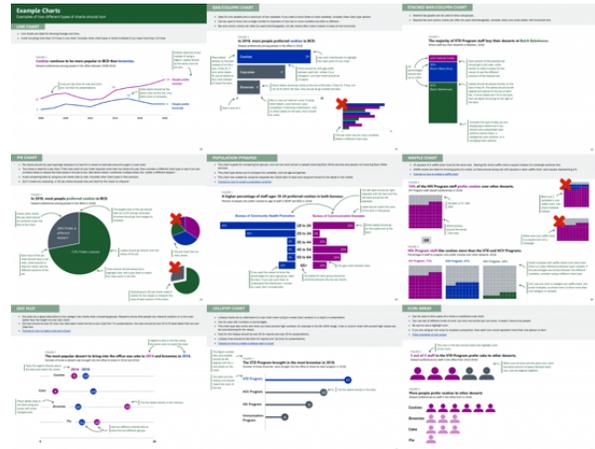


How to Create a Data Visualization Style Guide to Tell Great Stories (Part 2)



SARA DELONG

Updated on: Jul 14th, 2020

Data Visualization

[Student Showcases](#), [Style Guides](#)

Did you see Sara DeLong's post on [Why You Need to Create a Data Visualization Style Guide to Tell Great Stories?](#) You'll love Part 2. –Ann

So you decided your organization needs a style guide to save lots your team lots of time when creating charts, enhance brand cohesion, and improve trust with your stakeholders.

In [my previous post](#) I described how to identify if your team needs a Data Visualization Style Guide, how to secure buy-in from leadership and your coworkers, and some great resources to review before you get started.

This post will outline the key components of your Data Visualization Style Guide and how to ask for feedback that will make this new resource actionable.

PIE CHART

- Pie charts should be used sparingly because it is hard for a viewer to estimate area and angle in a pie chart.
- Two slices is ideal for a pie chart. If the main point of your chart requires more than two slices of a pie, then consider a different chart type or see if you can combine slices to reduce the total slices in the pie to two. See below where I combined multiple slices into "prefer a different dessert."
- Avoid comparing data by using two pie charts side by side. Consider other chart types in this scenario.
- Don't create any exploding or 3D pie charts because they are hard for the viewer to interpret.

FIGURE X
In 2018, most people preferred cookies in BCD.
Dessert preferences among people in the office in 2018.

Annotations for the main pie chart:

- Unlike other charts, the pie chart should be centered under the title of the chart.
- The largest slice of the pie should start at 12:00 and go clockwise. All slices should go from largest to smallest.
- Labels should go directly onto the slices of the pie.
- There should almost always be a highlight color with a pie chart to match the main point in the title.
- Each slice of the pie chart should have a 2pt wide, white border to help the viewer see the different sections of the pie.

Annotations for bad examples:

- This pie chart has too many slices.
- Exploding and 3D pie charts make it harder for the reader to interpret the area of each section of the chart.

Dessert Preference	Percentage
Prefer cookies	72%
Prefer a different dessert	28%

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Every guide might be a little different depending on your field and your

data.

Here are the key components of my Data Visualization Style Guide.

Note: The instructions in green type in the pictures below are for style guide users. These instructions help the user better understand the components of each chart type.

Chart Structure

This is a general overview of how charts should look for your team. This includes some of the basics of each chart, such as formatting for figure numbers, chart titles, chart subtitles, and axes.

Chart Structure for Reports

General chart formatting

- Refer to Chart Topography on page 4 for text size, font, and color for each component of the chart.
- Depending on the chart type and if you are using direct labeling, it may not be necessary to include one or both axis.
- The default should be no major or minor gridlines. They should only be used when there is no/very limited direct labeling and the viewer needs to be able to estimate the values along the chart. If used, they should be light grey (207, 210, 213) and used sparingly.
- The default should be using direct labeling to avoid using legends. This makes the data more readable.

