

Communication,
Communication,
Communication,

or the lost art of presenting

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The Art of Presenting

- What not to do
 - An illustration:
 - The Gettysburg address reduced to powerpoint...
 - Compared to what Lincoln actually said in 2 minutes.
- What you should do
 - A better way to present
 - The medium & the message
 - Tell a story
- Bad communication can be fatal
 - Another illustration
 - The Challenger space shuttle
- Some simple rules for good presentations
- “The 7 S’s”

An illustration of how presentations can spoil the message.

Just imagine how a modern business person might tackle making a speech at the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery...

Gettysburg Cemetery Dedication

Abraham Lincoln

As presented on powerpoint

*They would set put a clear agenda with the key points
...and a good summary*

Agenda

- Set objectives
- Had a battle
- Built a cemetery
- Next steps

As presented on powerpoint

Then summarise the key points in bullet points...

Key issues

- Previous management
 - 1,080 months ago
 - Set our objectives
- Objectives are;
 - 1. Liberty
 - 2. Equality
- Internal Conflict now resolved

As presented on powerpoint

And finish with where we are now & next steps...

Summary

- Restated vision
 - Government:
 - of }
 - for } colleagues
 - by }
- Next steps

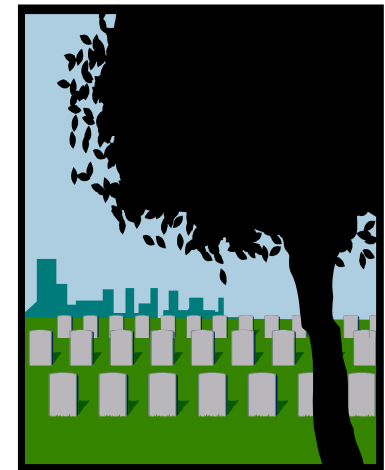
As presented on powerpoint

...Or it could be an inspirational piece of communication; a speech with no visual aids, just a few well-chosen words



“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.”

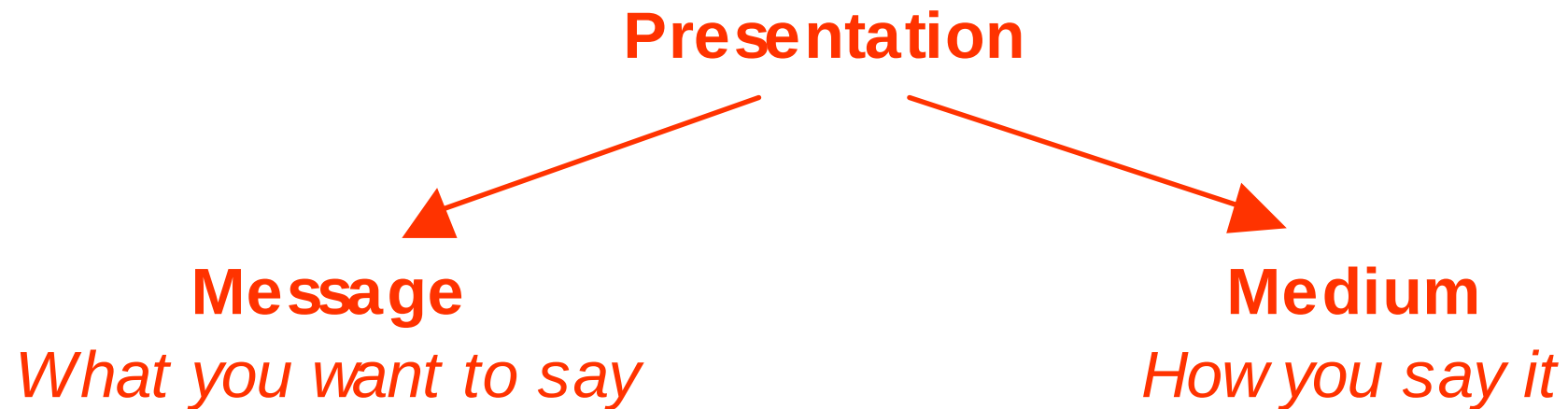
But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”



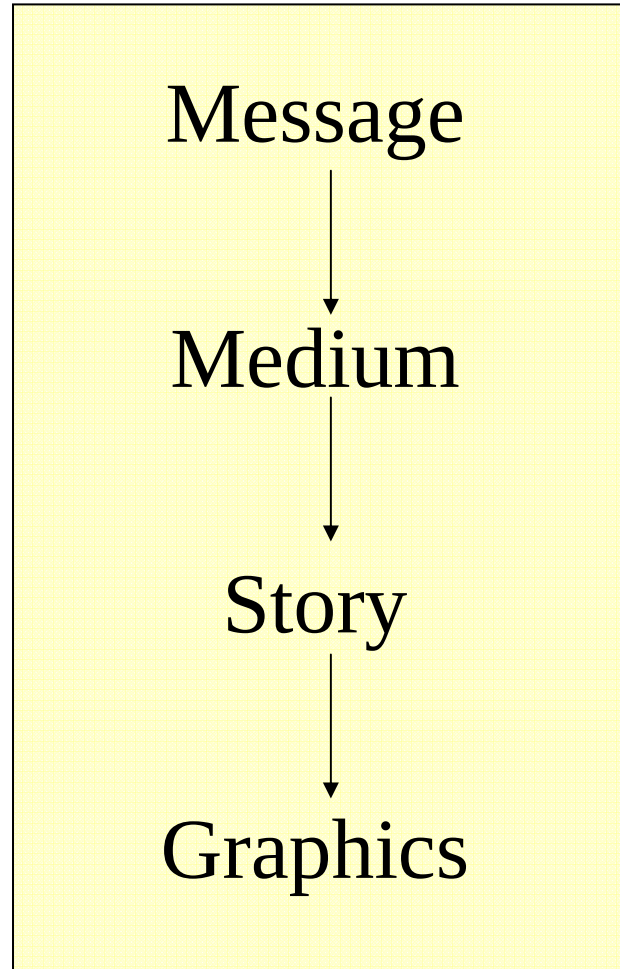
A Better Way to Present...

