistician.

57

Baseball data

Baseball data alphabetic order

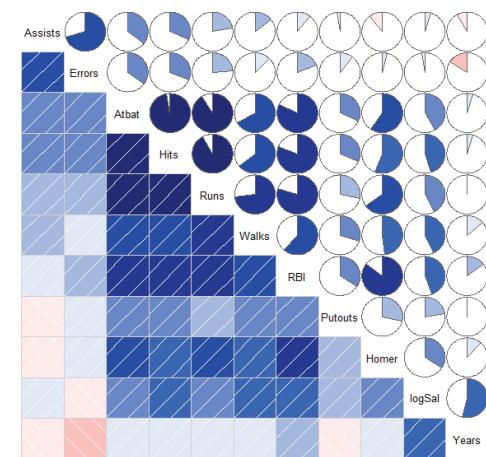


58

This is a corrogram display of the correlations among the baseball statistics, with the variables ordered alphabetically

Baseball data

Baseball data PC2/PC1 order



The same display, with the variables sorted according to the angles between vectors in the PCA

Not that dramatic, but it isolates the positive & negative correlations

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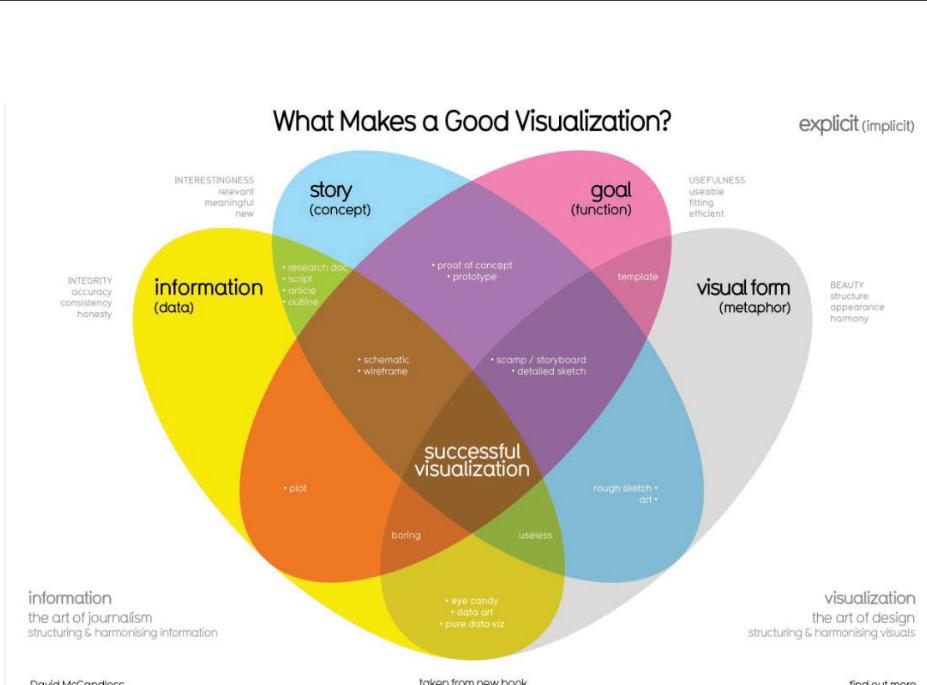
60

Good/excellent graphs



- Like good writing, good graphical displays of data communicate ideas with:
 - clarity,
 - precision, and
 - efficiency— avoids graphic clutter
 - Even better: excellent graphs **make the message obvious**
- What makes a good graph?
 - Integrity (quality of information)
 - Story (interesting, meaningful)
 - Goal (usefulness)
 - Visual form (beauty)

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62

Bad/evil graphs

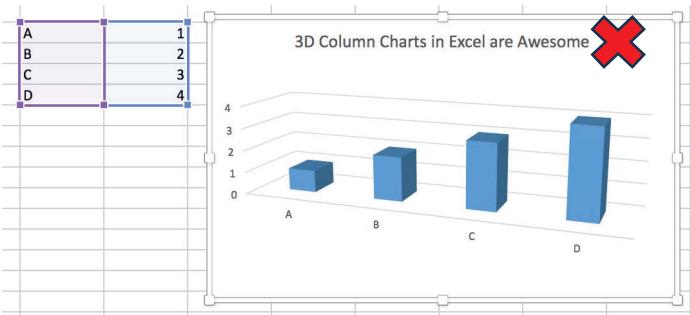


- Like poor writing, bad graphical displays:
 - distort or obscure the data,
 - make it harder to understand or compare, or
 - thwart the communicative effect the graph should convey.
 - Even worse: **evil graphs distort, or mislead.**

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Bad graphs are easy in Excel

Friends don't let friends use Excel for data visualization or statistics

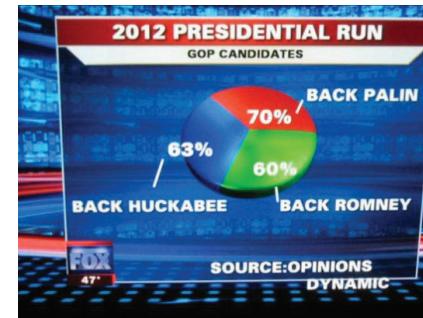


How many things are wrong with this graph?

