

# Designing Visual Appendices for Your Next Report—In Under an Hour



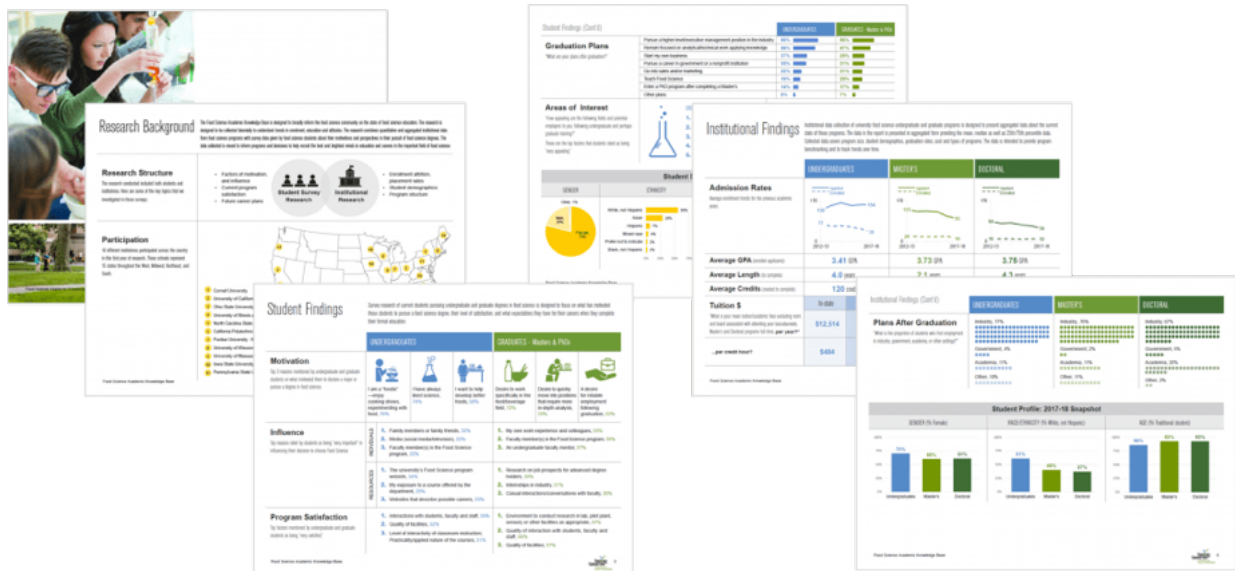
**ANN K. EMERY**

Updated on: Nov 10th, 2020

Data Visualization

[30-3-1 Approach to Reporting,  
Reports, Tables](#)

A couple years ago, I worked on this report:



This report summarized survey responses from both universities and their students. Even with hundreds of survey responses and dozens of survey questions, we kept the report's body to just six pages!

How'd we choose which findings to include in the report's main body?!

That can be a daunting task. But it doesn't have to be.

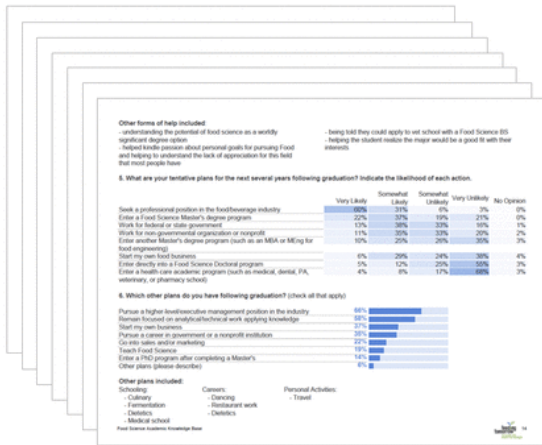
It's much easier to pare down our report's content *when we've got appendices to back us up.*

We don't have to worry about forgetting any important details, since readers can simply flip to the back to learn more.

We get to be transparent by showing *all* the data (in the appendices) without overwhelming our busy readers (by trying to shove everything into the body of the report).

