

DATA VISUALIZATION

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“Those hired into analytical roles typically have quantitative backgrounds that suit them well for the other steps (finding the data, pulling it together, analyzing it, building models), but not necessarily any formal training in design to help them when it comes to the communication of the analysis—which, by the way, is typically the only part of the analytical process that your audience ever sees”

Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic. “Storytelling with Data”.

PART A

PERCEPTION, DESIGN AND STORYTELLING
IN DATA VISUALIZATION

WHAT IS A GOOD DATA VISUALIZATION

Two conditions:

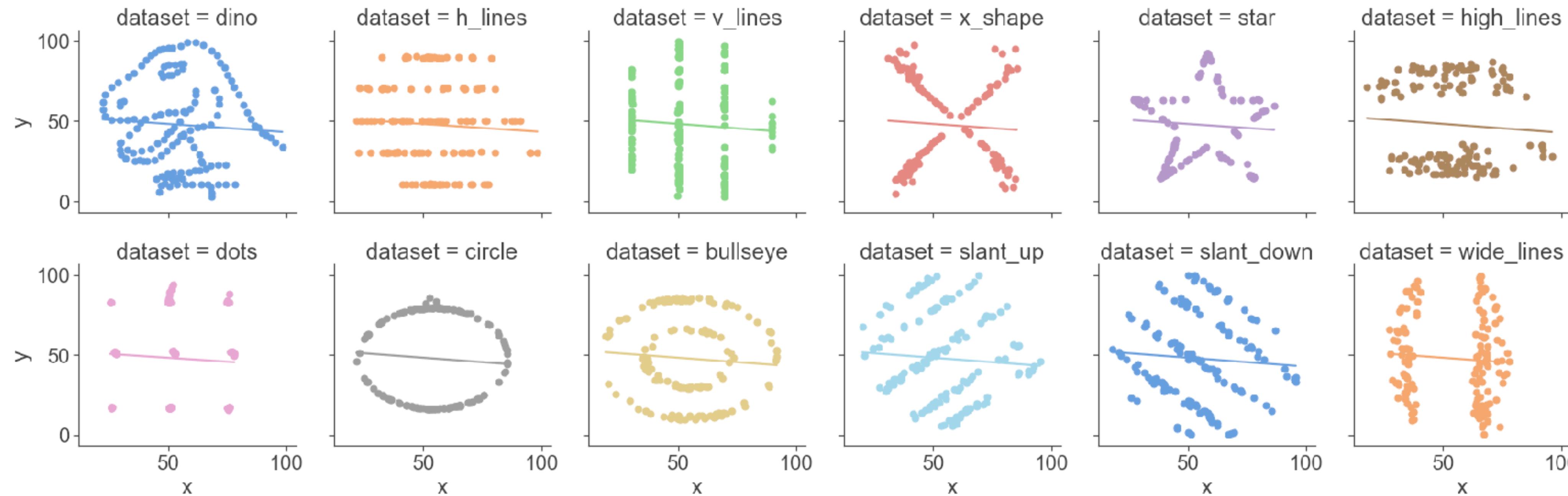
- ▶ Fair (e.g. correct data, not hiding important information)
- ▶ Effective and efficient: Reduce cognitive load and misinterpretations

Cognitive load

The amount of working memory used to take in information and consolidate it into long-term memory.

INTRODUCTION

How much longer would it take you to understand that the datasets are different?



WHY DO WE WANT TO REDUCE COGNITIVE LOAD

- ▶ More willing to **read** your paper
- ▶ More likely to **understand** the data/results
- ▶ More willing to **accept** the results
- ▶ More likely to **remember** them

HOW TO REDUCE COGNITIVE LOAD

- ▶ Good use of *perception* principles → Ethical and efficient
- ▶ Good use of *design* and *storytelling* principles → Effective



understand the
context



choose an
effective visual

PERCEPTION



**eliminate
clutter**



**focus
attention**



**tell a
story**

DESIGN

STORYTELLING

PART 1

UNDERSTAND

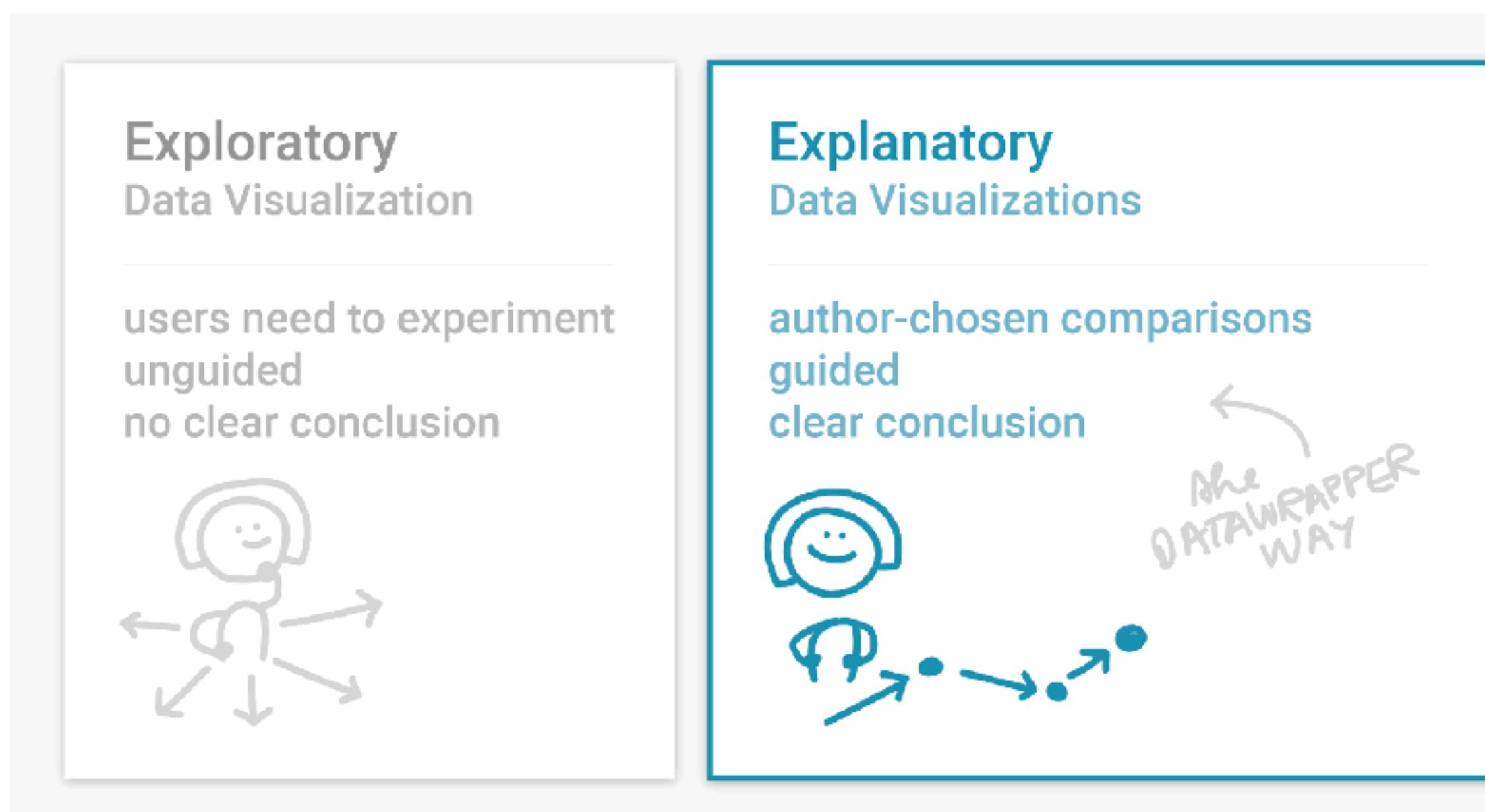
TWO MAIN QUESTIONS

- (1) WHO IS IT FOR?
- (2) WHAT IS THE MAIN MESSAGE?

PART 1: UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

(1) WHO IS IT FOR? — EXPLORATORY VS EXPLANATORY VISUALIZATION

- Yourself (exploratory) vs **others (explanatory)**
- Academics vs journalists vs lay audience
- Online audience (color/bw) vs presentation

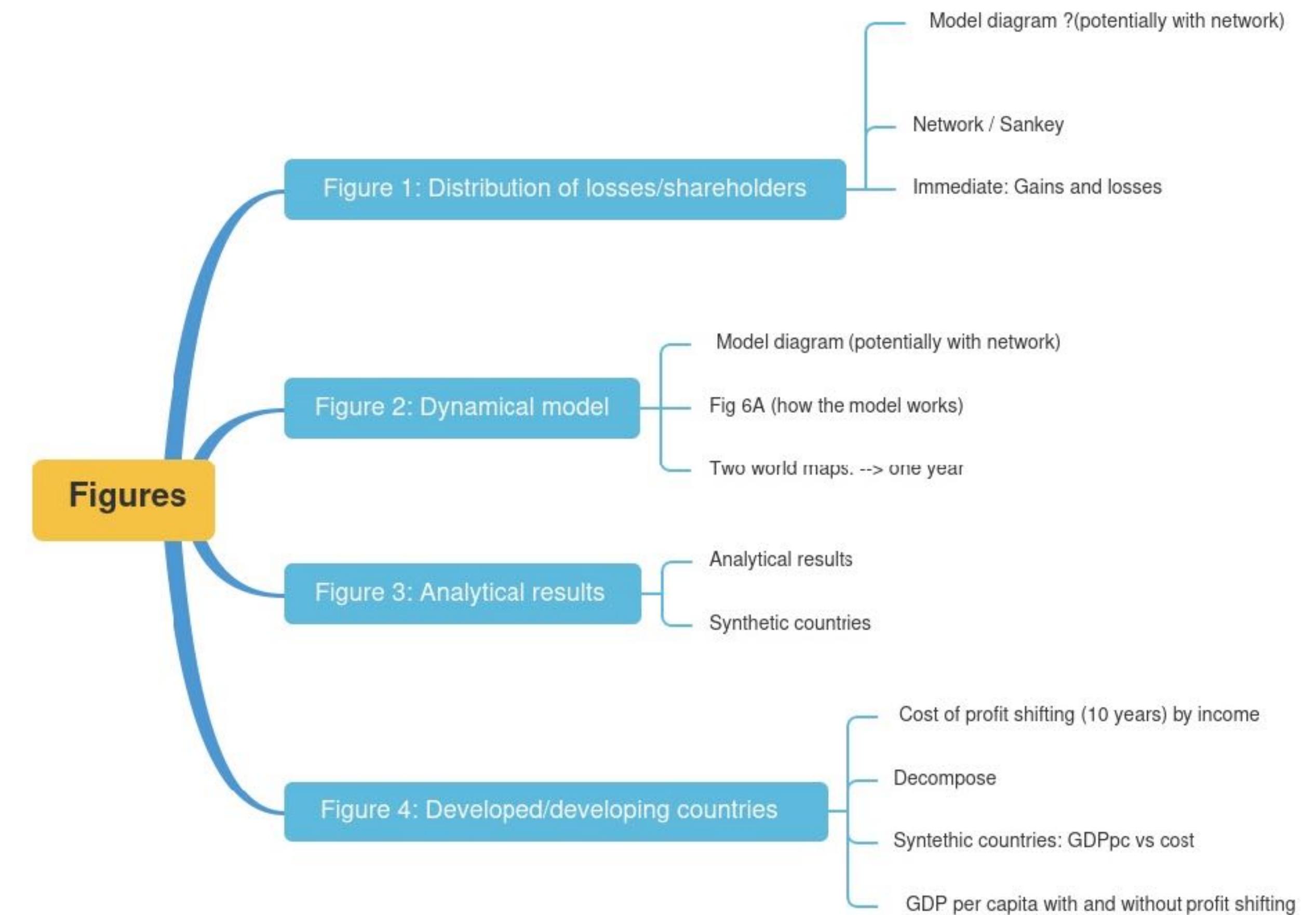


PART 1: UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

(2) WHAT IS THE MAIN MESSAGE?

Each figure should have **one**
(and only one) main message

Write it down in one sentence,
be specific.



PART 1: UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PRACTICE: EXPLORE DATASET

- ▶ Katya's dataset: students at the Humanities' Faculty of the UvA between September 2021 and September 2023.
 - ▶ Number of observations: 7850 students/student-program
 - ▶ Columns: BSA (none/positive/negative), Matchingvak (programs), MatchingResultaat (none/fulfilled/unsatisfied)
 - ▶ Message idea: TBD, the correlation between BSA and MatchingResultaat?
- ▶ Yan Shao's dataset: leader rated employees' performance and creativity, followers rated their own experience and leader's behaviors .
 - ▶ Number of observations: 154
 - ▶ Columns: IV: Leader creativity, moderator: leader humility, mediator: profiles based on two creative self-efficacy: idea generation self-efficacy and idea promotion self-efficacy, DV: creativity rated by the leader
 - ▶ Message idea: TBD, interaction between creativity, humility and idea generation
- ▶ School Shooting 1: (ss.tsv)
 - ▶ School shooting per day
 - ▶ Columns: date, number of victims, state of attack
 - ▶ Message idea: the probability of a new attack increases after each attack
- ▶ Steps:
 - ▶ 15 minutes to load data, explore it and come up with a message/audience
 - ▶ Limit yourself to 3 variables!

PART 2

EFFECTIVE VISUALS

PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL

WHICH FIGURE SHALL I USE?



THE UNSPOKEN PITCH

GOALS:

Two conditions:

- ▶ Fair (e.g. correct data, not hiding important information)
- ▶ Effective and efficient: Reduce **cognitive load** and misinterpretations

ELEMENTS OF A PLOT:

CHANNELS

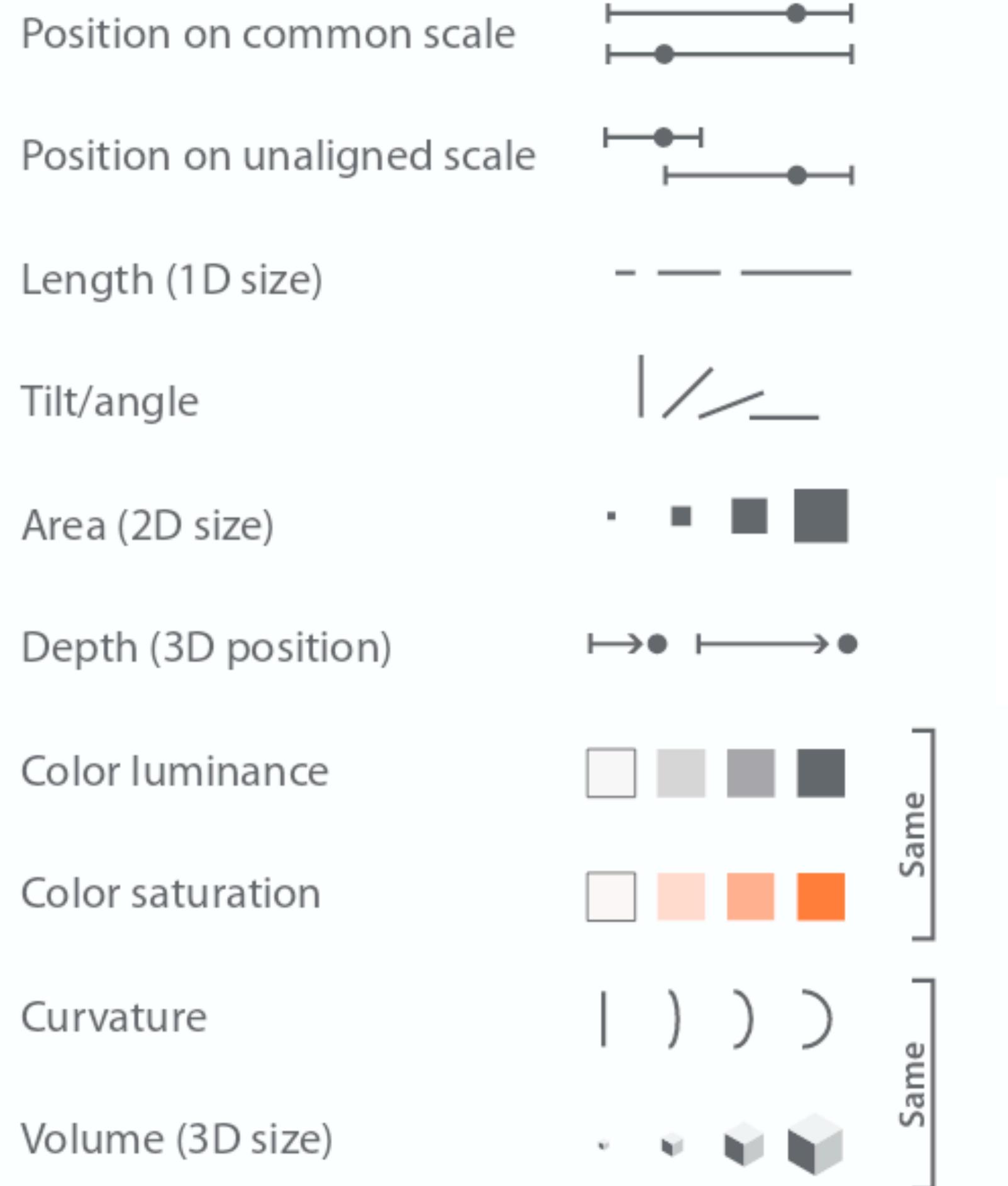
TEXT

TINYURL.COM/UU-DATAVIZ

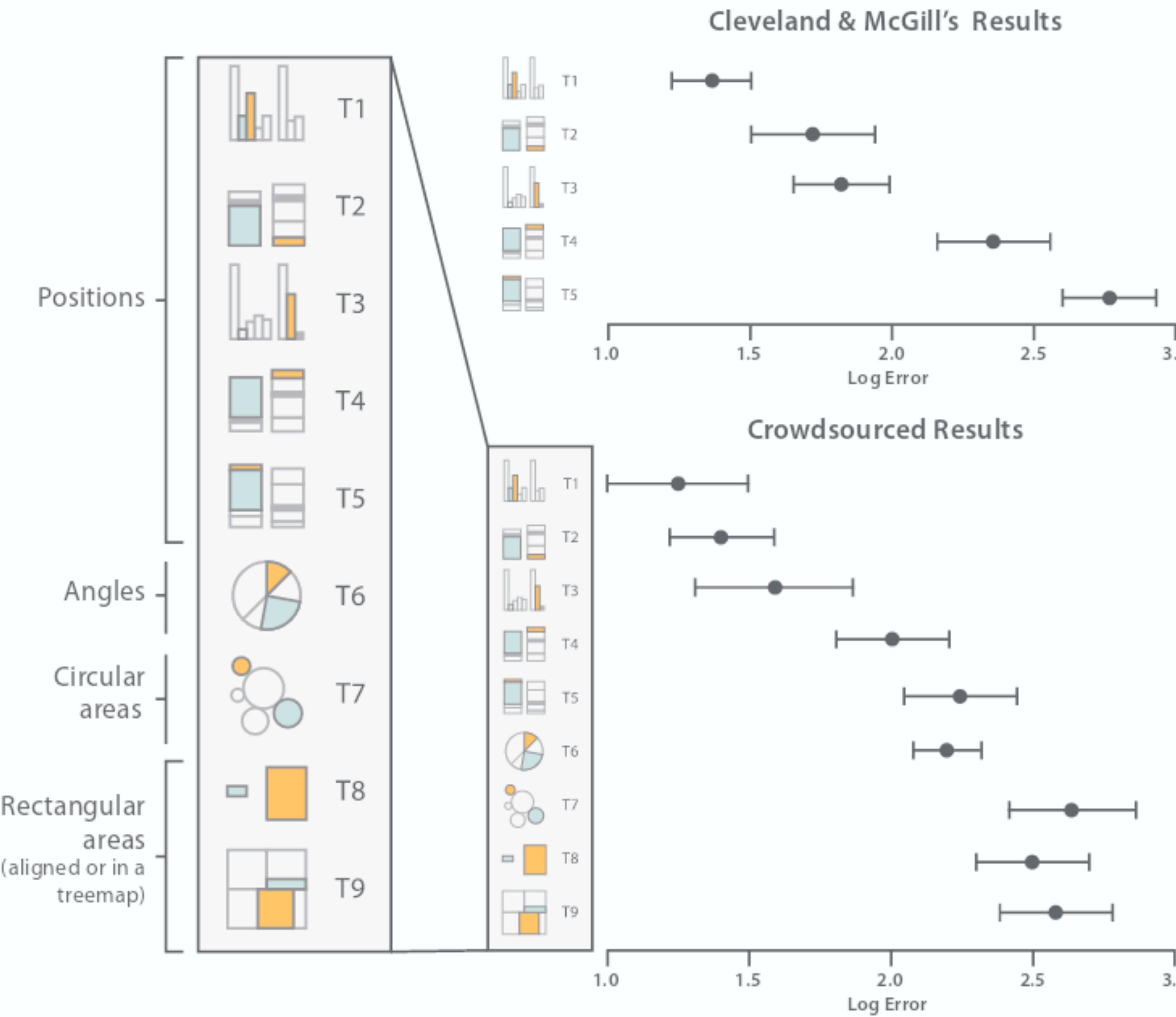
PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL