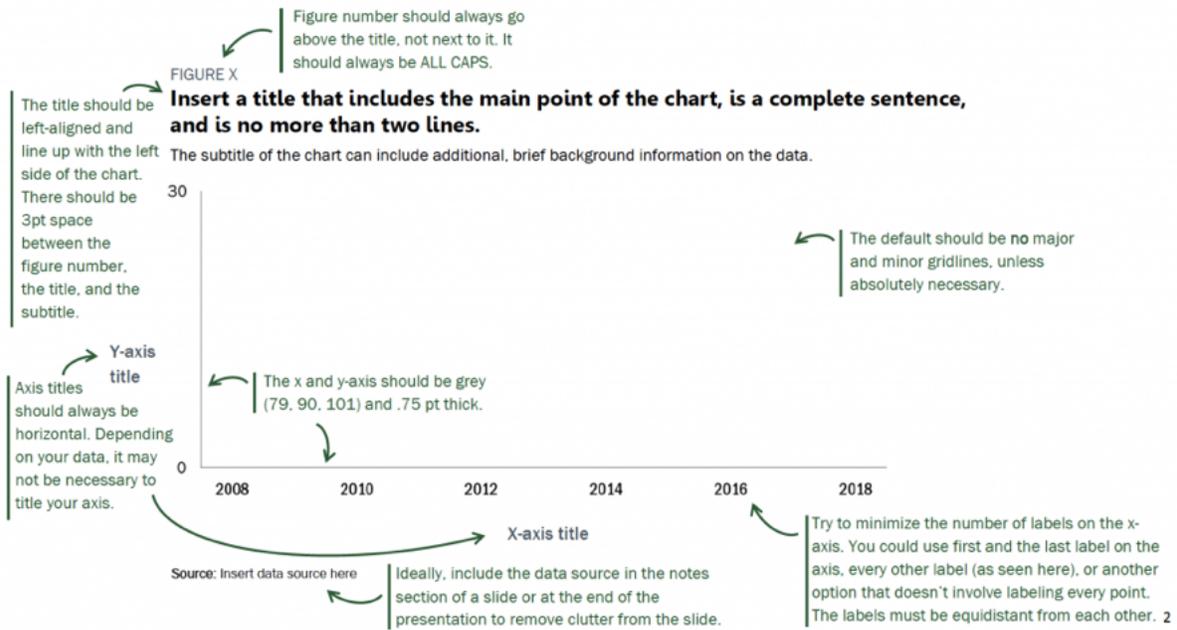


Chart Typography

I used Amy Cesal's [Sunlight Foundation Data Visualization Style Guide](#)

and Jon Schwabish's [Urban Institute Style Guide](#) as my starting points for choosing font size for different components of our charts. I was redesigning our reports at the same time I was making my style guide, so through trial and error my team determined what font sizes worked for different kinds of materials, e.g., reports vs. PowerPoints.

Chart Topography

Other colors may be used to show emphasis or align with elements in a chart title or label.

	Typeface	Web Size	Print Size	PPT Size	Case	Color	Notes
FIGURE NUMBER	Franklin Gothic Book	11	11	n/a	ALL CAPS	Hex #4F5A65 rgb(79, 90, 101) CMYK: 21, 10, 0, 60	If you need to include the figure number it should be one line above the title and not next to the title.
Title	Leelawadee Bold	18	14	32	Sentence case	Hex #000000 rgb(0, 0, 0) CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100	The title of your chart should be a complete sentence that interprets the chart for the viewer and includes a period at the end of the sentence.
Subtitle	Franklin Gothic Book	14	11	n/a	Sentence case	Hex #000000 rgb(0, 0, 0) CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100	The subtitle should state the content of the chart and add any additional clarifications about the data.
X and Y-axis titles	Franklin Gothic Book	12	11	24	Sentence case	Hex #000000 rgb(0, 0, 0) CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100	Always horizontal. Not always necessary.
X and Y-axis labels	Franklin Gothic Medium (Alternative: Franklin Gothic Medium Condensed)	12	11	24	Sentence case	Hex #000000 rgb(0, 0, 0) CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100	Always horizontal.
Direct labels	Franklin Gothic Medium (Alternative: Franklin Gothic Medium Condensed)	12	12	24	Sentence Case	Hex #000000 rgb(0, 0, 0) CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100	Always horizontal. Used for line or column charts. For example, if you are labeling a whole line.
Data-point label	Franklin Gothic Book	12	12	24	Sentence Case	Hex #000000 rgb(0, 0, 0) CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100	Always horizontal. For example, if you are labeling a specific data point on the chart.
Source and Notes	Franklin Gothic Book	11	9	9	Sentence Case	Hex #000000 rgb(0, 0, 0) CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100	Located below the chart. Bold "Source:" and "Notes:" .

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Color Palette

If you have agency colors, you should use those as a starting point.

The picture of the color palette below shows the different colors assigned to my public health programs for HIV, STDs and HCV. Each program is encouraged to start with their main color and then use the other colors in the palette as needed.