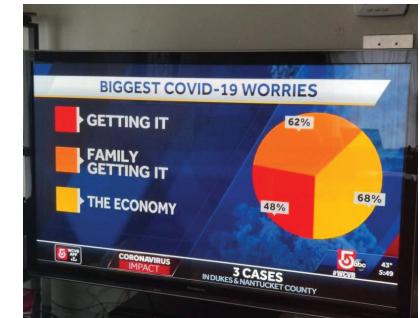
64

Pie charts are easy to abuse

What's wrong with these pictures?



$$1 \pi = 193\%$$



$$1 \pi = 178\%$$

Why do graphic designers so often get this wrong?

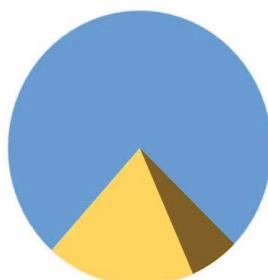
65

Pie chart merriment



On the other hand, pie charts are a great source of merriment for people interested in graphics

But: how much π have I eaten?

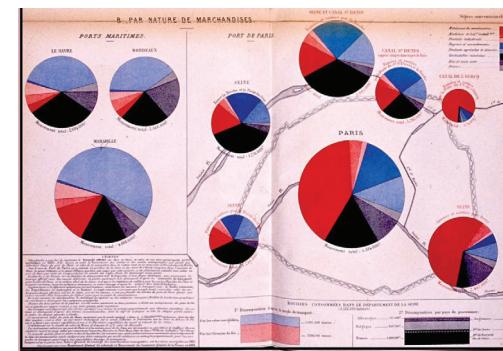


What perceptual ideas make this a great joke and lesson?

Once you see the pyramid, it's hard to see the pie.

66

But, can be used to great effect



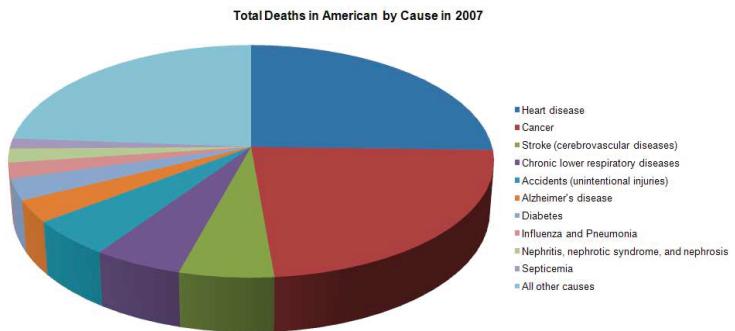
Album de Statistique Graphique, 1885, plate 17.

This graphic uses pie charts to show the transport of different kinds of goods to the ports of Paris and the principal maritime ports

- the size of each pie reflects **total**
- the sectors reflect **relative %**
- location places them in **context**

67

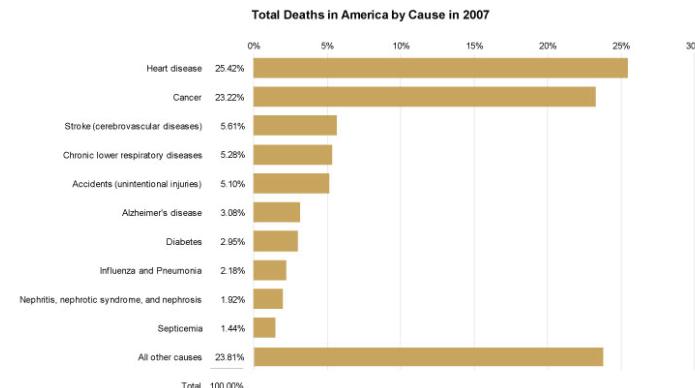
3D pie charts are usually evil



What was the intent of the designer of this graphic?
Which category led to the greatest total deaths?
What was the proportion of deaths due to strokes?
Did more people die from strokes vs. accidents?