- We're not Abraham Lincoln
 - Possibly we lack his rhetorical powers
- We've not usually got as simple a message!
 - Business presentations tend to explain complex problems with many facets and many uncertainties
 - Subject matter may be less compelling than a civil war
 - Listeners may need more convincing of our case
- So, it's more difficult...
 - Visual aids can be essential to help communicate complex information
 - It may take a bit longer to communicate
- But try following some suggestions

Start with acknowledging that a presentation is 50% message
& 50% medium



Start with what the message is, then think medium, story and finally what visual aids/graphics to use



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... *which 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 you need to use your judgement

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

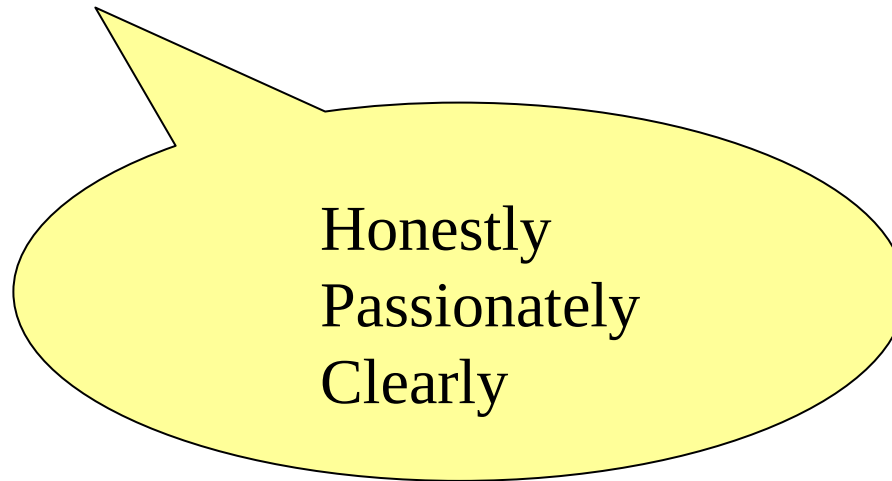


1. Purpose of a presentation
2. The issue in a nutshell
3. What you think is happening
4. Evidence to show this
5. What we should do about it
6. Conclusion and next steps

*But remember: What matters is what the audience **understands**, not what you say.*



Then tell your story....



Not like this...

The Challenger disaster:
An example of poor communication with tragic results...

Illustration of the dangers of poor presentations

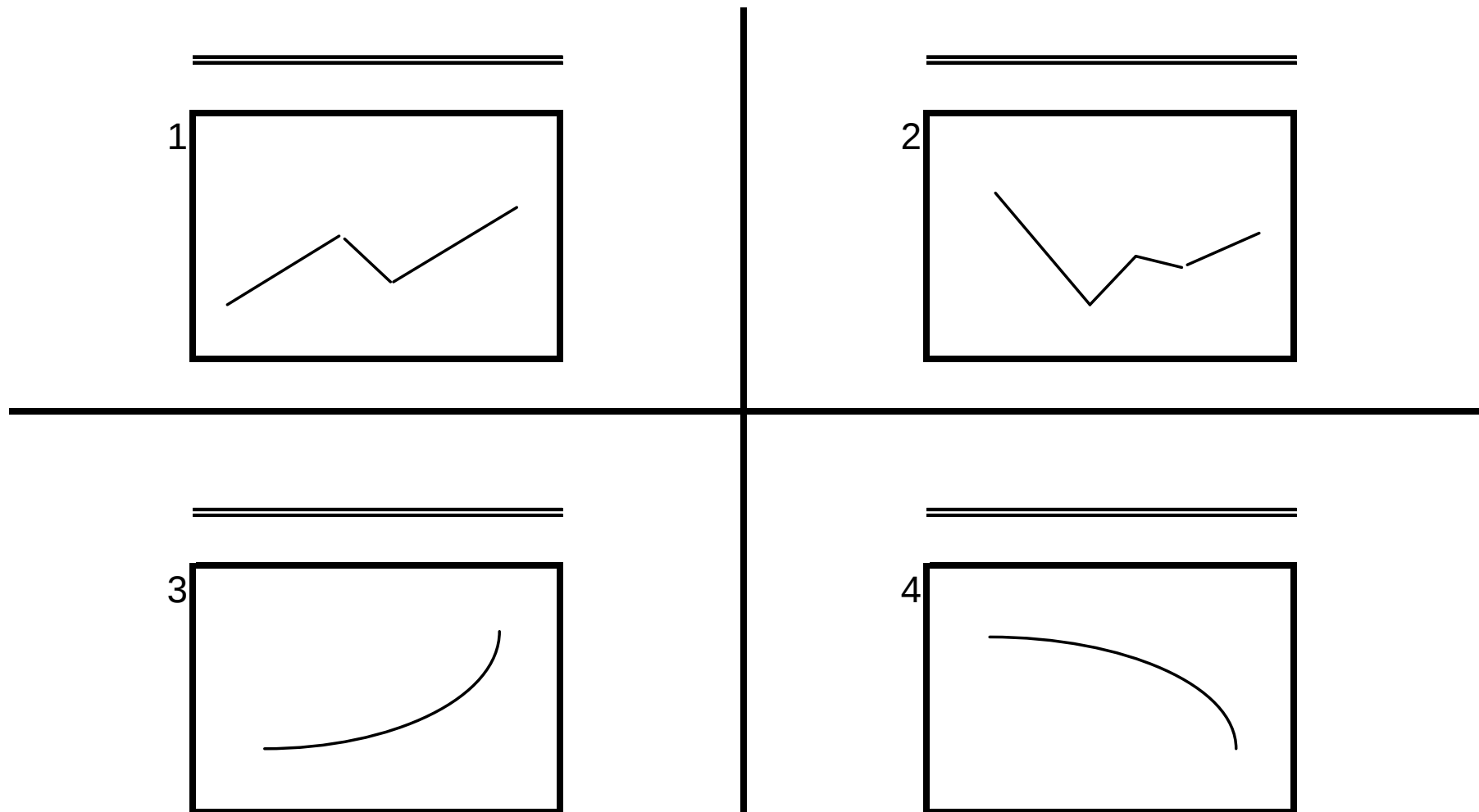
The Accident Report on the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster challenged the wording and presentational style of various technical briefings, largely on powerpoint, before the fatal flight, which failed to interpret or present the facts properly.