Channels: Expressiveness Types and Effectiveness Ranks

④ **Magnitude** Channels: **Ordered Attributes**



PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL



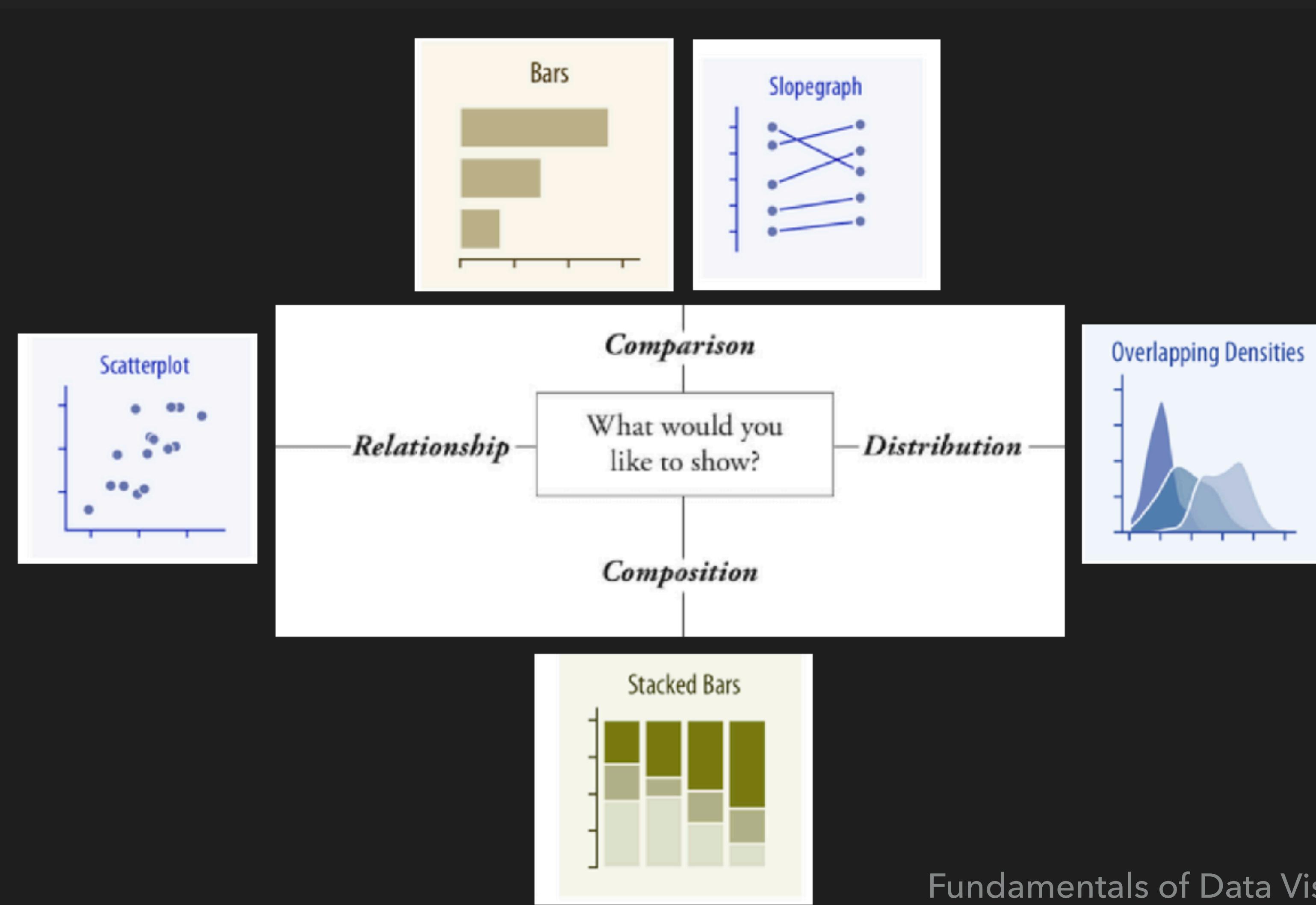
**NOT ALL CHANNELS
ARE EQUAL**

ELEMENTS OF A PLOT:

GRAPHICAL OBJECTS

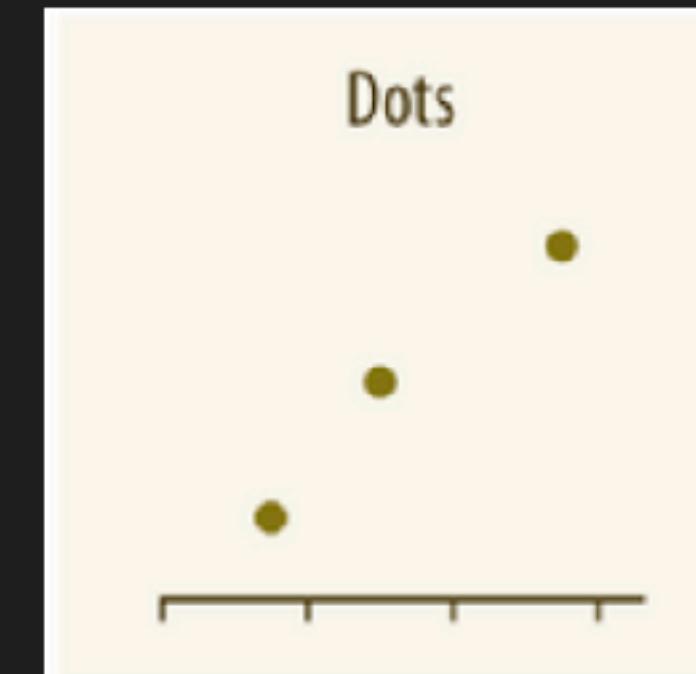
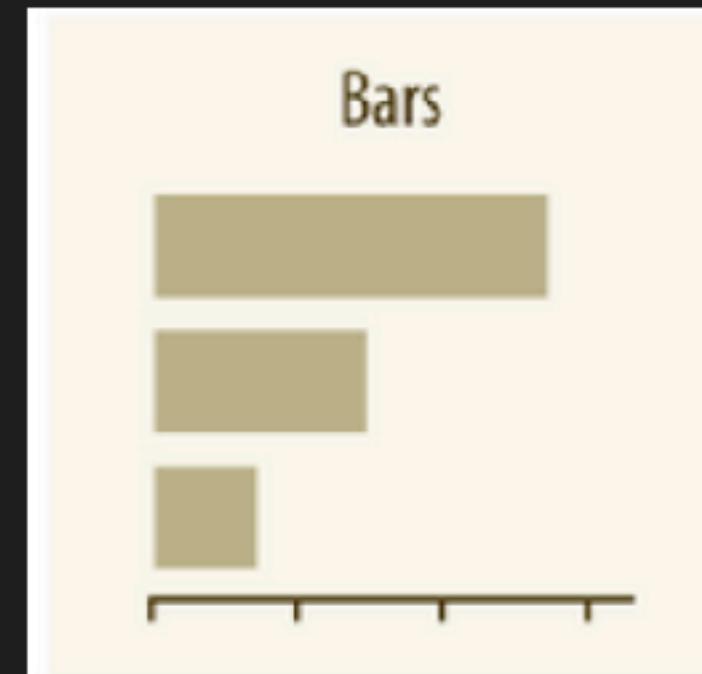
PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL

THE TYPE OF GRAPH DEPENDS ON THE GOAL



PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL

AMOUNTS AND PROPORTIONS

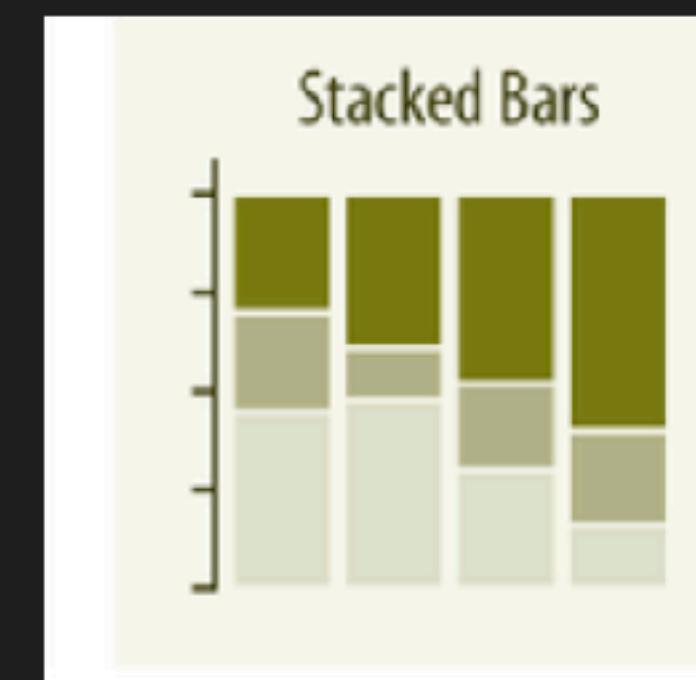


Required with log-scales

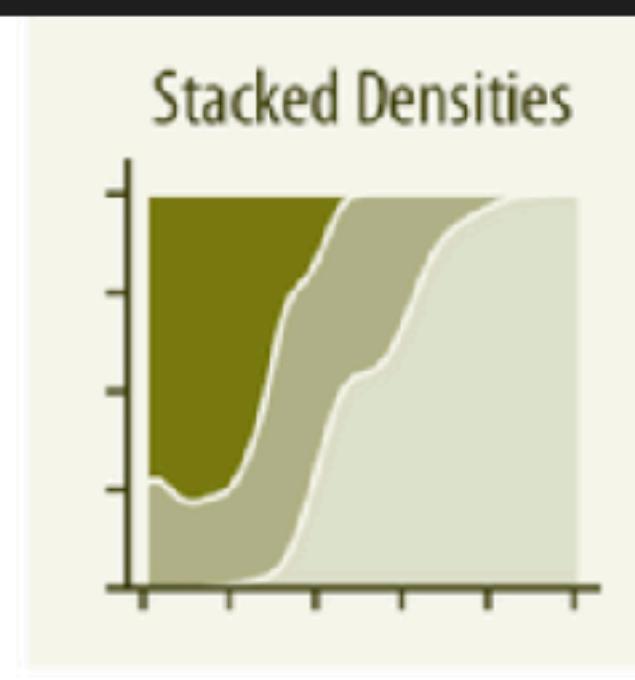
Trends



Differences within row



Proportions over x



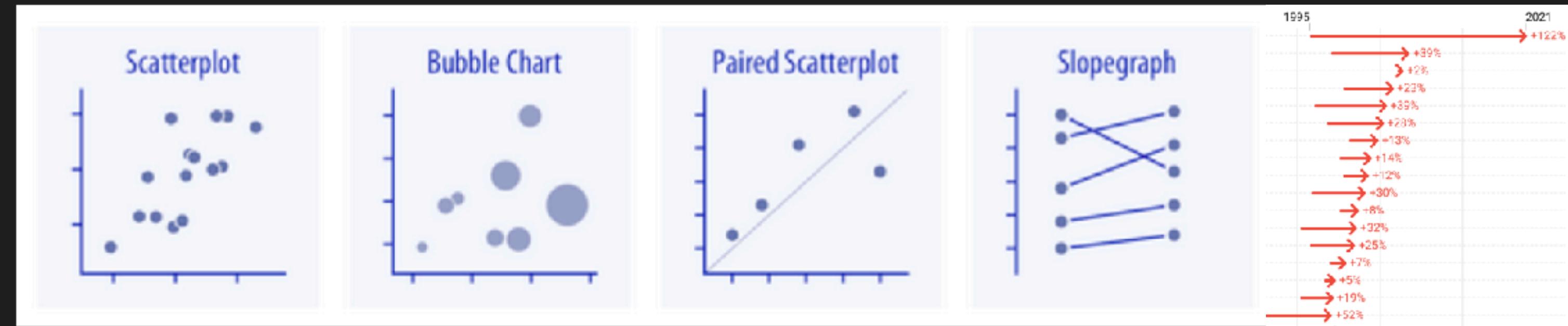
PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL

DISTRIBUTIONS

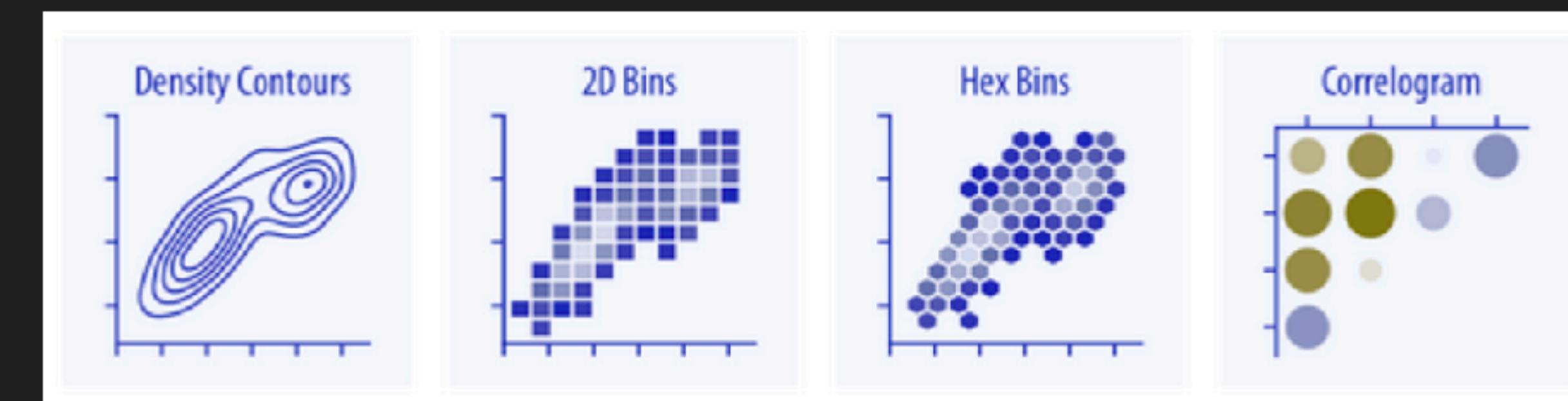


PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL

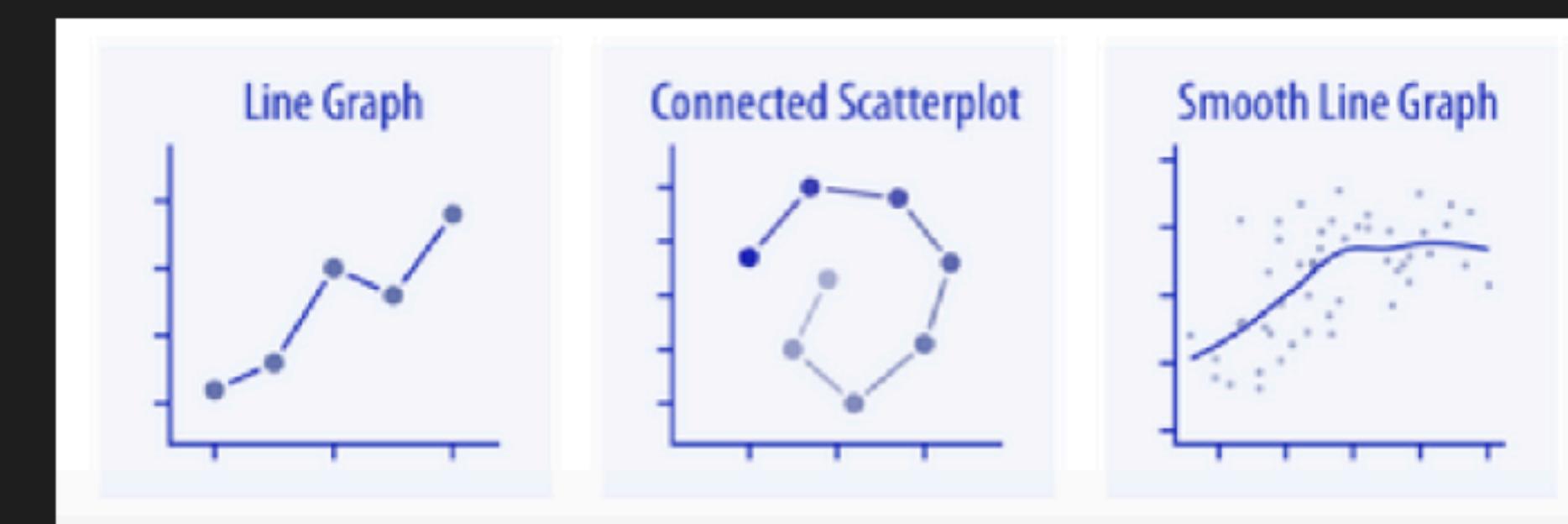
RELATIONSHIPS



Too many points?



Time series?

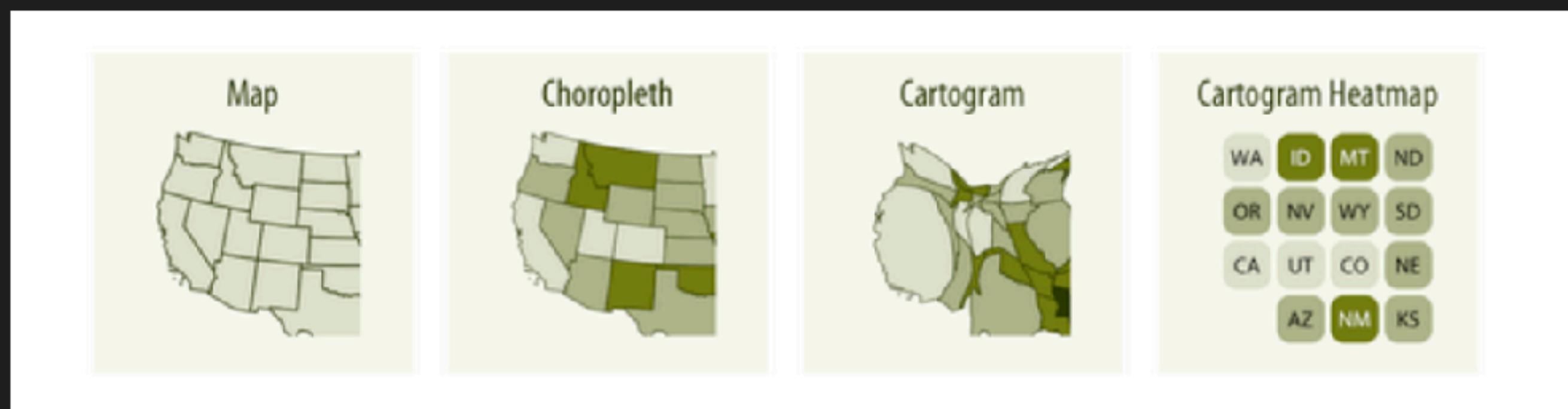


PART 2: CHOOSE AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

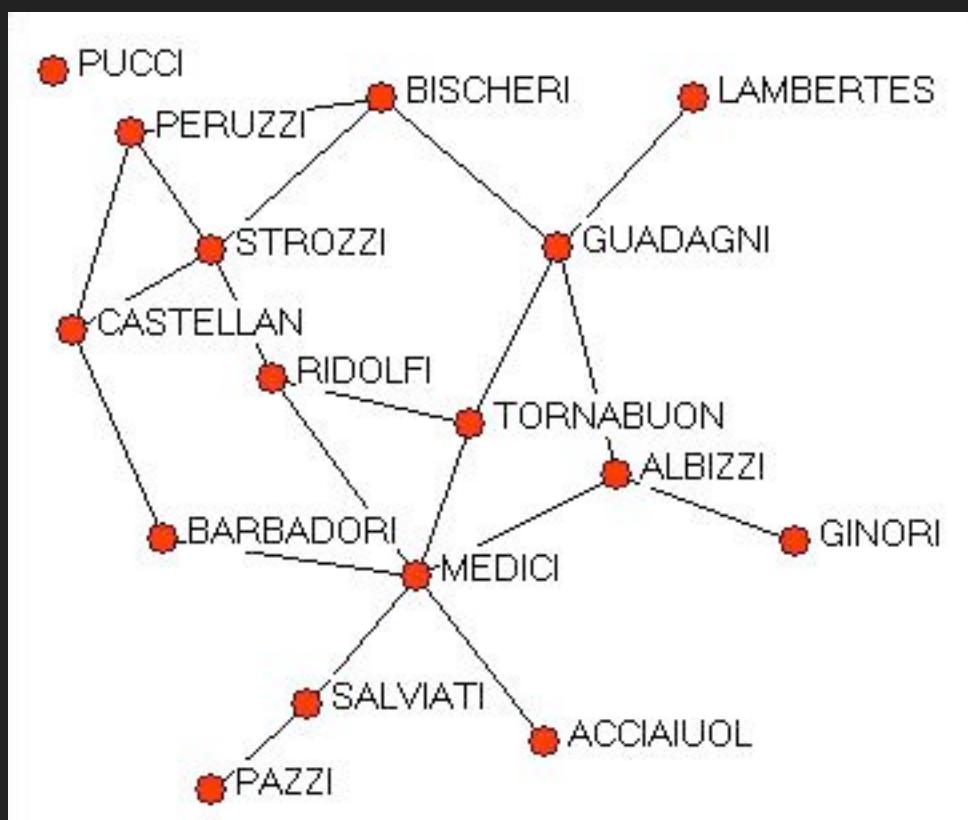
- ▶ Color is key (more on this later)
- ▶ Combine with a barplot or bubbles if the values are important

Do you *actually* need a map?

