

OFM GRAPHICS STYLE GUIDE

At the Office of Financial Management (OFM), several authors may work in concert to produce graphic materials. A consistent style maintains clear and effective communications. This graphic style guide addresses formatting questions that arise in daily operations.

The guiding principle for these style choices is simplicity and clarity. By eliminating unnecessary graphic elements, your charts will become crisper and easier to understand.

The goal of any communication is that the reader/viewer gets the intended message. This can be achieved by keeping three things in mind:

- Consider the user and what they need or want to know;
- Choose the right type of chart for your data and message; and
- Reduce “chart junk” (i.e. grid lines, background colors, shadowing, 3D, tick marks, borders, and excess zeros, decimal places, text, etc.) to improve your message delivery.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

- The most effective charts are the simplest.
- The easier something is to understand, the less likely it is to be misconstrued.
- Decorations and chart junk are distracting – use only if needed to tell the story. Make sure the colors represent well in black and white and grayscale – they may look great electronically, but aren’t of much value if the message is lost once printed in black and white or grayscale.
- The default legend and data labels are difficult to format – consider hand labeling elements if needed.
- Include a short, but meaningful title.
- If you did not create the chart you are using, make sure you (and Communications) have access to the source file. If not, consider re-creating it so we have the ability to update and edit if necessary.
- Would the data would be more effective if displayed in a table instead of a chart?
- The size of your chart elements (text, lines in a line chart, etc.) is dependent upon the size of your finished chart. The elements in a letter-sized chart are smaller in comparison to charts that are compressed to fit into smaller areas. Example – a letter-sized chart with 12 pt. font text will be readable, but if you reduce that same chart by 75 percent to insert into a document, the font becomes 3 pt. and unreadable. Consider your end result when building your chart.
- Text browsers and screen readers cannot interpret images to their users – alternative text must be provided for all graphics elements.

FONTS FOR CHARTS

Sans serif fonts are best for chart titles and axis and data labels. Examples of sans serif fonts used in our charts:

Tahoma Arial Arial Narrow Myriad Pro Myriad Pro Condensed Candara

Each example above is a 12 point font, but the Arial Narrow and Myriad Pro Condensed are much more compressed than Tahoma, Arial, Candara and Myriad Pro. Consider how much text you have and the available space – bottom line, make sure it's legible.

TYPES OF CHARTS

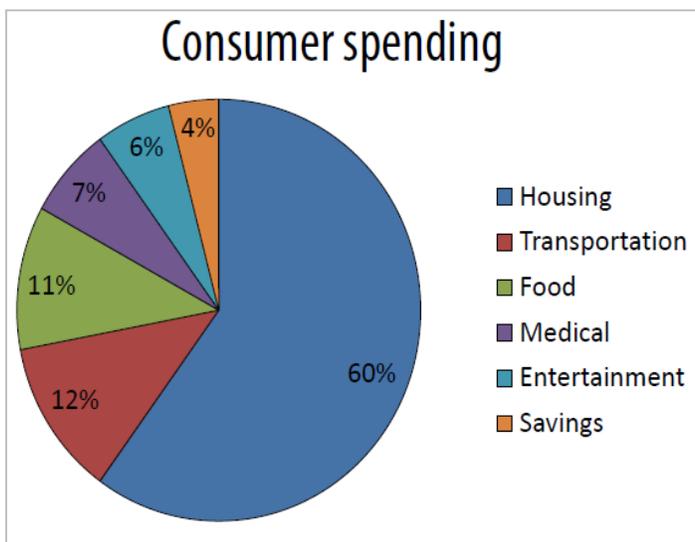
Once you know the purpose of your chart or graph, there are many styles to choose from. Most of our needs can be met by using one of these common designs: pie, bar/column, line and area.

