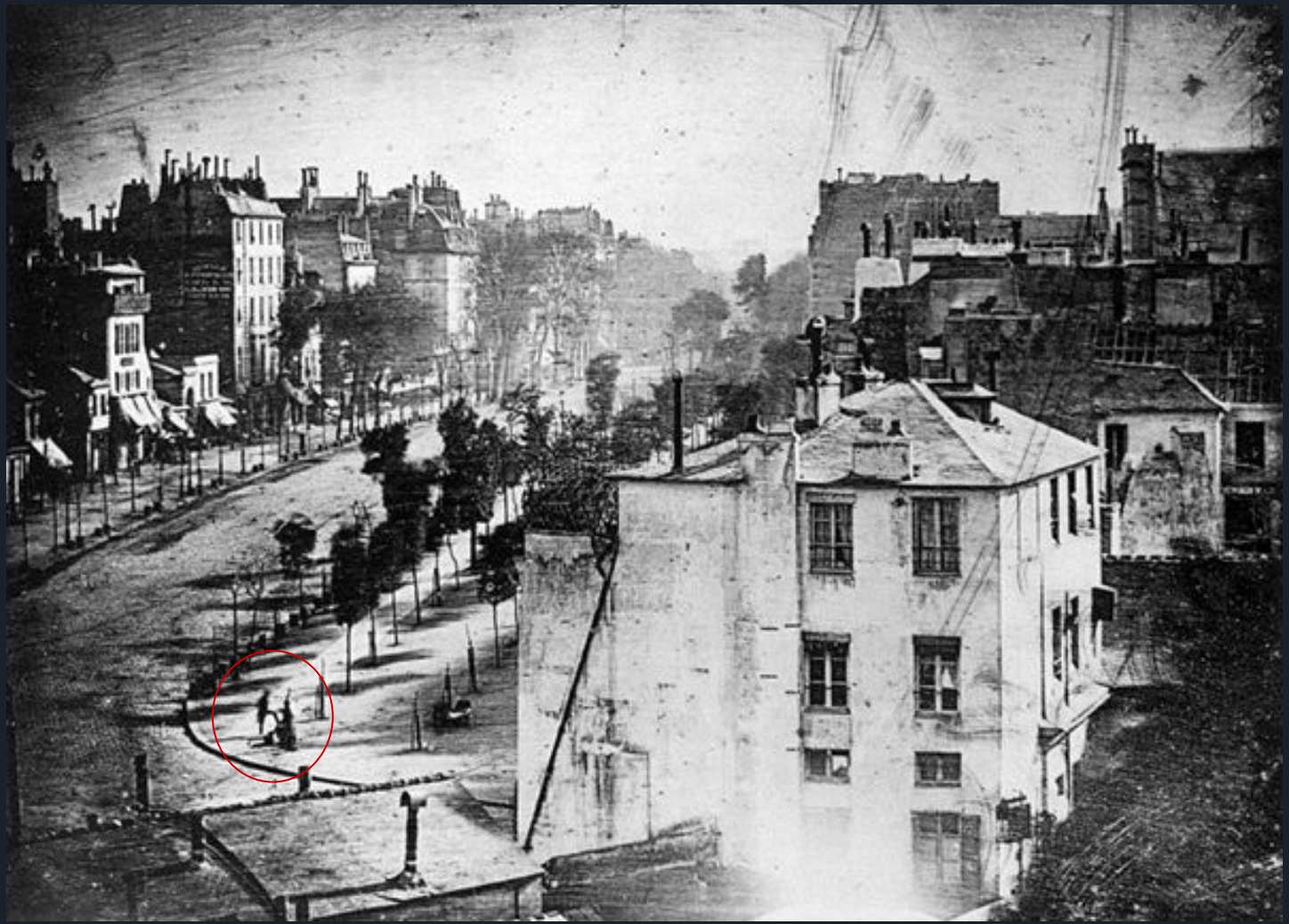