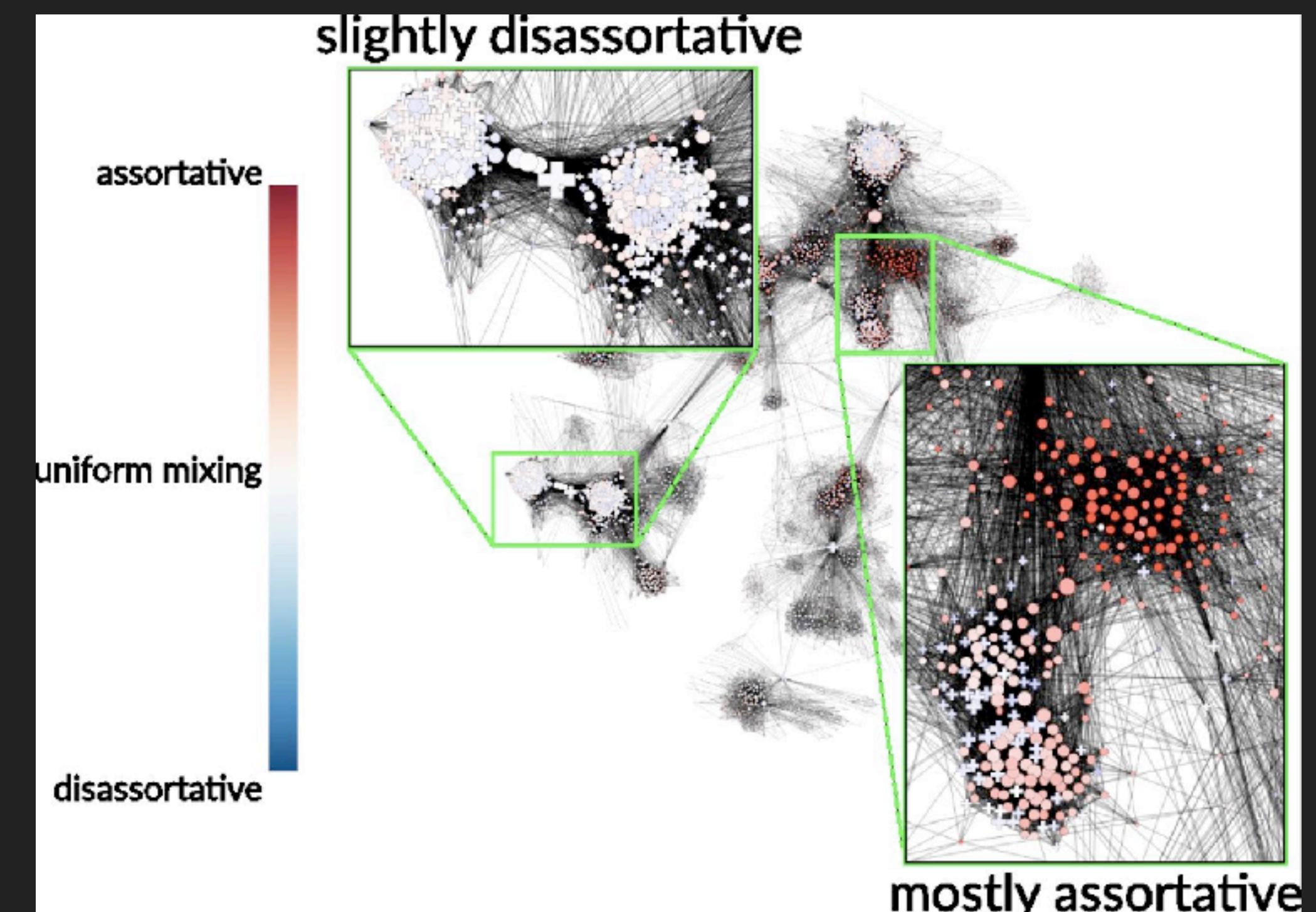


NETWORKS: DO YOU ACTUALLY NEED A NETWORK?

- ▶ Nobody wants to see your hairball
- ▶ Show if:
 - ▶ Small networks
 - ▶ Show a macro-pattern



Florentian families



Peel et al

ELEMENTS OF A PLOT:

SCALES, FACETS, TRANSFORMATIONS

SCALES, FACETS, TRANSFORMATIONS

- ▶ **Scales:** When to use logarithmic scale
 - ▶ Represent ratios or percentages (1:2 and 2:1 are equidistant from 1:1 in a log-scale)
 - ▶ Increase visibility (too many values with small values)
 - ▶ Show that our distribution follows a exponential (lin-log scale), lognormal (log-lin scale) or power-law (log-log scale) distribution
- ▶ **Facets** –> Comparing numbers next to each other is better
- ▶ **Transformations** –> Jitter, etc

PRACTICE: MAP TO CHANNELS AND SKETCH VISUALIZATION

- ▶ Link your message to the type of figure
 - ▶ Type of graph(s)
 - ▶ How are you mapping variables to channels?
 - ▶ Which transformations (if any)
- ▶ Steps:
 - ▶ 10 minutes to sketch your idea on paper
 - ▶ Mix groups and get feedback from other groups – 10 min

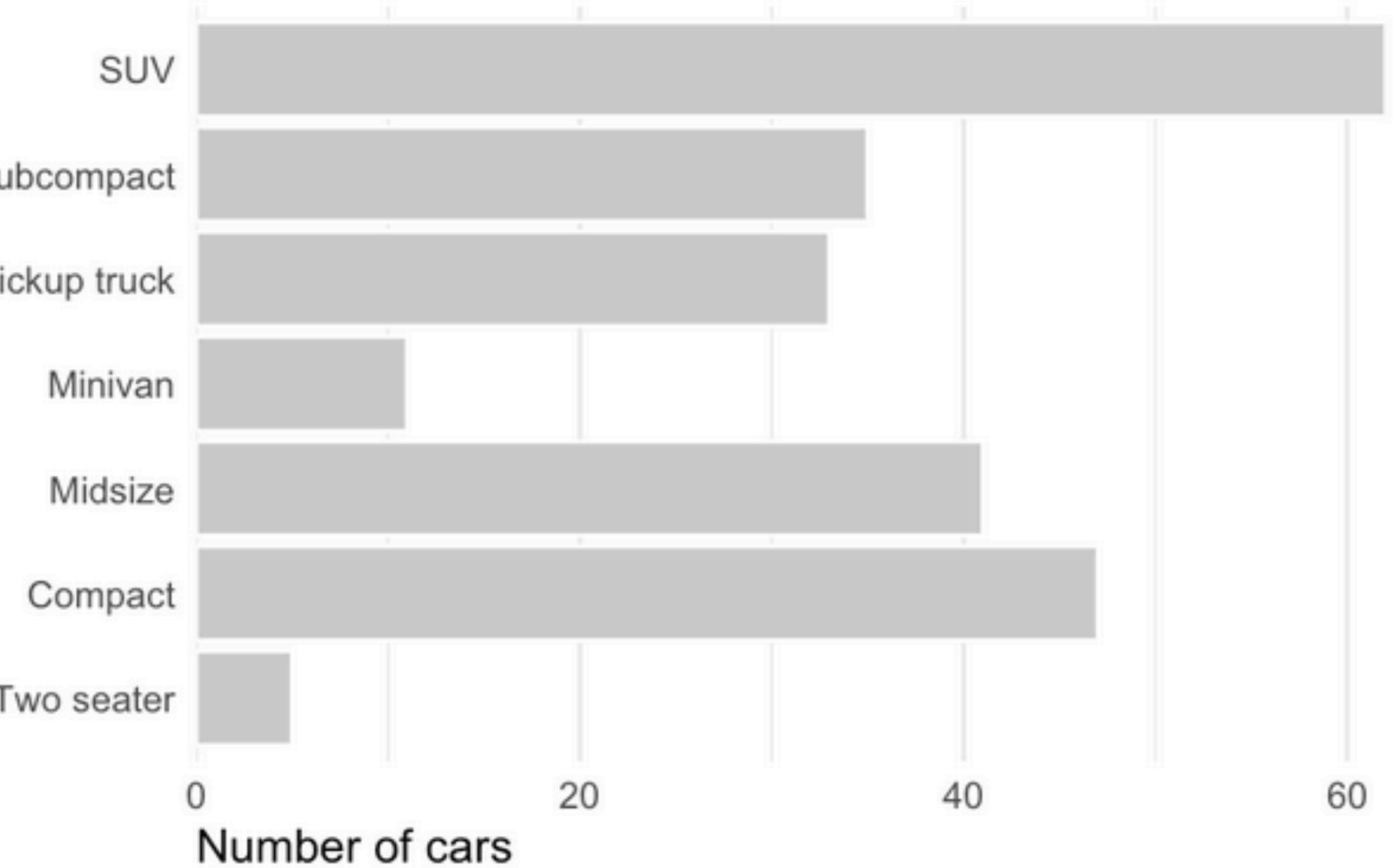
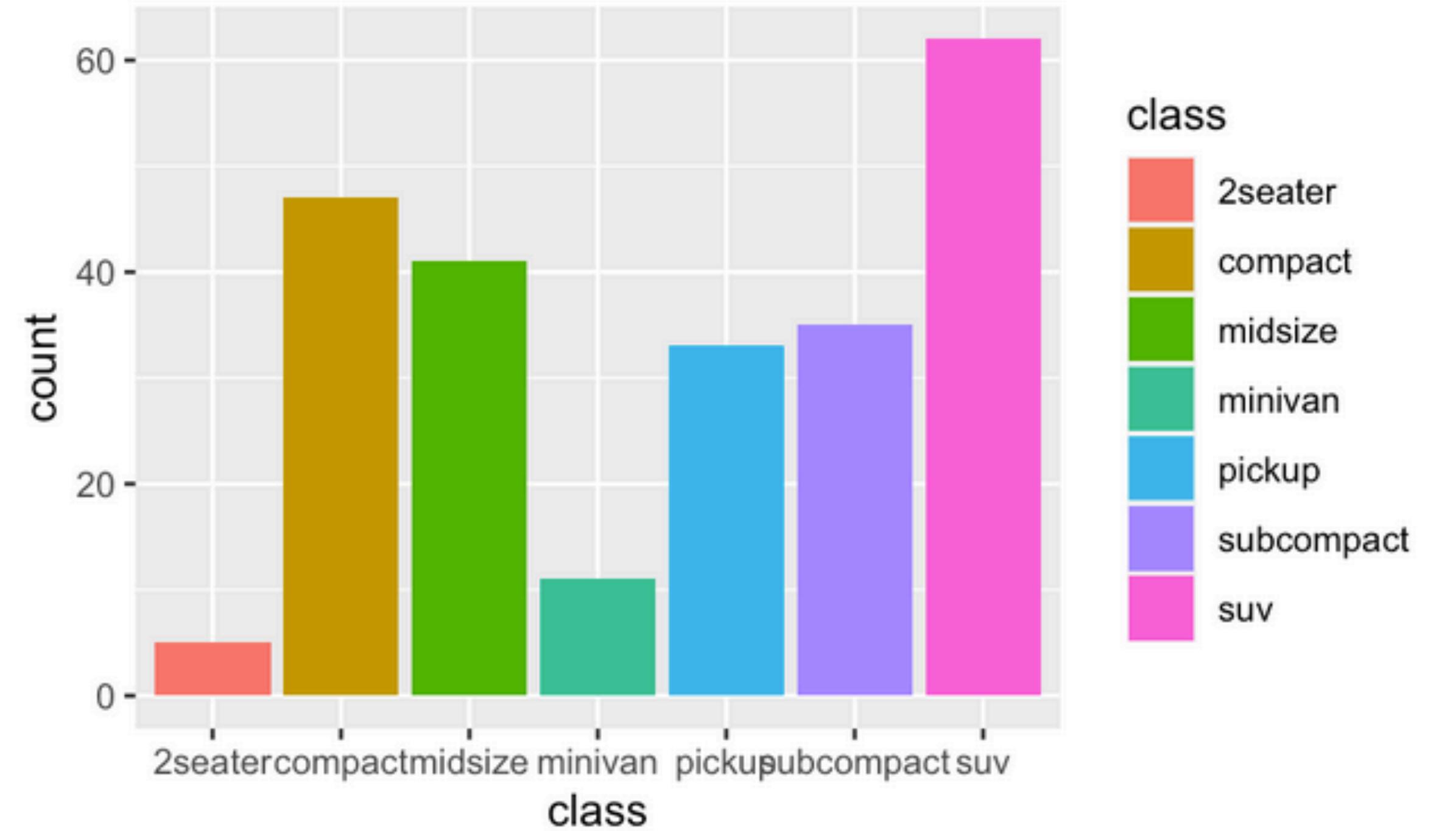
PRACTICE: MAP TO CHANNELS AND SKETCH VISUALIZATION

- ▶ Link your message to the type of figure
 - ▶ Type of graph(s)
 - ▶ How are you mapping variables to channels?
 - ▶ Which transformations (if any)
- ▶ Steps:
 - ▶ 20 minutes to code your plot
 - ▶ Python → *seaborn (sns.relplot or sns.catplot) + matplotlib for fine tuning*
 - ▶ R → *ggplot2*

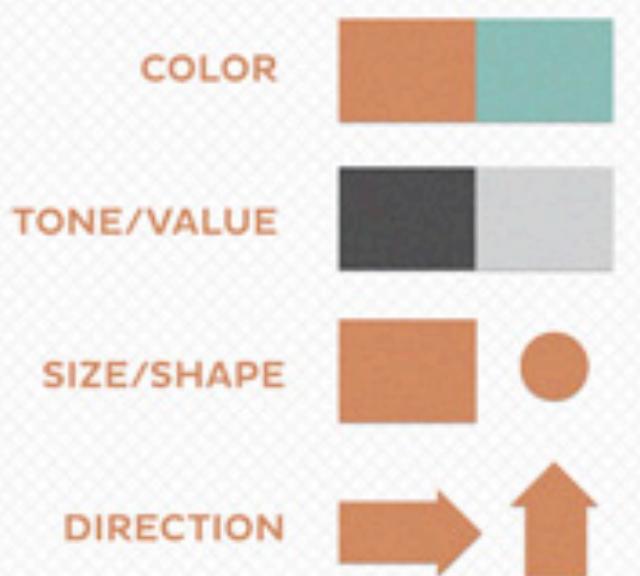
PART 3

DESIGN

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN: CRAP



CONTRAST



Unique elements in a design should stand apart from one another. One way to do this is to use contrast. Good contrast in a design – which can be achieved using elements like color, tone, size, and more – allows the viewer's eye to flow naturally.

To the left, you can see 4 ways to create contrast in your design.

ALIGNMENT

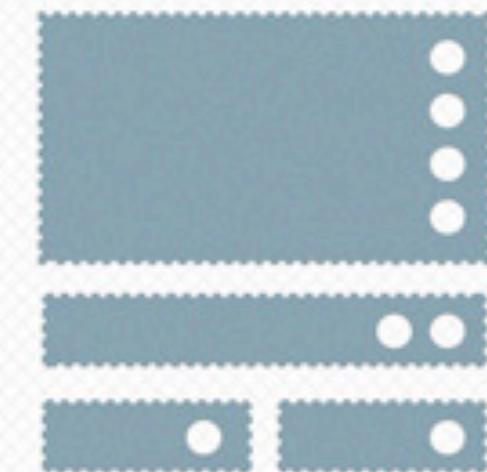
Proper alignment in a design means that every element in it is visually connected to another element. Alignment allows for cohesiveness; nothing feels out of place or disconnected when alignment has been handled well.

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REPETITION

Repetition breeds cohesiveness in a design. Once a design pattern has been established – for example, a dotted border or a specific typographic styling – repeat this pattern to establish consistency.



Establish a style for each element in a design and use it on similar elements.

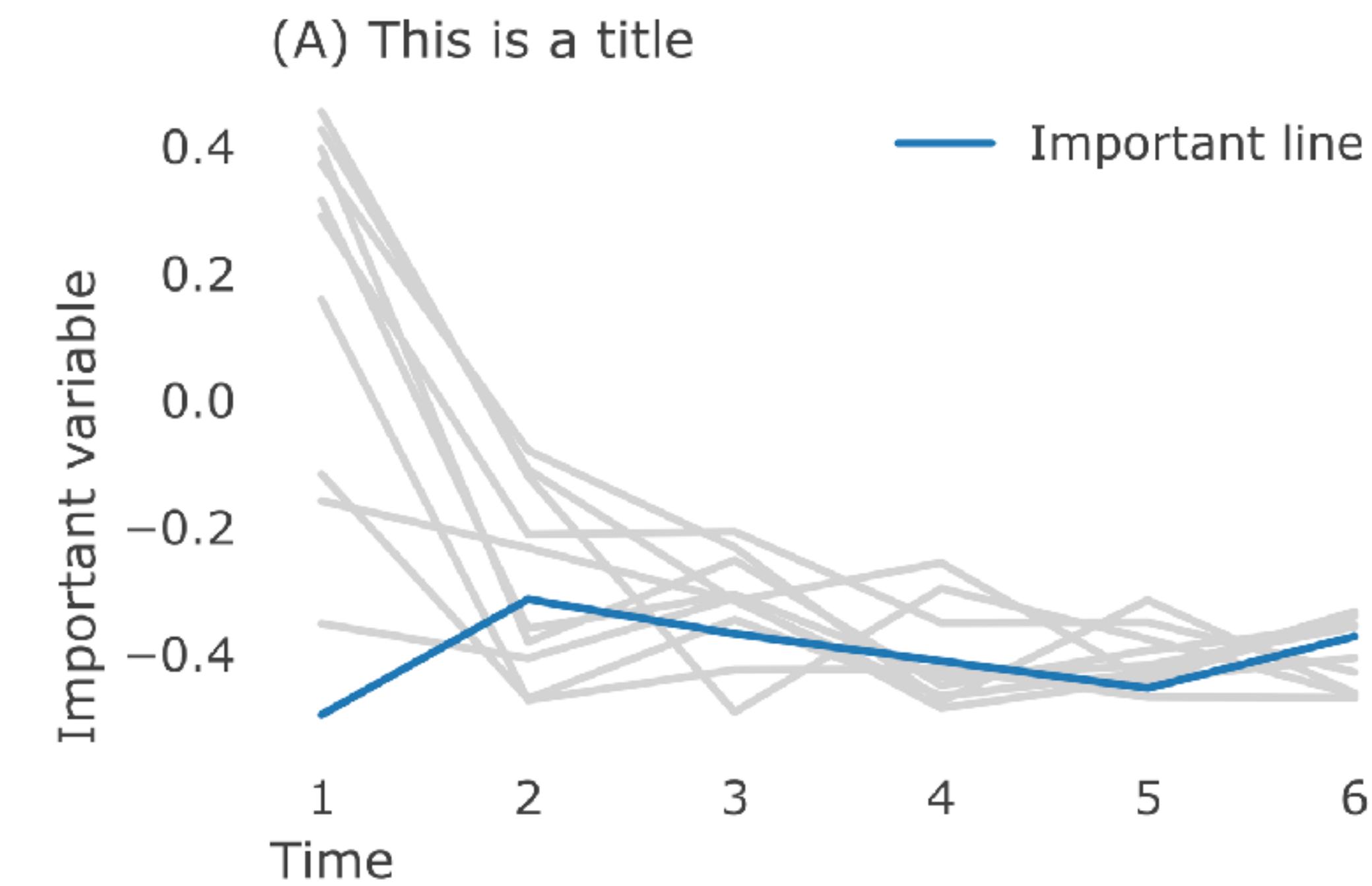
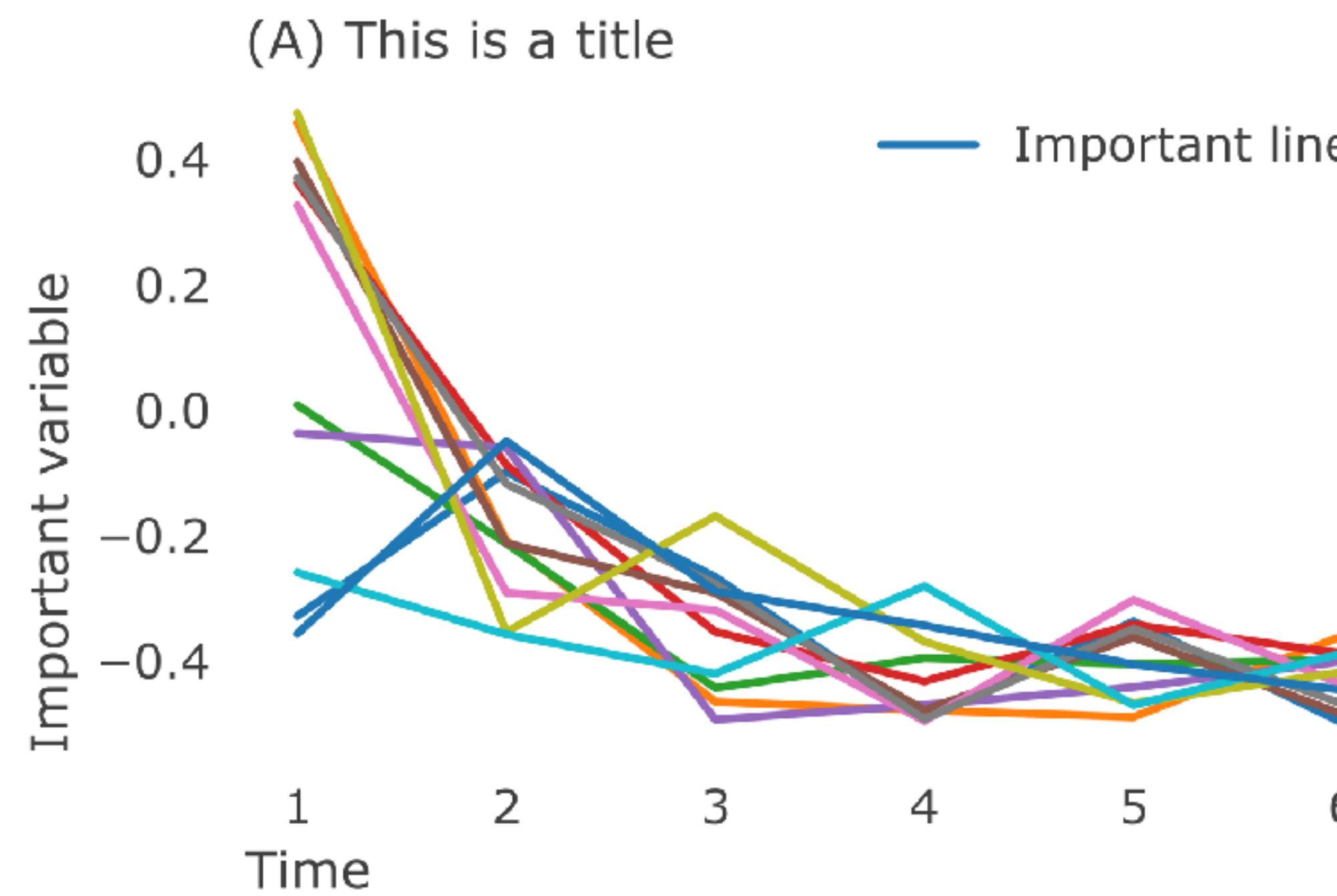
PROXIMITY

Proximity allows for visual unity in a design. If two elements are related to each other, they should be placed in close proximity to one another. Doing so minimizes visual clutter, emphasizes organization, and increases viewer comprehension.