Color Palette

Each program has a main color. This is the recommended color to start with or use to show emphasis in a chart or graph.

HIV Main Color Hex #800080 rgb (128, 0, 128) CMYK: 0, 100, 0, 49	STD Main Color Hex #0033A1 rgb (0, 51, 161) CMYK: 100, 68, 0, 36	HCV Main Color Hex #2A5934 rgb (42, 89, 52) CMYK: 52, 0, 41, 65	Hex #207C88 rgb (32, 124, 136) CMYK: 76, 8, 0, 6	Hex #52057F rgb (82, 5, 127) CMYK: 35, 96, 0, 50	Hex #4F5A65 rgb (79, 90, 101) CMYK: 21, 10, 0, 60
Hex #972E97 rgb (151, 46, 151) CMYK: 0, 69, 0, 40	Hex #2E58B2 rgb (46, 88, 178) CMYK: 74, 50, 0, 30	Hex #507758 rgb (80, 119, 88) CMYK: 32, 0, 26, 53	Hex #48939D rgb (72, 147, 157) CMYK: 54, 6, 0, 38	Hex #713296 rgb (113, 50, 150) CMYK: 24, 66, 0, 41	Hex #6F7881 rgb (111, 120, 129) CMYK: 13, 6, 0, 49
Hex #AE5CAE rgb (174, 92, 174) CMYK: 0, 47, 0, 31	Hex #5C7DC3 rgb (92, 125, 195) CMYK: 52, 35, 0, 23	Hex #77957D rgb (119, 149, 125) CMYK: 20, 0, 16, 41	Hex #71ABB3 rgb (113, 171, 179) CMYK: 36, 4, 0, 29	Hex #905FAD rgb (144, 95, 173) CMYK: 16, 45, 0, 32	Hex #8F969D rgb (143, 150, 157) CMYK: 8, 4, 0, 38
Hex #C58BC5 rgb (197, 139, 197) CMYK: 0, 29, 0, 22	Hex #8BA2D4 rgb (139, 162, 212) CMYK: 34, 23, 0, 16	Hex #9EB3A2 rgb (158, 179, 162) CMYK: 11, 0, 9, 29	Hex #99C3C8 rgb (153, 195, 200) CMYK: 23, 2, 0, 21	Hex #B08DC4 rgb (176, 141, 196) CMYK: 10, 28, 0, 23	Hex #AFB4B9 rgb (175, 180, 185) CMYK: 5, 2, 0, 27
Hex #DCB9DC rgb (220, 185, 220) CMYK: 0, 15, 0, 13	Hex #B9C7E5 rgb (185, 199, 229) CMYK: 10, 13, 0, 10	Hex #C4D1C7 rgb (196, 209, 199) CMYK: 6, 0, 4, 18	Hex #C2DBDE rgb (194, 219, 222) CMYK: 12, 1, 0, 12	Hex #CFBADC rgb (207, 186, 220) CMYK: 5, 15, 0, 13	Hex #CFD2D5 rgb (207, 210, 213) CMYK: 2, 1, 0, 16

Note: The tints of these colors are different from the tints and shades that Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Publisher create under each color when you add these colors as a color theme. Please use these tints instead of the ones pre-determined in Microsoft Office programs. If it is too hard to tell the different colors apart when using these tints and shades in close proximity, try selecting tints and shades from map color palette on page 9.

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Your Data Visualization Style Guide should start with the same fonts and colors from your organization's existing branding guidelines, if they exist.

