# **Next Steps: Designing Effective Graphs**

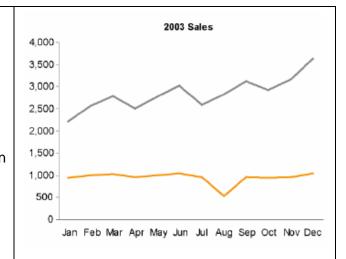


Seven common quantitative relationships in graphs and how to display them <sup>1</sup>

#### **Time Series**

Expresses the rise and fall of values through time.

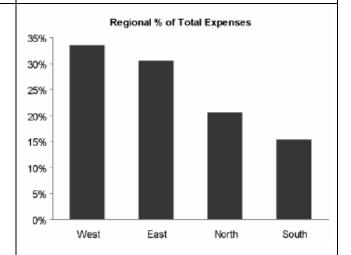
- Use lines to emphasize overall pattern
- Use bars to emphasize individual values
- Use points connected by lines to slightly emphasize individual values while still highlighting the overall pattern
- Always place time on the horizontal axis



#### Part-to-Whole

Expresses the portion of each part relative to the whole

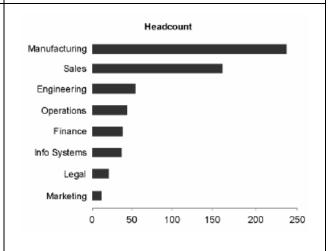
- Use bars only (horizontal or vertical)
- Use stacked bars only when you must display measures of the whole as well as the parts



## Ranking

Expresses values in order by size.

- Use bars only (horizontal or vertical)
- To highlight high values, sort in descending order
- To highlight low values, sort in ascending order



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### **Distribution**

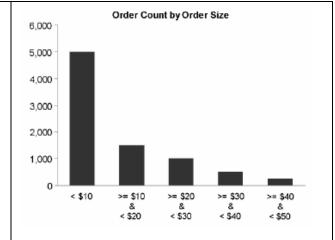
Expresses a range of values as well as the shape of the distribution across that range.

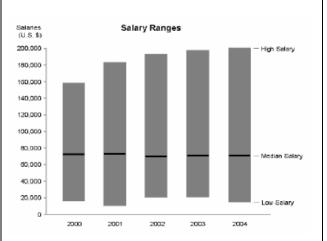
## Single Distribution:

- Use vertical bars to emphasize individual values
- Use lines to emphasize the overall shape

## Multiple Distributions:

- Use vertical or horizontal bars (a.k.a. range bars or boxes) to encode the full range from the low value to the high value, or some meaningful portion of the range (for example, 90% of the values)
- Use points or lines together to encode measures or center (for example, the median)

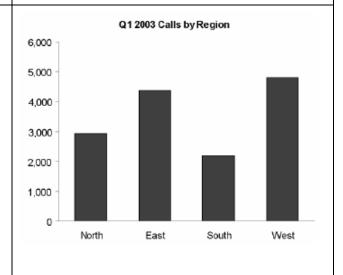




## **Nominal Comparison**

Simply expresses the comparative sizes of multiple related but discrete values in no particular order.

• Use bars only (horizontal or vertical)



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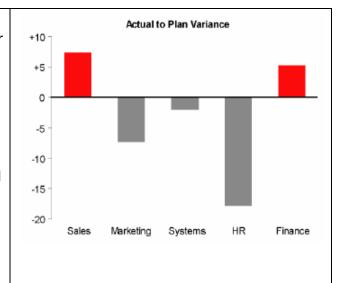
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#### **Deviation**

Expresses how and the degree to which one or more things differ from another.

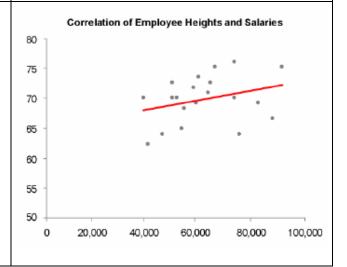
- Use lines to emphasize the overall pattern only when displaying deviation and time-series
- relationships together
- Use points connected by lines to slightly emphasize individual data points while also highlighting the overall pattern when displaying deviation and time-series relationships together
- Use bars to emphasize individual values, but limit to vertical bars when a time-series relationship is included
- Always include a reference line to compare the measures of deviation against



### Correlation

Expresses how two paired sets of values vary in relation to one another.

 Use points and a trend line in the form of a scatter plot.



<sup>1:</sup> Show Me the Numbers: Designing Tables and Graphs to Enlighten. Few, Stephen. 2004. Oakland, CA: Analytics Press.