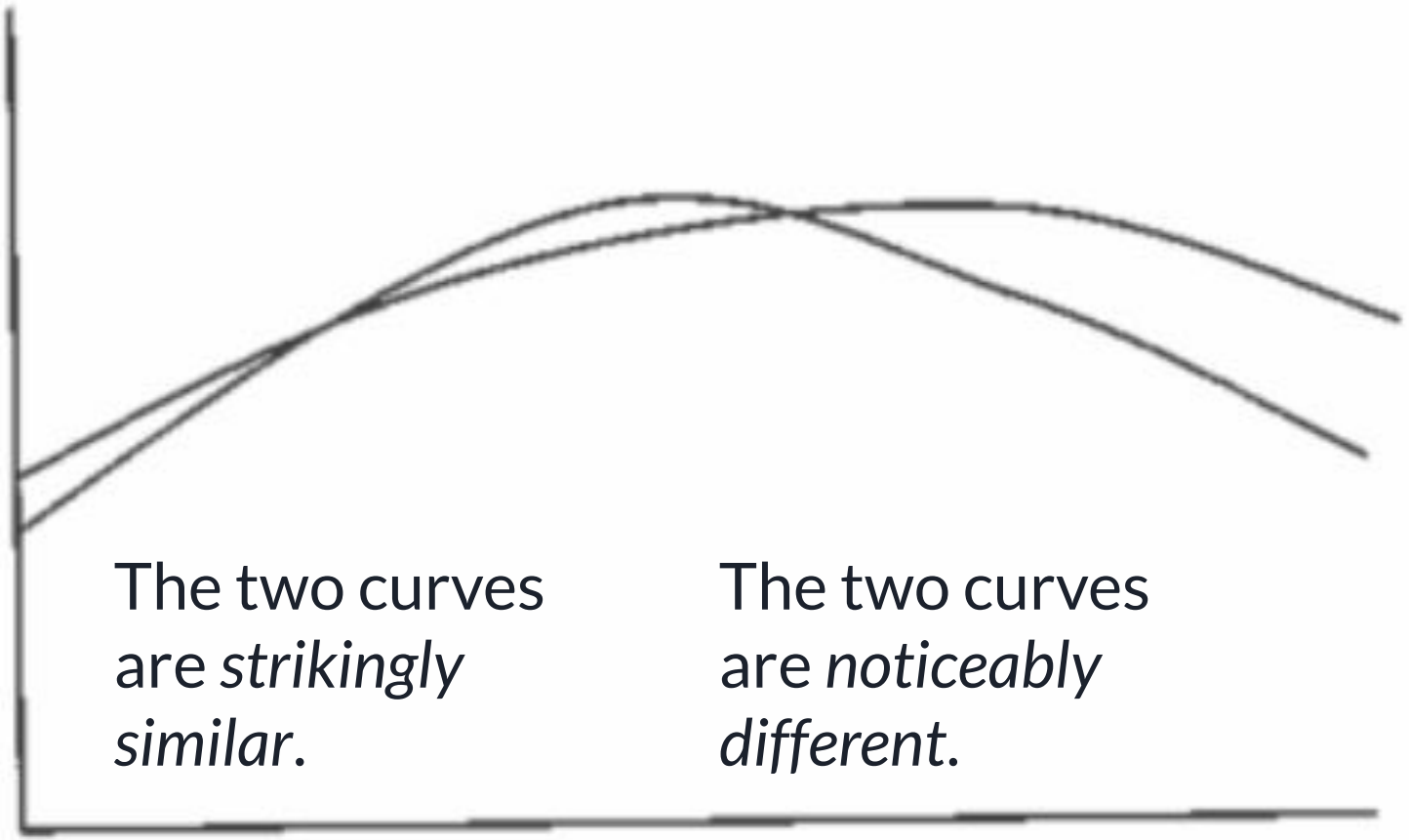
Stance & Describing Visuals

