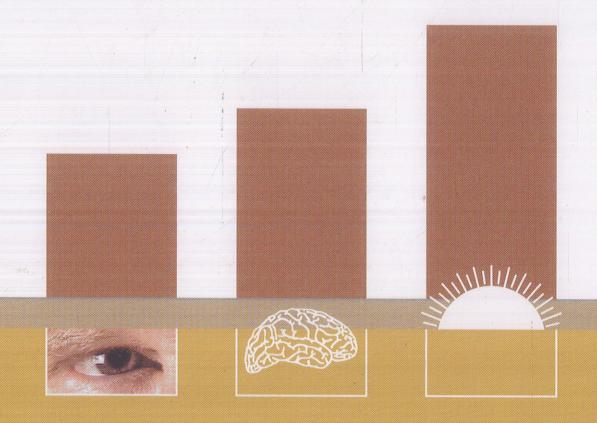


Designing Tables and Graphs to Enlighten



Stephen Few

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Graphs can be used to tell complex stories. When designed well, graphs can combine a host of data spread across multiple variables to make a complex message accessible. When designed poorly, graphs can bury even a simple message in a cloud of visual confusion. Excellent graph design is much like excellent cooking. With a clear vision of the end result and an intimate knowledge of the ingredients, you can create a whole that nourishes and inspires.

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PRACTICE IN GRAPH DESIGN

You've come far in your exploration of graph design. It's now time for some practice to pull together and reinforce all that you've learned. Expert graph design requires that you adapt and apply what you've learned to a variety of real-world communication problems. Working through a few scenarios with a clear focus on the principles of effective graph design will strengthen your expertise and your confidence as well.

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12. THE INTERPLAY OF STANDARDS AND INNOVATION

When you design tables and graphs, you face a multitude of choices. Of the available alternatives, some are bad, some are good, some are best, and others are simply a matter of preference among equally good choices. By developing and following standards for the visual design of quantitative information, you can eliminate all but the best choices once and for all. Doing so dramatically reduces the time it takes to produce tables and graphs as well as the time required by your readers to make good use of them. Doing so sets your skills and creativity free to be used where they are most needed.

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