CHOOSING THE RIGHT CHART · PART 2 OF 8 · AGES 11–16

Types of Chart

Eight common ways to show data, and the one job each does best.

Bar chart

Compares separate categories with bars of equal width and gaps between them. Bars can stand up as columns or lie flat, which suits long labels.

Line graph

Shows how a value changes over time. Points are plotted in time order and joined with straight lines, so rises, falls and trends stand out.

Pie chart

Shows how one total splits into parts. Each sector's angle is its share of 360°, so a quarter of the data fills a 90° sector.

Histogram

Shows how continuous data, such as times or heights, is spread across class intervals. The bars touch because the number scale has no gaps.

Scatter graph

Plots pairs of measurements as points to show whether two variables are related. A line of best fit can show the trend.

Pictogram

Uses rows of identical icons to show counts for each category. A key says what one icon is worth; half an icon shows half that amount.

Stacked bar chart

Splits each bar into coloured segments to compare totals and what they are made of across groups. Only the bottom segment shares a baseline.

Table

Rows and columns of exact numbers. Best when readers need to look up precise values rather than spot a pattern at a glance.

Chart, graph, plot or diagram?

The names overlap. A bar chart is also called a bar graph, and a scatter graph is also a scatter plot or scatter diagram. What matters is what the picture shows.

NEXT IN THE SERIES

3. Bar Chart vs Histogram: What Is the Difference?

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