As Shown in Writing a Data Commentary

Academic Writing





The two curves are *strikingly similar*.

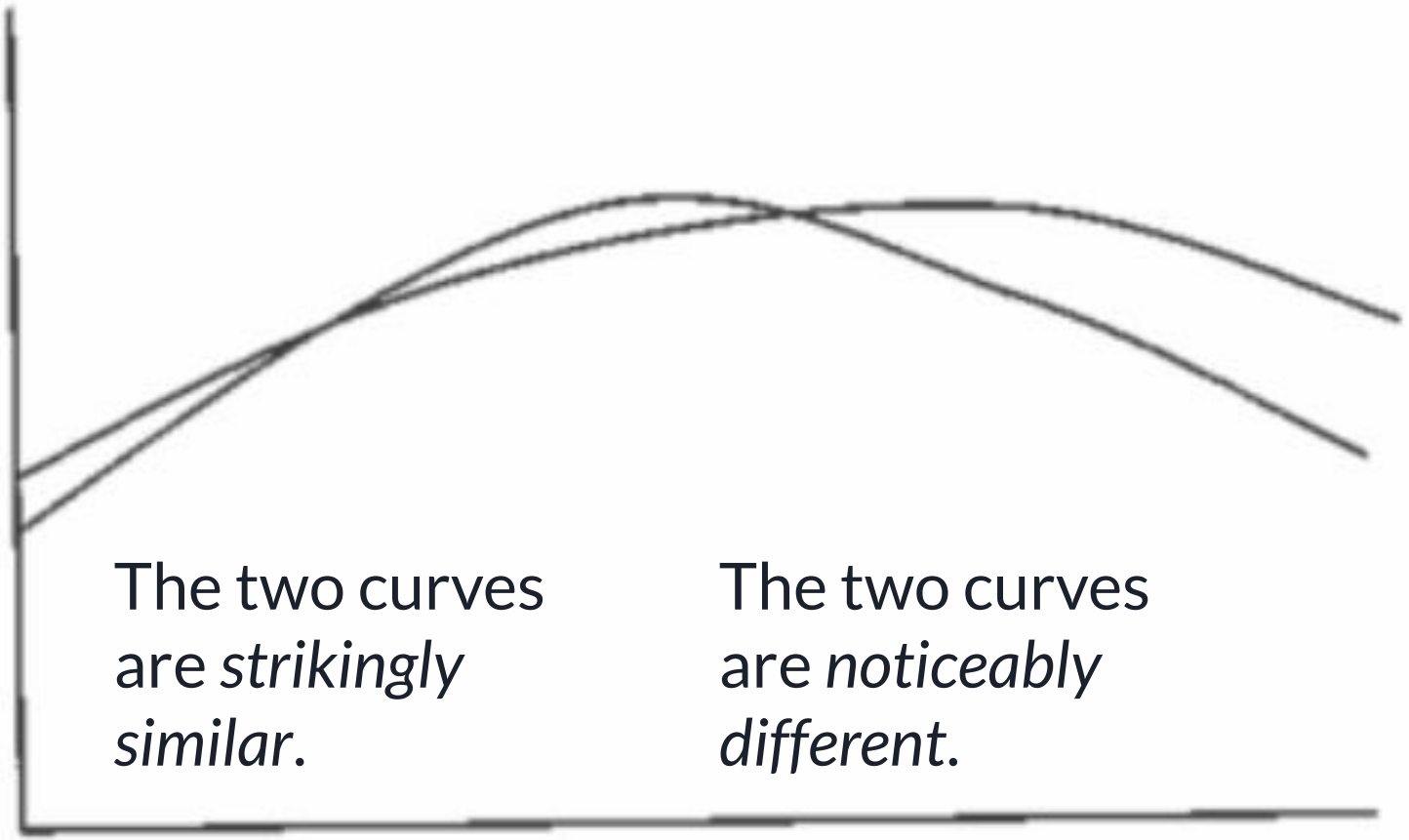
The two curves are *noticeably different*.

Images and graphs do not “speak for themselves.” The same is true of facts, statistics, etc. They have the significance we give them with our language.

The writer’s goal is to guide the reader’s perception.

Stance

Stance is the term used to describe how writers express their feelings, their opinions, and their attitude through their use of language *while also* being accurate. What you have written is fundamentally factual – or arguable – but it is colored by *your* opinion.



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Ways We Show Stance

- Adjectives
  - “There is a *wide* variety of options…”
  - “There is *sharp* disagreement…”
- Adverbs
  - “The two scholars *significantly* disagreed…”
  - “The figures were *considerably* different…”
- Hedging
  - Reporting Verbs
    - “The academic consensus *suggests*…”
    - “The problem *seems* to arise from…”
  - Modal verbs
    - “This *could* be the reason for the increase…”
    - “Future research *may* allow us to…”

Practice 5.1: Indicating Stance

Look at the handout. Underline all the places where you feel the author of each passage is indicating their stance. Then, compare with your partner.

Practice 5.1: Answers

a. Previous studies (Jones, 1997; Smith, 2006) have *indicated* that the intensity of physiotherapy provision *may* affect *some* patient outcomes including reduced mortality following a stroke.

b. Although *significant* sums of money have been *poorly* invested in the African continent, this essay *determines* that the effectiveness of foreign aid in Africa is *most apparent* in educational institutions, in transportation infrastructure, and in combating transmissible diseases such as malaria.

c. Communication is *probably* one of the *most important* of all human behaviours. Our use of language *may be* private - we can think to ourselves in words or write diaries that are meant to be seen by no one but ourselves - but language *certainly* evolved through social contacts among our early ancestors. Speaking and writing are *clearly* social behaviours: we learn these skills from other people and use them to communicate with them. An *effective* language system also *tends* to abide by certain rules. Although an *exact* definition is *difficult* to pin down, language *can be* characterised as a system of visual and/or vocal symbols which have meaning to the user and to the recipient. *There are thought to be* around 6000 *distinct* languages in the world. The world's largest language *is said to be* Chinese - it has more native speakers than any other - followed closely by English, Hindi/Urdu, Spanish and Arabic. The *most popular* foreign language *is usually claimed* (Smith, 2003) to be English.

Practice 5.1: Answers, continued

d. Patellofemoral disorders are *amongst* the *most common* clinical conditions encountered in the sporting and general population. Patellofemoral pain is *usually* described as diffuse, peripatellar, anterior knee pain. Symptoms are *typically* aggravated by activities such as ascending or descending stairs, squatting, kneeling, running and *prolonged* sitting.

