

Telling a story

The key to conveying information in a presentation

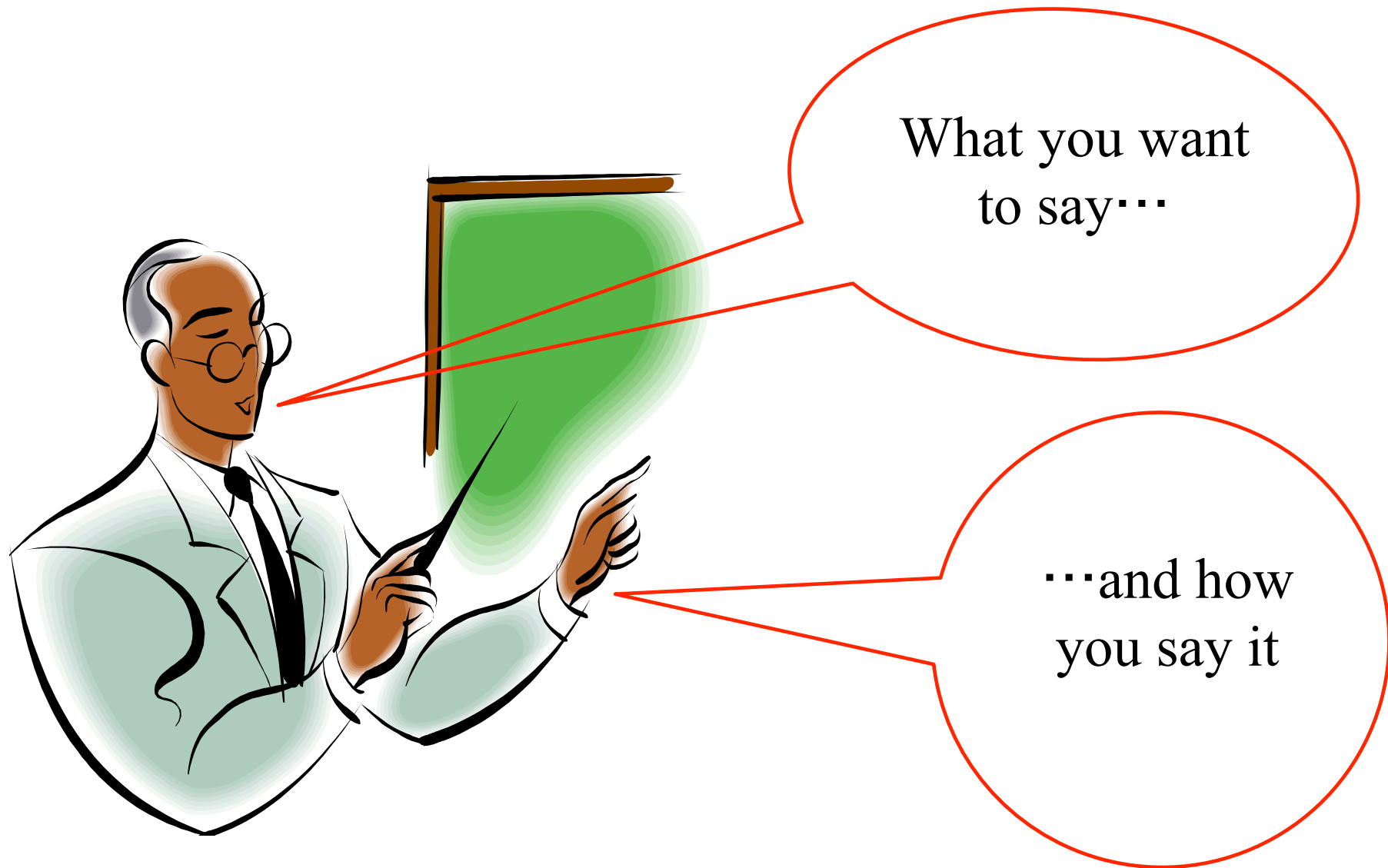
Simon Laffin
June 2017



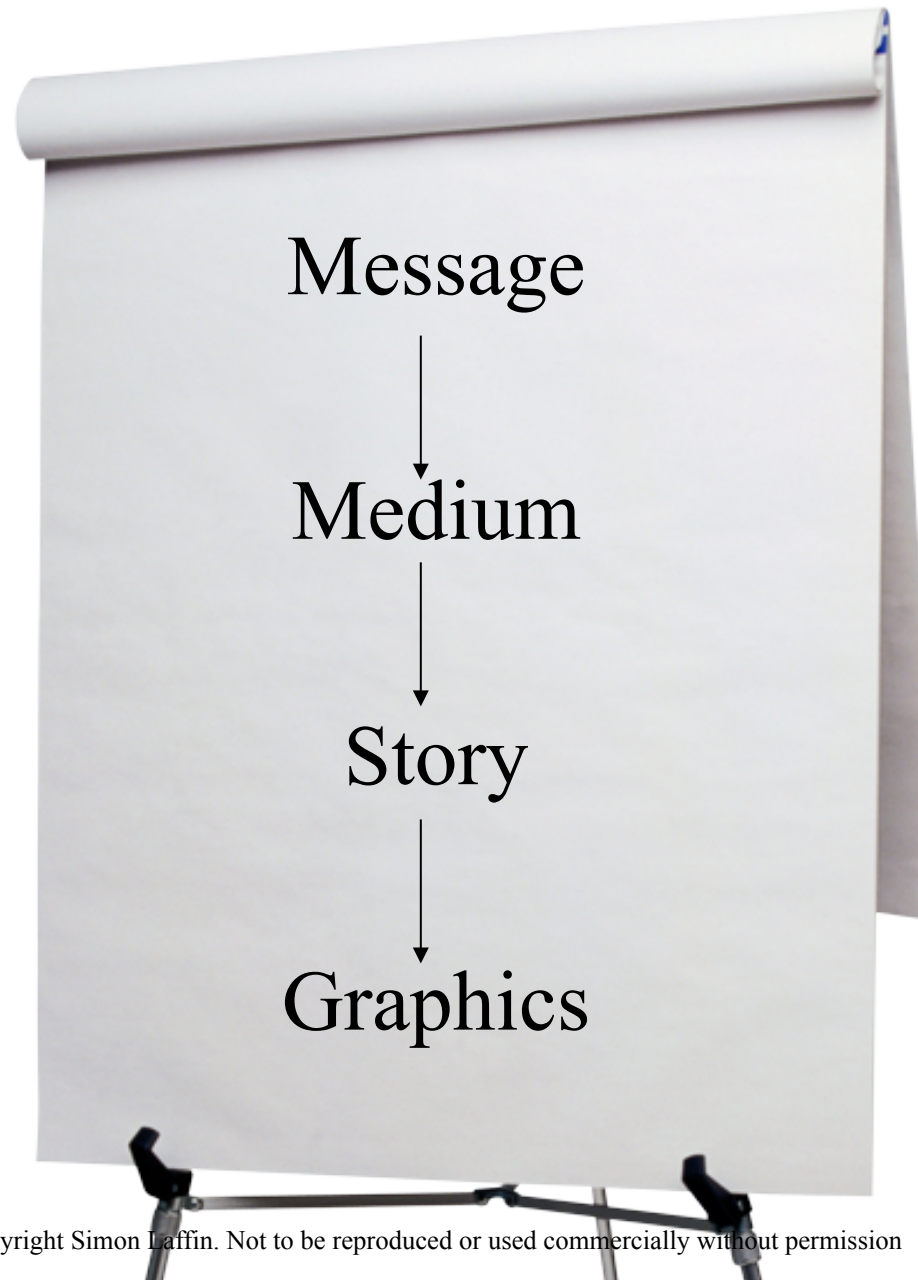
What makes a good presentation?