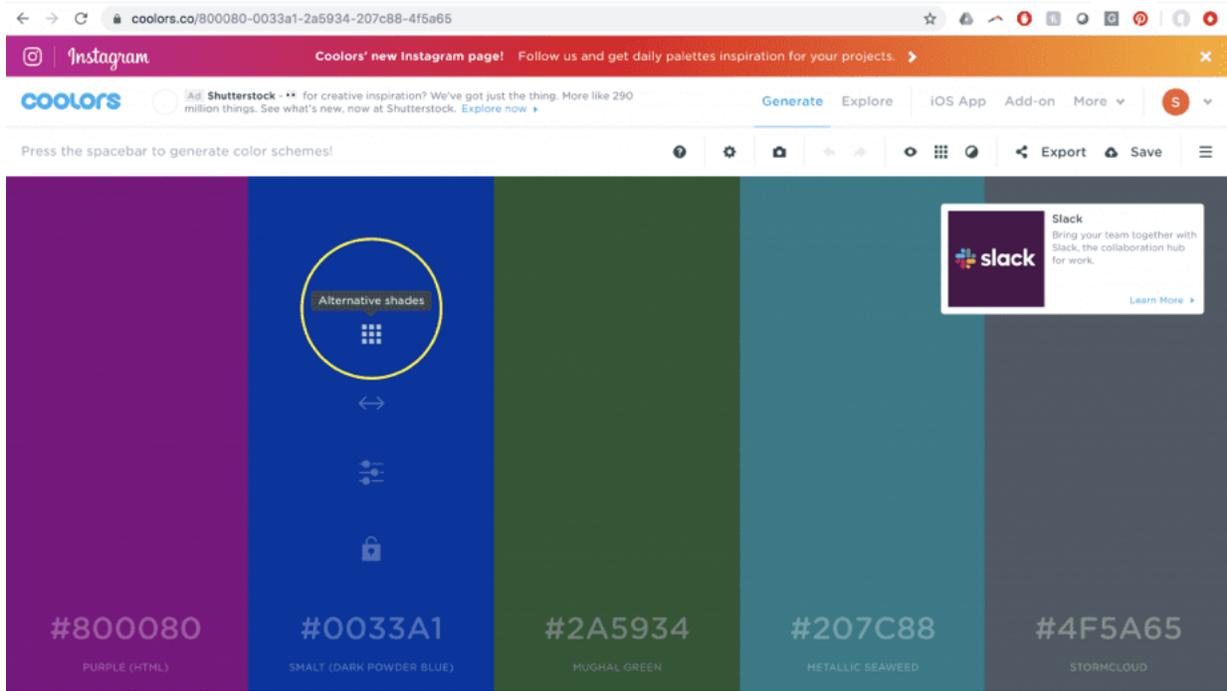
If you need to create your own color palette or add colors to your agency's color palette, here are some great tools:

- For inspiration on color combinations used by other businesses: <https://brandcolors.net/>
- To test out your color combinations, adjust your palette, and identify tints (lighter versions of your main color) and shades (darker versions of your main color): <https://colors.co/>.

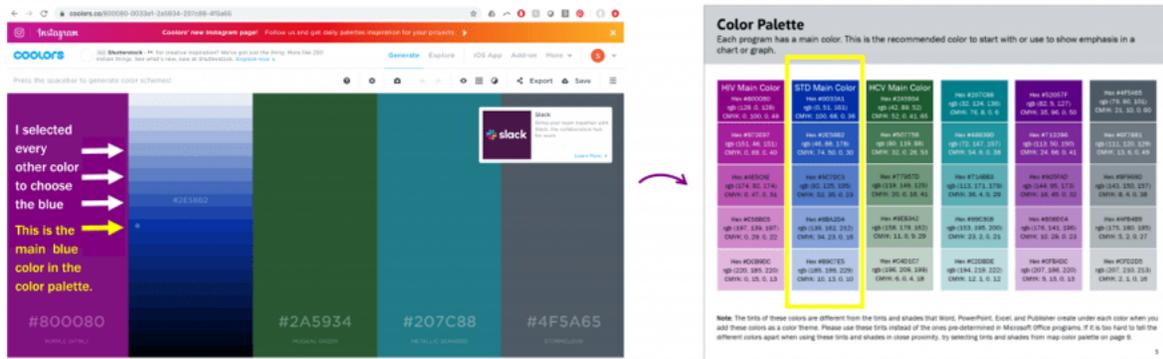
Identifying Tints and Shades

Here is how I identified the tints and shades for each color in my color palette.

Step 1: Once you have your color palette identified, select the symbol inside the yellow circle below:



Step 2: Then use a system to select the additional tints and shades for your style guide. By system, I mean I selected every other color (see the arrows and instructions in the picture below) for my tints and shades. I repeat steps one and two with each color in my color palette.



Check for Sufficient Foreground/Background Color Contrast

To ensure your colors are contrast compliant based on the Americans with Disabilities Act, here is an accessibility checker:

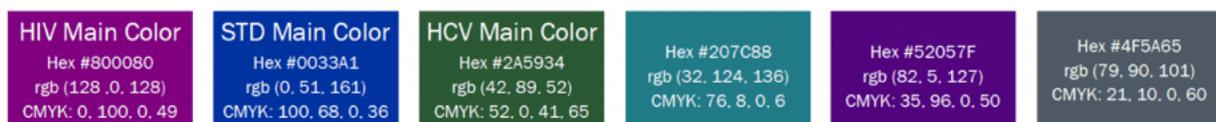
<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>.

