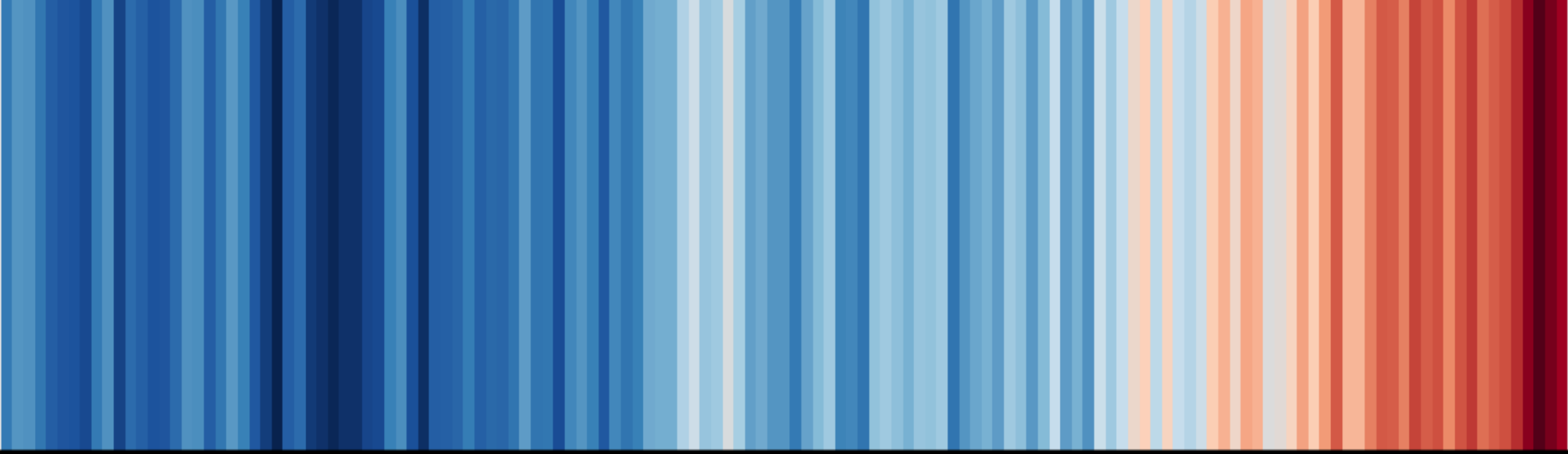


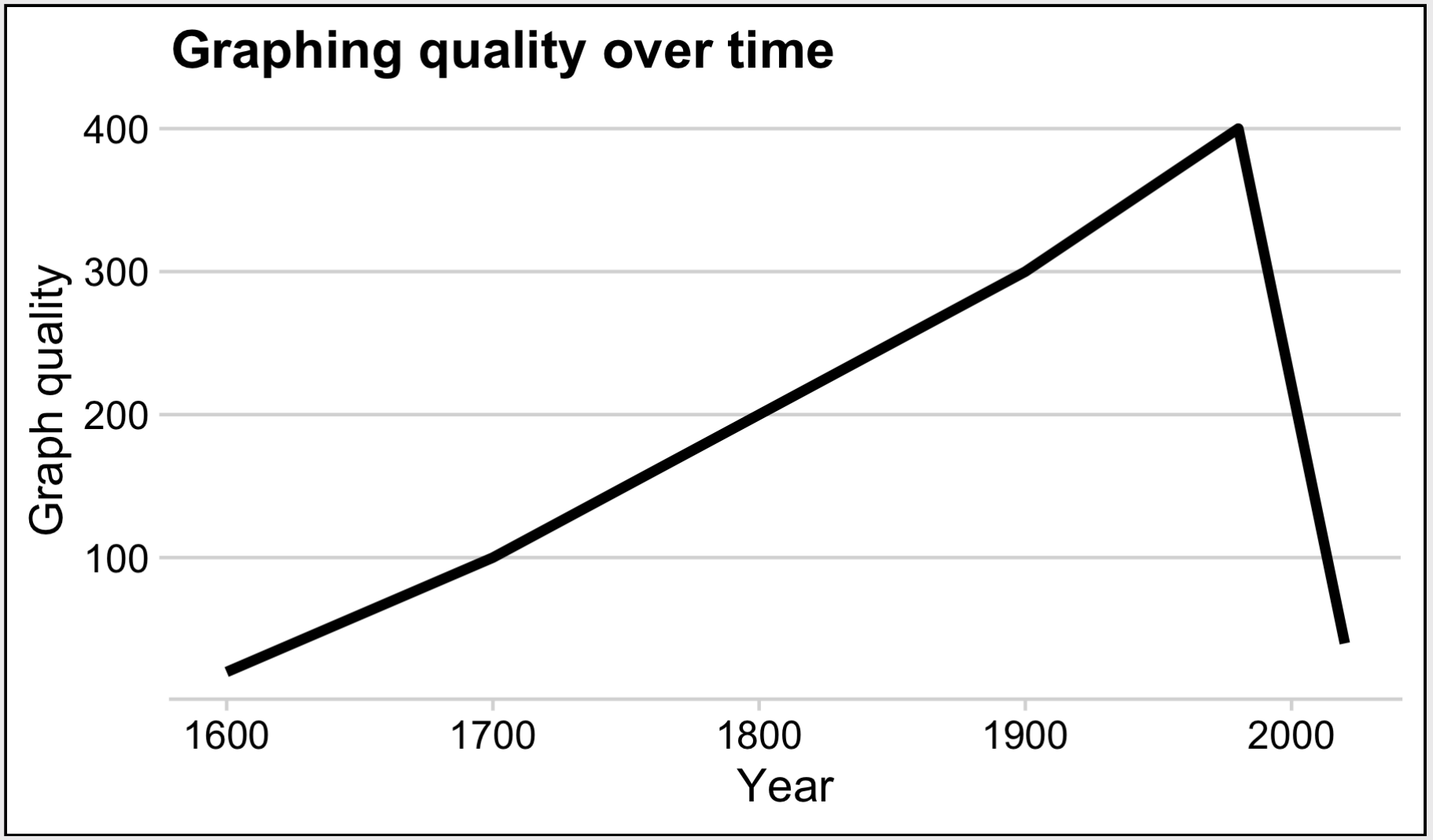
Visualizing Information

DTAIS Workshop

John Paul Helveston

July 12, 2022

Download this cheatsheet for today's content


Graphing quality over time
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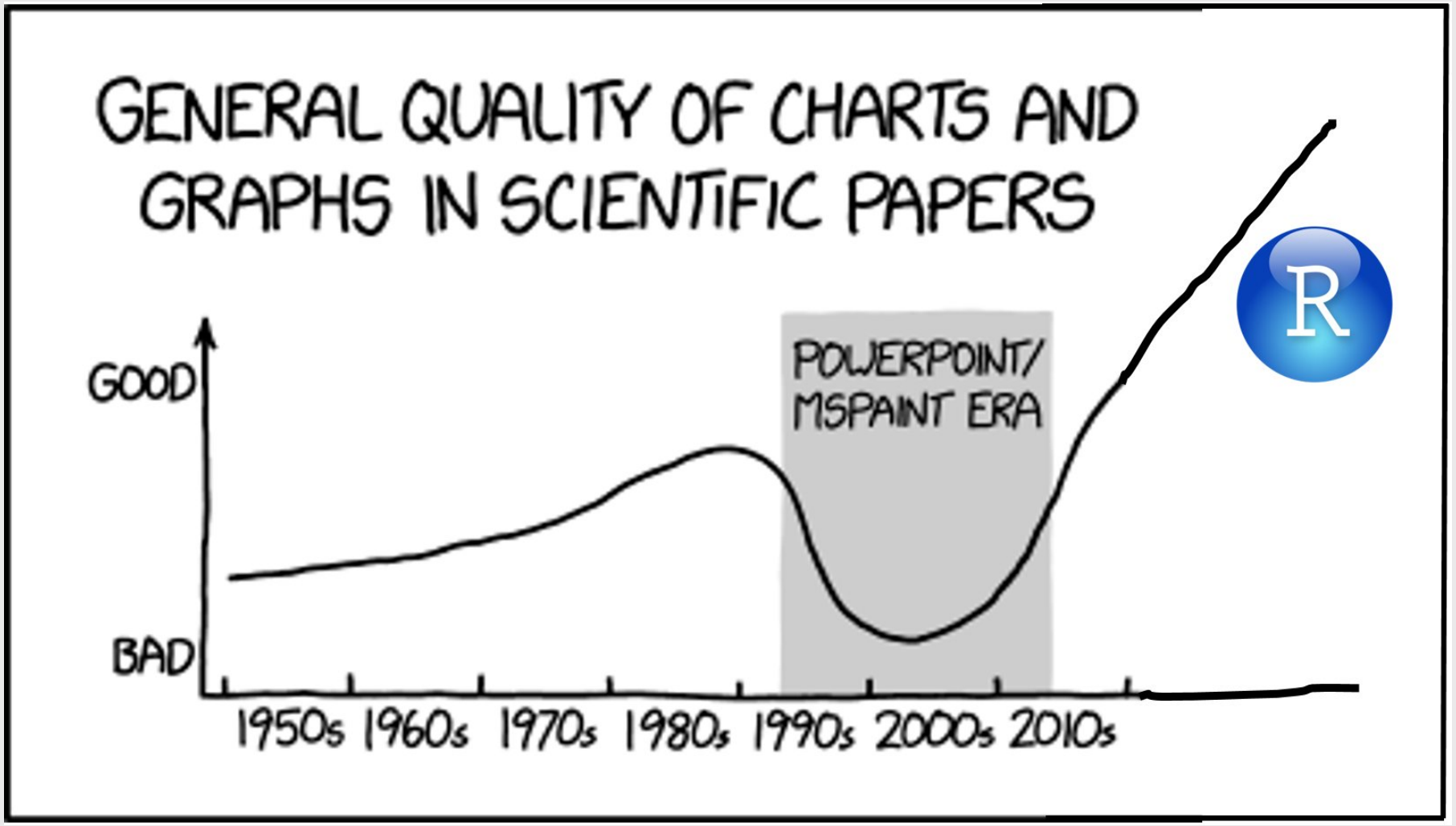
300
200
100
Graph quality
1600
1700
1800
1900
2000
Year


GENERAL QUALITY OF CHARTS AND GRAPHS IN SCIENTIFIC PAPERS
GOOD
BAD
POWERPOINT/ MSPAINT ERA
R
1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s 2010s

From here

"*Having word processing software doesn't make us great writers.*"

— Stephen Few

We don't write paragraphs like this

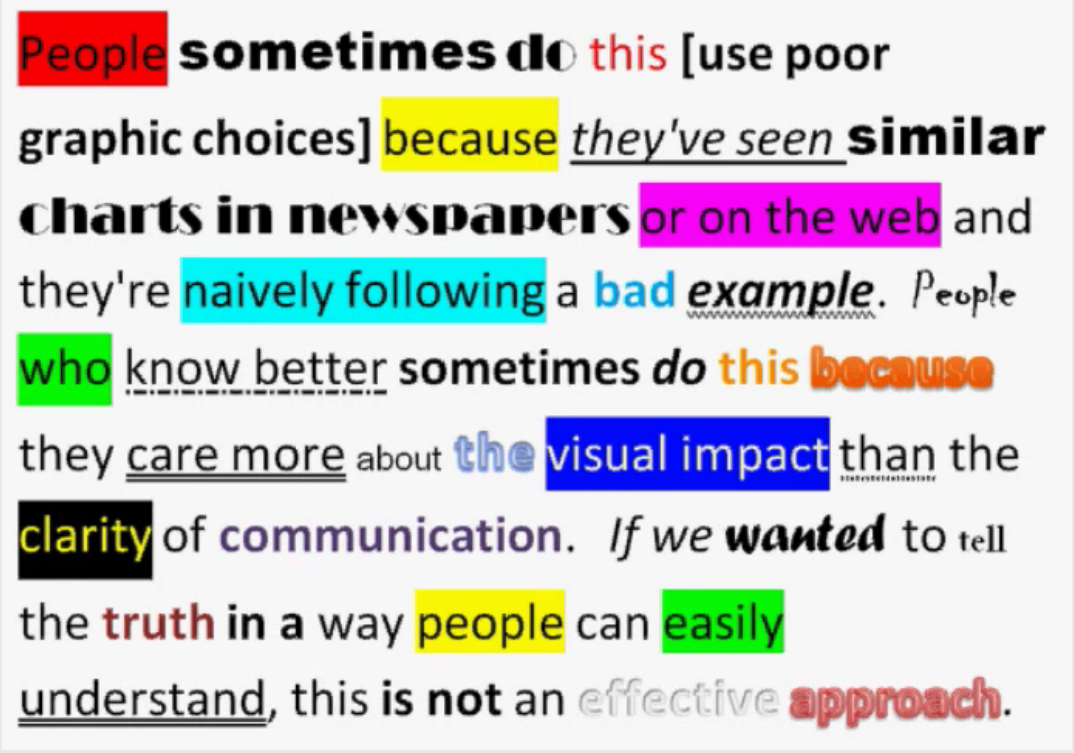


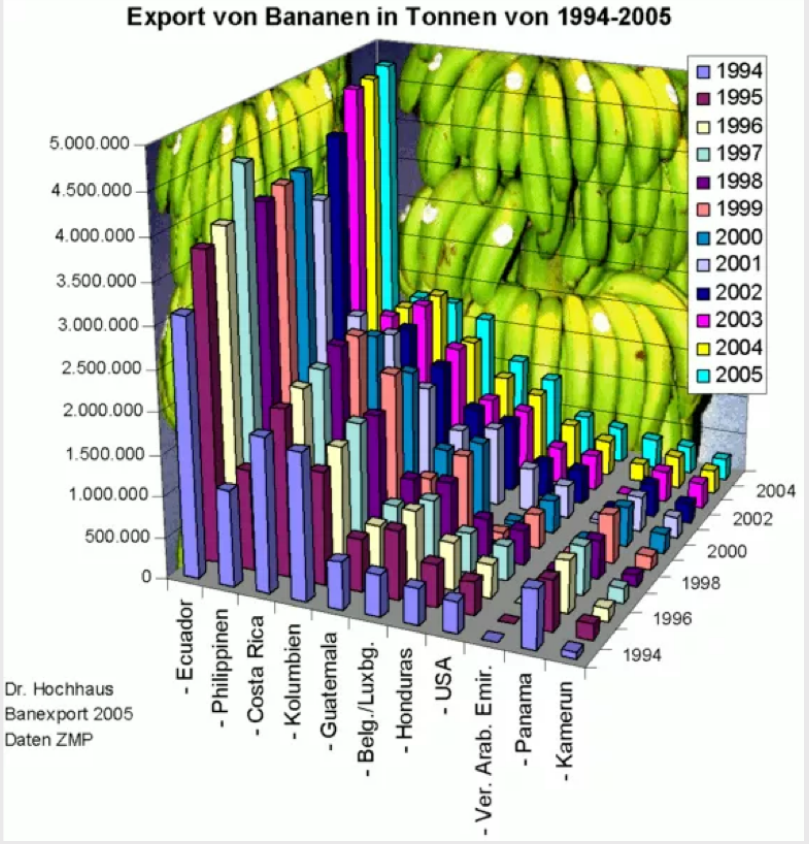
Image from Few (2012, pg. 227)

We don't write paragraphs like this

People sometimes do this [use poor graphic choices] because they've seen similar charts in newspapers or on the web and they're naively following a bad example. People who know better sometimes do this because they care more about the visual impact than the clarity of communication. If we wanted to tell the truth in a way people can easily understand, this is not an effective approach.

Image from Few (2012, pg. 227)

So don't make graphs like this



Visualizing Information

1. The Human Visual-Memory System

2. The Psychology of Data Viz

BREAK

3. 10 Data Viz Best Practices

Visualizing Information

1. The Human Visual-Memory System
2. The Psychology of Data Viz

BREAK

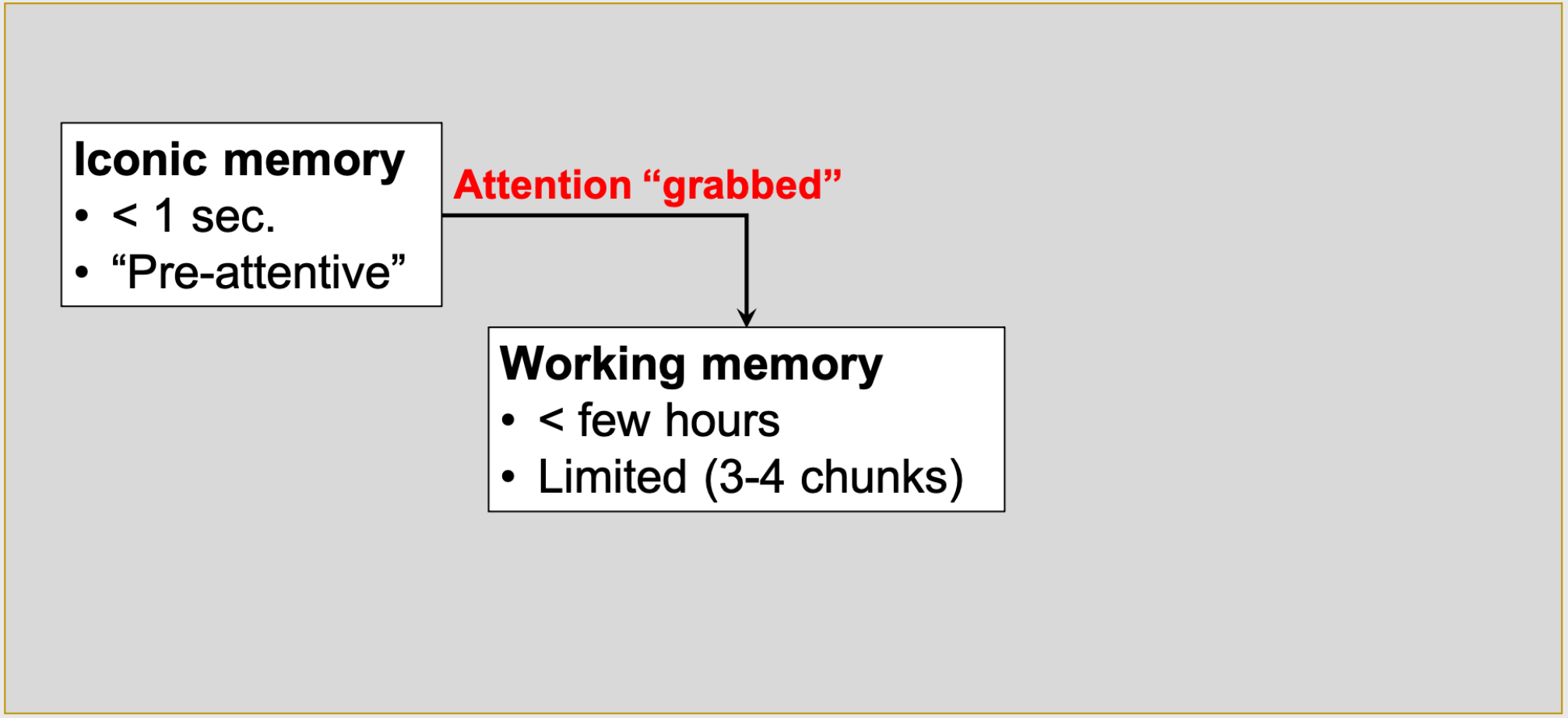
3. 10 Data Viz Best Practices

Good visualizations optimize for
the human visual-memory system

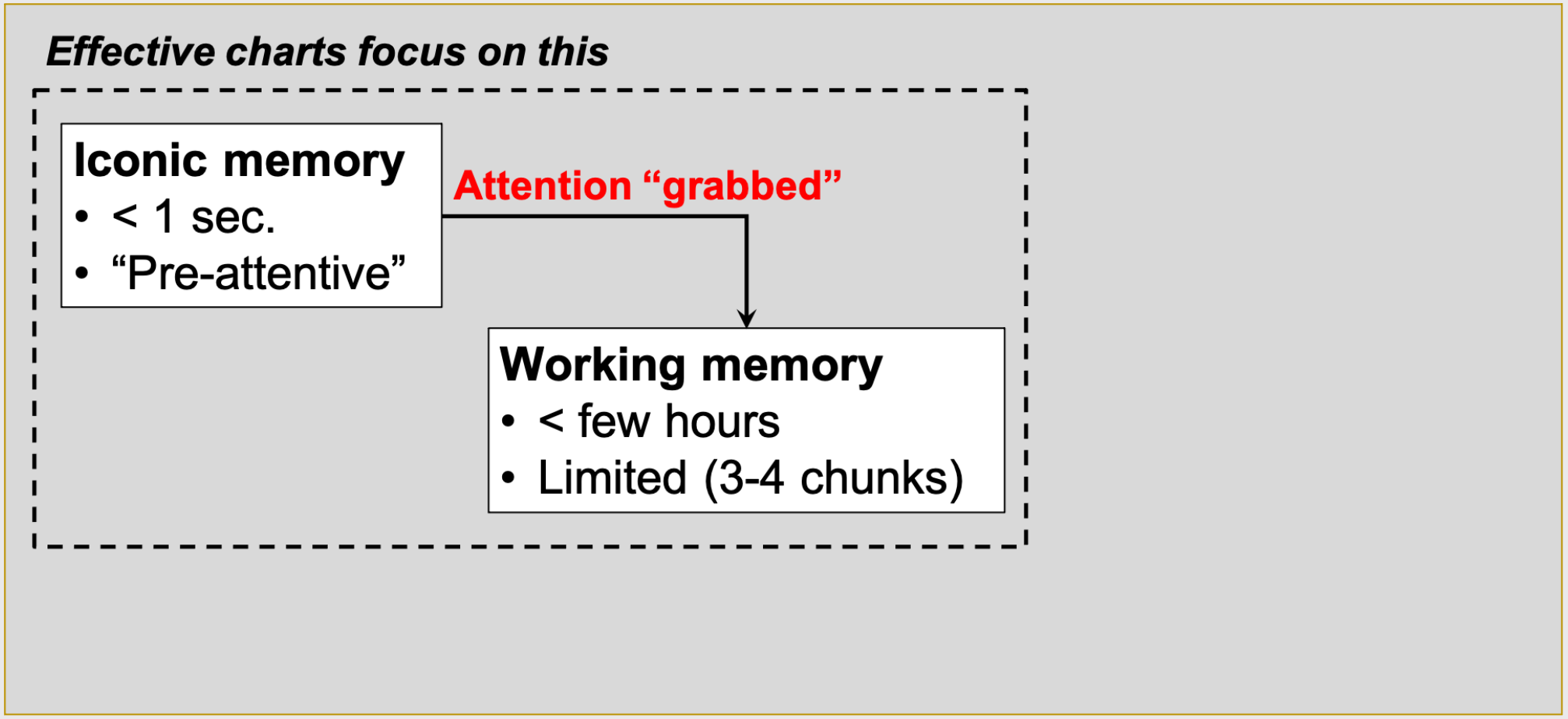
A (very) simplified model of the visual-memory system

Iconic memory
- < 1 sec.
- “Pre-attentive”

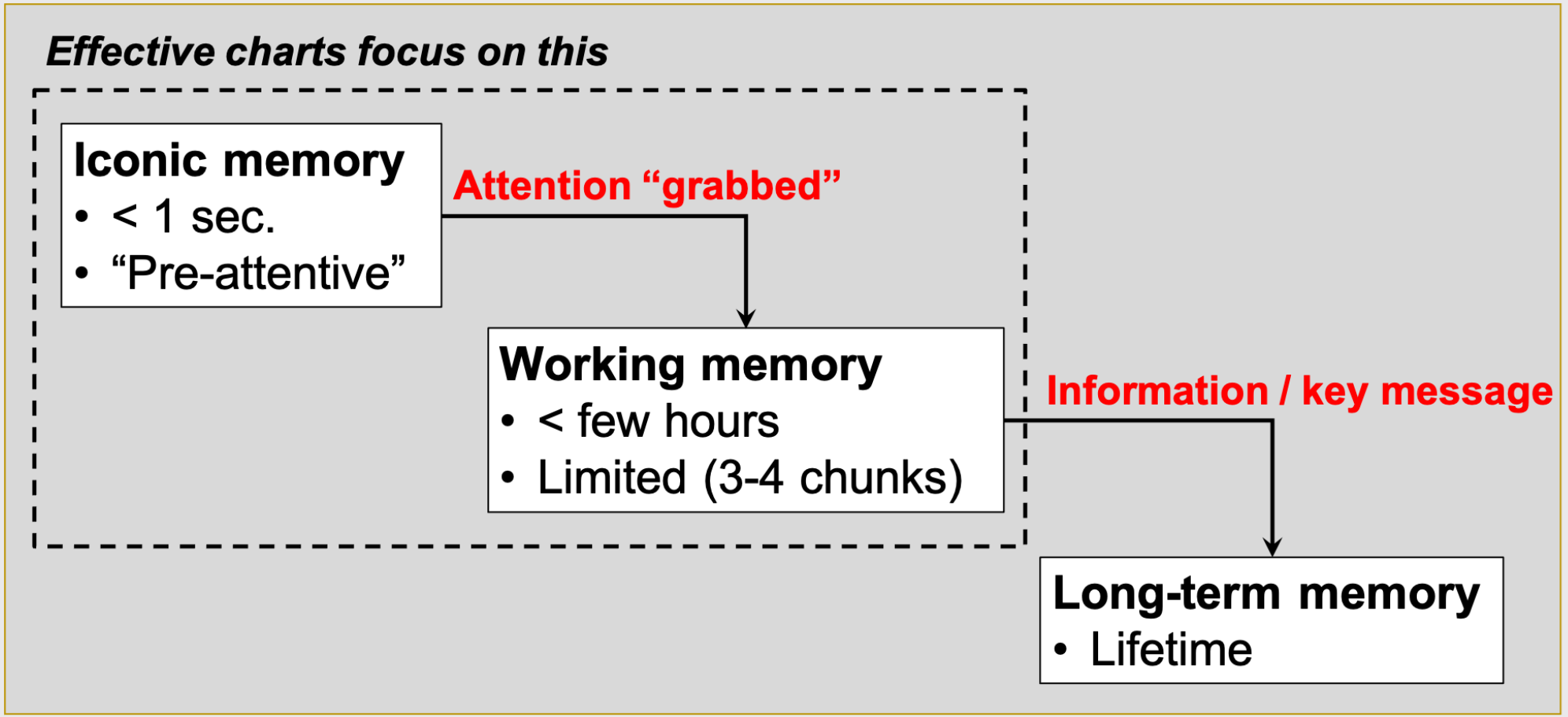
A (very) simplified model of the visual-memory system



A (very) simplified model of the visual-memory system



A (very) simplified model of the visual-memory system



Two objectives of effective charts:

1. Grab & direct attention (iconic memory)
2. Reduce processing demands (working memory)

The power of pre-attentive processing

Count all the "5"s

The power of pre-attentive processing

Count all the "5"s

```
82113490785641204361 2
30458964098170981273 4
12345098612479081273 4
02986019283740148936 3
12347982796120345981 6
23400981625690812763 4
12345908716234201523 7
12389478923749823019 2
```

The power of pre-attentive processing

Count all the "5s

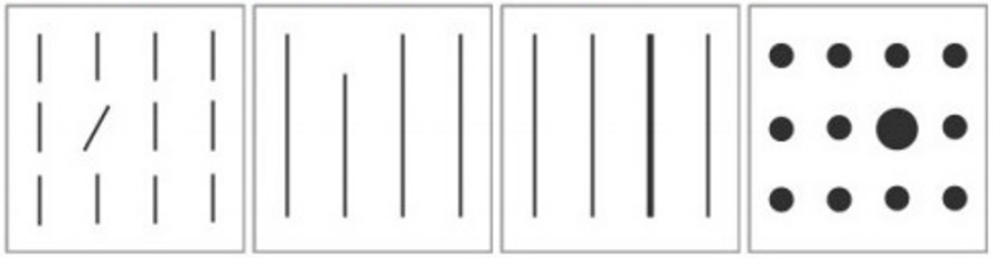
The power of pre-attentive processing

Count all the "5s

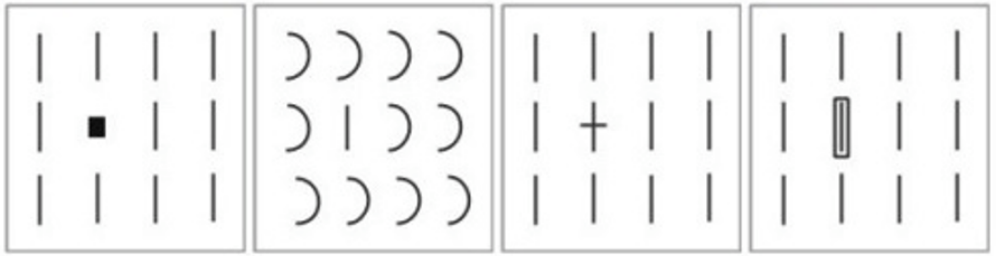
821134907856412043612
3045896409817098127 34
1234509861247908127 34
0298601928374014893 63
1234798279612034598 16
2340098162569081276 34
1234590871623420152 37
1238947892374982301 92