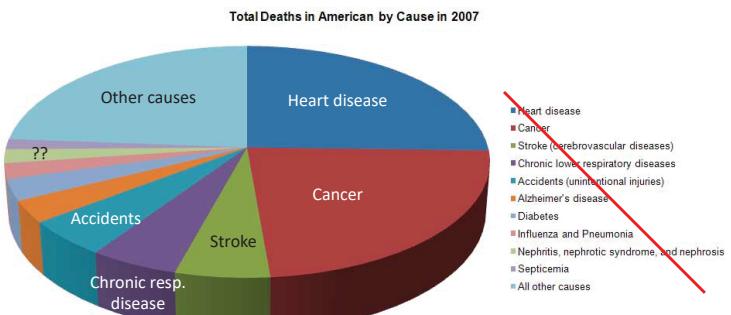
68

Simple re-design makes it clearer



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Or, try to use direct labels



As a rule of thumb, pie charts max out at ~ 5-7 sectors

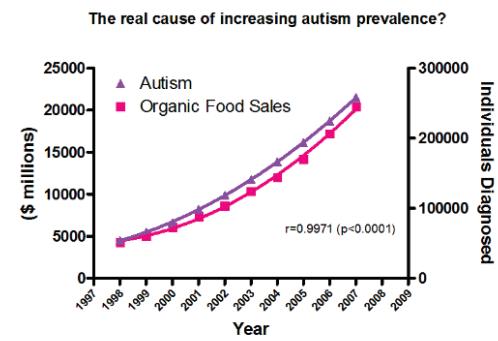
70

Double Y-axis: Really evil graphs

After pie charts, double Y-axis graphs have caused more trouble than almost any other

OMG, autism has been increasing directly with sales of organic food!

BAN
ORGANIC
FOOD!



71

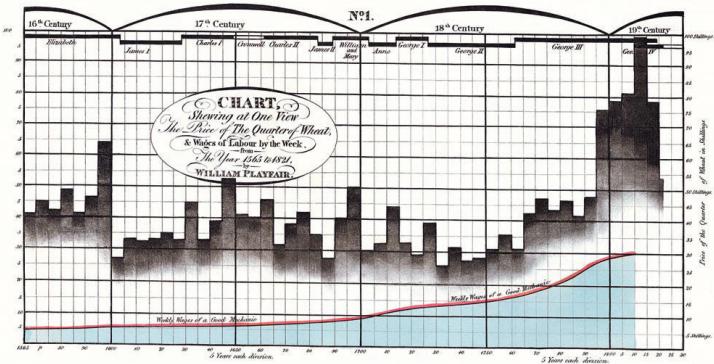
But, can be used to great effect

William Playfair invented the pie chart, line chart and bar chart.

In this figure, he shows 3 parallel time series over a 250-year period, 1560–1810

- weekly wages of a good mechanic
- price of wheat
- reigning monarch

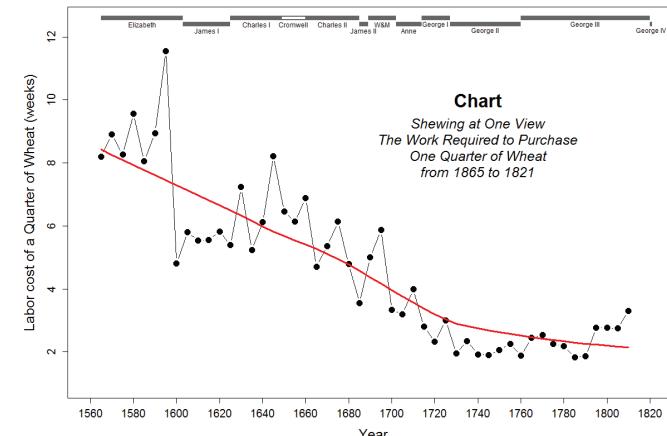
Goal: show that workers were better off most recently (1810) than in the past



72

Or, another graph would have been better

A modern re-vision plots the **ratio** of price of wheat to wages directly
Makes Playfair's point more directly, but less beautifully



73

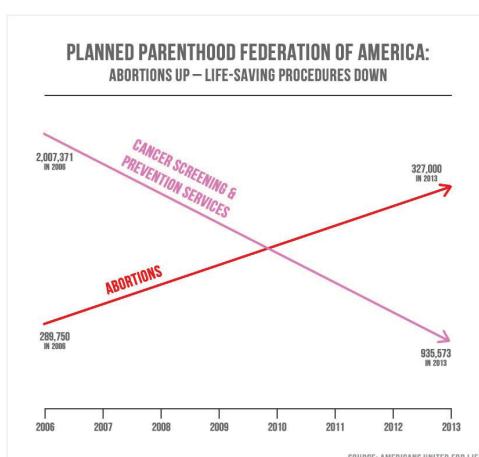
Even more evil: No scales, no data

Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, sparred with Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards during a high-profile hearing on Sept. 29, 2015 and presented this graph.

"In pink, that's the reduction in the breast exams, and the red is the increase in the abortions. That's what's going on in your organization."

Created by an anti-abortion group it is a deliberate attempt to mislead.

Can you see why?