A *wide* variety of disorders *may* fall under the umbrella term of patellofemoral pain. As a result, a *thorough systematic* evaluation of the patient's lower extremity alignment, patellar mobility and alignment, muscle flexibility, strength, co-ordination, soft tissue and articular pain is *important* in determining the *possible* causes of patellofemoral pain and prescribing an *optimal* rehabilitation programme. Management of patellofemoral pain syndrome *often includes* reduction of pain and inflammation through cryotherapy, heat therapy, massage therapy, muscle flexibility and strength training (especially quadriceps), patellar taping, bracing, orthotics, correction of abnormal biomechanics or other causative factors, acupuncture and surgery.

Using/Describing Visuals

- No visual (photograph, diagram, graph) should be used without receiving a verbal description
- Your description should draw the reader's attention to the elements that are relevant to your point
- You can then use those elements to argue for your thesis

Structure of a Data Commentary

Three Main Steps

1. **Direct your reader to the data and provide a broad summary of what it reveals**
   a. Example: “Figure 2 shows the relationship of X and Y…”
   b. Example: “The relationship of X and Y is shown in Figure 2…”
2. **Highlight exactly what is shows (relevant to your point)**
   a. Example: “As can be seen, Y increases significantly faster than X.”
   b. Example: “As can be seen, there is a change in the trend line after X=2.”
3. **Point out the importance or implications**
   a. Example: “This strongly suggests that an efficient way to increase Y may be to increase X.”
   b. Example: “This clearly shows that X and Y have a positive correlation.”

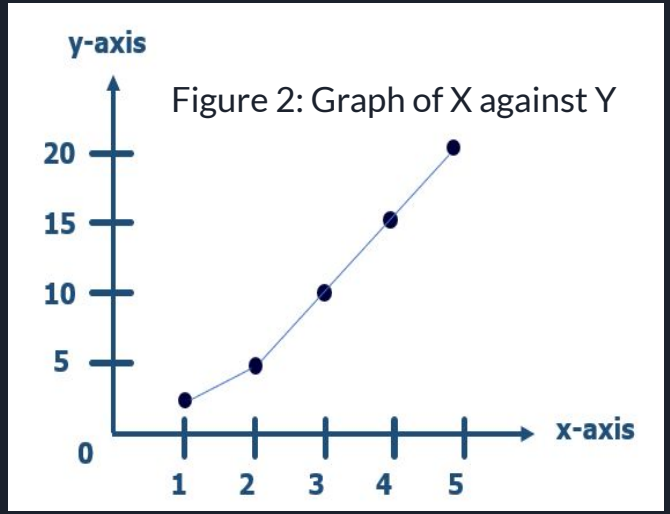

Figure 2: Graph of X against Y

Data Commentary Example

Figure 2 displays the relationship between X and Y for values of X up to 5.* As can be seen on the graph, while X and Y increase at or near the same rate initially, this rate begins to significantly increase beginning at X=2. From this, it can be concluded that, if elevated amounts of Y is a desired result, starting with higher amounts of X is a possible solution. This provides a potential way to alleviate the Y-deficiency crisis.

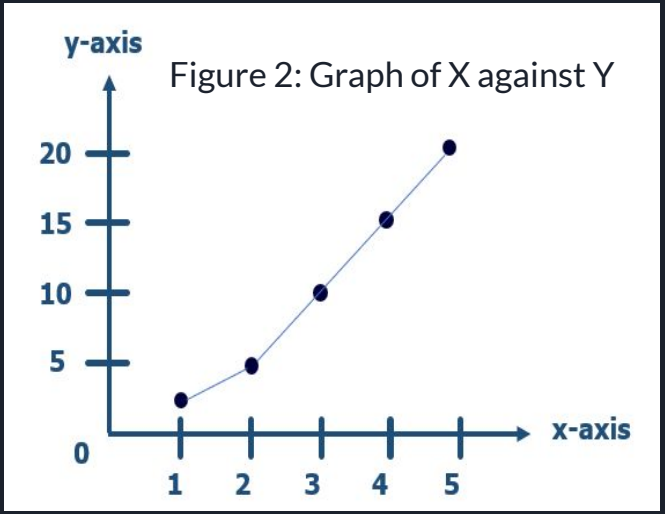

Figure 2: Graph of X against Y

*Make sure you paraphrase what the figure shows; do not merely list the title.

Practice 5.2: Structure of a Data Commentary

- *Read the data commentary.*
- *Identify the structure (which sentences are which parts)*
- *Identify the writer's thesis (if possible)*
- *Identify at least 5 ways that the author indicates stance*

Practice 5.3

Look at the provided table and find something that is interesting or notable to you. Using that, form a thesis and write a data commentary to support it.