Form

Orientation | Line Length | Line Width | Size

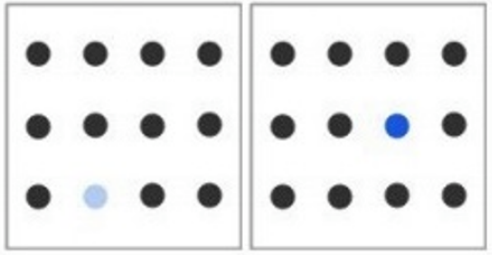


Shape | Curvature | Added Marks | Enclosure



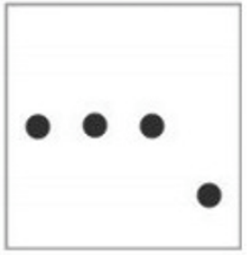
Color

Intensity | Hue

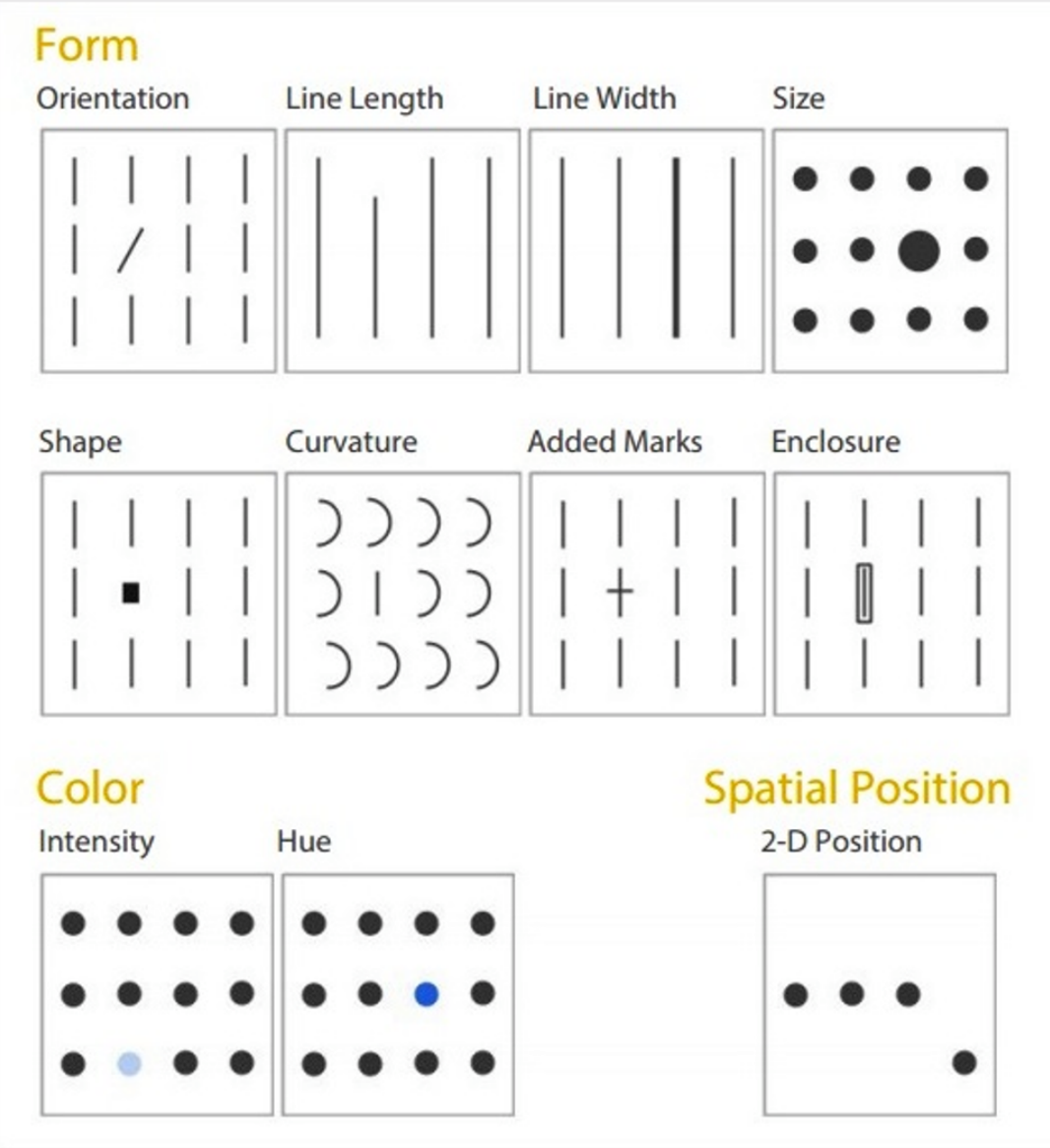


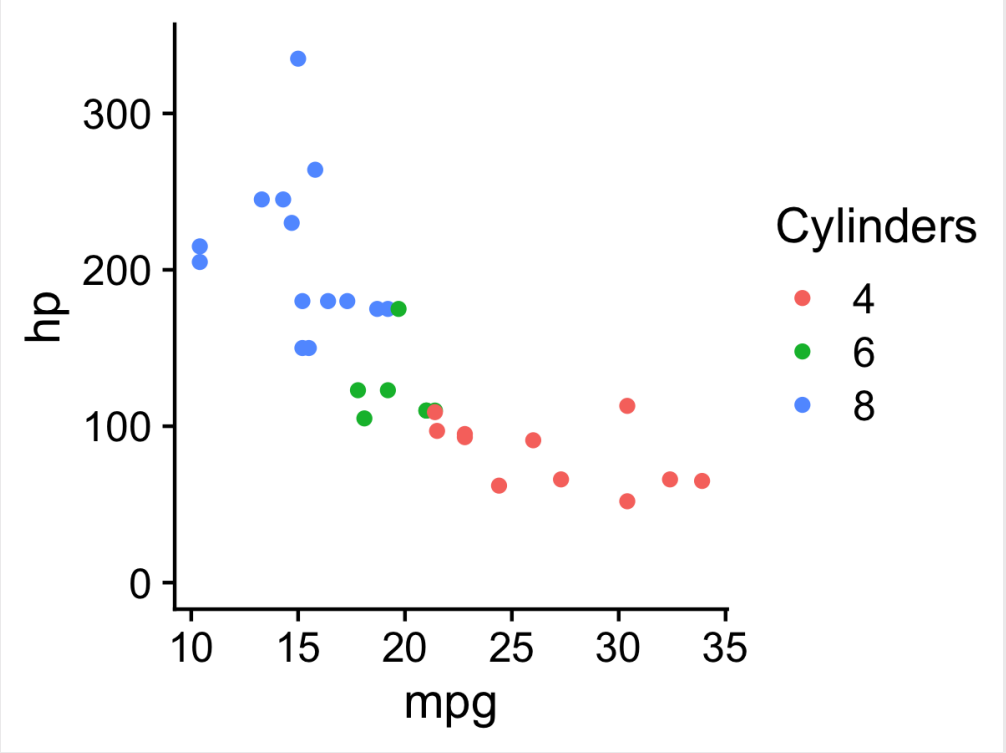
Spatial Position

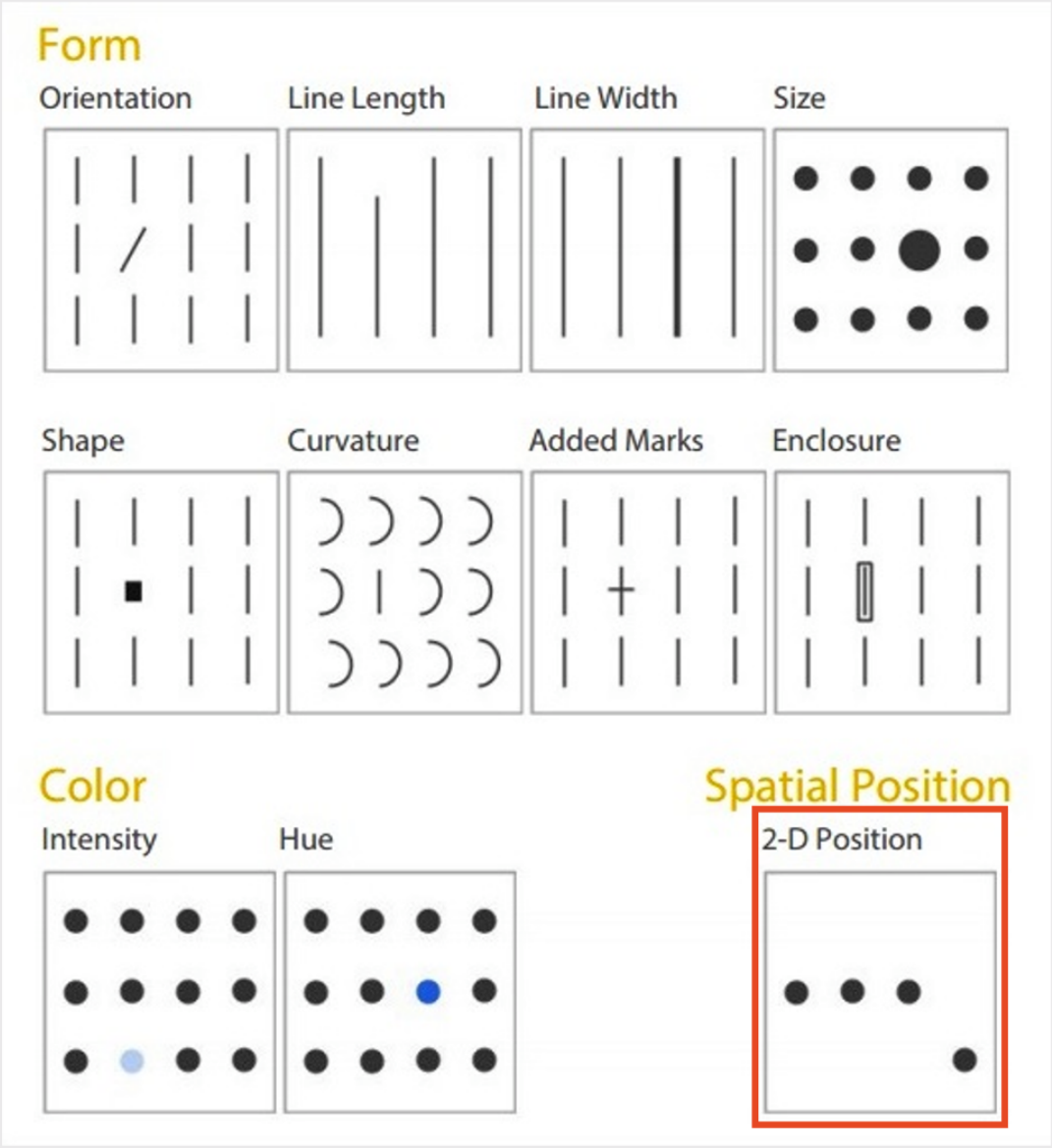
2-D Position



Pre-attentive attributes

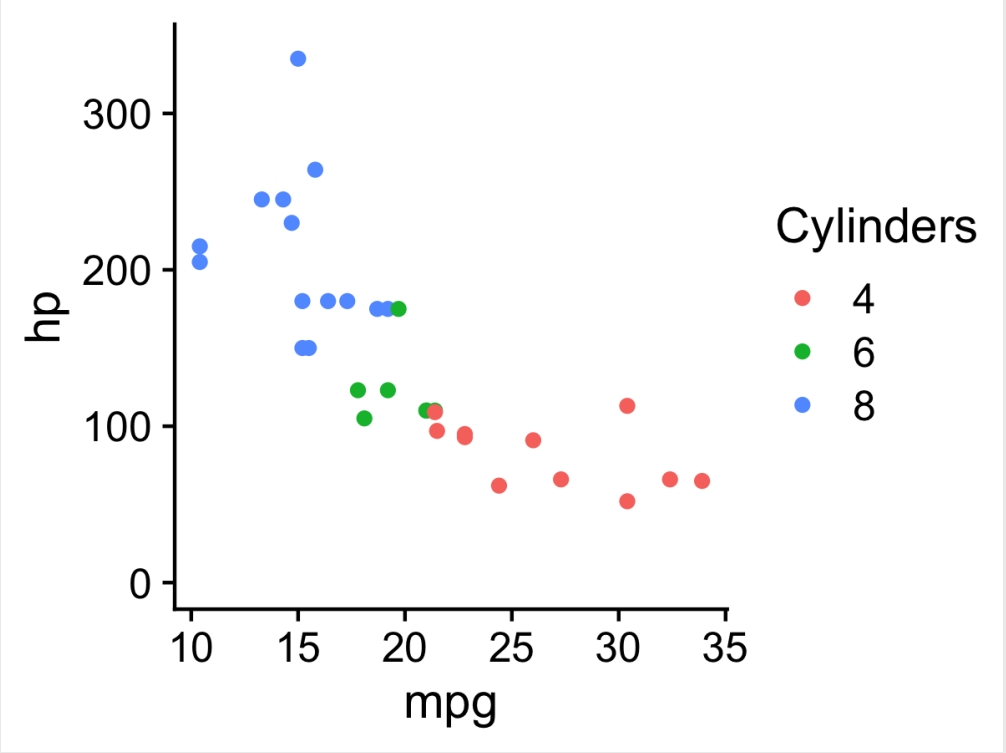


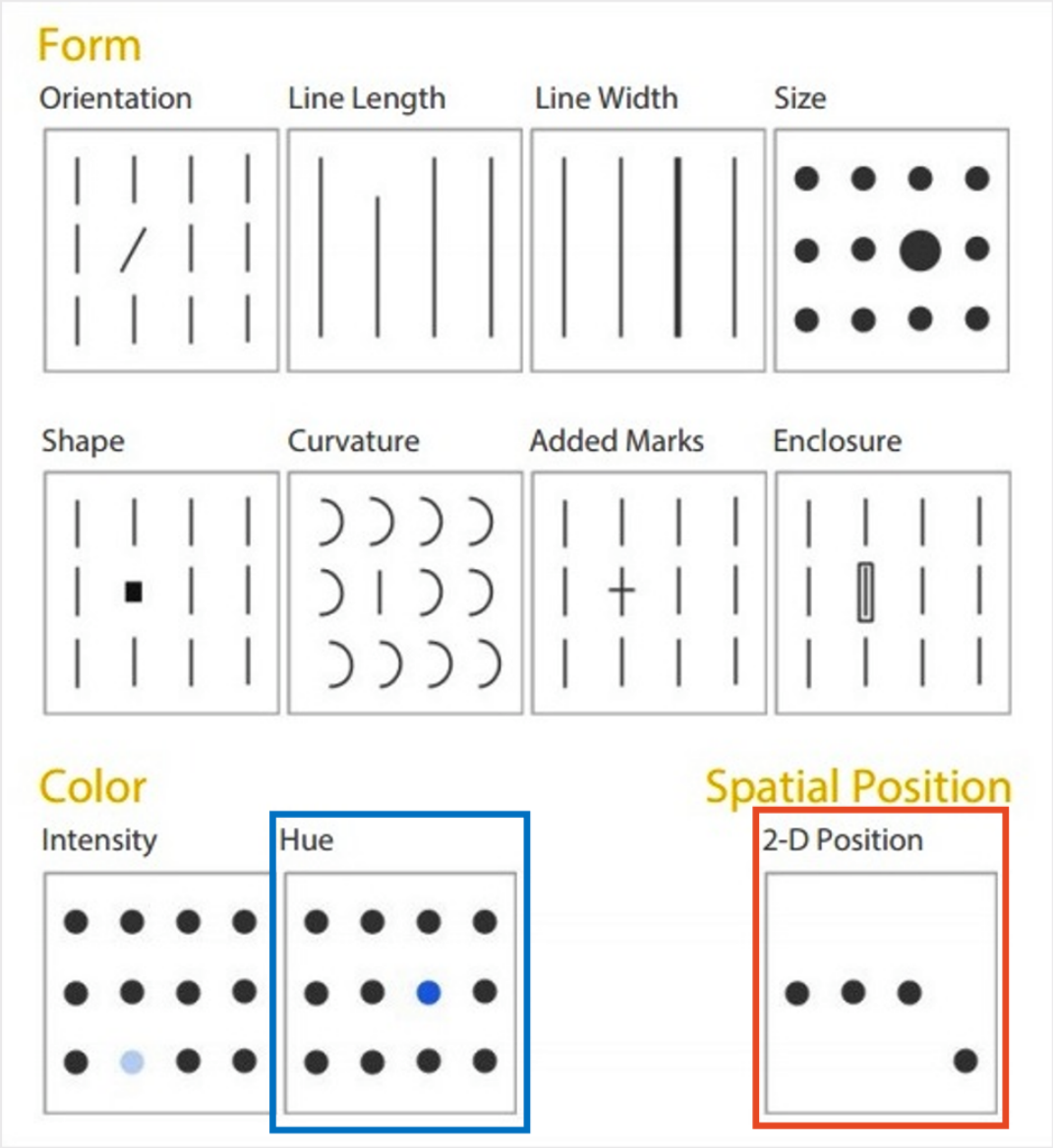




Pre-attentive attributes

Numerical (ratio) data

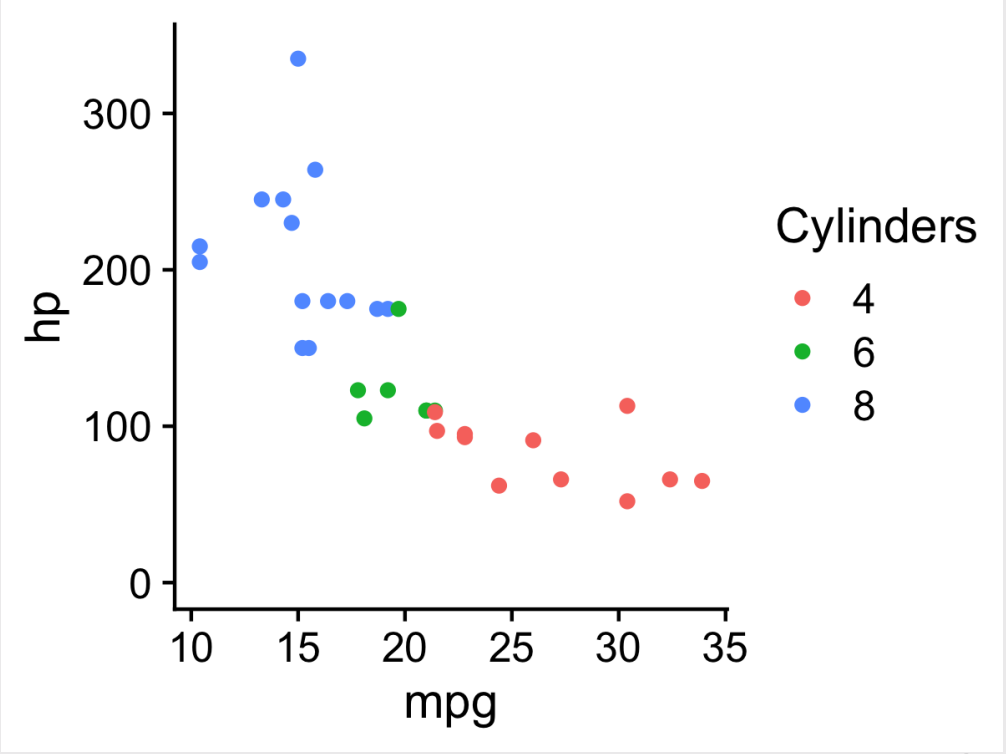




Pre-attentive attributes

Numerical (ratio) data

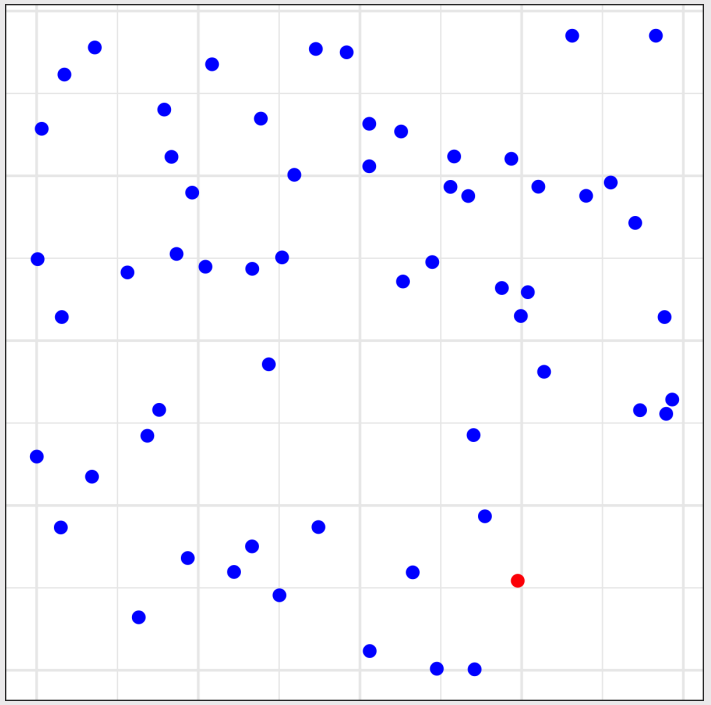
Categorical (ordinal) data



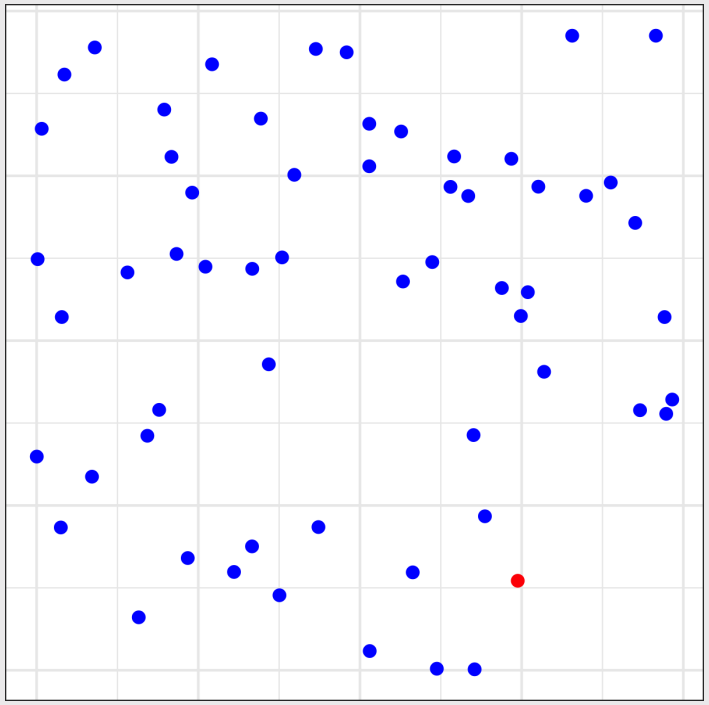
Not all pre-attentive attributes are equal

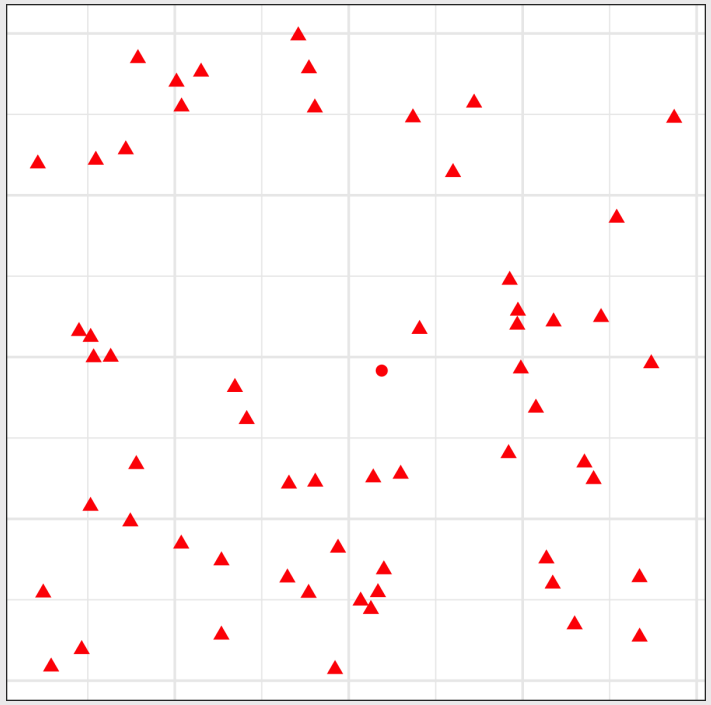
Where is the red dot?

Where is the red dot?

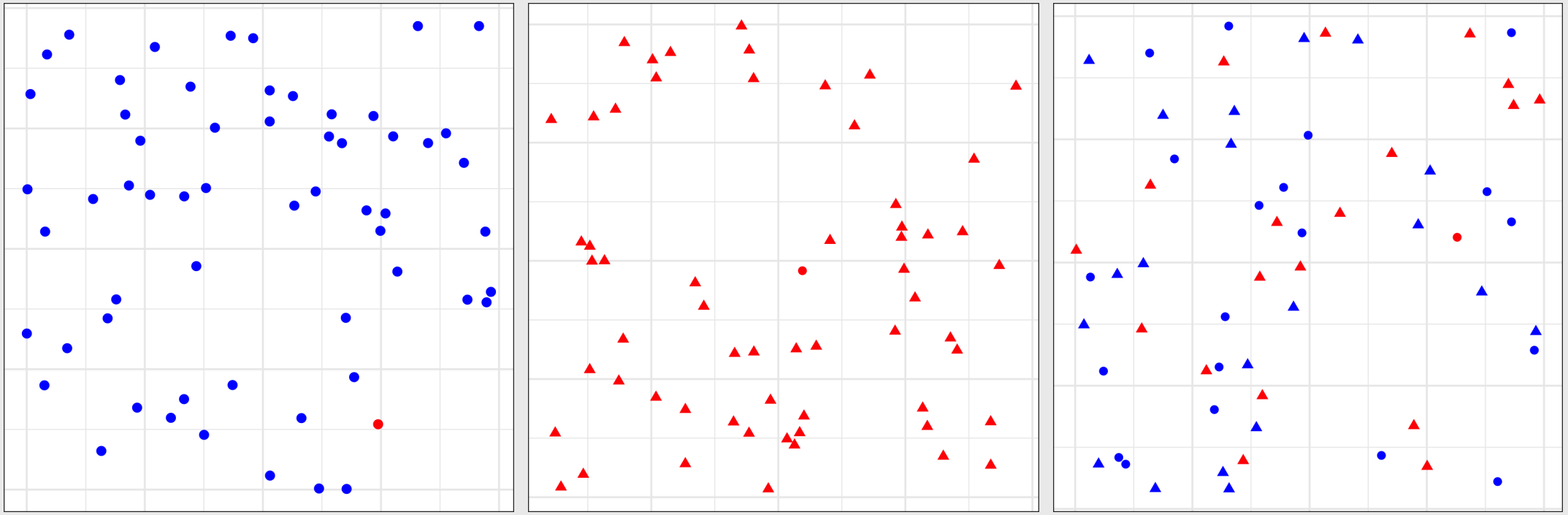


Where is the red dot?





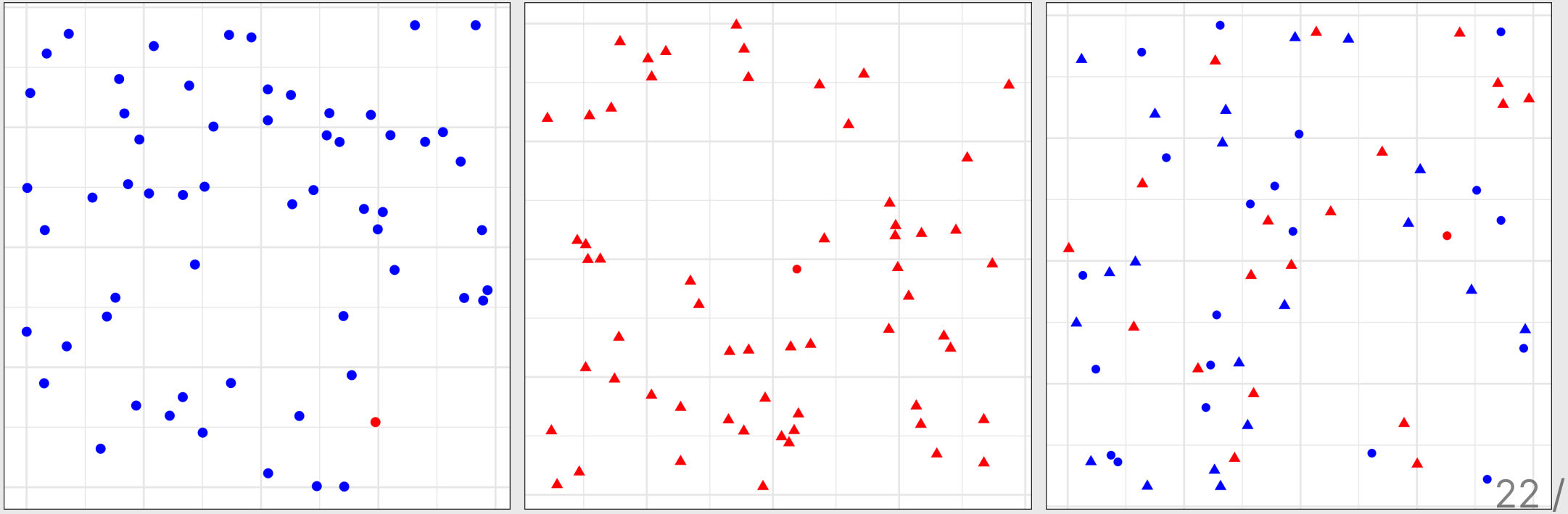
Where is the red dot?

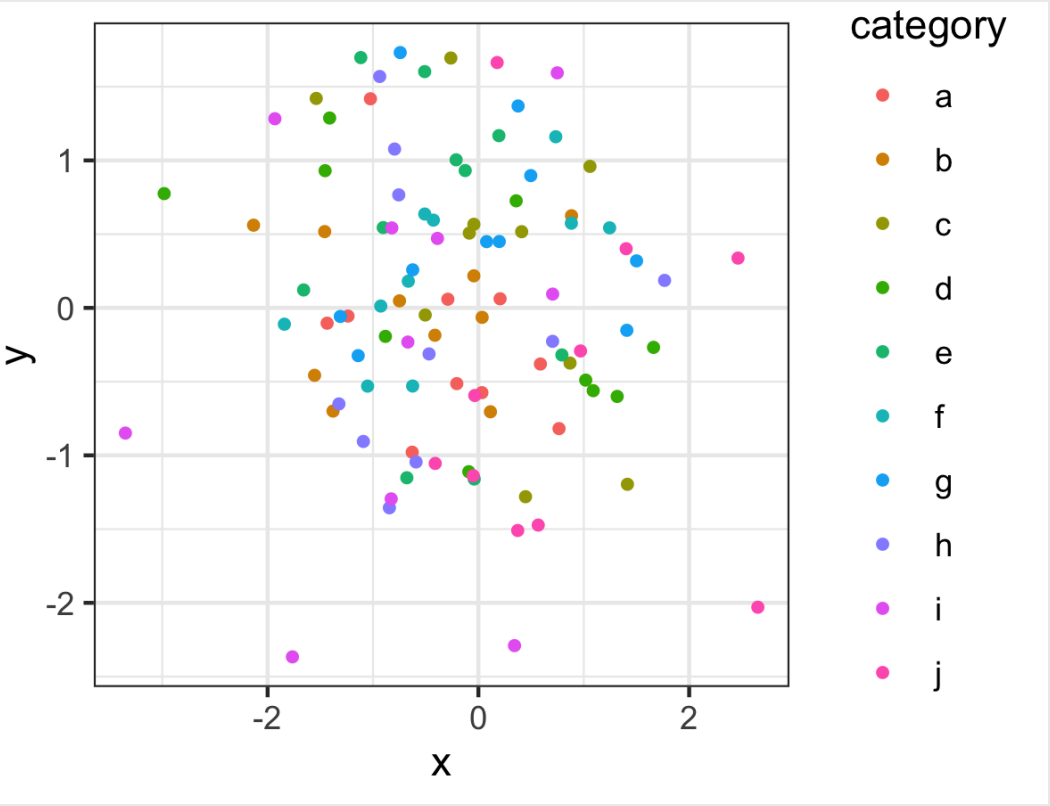


For categorical data:

1. Hue (color) > shape

2. Less is more (stay in working memory!)




category
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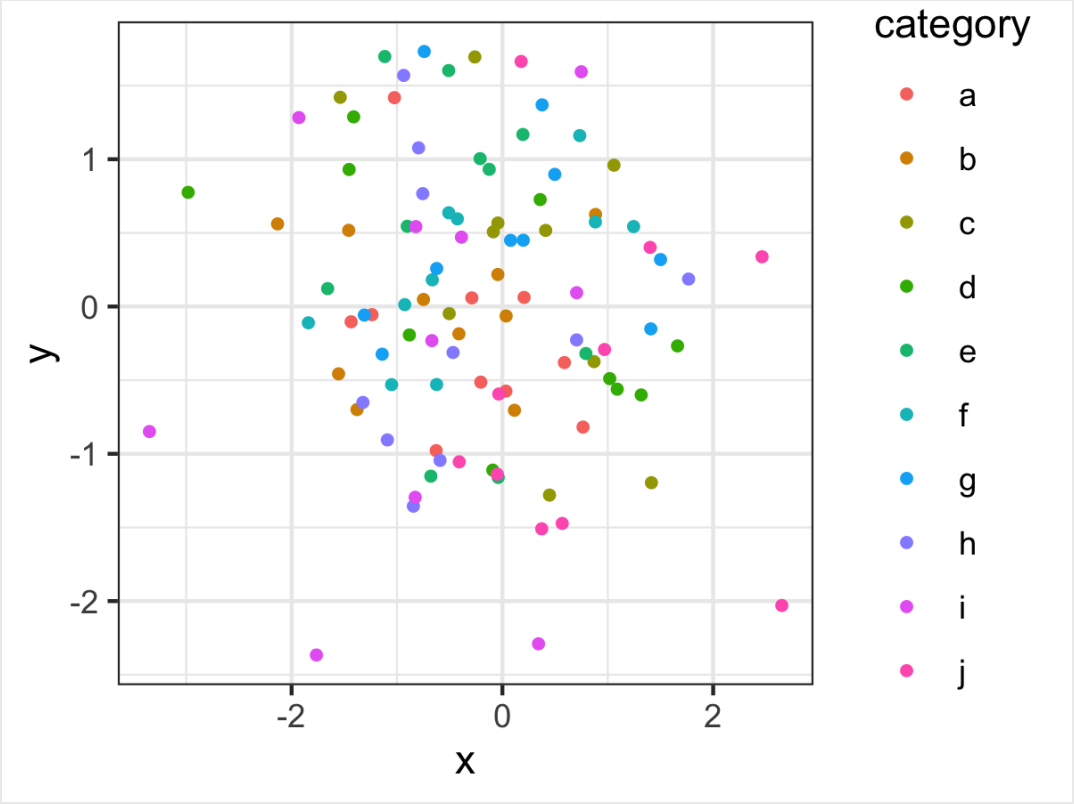
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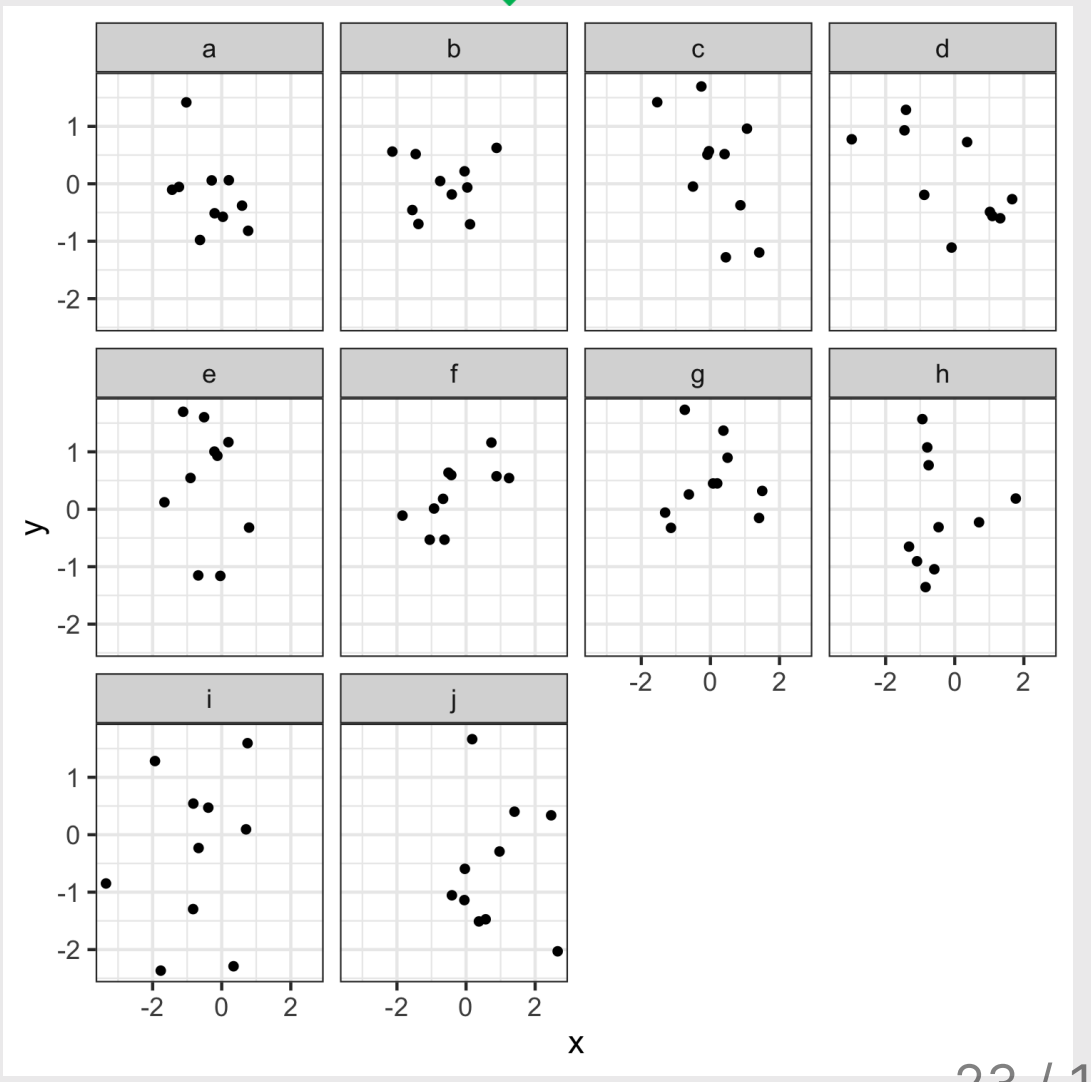
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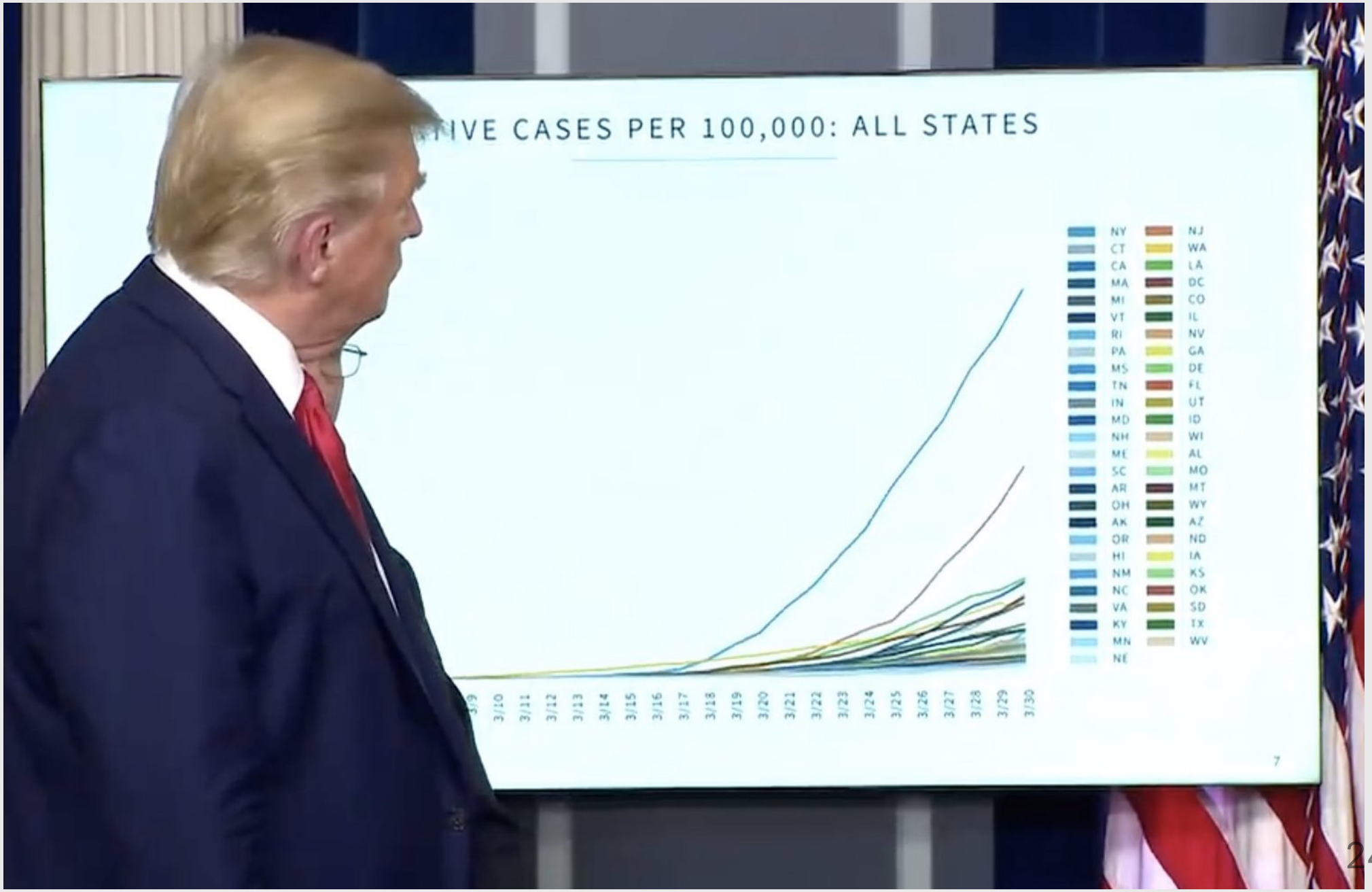
IVE CASES PER 100,000: ALL STATES
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7

Visualizing Information

1. The Human Visual-Memory System
2. The Psychology of Data Viz

BREAK

3. 10 Data Viz Best Practices

Much of the content in this section is from John Rauser's talk on YouTube

(Always cite your sources)

Graphical Perception and Graphical Methods for Analyzing Scientific Data

William S. Cleveland and Robert McGill

Summary. Graphical perception is the visual decoding of the quantitative and qualitative information encoded on graphs. Recent investigations have uncovered basic principles of human graphical perception that have important implications for the display of data. The computer graphics revolution has stimulated the invention of many graphical methods for analyzing and presenting scientific data, such as box plots, two-tiered error bars, scatterplot smoothing, dot charts, and graphing on a log base 2 scale.

Graphs provide powerful tools both for analyzing scientific data and for communicating quantitative information. The computer graphics revolution, which began in the 1960's and has intensified during the past several years, stimulated the invention of graphical methods: types of graphs and types of quantitative information to be shown on graphs (*1–4*). One purpose of this article is to describe and illustrate several of these new methods.

What has been missing, until recently, in this period of rapid graphical invention and deployment is the study of graphs and the human visual system. When a graph is constructed, quantitative and categorical information is encoded, chiefly through position, shape, size, symbols, and color. When a person looks at a graph, the information is visually decoded by the person's visual sys-

mation from graphs; theory and experimental data are then used to order the tasks on the basis of accuracy. The ordering has an important application: data should be encoded so that the visual decoding involves tasks as high in the ordering as possible, that is, tasks performed with greater accuracy. This is illustrated by several examples in which some much-used graphical forms are presented, set aside, and replaced by new methods.

Elementary Tasks for the Graphical Perception of Quantitative Information

The first step is to identify elementary graphical-perception tasks that are used to visually extract quantitative information from a graph. (By "quantitative information" we mean numerical values

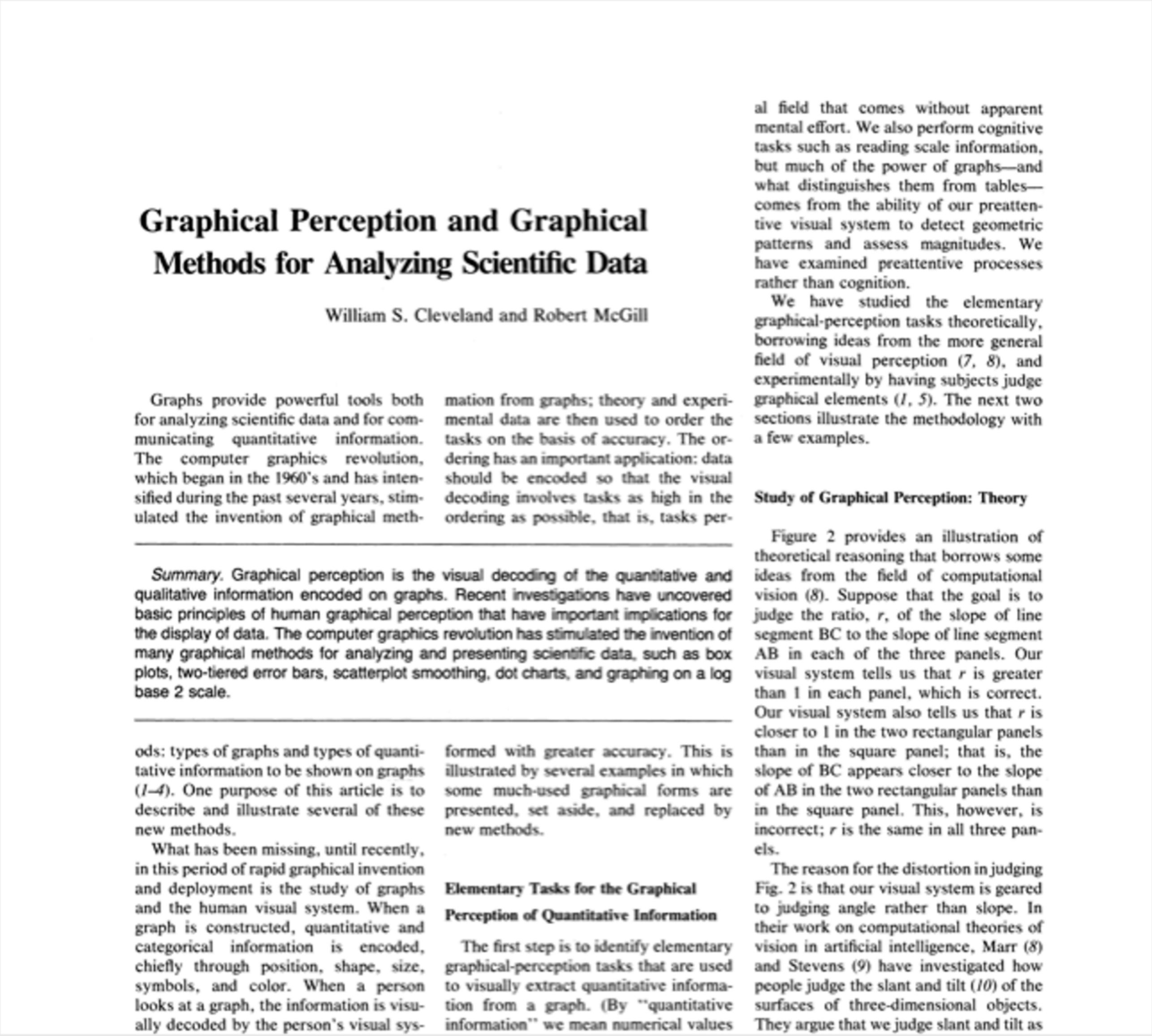
al field that comes without apparent mental effort. We also perform cognitive tasks such as reading scale information, but much of the power of graphs—and what distinguishes them from tables—comes from the ability of our preattentive visual system to detect geometric patterns and assess magnitudes. We have examined preattentive processes rather than cognition.

We have studied the elementary graphical-perception tasks theoretically, borrowing ideas from the more general field of visual perception (*7*, *8*), and experimentally by having subjects judge graphical elements (*1*, *5*). The next two sections illustrate the methodology with a few examples.

Study of Graphical Perception: Theory

Figure 2 provides an illustration of theoretical reasoning that borrows some ideas from the field of computational vision (*8*). Suppose that the goal is to judge the ratio, r, of the slope of line segment BC to the slope of line segment AB in each of the three panels. Our visual system tells us that r is greater than 1 in each panel, which is correct. Our visual system also tells us that r is closer to 1 in the two rectangular panels than in the square panel; that is, the slope of BC appears closer to the slope of AB in the two rectangular panels than in the square panel. This, however, is incorrect; r is the same in all three panels.

The reason for the distortion in judging Fig. 2 is that our visual system is geared to judging angle rather than slope. In their work on computational theories of vision in artificial intelligence, Marr (*8*) and Stevens (*9*) have investigated how people judge the slant and tilt (*10*) of the surfaces of three-dimensional objects. They argue that we judge slant and tilt as



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Cleveland, W. S., & McGill, R. (1985). Graphical perception and graphical methods for analyzing scientific data. Science, New Series, 229(4716), 828-833.

Cleveland's operations of pattern perception:

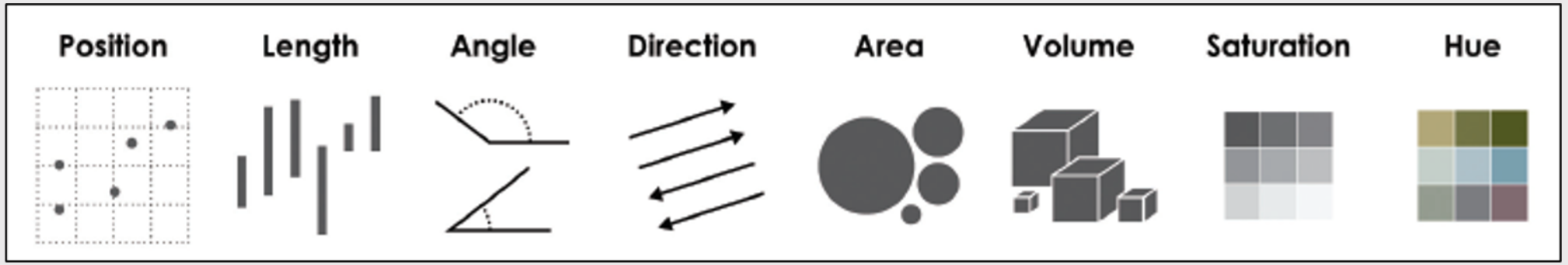
1. Estimation
2. Assembly
3. Detection

Cleveland's operations of pattern perception:

1. Estimation -------->
2. Assembly
3. Detection

- **Discrimination** (X equal to Y?)
- **Ranking** (X greater than Y?)
- **Ratioing** (X double Y?)