For example, it criticised;

- The use of statistical “sleight of hand” at times
- The comfort apparently given that the probability of foam loss was “*no higher or lower than previous flights*”, but this actually meant that the risk on the next flight was just as high as on previous flights.
- That when complex engineering analysis and risk assessment are condensed to fit on a standard form, information is invariably lost
- Typography that was “so choppy and clunky that it impedes understanding” . This included confusing lay out of bullet points.
- The word “significant” being used to mean anything for “detectable” to “an amount of damage so that everyone dies”

NB. There is a length review of this in ‘Powerpoint does rocket science’, at http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=0001yB&topic_id=1

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

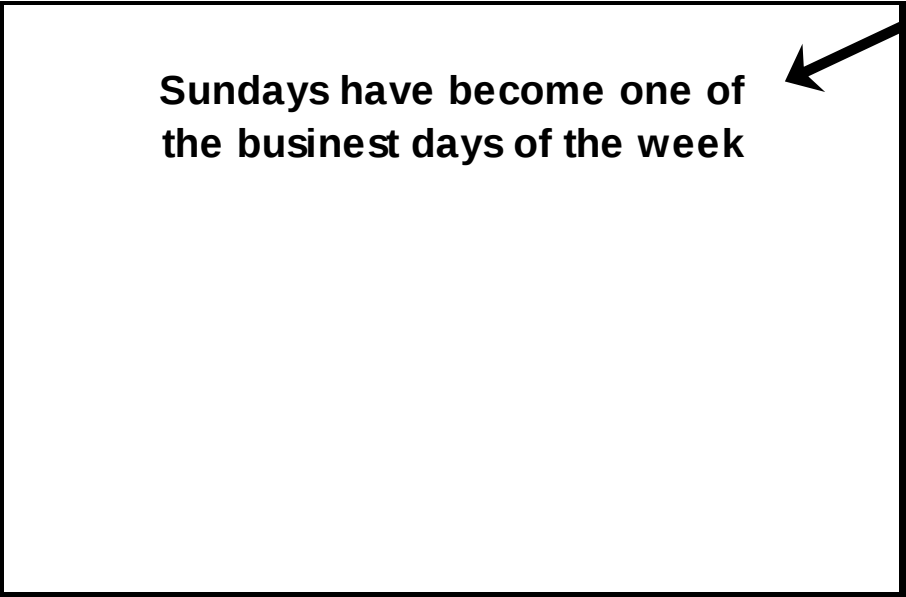


Decide what the message is of each slide and how each works to tell the whole message of the entire presentation

- 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

- Eg

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



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

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

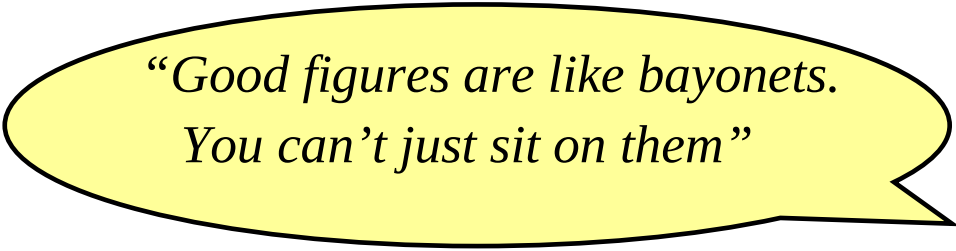
Eg

Sundays have become one of the busiest days of the week	
	<u>£K</u>
Average Sales (Mon - Wed)	200
Average Sales (Thurs - Sat)	300
Average Sales (Sunday)	275
	775

**This is
the
evidence**

Data is useful, but good graphics are better.
However poor graphics are worse!

The graphic should make your point very clearly and stand on its own
So try to make the message punchy.
A really good graphic makes you really feel you understand and want to
act on it