See: <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2015/oct/01/jason-chaffetz/chart-shown-planned-parenthood-hearing-misleading/>

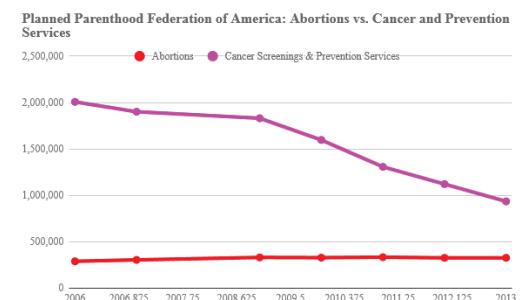
74

Corrected graph

This graph shows the actual data from the Planned Parenthood reports used by Americans United for Life

The number of abortions was relatively steady.

Some services like pap smears, dropped due to changing medical standards about who should be screened and how often.



What improvements can be made to this graph?

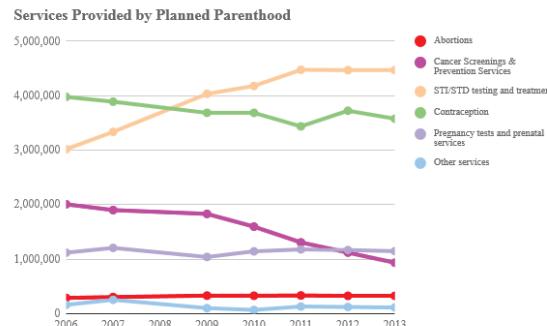
- Fix formatting of axis labels
- Choose better colors
- Use direct labels

75

Corrected graph, in context

Showing a wider range of PP activities puts these data in context

PP activities were far higher for contraception and STD testing



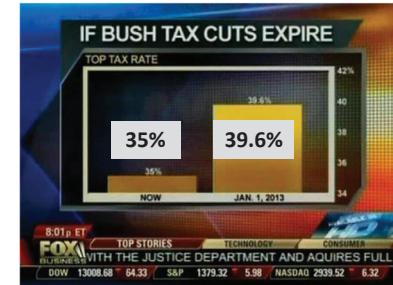
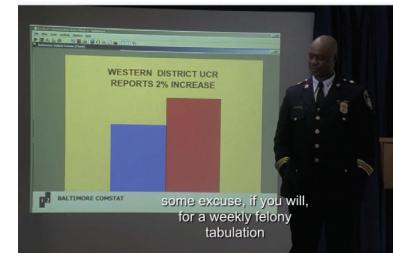
76

Evil Bars

You can say anything you want if you don't show a scale for the vertical axis

Q: Do people judge the difference in heights or the ratio of heights?

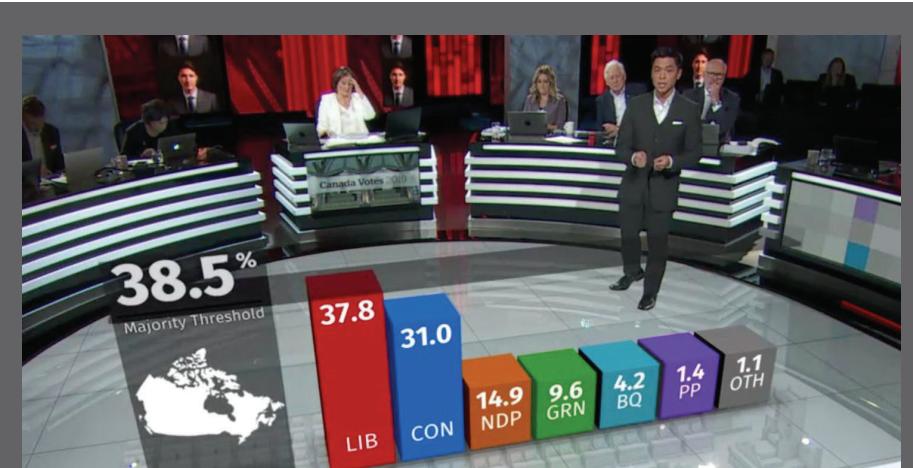
A: It depends on the question



You can greatly distort the perception of difference or ratio by truncating the Y axis.

Y-axis truncation is/was the default in Excel!

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More evil:
3D bars

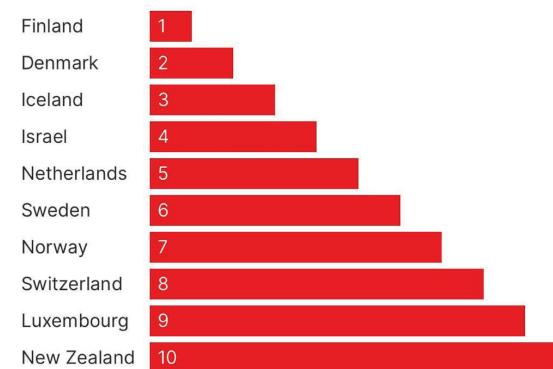
- CBC found it irresistible to make 3D bars to show the 2015 election projection.
- Why do you think the smallest 5 bars are all the same height?

