

The Visual Vocabulary

After you think of the purpose of your visualization, though, there are several resources that you can use to guide your decisions in terms of what encoding to use to represent your data.

So here are some ideas. For example, you could refer to certain websites that work as data visualization catalogs. They show you the different varieties of charts, and maps, and graphs that exist nowadays to represent data. And they tell you what each one of those is useful for. And in what cases you should use one encoding or another encoding. What kind of graphic or another kind of graphic. Depending on what you want to communicate, depending on the tasks that you want to enable, depending on what you want your readers to see in the graphic that you're designing.

So one of these websites would be the Data Visualization Catalog. It actually has that name. That would be datavizcatalog.com. This is a very, very good website as a starting point to make decisions as to how to encode your data.

And then you also have Ann K. Emery's essentials website. Ann also writes about visualization. She also provides training about data visualization in companies. And she has this wonderful website, which is very similar to the Data Visualization Catalog. Sort of a series of articles, little articles, about different kinds of graphs and maps, explaining when you should use one or when you should use a another.

Another resource that you can use to guide your decisions is the Visual Vocabulary. The Visual Vocabulary is a big poster. It's a PDF document, but you can print it out if you want. It has a very large size. That was designed by the graphics department at the Financial Times, the newspaper in the UK. As you may see, the poster is subdivided into columns. Each one of these columns is named with a purpose that a visualization may have.

What is it that you want to show? Do you want to show deviation, relationship, or association, or correlation, ranking, distribution change over time, parts of the whole, spatial distributions? What is it that you want to show? And then underneath each one of these headers, you have different kinds of graphics that may help you achieve that goal. That may help you fulfill that purpose.

So there are several options that you may have if you want to show spatial distributions, or flows or associations, and correlations, and so on and so forth. So this is sort of a chart chooser. If you are out of inspiration, if you want to get inspiration from someone, either of these resources can be really, really helpful to guide your decisions.