- Good presentations convey information in an interesting way
 - Clear, succinct, & engaging
- The presenter must know what his prime message is
 - And convey that early
- The presentation must be as short as possible
 - But enough to make the prime message
- Good presentations are about getting across information
 - Keep design & graphics as tools not drivers
 - Don't let design distract from your message

Any presentation consists of message & medium



Message, then medium, then story, and finally graphics



What do you want them to take away from the presentation?



Stop

Think about what your message is.

It's the most important thing.

What do you really want
to ensure that they
remember as
they leave...?



The message

It's your chance to make a mark. Decide what's really important.



It's your diagnosis.

Even if it's a routine accounts presentation, you have the responsibility to pick out what you think is important and what really happened.

Having decided your message, decide which medium to use

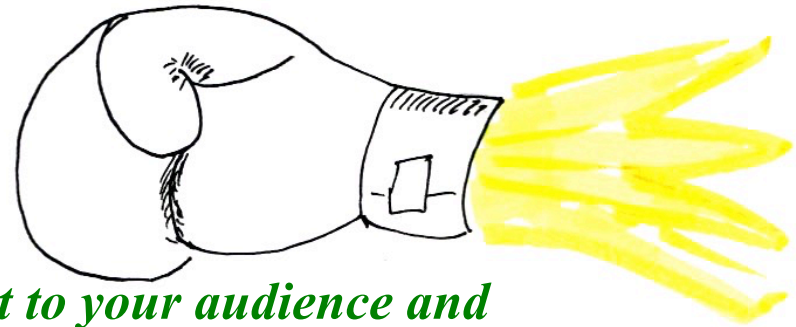
- If it's a meeting with you present, it's generally better to do a presentation:

- Slides... *help you to be punchy*

- Standing up... *which shows respect to your audience and encourages you to be more formal and less 'chatty'*

- Distribute copies of slides (if any) afterwards... *which encourages people to watch you, not flick through papers*

- Obviously these aren't always appropriate in all circumstances, so use your judgement



You know your message and medium, so now tell a story...



1. Purpose of a presentation
2. The issue in a nutshell
3. What you think is happening
4. Evidence to show this
5. What we should do about it
6. Conclusion and next steps

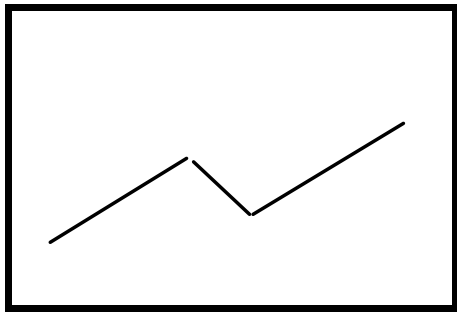
*Remember that what matters is what the audience understands (**not** what you actually say).*



Now start to tell the story. Layout the presentation on a clean sheet first...
handwriting it...like this;

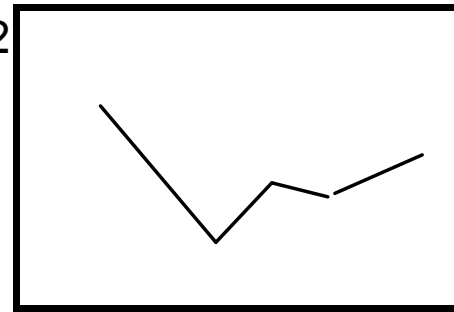
Things are getting better

1



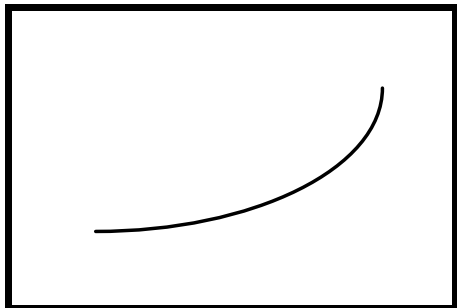
Sundays are becoming busy

2



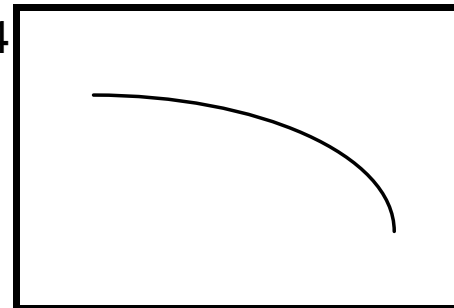
Things are getting exponential

3



But there's trouble here

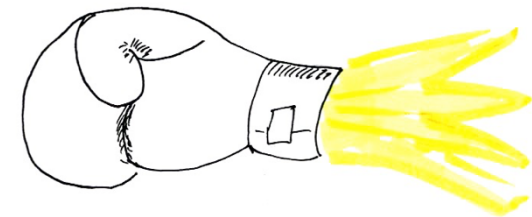
4



Decide the message of each slide and how each works to tell the message of the entire presentation

- Do it page by page
- Write the message of that slide at the top, one sentence per page
- Leave the space beneath blank for now

Sundays are one of the busiest days of the week



***This is the point
you want to make***

Then back it up with facts, further explanation, or better a graphic.