Pie charts

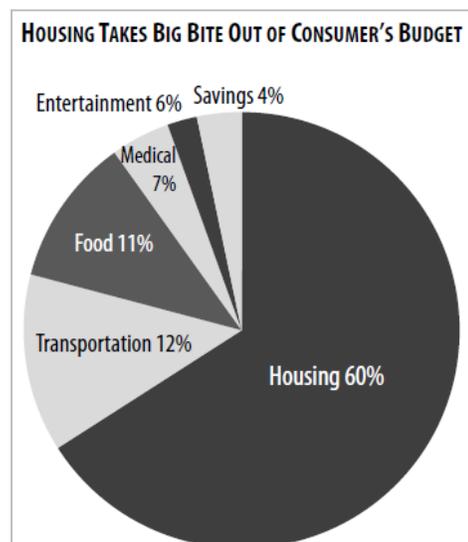
Pie charts are used to show relative proportions or composition of a total amount.

- Values can be absolute or percentages.
- Pie slices can be exploded for emphasis, but use sparingly (1 or 2 slices only) to avoid distracting from your message.
- If possible, limit the pie slices to six or less.
- The most important piece should be in the top right quadrant; arrange slices from the largest to the smallest in a clockwise direction.
- Hand label slices and keep labels short; avoid using the software data labeling function.
- If using color for pie slices, lines between slices are optional.

Examples:



Powerpoint's default pie chart format



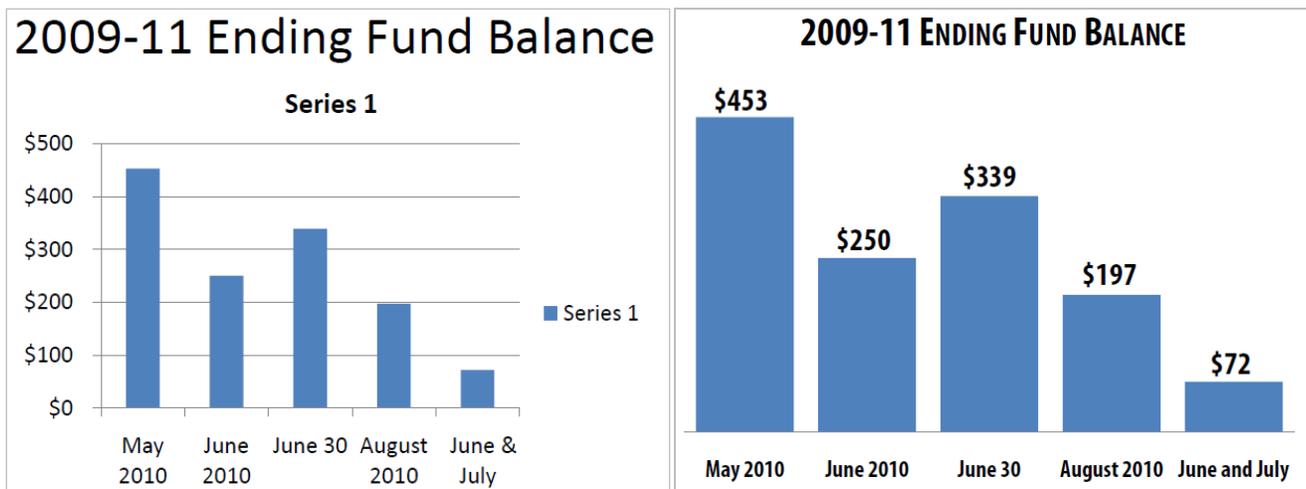
Simplified format

Bar charts

Horizontal and vertical (column) bar charts are used to show differences between data at set moments in time and differences in related data.

- Use horizontal bars to show several items in a single series or when X-axis labels won't fit along the X-axis.
- Use data labels (keep short, do manually for more formatting options). Gridlines and X-axis labels can then be eliminated, giving you a cleaner chart.
- Bars should be equal in size to or larger than the white space separating them.
- Stacked bars show totals or portions of totals rather than relative differences between data sets (good for showing how portion of totals change over time).
- Use darker fill colors at the base of a stacked bar; with the color getting lighter as it goes up.