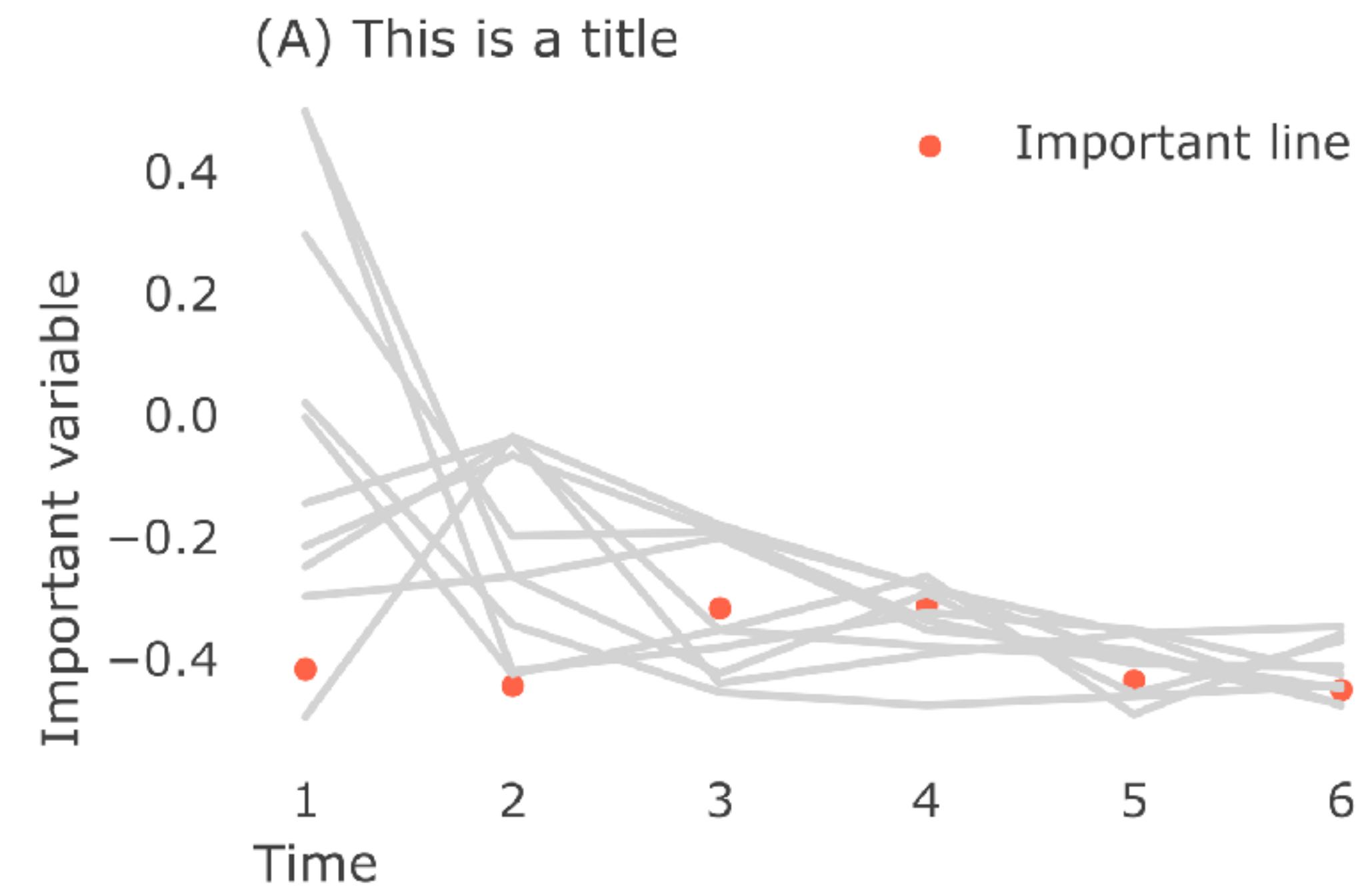
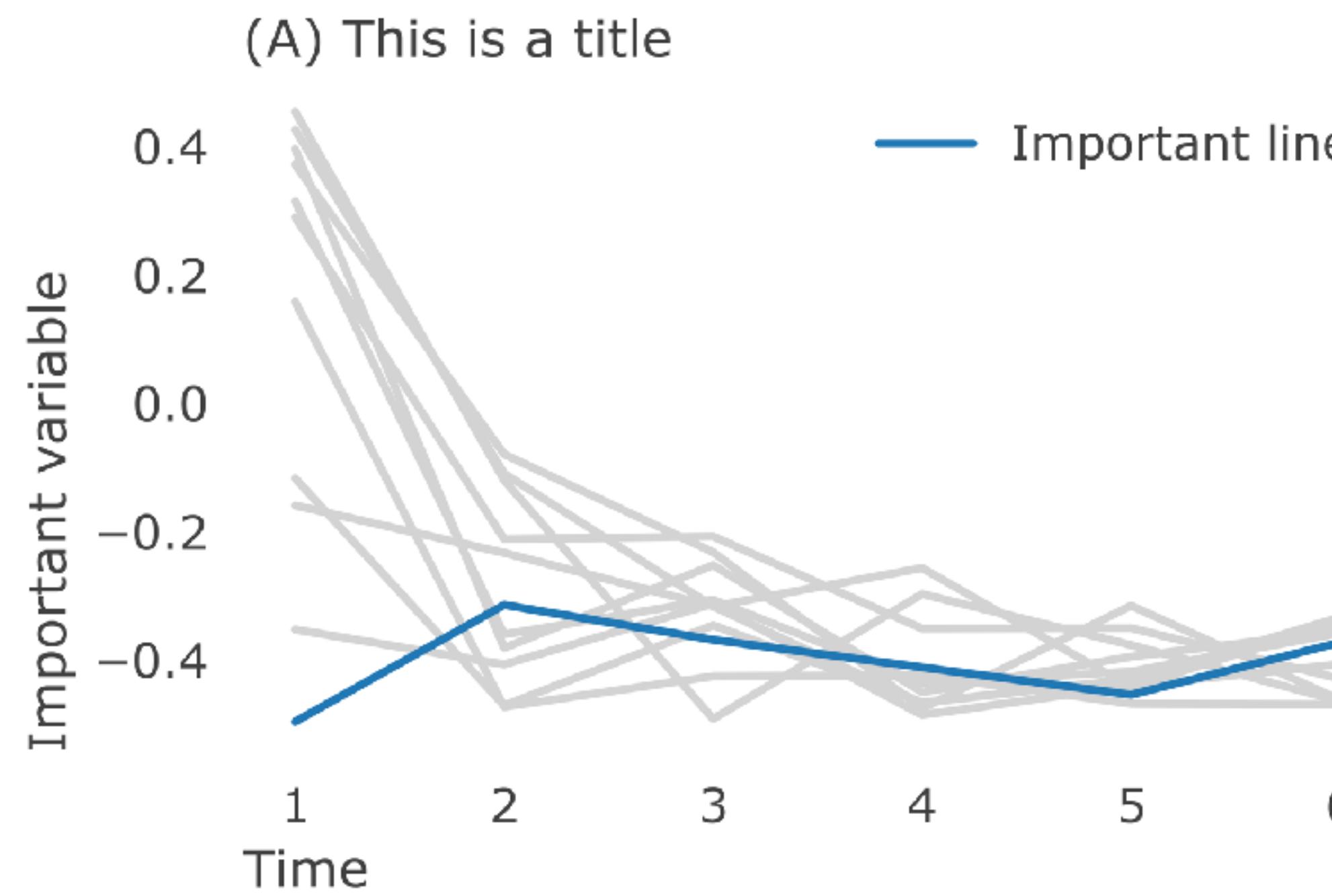


CONTRAST: ELIMINATE CLUTTER

- ▶ Unique elements should stand apart from each other



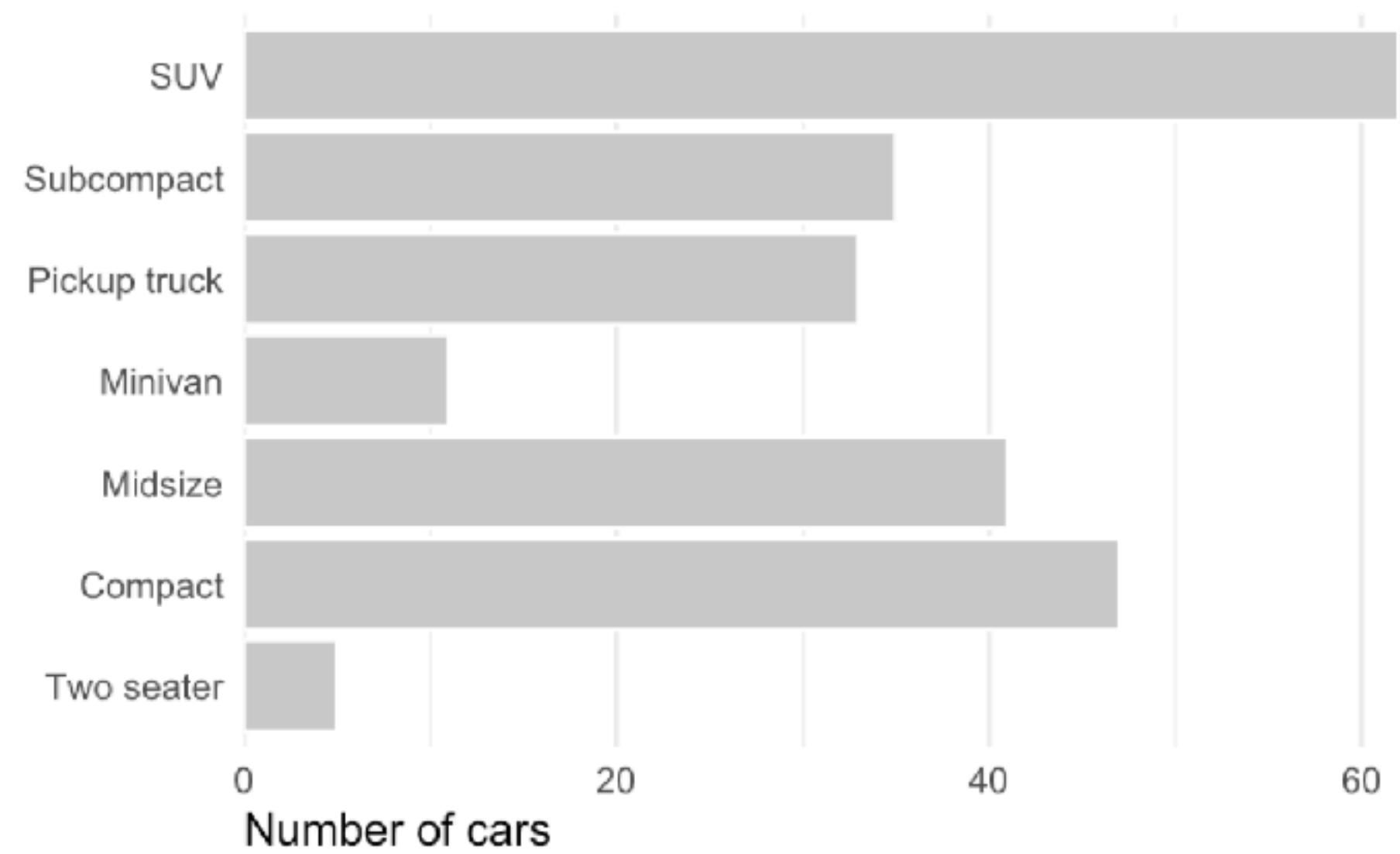
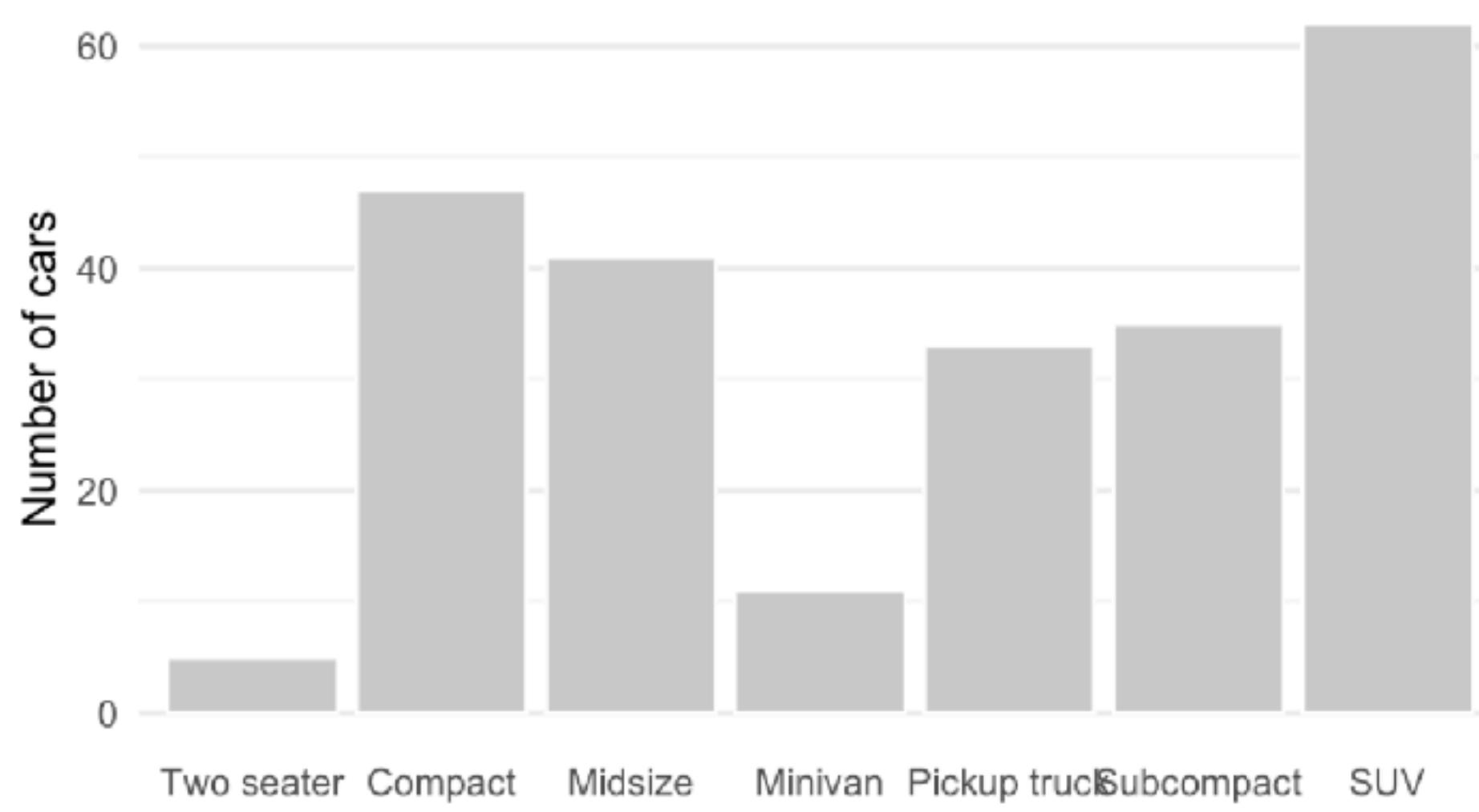
REPETITION



ALIGNMENT

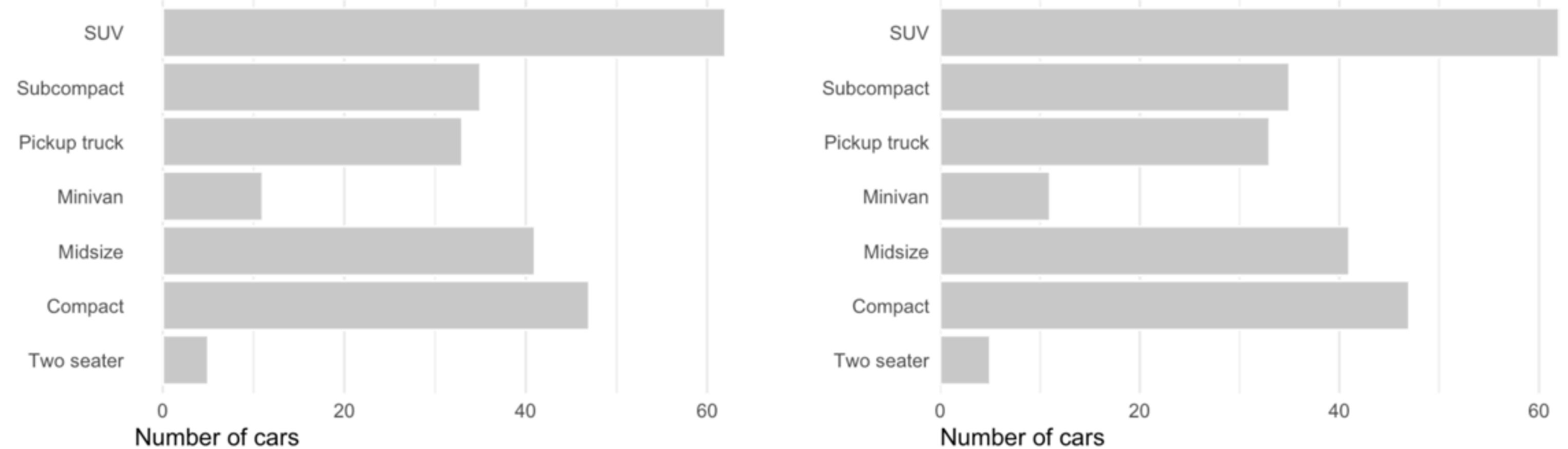
DOES NOT
LOOK SO GOOD

LOOKS
GOOD

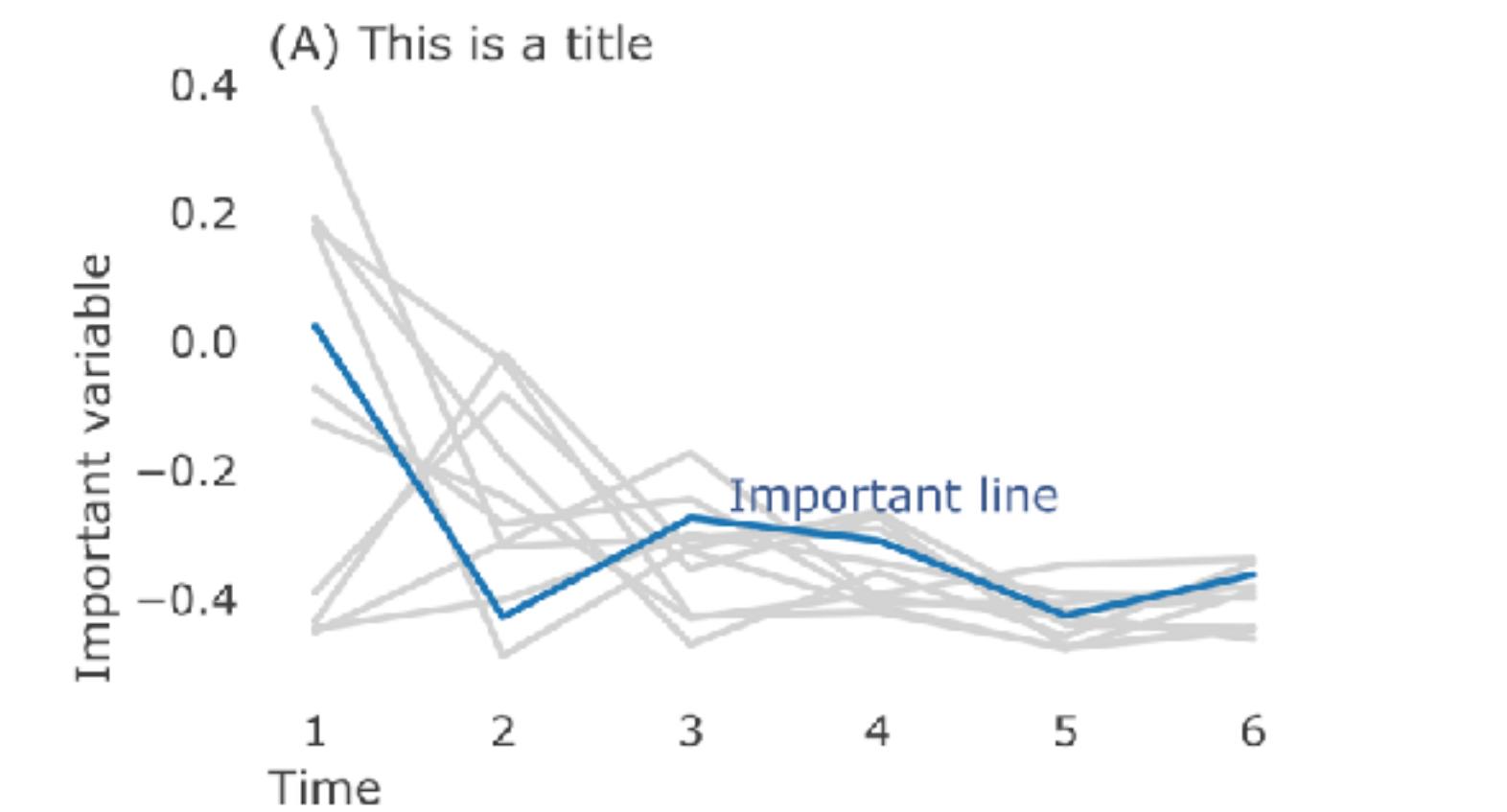
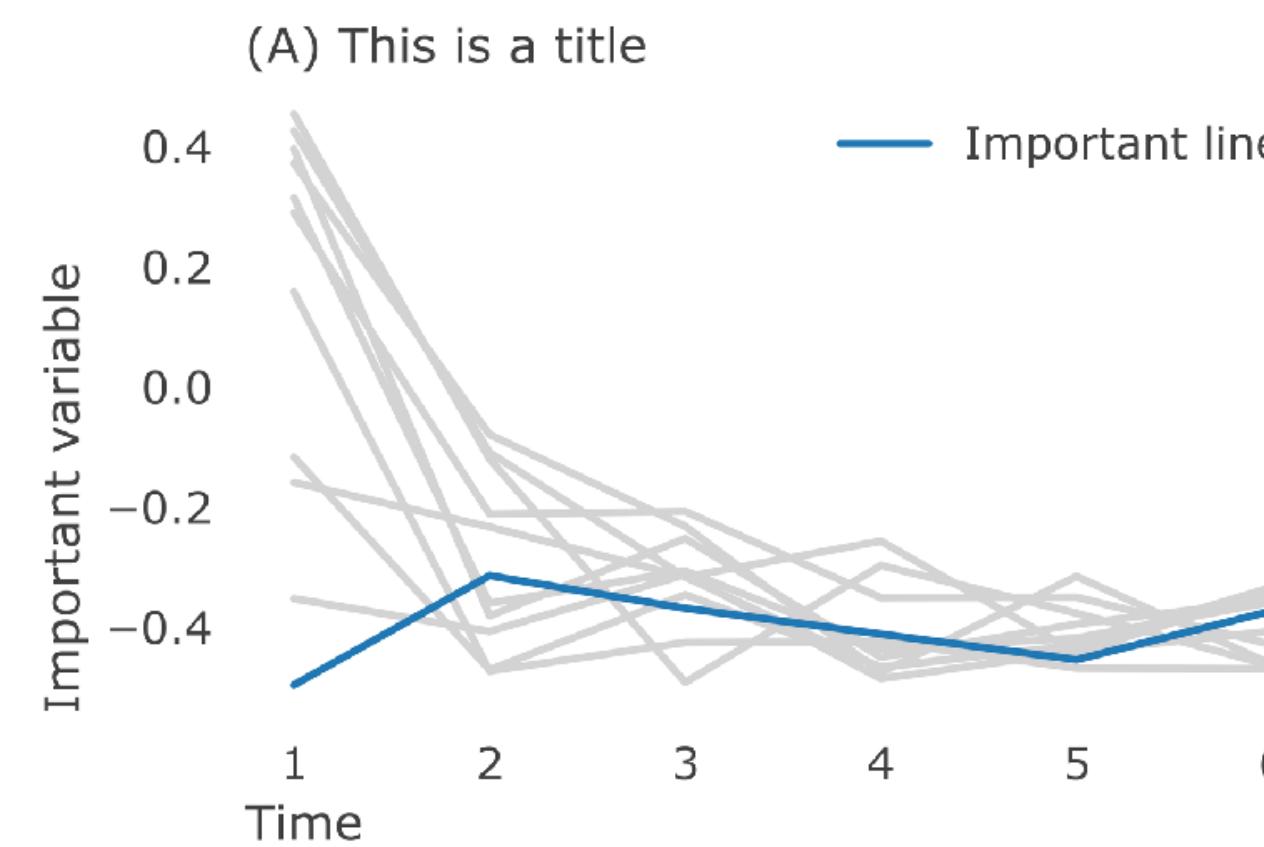
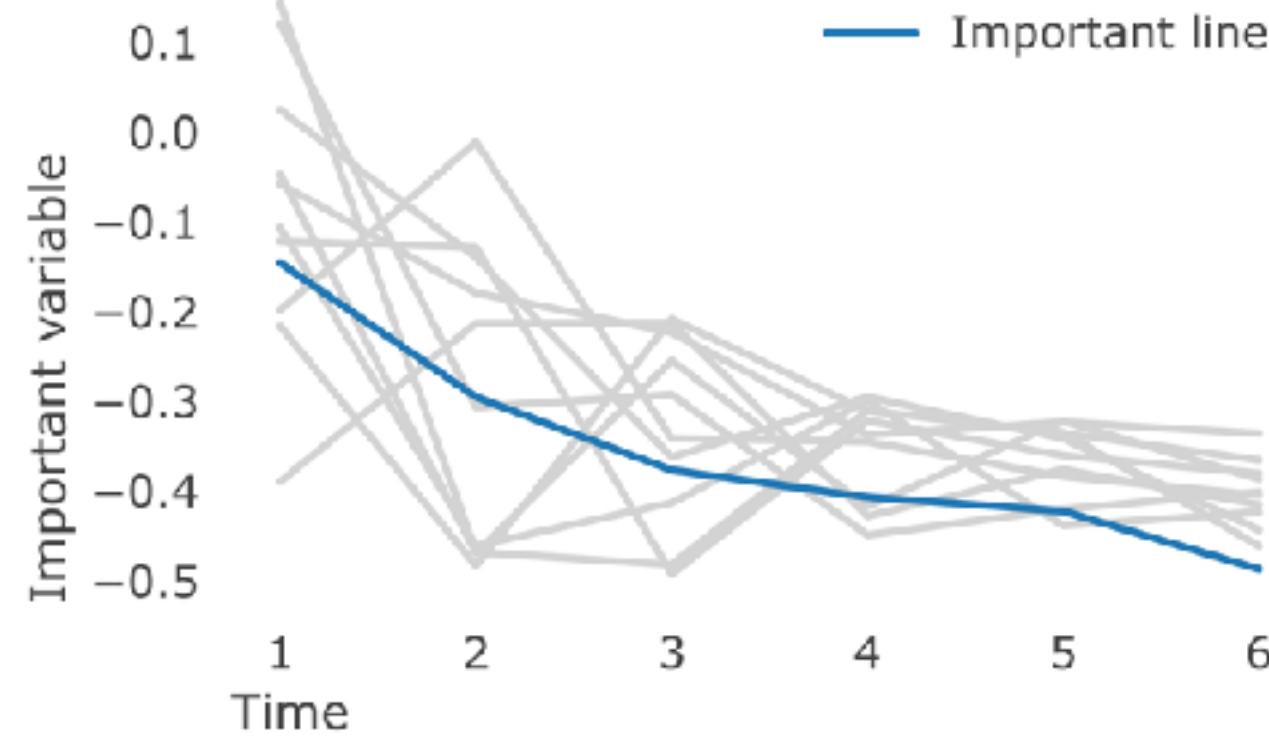