Estimation: Hierarchy for *numerical* data



More Accurate

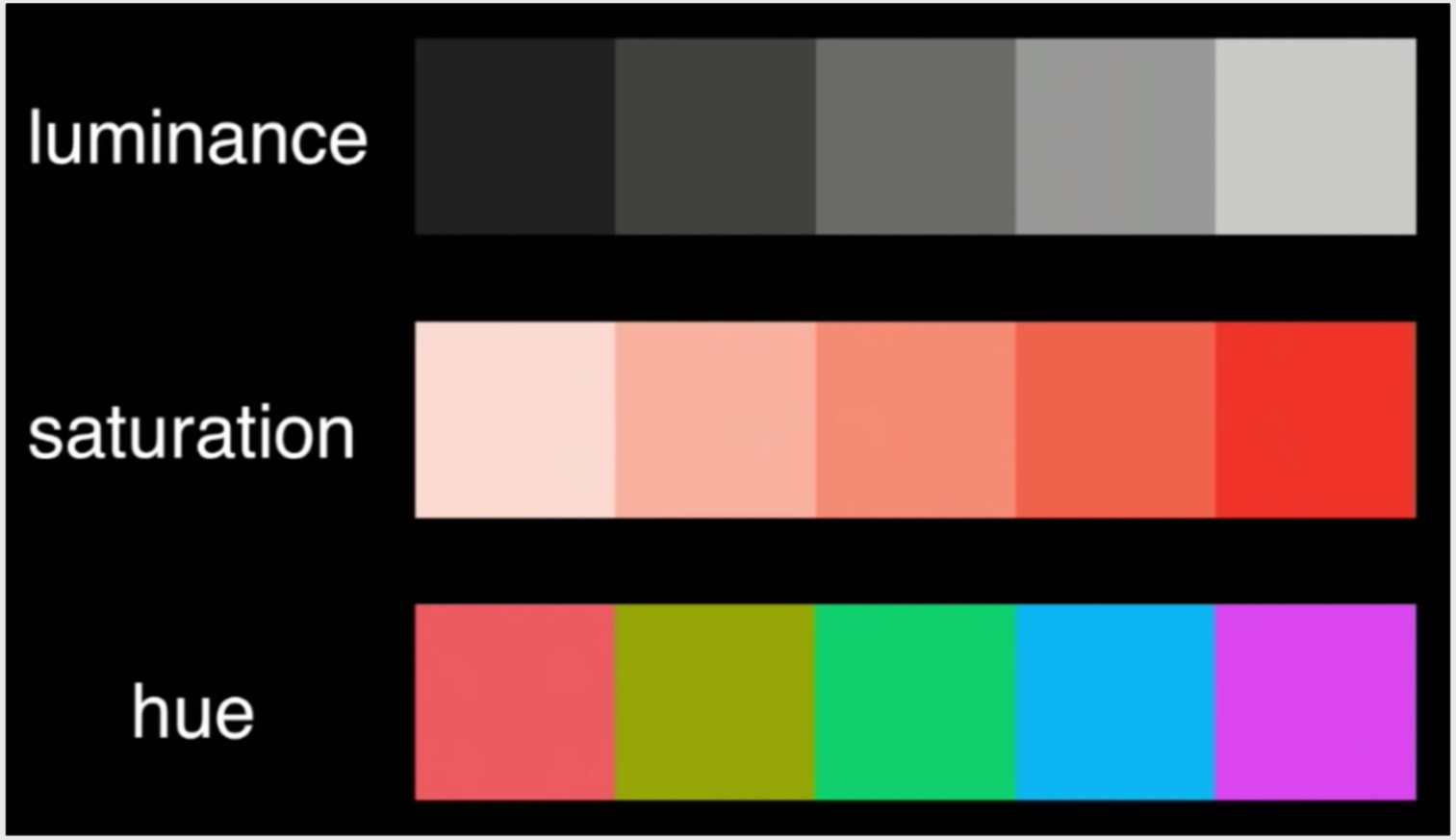
Less Accurate

Example: Life expectancy in countries in Asia

```
#>              country lifeExp
#> 1        Afghanistan  43.828
#> 2               Iraq  59.545
#> 3           Cambodia  59.723
#> 4            Myanmar  62.069
#> 5        Yemen, Rep.  62.698
#> 6              Nepal  63.785
#> 7         Bangladesh  64.062
#> 8              India  64.698
#> 9           Pakistan  65.483
#> 10          Mongolia  66.803
#> 11  Korea, Dem. Rep.  67.297
#> 12           Thailand  70.616
#> 13          Indonesia  70.650
#> 14               Iran  70.964
#> 15        Philippines  71.688
#> 16            Lebanon  71.993
#> 17             Jordan  72.535
#> 18       Saudi Arabia  72.777
#> 19              China  72.961
```

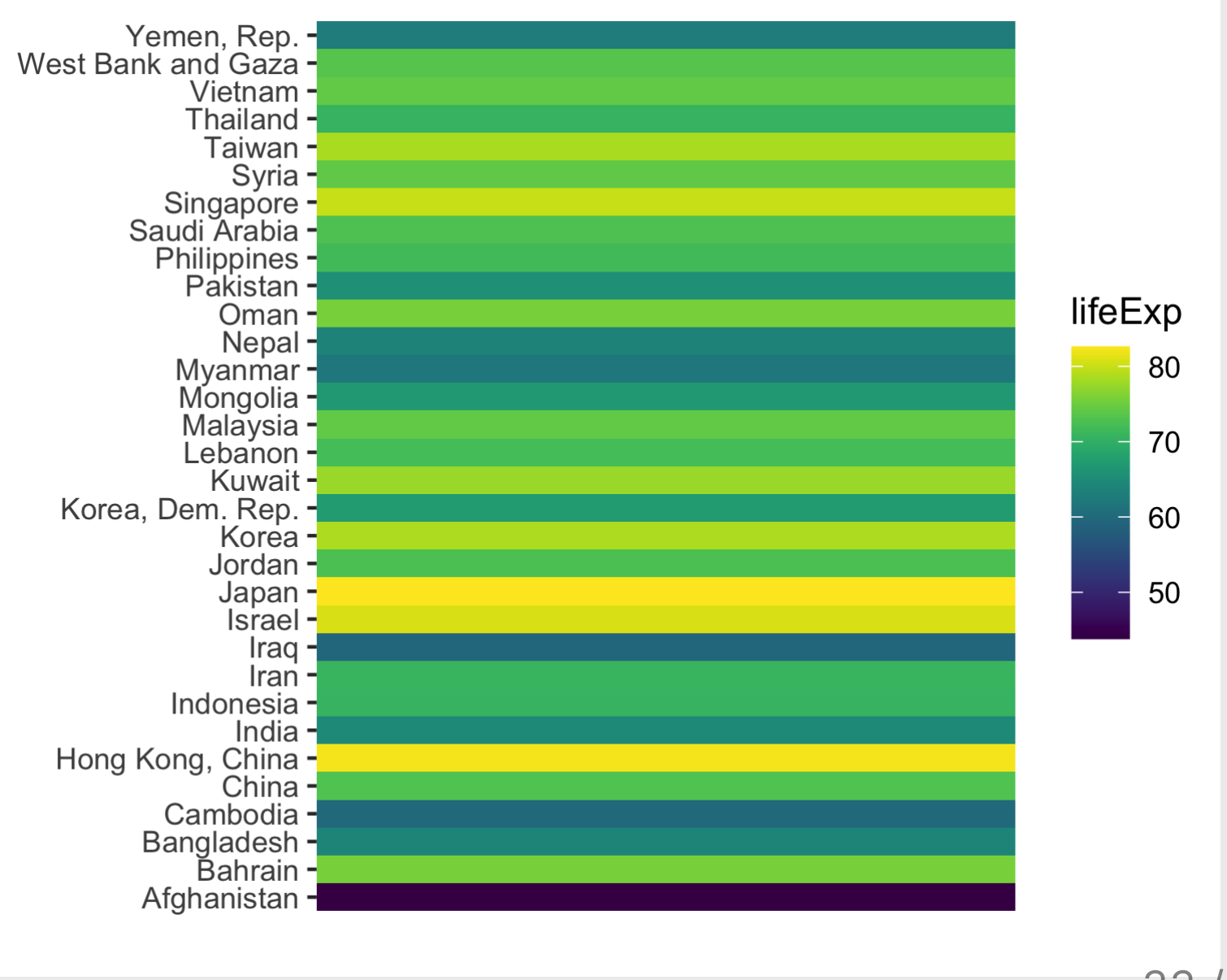
1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. **Color hue**

1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. **Color hue**



1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. **Color hue**

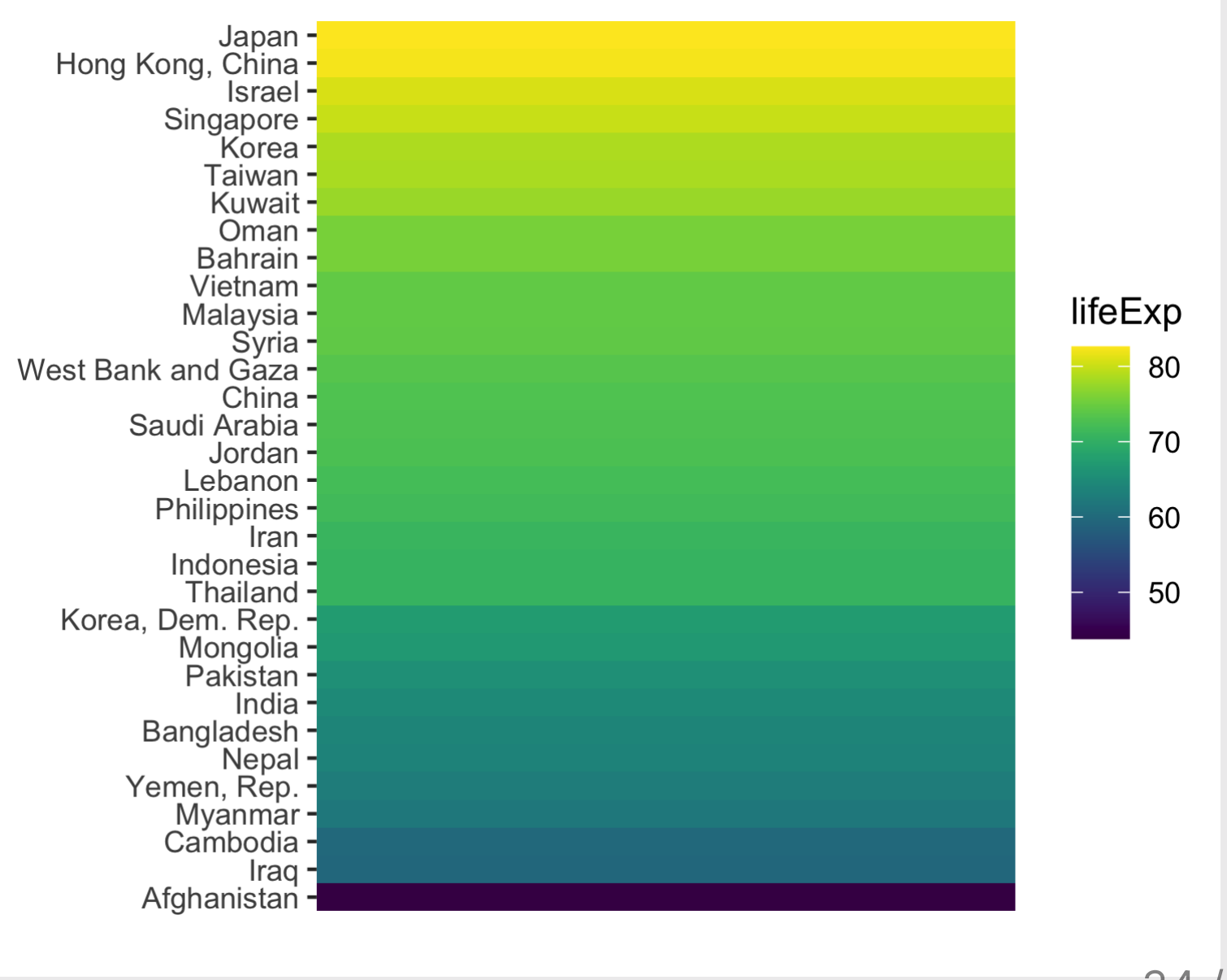
- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ / ❌ **Rank**
- ❌ **Ratio**



1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. **Color hue**

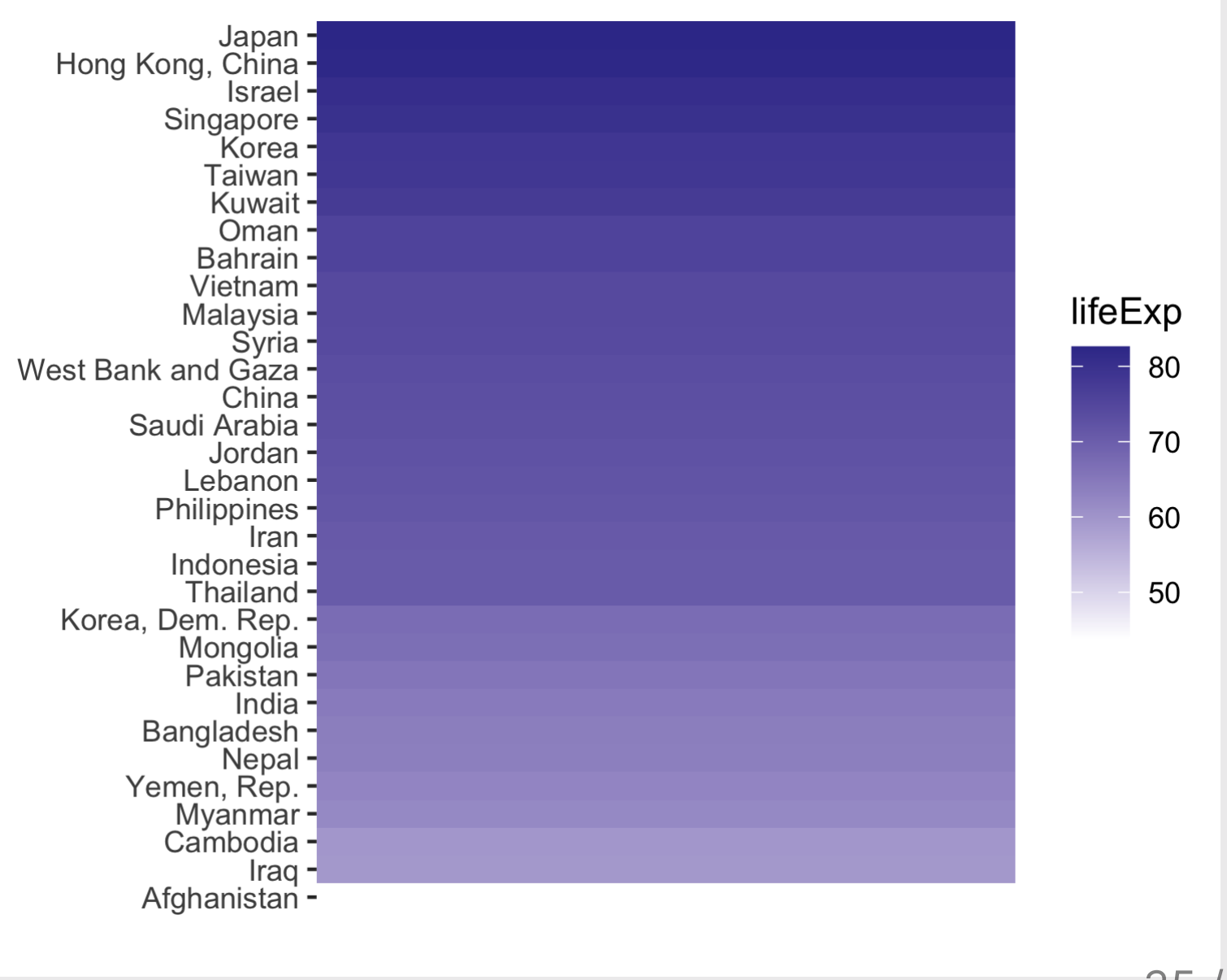
Sorting helps a bit...

- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ / ❌ **Rank**
- ❌ **Ratio**



1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. **Color saturation**
7. Color hue

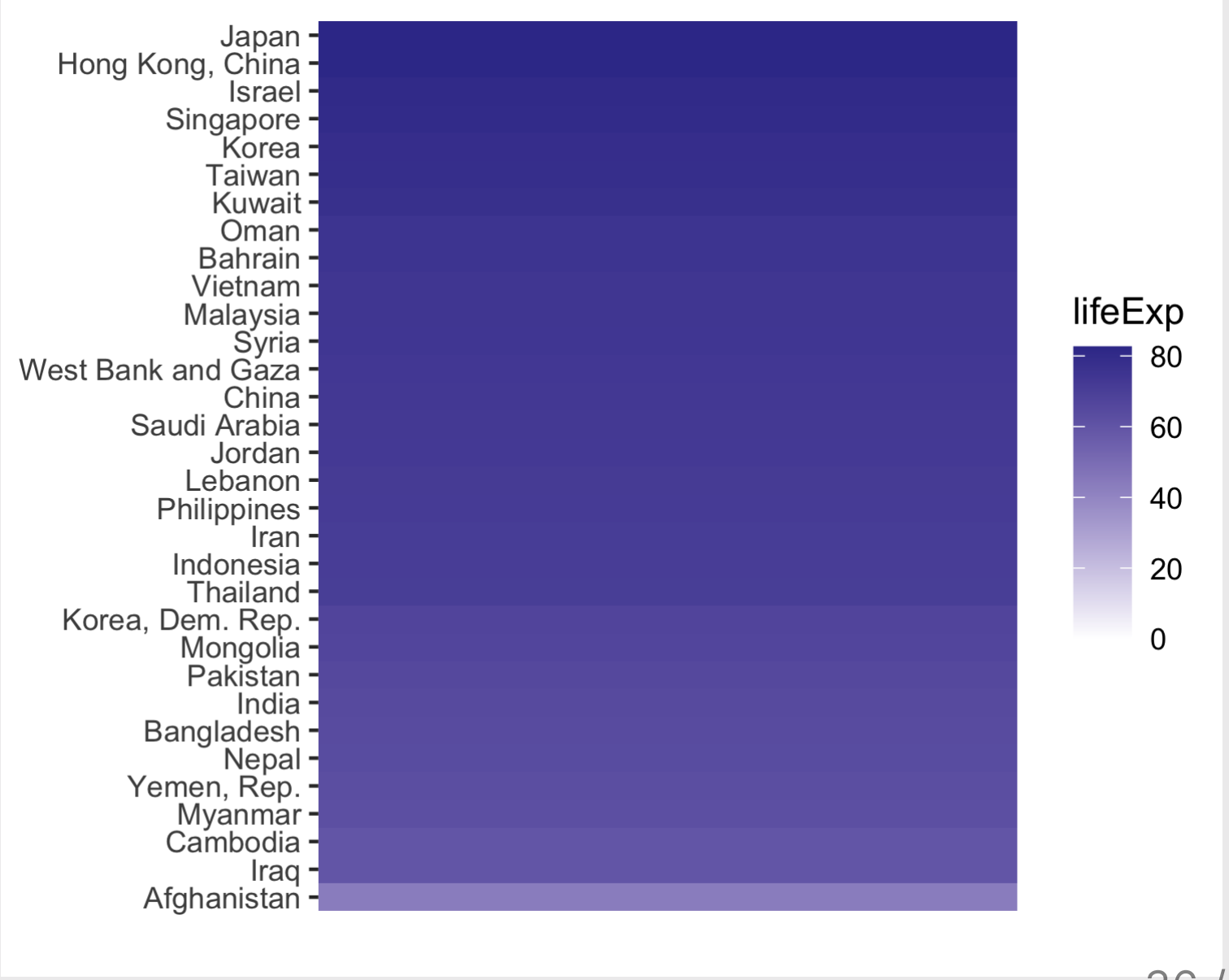
- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ / ❌ **Rank**
- ❌ **Ratio**



1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. **Color saturation**
7. Color hue

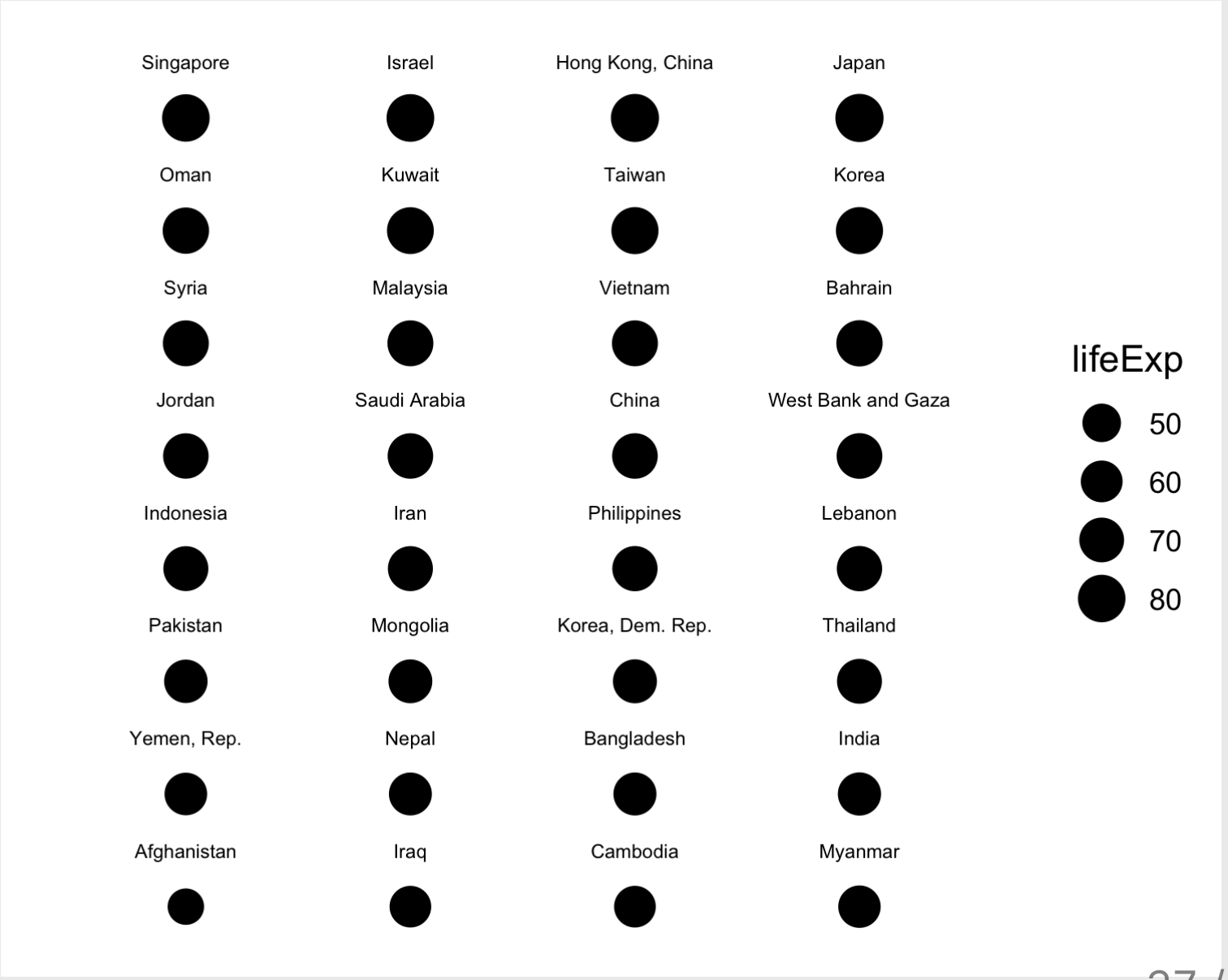
Align to 0 scale:

- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ / ❌ **Rank**
- ✅ / ❌ **Ratio**



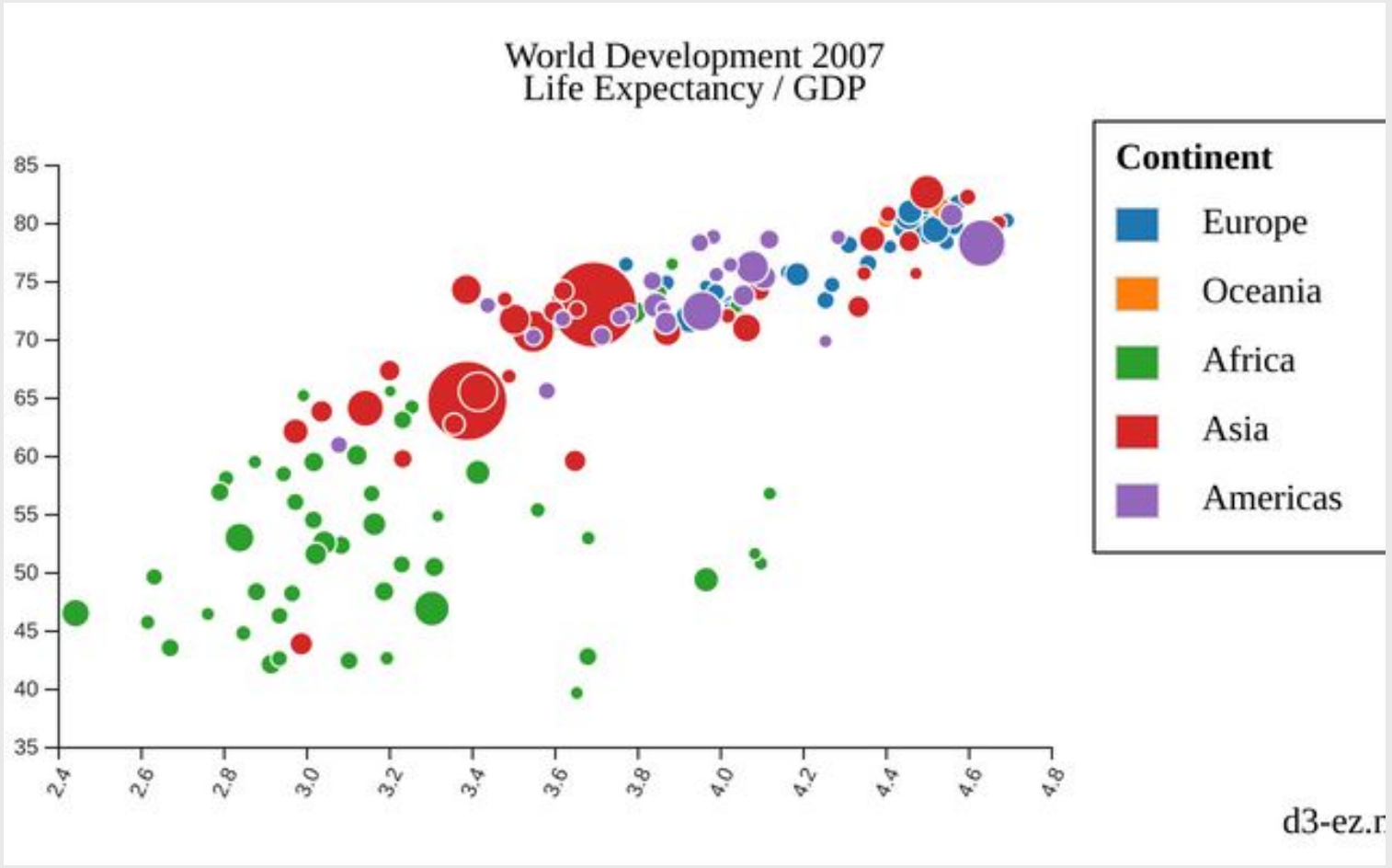
1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. **Area**
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ / ❌ **Rank**
- ✅ / ❌ **Ratio**



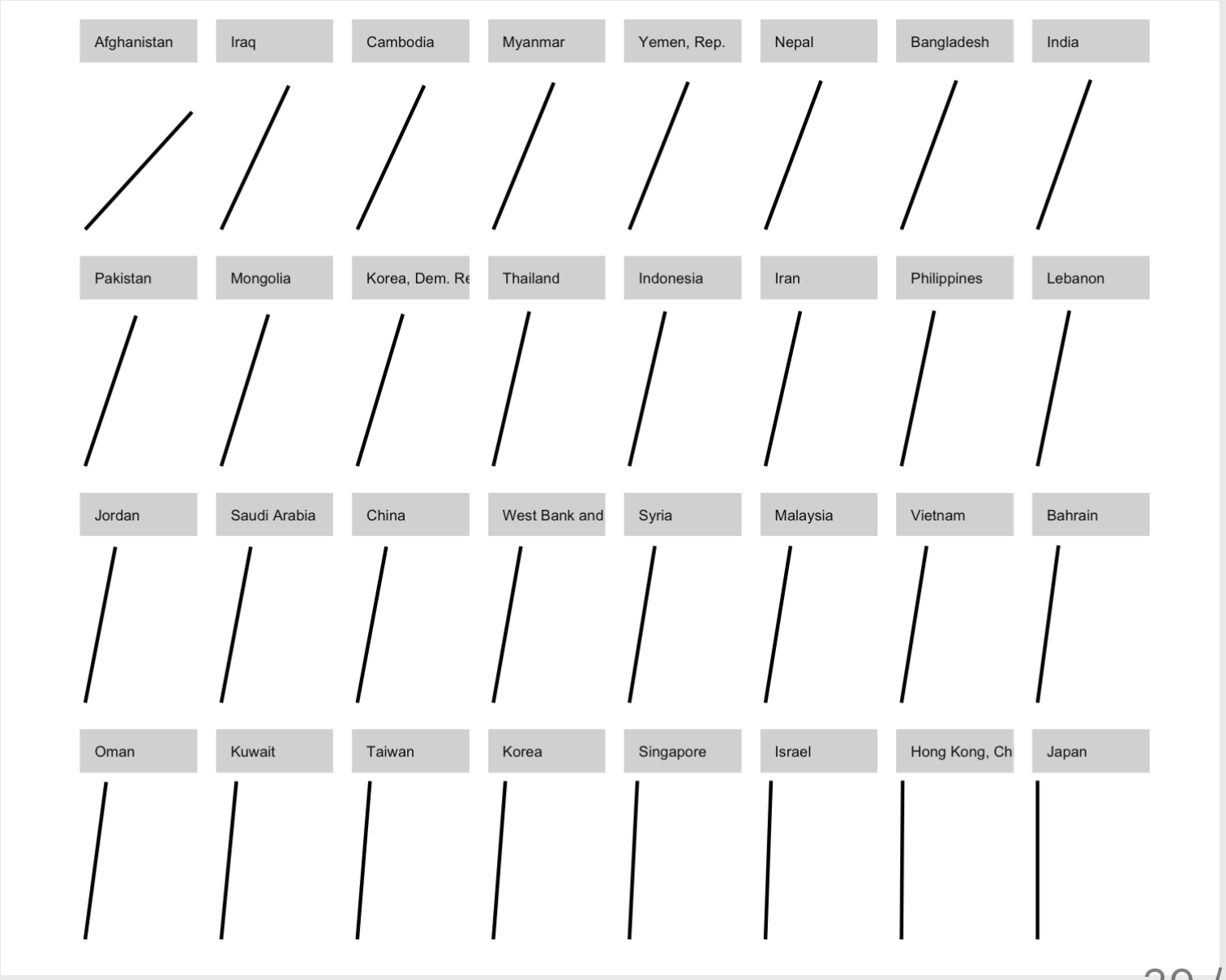
1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. **Area**
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

Area works okay for "bubble" charts

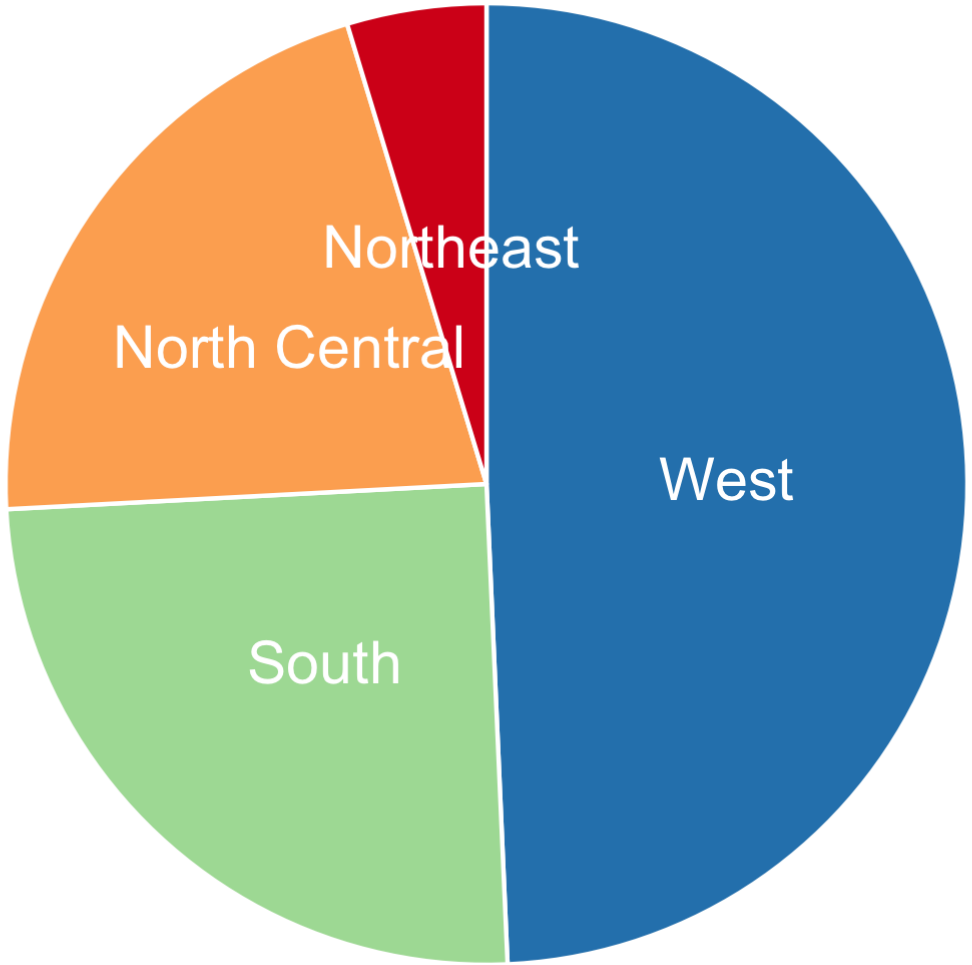


1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. **Angle**
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ **Rank**
- ✅ / ❌ **Ratio**



1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. **Angle**
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue



1. Position on a common scale
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. **Length**
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

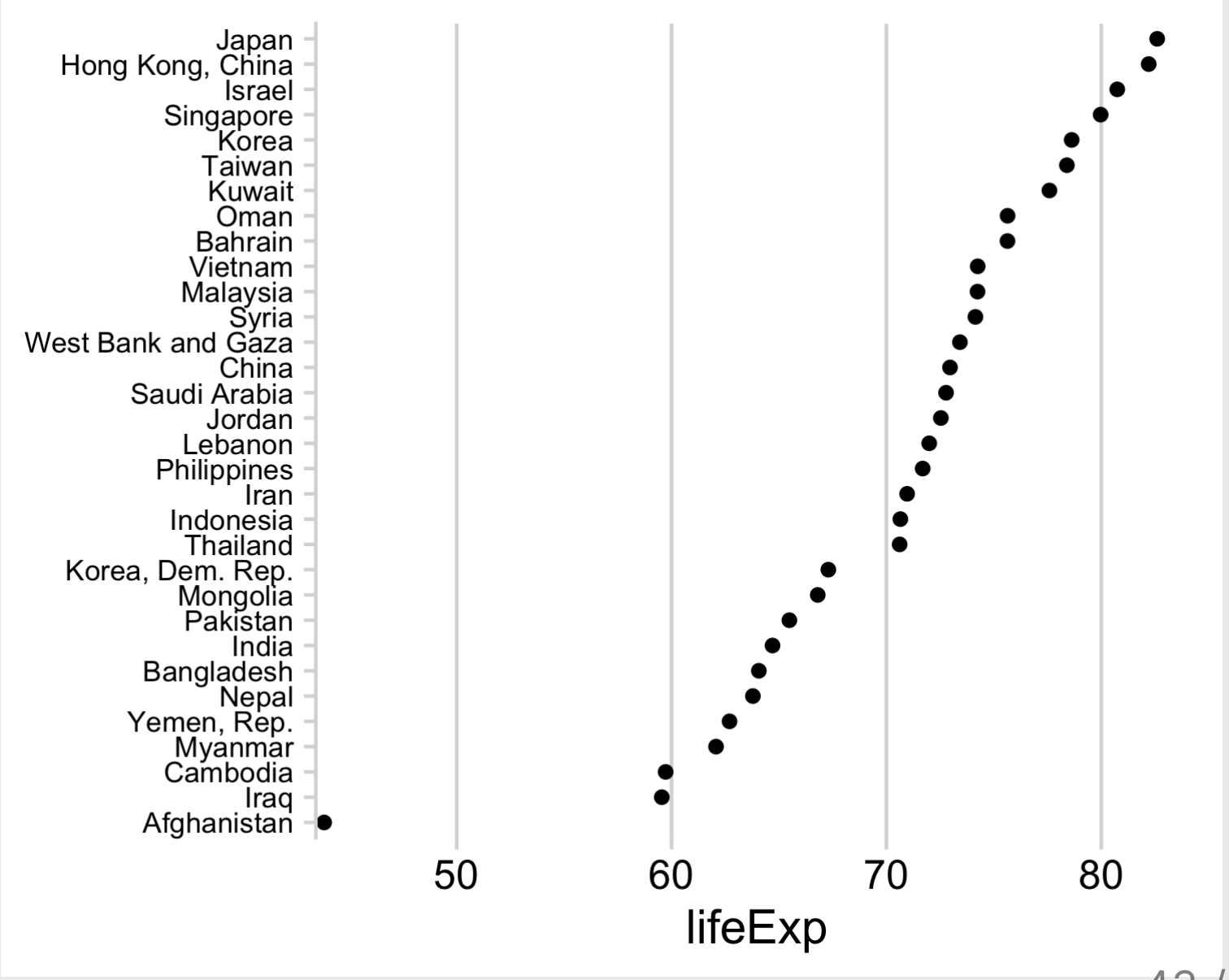
- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ / ❌ **Rank**
- ✅ **Ratio**

1. Position on a common scale
2. **Position on non-aligned scales**
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

- ✅ / ❌ **Discriminate**
- ✅ / ❌ **Rank**
- ✅ **Ratio**

1. **Position on a common scale**
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

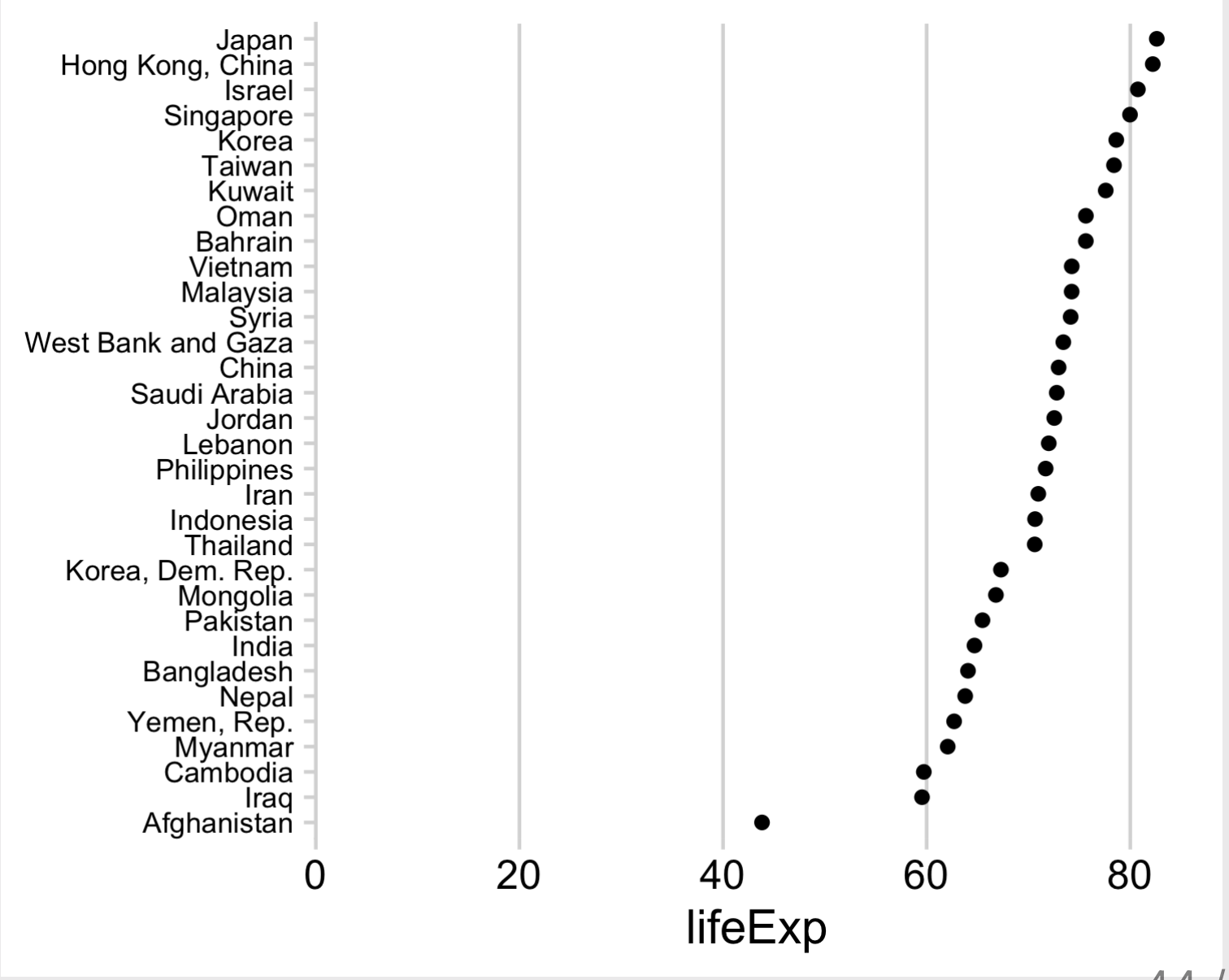
- ✅ **Discriminate**
- ✅ **Rank**
- ✅ **Ratio**



1. **Position on a common scale**
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

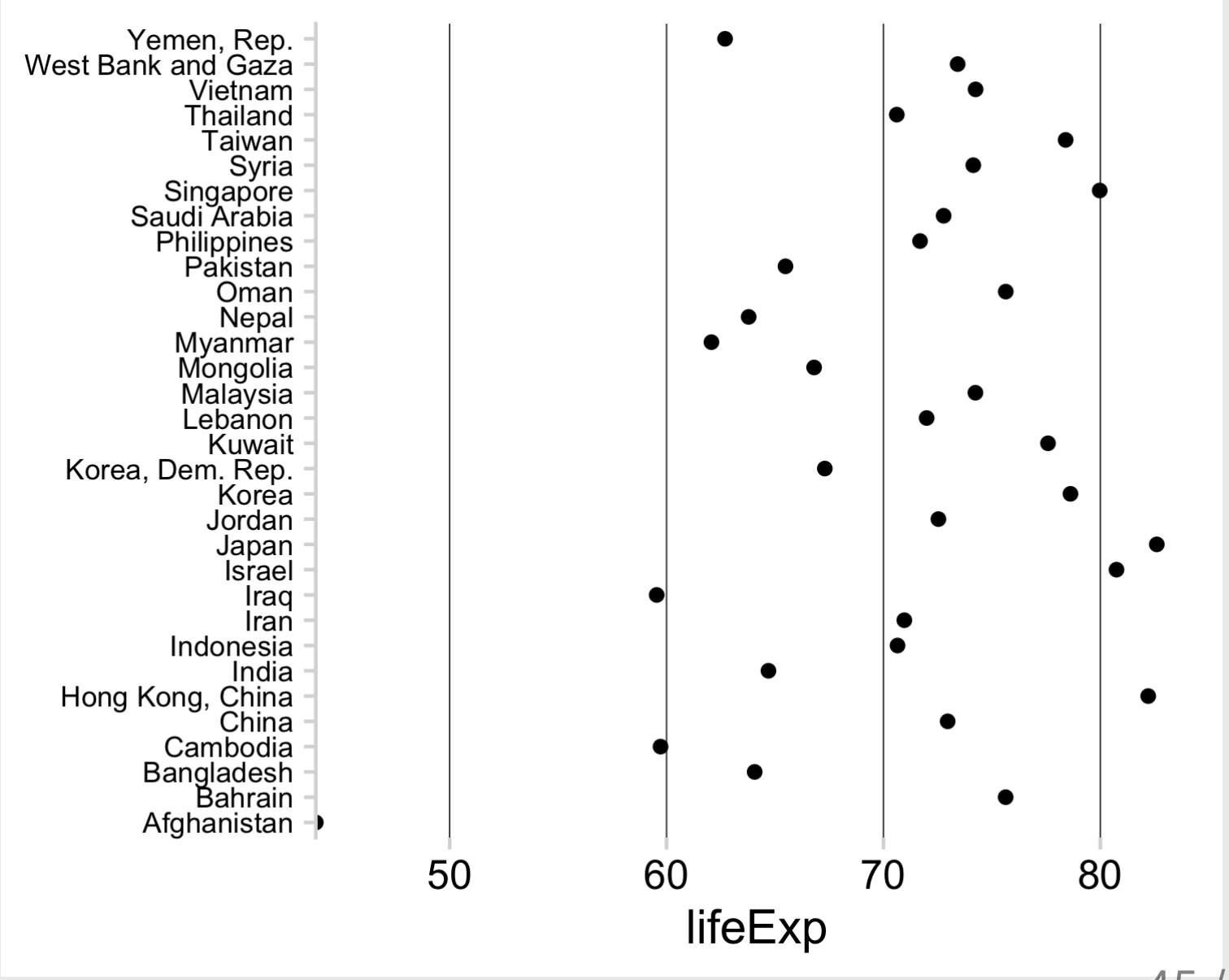
No need to scale to 0:

- Lowers resolution
- Isn't needed for accurate ratioing



1. **Position on a common scale**
2. Position on non-aligned scales
3. Length
4. Angle
5. Area
6. Color saturation
7. Color hue

Sorting still matters!