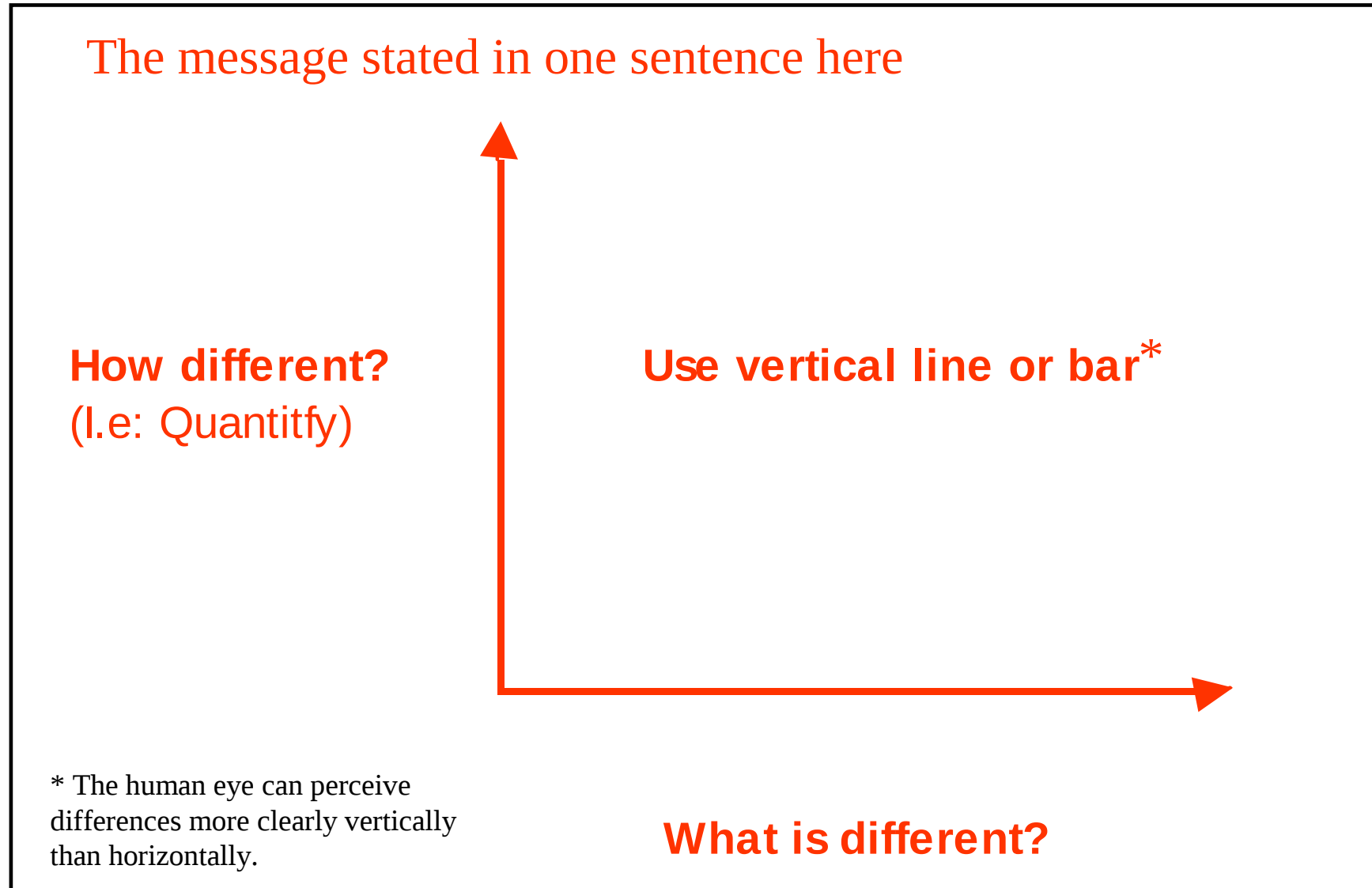


*“Good figures are like bayonets.
You can’t just sit on them”*

Sir Peter Gibbings

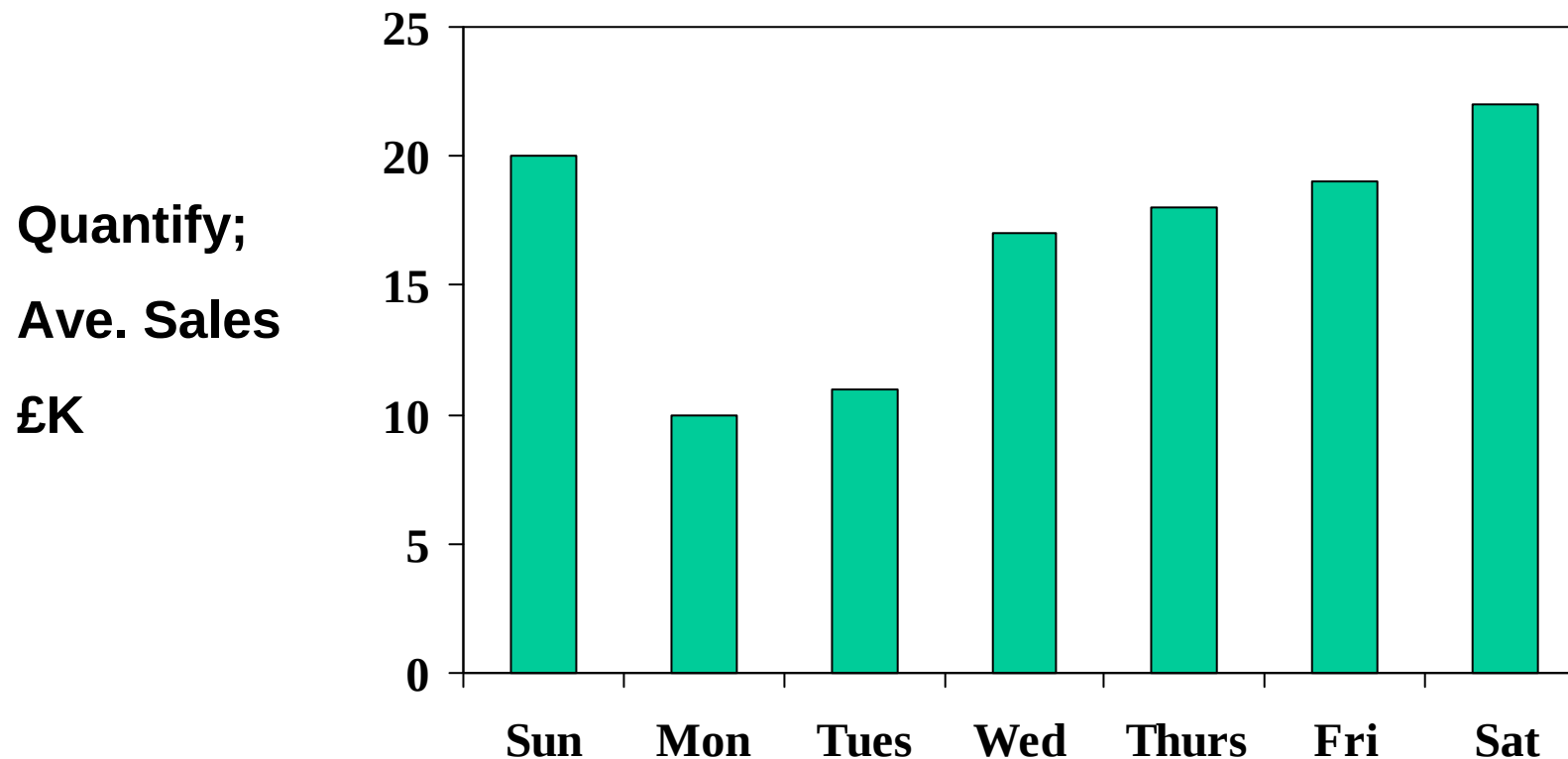
So here are some ways to make clear & impactful graphics...