Sundays are one of the busiest days of the week

Average Sales (Mon - Wed)
Average Sales (Thurs - Sat)
Average Sales (Sunday)

£K

200

300

275

775

*This is
the
evidence*

Data is useful - good graphics are better

Graphic should make the point clearly and stand on its own.

A really good graphic makes you really feel you understand and want to act on it

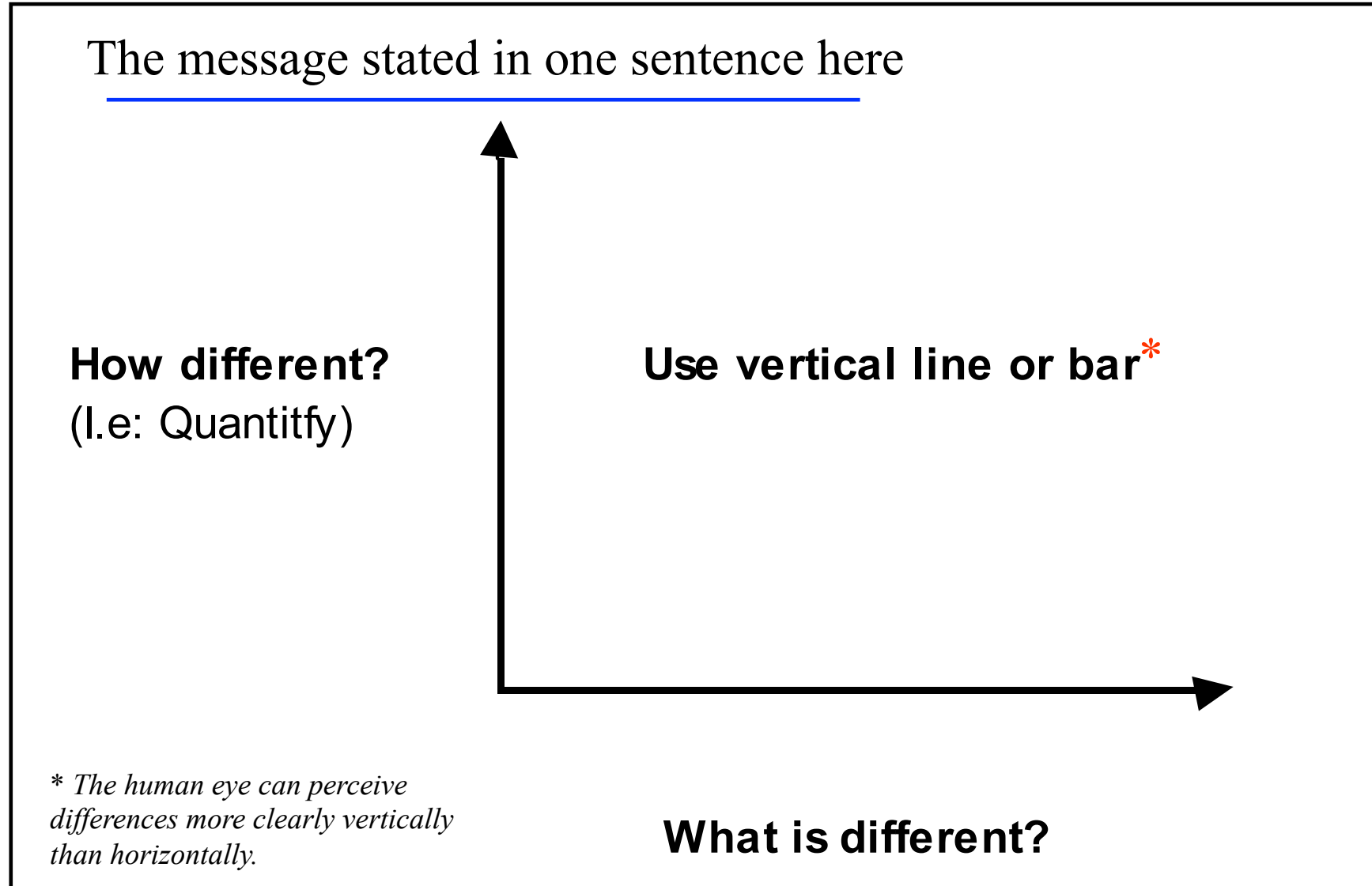
*“Good figures are like bayonets.
You can’t just sit on them”*

Sir Peter Gibbings



So here are some ways to make clear & impactful graphics...

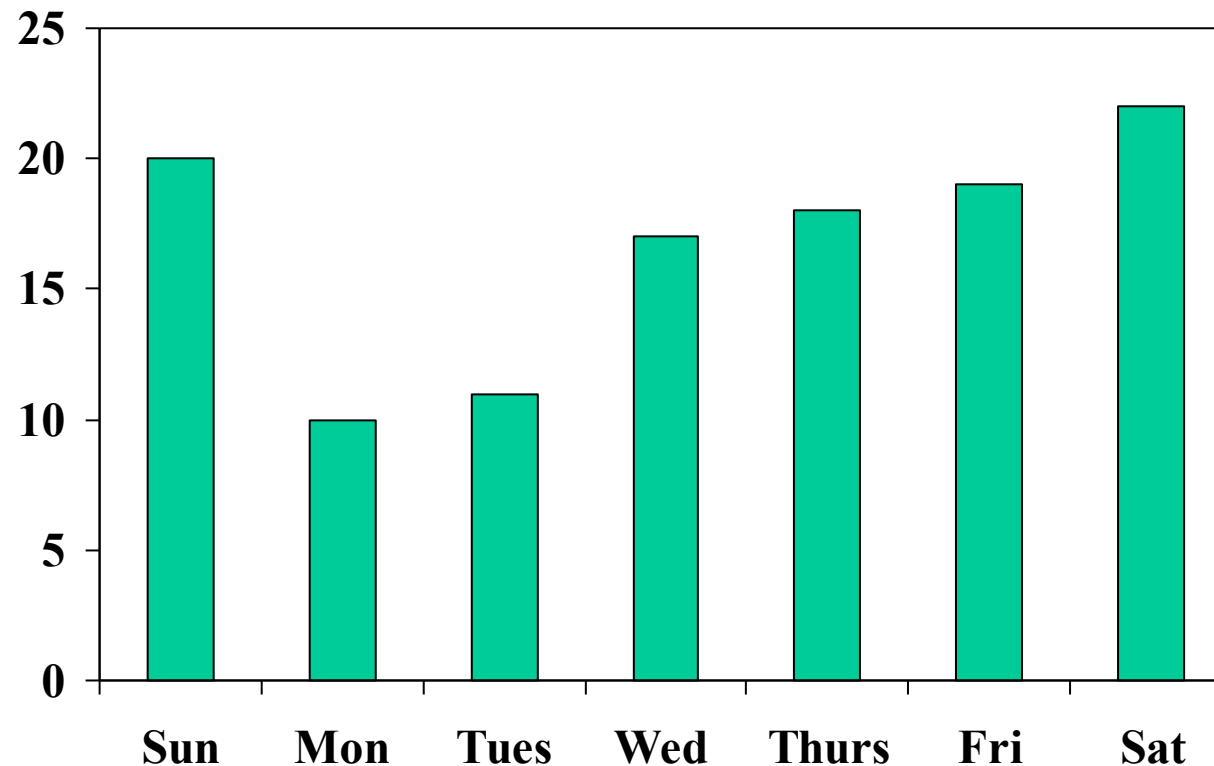
The point you make at the top should *design* the graphic for you



