

IOWA

Division of Student Life

GUIDE FOR PRESENTING DATA EFFECTIVELY

Data presentation is about making information clear, memorable, and actionable. Whether you're summarizing survey results, program outcomes, or participation trends, effective presentation ensures your audience understands the key messages quickly and accurately.

Define Your Purpose

- Begin every presentation with a clear goal in mind
- Focus on the main story your data tells
- Avoid including every detail, prioritize what your audience needs to know
- Think about what action or decision your data should support

Choose The Right Data Presentation Method

- Match your chart type to your message:
 - **Bar chart:** Compare categories
 - **Line chart:** Show trends over time
 - **Pie chart:** Show simple parts of a whole
 - **Stacked bar chart:** Show parts within categories
 - **Heat map:** Show intensity by location or frequency
- Avoid complicated charts like 3D visuals that make data hard to read

Simplify Visuals for Clarity

- Remove extra elements that clutter your visual, like heavy gridlines or background images
- Use bold fonts or highlight colors to draw attention to your key points
- Keep labels short and clear
- Focus on the essential takeaway

Use Color Purposefully

- Use color to highlight important data, not just for decoration
- Stick to a simple palette (2–3 colors maximum)
- Make sure your colors are easy to see and accessible (avoid red/green combos)
- Be consistent with color choices across your whole presentation
- View the University of Iowa Brand Manual for some guidelines and examples for charts and graphs: <https://brand.uiowa.edu/graphic-elements>

Design for Readability

- Keep text labels short and to the point
- Use clear, readable fonts (sans-serif works best)
- Maintain a good font size (at least 12 pt for printed materials)
- Align text consistently and give it enough space
- Use titles and captions to explain charts at a glance

Keep Text and Visuals Together

- Place text explanations right next to the visuals they describe
- Avoid forcing the audience to flip between pages or slides to connect information
- Make the flow natural between text and visuals

Prioritize Important Content

- Start with your most important message — don't save it for the end
- Use hierarchy: main takeaway first, details later
- Assume your audience will skim, and make sure they catch your key points early

Avoiding Common Mistakes

- Don't overload visuals with too much data
- Stick to a simple color scheme
- Always label your axes and data points clearly
- Customize your charts — don't settle for default settings
- Avoid visual clutter and distractions

Layout Structure and Tips

- Use alignment grids to keep everything neat
- Leave white space to avoid visual crowding
- Guide your reader's eye from big insights to supporting details
- Keep fonts and colors consistent throughout your report

Simplified Checklist

- ✓ Start with a clear message
- ✓ Use the right chart type
- ✓ Keep visuals clean and simple
- ✓ Use color to emphasize, not decorate
- ✓ Make text and labels easy to read
- ✓ Place visuals and explanations close together
- ✓ Lead with your key insights
- ✓ Keep layout consistent and organized
- ✓ Check accessibility (color contrast, font size)

Sources:

Evergreen, Stephanie D. H. *Presenting Data Effectively: Communicating Your Findings for Maximum Impact*. Sage, 2018

EXAMPLE:

LATE NIGHT UBER VOUCHER PROGRAM

The Uber Voucher Program provided over 10,000 safe late-night rides for University of Iowa students during the Fall 2024 semester. Eligible students could claim two 5-dollar Uber vouchers, available from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. daily throughout the fall semester. This pilot program aimed to promote safe travel choices and reduce risks associated with late-night commuting.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- ✓ First-years claimed 40% of the total vouchers
- ✓ 1,200 claimed vouchers during finals week
- ✓ Top pick-up spots: Main Library, Residence Halls, Downtown Iowa City