Including Lots of Color Codes

Ideally, a Data Visualization Style Guide should be user friendly with several different kinds of chart-making software.

By including all the different color codes, it minimizes the number of steps a person has to take to convert a color into the code they need (e.g. from RGB to HEX).

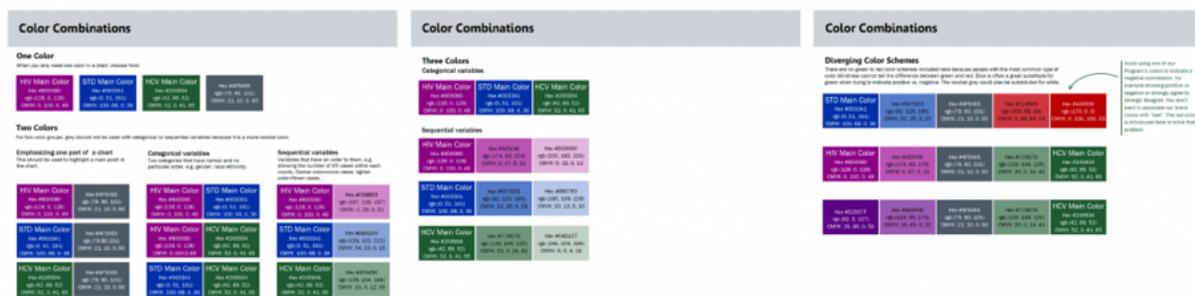
Also, maybe your whole team just uses RBC and CMYK color codes now, but by including all three, you are increasing the sustainability of this style guide if your team adds new software that uses a different color code in the future.



Recommended Color Combinations

This was really important to my team members. Some people don't want to spend lots of time making decisions about colors. Providing color combination recommendations in the style guide saves my coworkers lots of time, but still allows room for creativity and autonomy.

Fewer decisions to make = timer saver.



Map Color Palette

We determined through trial and error that the overall color palette in the style guide could not be applied as is to maps because we needed

colors with higher contrast between one another.

The viewer has to be able to tell the difference between the colors when they are in close proximity to one another.

I adjusted the colors slightly for my map color palette to ensure they would be distinguishable from one another when the colors are close together.

Map Color Palette

Use these colors when creating maps. These colors have higher contrast from one another and it will easier for the reader to tell these colors apart when they are close together.

Hex #600046 rgb (70, 0, 70) CMYK: 0, 100, 0, 72	Hex #000058 rgb (0, 28, 88) CMYK: 100, 68, 0, 65	Hex #17311D rgb (23, 49, 29) CMYK: 53, 0, 40, 80
HIV Main Color Hex #800080 rgb (128, 0, 128) CMYK: 0, 100, 0, 49	STD Main Color Hex #000080 rgb (0, 0, 128) CMYK: 100, 68, 0, 36	HCV Main Color Hex #008000 rgb (0, 128, 0) CMYK: 100, 0, 0, 52
Hex #C559C5 rgb (197, 139, 197) CMYK: 0, 29, 0, 22	Hex #808080 rgb (128, 128, 128) CMYK: 34, 23, 0, 18	Hex #404040 rgb (64, 64, 64) CMYK: 53, 0, 40, 80
Hex #E7DCE7 rgb (231, 208, 231) CMYK: 0, 9, 0, 9	Hex #D0D0D0 rgb (208, 208, 208) CMYK: 12, 8, 0, 7	Hex #B0B0B0 rgb (176, 176, 176) CMYK: 15, 0, 12, 35
Hex #E7E7E7 rgb (239, 240, 241) CMYK: 1, 0, 0, 5	Hex #D0D0D0 rgb (208, 208, 208) CMYK: 12, 8, 0, 7	Hex #B0B0B0 rgb (176, 176, 176) CMYK: 15, 0, 12, 35

MAP

- Refer to the map color palettes on page 9.
- The outline around the whole state should be light grey (175, 180, 185) for reports and darker grey (79, 90, 101) for PowerPoint presentations. The state outline should always be 1.5pt wide.

No County Labels

You may not always need to label every county. Consider labeling just some counties or none at all. For example, in a PowerPoint presentation it will be hard to read the labels because they are so small.

FIGURE X
The majority of people living with HIV live in the southern and southeastern part of the state.
Geographic distribution of people living with HIV in Wisconsin, 2018

For no cases use the grey (239, 240, 241)

Use white outlines around each county. Line width 1pt.

