A few things to remember when making charts

do

1 *Clarify* the information for your readers; make sure it's the right data for the story, and no more.

2 Give numbers a context, for example, a visual comparison, or a historical timeframe.

How many $100 bills would there be in a pile as high as the Empire State Building?*

3 Charts are pictures of data (see 4 & 5 below). A well-made "picture" of this kind can help readers understand complex statistics.

4 Use icons this way:

In other words, increase a number by multiplying the icon that represents it.

5 Charts are graphic; they *show* things.

However graphically inconvenient this bottom bar may be, it tells the story of these numbers. Find a way to accommodate it!

6 If you work in newspapers, magazines or on the web, and you make a mistake, print a correction as soon as you can.

7 Whenever possible, check the source of your information against other sources. And give credit to the sources you use.

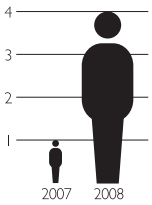
don't

1 Don't *simplify*—that's a dangerous word that implies dumbing down the data. Readers may be in a hurry, but they *are* sensible. So don't use every statistic you find or are given—they may not all be necessary.

2 Don't throw numbers around without something to compare them to. Out of context, statistics can be used to mean anything. (That's called propaganda.)

3 Don't overdo the picture-making. The point is to make the information clear—not pretty, or dressed up in color, or three-dimensional.

4 Not this way:



Look at the difference between these two charts that deal with same statistic. The one on the right may be more exciting, but it exaggerates the 2003 number deceivingly.

Making one icon 4 times as **high** *as another exaggerates the four-fold increase.*

5 So, don't break the scale just to make charts a convenient size for your layout.

Doing this misrepresents the numbers. If you cannot find space to chart the numbers properly, you should present the data as a simple table instead of a chart like this that does not *show* the numbers.

6 Don't assume that readers overlook errors. They will notice them, and uncorrected mistakes undermine readers' trust. If you don't care, why should they?

7 Don't use the web as a sole source. Almost *anything* you find on the web needs to be checked against a non-web source, or at least against another web source.

*There would be 3,750,000 one hundred dollar bills ($375,000,000) in a pile that's as high as the Empire State Building. Remember that since all U.S. bills are same thickness (0.0042") a pile of 3,750,000 ONE dollar bills ($3,750,000) would also be that high.

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