The graph designs itself as it's the days of the week that are different, and the sales are the quantification.

Sundays have become one of the busiest days of the week.

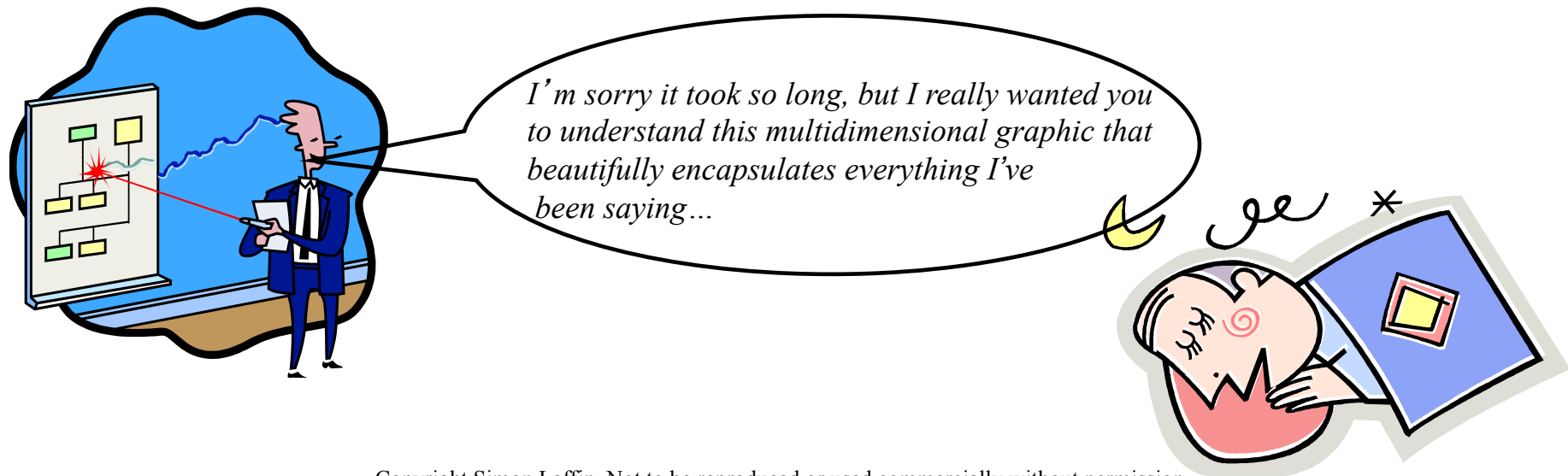
Quantify;
Ave. Sales
£K



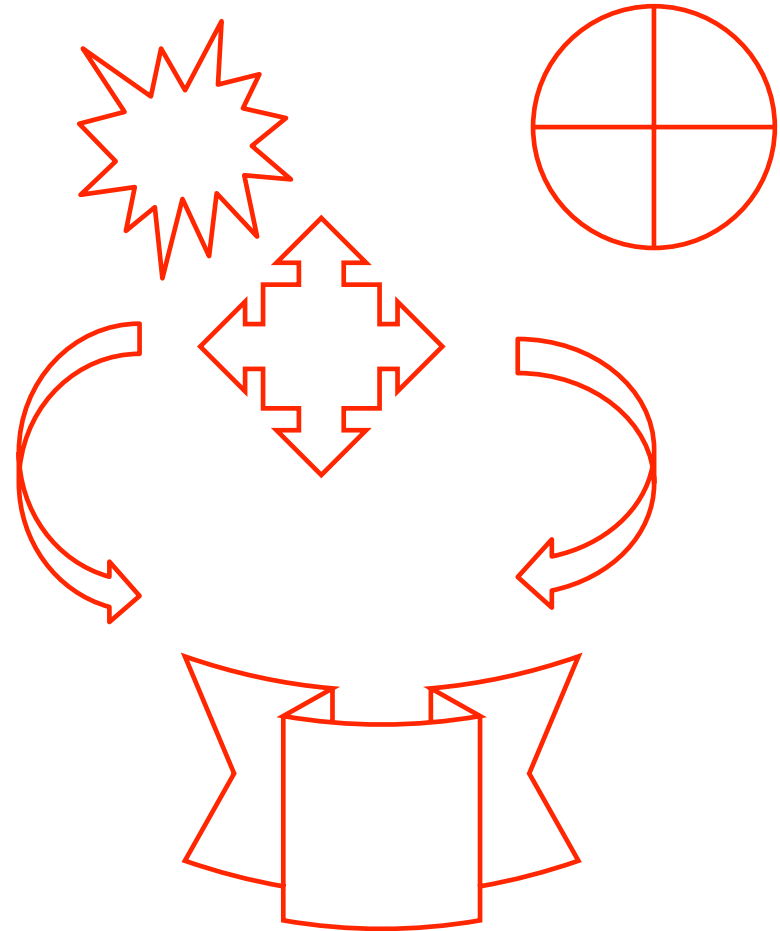
What's different? = Days of the Week

Simplicity is perfection in a graphic

- Keep to one message per graphic.
- Keep it simple.
- No *clever* graphic that ‘explains’ lots of things in one graph
- Colour looks good on screen but remember it doesn’t photocopy well in black & White.
- Small type looks good on paper but illegible on screen
 - Smaller than 20 font is difficult to read.
- Put “Interesting, but not vital” information in your briefcase