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



So in this example, having started with the message about Sundays, the graph designs itself as clearly it's the days of the week that are different, and the sales are the quantification.

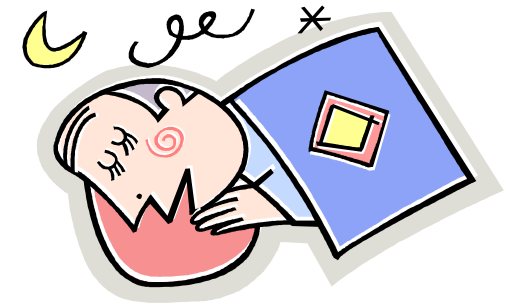
Sundays have become one of the busiest days of the week.



What's different? = Days of the Week

Simplicity is perfection in a graphic

- One message per graphic.
- Keep graphic simple.
- Don't make a very 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 an appendix.



And a word of warning, don't let the beauty of complex computer graphics lead you astray



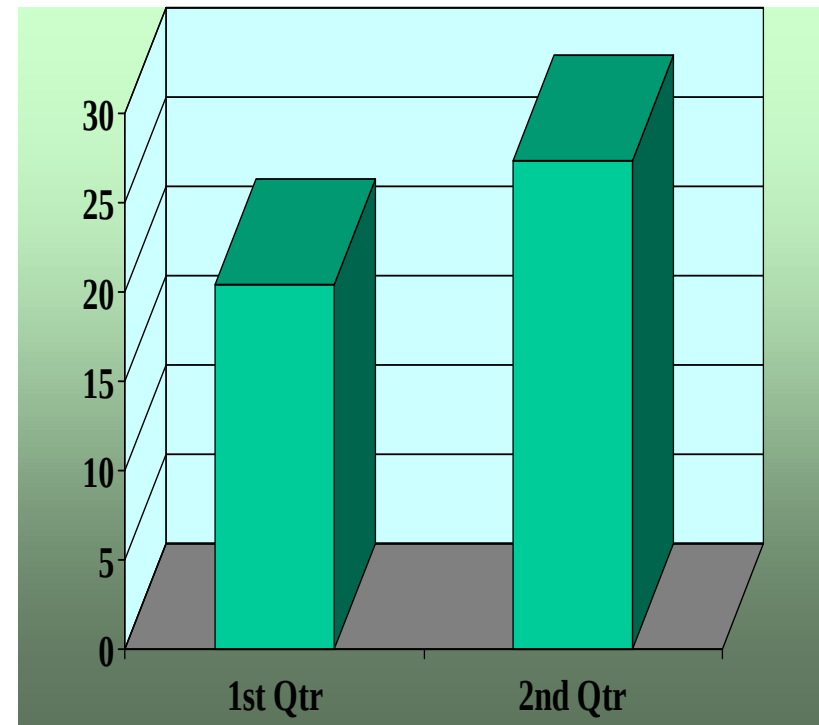
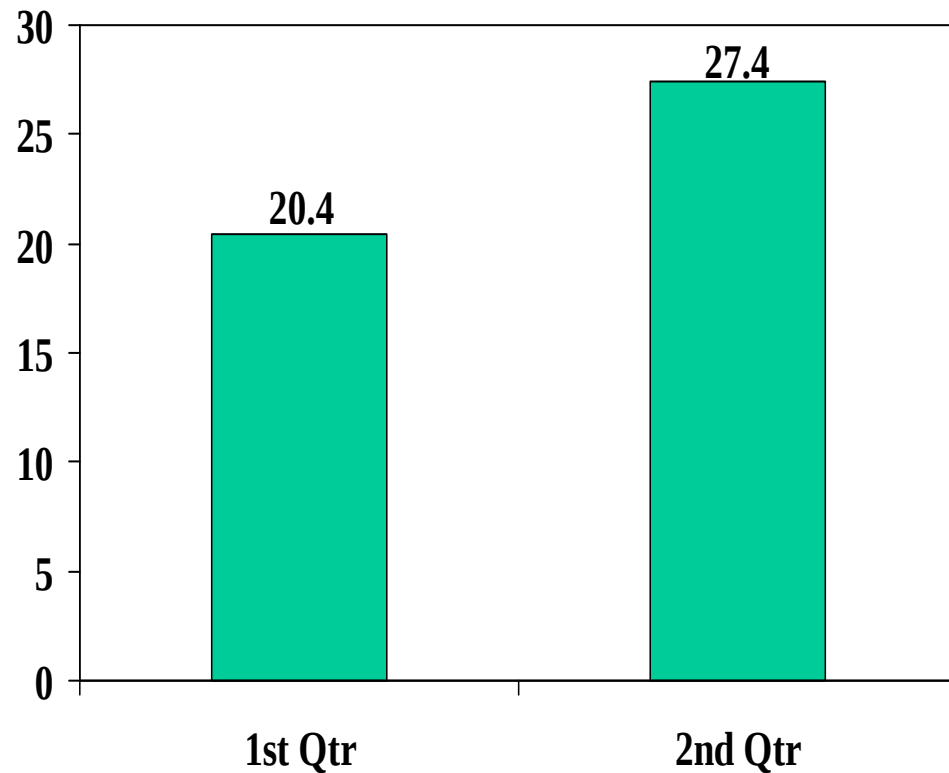
Design the graphic using pen and paper first