Cleveland's operations of pattern perception:

1. Estimation
2. Assembly
3. Detection

Cleveland's operations of pattern perception:

1. Estimation
2. Assembly --------> **The grouping of graphical elements**
3. Detection

Assembly: Gestalt Psychology

The whole has a reality that is entirely separate from the parts

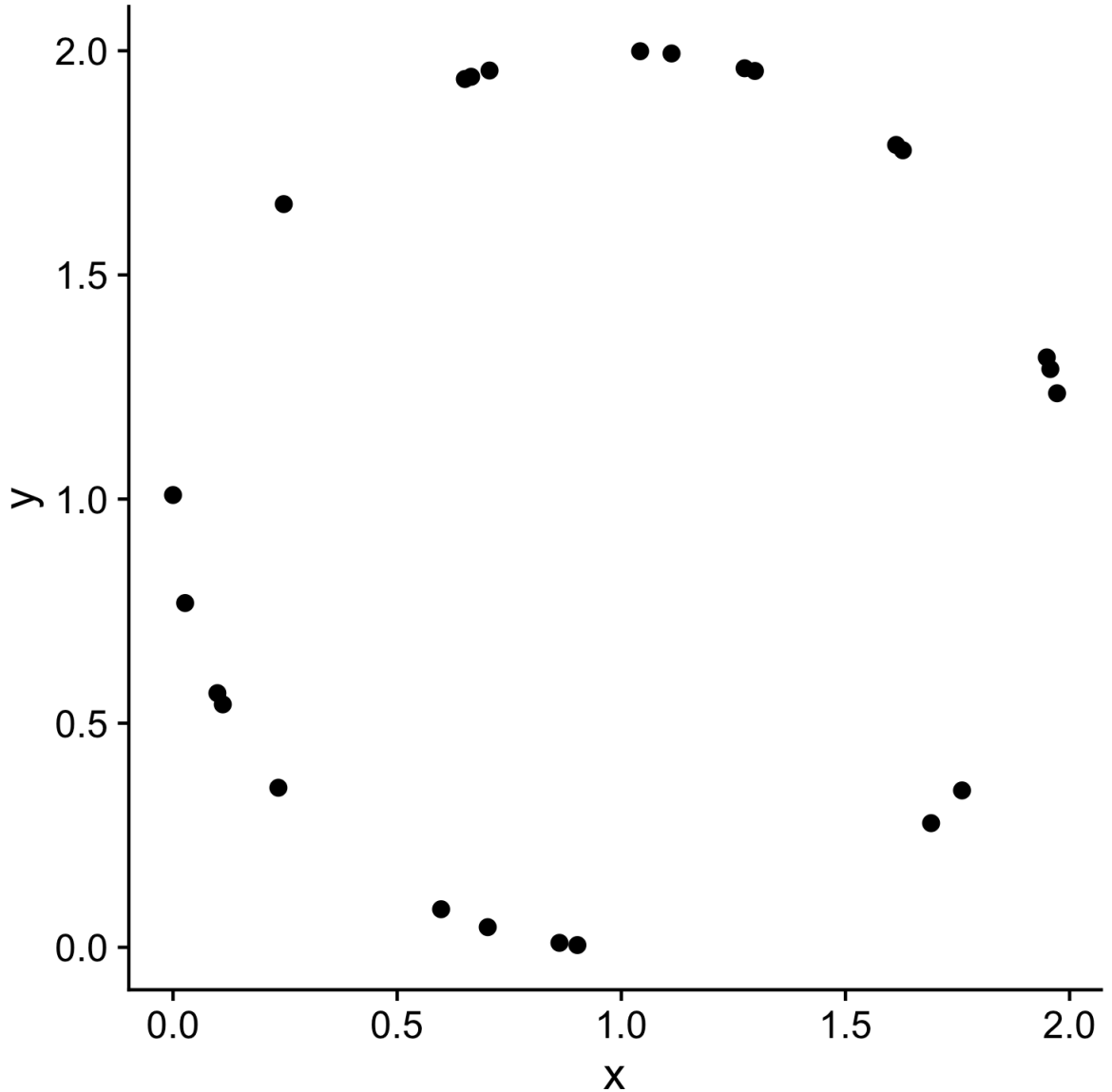

WWF

Reification

Emergence

Law of Closure

Our minds fill in the missing information



Prägnanz

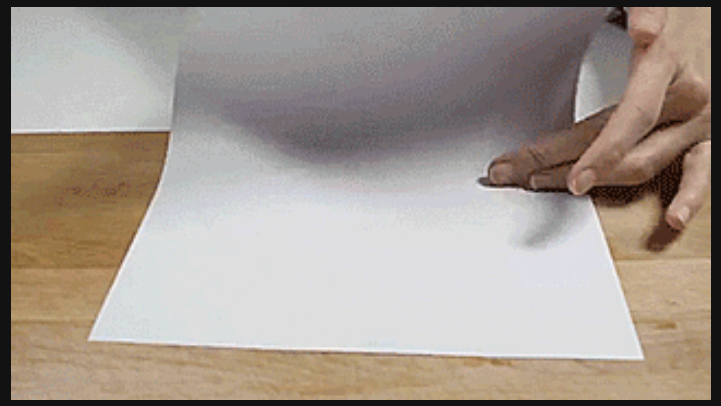
We strongly prefer to interpret stimuli as regular, simple, and orderly

Prägnanz

We strongly prefer to interpret stimuli as regular, simple, and orderly

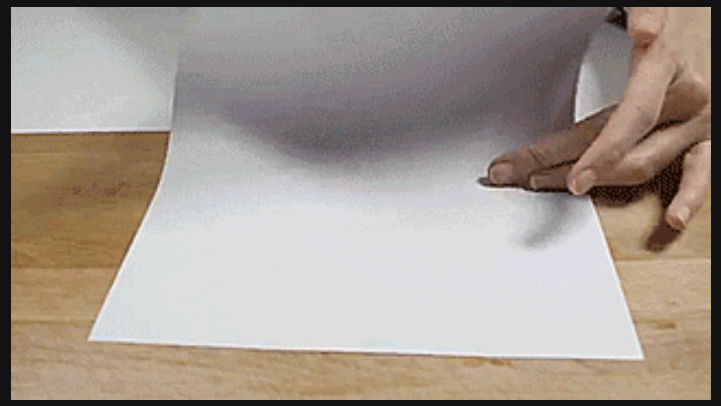
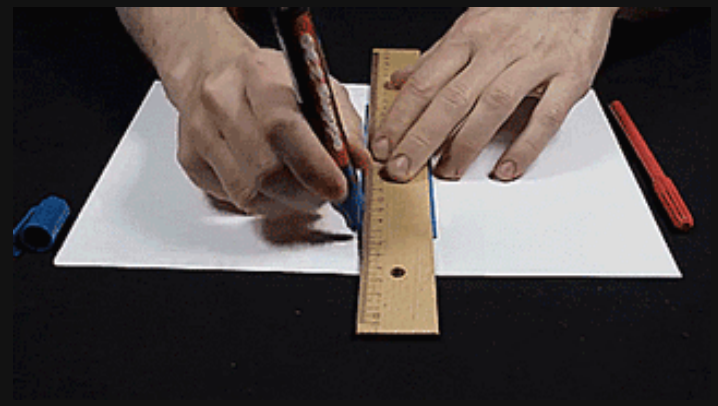
Prägnanz

We strongly prefer to interpret stimuli as regular, simple, and orderly



Prägnanz

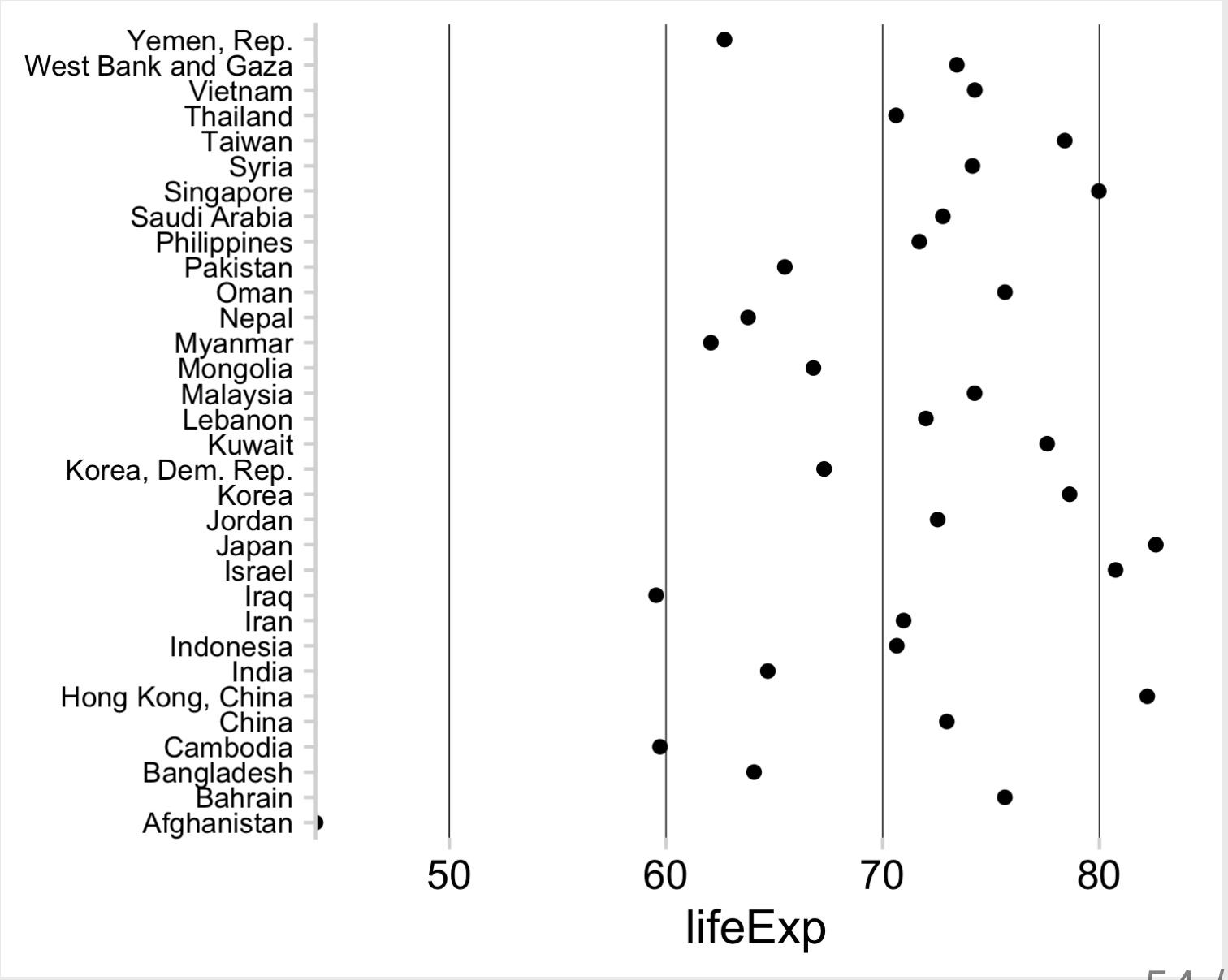
We strongly prefer to interpret stimuli as regular, simple, and orderly

Prägnanz

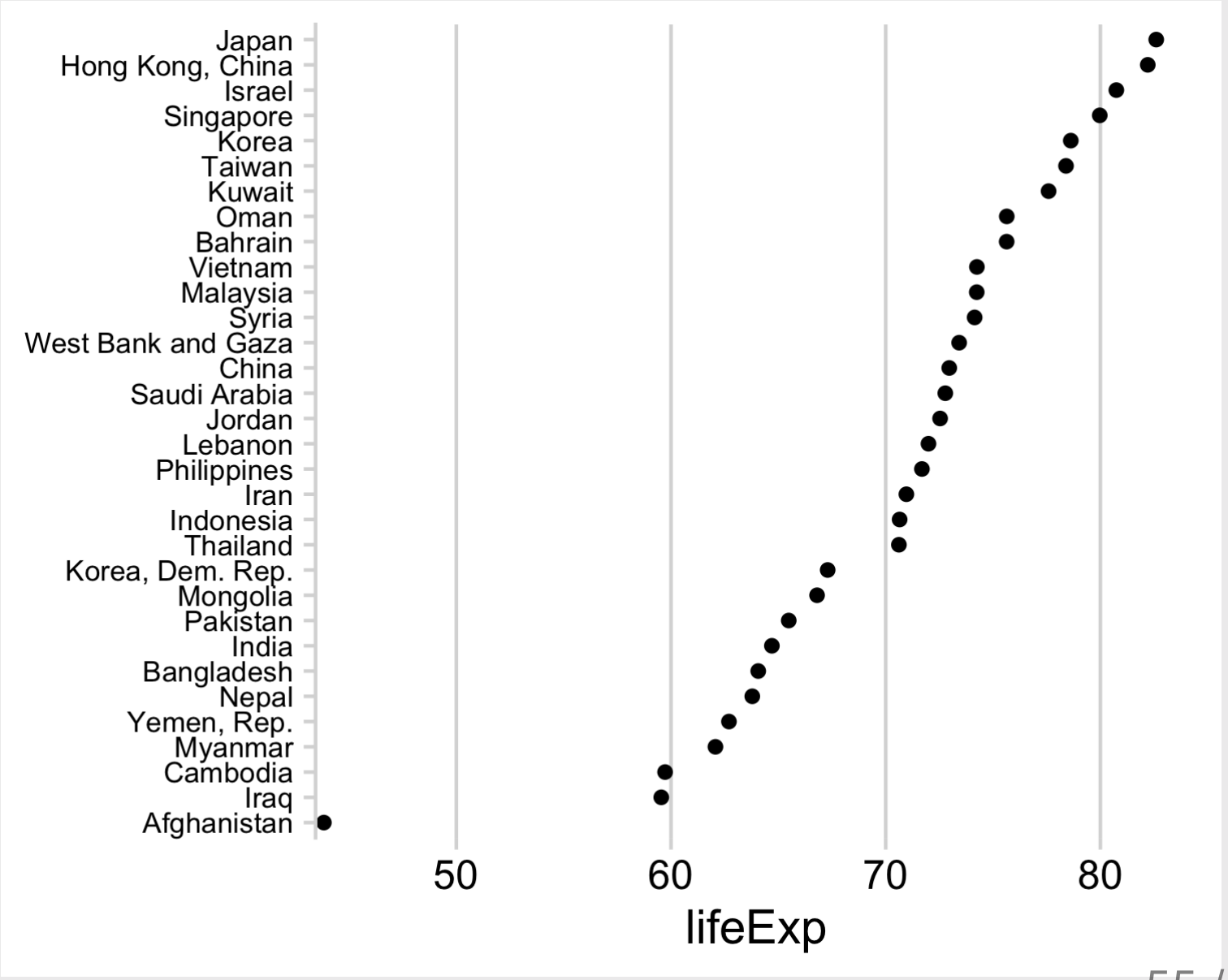
This should cause you cognitive pain

It's the graphical equivalent of this:



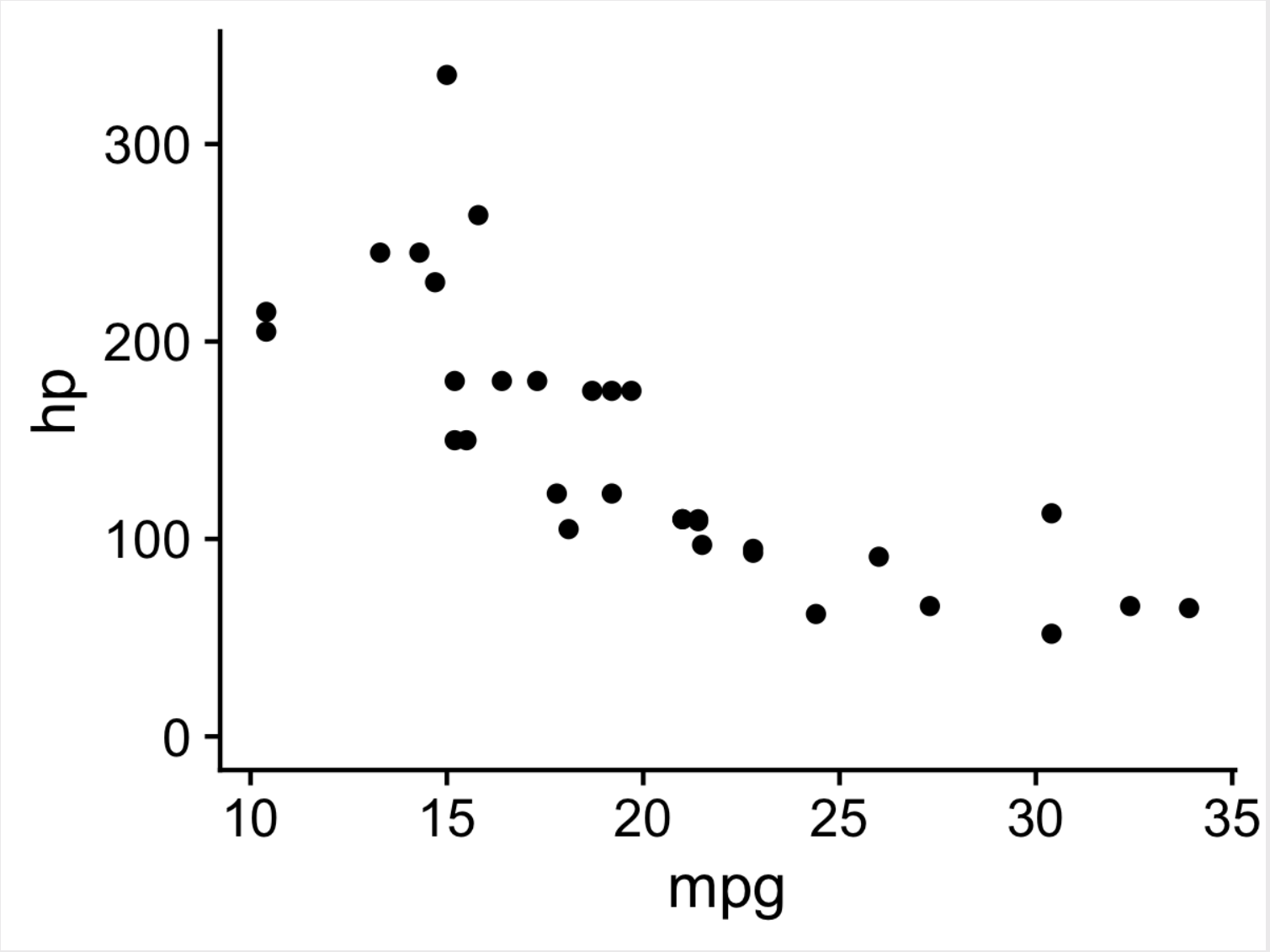
Prägnanz

This makes our brains happy



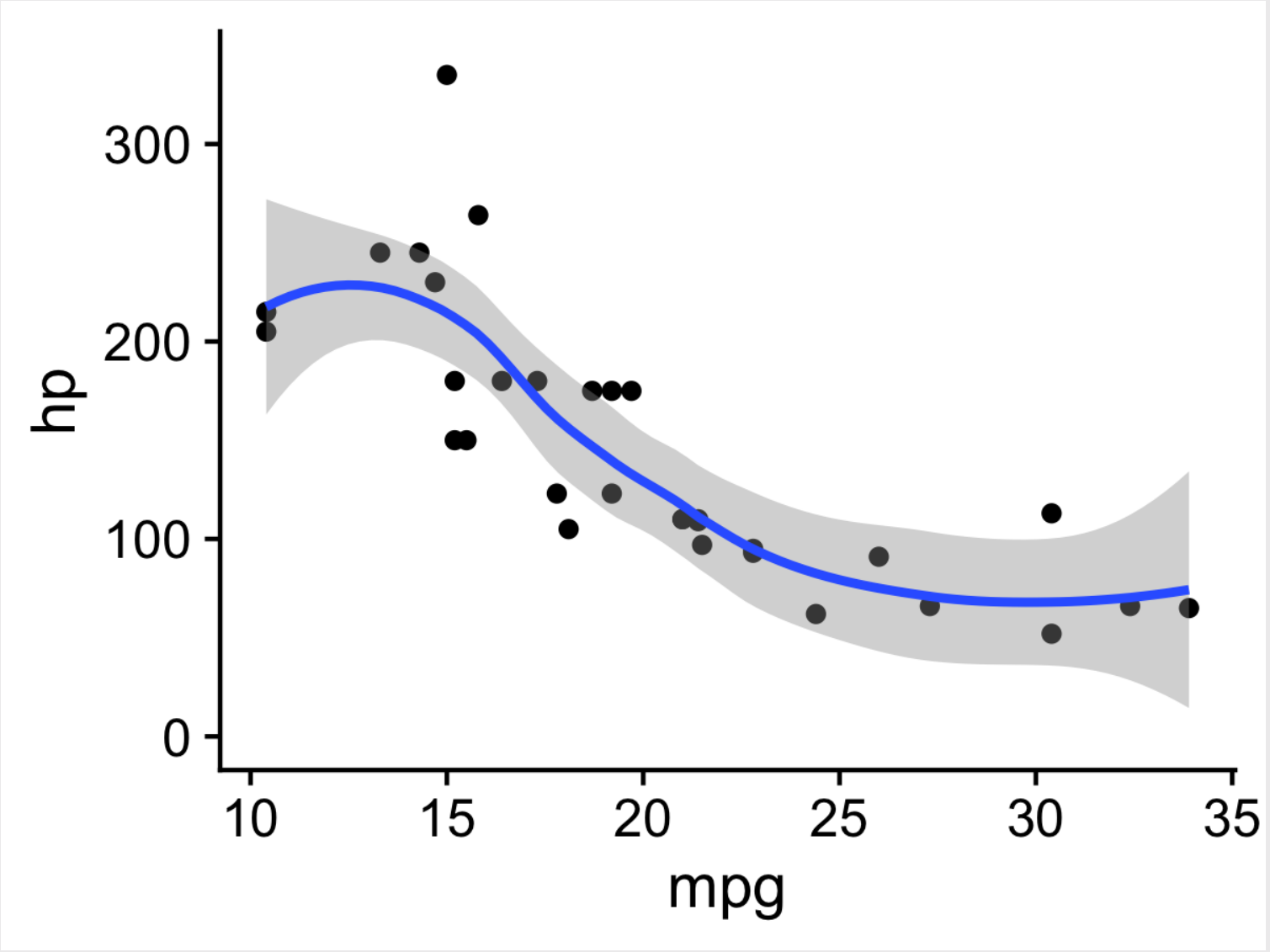
Law of Continuity

We will group together objects that follow an established direction



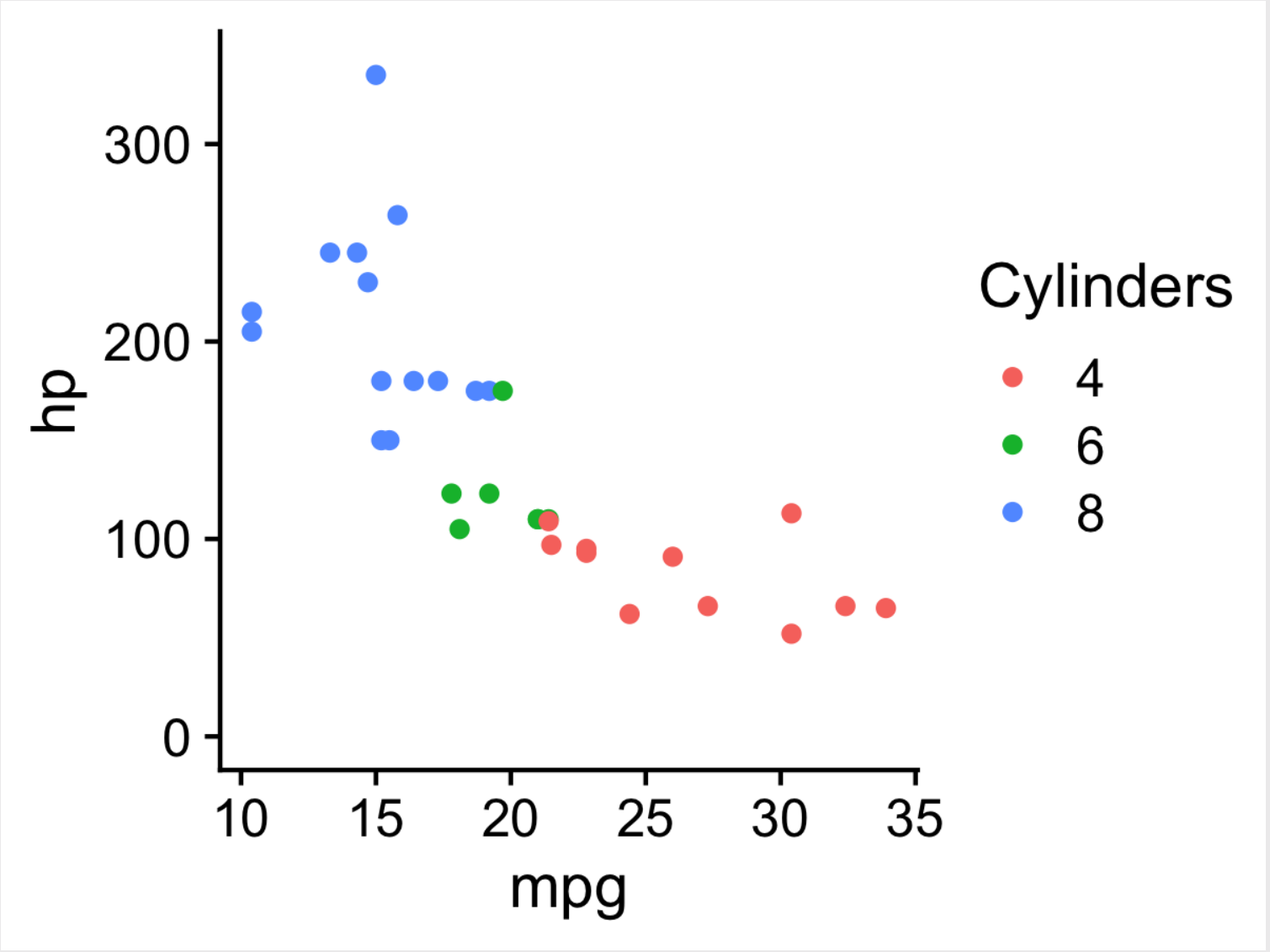
Law of Continuity

We will group together objects that follow an established direction



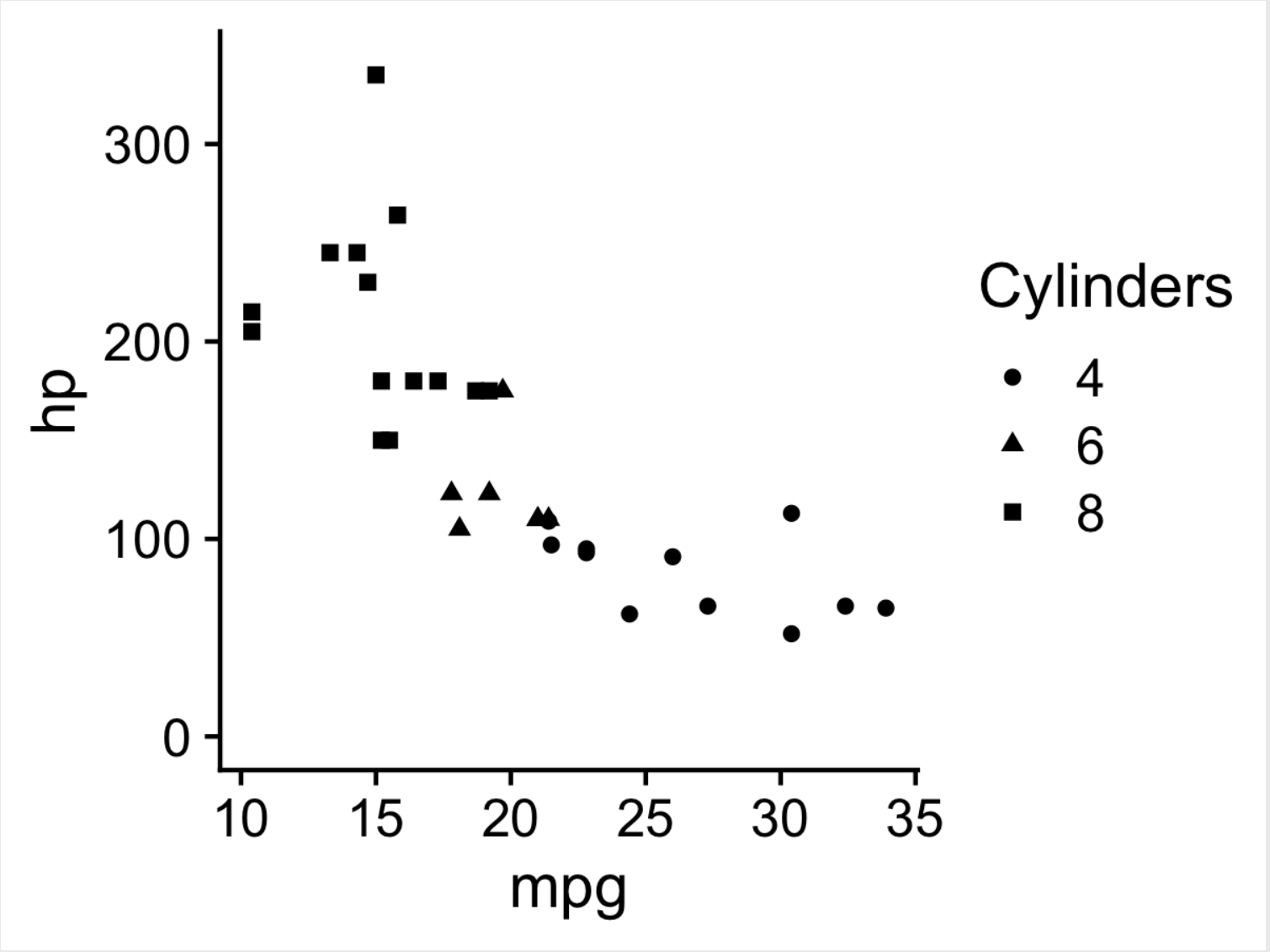
Law of Similarity

We see elements that are *physically similar* as part of the same object



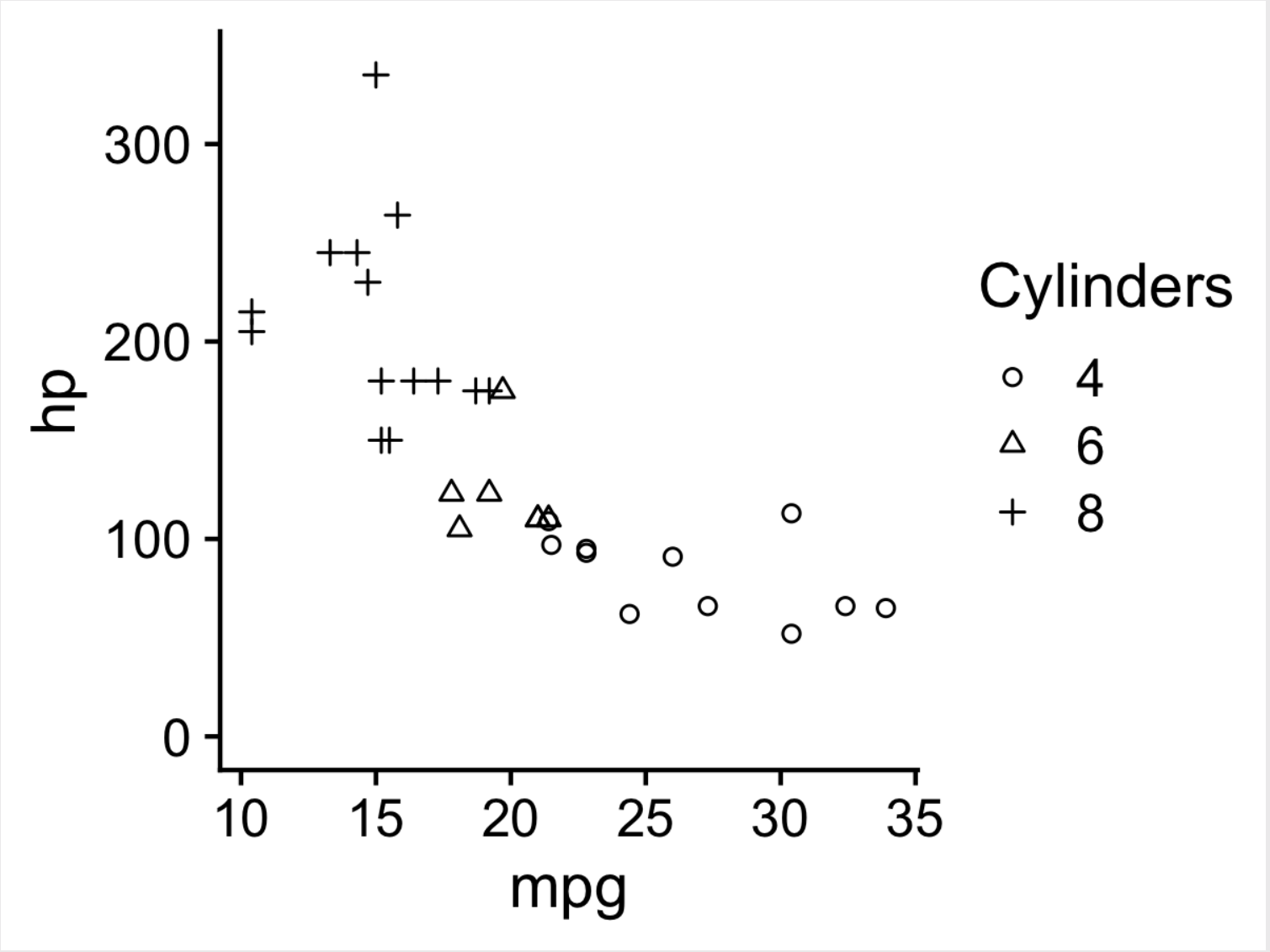
Law of Similarity

We see elements that are *physically similar* as part of the same object



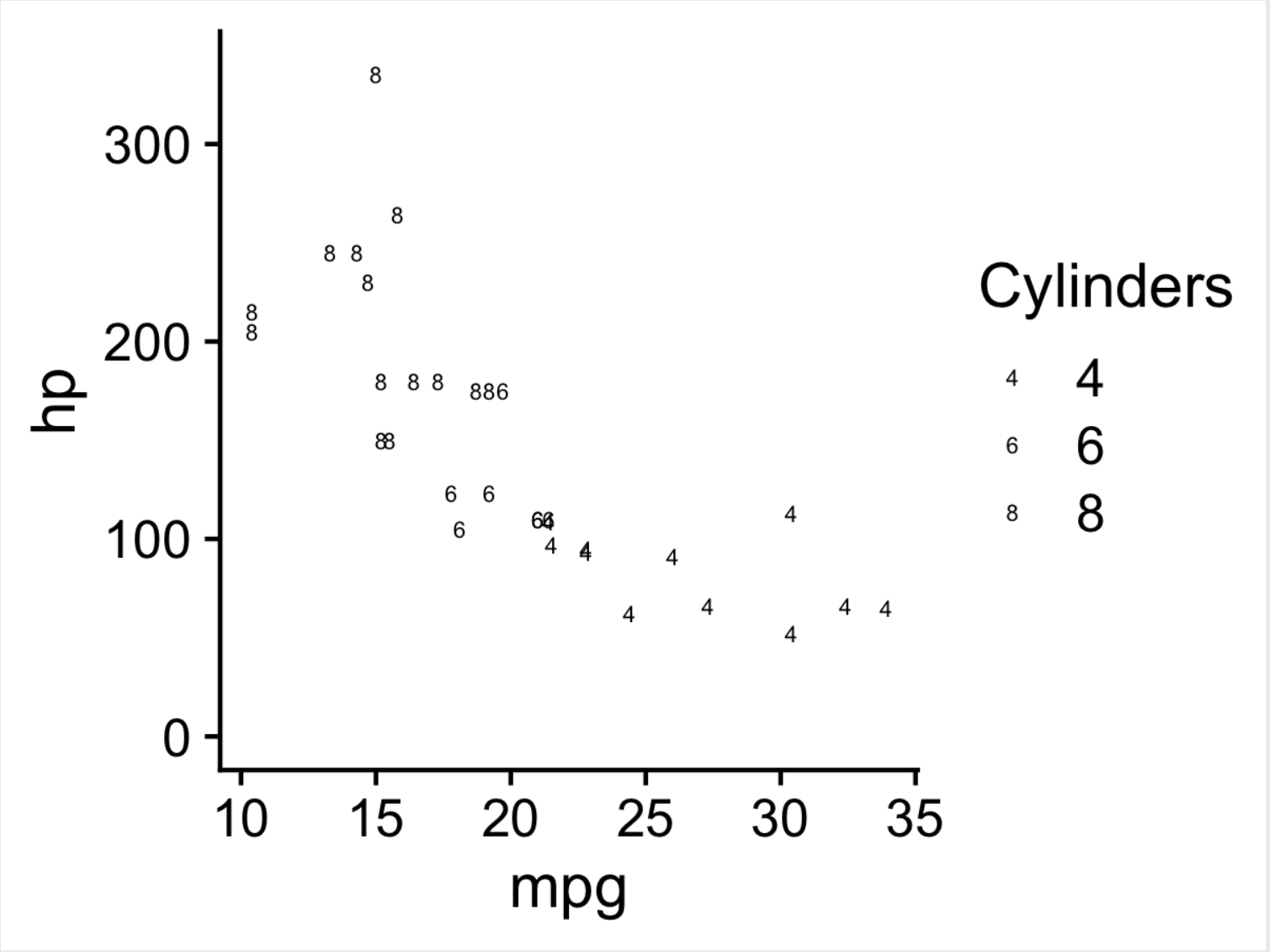
Law of Similarity

We see elements that are *physically similar* as part of the same object



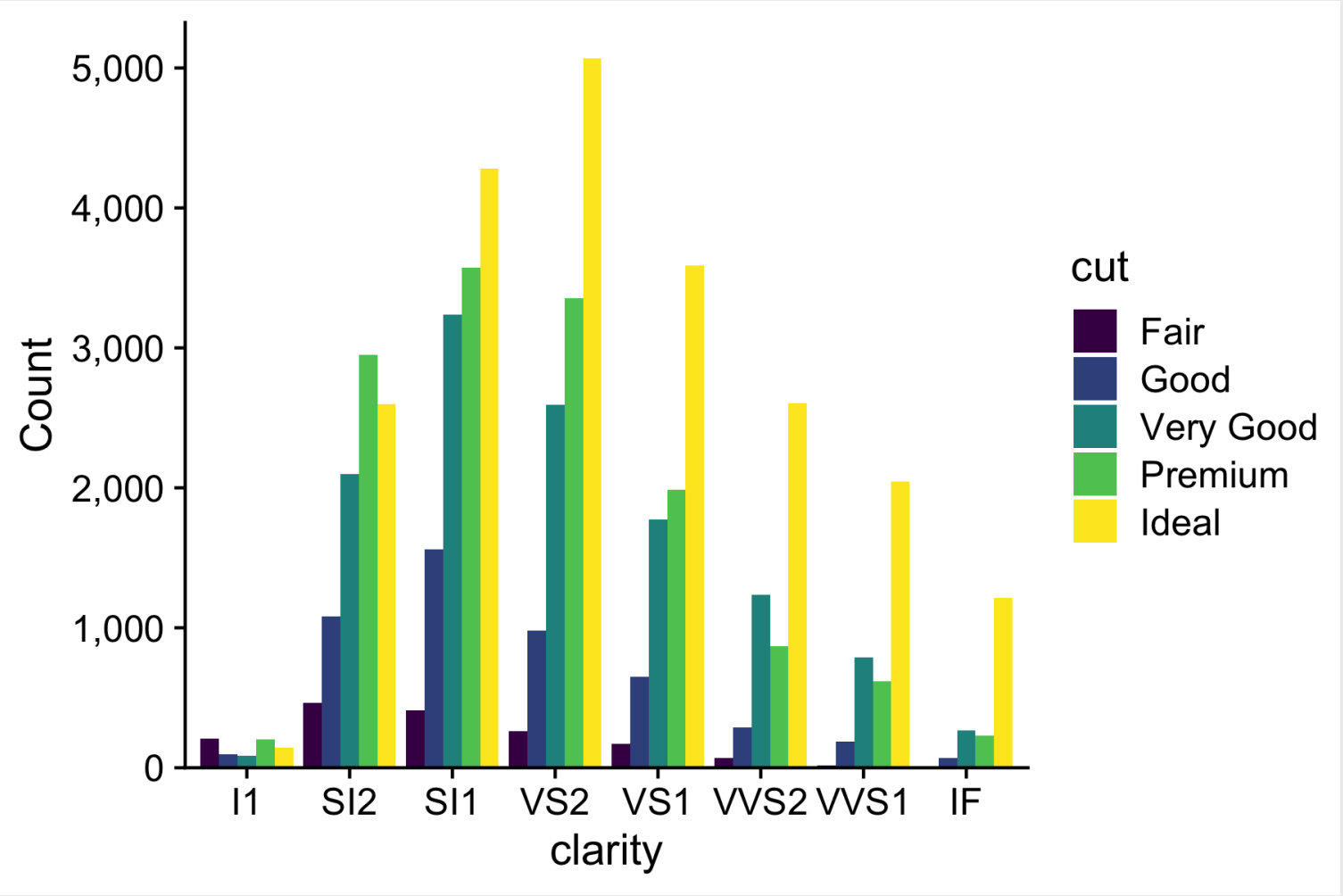
Law of Similarity

We see elements that are *physically similar* as part of the same object



Law of Proximity

We tend to see elements that are *physically near* each other as part of the same object



