

# A Day in the Life - Design Critique

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The given infographic compares the average time spent by Americans in each daily activity in 2004 and 2014. The data for the same was obtained from the [Labor Department](#), and the infographic was published by [Christopher Kaeser](#) in [The Wall Street Journal](#) circa 2014.

The title for this visualisation is “A Day in the Life”, [aply referring to the storytelling genre](#) which involves narrating a single day in the character’s life. However, the [subtitle is slightly misleading](#) as it simply mentions that the data depicts the average time spent by Americans in each daily activity, [without specifying details about its subjects](#), such as the age group.

At first glance, the infographic is [an innovative way to portray the given data](#). It is done by splitting the form of a person into small squares, and then sorting these squares by count to represent how many minutes were spent in each activity. It even [includes a visual representation of certain activities](#) - for example, “Work related” activities are represented by the outline of a suitcase, “Eating and drinking” is represented by the outline of a glass and straw, and “Leisure and sports” is represented by the outline of a ball.

However, despite being creative and aesthetically pleasing, [the visualisation could be deceptive to audiences](#). For starters, the ratio between the values from 2004 and 2014 are lost in the graphical aspects, and [many people may ignore the 2004 values entirely, defeating the purpose of the infographic](#). Along with this, in making the 2004 values exclusively text-based, the creators have made it more [difficult to discern the actual ratio of change in time](#) for each activity over the decade.

Additionally, the infographic states in small text at the bottom that the time may not total twenty four hours owing to rounding. On calculating, one can see that the 2014 values sum up to have an extra nineteen minutes, while the 2004 values sum up to a perfect twenty four hours. This further contributes to the visualisation being misleading to audiences.

Another factor that leads to the infographic being illusory is the fact that it never actually depicts the change between 2004 and 2014. The visuals are solely focused on the 2014 values, while the 2004 values are simply mentioned in text below them. The colours only denote an increase or decrease in the time spent, without actually showing audiences how much change there has been.

Furthermore, while the font used is appropriate for the infographic, in that it looks like the font likely to be seen on a clock face, the colour scheme is not. The only colour that is fitting is the use of grey for the sections with no change. Typically, an increasing value would be illustrated in green, while a decreasing value would be given in red. The use of blues and yellows in their stead, respectively, means that the infographic does not immediately incite the reaction intended, and has an almost disconcerting effect.

In making the number of blocks in each section equal to the number of minutes spent doing that specific activity, the creators have given the infographic more depth. Unfortunately, this detail is distorted by the fact that the activities have been reshaped to fit the outline of a person, and it skews the ratios between sections.

Moreover, there is no definite split between many sections. The activities entitled “Shopping” “Phone call, mail and email”, and “Work related” are all depicted in the same region of the infographic. However, as all their values have decreased, each of these sections are given in yellow, which makes it arduous to distinguish between them.

As mentioned previously, certain activities are represented not only by the number of blocks, but also by the outline in which they are depicted. This **contributes to the visual appeal** of the infographic, but in doing so, the data represented has **lost a sense of logical progression**. For example, the “Leisure and sports” section borders “Organizational, civic and religious activities”, but is nowhere near “Watching TV”, **despite having more in common with the latter**.

In addition, the titles used to denote the activities have an unsettling effect. Phrases such as, “Eating and drinking” and “Organizational, civic and religious activities” **appear to be more similar to descriptive sentences rather than headings** as only the first letter of each phrase has been capitalised, instead of the first letter of each individual activity.

The activities illustrated are also not always in line with the description of the infographic. While the visualisation **claims to represent average time spent by Americans in these activities in general**, a child would be unlikely to do any activity that is “Work related”, and an old person may not spend much time indulging in “Leisure and sports”. By **not mentioning what age group** is being referred to in the visualisation, the creators are once again deceiving audiences.

Lastly, the values mentioned within the infographic also seem illusive. For example, it is **highly unlikely that the average American would spend forty four minutes shopping on a daily basis**, and only three hours and thirty five minutes working. Certain details regarding the activities have also been omitted, such as **not specifying who constitutes a “non-household member”** in the “Caring for non-household members” section.

In conclusion, we can see that, in **giving so much importance to the visual aspects** of the infographic, the creators have **failed to convey their message to the audience**. The 2004 values have been entirely overlooked, as has the actual amount of change, resulting in the **visualisation losing its purpose entirely**. The use of the human silhouette to depict the data leads to **distortion and distraction, which could have easily been avoided had a simpler graph been utilised**.

On the whole, **the design simply does not work**. It's only positive is in the fact that it is visually appealing. It has failed to deliver in all other aspects, including comprehensibility and informativeness.