County Labels

You might want to label each county or zip code on a map included in a report or posted on a web page.

FIGURE X
The majority of people living with HIV live in the southern and southeastern part of the state.
Geographic distribution of people living with HIV in Wisconsin, 2018

Make sure all labels are readable.

Map labeling is tricky. We ran into many different opinions about how maps should be labeled. It's easy to over label a map, especially when you are dealing with small spaces, such as counties in a state. Also sometimes there are limitations with the mapping software when it comes to colors and labels. The maps above were made in GIS.

It's important to ask yourself if the audience is really going to look for the label on each county, or do they just need to get a sense of the color scale.

Ask the question, what do I want my audience to understand from this map? How will the map be presented? Presentation? Report? Online? Interactive?

Example Charts

This is one of the most important sections!

Example Charts
Examples of how different types of charts should look.

LINE CHART

- Line charts are best for showing change over time.
- Avoid including more than 3-4 lines in one chart. Consider other chart types or small multiples if you need more than 3-4 lines.

FIGURE 1
Cookies continue to be more popular in BCD than brownies.
Desert preferences among people in the office between 2010 and 2016.

Directly label the lines instead of using a legend. Labels should be placed above the lines and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the lines are clearly identifiable.

Place labels above the lines instead of using a legend. Labels should be placed above the lines and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the lines are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the lines. Labels should be placed above the lines and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the lines are clearly identifiable.

BAR/COLUMN CHART

- Use for one variable and a maximum of five variables. If you need to show three or more variables, consider other chart types instead.
- Color used to show a single number is important to how the chart is read (color is either on or off).
- Use and color charts can often be used interchangeably, consider which one works better with the data.
- Use and color charts can often be used interchangeably, consider which one works better with the data.

FIGURE 2
In 2016, more people preferred cookies in BCD.
Desert preferences among people in the office in 2016.

Place labels directly on the bars. Labels should be placed above the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the bars. Labels should be placed above the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the bars. Labels should be placed above the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

STACKED BAR/COLUMN CHART

- Stacked bar graphs can be used to show subgroups.
- Stacked bar and column charts can often be used interchangeably, consider which one works better with the data.

FIGURE 3
The majority of STD Program staff buy their desserts at Dutch Bakeries.
Where staff buy their desserts in 2016.

Each section of the stacked bar should get a label. Labels should be placed to the right of the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the sections. Labels should be placed to the right of the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the sections. Labels should be placed to the right of the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

PIE CHART

- Pie charts should be used sparingly. Reserve it for a reason to emphasize area and angles in a pie chart.
- The chart is best for a single chart. If the main goal of your chart is to show more than one chart of a pie, then consider a different chart type or use 3D pie charts to emphasize the 3D effect in the pie for the data. The bars where you have the most data are the best to use.
- Avoid comparing slices by using the same color. Consider other chart types in the scenario.
- Don't create any overlapping or 3D pie charts because they are hard to read.

FIGURE 4
In 2016, most people preferred cookies in BCD.
Desert preferences among people in the office in 2016.

Labels should be placed directly on the slices. Labels should be placed directly on the slices and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the slices are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the slices. Labels should be placed directly on the slices and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the slices are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the slices. Labels should be placed directly on the slices and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the slices are clearly identifiable.

POPULATION PYRAMID

- Use when you are comparing two groups, such as men and women or people receiving HIV wide services and people not receiving HIV wide services.
- The chart type allows you to compare two variables, such as age and gender.
- The chart type allows you to compare two variables, such as age and gender.
- Use and color charts can often be used interchangeably, consider which one works better with the data.

FIGURE 5
A higher percentage of staff ages 18-24 preferred cookies in both bureaus.
Percent of people who prefer cookies by age group in BCD and STD in 2016.

Labels should be placed to the right of the bars. Labels should be placed to the right of the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the bars. Labels should be placed to the right of the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the bars. Labels should be placed to the right of the bars and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the bars are clearly identifiable.

WAFFLE CHART

- All squares of a waffle chart must be the same size. Making the whole waffle chart a square instead of a rectangle will help.
- Waffle charts are best for showing parts of a whole. Waffle charts should consist of 100 squares or less. Waffle charts, each square representing 1%.
- Labels on the waffle chart should be placed to the right of the waffle chart.

FIGURE 6
74% of the HIV Program staff prefer cookies over other desserts.
Percentage of staff who prefer cookies in 2016.