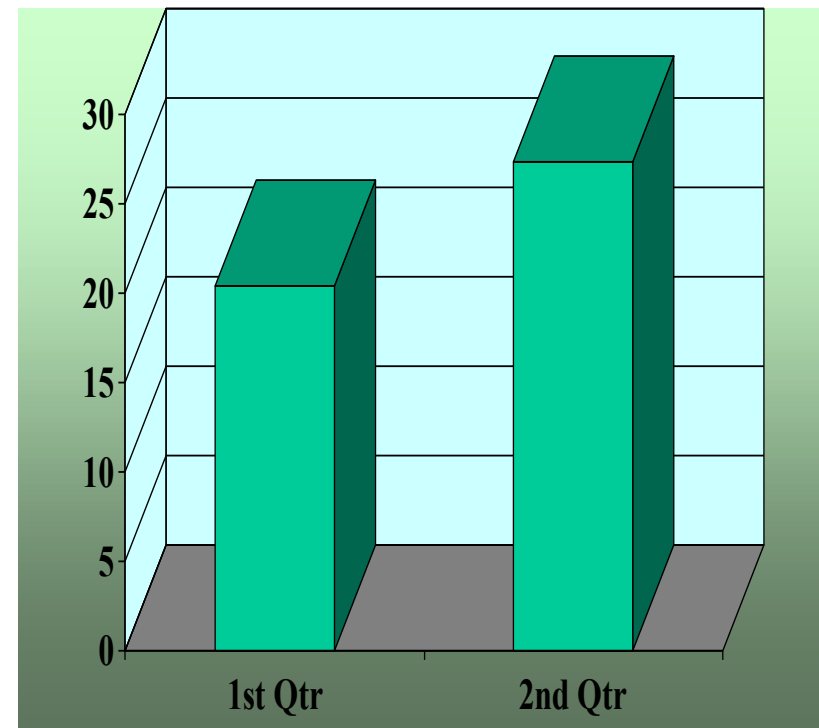
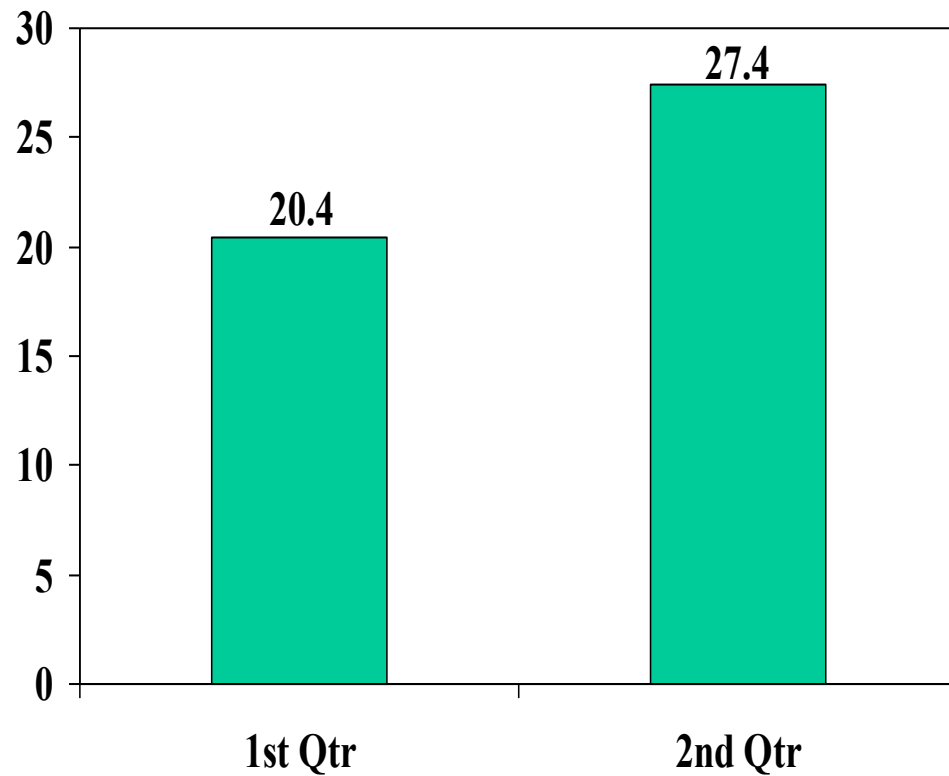


Don't let the beauty of computer graphics lead you astray



Avoid gimmicks, eg 3D graphs that confuse the message for no gain at all.

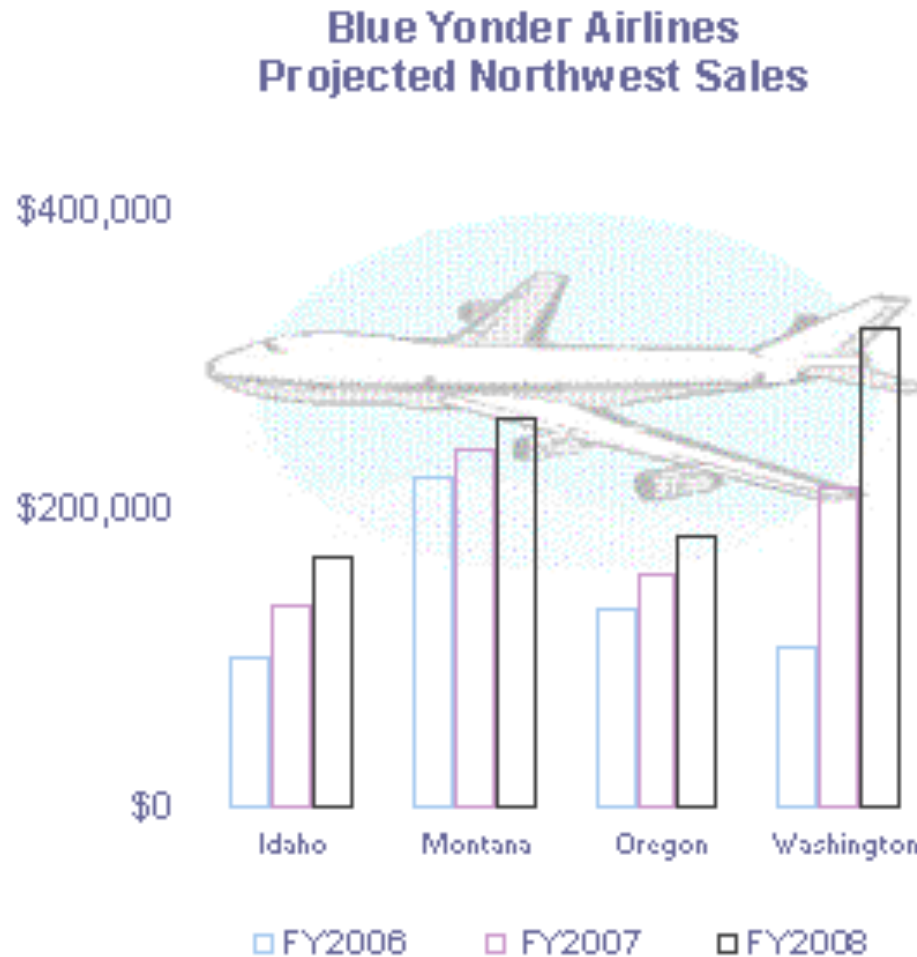
Which of these graphs communicates better?