78

How to make a confusing bar chart

Top 10 Happiest Countries in 2023

This chart shows the top 10 happiest countries according to the 2023 World Happiness Report.



Why did they make this a bar chart?

What re-design would avoid the confusion?

Kilde: [World Happiness Report](https://twitter.com/TheEditorDiary/status/1742939764003893567/photo/1)

<https://twitter.com/TheEditorDiary/status/1742939764003893567/photo/1>

79

Graphical Excellence: Tables

A study by Abigail Friendly (2017) wanted to show the use of benefits afforded to Toronto developers for their contributions of different types over time

Figure 9: Section 37 benefits by type (1998–2015)



Source: Friendly, A. R. (2017). *Land Value Capture and Social Benefits: Toronto and São Paulo Compared*. IMFG Papers on Municipal Finance and Governance, No 33, University of Toronto, <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/imfg/>

80

Graphical failure

This graph reports the results of a survey by Sherman Kent for the CIA with the question:

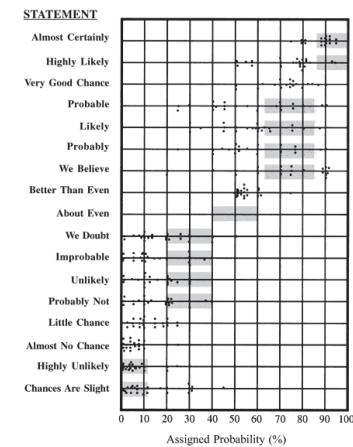
What [probability/number] would you assign to the phrase "[phrase]"

The goal was to contribute to an understanding of how intelligence analysts use these terms

Why can this be considered a graphical failure?

- Grid lines obscure the data
- What do the grey bars mean?

Figure 18: Measuring Perceptions of Uncertainty



<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/psychology-of-intelligence-analysis/fig18.gif/image.gif>

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Graphical excellence

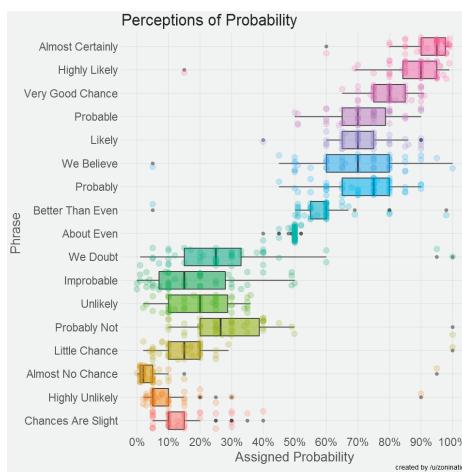
This graph shows the same data, as both dotplots & boxplots

We can see a lot more:

- "about even" has very low variability
- the last 3 categories are listed out of order
- the extreme outliers stand out
- skewness is – for high probability, + for low probability

Technical notes:

- software: ggplot2
- design: faint grid lines
- color: points use transparent color & jittering; outliers also shown in black



From: <https://github.com/zonation/perceptions>

82

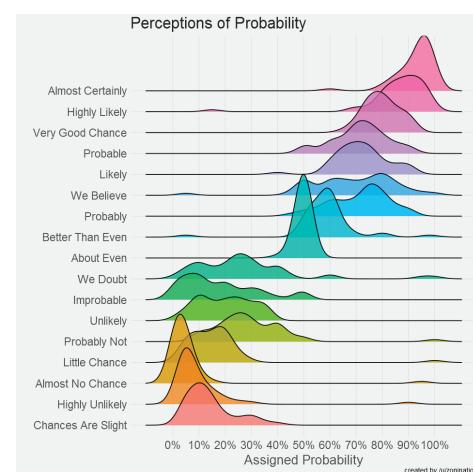
Graphical excellence

This graph uses "ridgeline" plots to show the same data

Each one is a small version of a density plot showing a smoothed version of the distribution

Stacking them in this way allows center, variability, shape and other features to be readily compared.

Color & transparency are used effectively

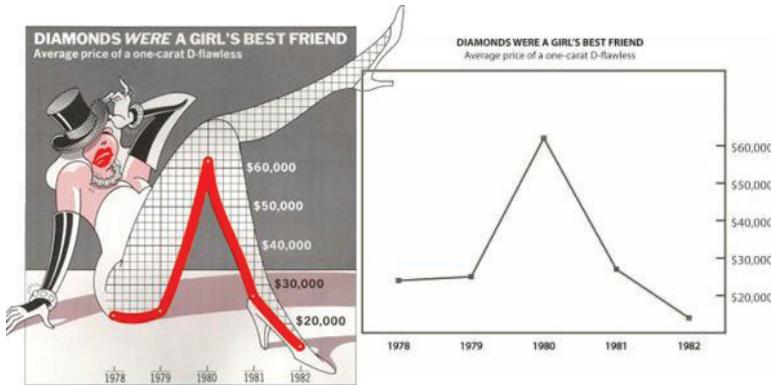


83

Chart junk or effective info vis?