PART 3: DESIGN

PROXIMITY



(A) This is a title



PRINCIPLE 1

Contrast blah

PRINCIPLE 2

Repetition blah

Principle 3

Alignment blah

PRINCIPLE 4

Proximity blah

PRINCIPLE 1

Contrast blah

PRINCIPLE 2

Repetition blah

Principle 3

Alignment blah

PRINCIPLE 4

Proximity blah

PRINCIPLE 1

Contrast blah

PRINCIPLE 2

Repetition blah

PRINCIPLE 3

Alignment blah

PRINCIPLE 4

Proximity blah

PRINCIPLE 1

Contrast blah

PRINCIPLE 2

Repetition blah

PRINCIPLE 3

Alignment blah

PRINCIPLE 4

Proximity blah

PRACTICAL GUIDE

- Reduce cognitive load:
 - Removing unnecessary clutter (contrast)
 - More professional/aesthetically pleasant
- Contrast:
 - Eliminate unnecessary lines (all frames, use gray grid lines, etc)
 - Don't use a gray background
 - White space is your friend (allows for "breathing")
 - Enlarge the labels
 - Use vector graphics (svg/pdf/eps) to avoid blurry figures -> Edit them in AI or Inkscape
- Repetition: Be consistent in different figures
- Alignment: Make sure you align subplots/labels
- Proximity: When possible, label data directly (instead of using legends)

PRINCIPLES OF VISUAL PERCEPTION

GESTALT PRINCIPLES OF VISUAL PERCEPTION

Principles/laws of human perception that describe how humans group similar elements, recognize patterns and simplify complex images when we perceive objects – the way of brains to find and create order



PROXIMITY

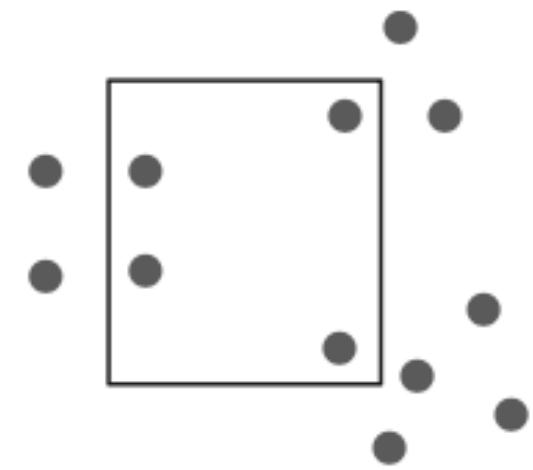
e.g. grouped barplot: Bars next to each other are perceived as related



SIMILARITY

e.g. color across plots is perceived as related (be consistent)

GESTALT PRINCIPLES OF VISUAL PERCEPTION



ENCLOSURE

Enclosed areas contain related objects (highlight areas)



CLOSURE

No need to close frames

GESTALT PRINCIPLES OF VISUAL PERCEPTION



CONTINUITY

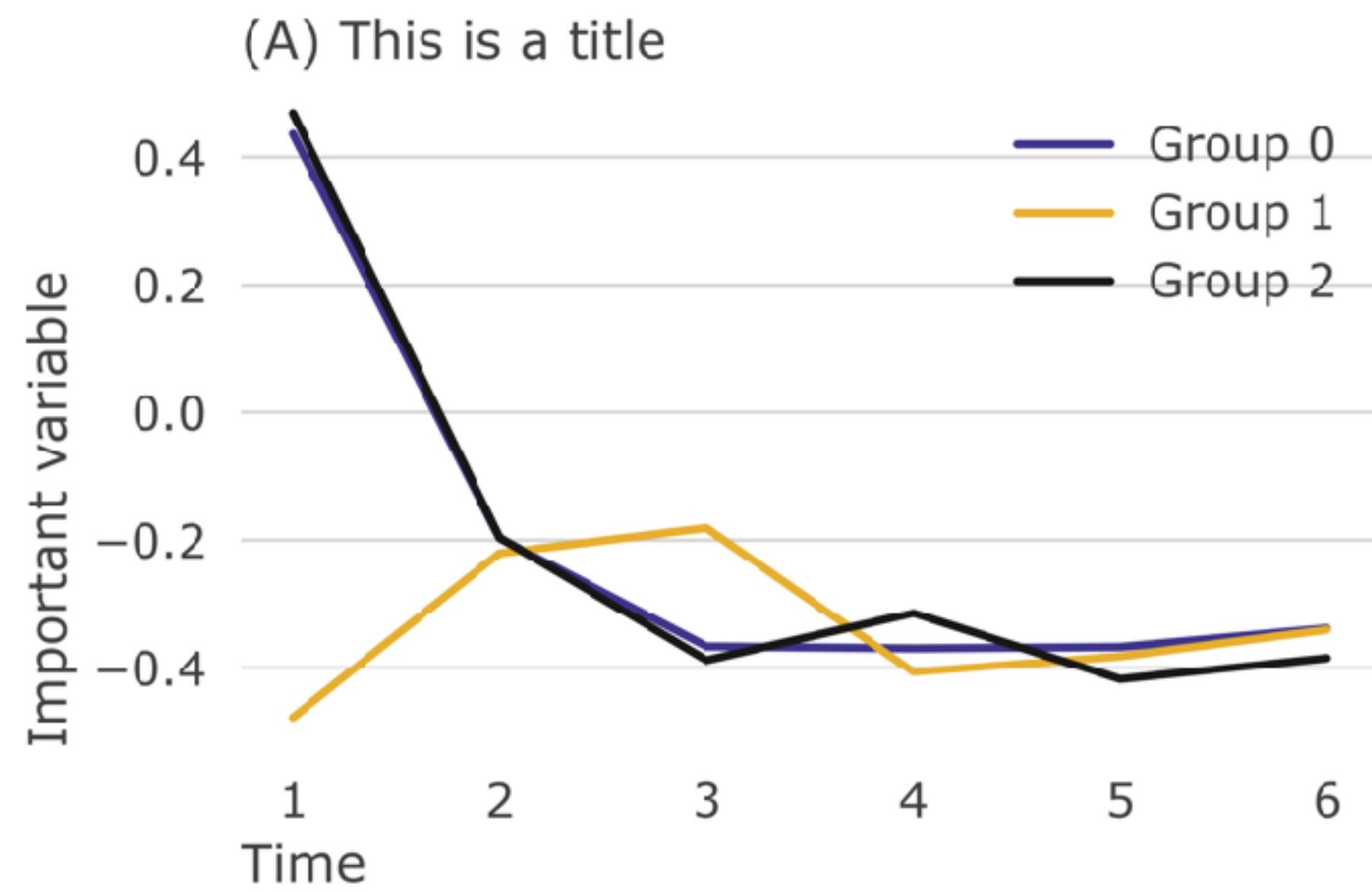
e.g., No need to have a left line



CONNECTION

e.g., Networks

PART 3: DESIGN



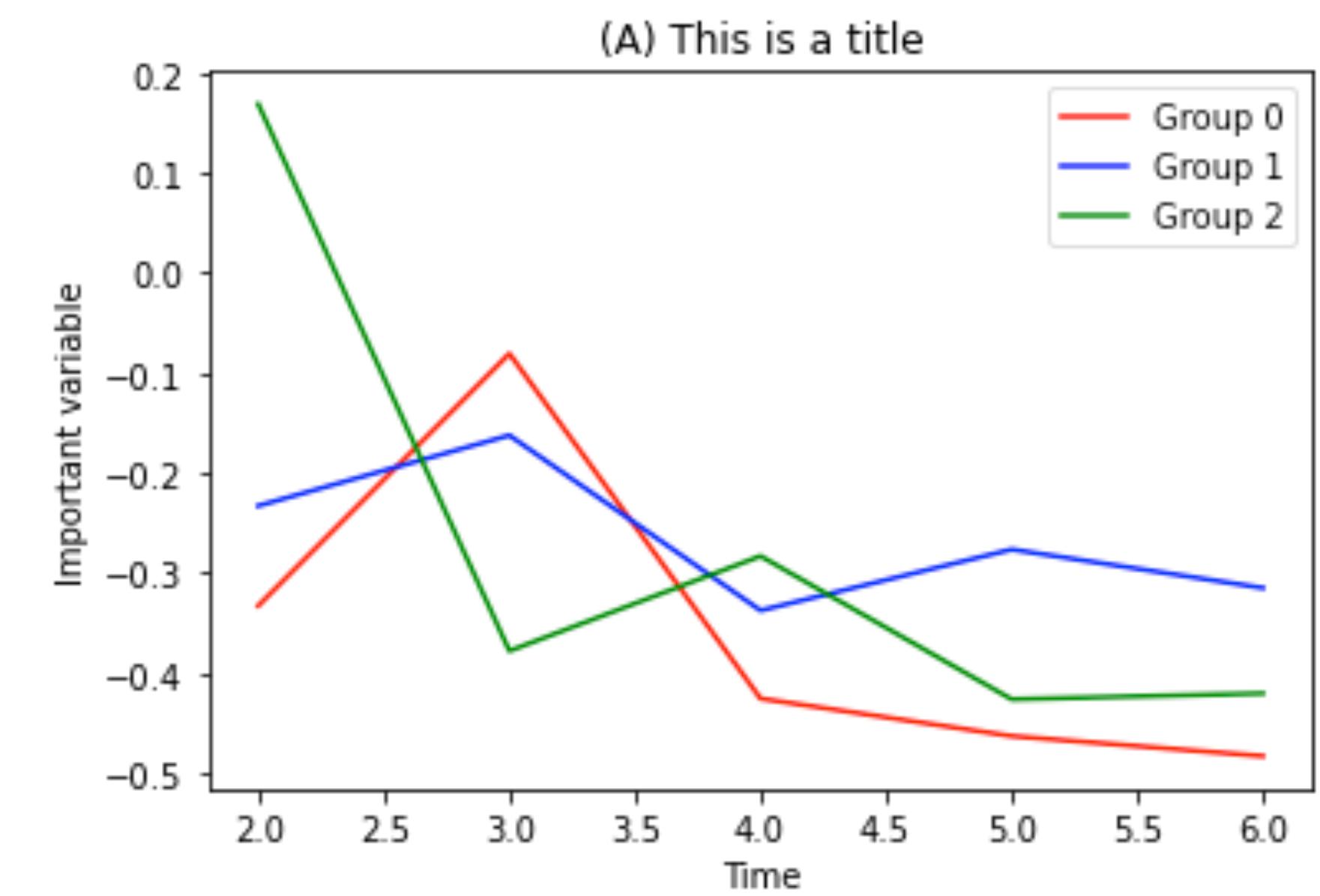
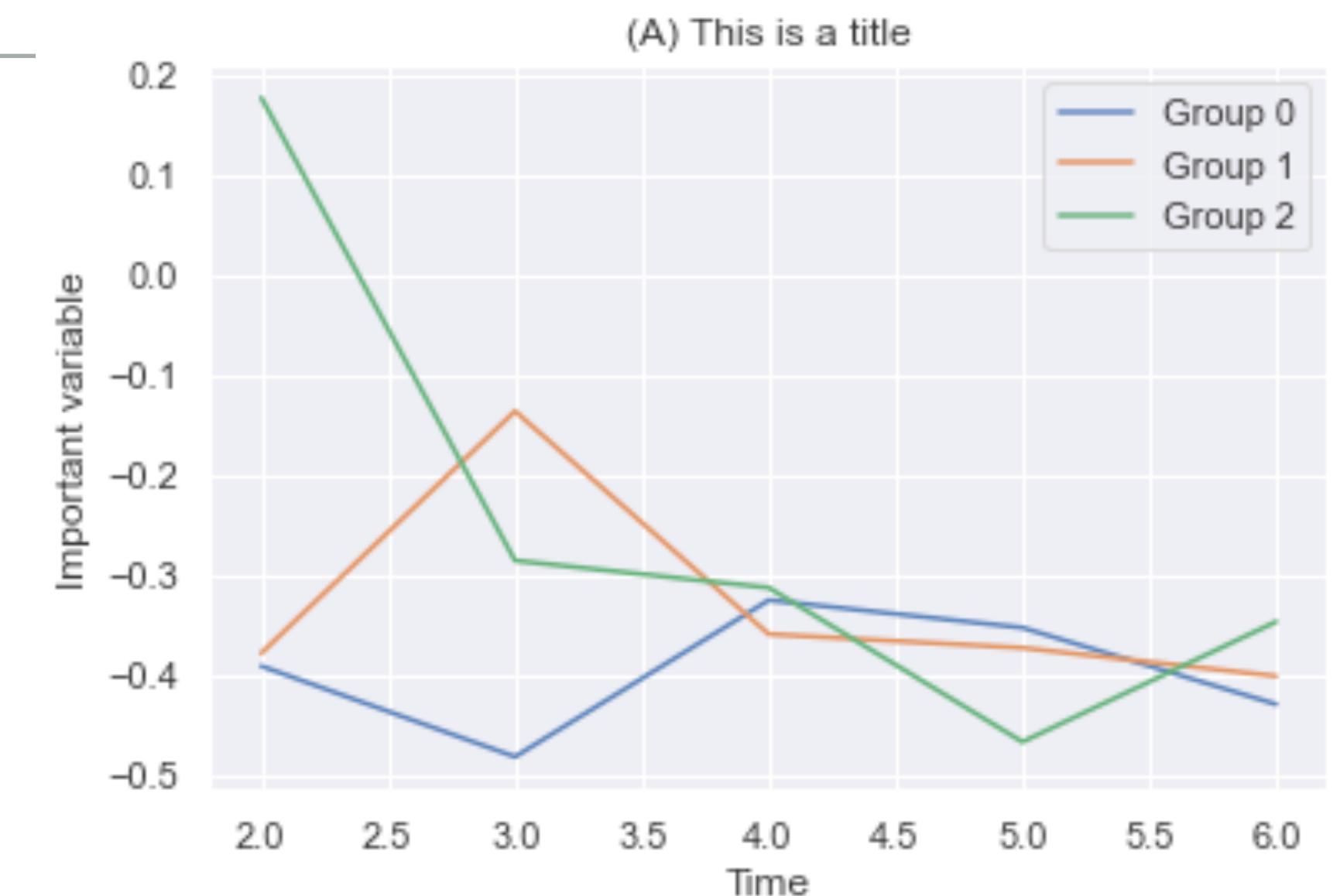
Closure: No need for a frame, we understand that it is one plot

Proximity: We know that the labels belong to the axes because they are nearby

Continuity: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 are perceived as connected