THEN

Reproduce it on P.C



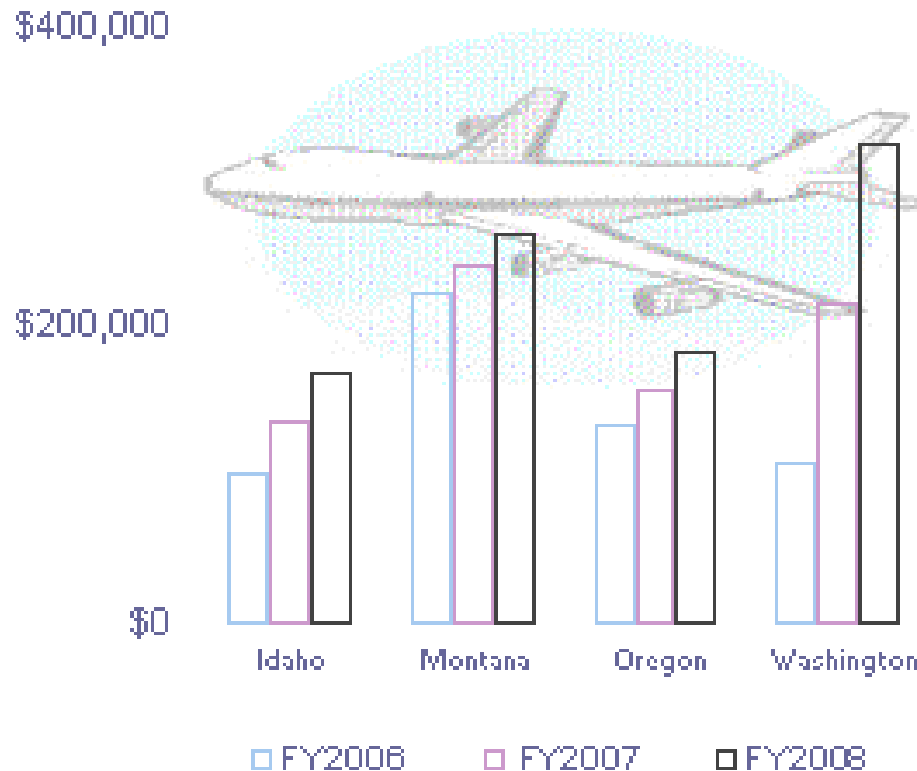
Especially avoid gimmicks, such as 3D graphs that confuse the message for no gain at all. Which of these graphs communicates better?



Yes, these graphs show the same numbers!

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

Blue Yonder Airlines
Projected Northwest Sales



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

Graphic recommended by Microsoft Office website;

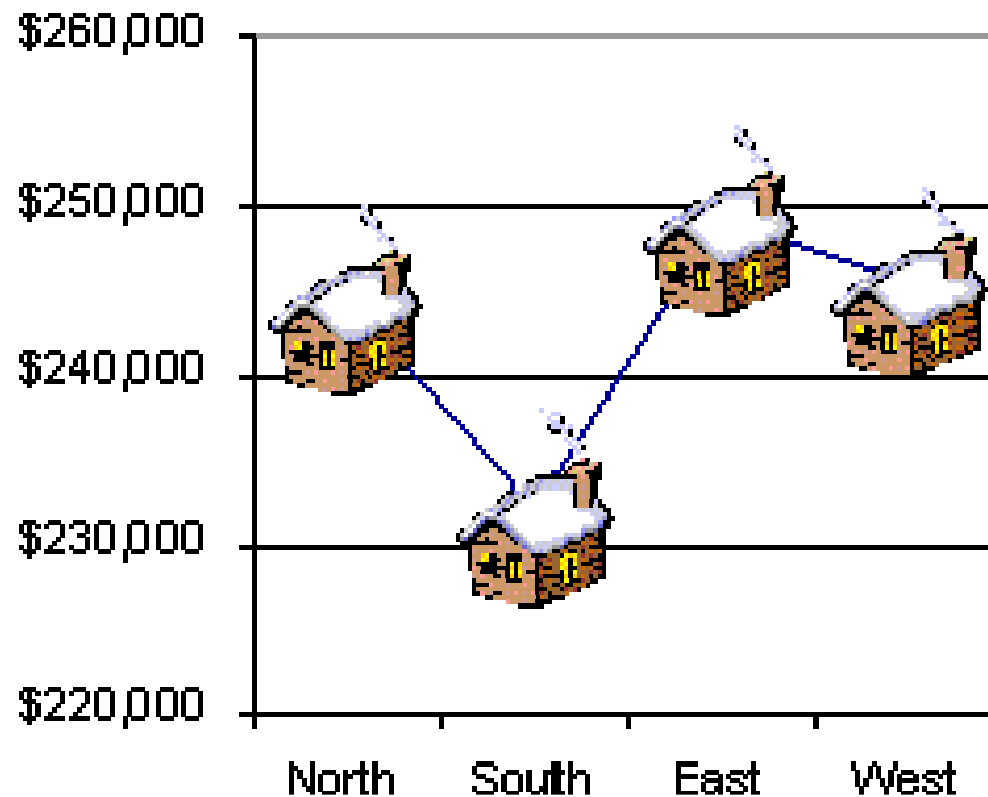
Make charts more compelling by adding pictures

[Help](#)

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It gets worse.....