Law of Proximity

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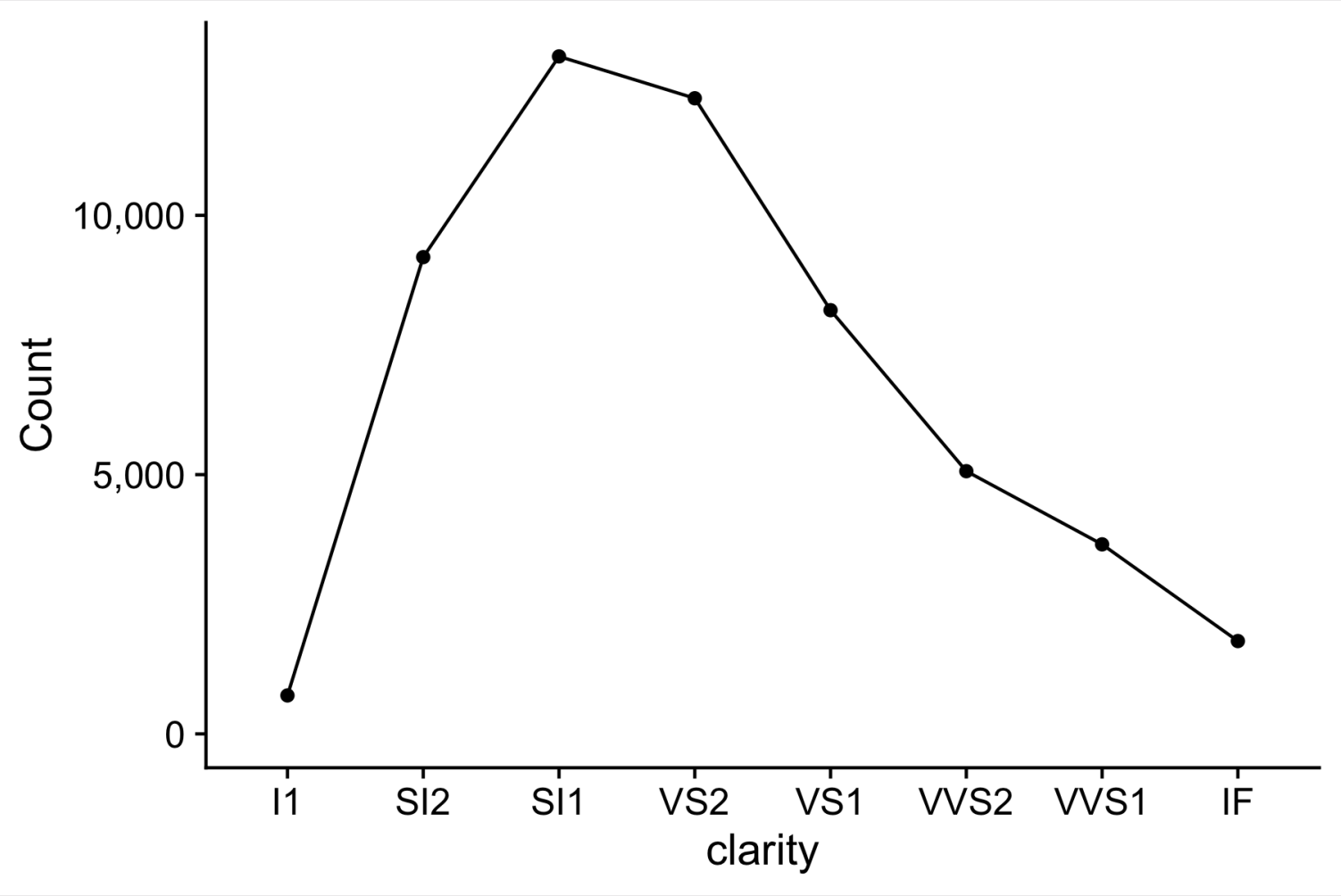

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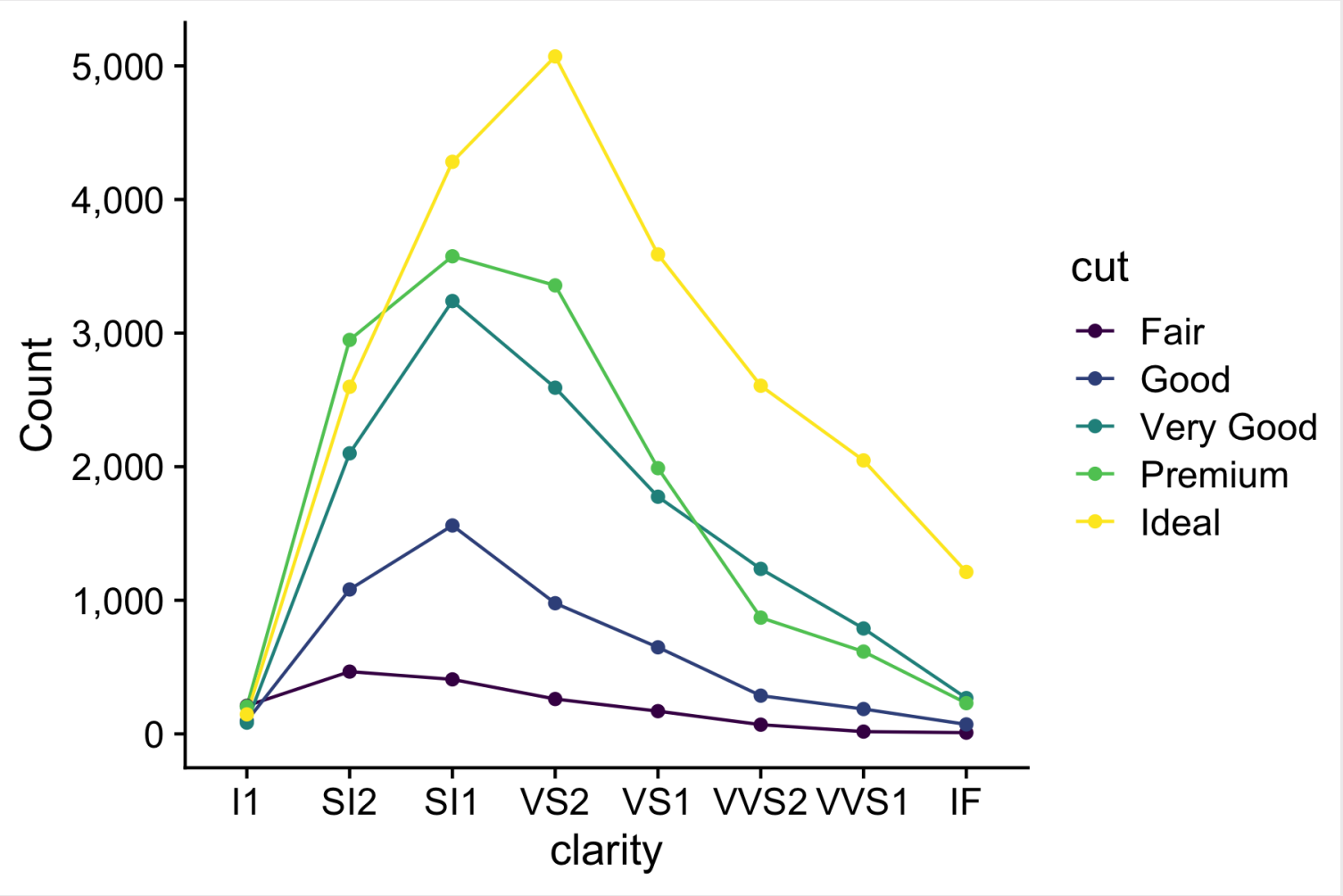
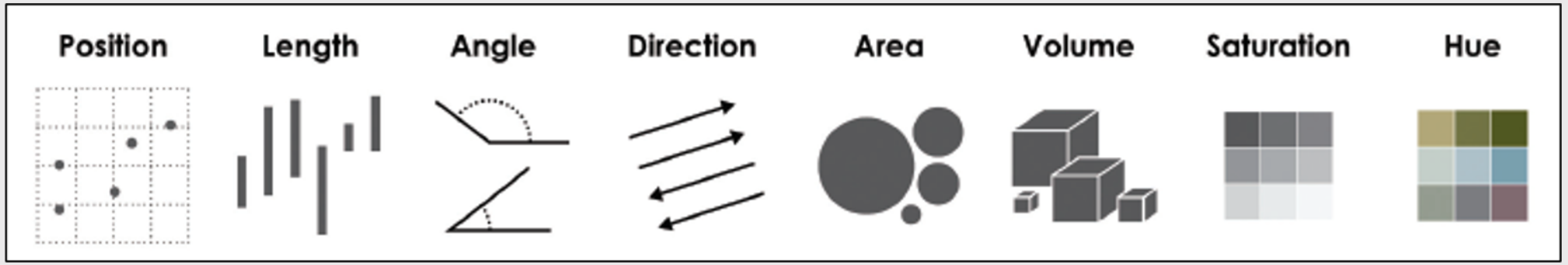


Cleveland's operations of pattern perception:

1. Estimation
2. Assembly
3. Detection

Estimation: Hierarchy for *numerical* data

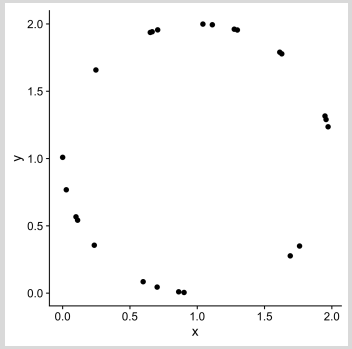


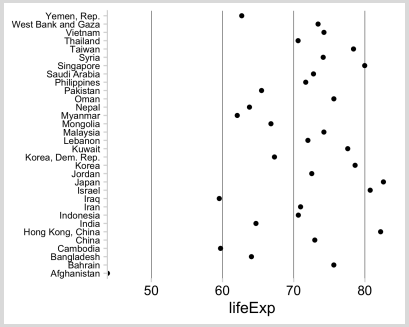
More Accurate

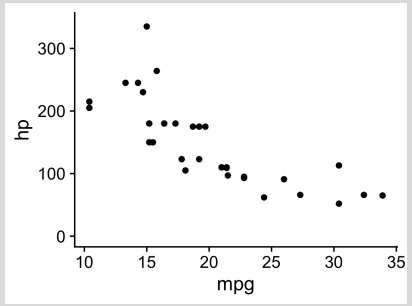
Less Accurate

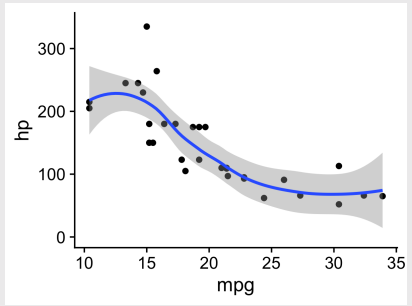
Assembly: Gestalt Psychology

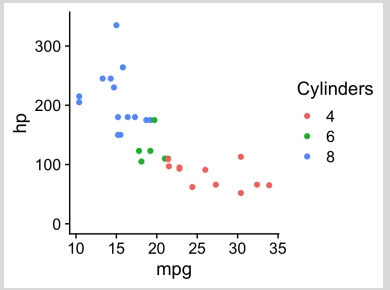
Law of Closure	Prägnanz	Law of Continuity	Law of Similarity	Law of Proximity
Fill in the missing information	We like regular, simple, and orderly	Group together objects with established direction	Physically *similar* = same object	Physically *near* = same object

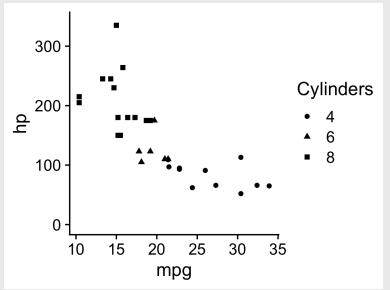


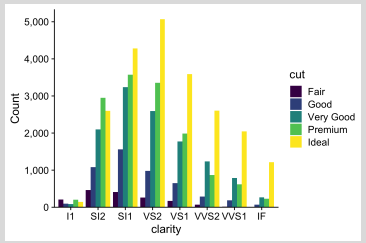


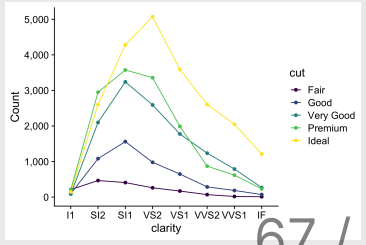












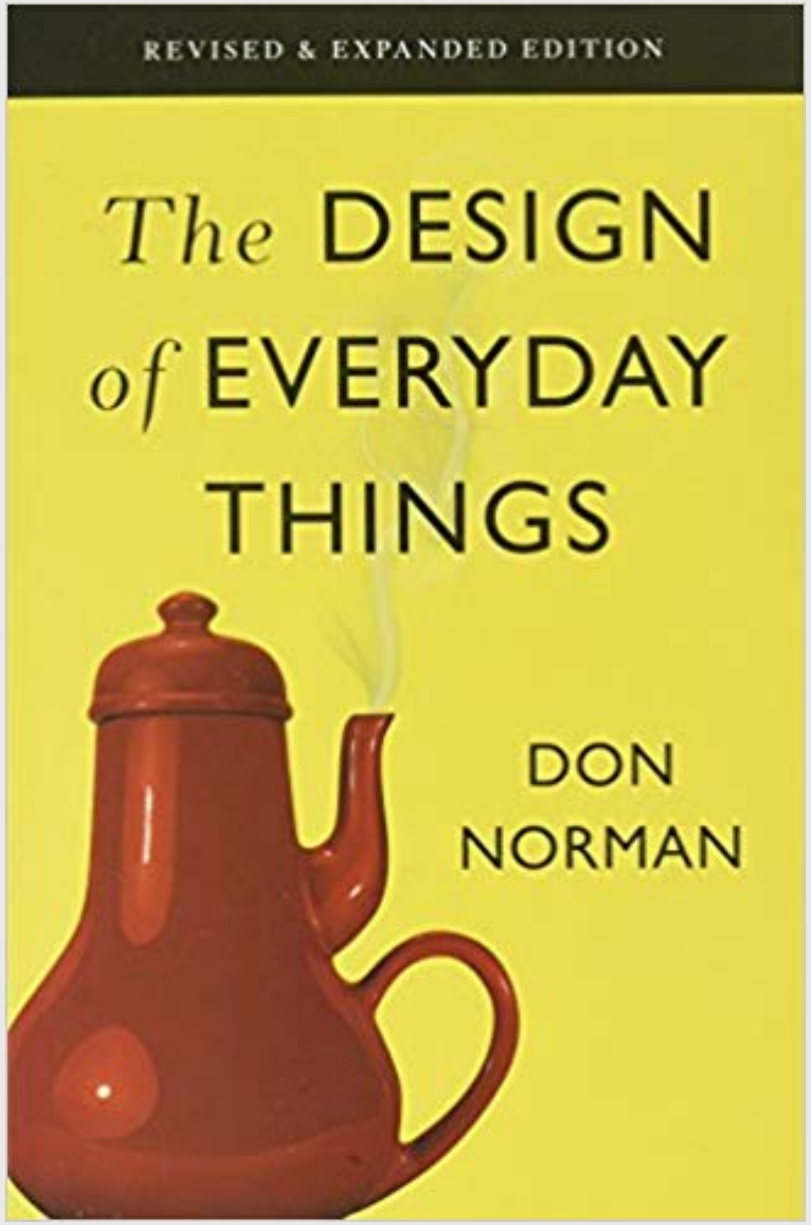
Cleveland's operations of pattern perception:

1. Estimation
2. Assembly
3. Detection --------> **Recognizing that a geometric object encodes a physical value**

Norman door (n.):

1. A door where the design tells you to do the opposite of what you're actually supposed to do.

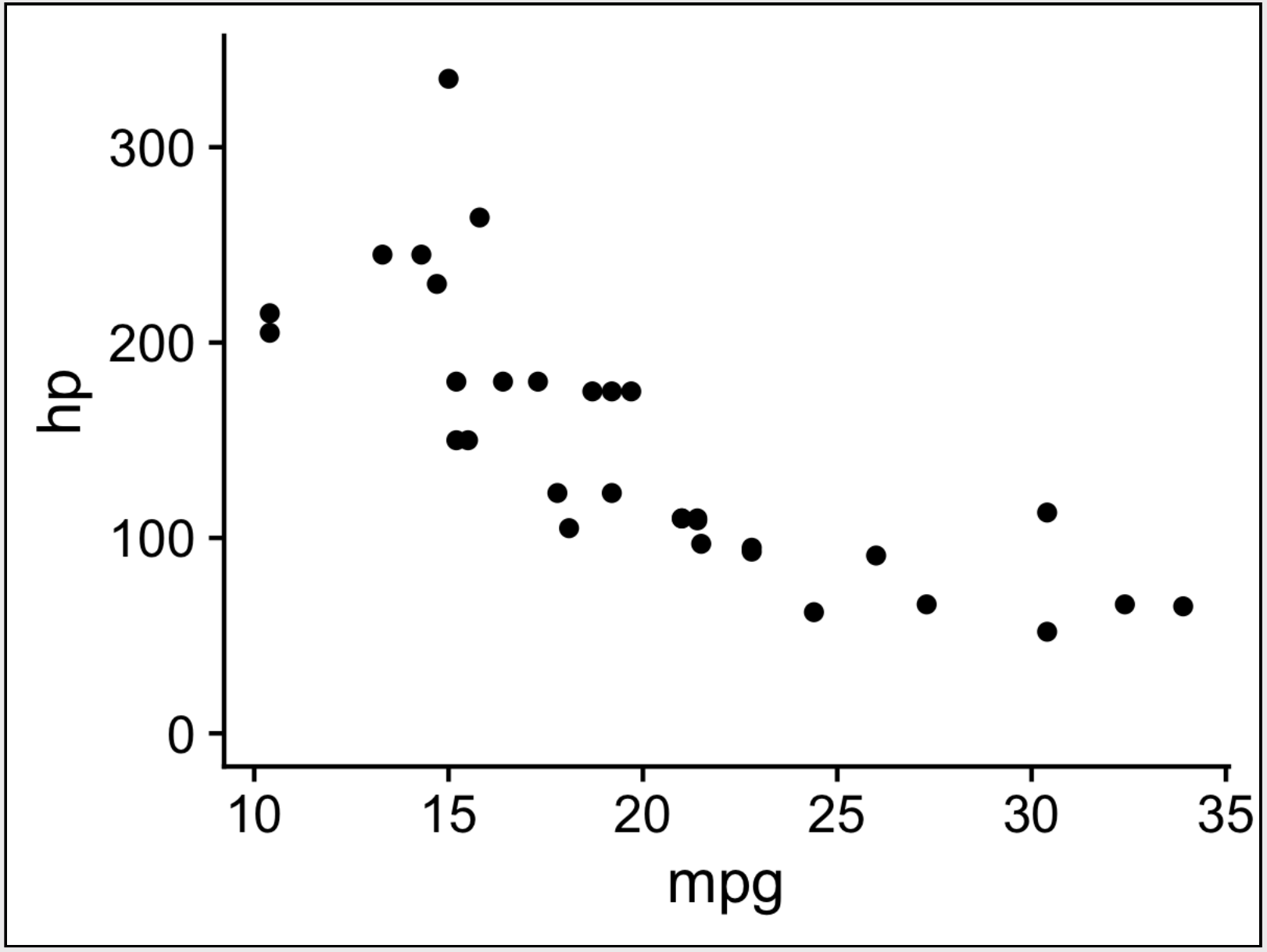
2. A door that gives the wrong signal and needs a sign to correct it.

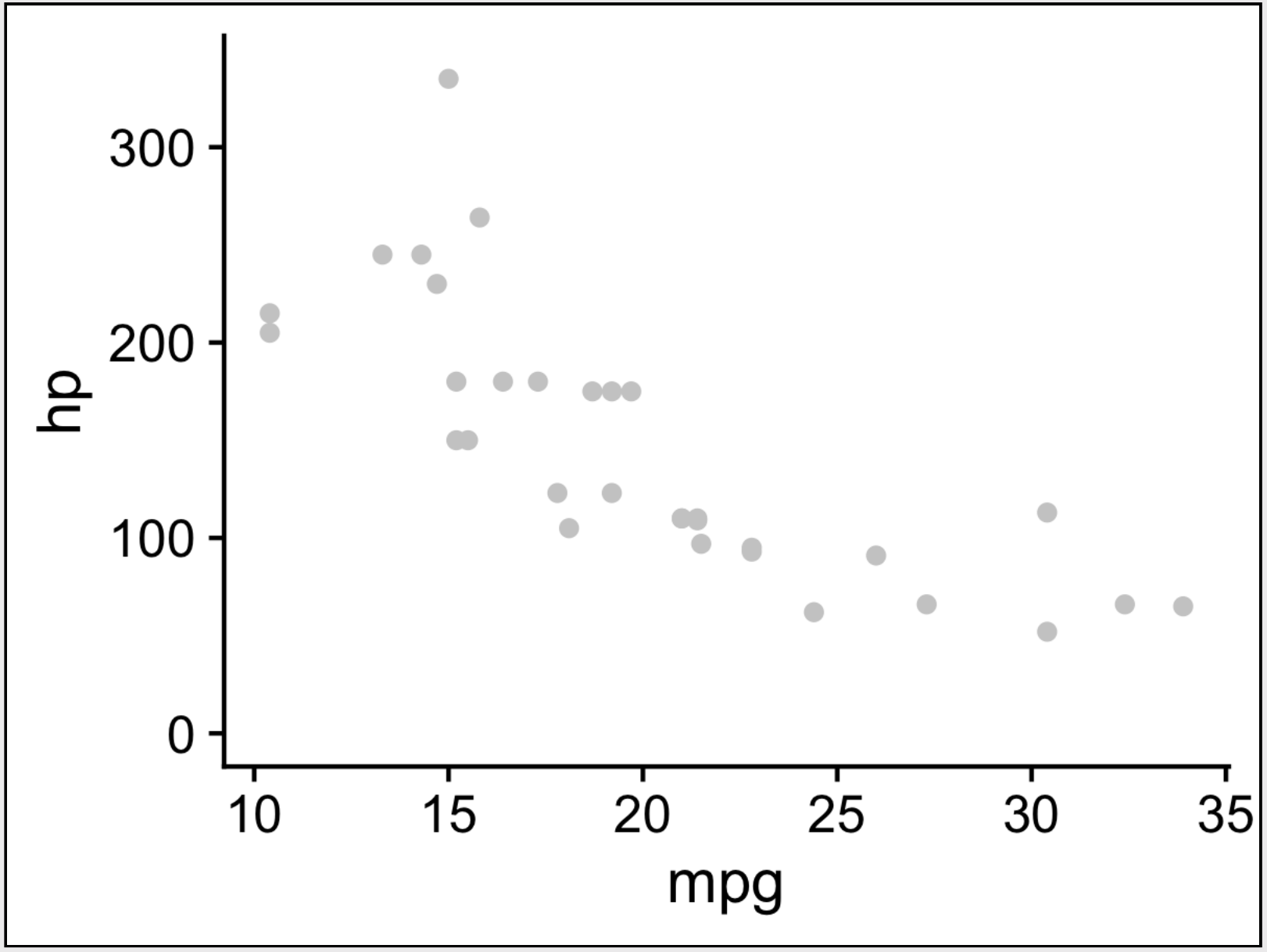


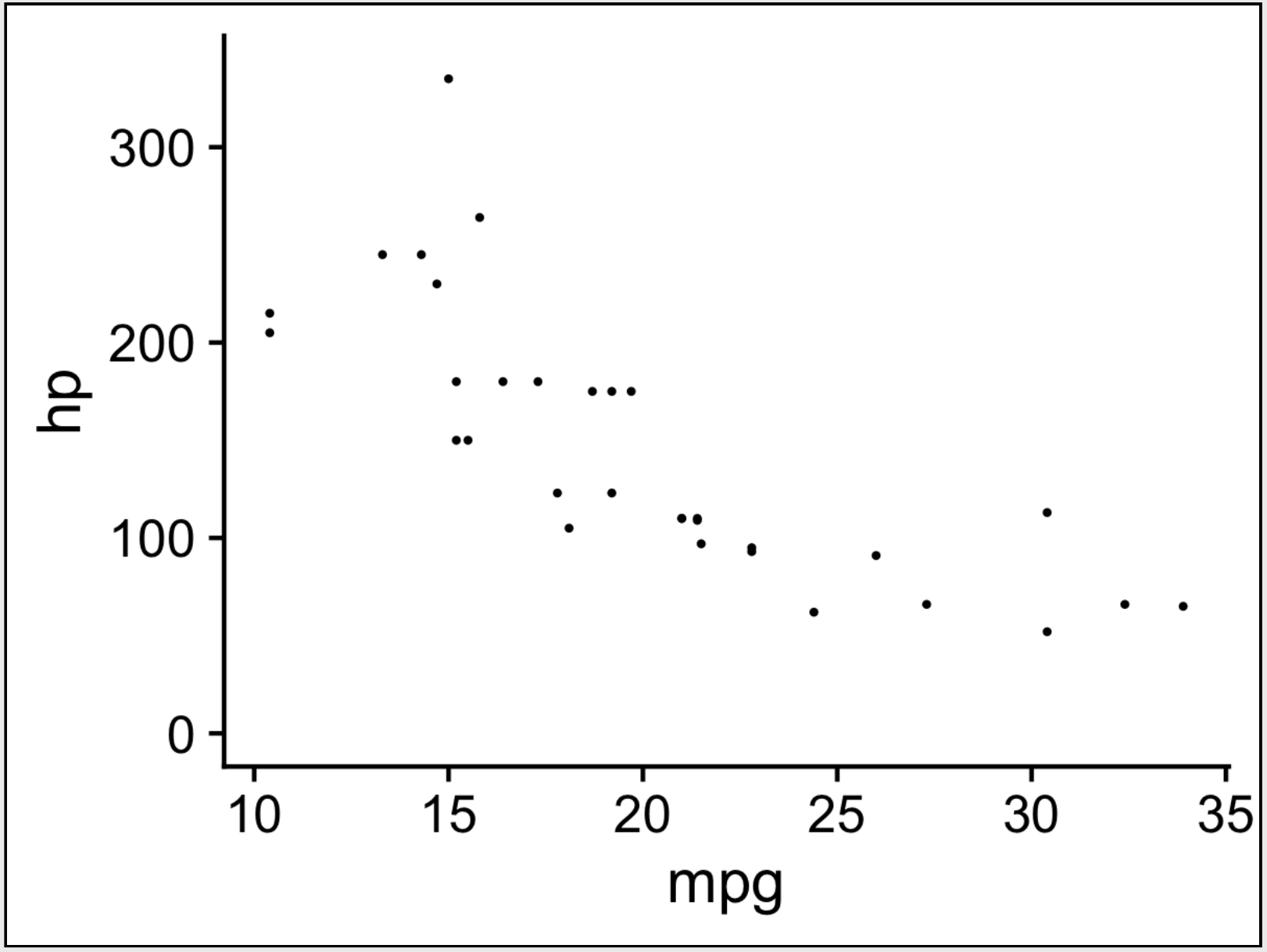
Norman door

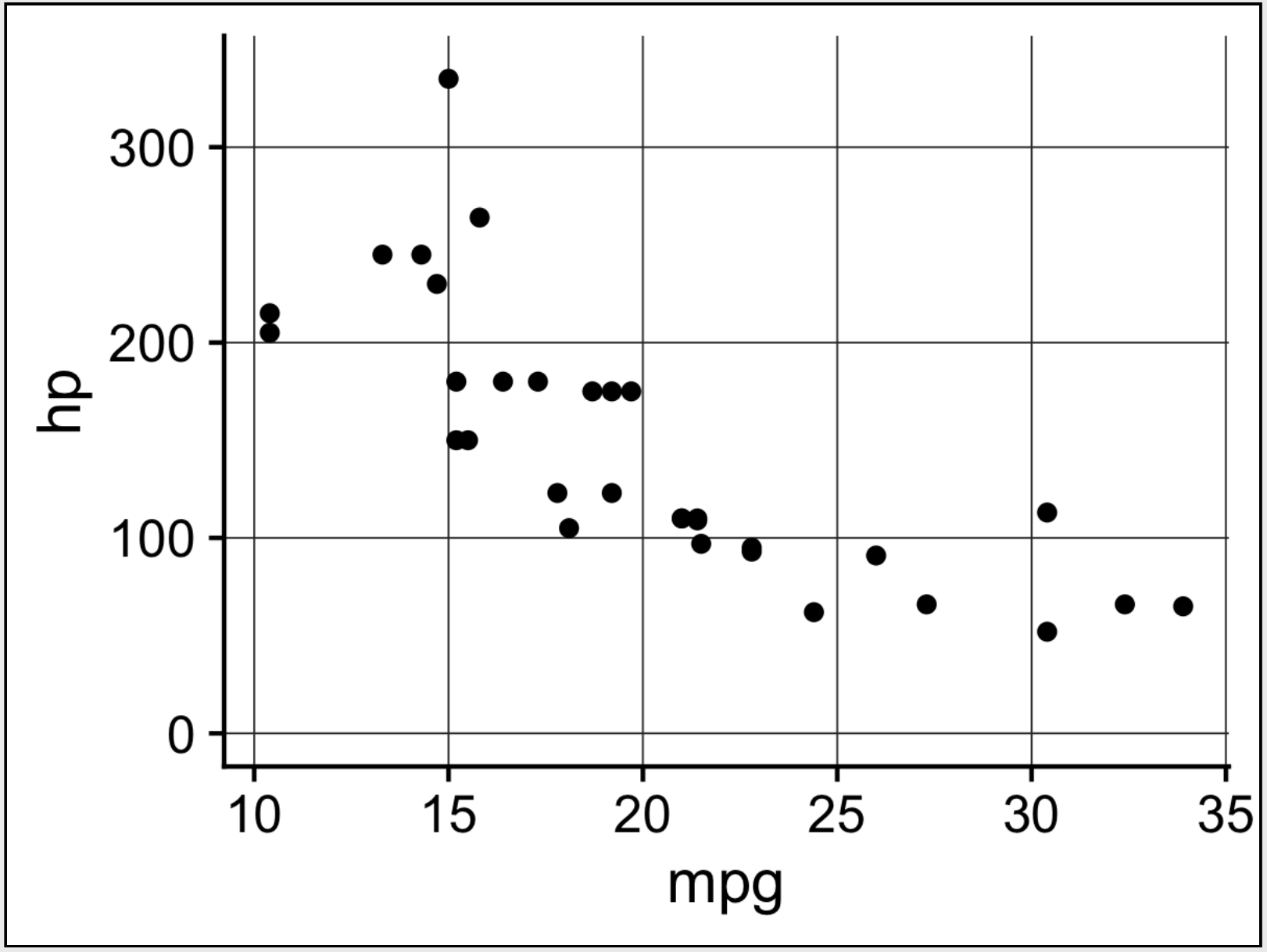
Norman door

Non-Norman door


300
200
100
0
hp
10
15
20
25
30
35
mpg


300
200
100
0
hp
10
15
20
25
30
35
mpg


300
200
100
0
hp
10
15
20
25
30
35
mpg


300
200
100
0
hp
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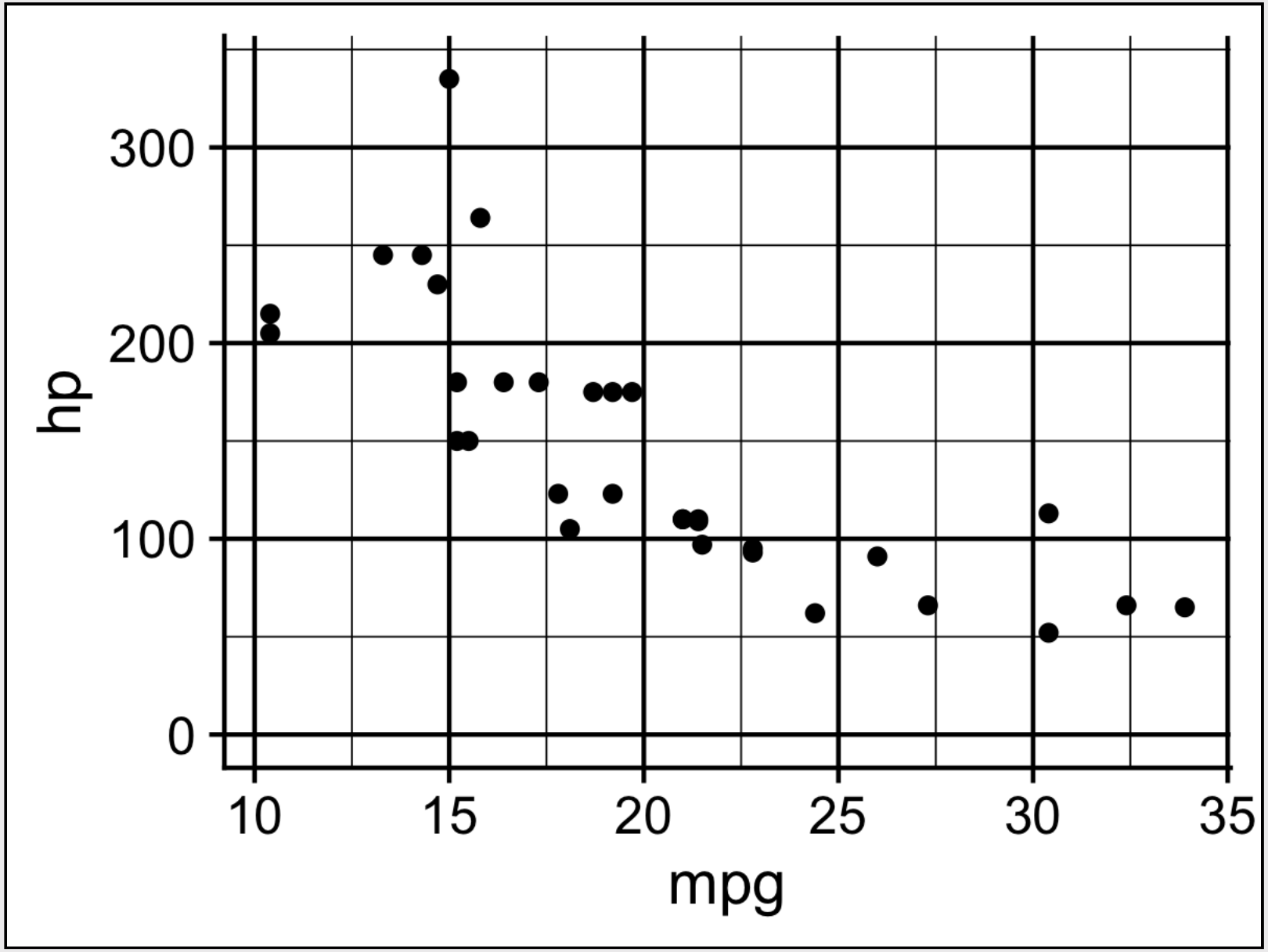
15
20
25
30
35
mpg


300
200
100
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hp
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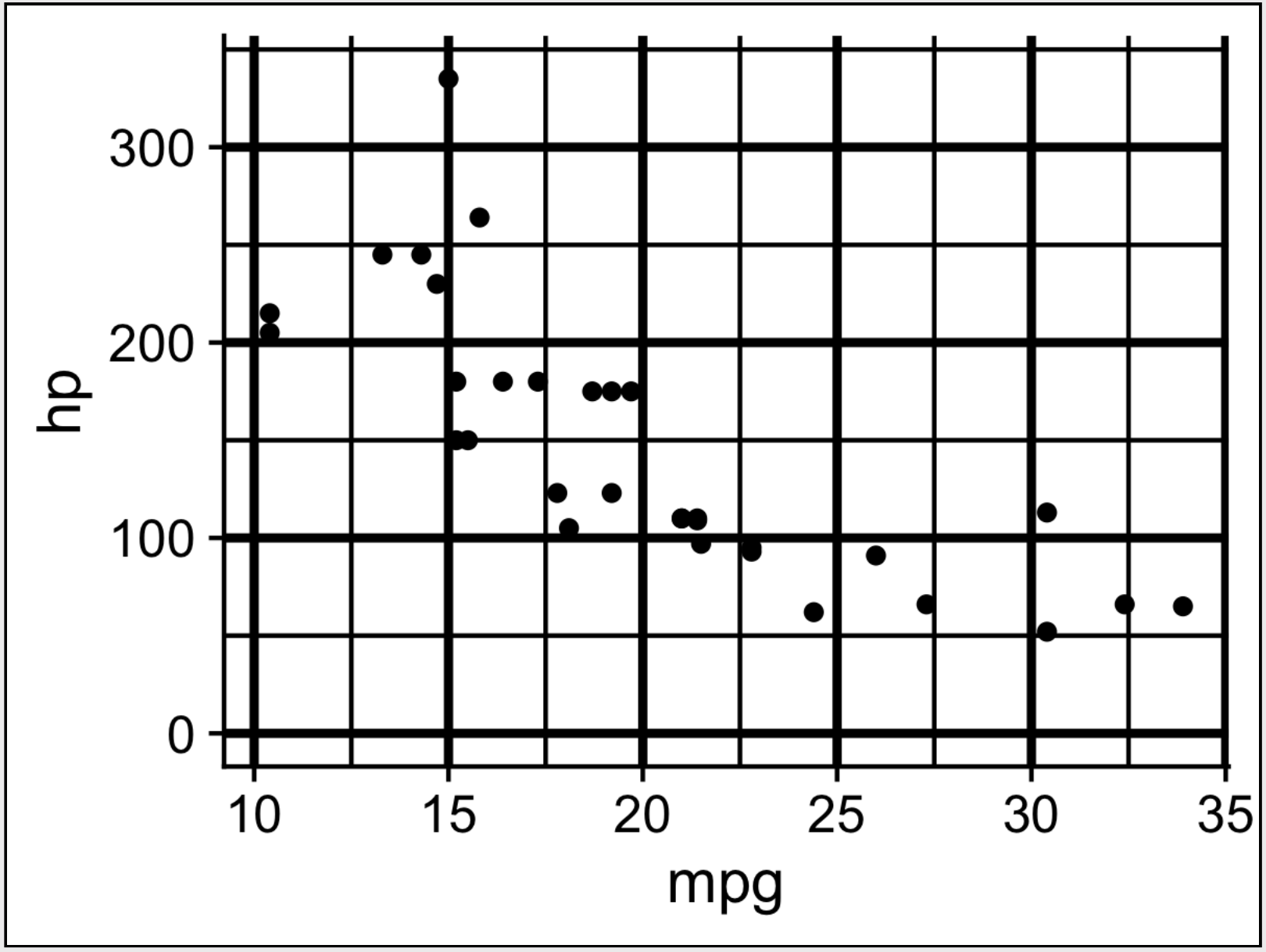
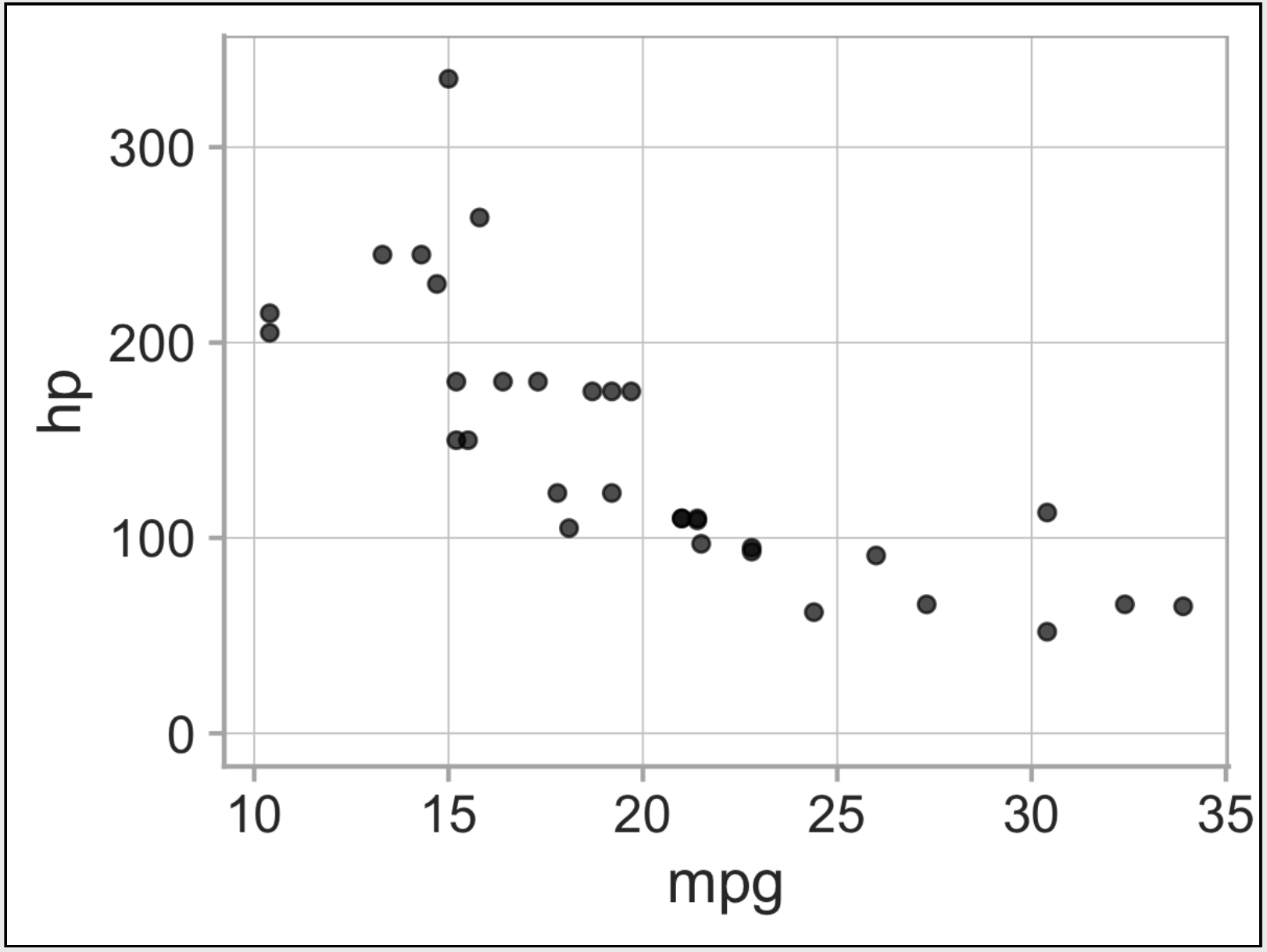
20
25
30
35
mpg


300
200
100
0
hp
10
15
20
25
30
35
mpg

The white circles you see at the intersections is called the **"Hermann Grid illusion"**


300
200
100
0
hp
10
15
20
25
30
35
mpg

Break!

Stand up, Move around, Stretch!