Yes, these graphs show the same numbers!

Don't be seduced by Bill Gates! He may be rich, but he doesn't know how to display information...

Microsoft Office website;



The airplane is very pretty, but does it help or hinder the Message?

No, don't!

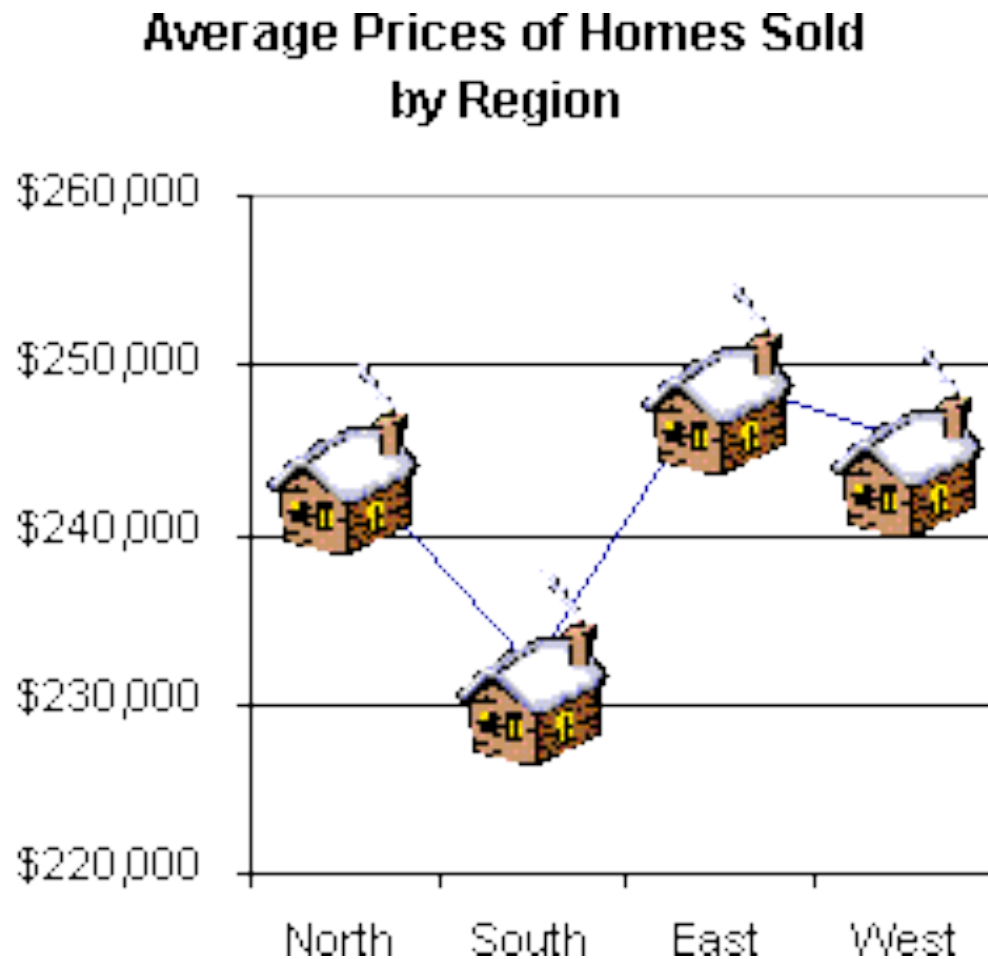
Make charts more compelling by adding pictures

[Help](#)

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It gets worse.....

Microsoft Office website;