This particular report was six pages long *plus 33 pages of appendices!*

# Visual Appendices



depict data studio

## What Can—and Should—Be Included in Appendices

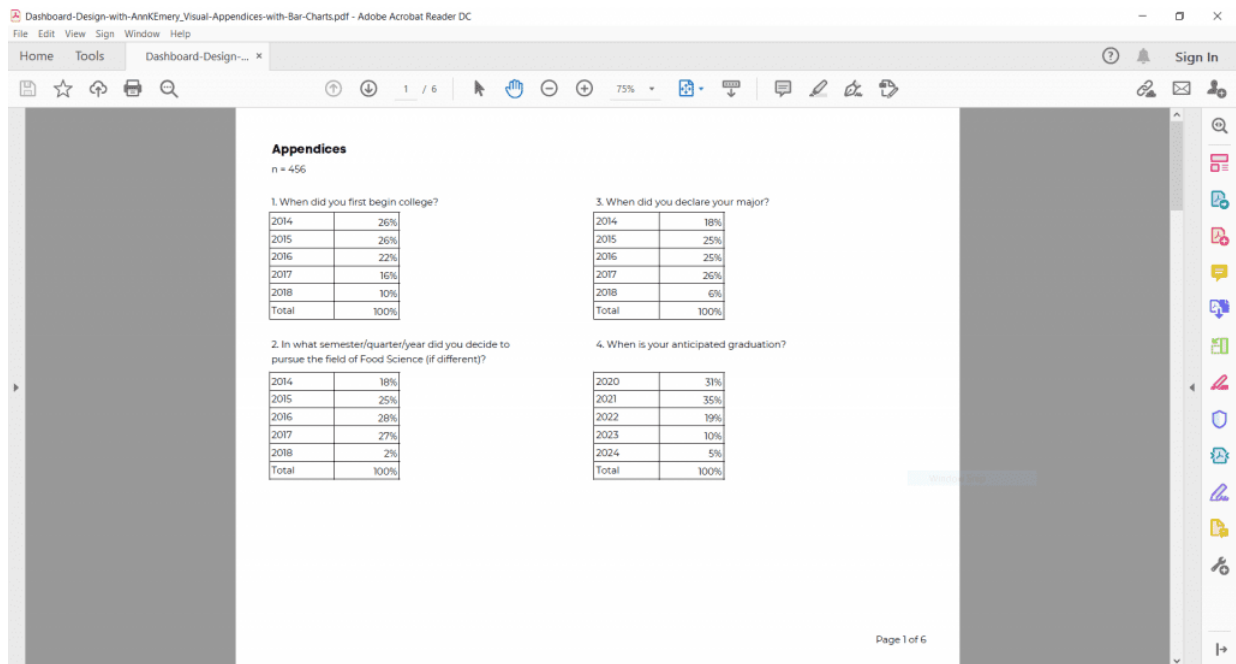
Here's everything that can be removed from the report's main body and pushed to the appendix:

- Question-by-question survey responses (i.e., tables and tables of closed-ended and open-ended survey data)
- Data collection instruments (e.g., an empty copy of the questions from the survey)
- Transcripts from qualitative data collection (like focus groups or interviews)
- Meeting minutes or other official documents we might've referenced quickly within the body of the report
- Anything that would put our non-technical audiences to sleep
- Anything that's not central to the key takeaway message from the report
- Anything we feel like we should include *just in case*
- Anything *that one person* who asks lots of questions might need to know about
- Patterns over time (e.g., our report's main body could focus on *this year's data*, but we might include tables that compare this year's

data to last year's data in the appendix)