Connection: All dots within one line

Similarity: The three lines represent similar data





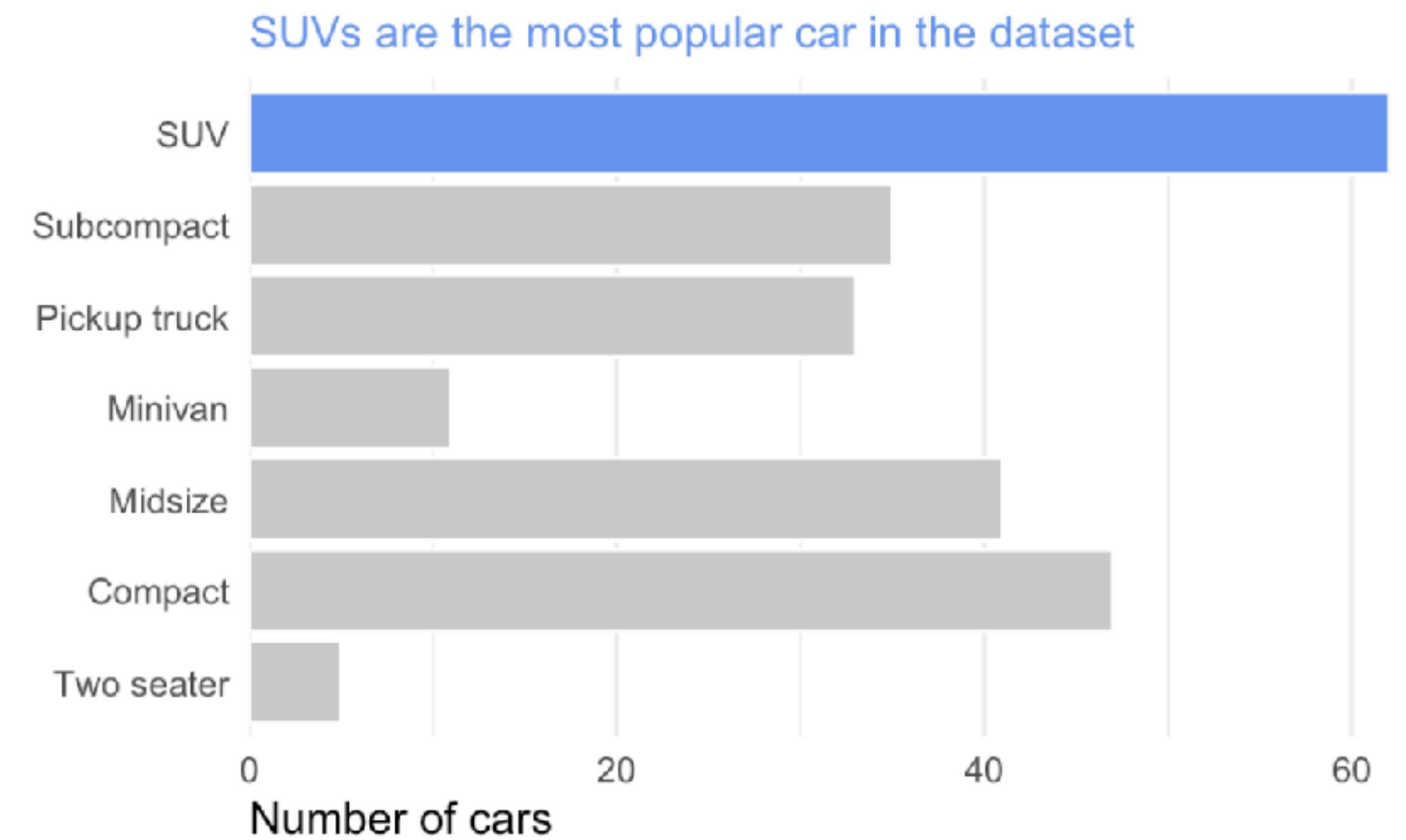
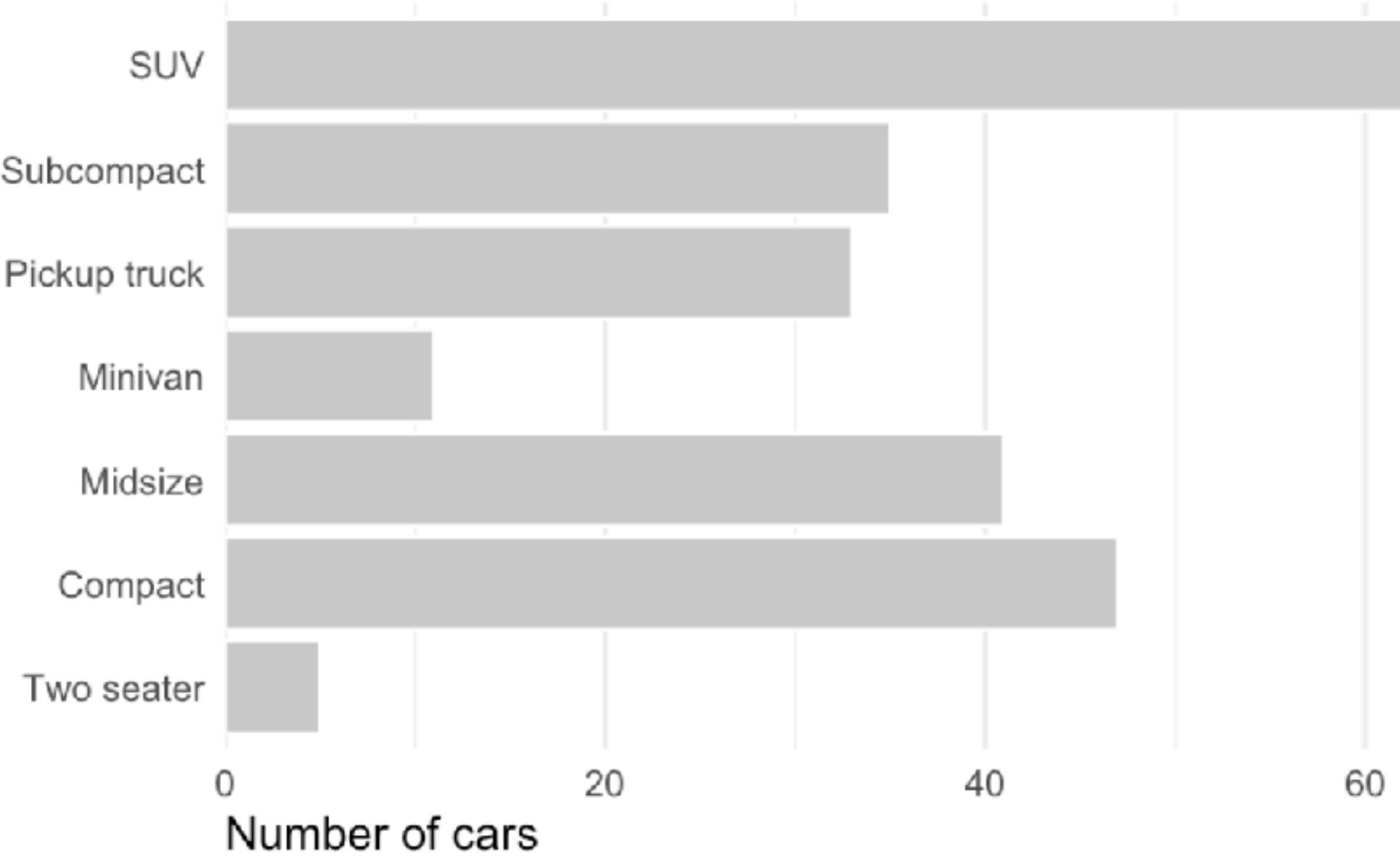
TENSION

focus
attention

PRACTICAL GUIDE

GUIDE THE READER / FOCUS ATTENTION

- Compare how you read the figure in the right and in the left



WHY DO WE NEED TO FOCUS ATTENTION?

Help the person interpret the plot (reduce cognitive load, make it enjoyable)

HOW DO WE FOCUS ATTENTION?

Using pre-attentive attributes











PART 3: DESIGN

756395068473

658663037576

860372658602

846589107830

756395068473

658663037576

860372658602

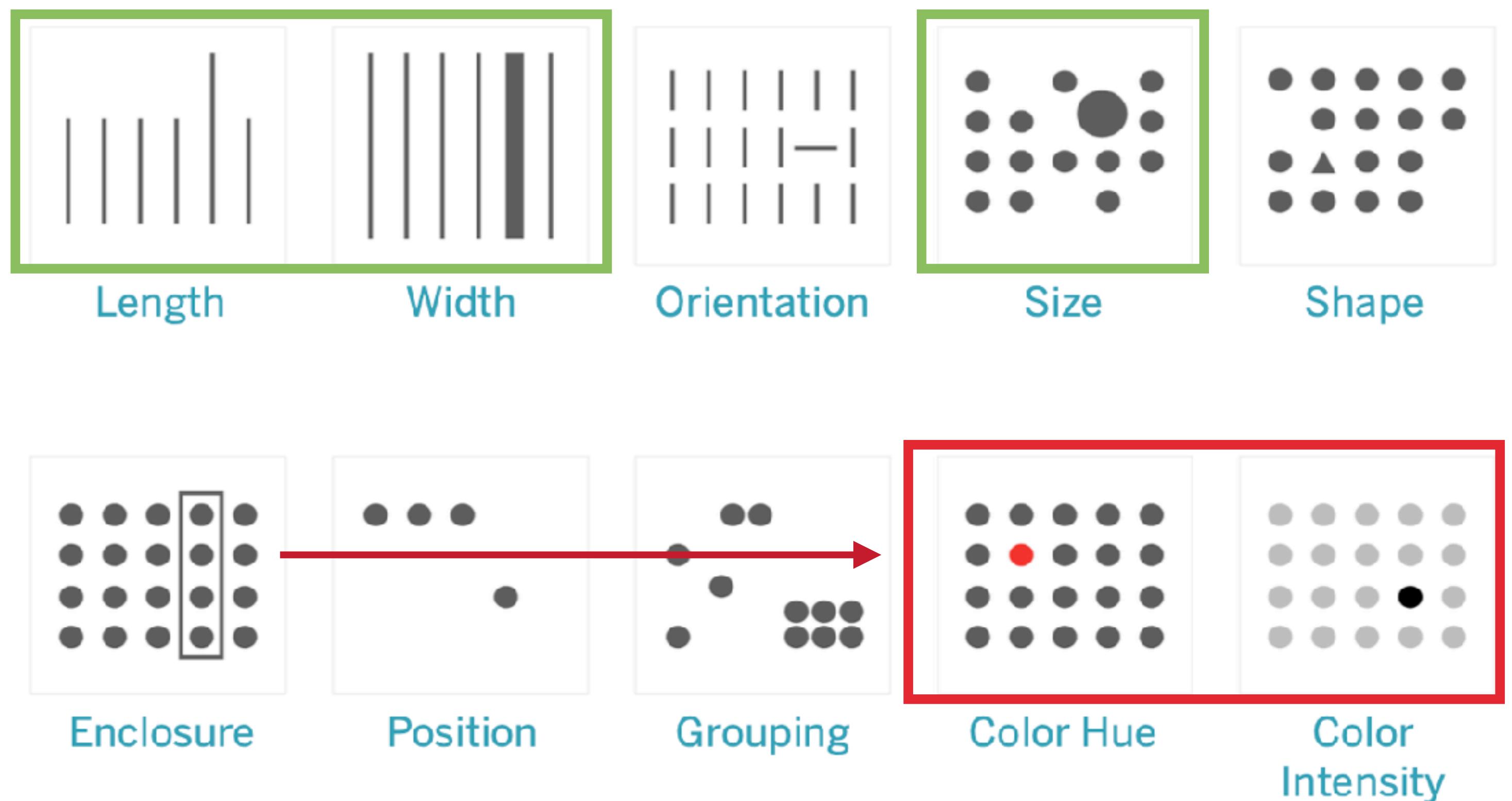
846589107830

Storytelling with data

IMPORTANT PRE ATTENTIVE ATTRIBUTES

What do we focus on:

- ▶ Large objects
- ▶ Bright objects
- ▶ Contrasting objects



Color makes ice cream taste sweeter,
veggies taste fresher,
and coffee taste richer

Ellen Lupton

81% more likely to have thought about quitting

70% more likely to say that they find cigarettes less satisfying

66% more likely to think that their cigarettes are of poorer quality

Pantone 448c

COLOR

The most useful **pre-attentive attribute**

- ▶ Increases contrast
- ▶ Allows for consistency

Color affect emotion, but is subjective and culture-dependent.

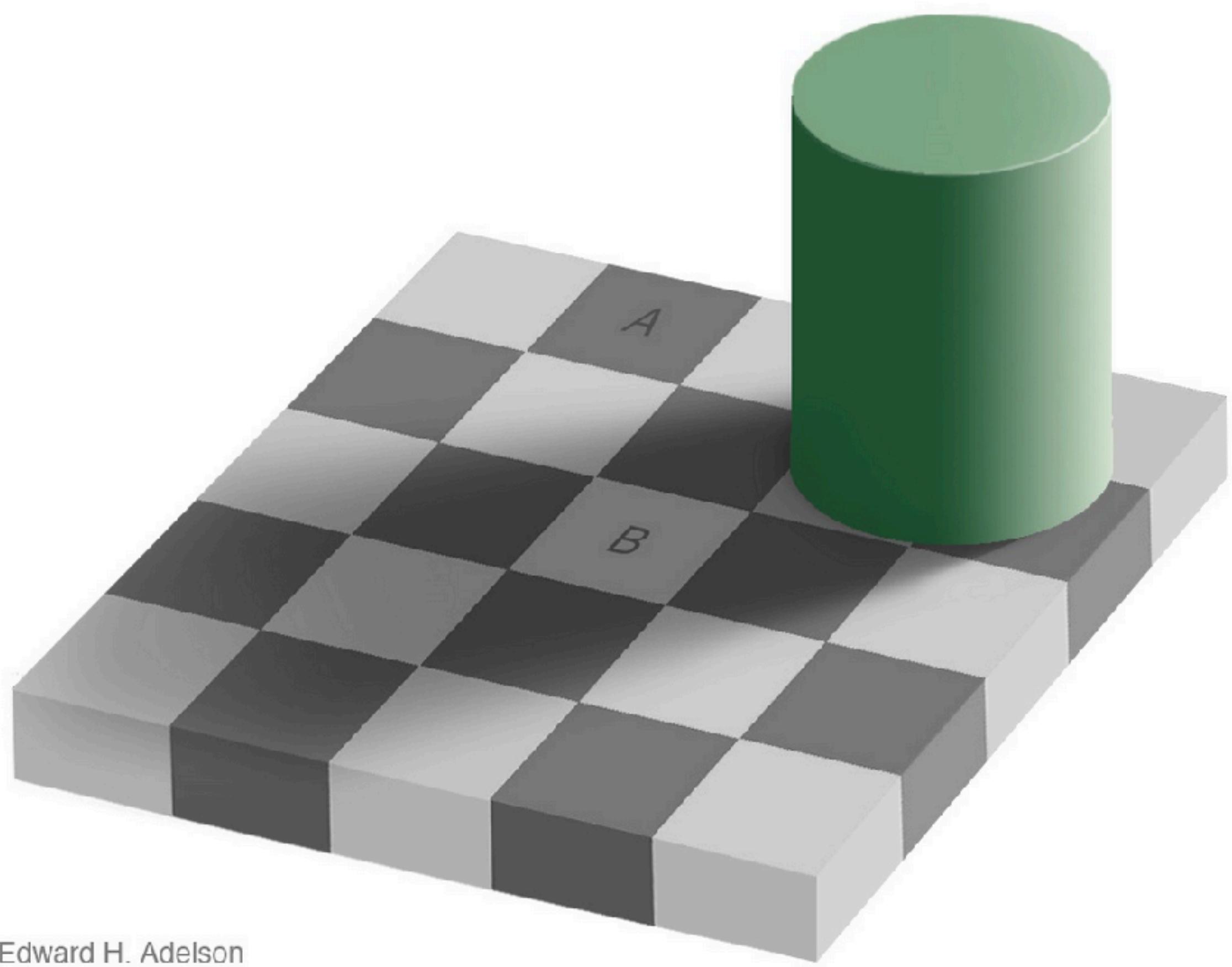
Some responses are nearly universal

- ▶ Warm colors --> alive/alert
- ▶ Blue colors --> calming/focus

<https://blog.datawrapper.de/which-color-scale-to-use-in-data-vis/>

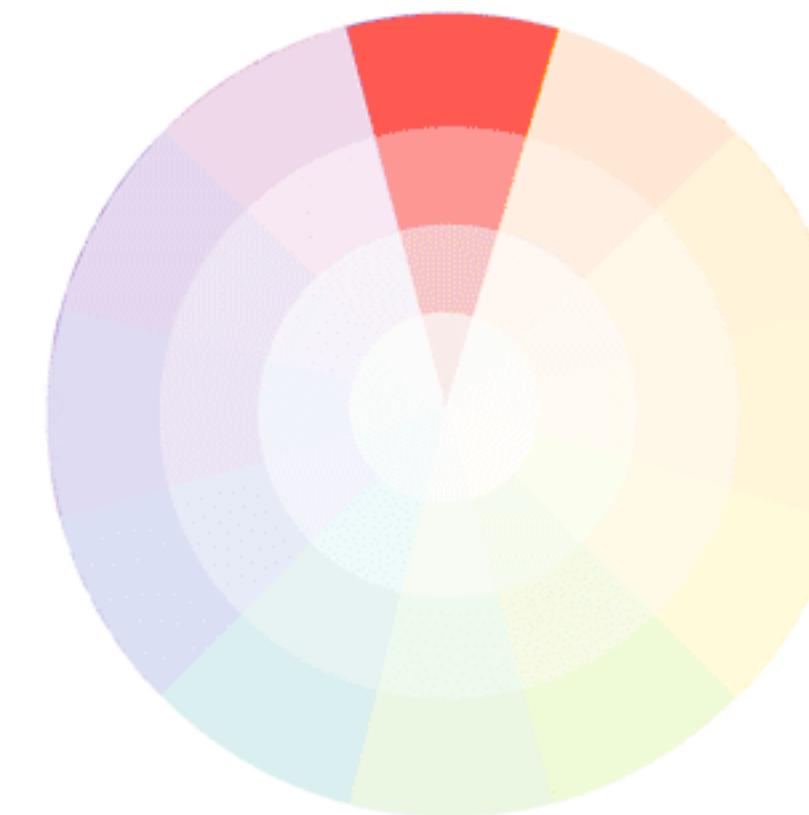
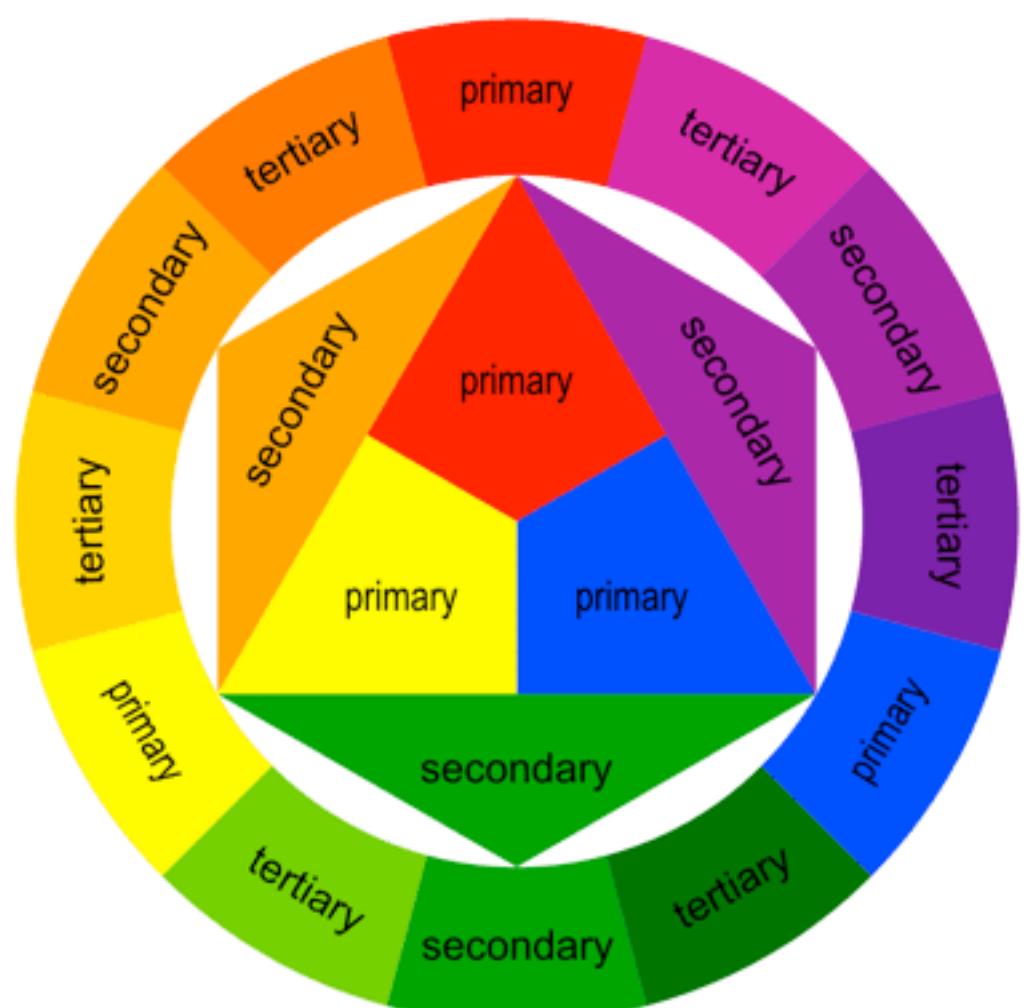
<https://davidmathlogic.com/colorblind/#%23D81B60-%231E88E5-%23FFC107-%23004D40>