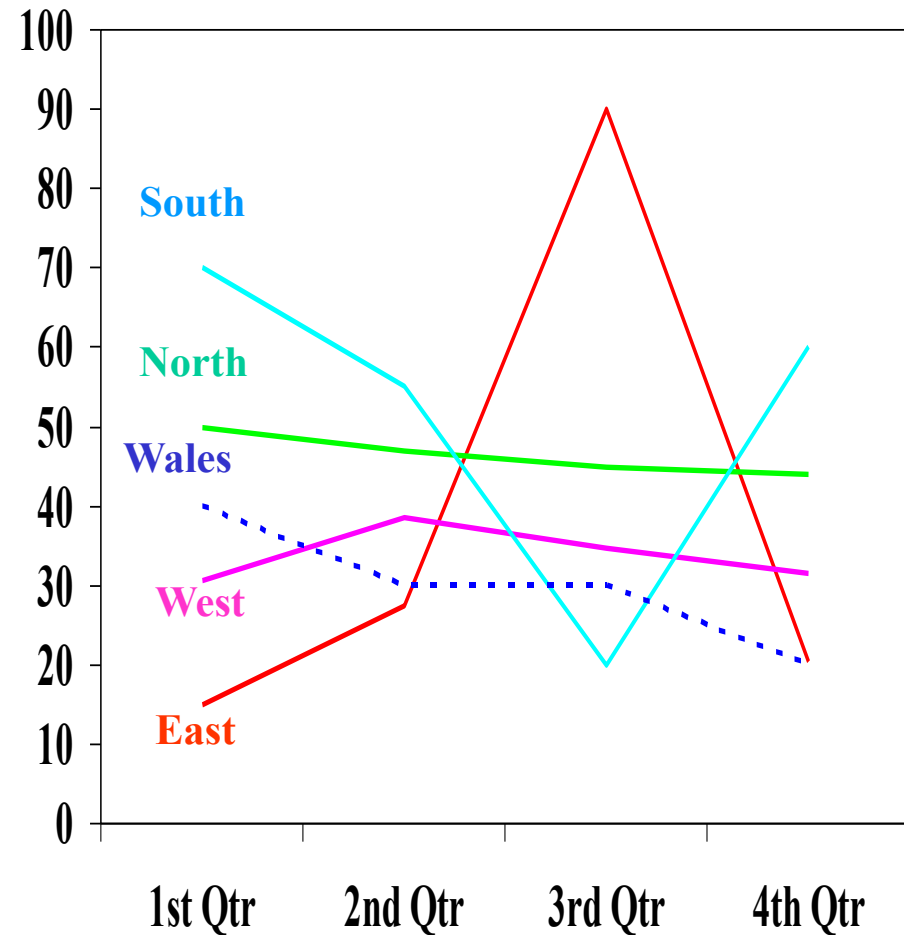
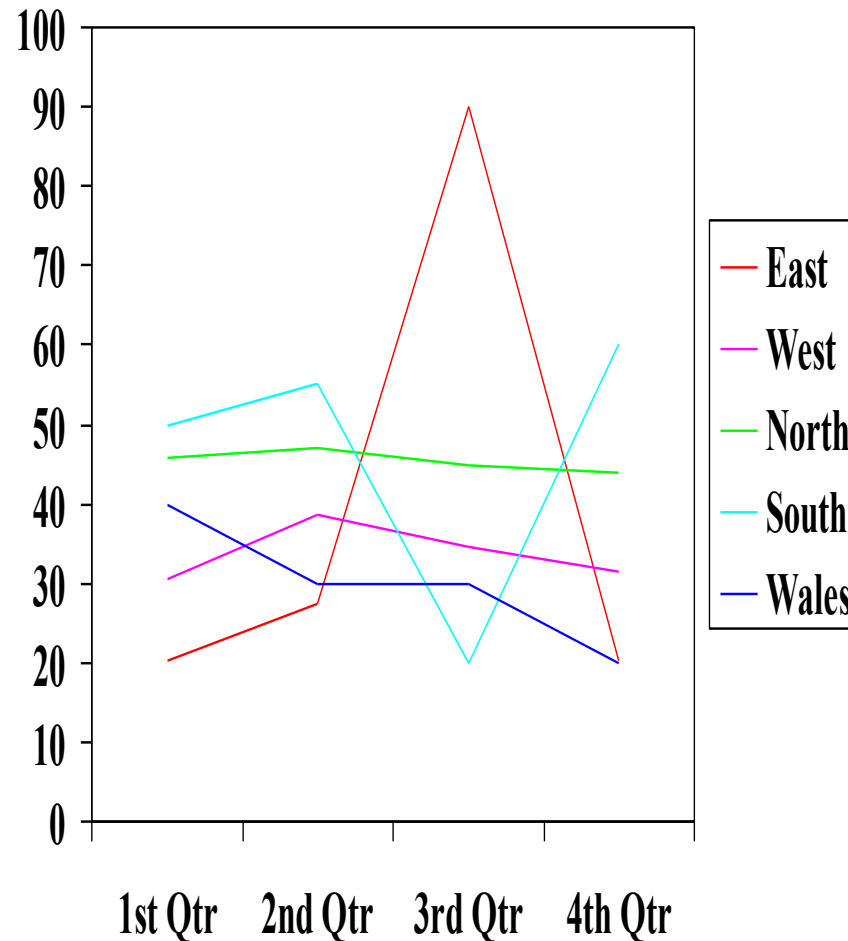


“In a 2-D line, scatter, or unfilled radar chart, pictures can also serve as data markers. For example, you could use a picture of a house as a data marker to represent the data point for average home sales per region, as depicted in the following chart.”

No, don't!

Powerpoint is lazy and puts data labels in a separate legend.

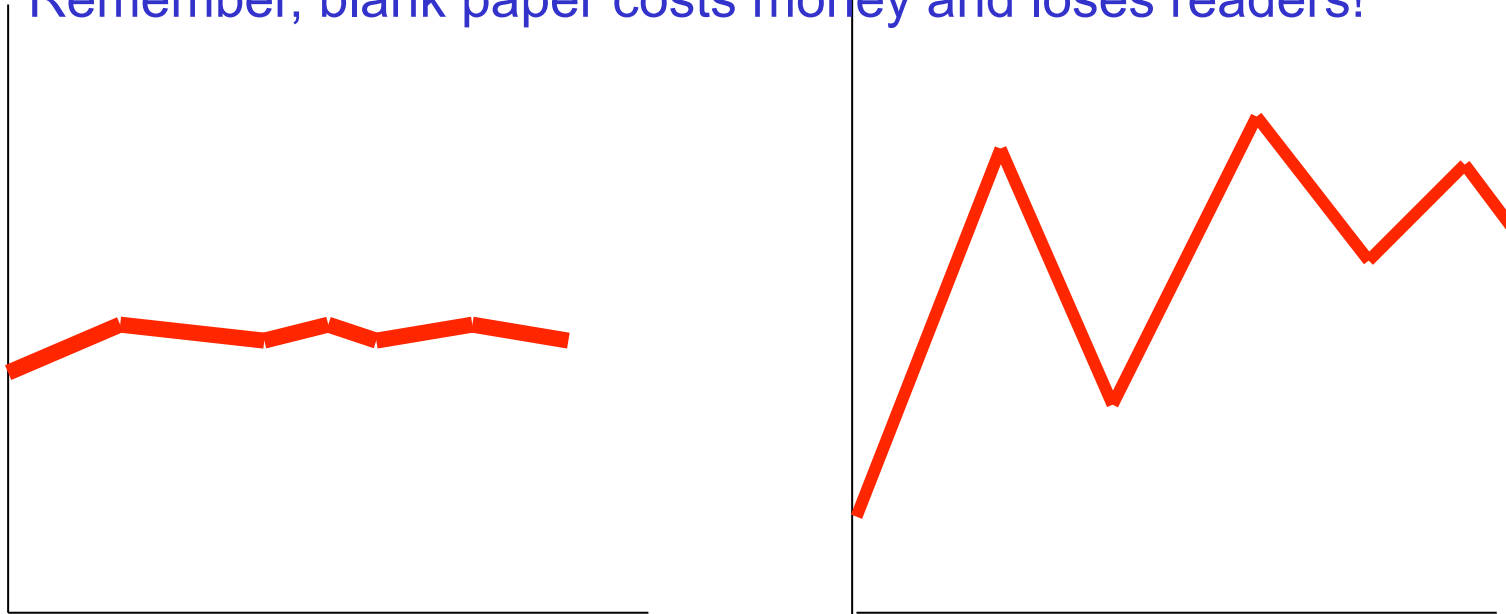
Put datalabels next to the relevant lines, otherwise audience spends time decoding the graph



Which graph is clearer?