Charts can be offensive and/or effective

What is the message?
Who is the audience?



NB: Info designers now consider the term "chart junk" itself offensive

84

Chart junk or effective info vis?

Suzana Herculano-Houzel has a new method for determining counts of cortical neurons across different species. How to present this effectively?

Goal: compare mammal species brain size and cortical neuron count

Neuron count is shown both as numbers and bars

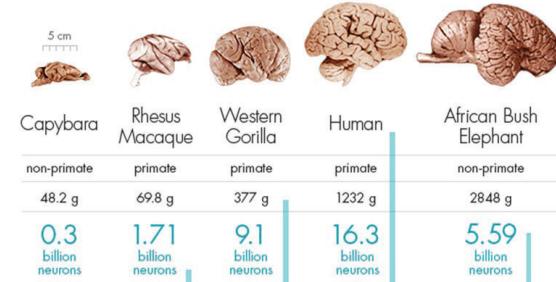
Claim: Human brain is ~ linear of primate brains

What do you think?

How could this be made better?

BRAIN SIZE AND NEURON COUNT

Cerebral cortex mass and neuron count for various mammals.



From: Herculano-Houzel, "The human brain in numbers: a linearly scaled-up primate brain "
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/neuro.09.031.2009/full>

85

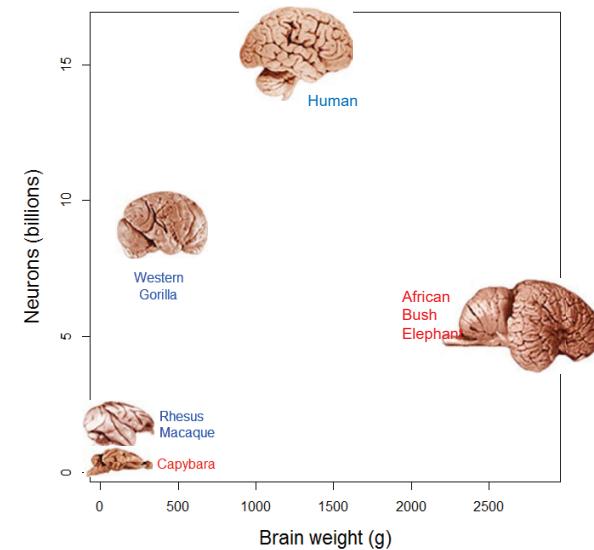
As a scatterplot?

A scatterplot makes clear how humans differ from other species

- Using scaled images as point symbols also conveys brain size
- **Primates** are distinguished from **non-primates** by text color

This is arguably a more effective display.

What do you think?



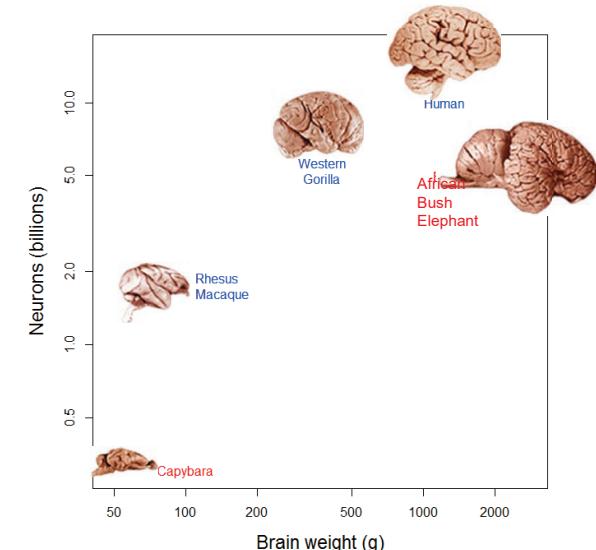
86

As a scatterplot – log scale

Perhaps even better is to make the plot using log scales for both axes

The relationship is now easier to see, but only approx. linear

The argument for neurons ~ brain weight needs more work.



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Why graphs matter: Climate change

In the movie, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Al Gore used the now-famous “hockey stick” graph to show that human activities had greatly increased the degree of global warming over the recent past

The goal was to raise public awareness and call for action to curb environmental effects: CO₂ emissions as the main agent.