05:00

Visualizing Information

1. The Human Visual-Memory System
2. The Psychology of Data Viz

BREAK

3. 10 Data Viz Best Practices

10 Data Viz Best Practices

1. Remove chart chunk
2. Don't make 3D plots*
3. Don't lie
4. Don't use pie charts for proportions*
5. Don't stack bars*
6. Rotate and sort categorical axes*
7. Eliminate legends & directly label geoms*
8. Don't use pattern fills
9. Don't use red & green together
10. Consider tables for small data sets

*most of the time

10 Data Viz Best Practices

1. Remove chart chunk
2. Don't make 3D plots*
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10. Consider tables for small data sets

*most of the time

"*Erase non-data ink.*"

— Ed Tufte

Figure 1.6: `Monstrous Costs' by Nigel Holmes, in Healy, 2018

Figure 1.6: `Monstrous Costs' by Nigel Holmes, in Healy, 2018

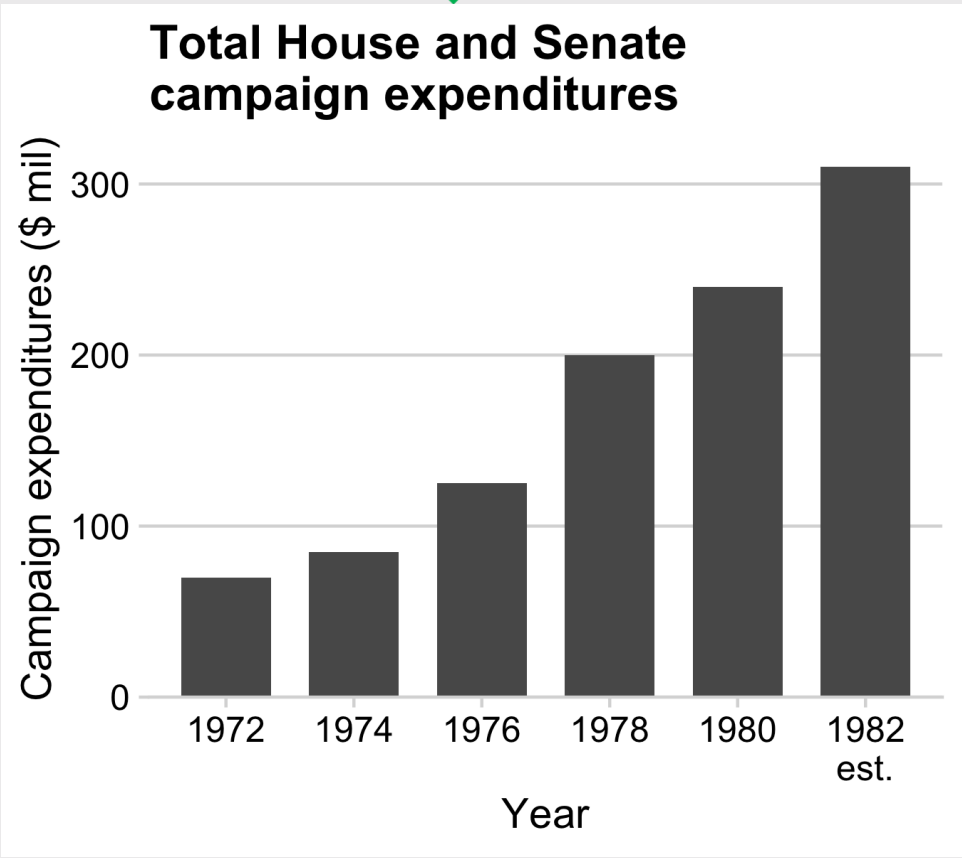
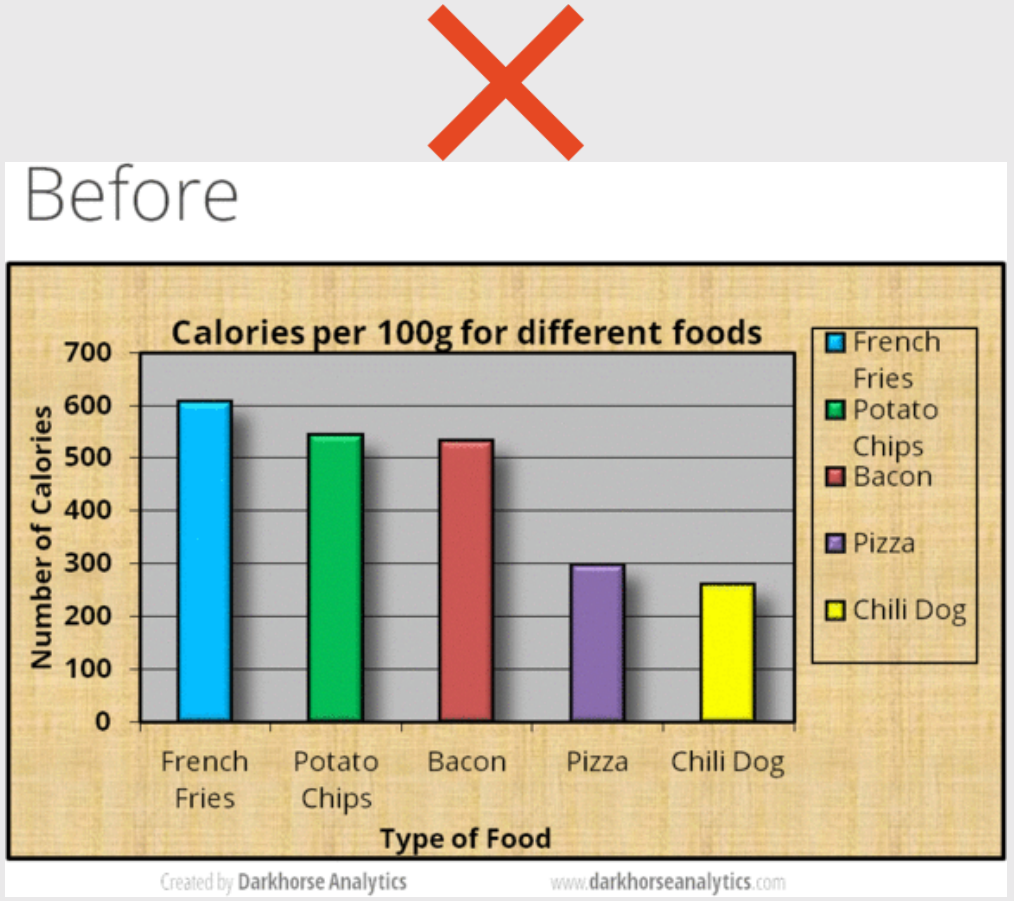
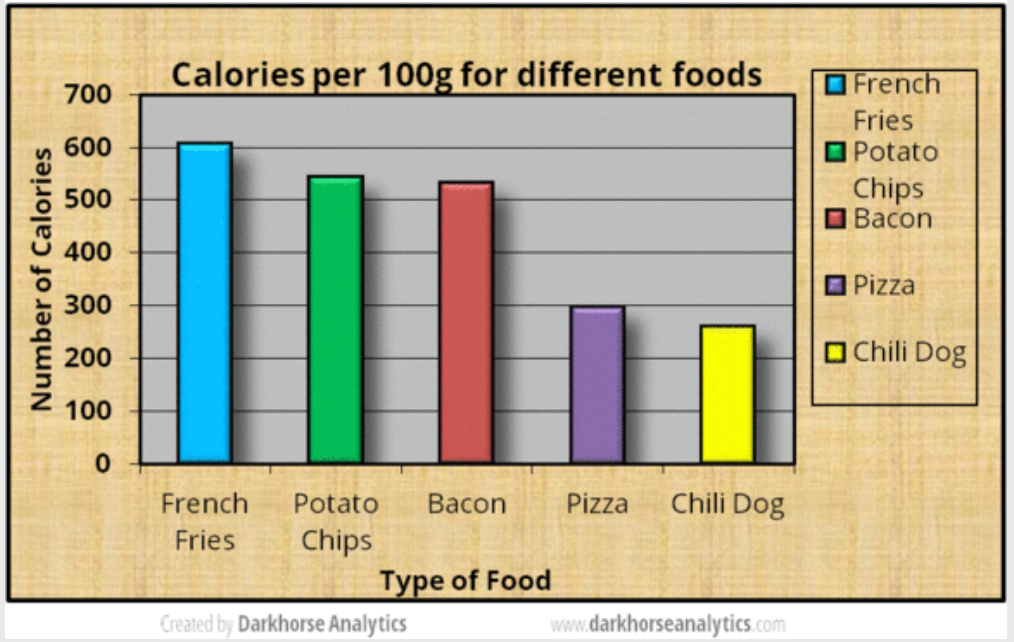


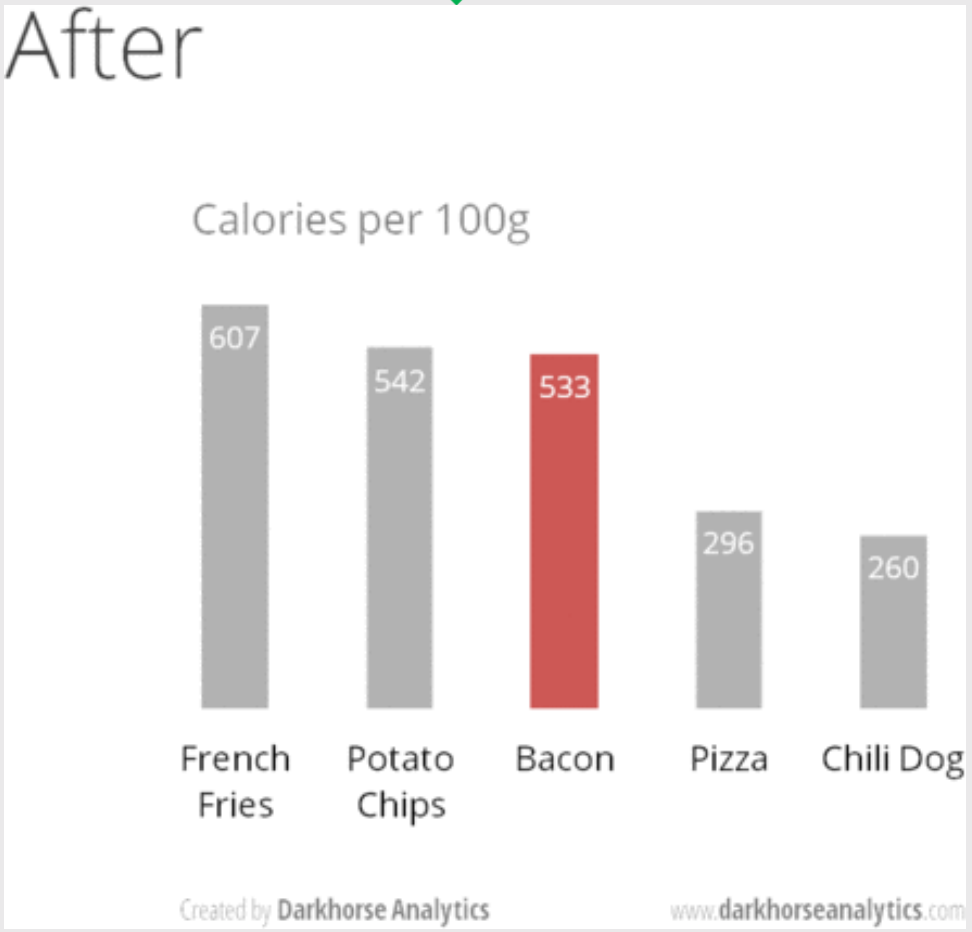
Figure 24.1: From Data Looks Better Naked by Darkhorse Analytics


Before
Calories per 100g for different foods
Number of Calories
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
French Fries
Potato Chips
Bacon
Pizza
Chili Dog
Type of Food
French Fries
Potato Chips
Bacon
Pizza
Chili Dog
Created by Darkhorse Analytics
www.darkhorseanalytics.com

Before



After



10 Data Viz Best Practices

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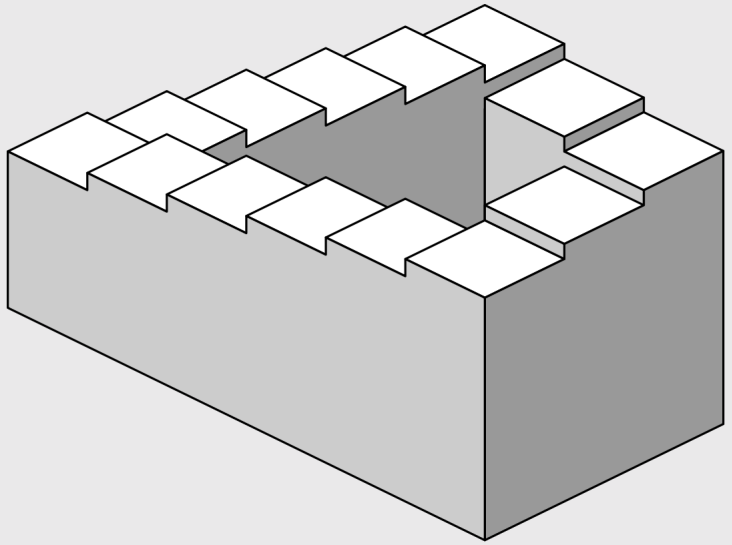
2. Don't make 3D plots*
3. Don't lie
4. Don't use pie charts for proportions*
5. Don't stack bars*
6. Rotate and sort categorical axes*
7. Eliminate legends & directly label geoms*
8. Don't use pattern fills
9. Don't use red & green together
10. Consider tables for small data sets

*most of the time

Humans aren't good at distinguishing 3D space



Penrose Stairs, made famous by M.C. Escher (1898-1972)

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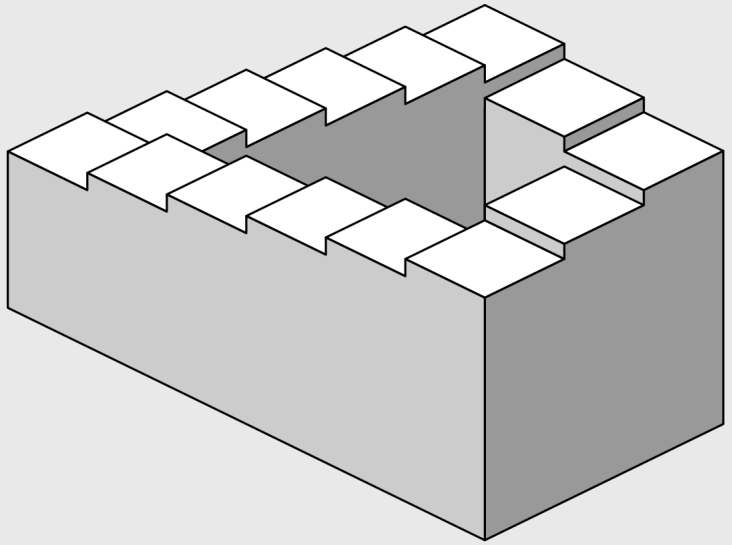
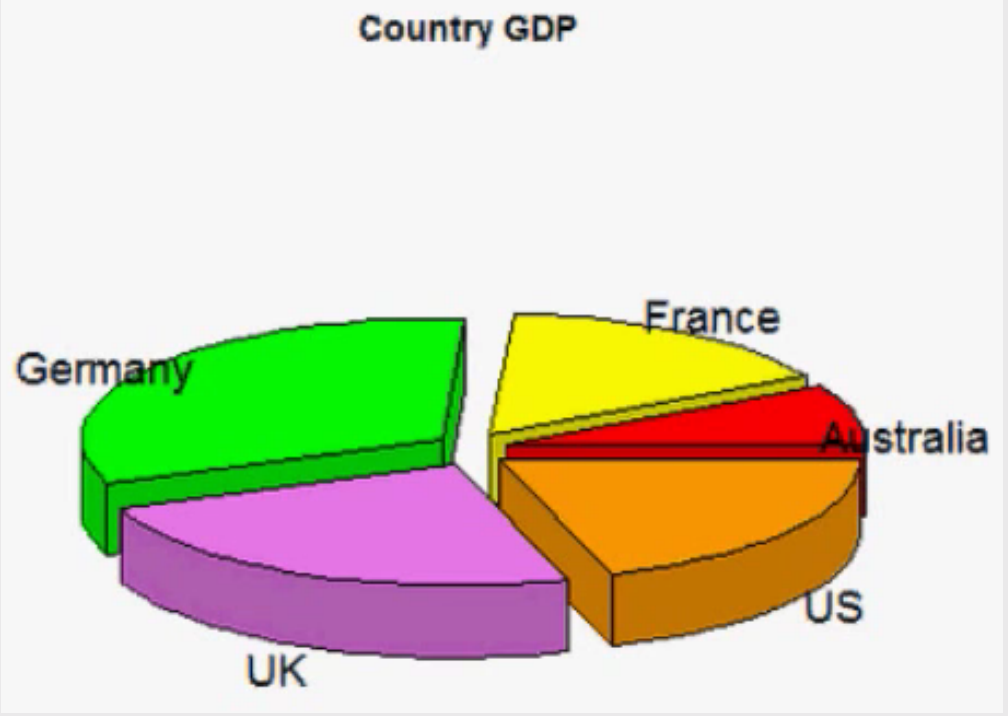
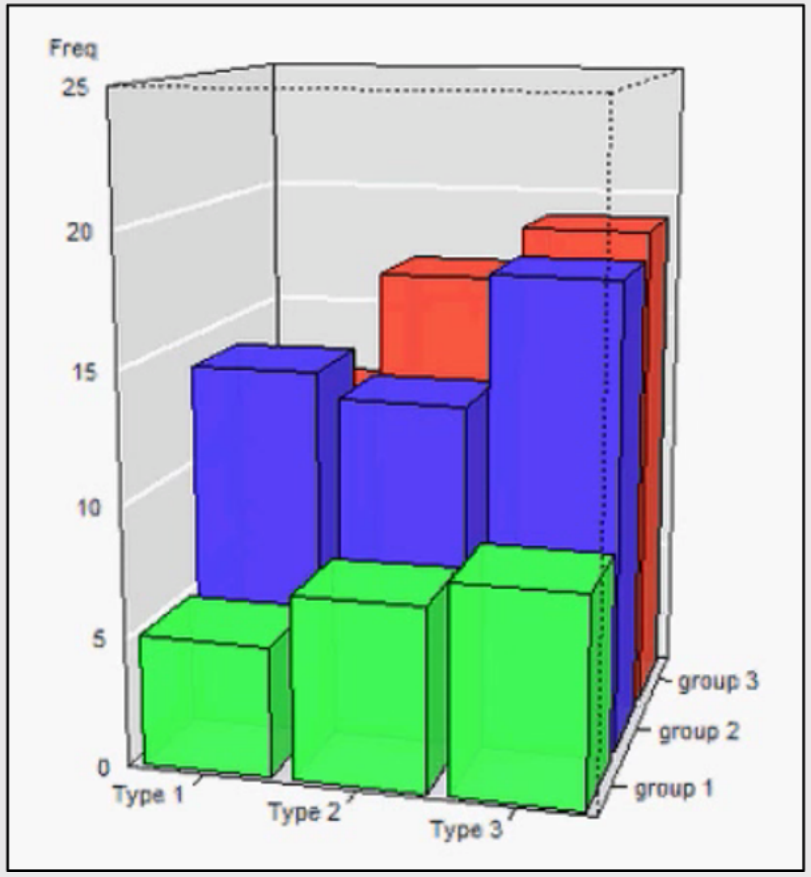


Penrose Stairs, made famous by M.C. Escher (1898-1972)

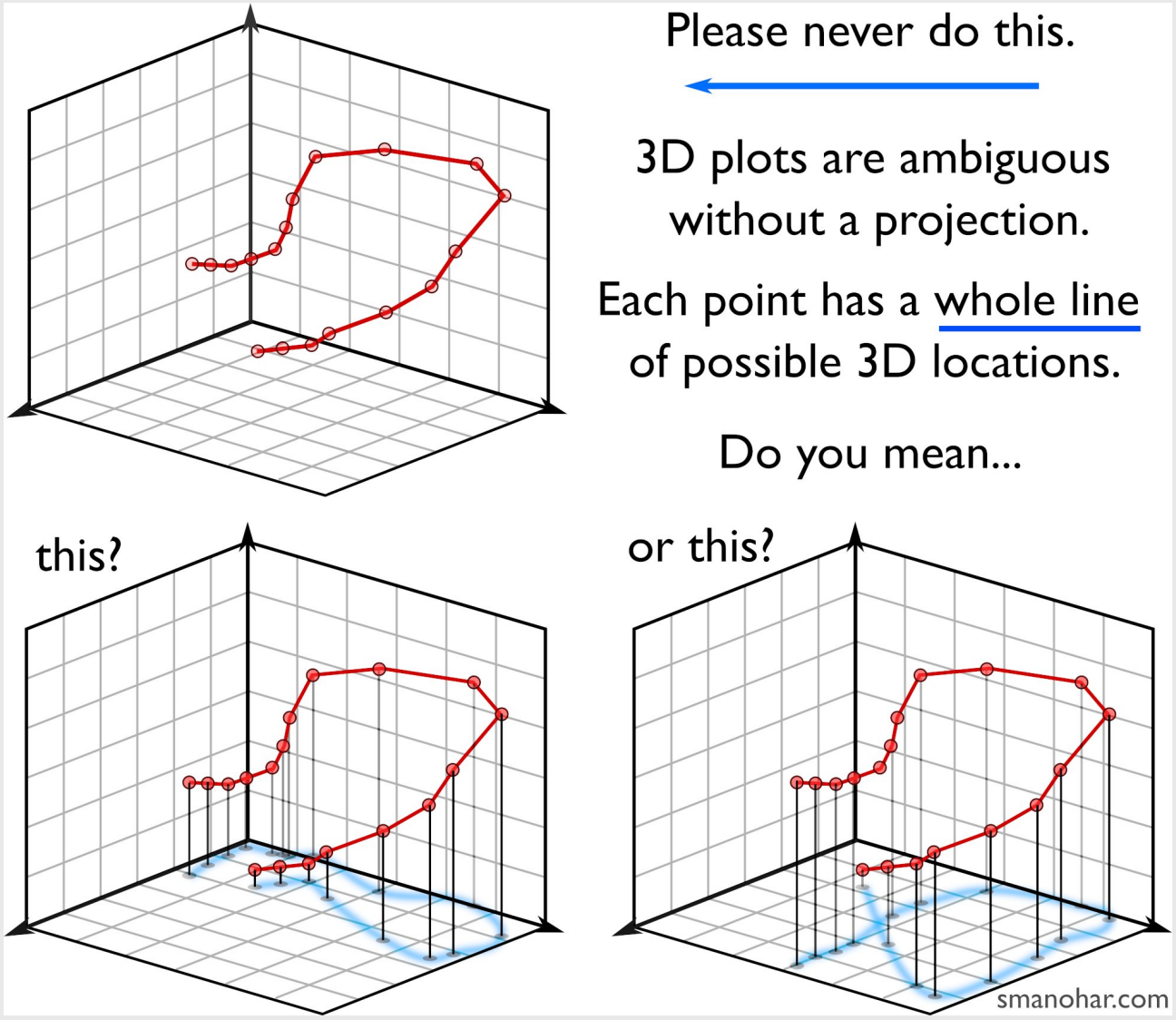
Ink proportions != true proportions

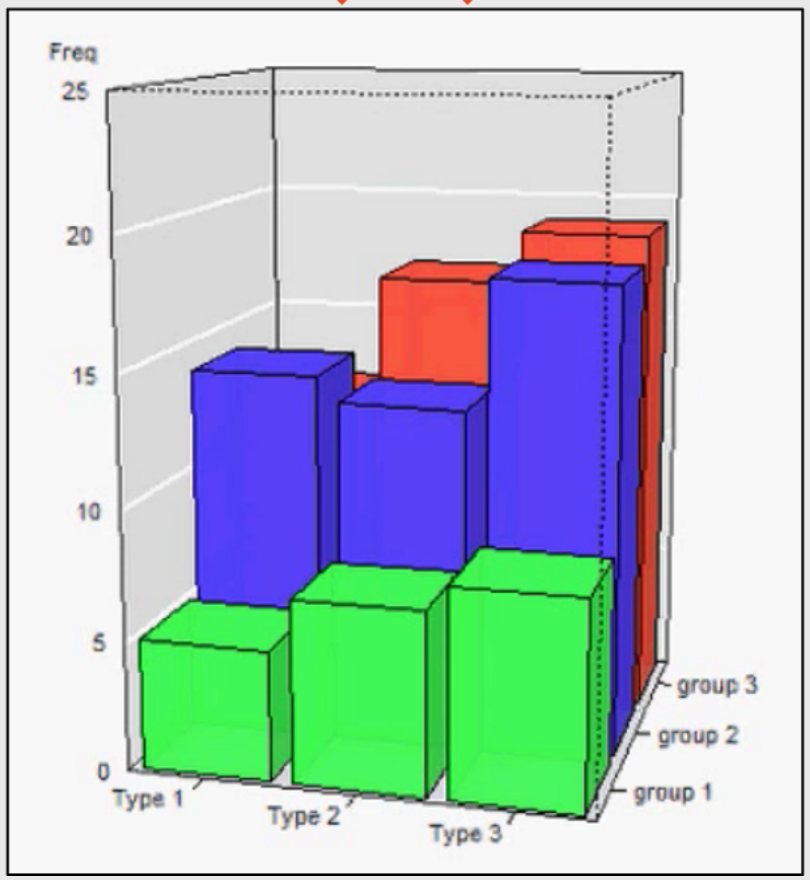


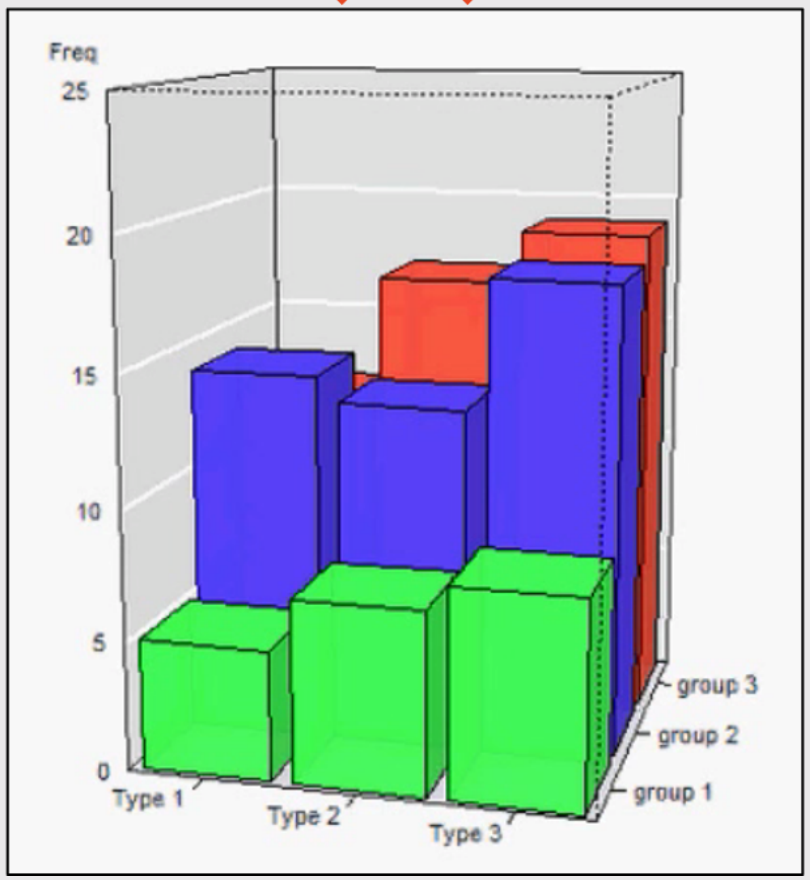
Occlusion: geoms are obscured



Multiple interpretations




Freq
25
20
15
10
5
0
Type 1
Type 2
Type 3
group 3
group 2
group 1


Freq
25
20
15
10
5
0
Type 1
Type 2
Type 3
group 3
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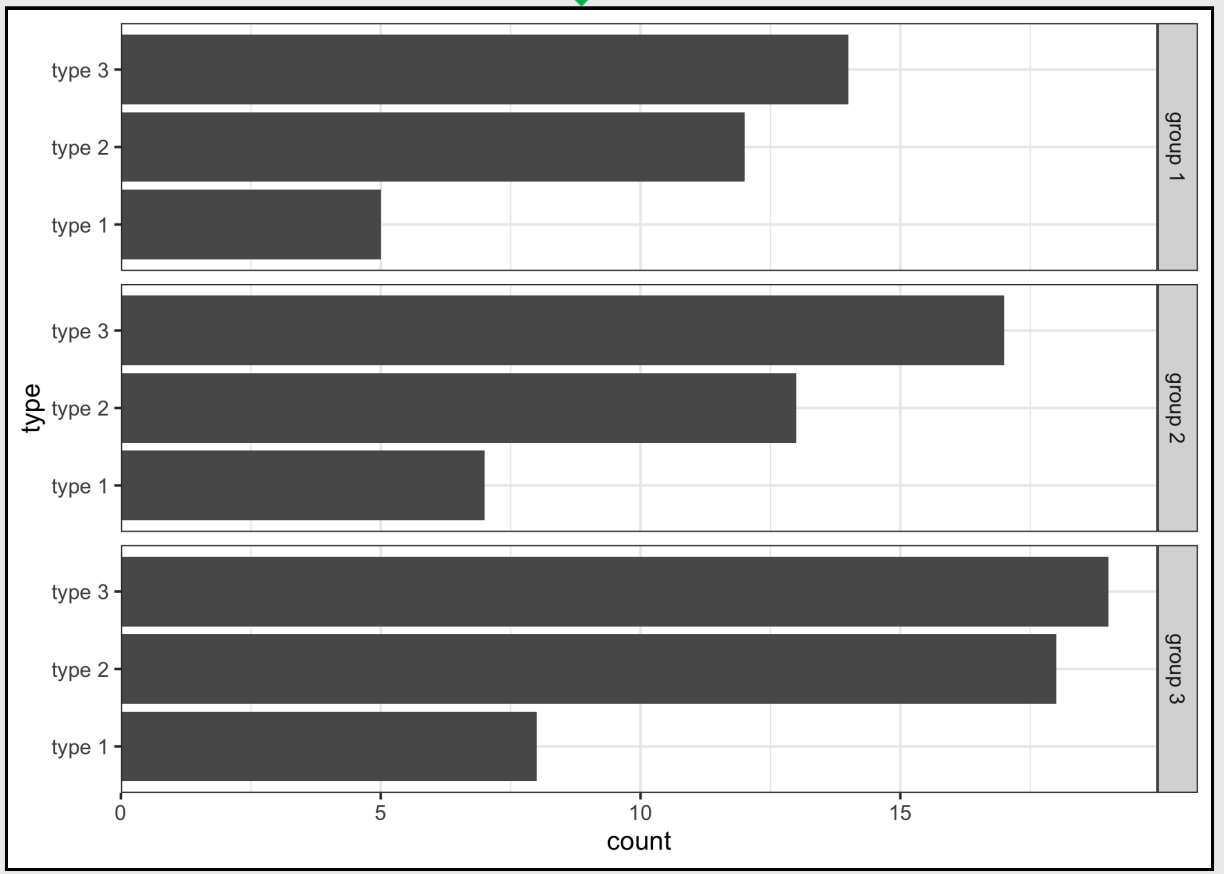
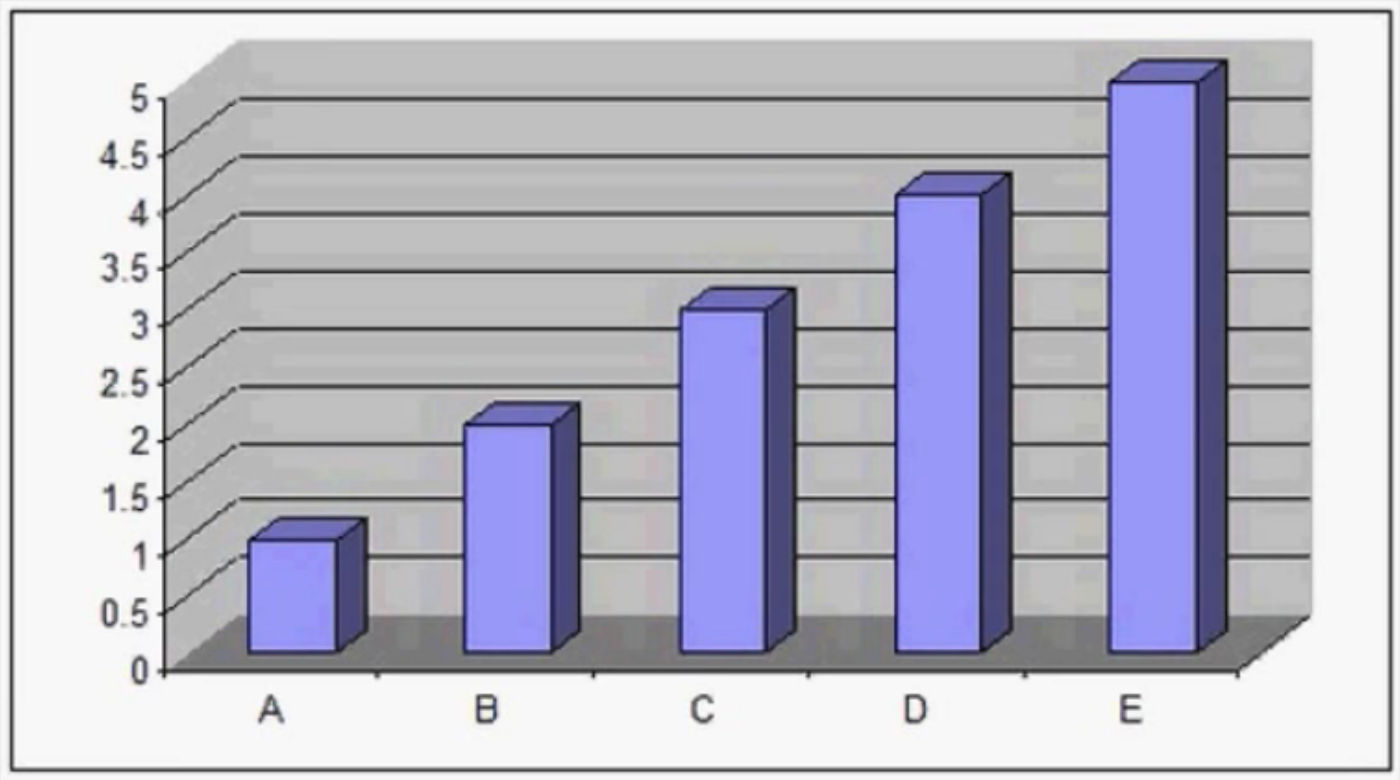
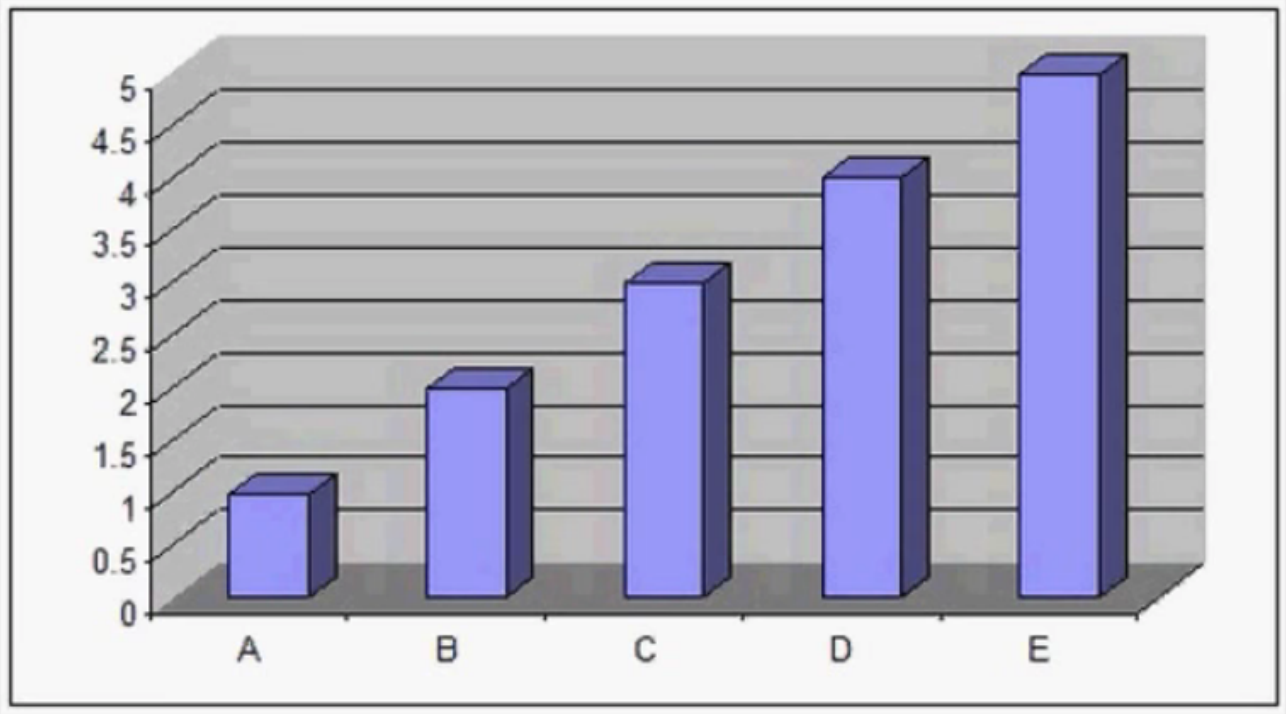
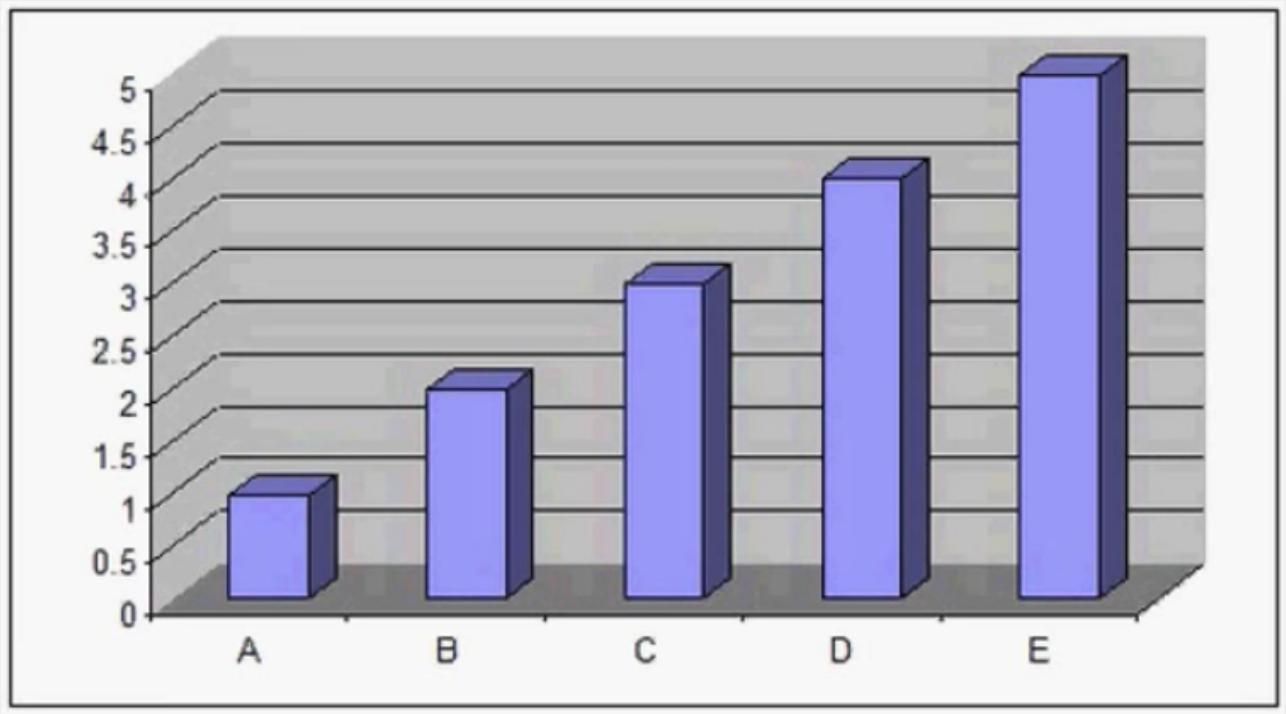

type 3
type 2
type 1
group 1
type 3
type 2
type 1
group 2
type 3
type 2
type 1
group 3
type
0
5
10
15
count

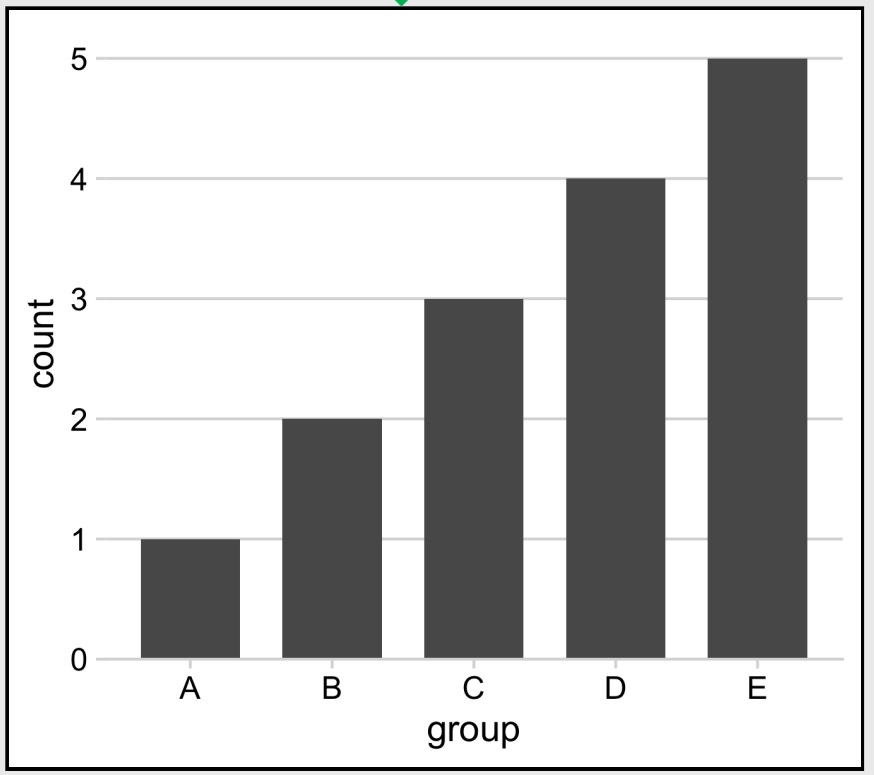
The third dimension distracts from the data

(this is what Tufte calls "chart junk")