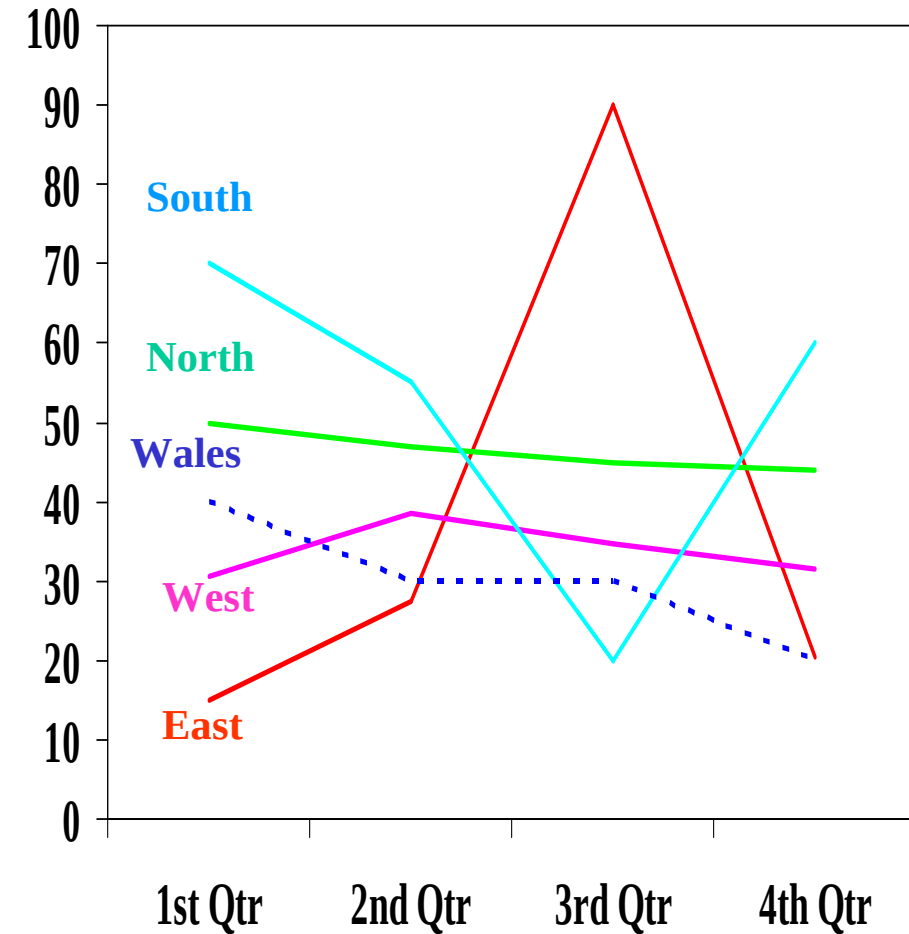
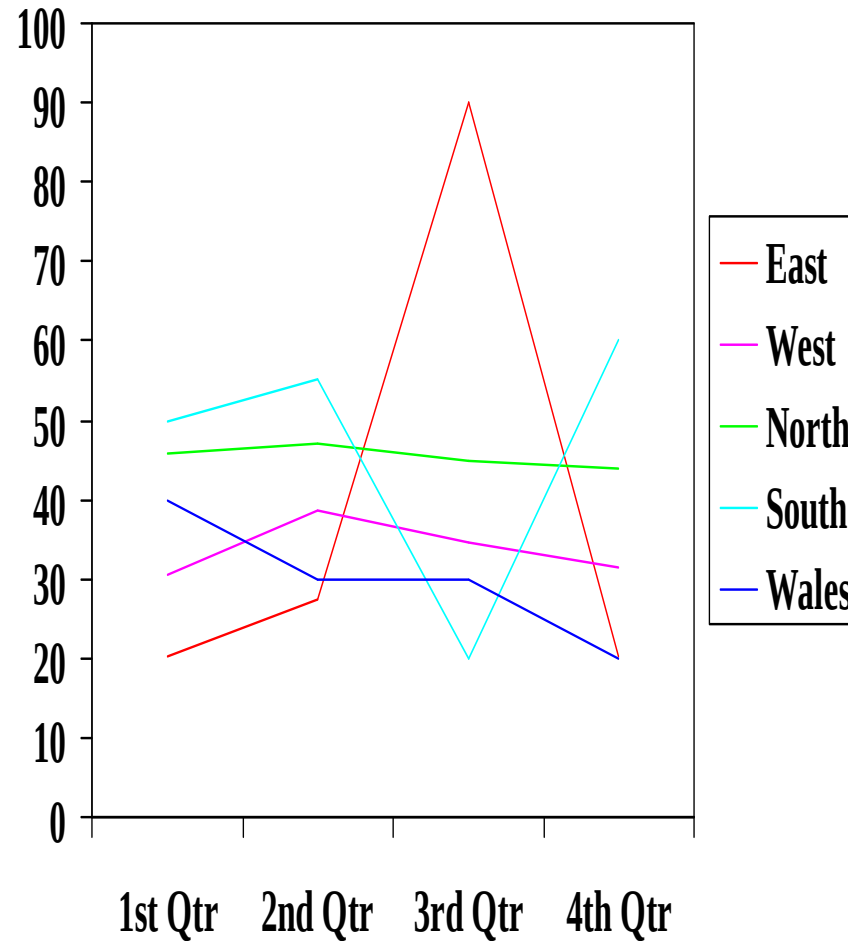
**Average Prices of Homes Sold
by Region**



“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.”

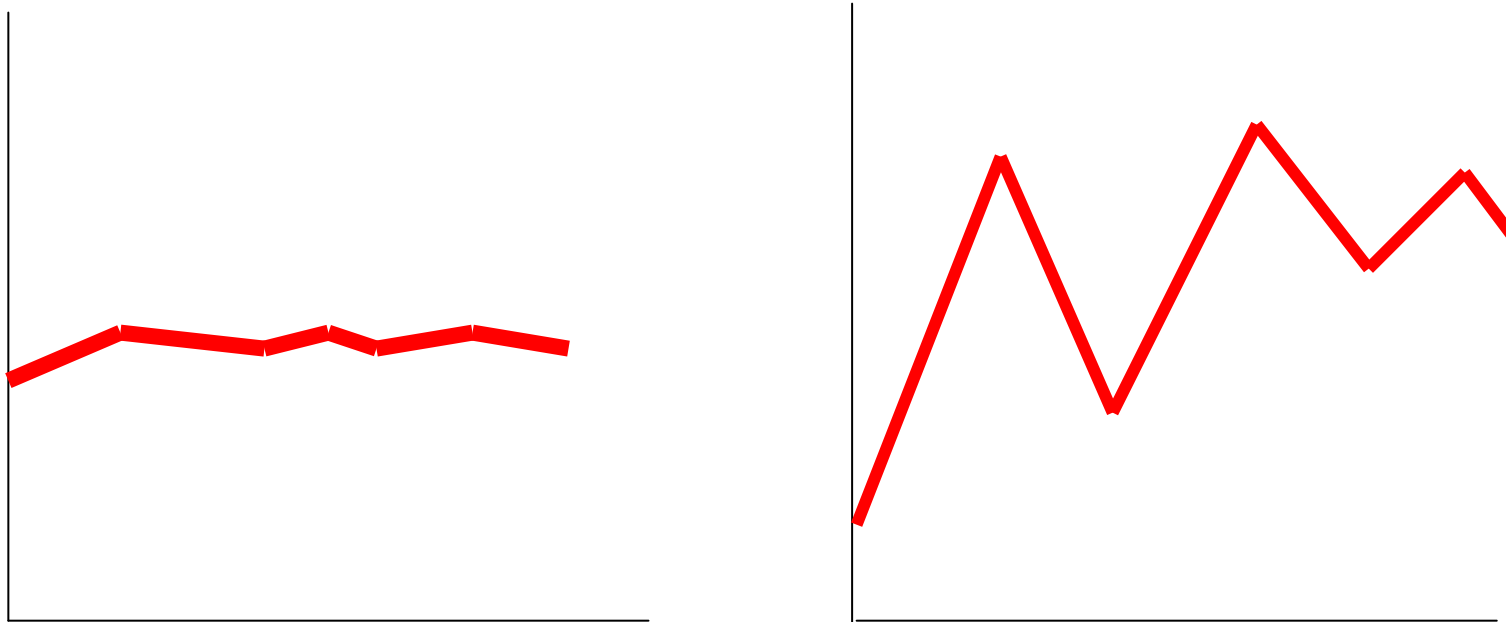
**Graphic recommended by
Microsoft Office website;**