# What Appendices Typically Look Like

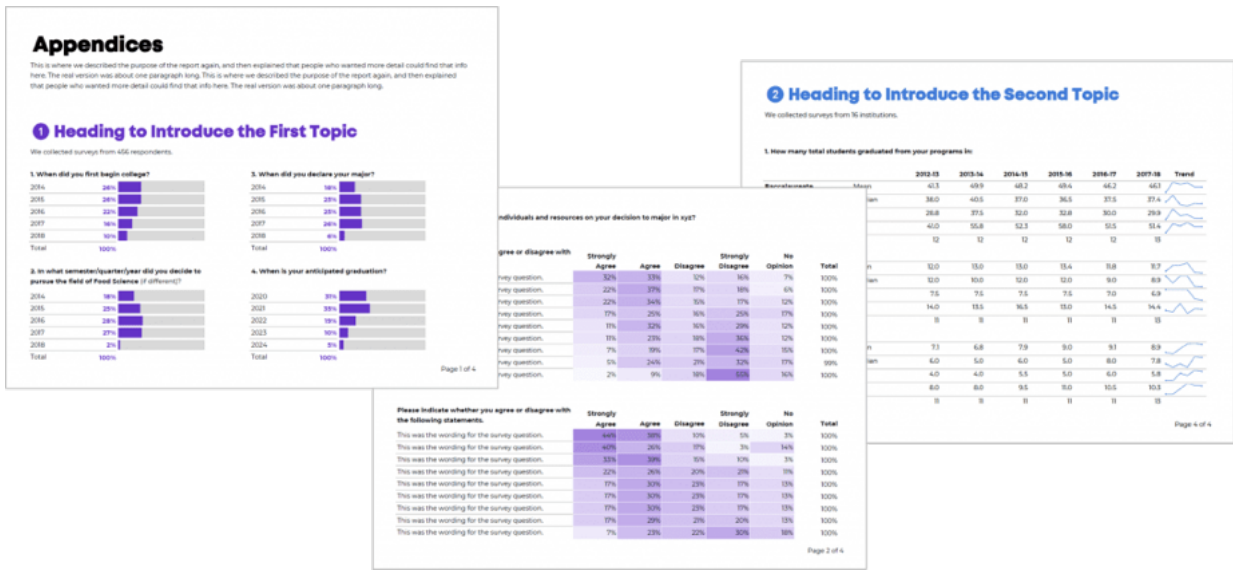
Here's what tables in the back of reports typically look like: Tiny font sizes, cluttered tables, and no visuals to help readers spot the key patterns.



But what if I told you our appendices could get *even better* than that—in under an hour??

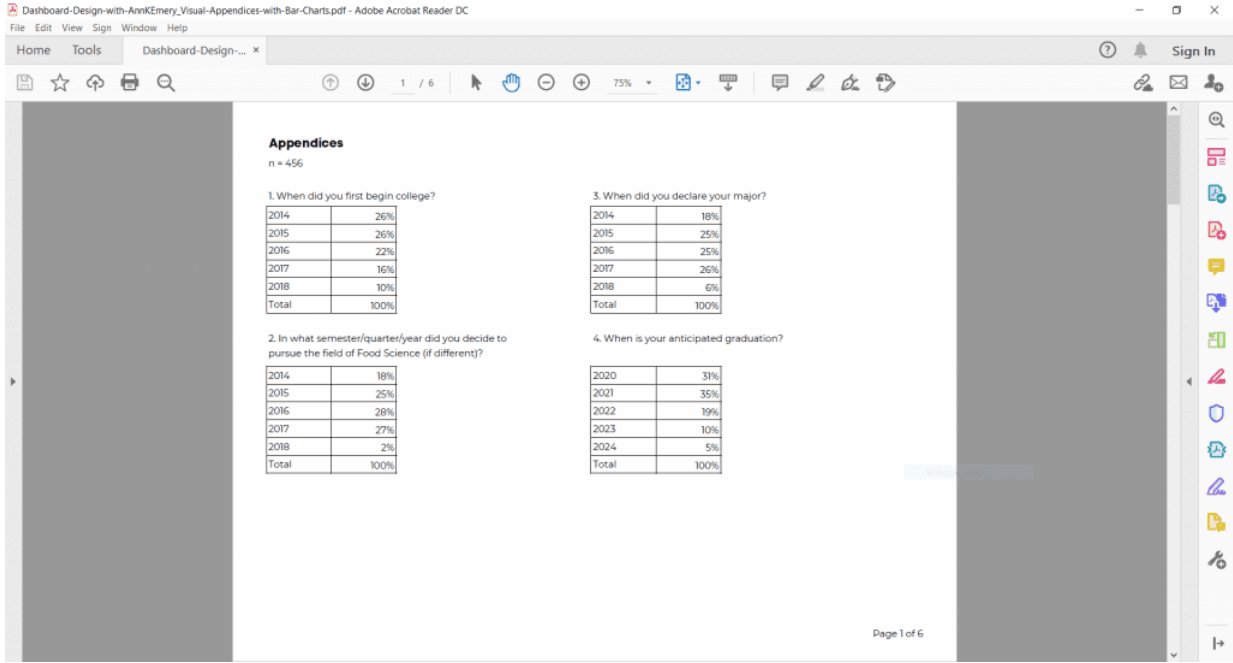
## Introducing... Visual Appendices!