Examples:



Powerpoint's default bar/column chart format

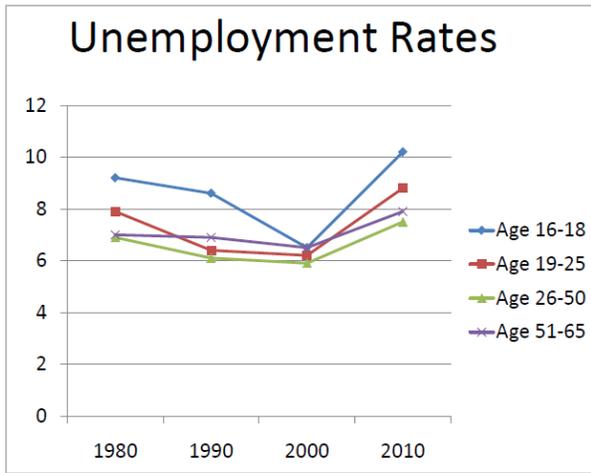
Simplified format

Line charts

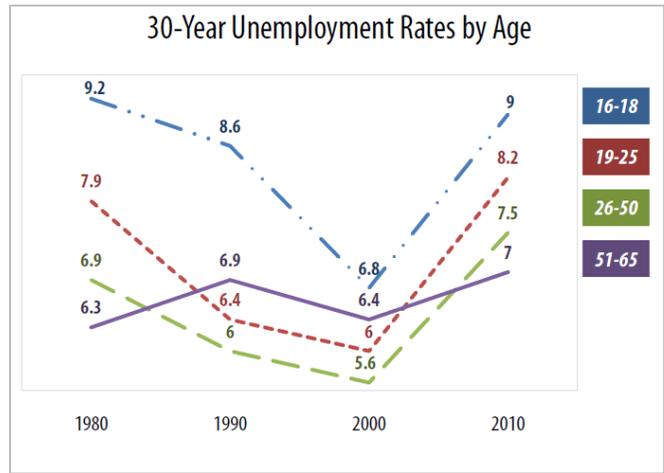
Line charts are best for showing time series data, trends, larger number of data points and data flow.

- Limit charts to no more than 4 or 5 lines each.
- Color or line styles are good distinguishers between lines. Be consistent – use the same line color or style for each data set throughout your publication.
- Generally, use 2–5 points size or larger for each line, dependent upon the finished size of your chart (manual adjustment may be required).
- Trend/data lines should be thicker than axis/gridlines.
- Add data labels (use the software data label function) and eliminate gridlines for a cleaner chart.

Examples:



Powerpoint's default line chart format



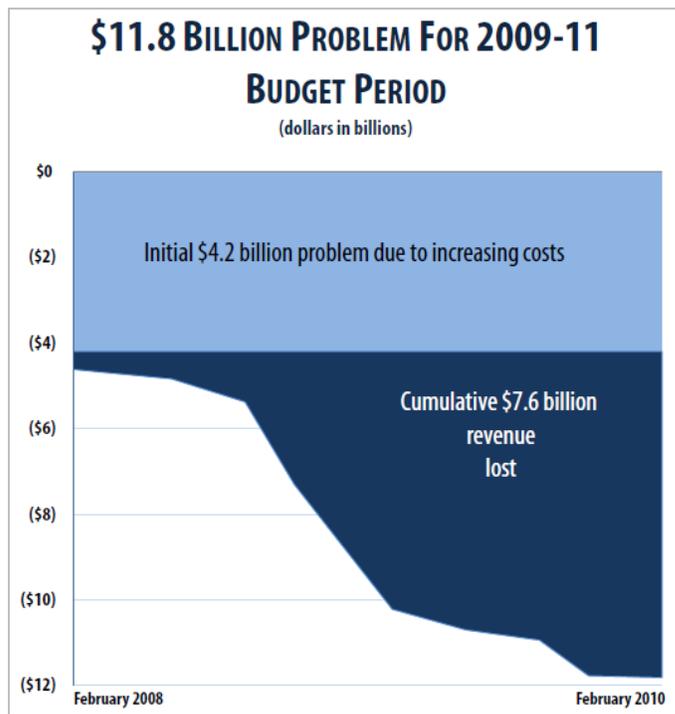
Simplified format

Area charts

Area charts are useful for showing totals.

- The most important data set should be shown at the bottom.
- If using color fill, the darker color should be at the bottom and lighten as it goes up.

Example:



PICTURES

If a picture (or map) is worth a thousand words, you may want to consider using it in your publication. Be mindful that pictures increase your file size substantially so they should never be used solely for decoration.

Please contact the Communications Team for more information about using pictures in your publication.