CHOOSING THE RIGHT CHART · PART 1 OF 8 · AGES 11–16

Choosing the Right Chart

Decide which question your data answers, then pick the chart built for that job.

Compare categories: bar chart

Which is biggest or smallest? Draw one bar per category, with gaps between bars and a value axis that starts at zero. Sort the bars by size unless the order matters.

Change over time: line graph

How has something changed? Put time along the horizontal axis and join the points in order. Several lines can share a graph, but more than about four gets hard to follow.

Parts of a whole: pie or stacked bar

What share is each part? A pie chart suits one total split into a few parts of clearly different sizes. A stacked bar compares shares across several groups.

A distribution: histogram

How are measurements spread out? Group continuous data, such as times or heights, into class intervals and draw touching bars to show where values bunch up.

A relationship: scatter graph

Does one thing change as another changes? Plot each pair of values as a point. An uphill or downhill pattern suggests a correlation, not proof of a cause.

Sometimes no chart is best

If readers need exact values, a clear table often works better than any chart. And if you cannot sum up your chart's message in a sentence or two, rethink it.

NEXT IN THE SERIES

2. Types of Chart and What Each One Is For

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