Here's my wish for your next report: Visual appendices!



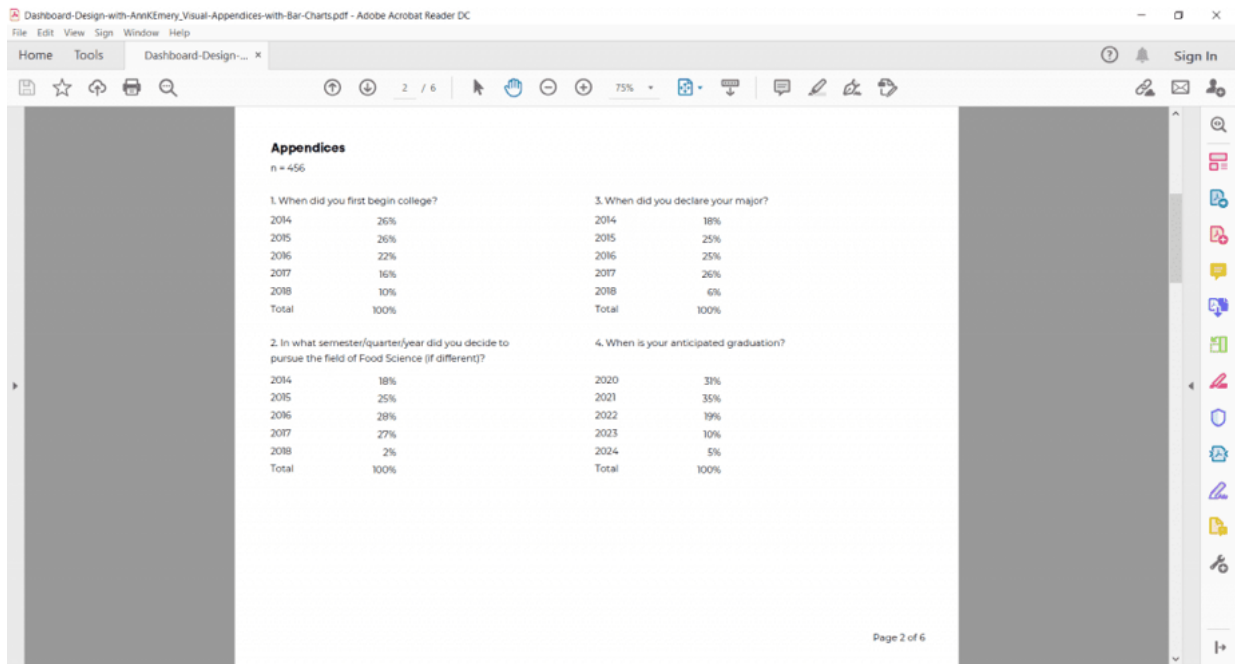
# 5 Easy Edits to Appendices

Let's start with those original appendices that I showed you a moment ago...