5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
A
B
C
D
E


5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
A
B
C
D
E


5
4
3
2
1
0
count
A
B
C
D
E
group

10 Data Viz Best Practices

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2. Don't make 3D plots*
3. Don't lie
4. Don't use pie charts for proportions*
5. Don't stack bars*
6. Rotate and sort categorical axes*
7. Eliminate legends & directly label geoms*
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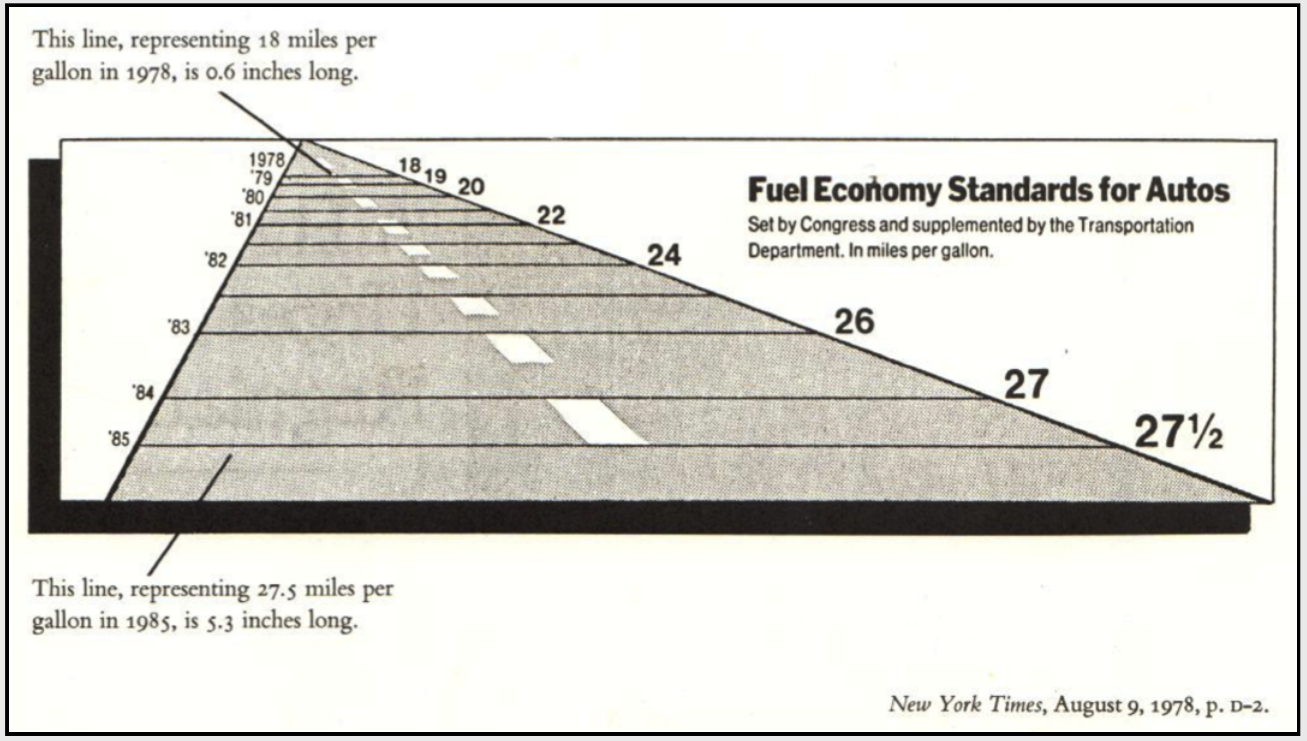
10. Consider tables for small data sets

*most of the time

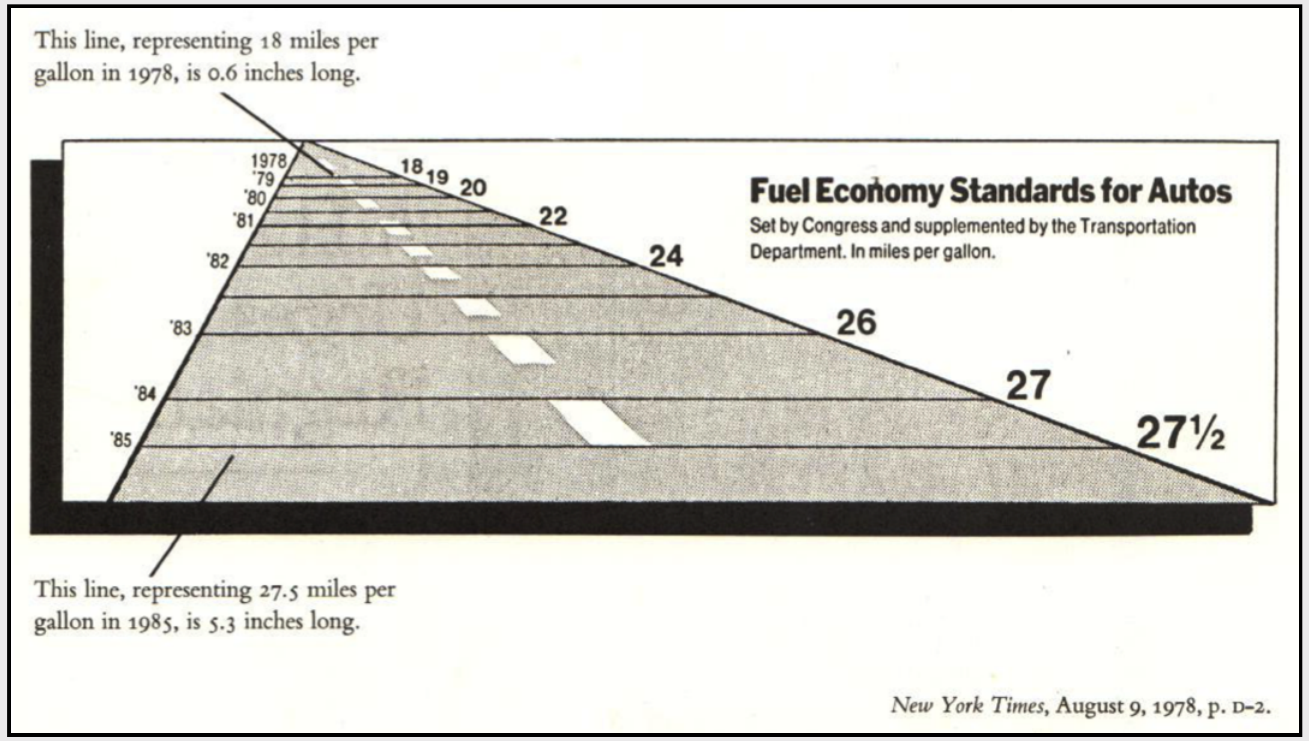
$$\text{"Lie Factor"} = \frac{\text{Size of effect in graphic}}{\text{Size of effect in data}}$$

"Lie Factor" = $\frac{\text{Size of effect in graphic}}{\text{Size of effect in data}} = \frac{\frac{5.3-0.6}{0.6}}{\frac{27.5-18}{18}} = \frac{7.83}{0.53} = 14.8$



Edward Tufte (2001) "The Visual Display of Quantitative Information", 2nd Edition, pg. 57-58.

$$\text{"Lie Factor"} = \frac{\text{Size of effect in graphic}}{\text{Size of effect in data}} = \frac{\frac{5.3-0.6}{0.6}}{\frac{27.5-18}{18}} = \frac{7.83}{0.53} = 14.8$$



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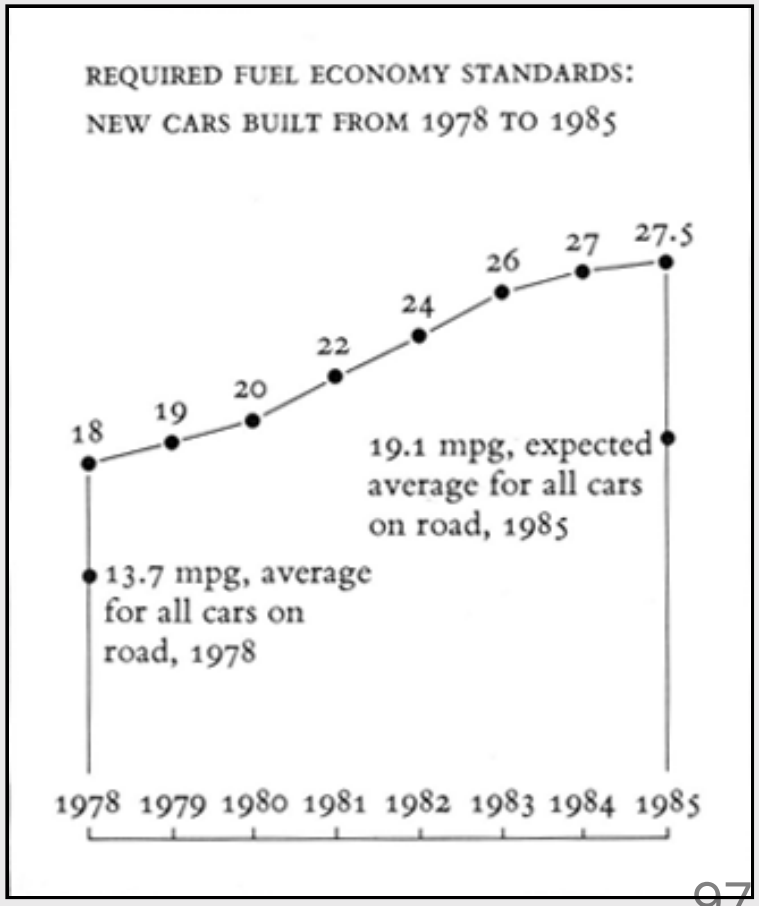

Bar charts should always start at 0

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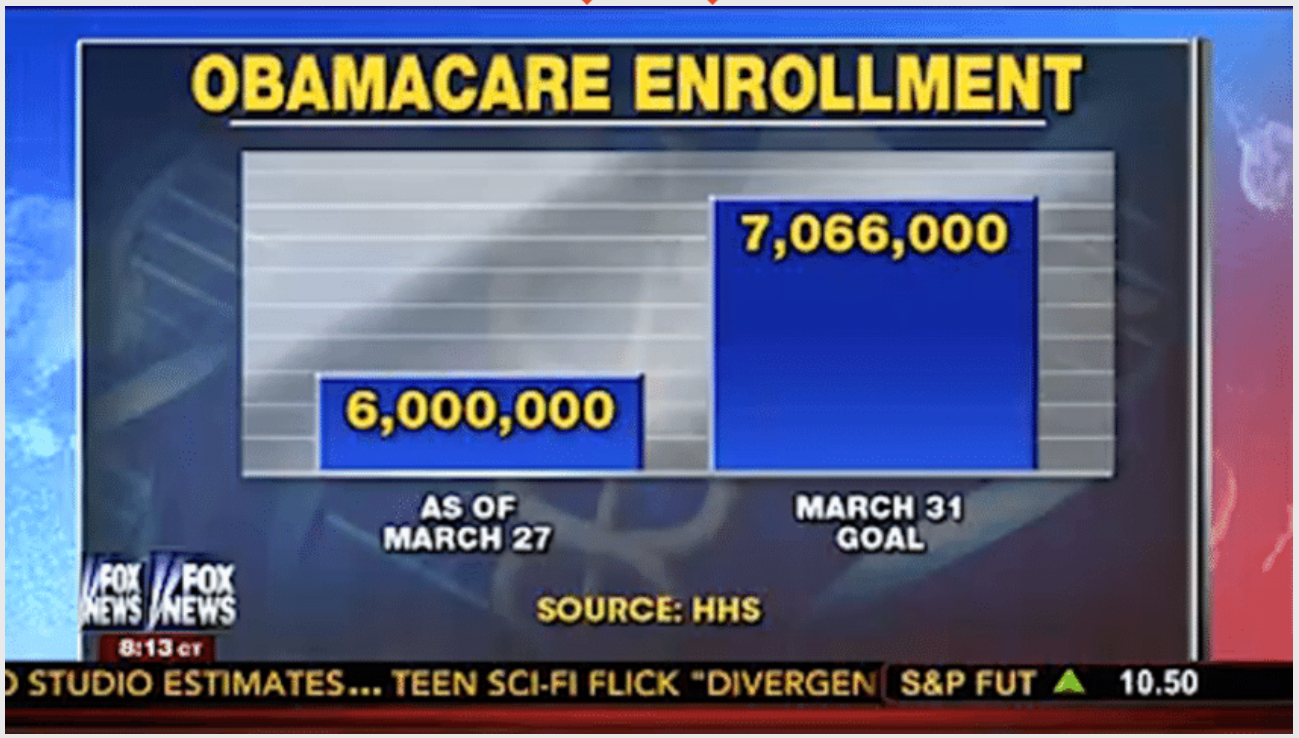
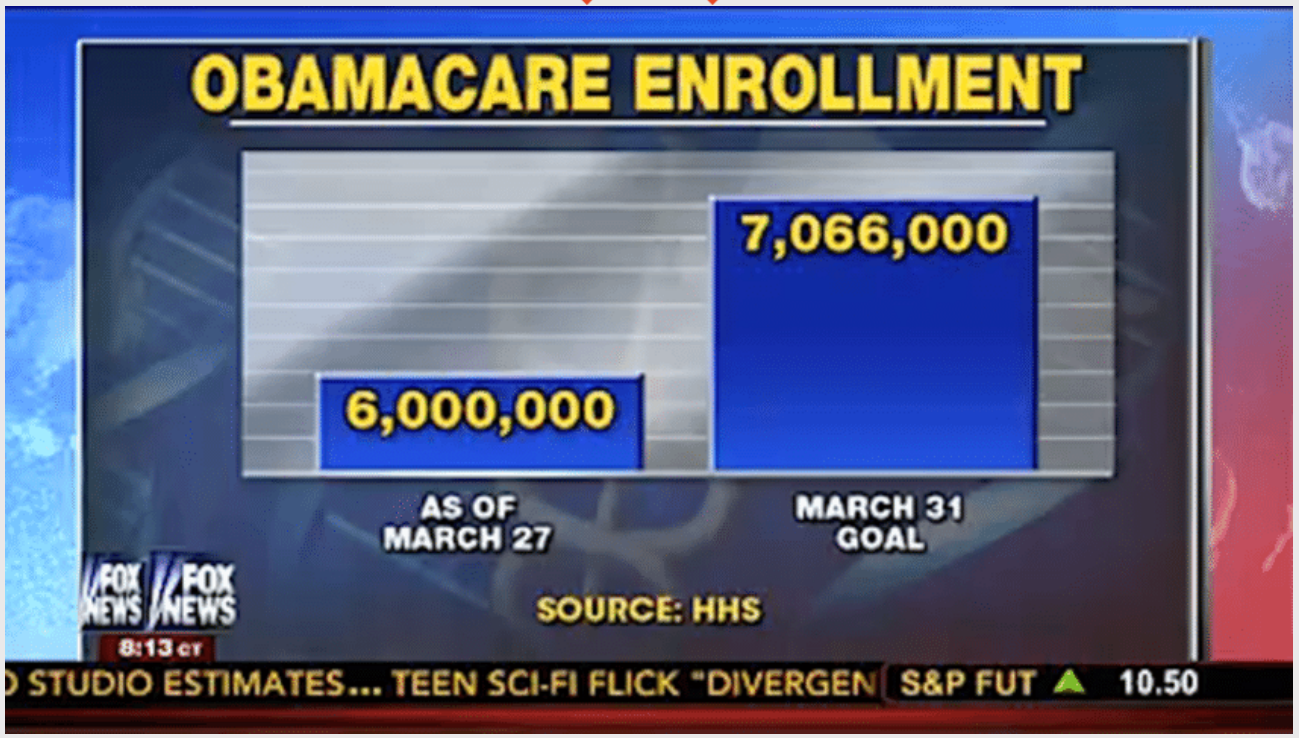


Image from http://livingqlikview.com/the-9-worst-data-visualizations-ever-created/

Bar charts should always start at 0



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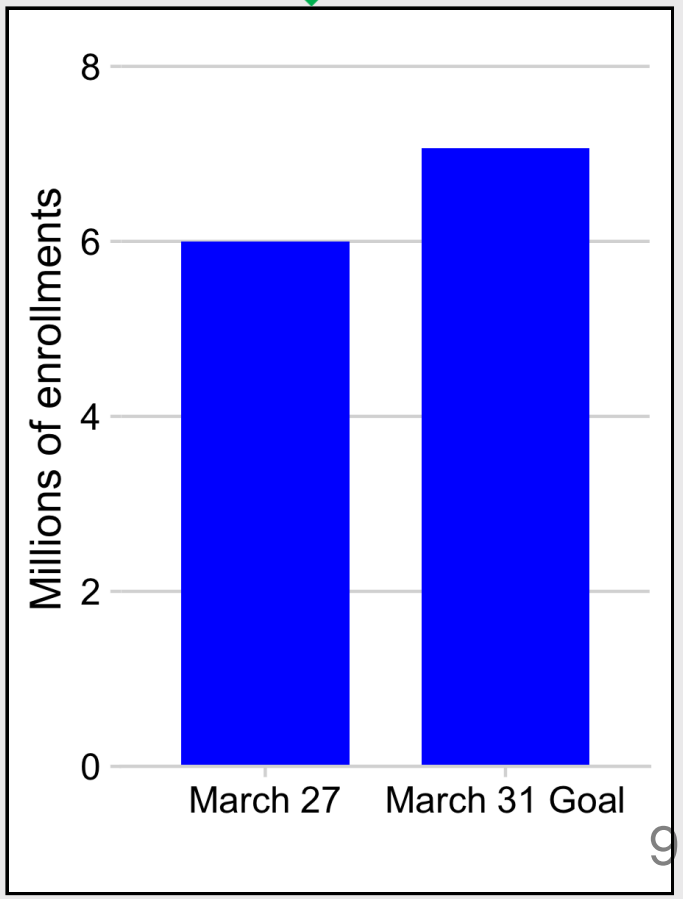

Don't cherry-pick your data

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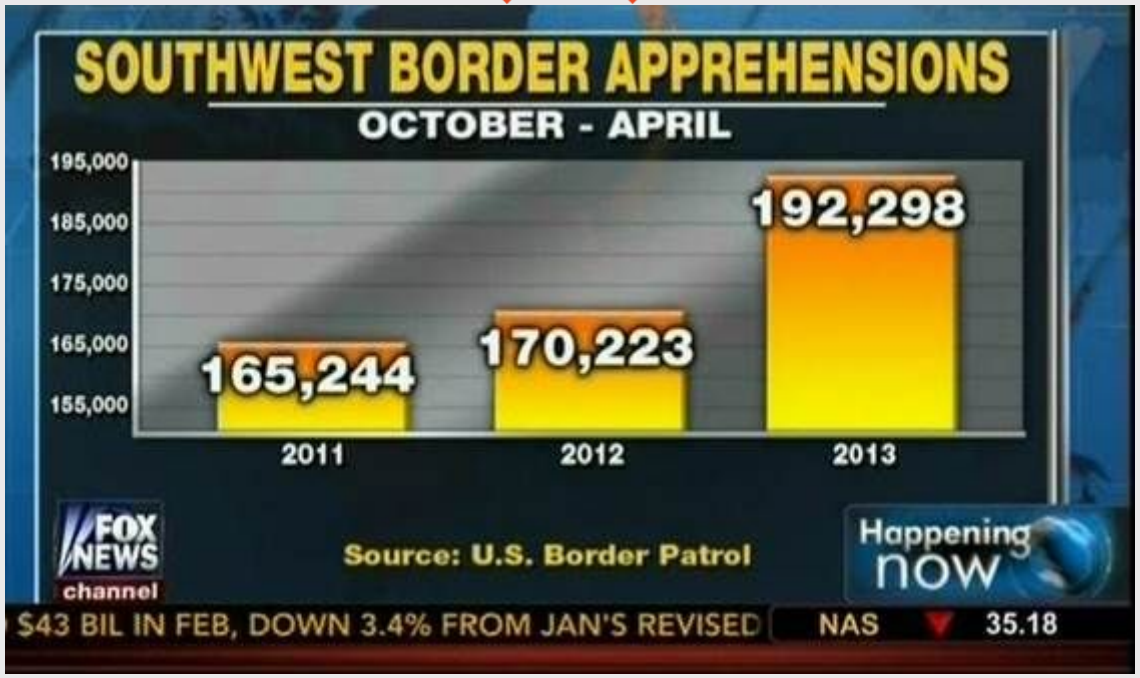

Image from https://www.mediamatters.org/fox-news/fox-news-newest-dishonest-chart-immigration-enforcement

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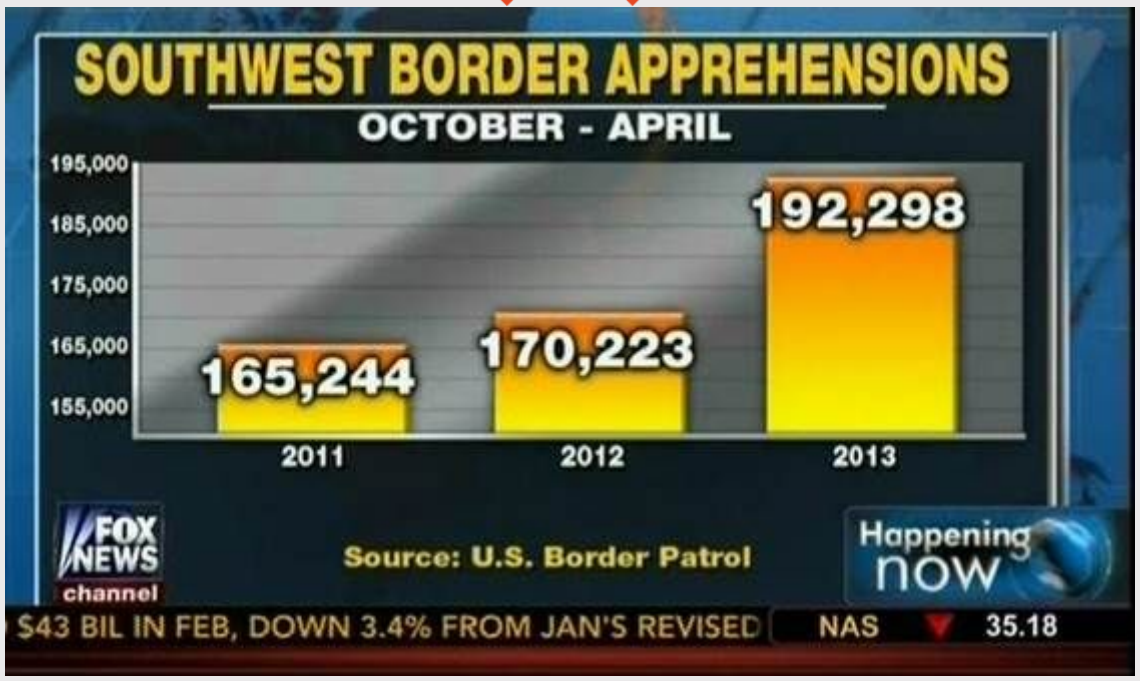
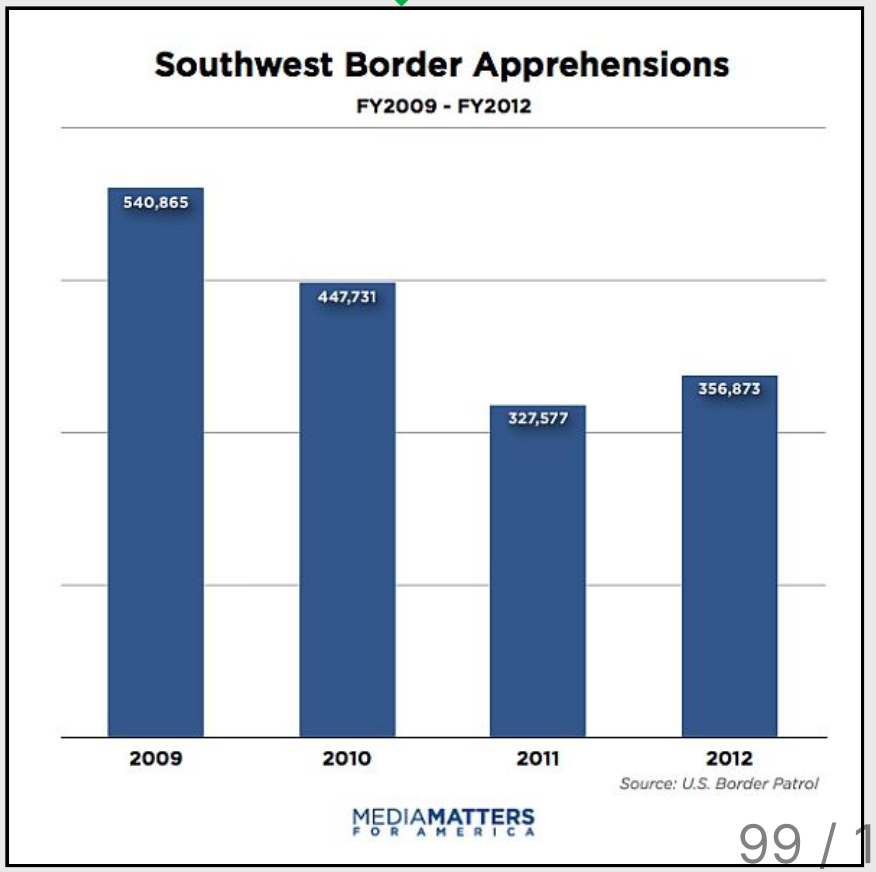
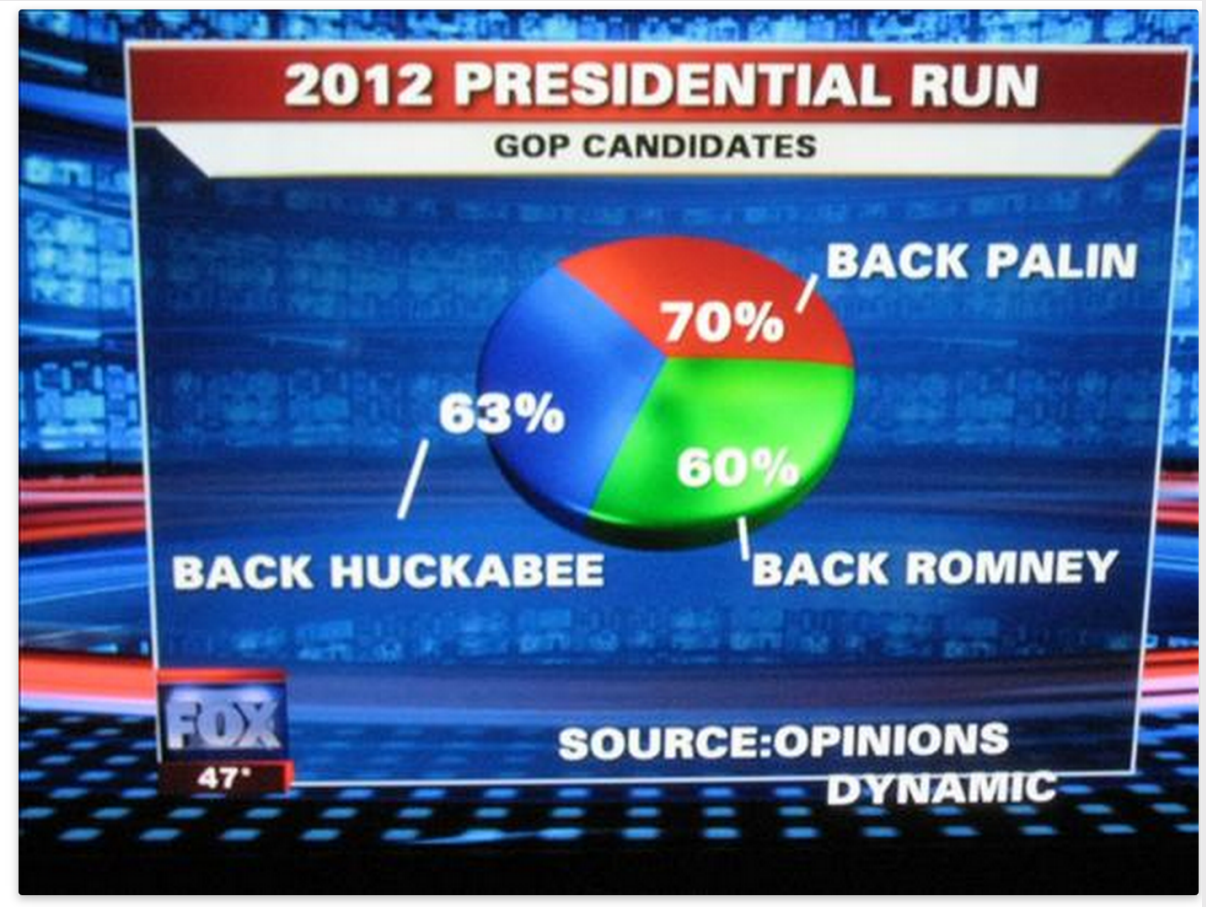


Image from https://www.mediamatters.org/fox-news/fox-news-newest-dishonest-chart-immigration-enforcement



Make sure your chart makes sense



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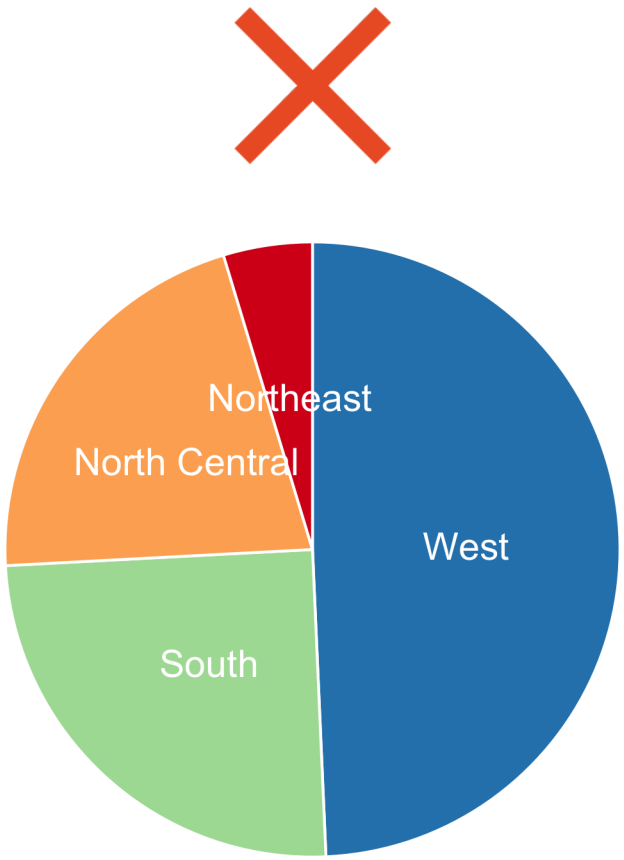
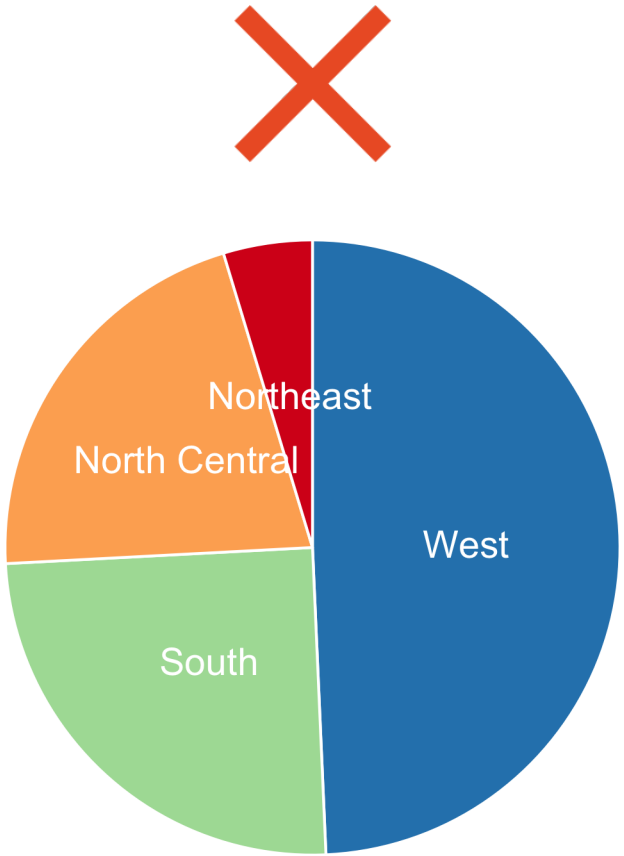
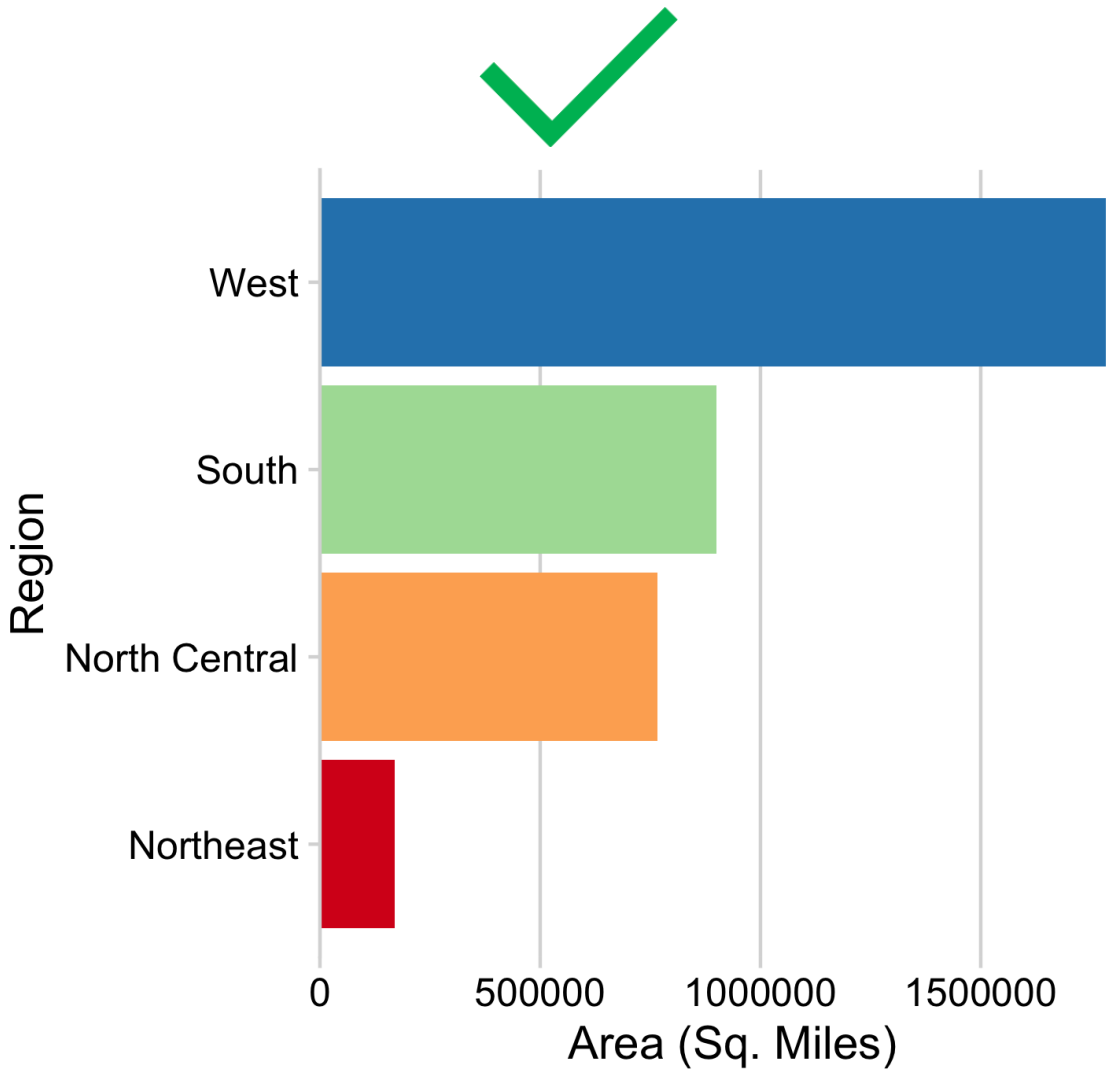

Northeast
North Central
West
South


Northeast
North Central
West
South


West
South
North Central
Northeast
Region
0
500000
1000000
1500000
Area (Sq. Miles)

Exceptions:

- Small data
- Simple fractions
- If sum of parts matters

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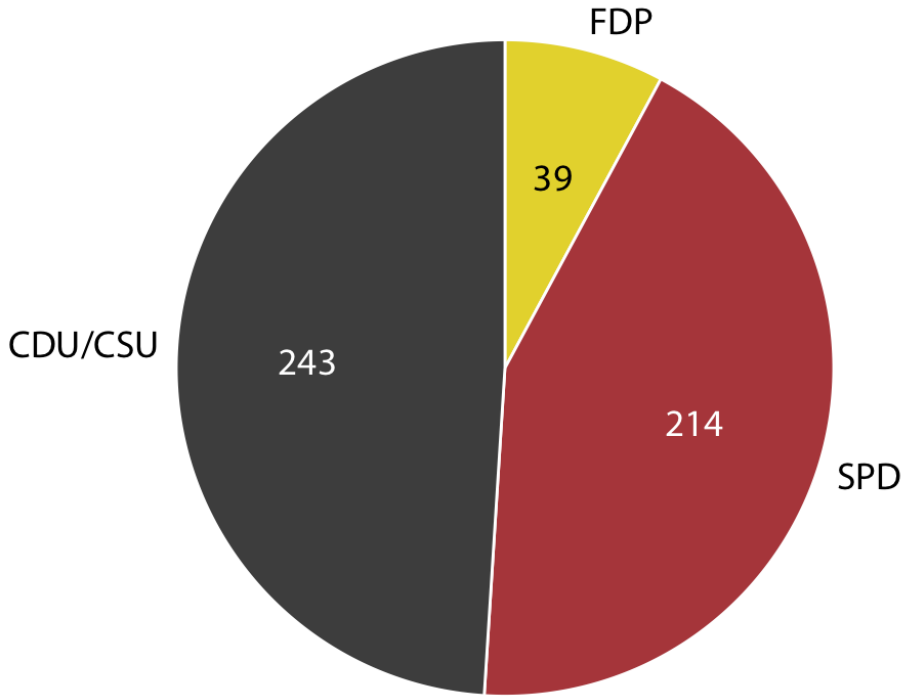
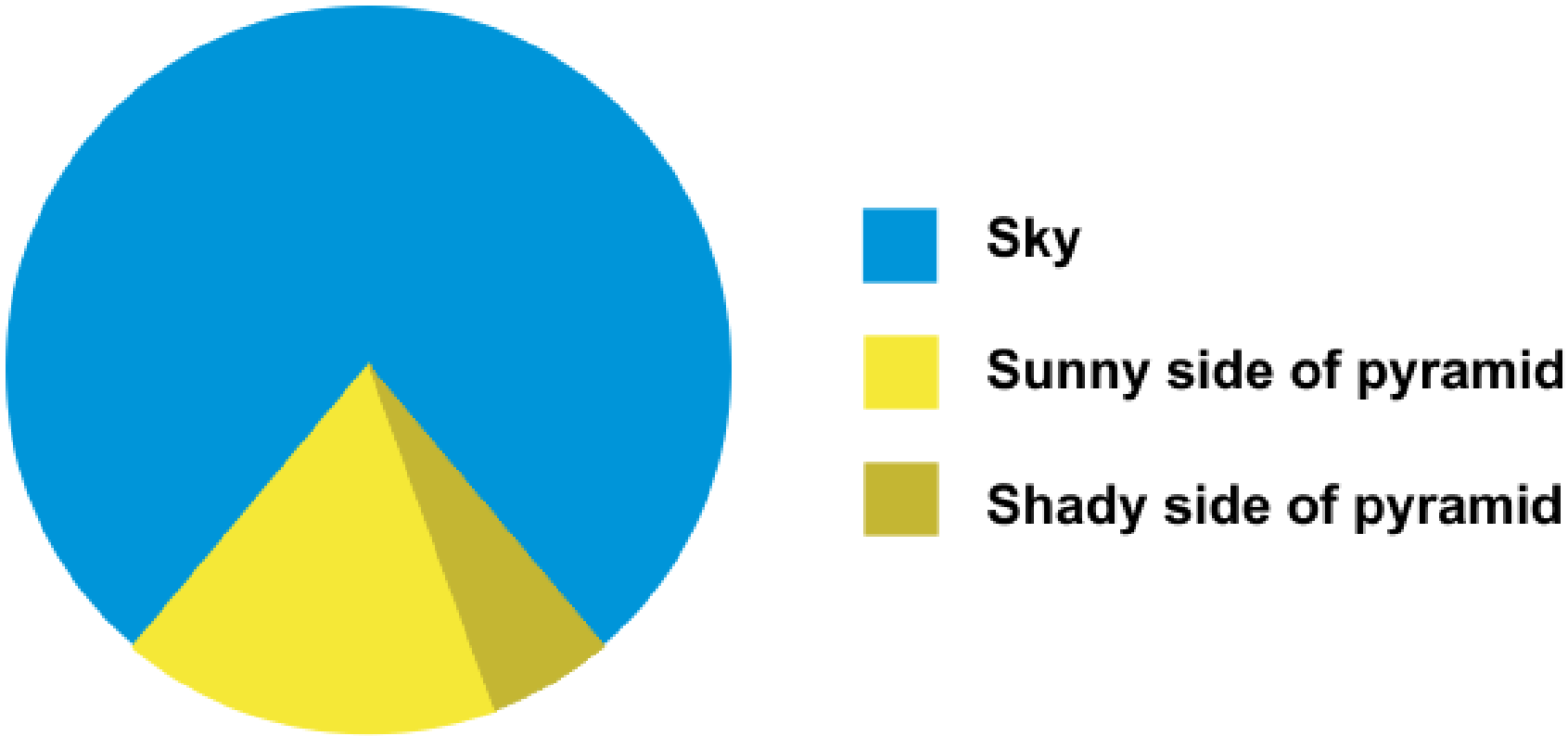
- Simple fractions
- If sum of parts matters