Labels should be placed to the right of the waffle chart. Labels should be placed to the right of the waffle chart and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the waffle chart is clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the squares. Labels should be placed to the right of the waffle chart and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the waffle chart is clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the squares. Labels should be placed to the right of the waffle chart and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the waffle chart is clearly identifiable.

DOT PLOT

- Dot plots are a great alternative to bar charts when comparing groups. Research shows that people can recognize position on a line more easily than they can on a bar chart.
- The chart is best for a single chart. If the main goal of your chart is to show more than one chart of a dot plot, then consider a different chart type or use 3D dot plots to emphasize the 3D effect in the dot plot for the data. The bars where you have the most data are the best to use.
- Avoid comparing slices by using the same color. Consider other chart types in the scenario.
- Don't create any overlapping or 3D dot plots because they are hard to read.

FIGURE 7
The most popular dessert to bring into the office was cake in 2014 and brownies in 2016.
Number of office desserts brought into the office between 2014 and 2016.

Labels should be placed to the right of the dots. Labels should be placed to the right of the dots and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the dots are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the dots. Labels should be placed to the right of the dots and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the dots are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the dots. Labels should be placed to the right of the dots and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the dots are clearly identifiable.

LULLYPOP CHART

- Lollipop charts are an alternative to bar charts when trying to create chart variation in a report or presentation.
- Color used to show a single number is important to how the chart is read (color is either on or off).
- Use and color charts can often be used interchangeably, consider which one works better with the data.

FIGURE 8
The STD Program brought in the most brownies in 2016.
Number of office desserts brought into the office in each bureau in 2016.

Labels should be placed to the right of the lollipops. Labels should be placed to the right of the lollipops and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the lollipops are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the lollipops. Labels should be placed to the right of the lollipops and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the lollipops are clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the lollipops. Labels should be placed to the right of the lollipops and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the lollipops are clearly identifiable.

ICON ARRAY

- Icon arrays are a great alternative to bar charts when comparing groups. Research shows that people can recognize position on a line more easily than they can on a bar chart.
- The chart is best for a single chart. If the main goal of your chart is to show more than one chart of an icon array, then consider a different chart type or use 3D icon arrays to emphasize the 3D effect in the icon array for the data. The bars where you have the most data are the best to use.
- Avoid comparing slices by using the same color. Consider other chart types in the scenario.
- Don't create any overlapping or 3D icon arrays because they are hard to read.

FIGURE 9
3 out of 5 staff in the STD Program prefer cake to other desserts.
Percentage of staff who prefer cake in 2016.

Labels should be placed to the right of the icon array. Labels should be placed to the right of the icon array and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the icon array is clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the icons. Labels should be placed to the right of the icon array and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the icon array is clearly identifiable.

Use color to distinguish between the icons. Labels should be placed to the right of the icon array and rotated 90 degrees. This is the only way to ensure the icon array is clearly identifiable.

This section can feel like a big undertaking. Start by looking at your organization's existing data documents. Identify the chart types that your colleagues use regularly and then consider adding a few other chart types to increase chart variation options for your staff. For example, include a lollipop chart in addition to a bar chart, and a waffle chart in addition to a pie chart. This section can include as many or as few charts as you see fit for your organization.

This is another example where the trial and error process is so important. Because we created this style guide while redesigning large data reports, we were able to test different sample charts for the style guide. We adjusted line and dot thickness, label placement, chart sizes, and font size to figure out what worked best. Then we used the style guide to standardize our decisions for future data deliverables. Our decision process was a balance of data visualization best practices, the story we were telling with our data, and my colleagues' input.

Other Data Visualization Resources

If you think your team is interested in other data visualization information, then you could include additional resources at the end of the document.

Other Data Visualization Resources

If you are interested in learning more about data visualization, check out these other great resources:

- Ann Emery
 - [Depict Data Studio Blog](#)
 - [Chart Chooser](#)
 - [Online Courses](#)
- Stephanie Evergreen
 - [Blog](#)
 - [Evergreen Data Academy](#)
 - [How to create specific charts in Excel](#)
- [Storytelling with Data Blog](#)
- Sara DeLong
 - [Blog](#)
- [Echo Rivera \(Designing Presentations\)](#)
- [PolicyViz Blog by Jon Schwabish](#)

This Data Visualization Style Guide was inspired by the data visualization style guides created by Amy Cesal and Jon Schwabish.