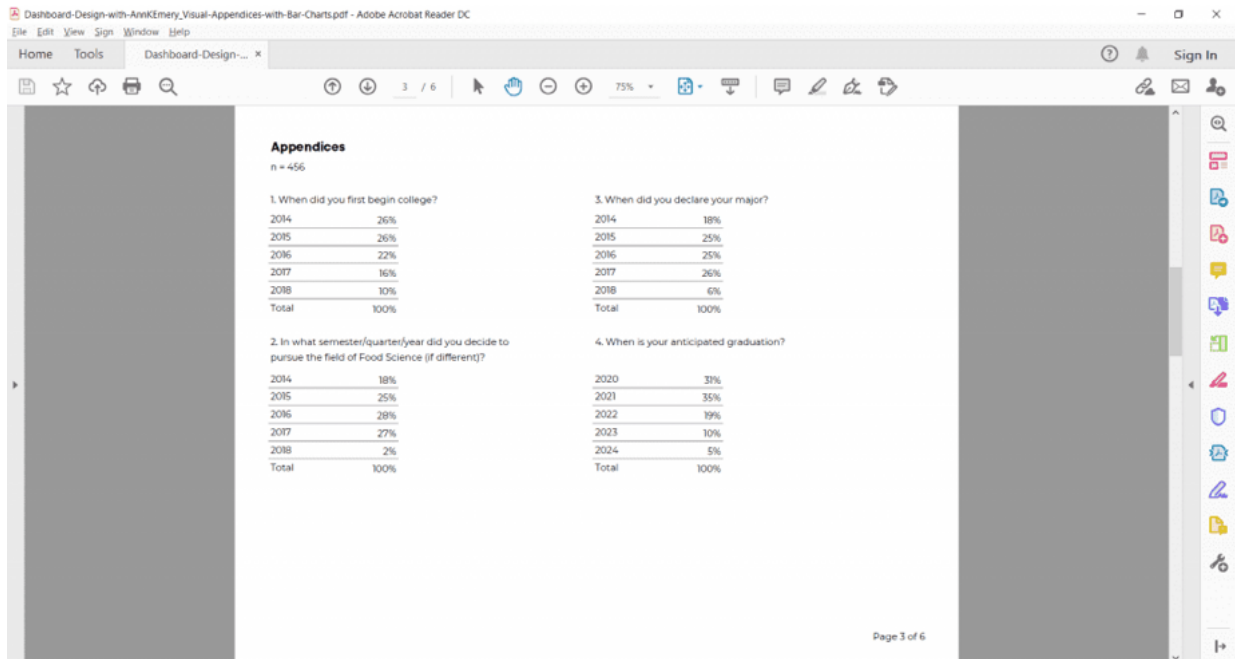


First, declutter the existing tables. Remove all the unnecessary borders and lines.

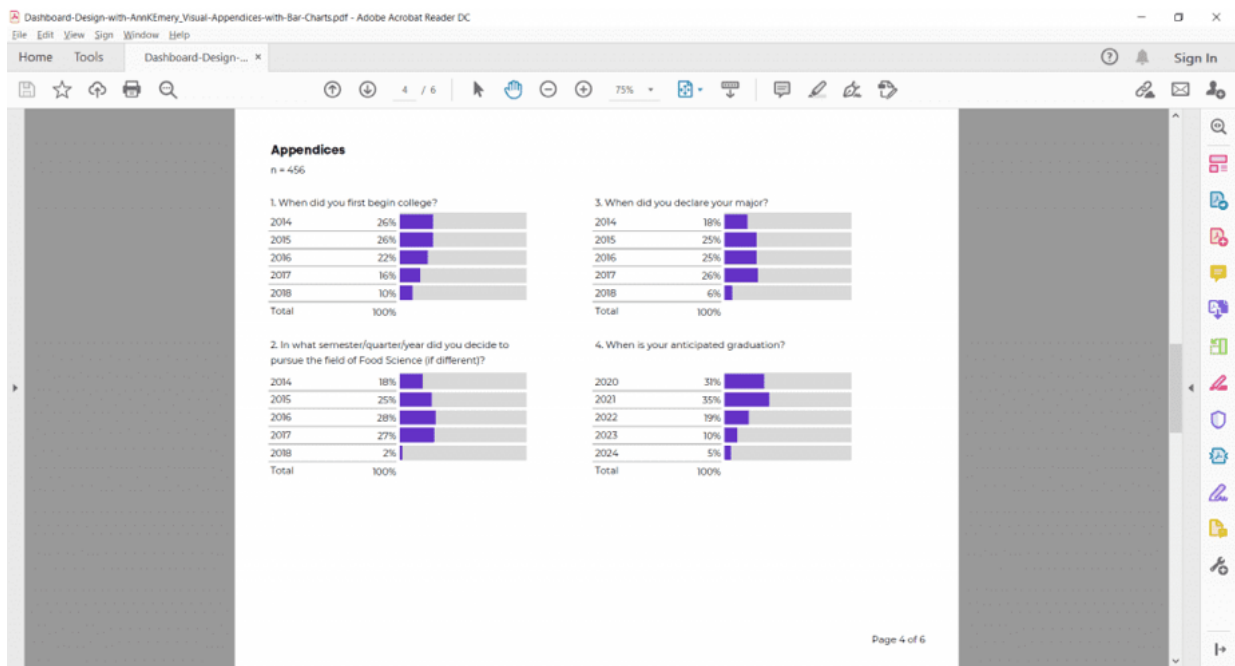
Oops! Too bare. Don't worry, we'll continue editing in the next step.