Movie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZUoYGA15i0>; <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0497116/>

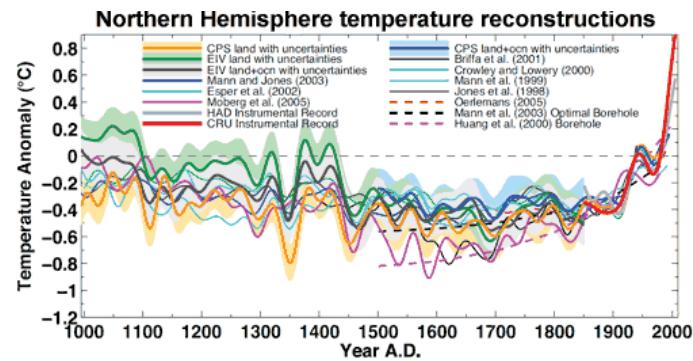
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Climate change: data sources

The MBH (1999) paper had used a wide variety of data sources. They were combined using a novel statistical technique, the first eigenvector-based climate field reconstruction (CFR).

Climate scientists understood this; the sceptics did not.

TOO MUCH INFO??



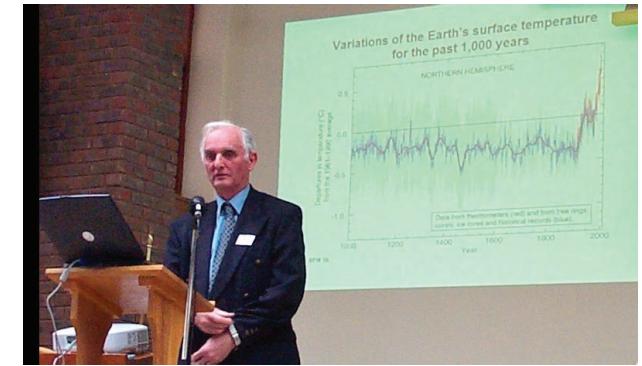
See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hockey_stick_controversy for details

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Climate change: Original graph

Sir John Houghton presents the original Northern Hemisphere hockey stick graph to the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) in 2005.

It is based on an analysis by Mann, Bradley & Hughes (1990), with a smoothed curve and uncertainty intervals.



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Countering climate change

Taking a longer view, and adding a lot of extraneous historical details, climate sceptics were easily able to mount alternative explanations: Solar irradiation & volcanoes

How to mislead:

- Show no temp. scale
- Draw smoothed curve
- Suggest that all is due to “swings” in temp.
- Compress recent history into the end of the time scale

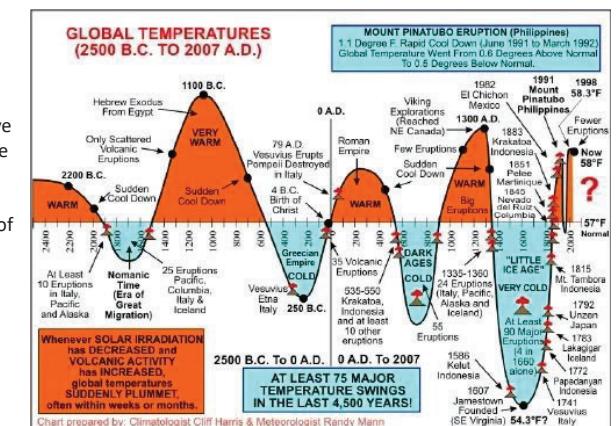


Chart prepared by: Climatologist Cliff Harris & Meteorologist Randy Mann

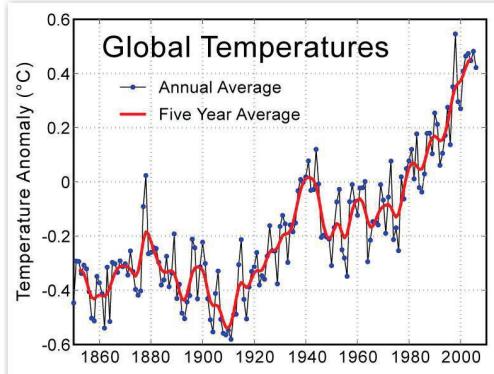
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Time scale

Perhaps one fault with the original graphs was trying to show noisy data, from many sources, over too wide a time span.

What could you do to make this graph even more convincing?

- Add an overall smooth curve
- De-emphasize the annual data



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Climate change: Infographic

A politically-incorrect graphic shows very clearly the effect of global warming on panty size



Source: <http://www.politically-incorrect-humor.com/2010/03/positive-proof-of-global-warming>

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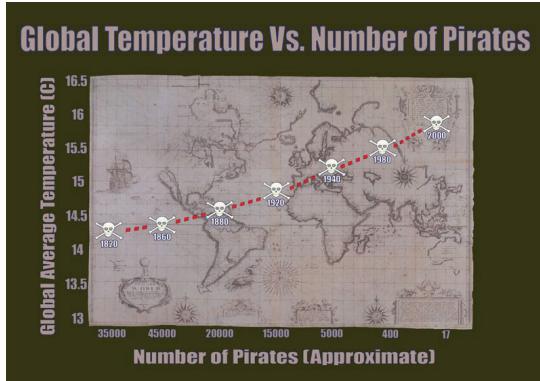
Climate change: other explanations

This infographic attempts to relate global warming to the decrease in pirates

Aside from the substance, how many things are wrong about this graphic?