COLOR IS PERCEIVED RELATIVELY TO THE CONTEXT

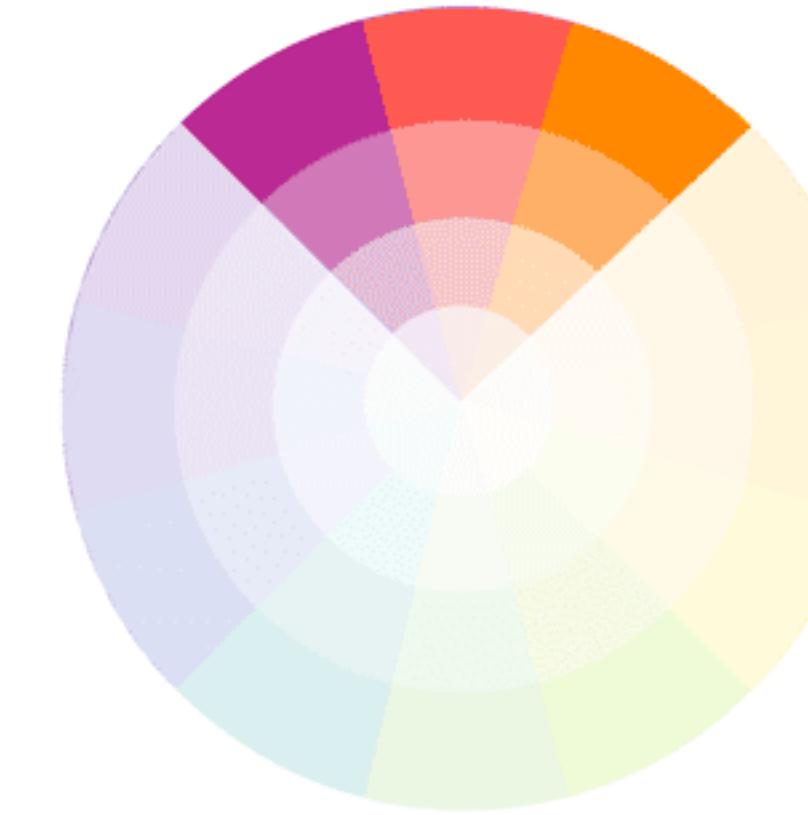


Edward H. Adelson

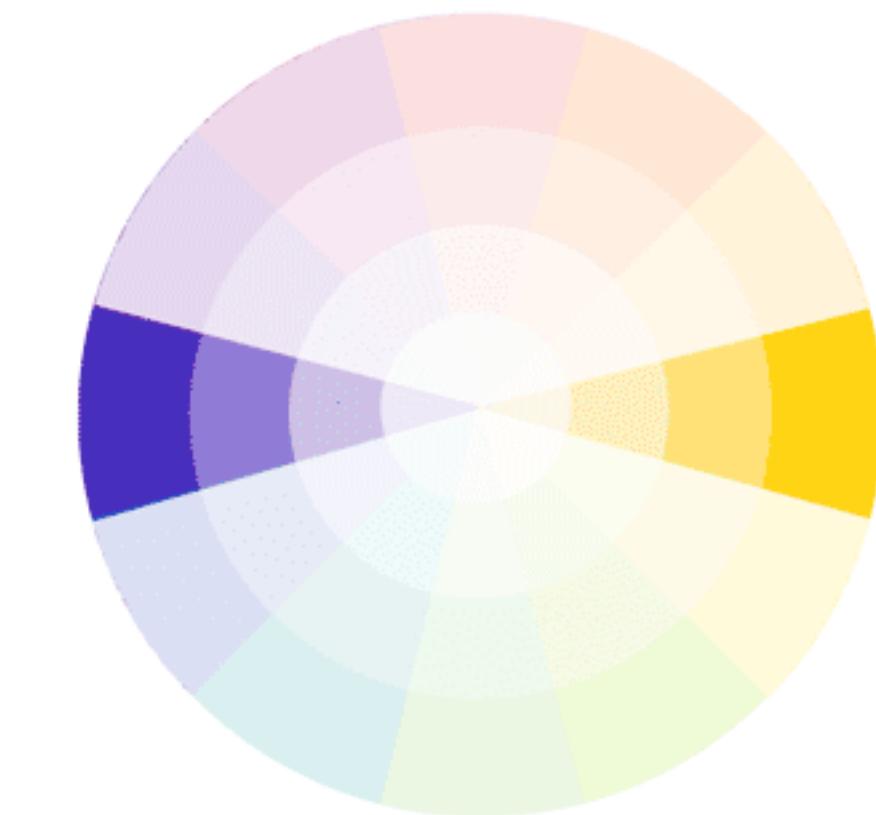
COLORS THAT LOOK GOOD TOGETHER



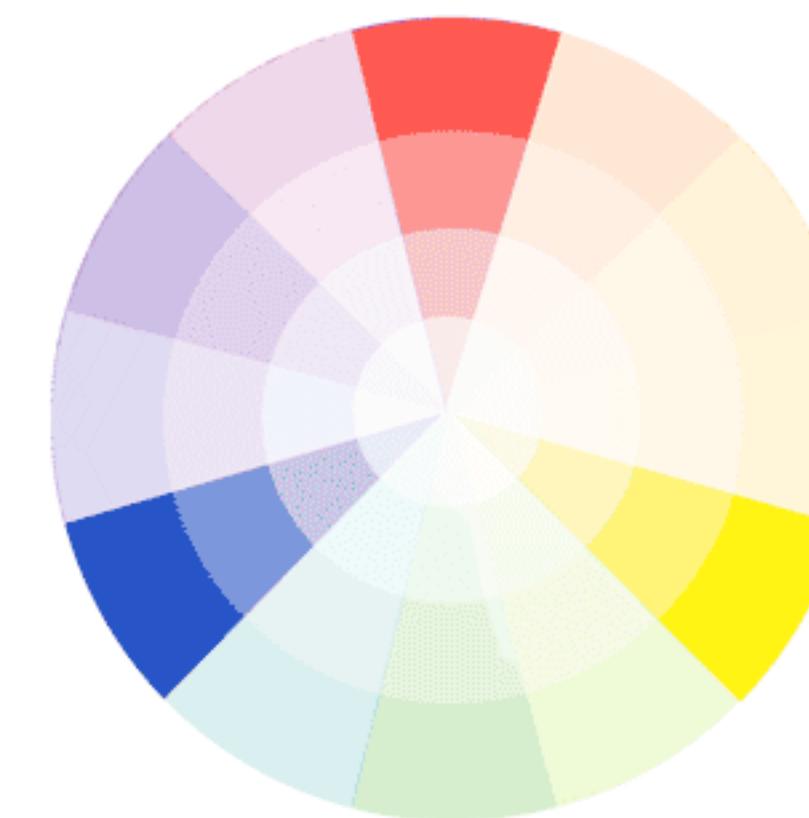
Monochromatic



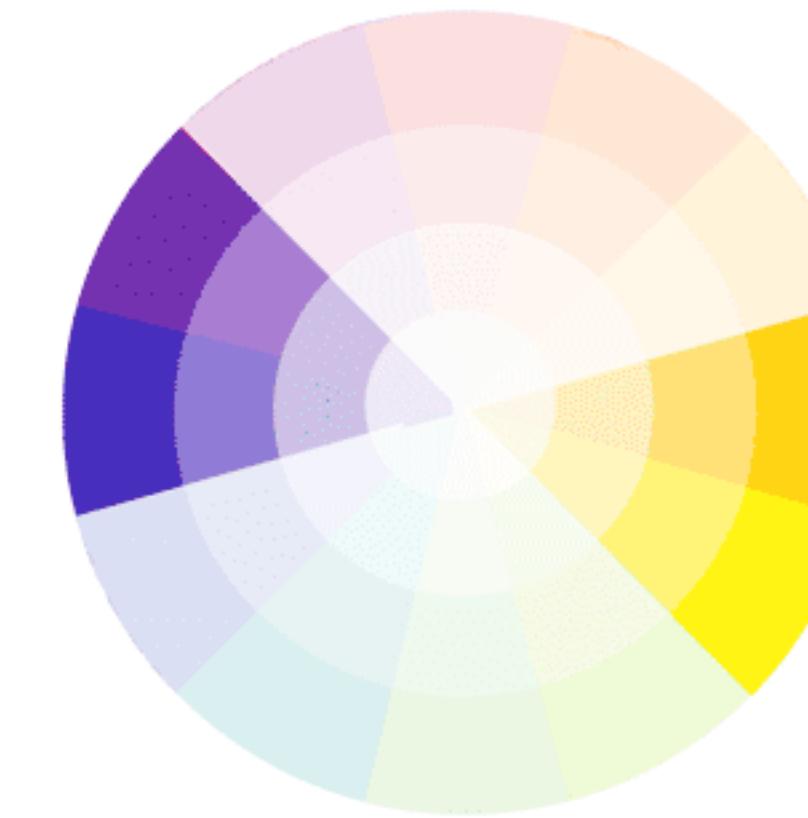
Analogous



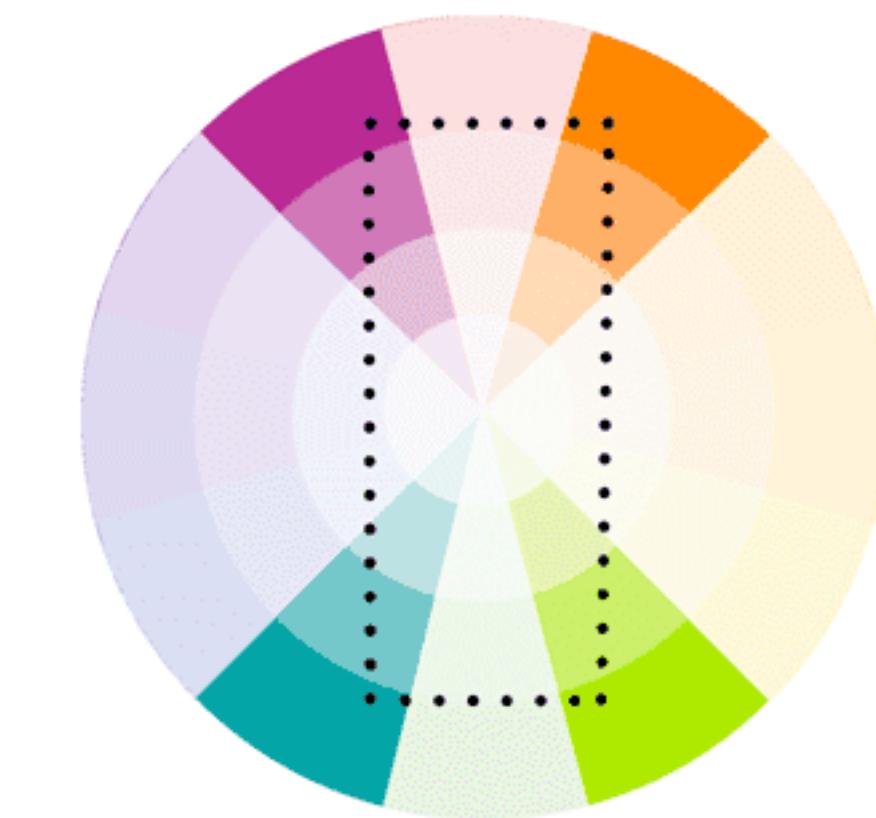
Complementary



Triad



Split-Complementary



Tetradic

COLOR PALETTES

SEQUENTIAL

Minimum is important



DIVERGING

Mean is important



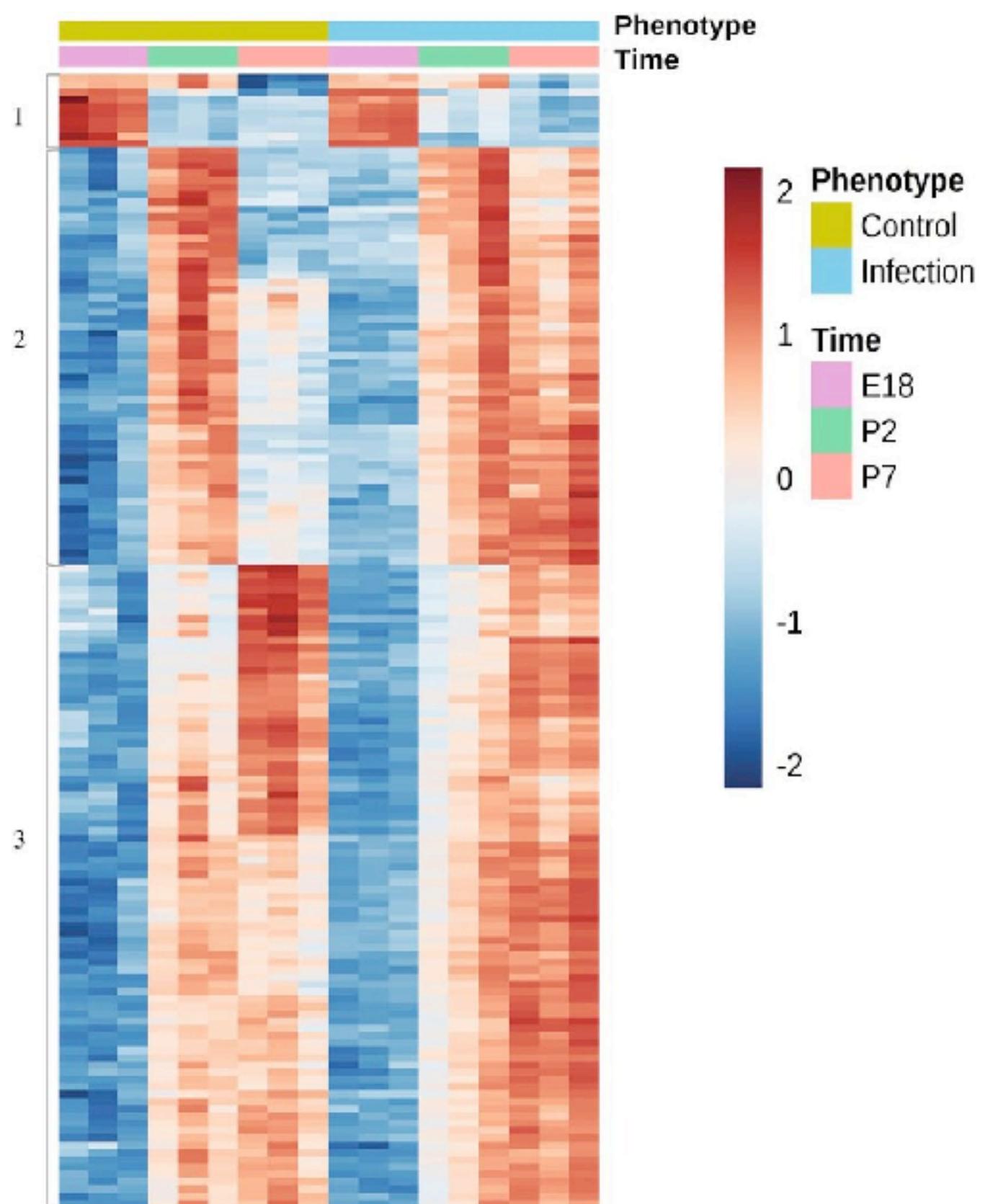
QUALITATIVE

Represent categories



COLOR TO REPRESENT VALUES

ONLY IF THE EXACT VALUES ARE NOT IMPORTANT



PRACTICE: MAKE YOUR VIZ BEAUTIFUL AND EFFECTIVE

- ▶ Think of the CRAP principles. Are you following them?
- ▶ Color:
 - ▶ How are you using color? (guide the reader, represent categories, represent values)
 - ▶ Which palette?
- ▶ How are you using pre-attentive attributes?
- ▶ Steps:
 - ▶ 20 minutes to refine your plot

PART 4

STORYTELLING

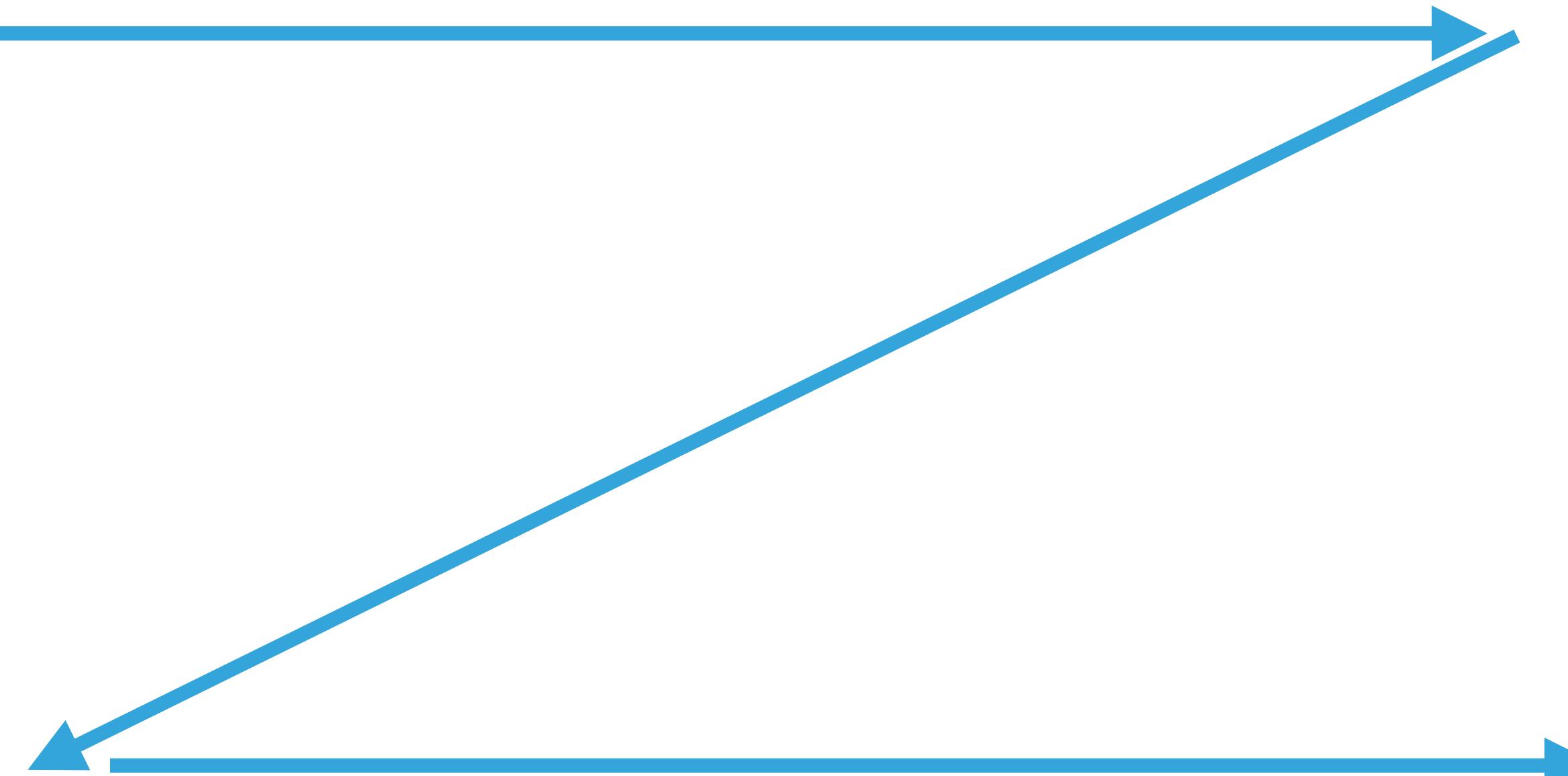
STORYTELLING

Storytelling is the **most effective tool** to make audiences enjoy a presentation, make them patient and curious to accept an idea, help them better understand an instruction, and keep them awake in lectures. People love cute stuff – *Mengyan Li*

A great story does more than represent emotion from a distance. It makes us feel an emotional charge – *Ellen lupton*

You probably read this 1st

You probably read this 2nd



NARRATIVE ARC: EVERY PLOT IS A 10-SECOND STORY

Exposition: What key information does the reader need to understand the plot and its importance?

- Creates anticipation
- Clear labels and title. Leverage how we read plots (Z). Use illustrations!

Middle/conflict: What is the point of the plot?

- This is the “aha moment” where the audience understands why the plot matters
- Emphasize what changed, what doesn't match expectations, or what groups differ
- Highlight the key pattern with pre-attentive attributes, use color to evoke emotions.

Resolution: Provide the implications

- Ensure the reader grasps the core message of the plot
- Reinforce the main message visually (e.g., annotation at the end of a line, summary value)

Russia has recorded more than 753,000 excess deaths during the pandemic, almost four times the official Covid death toll provided by state agencies

Daily **excess deaths** vs **reported deaths**, per million people



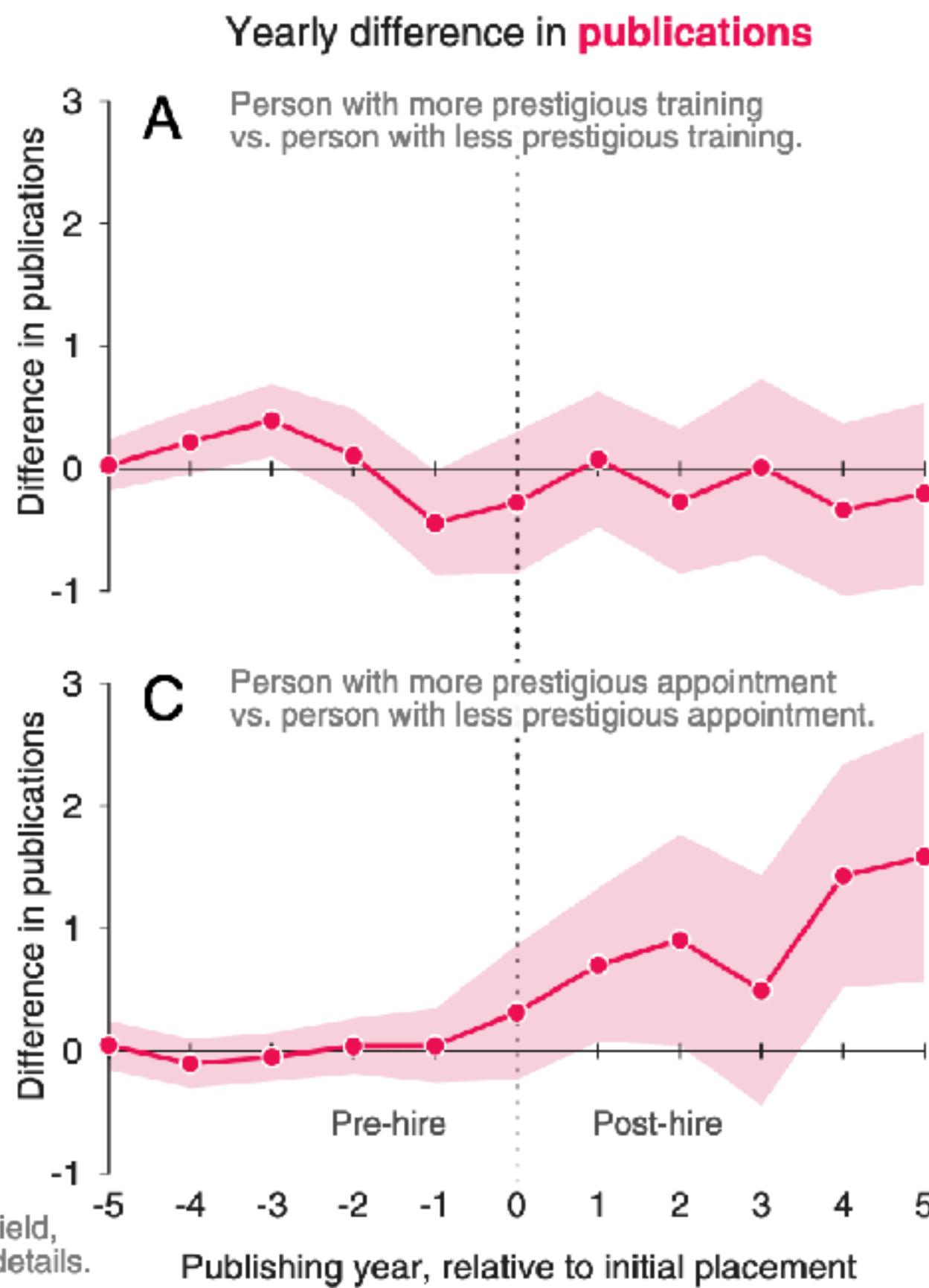
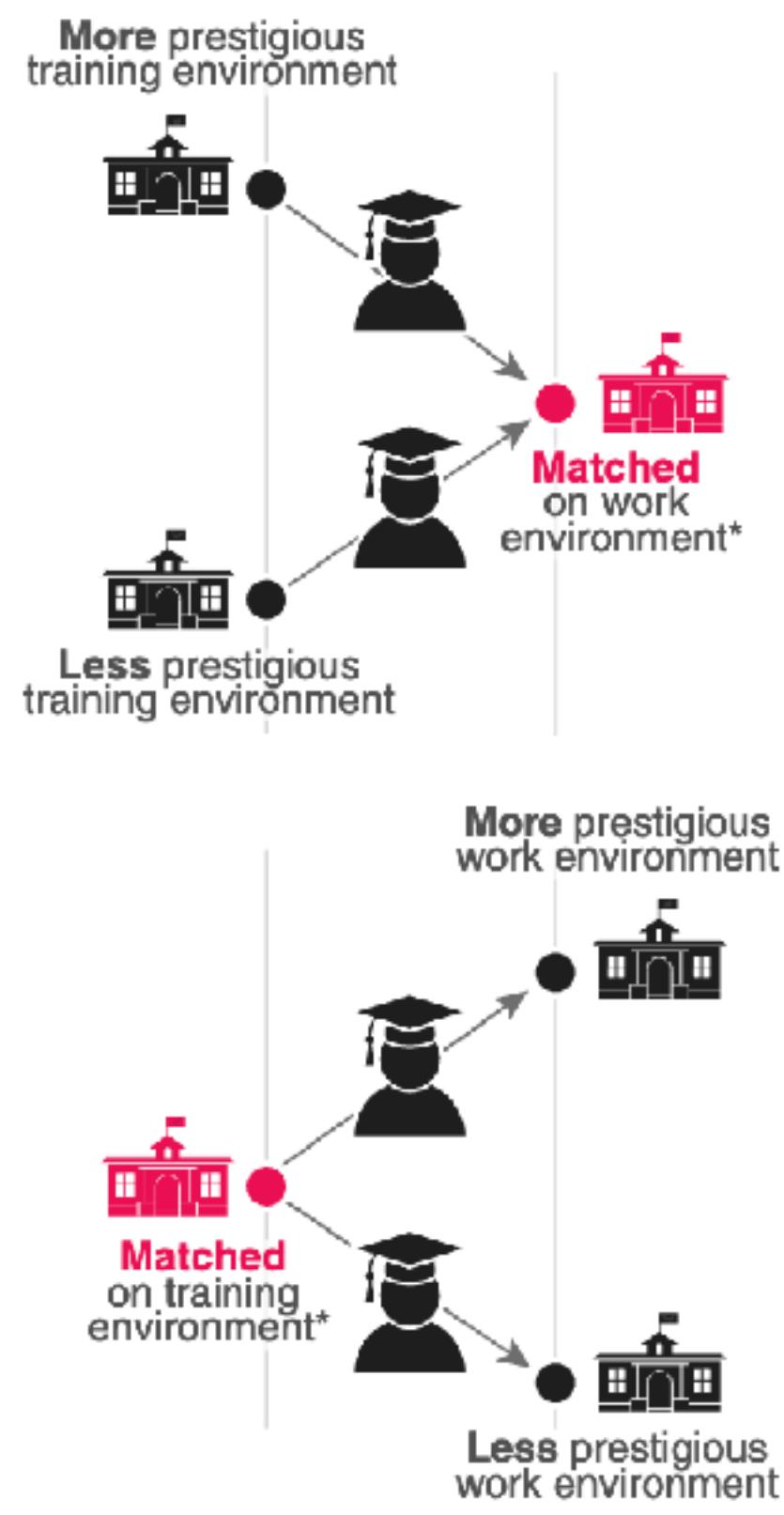
Source: Johns Hopkins CSSE; FT analysis of national mortality data and Karlinsky & Kobak's World Mortality Dataset

© FT

Exposition: Label on top-left corner, tells the reader what to do

Conflict: **Excess** and **reported** deaths are very different

Resolution: The reader has understood how it looks in different countries



Exposition: Label and drawings.