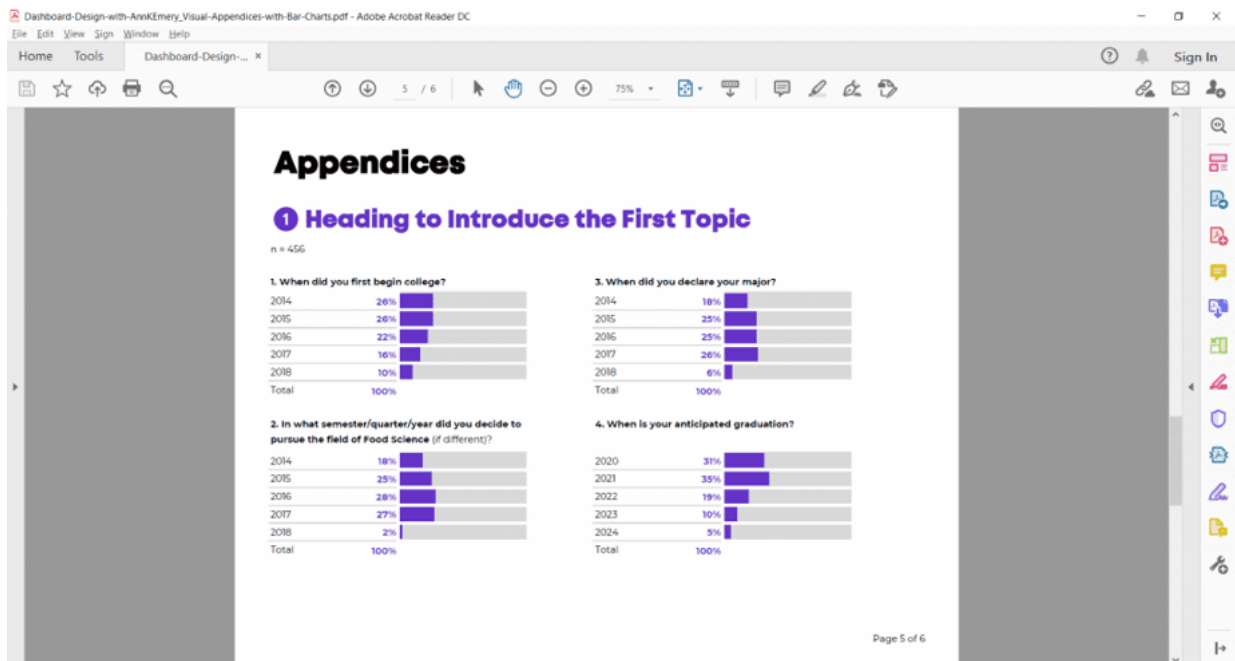
Second, I re-add the horizontal lines in gray rather than in black. Light gray horizontal lines ensure that our viewers can still read across the rows *without distracting from the data by adding lots of dark ink.*



