
Chicago Chapter STC
Northern Illinois University

**Institute for
Professional
Development**

Presenting Data Visually

Saturday, October 30th 2004

Instructor: Karl P. Keller
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Course Pack:
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Session Description

Complex data is often presented most efficiently and persuasively using visual tools such as graphs, tables, and diagrams. A well-structured table or graph is a powerful communication tool, conveying at a glance important information. Creating these information displays is a key skill that technical communicators need to master. This course will cover best practices in creating graphs, tables, and diagrams to communicate technical data clearly and powerfully.

Through a combination of lecture and interactive exercises, we will address the following issues:

- (1) when to use a table, graph, or diagram and what type/format to use;
- (2) how to organize, design, and highlight a information display for quick comprehension;
- (3) how to use common software (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) to quickly create the best-looking and clearest information displays.

The session will also review some basic quantitative and statistical reasoning skills needed to understand and create graphs and tables, as well important issues in cognitive science that help us understand how readers process data displays.

We will also review best formats for designing graphs and tables. Interactive exercises will include challenges in selecting and designing the best information displays, as well some basic exercises using common software.

Learning Objectives

This course will combine both the theoretical and practical aspects of creating data graphics and tables. When the course is completed, the student should know

- How to recognize technical communication situations that require graphics or tables
- Specific graph types and when to use them
- Best practices in formatting graphs, diagrams, and tables
- Best practices in highlighting graphs, diagrams, and tables.
- How to apply standard software packages to execute those best practices
- Basic theoretical concepts behind diagrams

Course Agenda – Presenting Data Visually

Day 1 - Saturday, October 30th, 2004

9:00 – 10:00

- Class and Instructor Introductions
- Introduction to the Course
- What is information display? A table? A graph? A diagram? A flow chart?
- Why do we use them?
- What qualities are present in a good information display? Issues of cognition, reasoning.
- Know the four “chokepoints” and how to get around them.

10:00 – 10:15

- Break

10:15 – 11:30

- Best practices in table design, formatting, highlighting
- Group interactive exercises – meeting the challenge of selecting the best display

11:30-12:30

- Lunch

12:30 – 12:45

- Morning review and questions

12:45 – 2:00

- Review of graph types, purposes, selection criteria
- Best practices in graph design, formatting, highlighting
- Excel issues in graph design – how not to be tricked by the Excel Wizard

2:00 – 2:15

- Break

2:15 – 3:00

- Group interactive exercises – the challenges of graphing datasets

3:00-3:45

- Diagrams – review of the 14 types
- Best practices in design, formatting, highlighting diagrams

3:45-4:00

- Questions & Review