Powerpoint is lazy and puts datalabels in a separate legend. This makes a graphic much slower to understand. If you put datalabels next to their relevant lines, the audience will spend more time listening to you, rather than 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!)

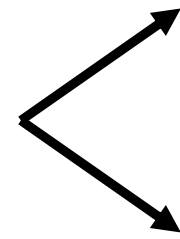
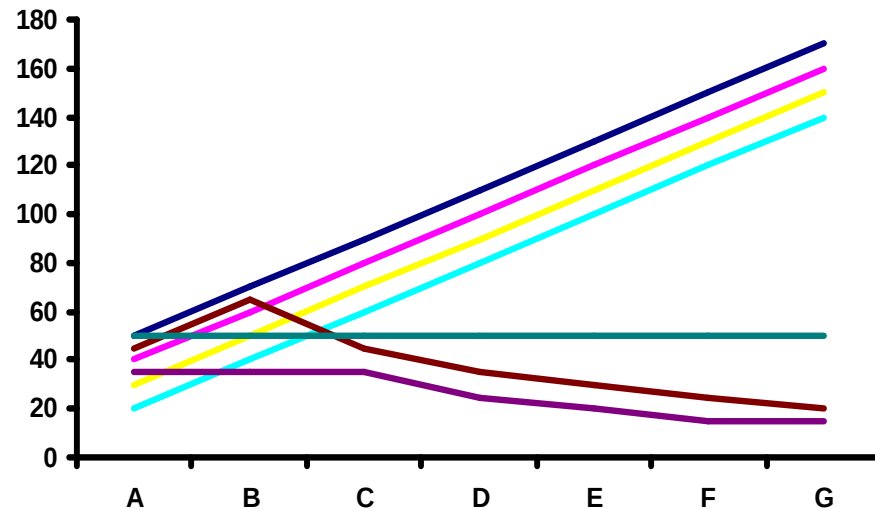


These graphs show the same numbers, but with different scales selected

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

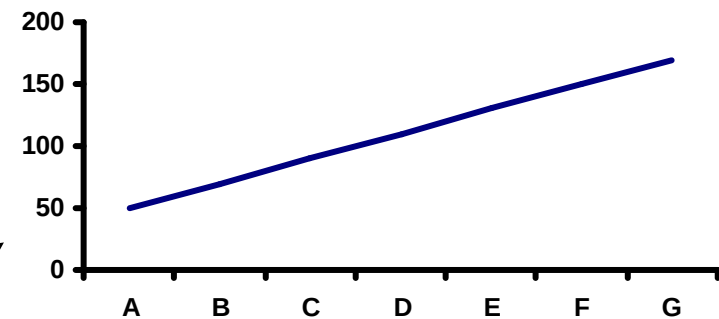
Always try to tell only one message at a time. Otherwise graphs can get too many contrasting data points and lines going everywhere (the 'dead spider' diagram). If the data is complex, try to split it out into the different messages, one at a time.

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).



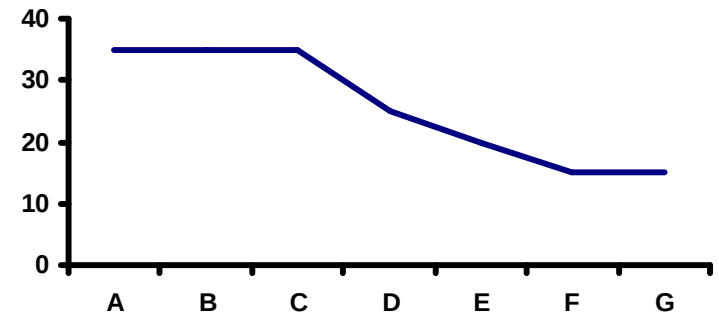
First level

The overall trend



Second level

The outliers within the trend



Finally, what type of graphic should you use?

- **Line Charts:** Best for when you have many values, especially for time series or % statistics. This should be the most common form of chart.
- **Bar Charts:** Use these when you have only a few data points, especially when they are absolute values. They work best for static comparisons, ie comparing different products or areas at one point in time. Beware however of software that forces bar charts to have a small scale, because it thinks any bar chart must include the origin (ie zero). Vertical bar charts (ie columns) tend to be the most clear.
- **Pie:** These are usually drawn up by people who are not sure what their message is. A vertical bar chart does a better job in communicating relative size of components of a whole than a pie chart. I recommend that you eat pies, not graph them.

So, to summarise...

1. Decide your story
2. Plot the story, handwritten on paper
3. Hand-draw the graphics
4. Check the story is complete and sensibly ordered
5. Only then reach for the pc...

Or to put it another way...

Simon's Seven S's:

Shout the Story, using Simple graphics, telling a Single message in a Single dimension, perhaps on a Second level, but always on a big Scale. Oh, and by the way Sketch the graph first.

(Ok that's eight, but who's counting?)