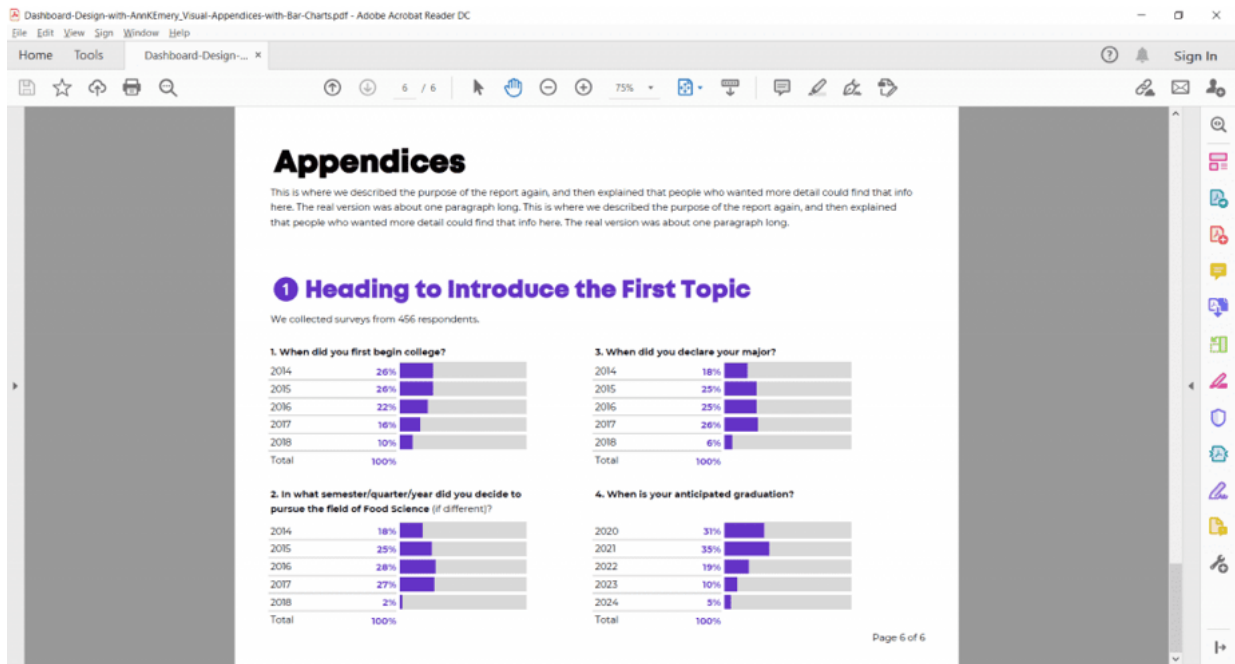
Third, add visuals! This is the most fun part.



Fourth, apply a text hierarchy. A text hierarchy means our title is going to be the largest, boldest, darkest text on the page (followed by Heading 1s, 2s, and 3s).



Fifth, add some plain-language text. In this fictional example, I've added a short introductory section. I've also changed the  $n=456$  jargon into a friendly sentence: "We collected data from 456 respondents."



## 3 Quick Visuals to Include in Appendices

There are plenty of quick visuals that we can include in our appendices. Here are a few of my favorite styles.

### Bar Charts (or Stacked Bar Charts)

I showed you this approach already. We can build bar charts or stacked bars to visualize *how many* (“frequencies”).



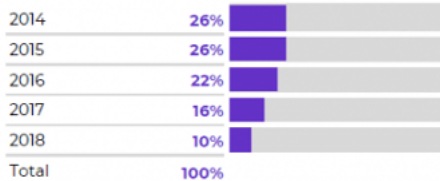
# Appendices

This is where we described the purpose of the report again, and then explained that people who wanted more detail could find that info here. The real version was about one paragraph long. This is where we described the purpose of the report again, and then explained that people who wanted more detail could find that info here. The real version was about one paragraph long.

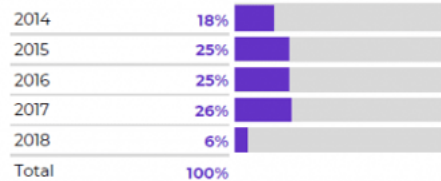
## ① Heading to Introduce the First Topic

We collected surveys from 456 respondents.