Conflict: Between both matched persons.

Resolution: Reader has learned that prestige helps get published.

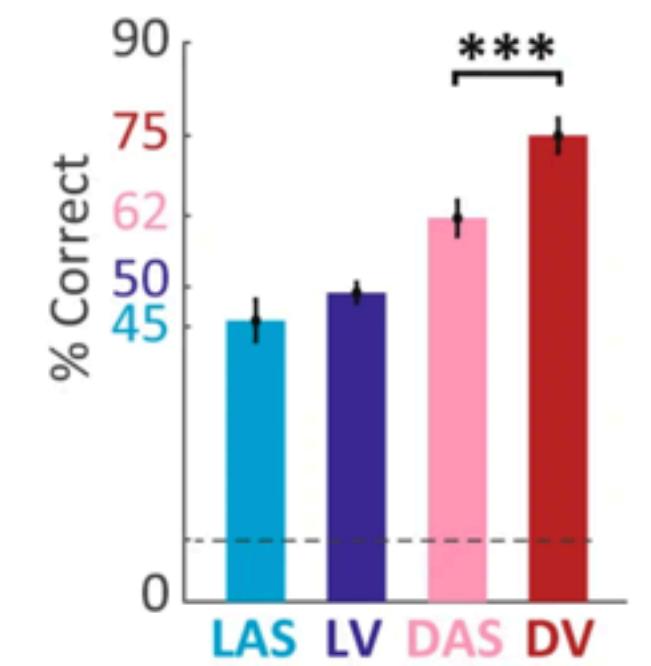
A. Behavioral experiment

Listen: Reconstructed  digit sounds

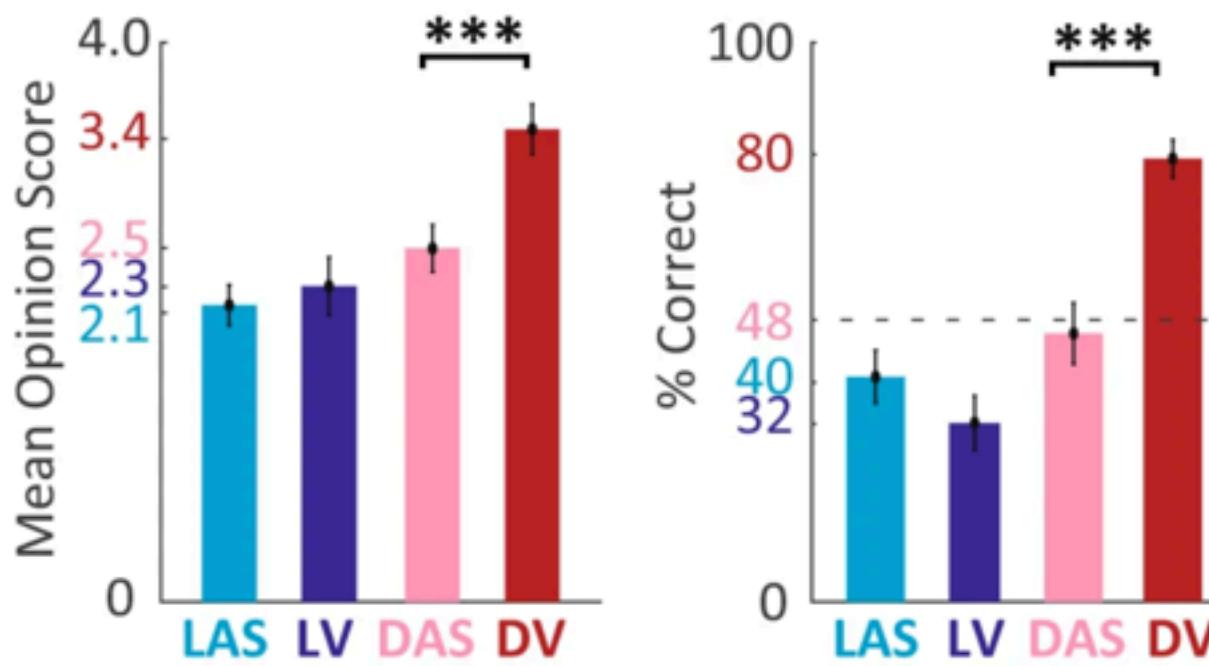
Report:

Digit?	[Gray bar]
Quality?	[Gray bar]
Gender?	[Gray bar]

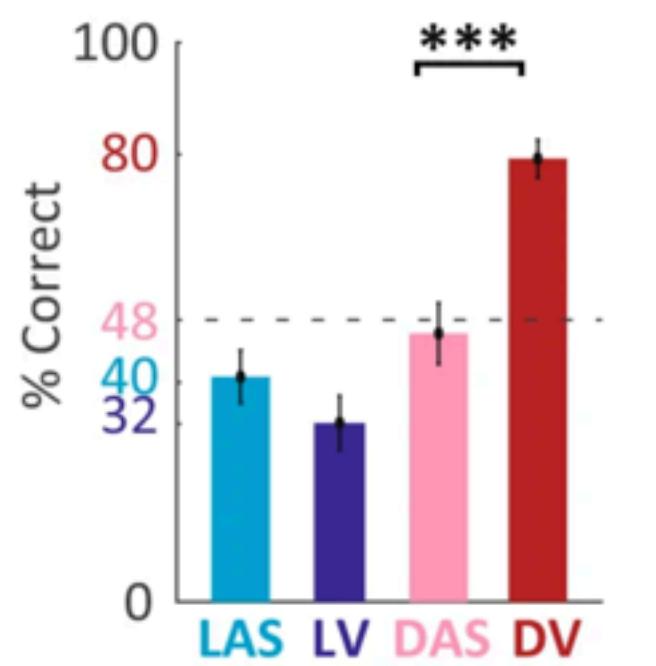
B. Digit intelligibility



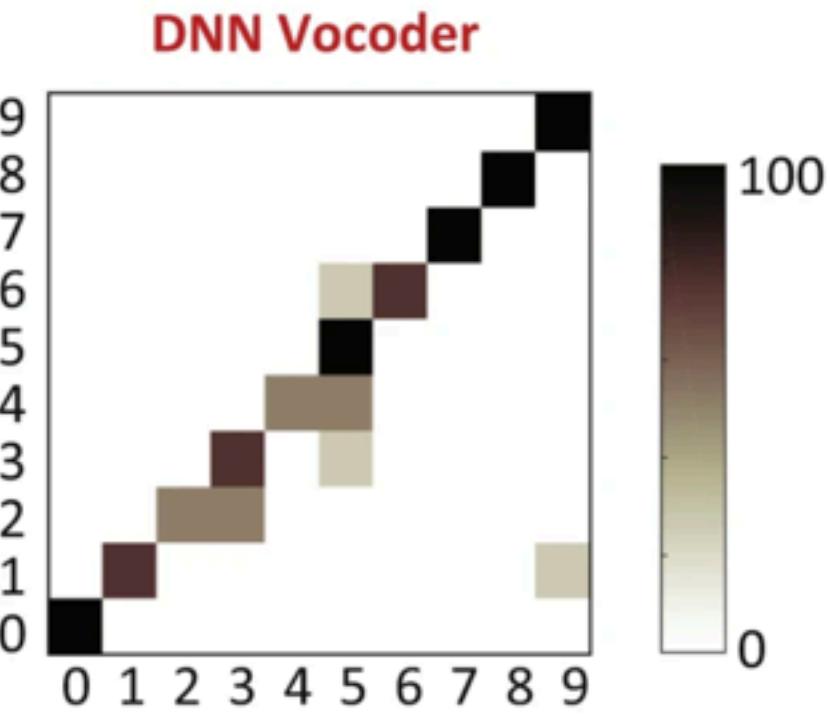
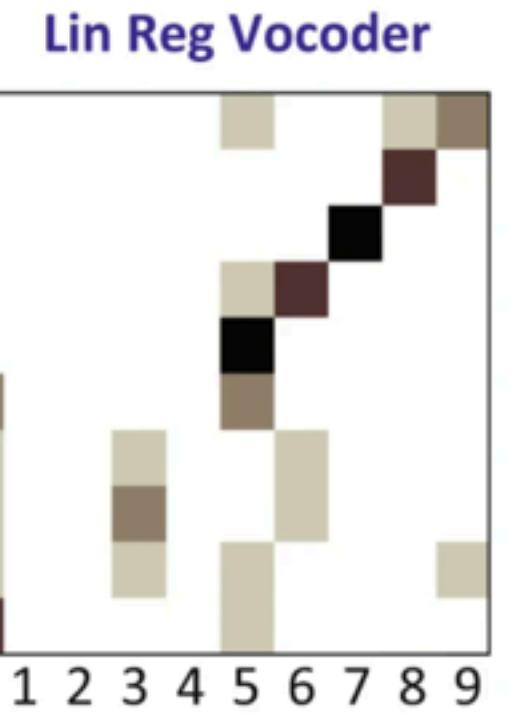
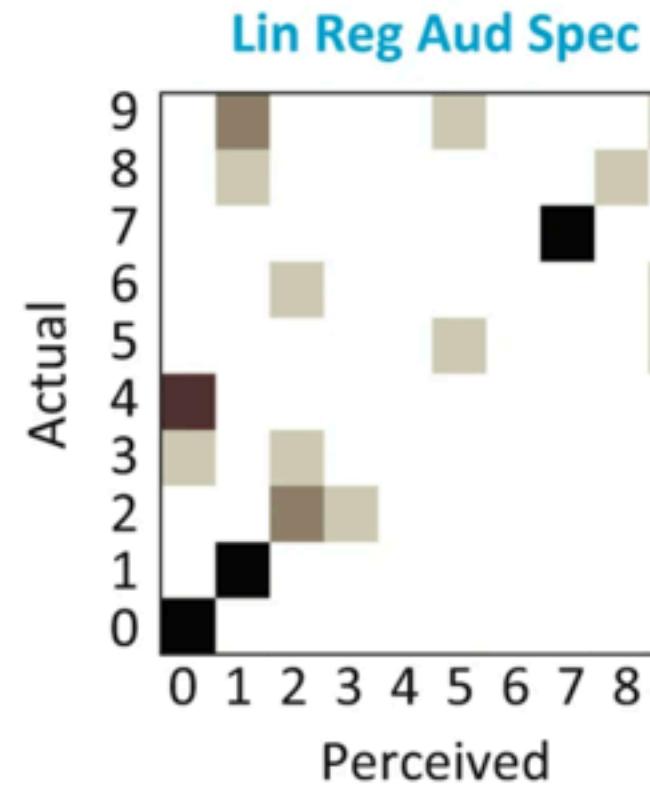
C. Speech quality



D. Gender identification



E. Digit confusion patterns

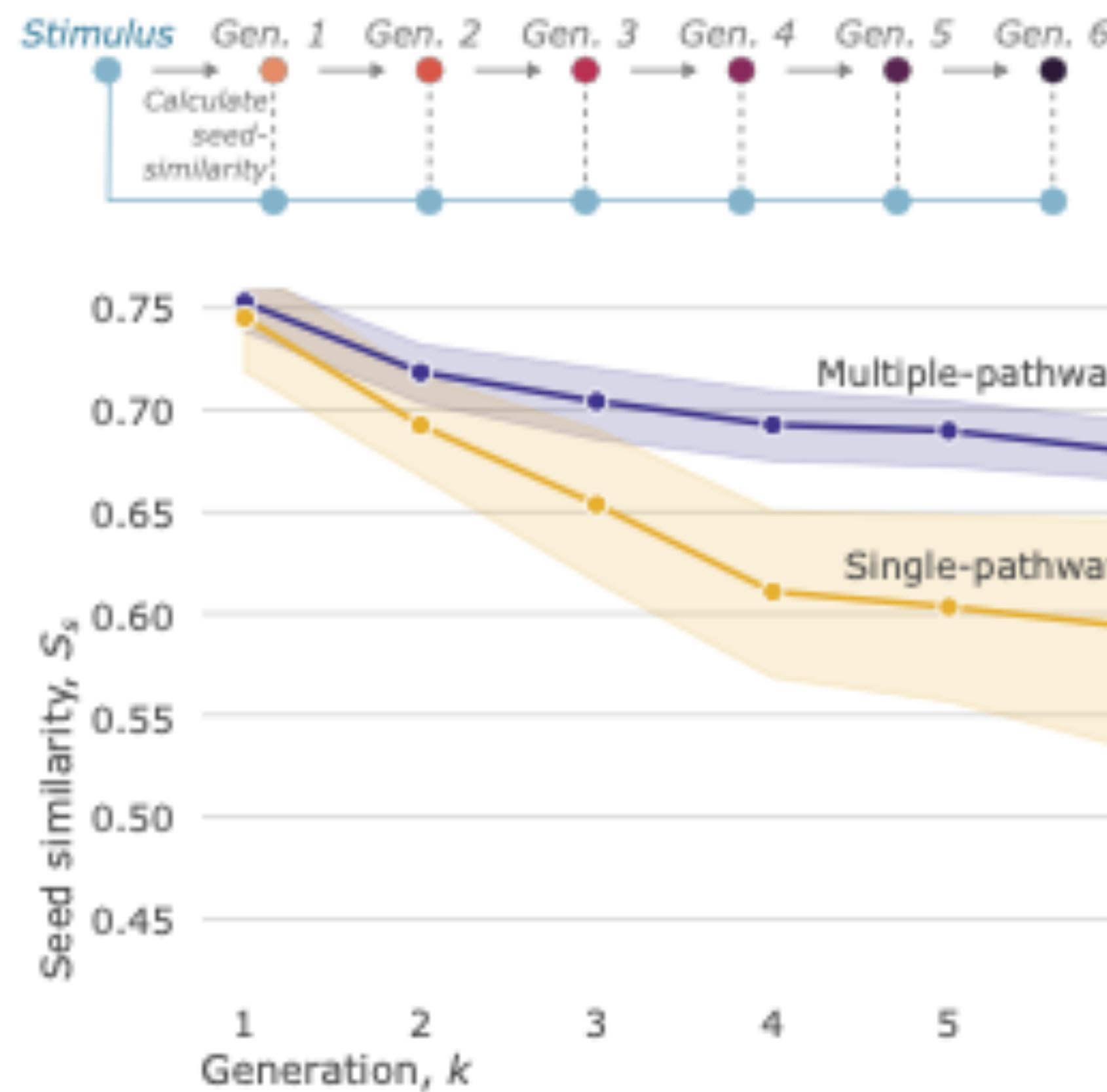


Exposition: (A) tells you how to read the rest of the plot

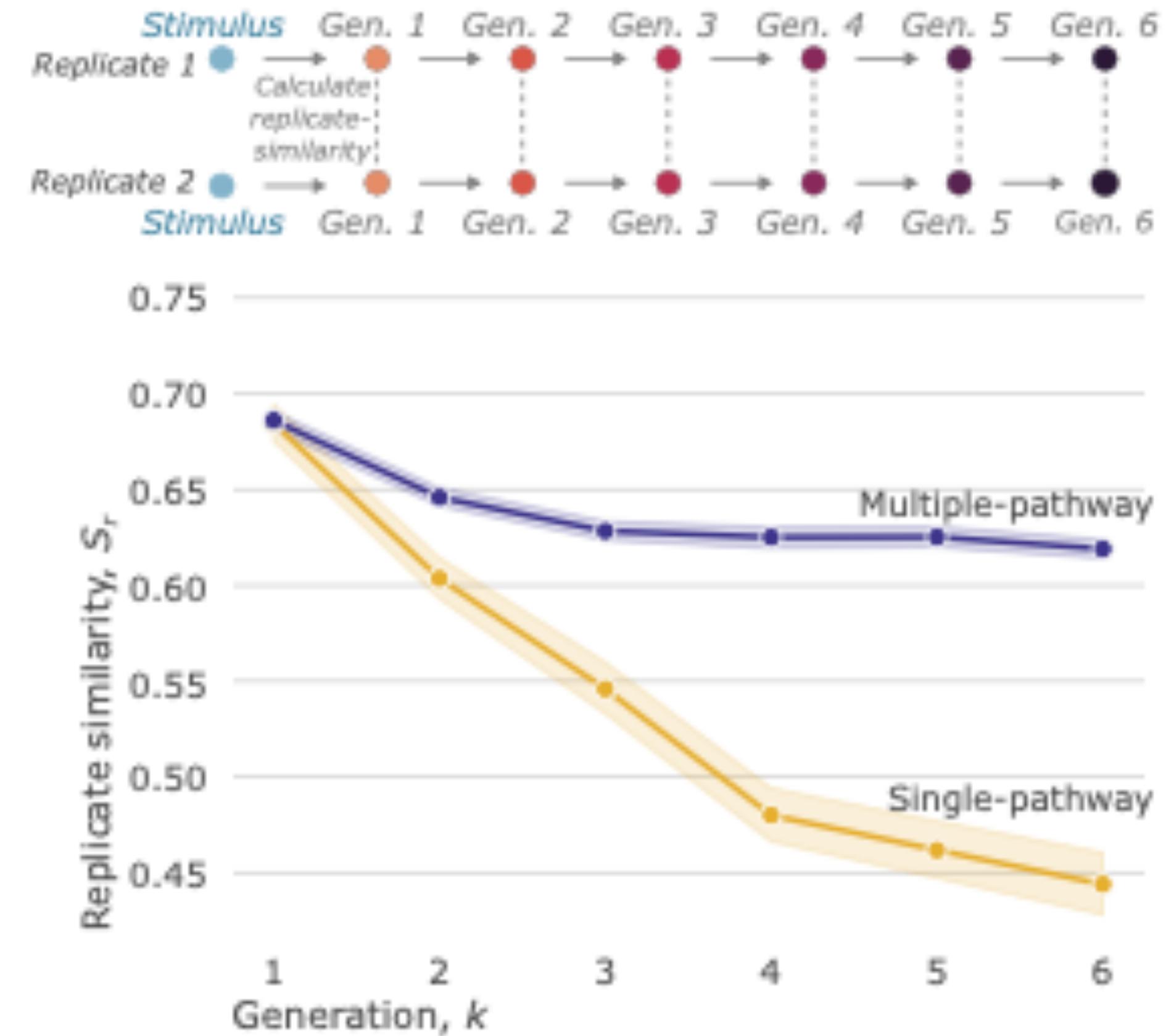
Conflict: Between the four methods

Resolution: **DNN Vocoder** much better

(A) Similarity with the original story



(B) Similarity between independent replicates



Exposition: Diagrams explaining what the data represents

Conflict: Between single and multiple-pathway

Resolution: Similarity between independent replicates decay in single, but not in multiple

PRACTICE: TELL A STORY

- ▶ (1) What is the exposition, conflict and resolution in your graph?
- ▶ (2) How will your graph be perceived by the audience? What moods and emotions might users experience as they engage with your work? (not frustrated!)
- ▶ (3) How can you guide them in the interpretation?
- ▶ Steps:
 - ▶ Do (1) – 5 minutes.
 - ▶ Mix groups and do (2) – 10 min.
 - ▶ Return to original groups to do (3) – 10 min