Powerpoint may automatically select a poor scale, often because it wants to include the origin (ie 0)

You can – and should- change this.
Remember, blank paper costs money and loses readers!

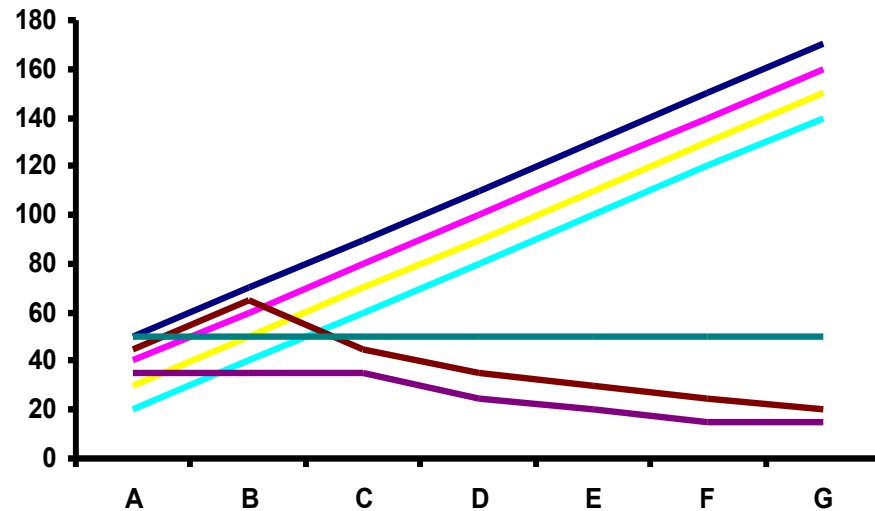


These graphs show the same numbers, but with different scales selected

- *Use scale to tell the story, not record irrelevant data.*
- *Don't lose the message in order to record extreme values or outliers. Let them be off the scale.*
 - *Unless extreme values or outliers are your message!*

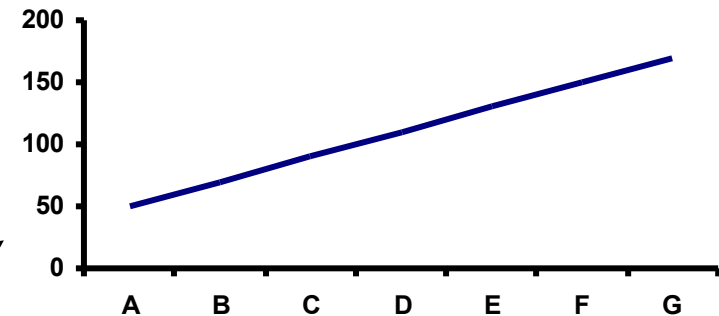
Always try to tell only one message at a time.

Graphs can get too many contrasting data points and lines going everywhere (the 'dead spider' diagram). If the data is complex, try to split it out into the different messages, one at a time.

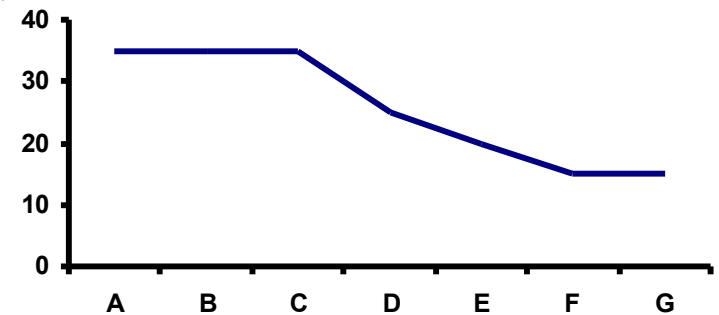


For example, there may be an underlying trend that is one message, but you may also want to focus on some that buck this trend. This may lead to a confusing graphic, so think about splitting it into two (ie a second level graph).

First level
The overall trend



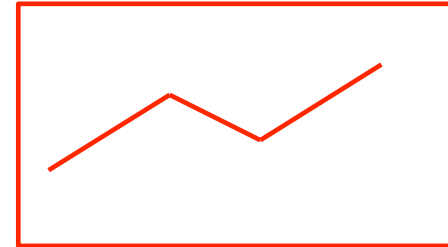
Second level
The outliers within the trend



Finally, what type of graphic should you use?

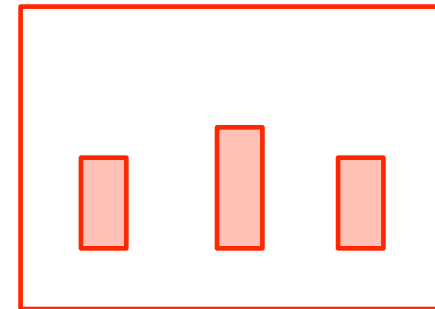
- **Line Charts:**

- Many data points, especially for time series or % statistics.



- **Bar Charts:**

- Few data points, especially absolute values.
- Best for static comparisons, ie different products or areas at one point in time.
- Vertical bar charts (ie columns) are clearest.
- Don't include the origin if it makes the scale too small



- **Pies:**

- Drawn up by people who are not sure what their message is.
- A vertical bar chart is better at communicating relative sizes than a pie chart is.
- Eat pies, don't graph them.



Bullet slides are OK too



- Not all information needs a graphic



- Bullet slides work well, if;
 - Use headlines not sentences
 - Restrict to 4 or 5 points
 - Use slides as prompts and signposting
 - Don't read them
 - Speak in the same order as the bullet points

Tables of numbers can be OK

- But keep short & simple
 - Maybe 6 numbers at most
 - Do NOT copy & paste straight from a spreadsheet!
 - A spreadsheet is a calculator not a presentation
- Use consistent, meaningful colours
 - Default black, good news green, bad news red, % blue
- Use a large font
 - Bigger numbers have more impact

So, to summarise...

- **Decide your story**
 - What's your medium?
 - What's your message?
- **Plot the story**
 - Tell the story
 - Look for the bayonet graphic
- **Let the message draw the graphics**
 - Keep it simple
 - Choose the right graphic
 - Keep bullet slides short & simple
- **Check the story**
 - Complete, well-ordered and convincing



For further information;

The financial dashboard – how to present financial information



(...without crashing your car)

Simon Laffin
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