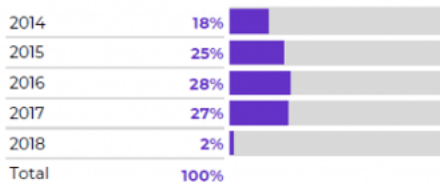
### 1. When did you first begin college?



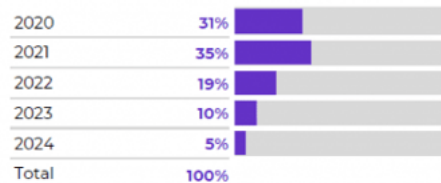
### 3. When did you declare your major?



### 2. In what semester/quarter/year did you decide to pursue the field of Food Science (if different)?



### 4. When is your anticipated graduation?



## Heat Tables (or Any Type of Color-Coded Cells)

I love creating heat tables to help readers spot the highs and lows in the dataset. Heat tables are more helpful than bar charts when our tables have several rows and columns (like these fictional tables below, which have seven columns each).

5. How influential were these individuals and resources on your decision to major in xyz?

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion	Total
This was the wording for the survey question.	32%	33%	12%	16%	7%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	22%	37%	17%	18%	6%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	22%	34%	15%	17%	12%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	17%	25%	16%	25%	17%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	11%	32%	16%	29%	12%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	11%	23%	18%	36%	12%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	7%	19%	17%	42%	15%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	5%	24%	21%	32%	17%	99%
This was the wording for the survey question.	2%	9%	18%	55%	16%	100%

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion	Total
This was the wording for the survey question.	44%	38%	10%	5%	3%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	40%	26%	17%	3%	14%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	33%	39%	15%	10%	3%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	22%	26%	20%	21%	11%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	17%	30%	23%	17%	13%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	17%	30%	23%	17%	13%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	17%	30%	23%	17%	13%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	17%	29%	21%	20%	13%	100%
This was the wording for the survey question.	7%	23%	22%	30%	18%	100%

## Trend Lines (or Vertical Columns)

Finally, I love creating trend lines (or, vertical columns) to show patterns over time. In this fictional example, we're comparing how the patterns shifted between the 2012-13 academic year and the 2017-18 academic year.

## ② Heading to Introduce the Second Topic

We collected surveys from 16 institutions.

### 1. How many total students graduated from your programs in:

		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	Trend
<b>Baccalaureate</b>	Mean	41.3	49.9	48.2	49.4	46.2	46.1	
	Median	38.0	40.5	37.0	36.5	37.5	37.4	
	Q1	28.8	37.5	32.0	32.8	30.0	29.9	
	Q3	41.0	55.8	52.3	58.0	51.5	51.4	
	n	12	12	12	12	12	13	
<b>Master's</b>	Mean	12.0	13.0	13.0	13.4	11.8	11.7	
	Median	12.0	10.0	12.0	12.0	9.0	8.9	
	Q1	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.0	6.9	
	Q3	14.0	13.5	16.5	13.0	14.5	14.4	
	n	11	11	11	11	11	13	
<b>Doctoral</b>	Mean	7.1	6.8	7.9	9.0	9.1	8.9	
	Median	6.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	8.0	7.8	
	Q1	4.0	4.0	5.5	5.0	6.0	5.8	
	Q3	8.0	8.0	9.5	11.0	10.5	10.3	
	n	11	11	11	11	11	13	

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The next time you're adding appendices to your report, add visual appendices!

## Bonus: Learn How to Make Visual Appendices

I'm leading a live 60-minute training on visual appendices as part of the *Dashboard Design Full Course*, which opens for once-a-year enrollment the week of November 16-20, 2020. [Learn more.](#)

### More about [Ann K. Emery](#)

Ann K. Emery is a sought-after speaker who is determined to get your data out of spreadsheets and into stakeholders' hands. Each year, she leads more than 100 workshops, webinars, and keynotes

for thousands of people around the globe. Her design consultancy also overhauls graphs, publications, and slideshows with the goal of making technical information easier to understand for non-technical audiences.

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