Simple explanation:
Lack of pirates causes
global warming!

Conclusion:
To stop global warming,
become a pirate!

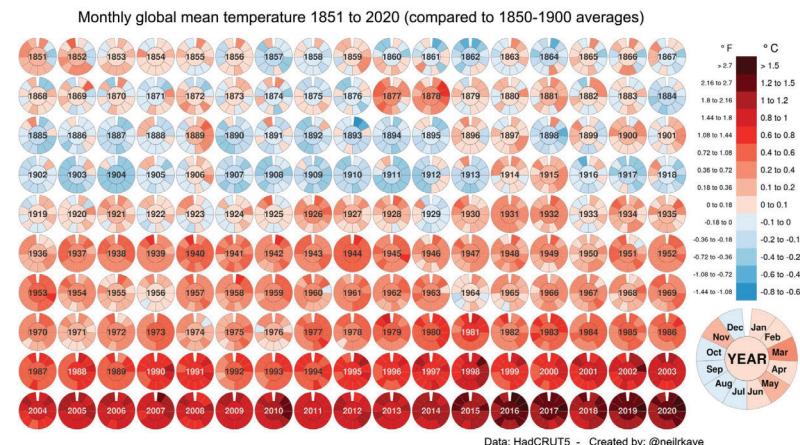


Source: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikaandersen/2012/03/23>true-fact-the-lack-of-pirates-is-causing-global-warming>

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Circle graphs

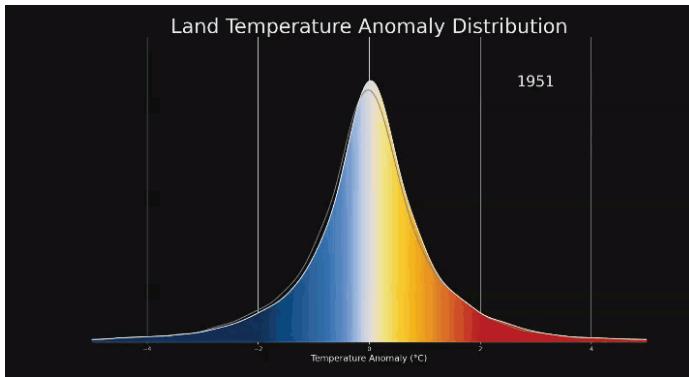
What features makes this graph effective?



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Animation

Shifting Distribution of Land Temperature Anomalies, 1951-2020

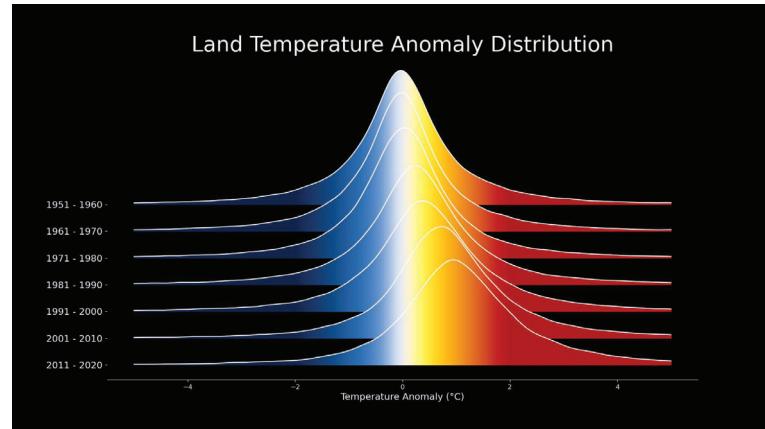


<https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/4891>

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Animation -> Ridgeline plot

A ridgeline plot (stacking traces) turns the animation into a static graph



<https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/4891>

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Some graphic rules

- Bars
 - Don't cut off their feet
 - Don't add dynamite fuses
- Pies
 - Generally, best preserved for dessert
 - Well used for part-whole relations with a small number of categories
 - Better used as a graphic form in larger displays
- Axes
 - Avoid double Y-axes
 - Don't truncate without considerable thought
- 3D
 - Avoid for useless "glitz"

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Summary

- Graphs as a form of communication
 - Data (numbers), words, images → Stories
 - Goal: tell a story
- Analysis graphs vs. presentation graphs
 - Know your audience
- Some principles of effective data display
 - Make the data stand out
 - Facilitate comparisons
 - Effect ordering
 - Direct labeling

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