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How to Ask for Feedback about Your Data Visualization Style Guide

****This is really important.****

About halfway through the development process of my Data Visualization Style Guide, I sent the guide around for feedback from coworkers I knew were going to use it. I asked for specific feedback on what is working and not working. Am I on the right track? Is this resource useful and clear?

Then I incorporated their feedback and created an almost final draft of the guide.

When I had an almost final draft I asked for even more feedback! What doesn't make sense? What would make this resource more useful to you? What should be included to make this useful to a future new employee of our team?

In this final feedback stage, it was important to share our evolving style guide with team members who hadn't seen earlier drafts and maybe were only going to make charts occasionally. These folks could provide feedback on what made sense and where guidance was missing. Ideally, a new employee could pick up our new Data Visualization Style Guide and use it to make charts that align with the program's brand without needing additional guidance.

Reminder: Don't ask for feedback unless you plan to use a good percentage of it. It wastes people's time and sends a message that you don't value their opinions. Not using their feedback at all could reduce the number of people who use your guide because your colleagues don't feel invested in it.

How We've Used Our Data Visualization Style Guide

Here are some examples of data materials created using our Data Visualization Style Guide:

1. [Wisconsin HIV Annual Data Report](#)
2. [Wisconsin HIV Data Two-Page Summary](#)
3. [Wisconsin Hepatitis C Annual Data Report](#)
4. [Wisconsin Hepatitis C Data Two-Page Summary](#)

Key Takeaways for Creating Data Visualization Style Guides

Here are three lessons learned.

- Before you create a Data Visualization Style Guide it is crucial to secure buy-in from leadership and the majority of your colleagues who will be using the style guide. This buy-in will help ensure this document is relevant and will be used for future data-intensive materials.
- Before you start creating this resource, ask future Data Visualization Style Guide users: *“What should be included in our style guide that would make this resource useful to you and increase the chances that you will use this tool to guide chart creation?”* This is key because it ensures that you include what is important to your data team.
- Create a style guide as you are redesigning data documents. Don’t try to create a style guide and then apply it to lots of documents. Working on the style guide and data materials side by side will ensure you create a resource guide that actually works. This will set you and your new tool up for success.

The Benefits of Having a Data Visualization Style Guide

Designing a Data Visualization Style Guide may sound like a lot of work, but the benefits for your organization are enormous.

You will:

- Save your colleagues valuable time when designing data deliverables
- Enhance your organization’s brand, communications, and professionalism
- Increase the accessibility and communication of your data to key stakeholders because of your consistent use of data visualization best practices.

Bonus: Purchase Our Guide

The ideas and examples shared here and my previous post should give you all the tools you need to get started.

Or, save time and download our guide.

[Buy the Guide](#)

More about **Sara DeLong**

Sara DeLong is passionate about strategic information design and data visualization that creates an impact. She currently lives in Denver and works in public health and communications. Working in public health in nonprofit and government settings has taught her that the most effective communications materials are collaborative, community-driven, and bold with color. Sara enjoys the challenge of taking complex content and transforming it into visually engaging materials that lead to action.

3 Comments

-  *Kelly Wiens* says:

July 15, 2020 at 4:34 pm

There is real gold in this discussion and information.

However I have a concern about red-green colour blindness. You can see simulations at <https://www.color-blindness.com/coblis-color-blindness-simulator/>

I took screenshots and uploaded it to the webpage, and under red-weak or red-blind, you'll see that the purple and the blue don't differentiate well.

There are some good options for colour palettes here: <https://venngage.com/blog/color-blind-friendly-palette/>

[Reply](#)

-  *Ann K. Emery* says:

July 15, 2020 at 4:37 pm

Yep, it's really difficult to follow branding colors from existing logos and websites... AND use sufficient color contrast... AND choose colors that can be printed in grayscale... AND choose colors that are legible for people with color vision deficiencies.

Are you familiar with direct labeling? That's the dataviz technique that helps you achieve accessibility, regardless of the brand colors that you need to follow.

Thanks for mentioning venngage! There are lots of great accessibility resources but I hadn't seen that particular one before.

[Reply](#)

-  *Brian* says:

September 1, 2020 at 8:58 pm

Ann – this is a very good resource and something every organization needs. Sending to my team!

It definitely takes the right type of employee to see this task through. I can appreciate your agile approach to getting feedback from coworkers.

What decision criteria did you use when analyzing feedback from the team? Were you just looking for a majority sign off? I find that conversations around colors and formatting never really end in 100% agreement.

-Brian

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