Best pie chart of all time



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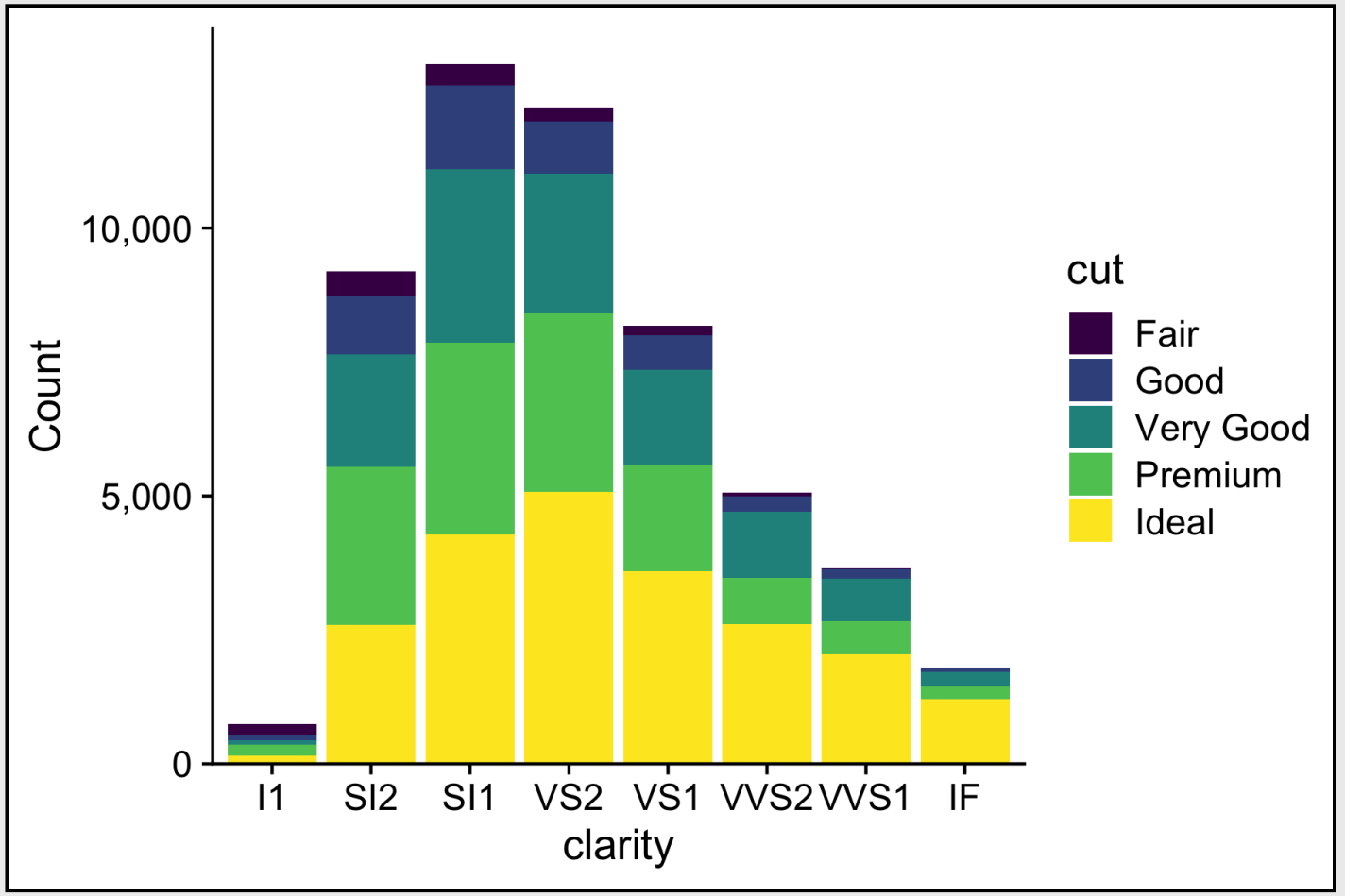
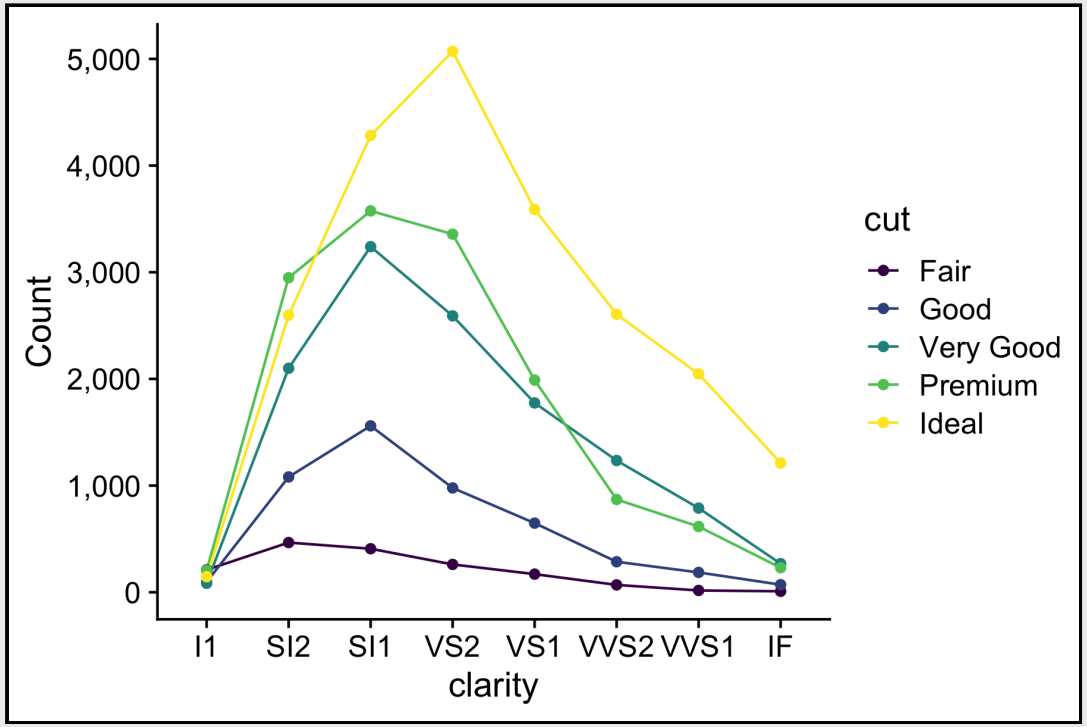
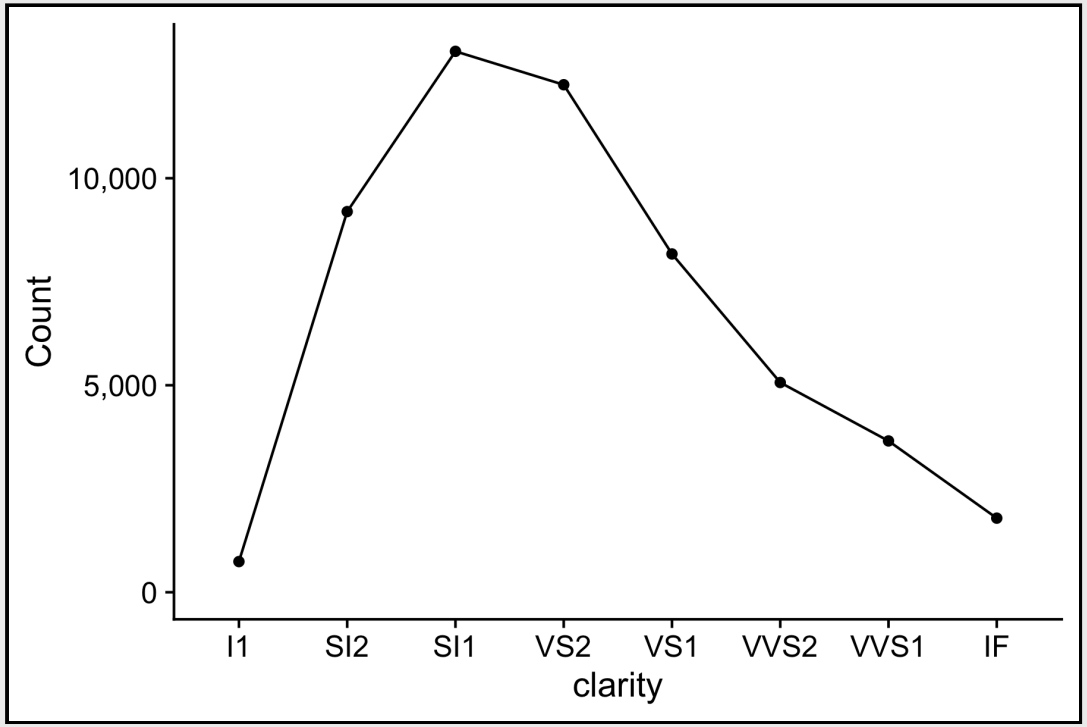
Stacked bars are rarely a good idea

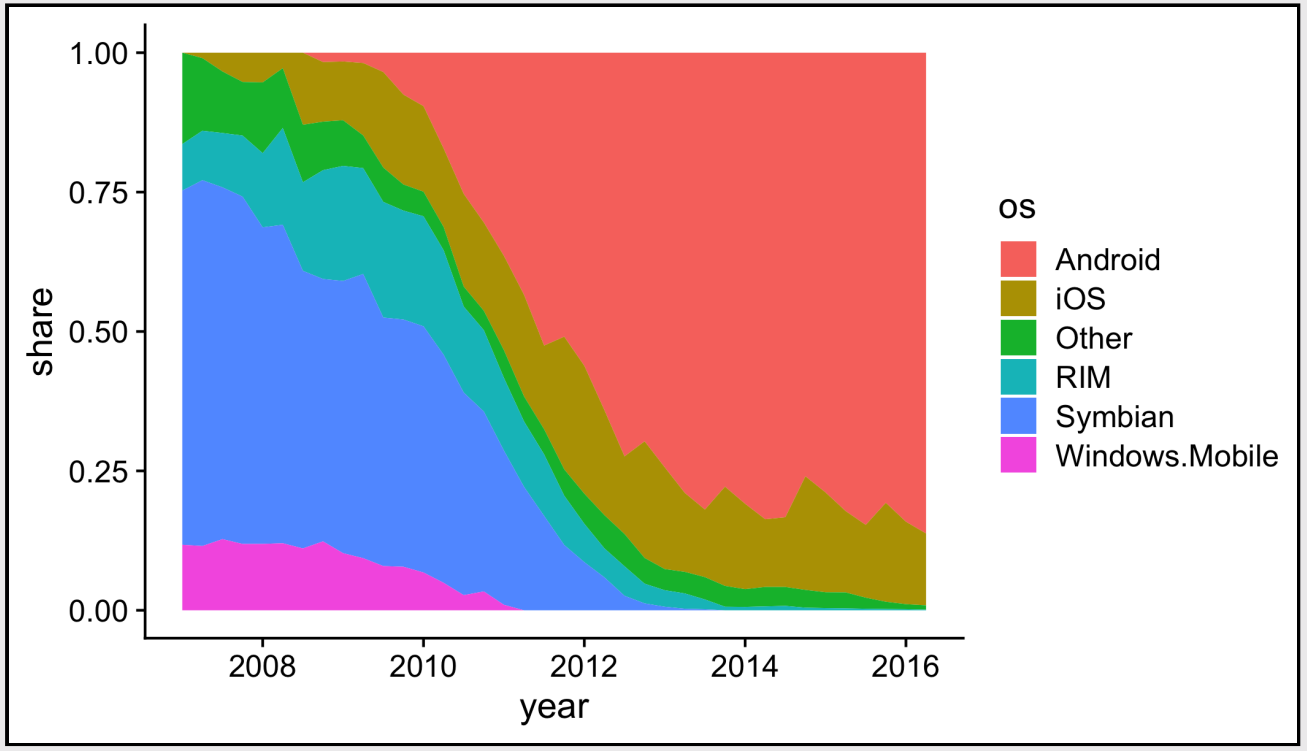


"Parallel coordinates" plot usually works better





Exception:
When you care about the *total* more than the categories



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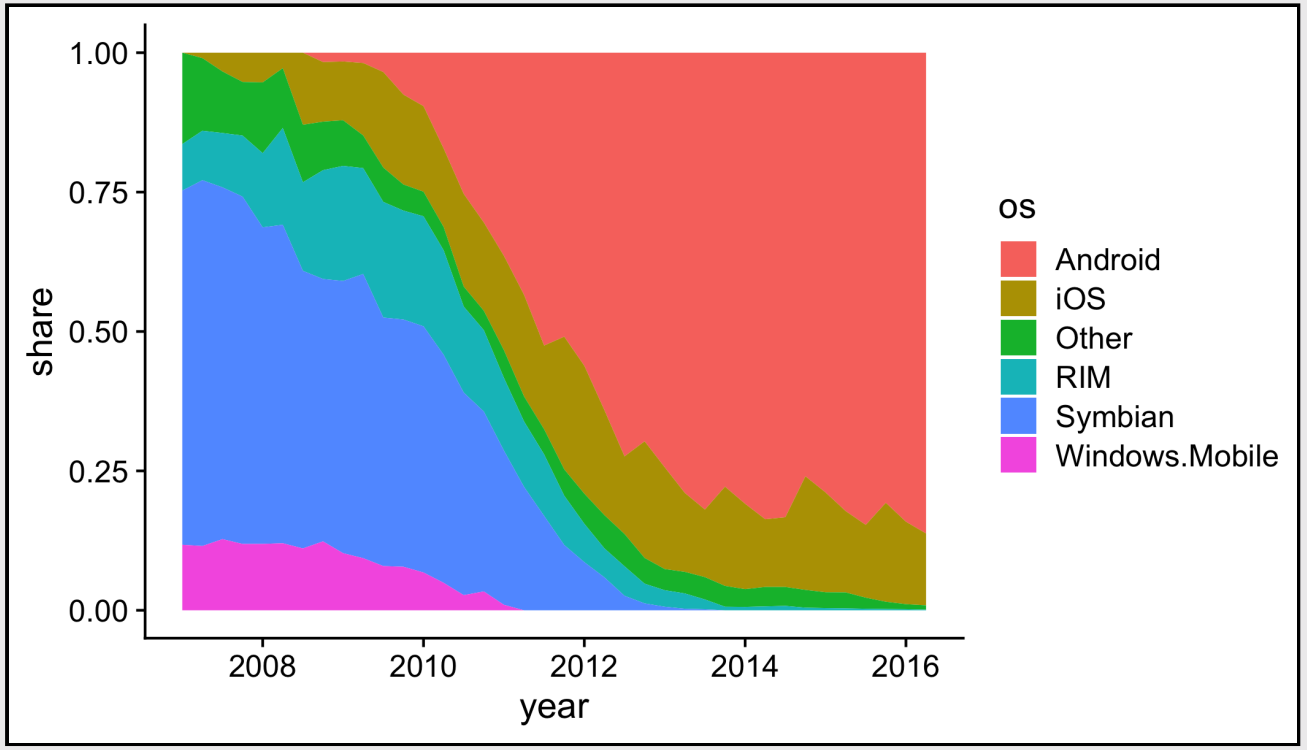

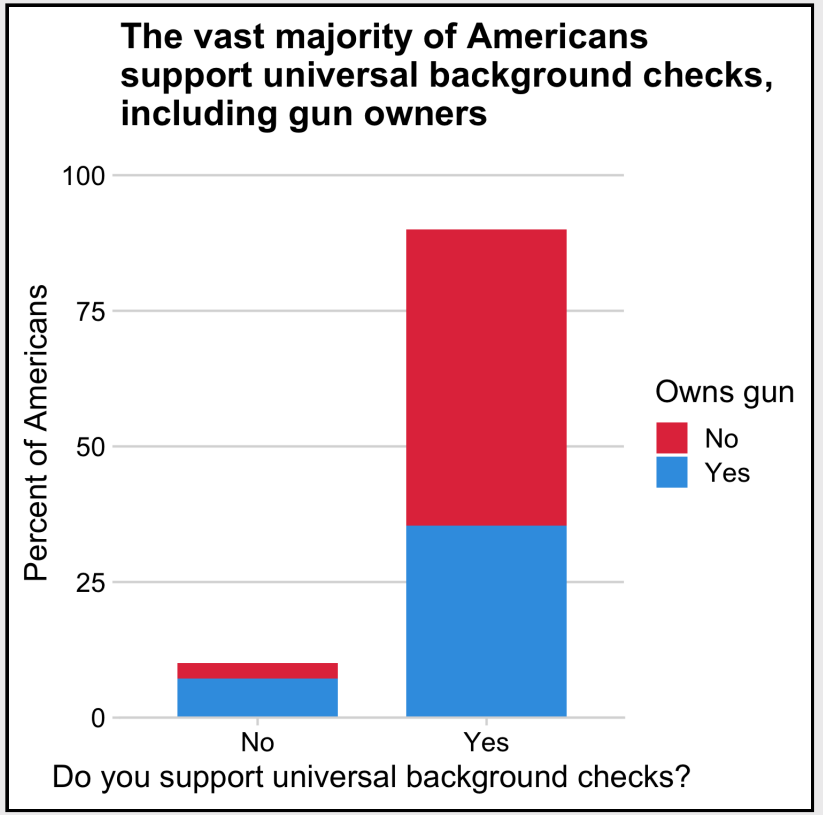

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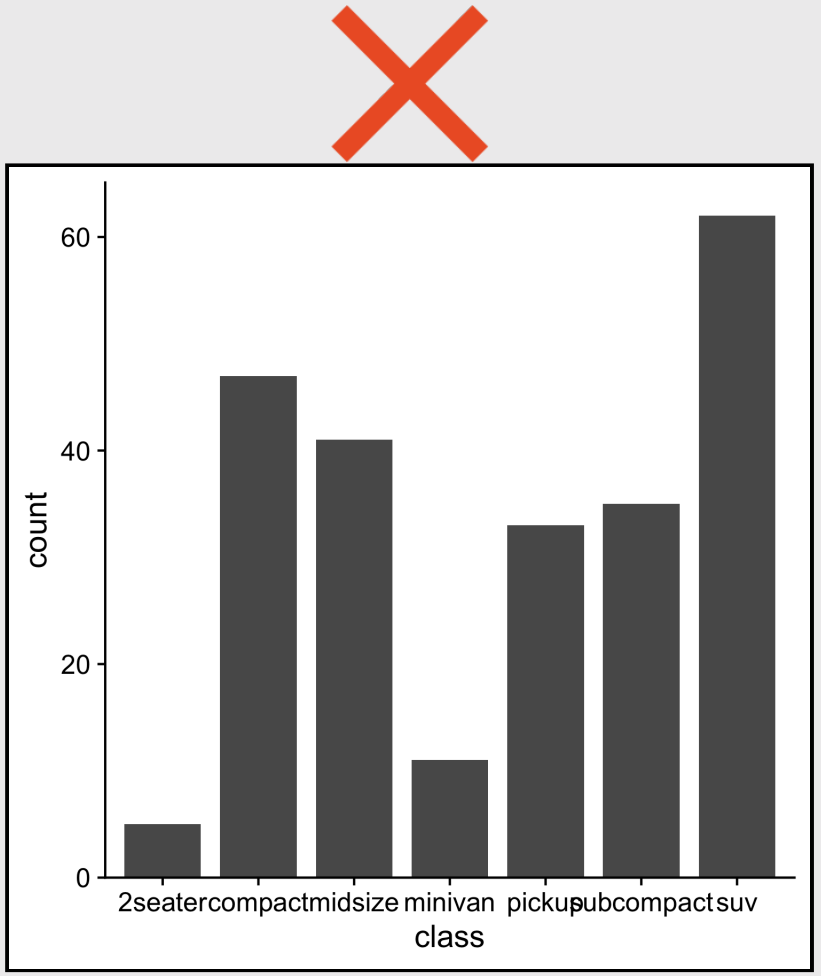
Rotate axes if you can't read them



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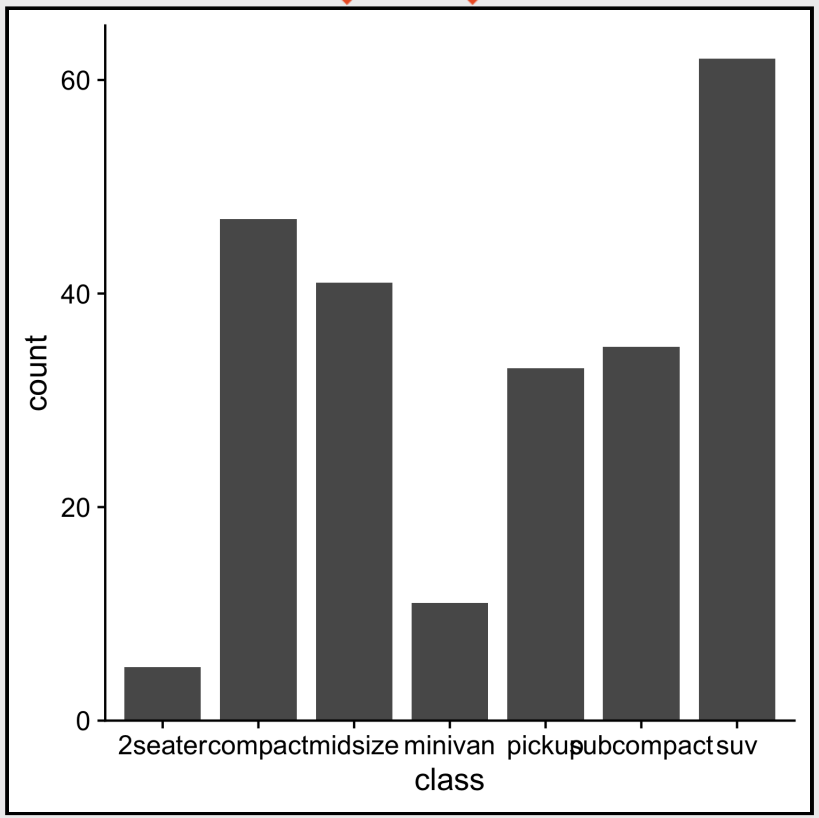
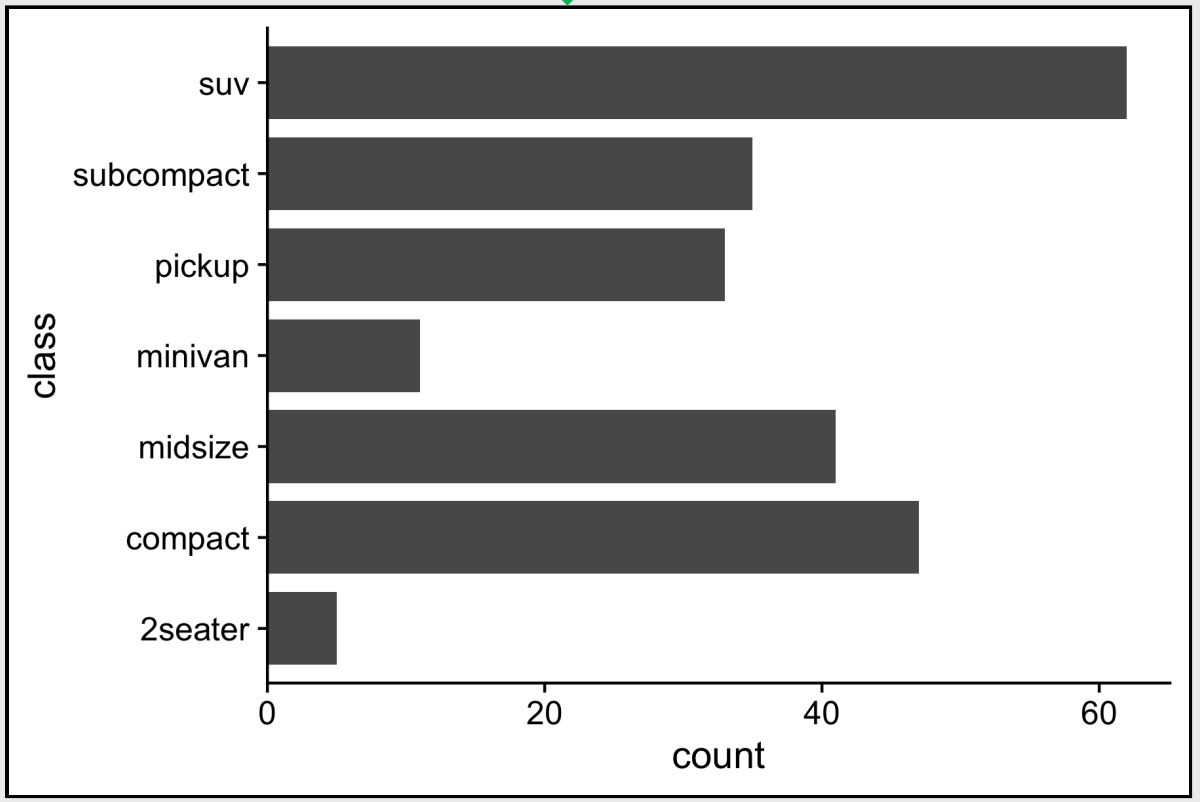
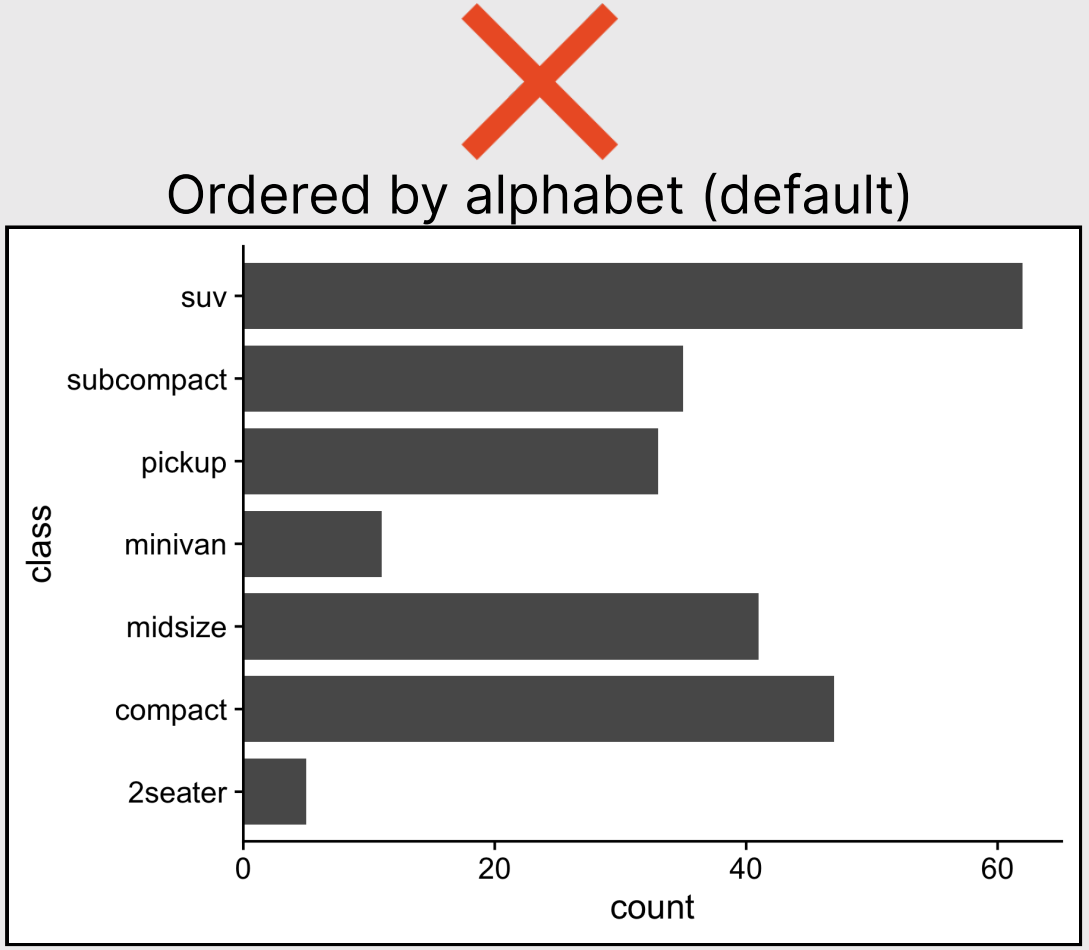




Default order is almost always wrong



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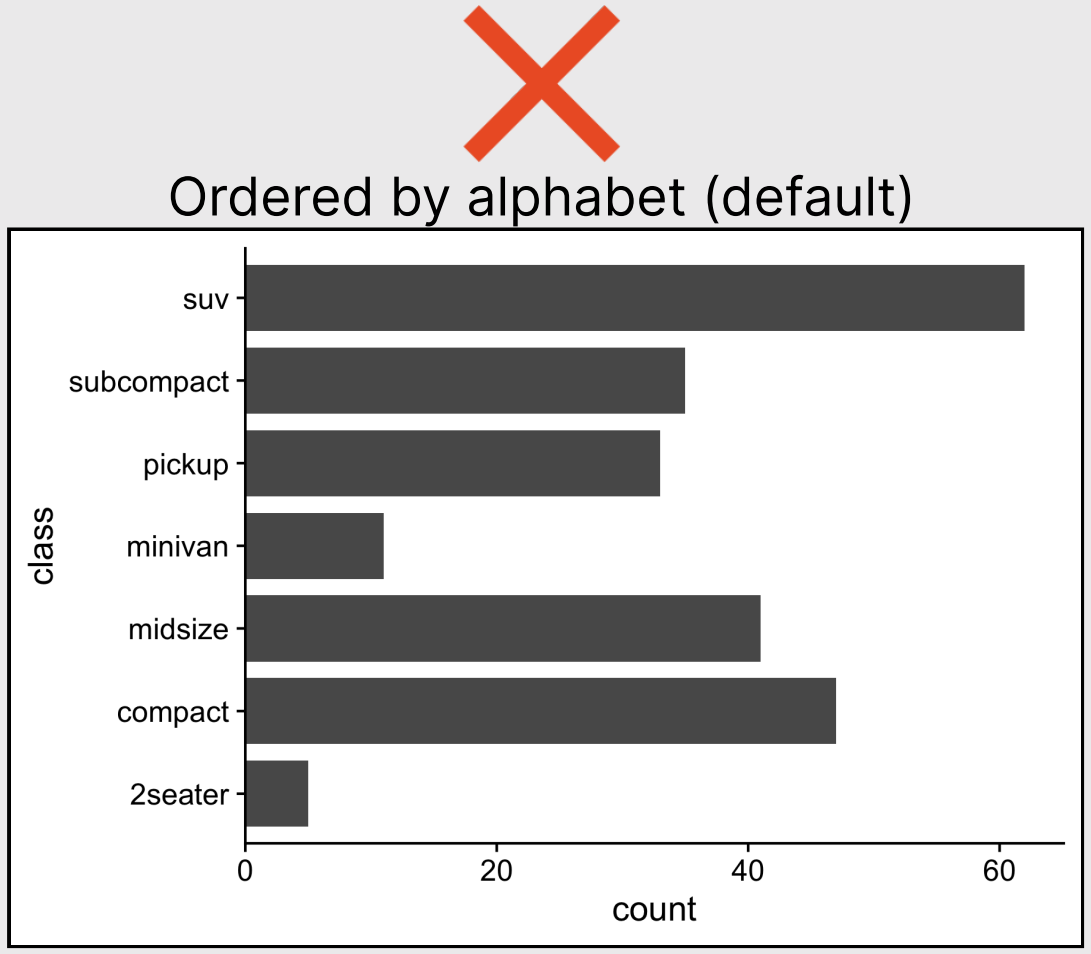
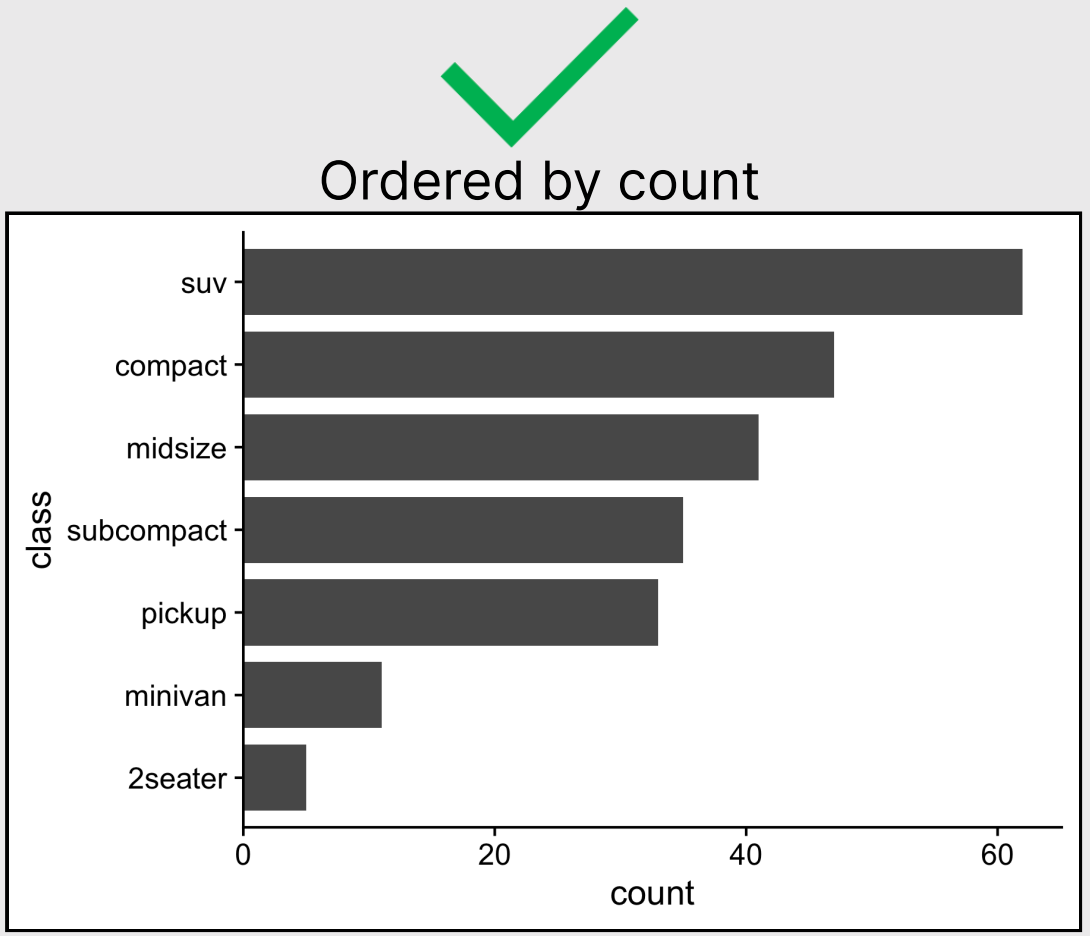
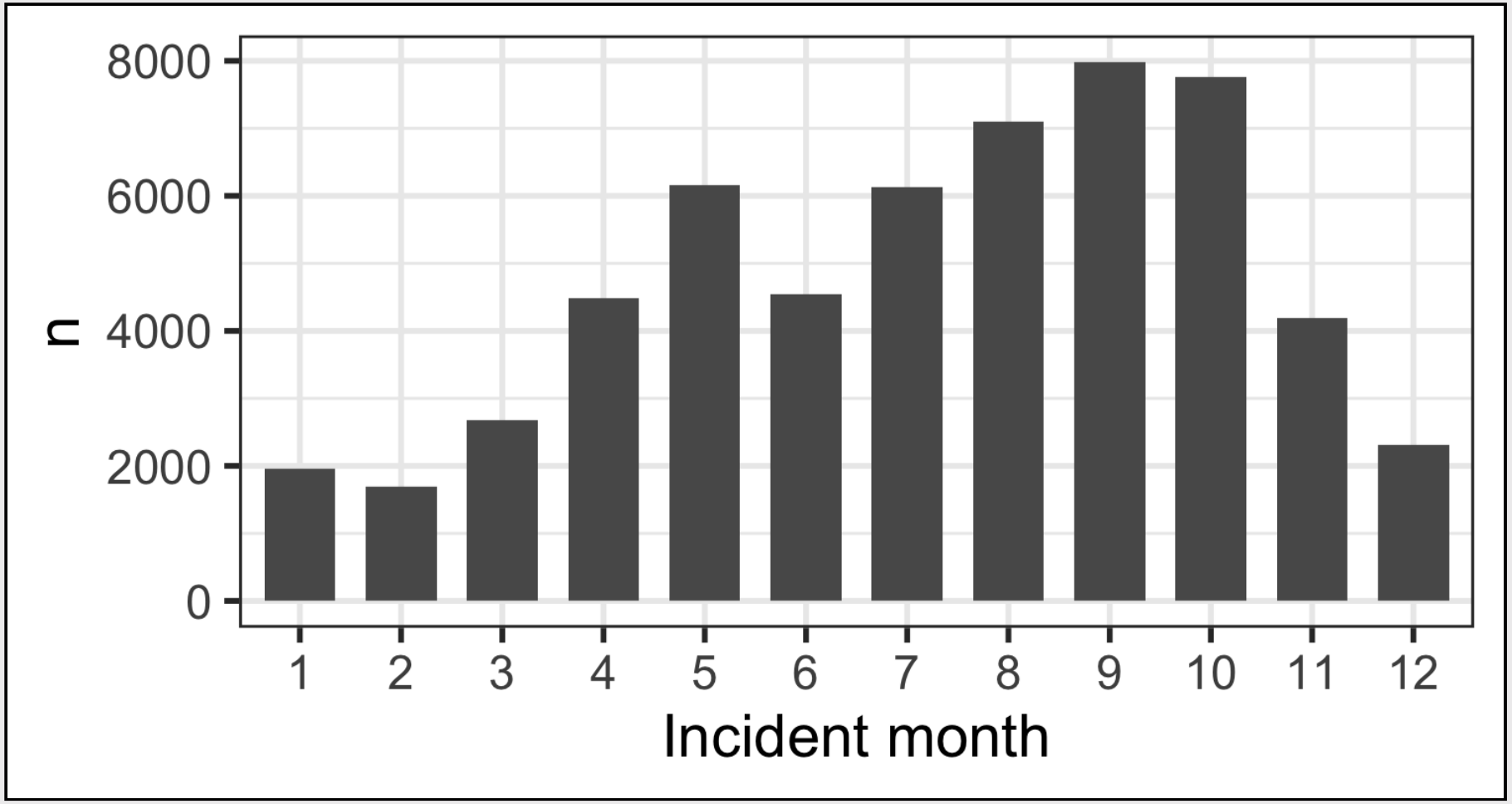




Exception: Ordinal variables



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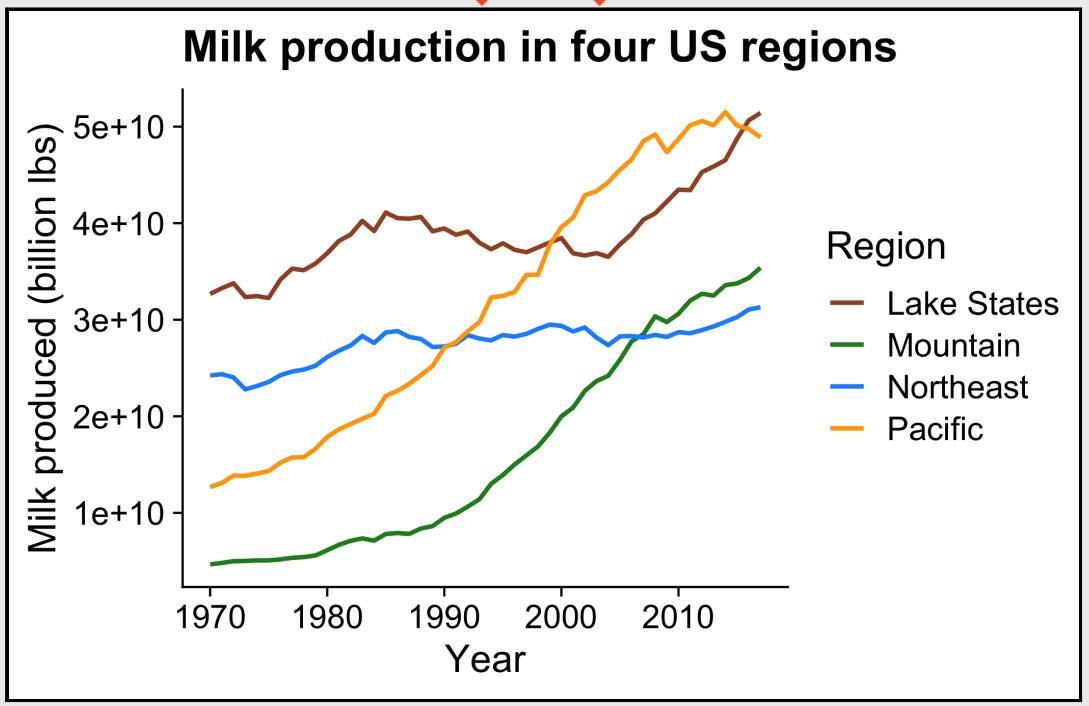
Directly label geoms



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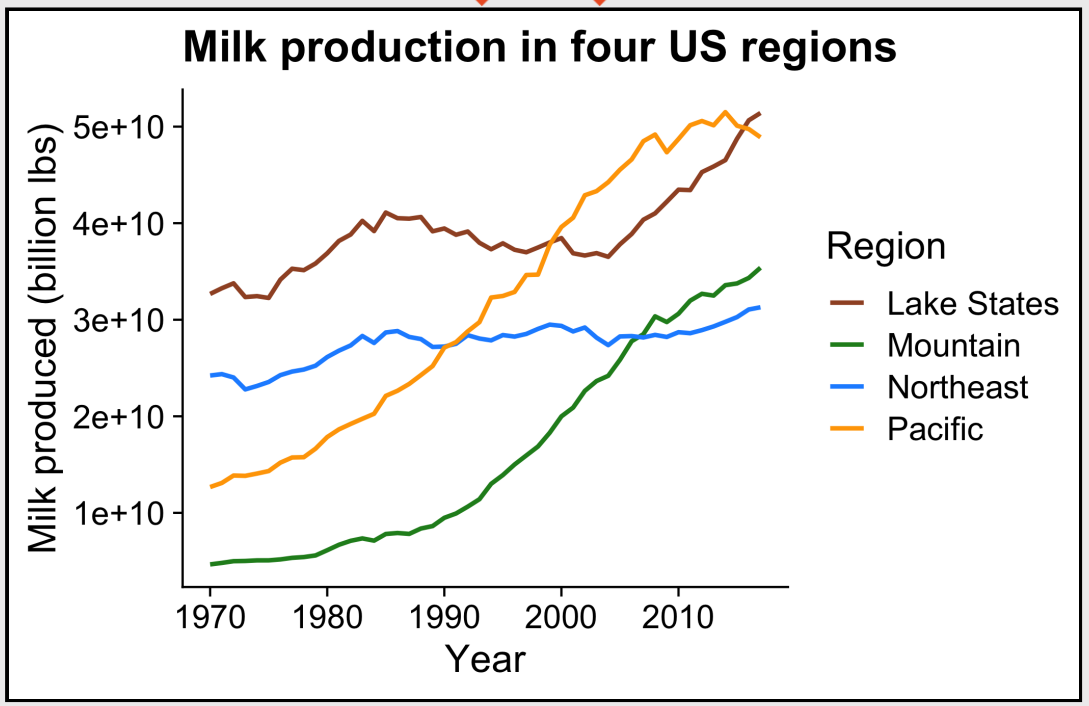
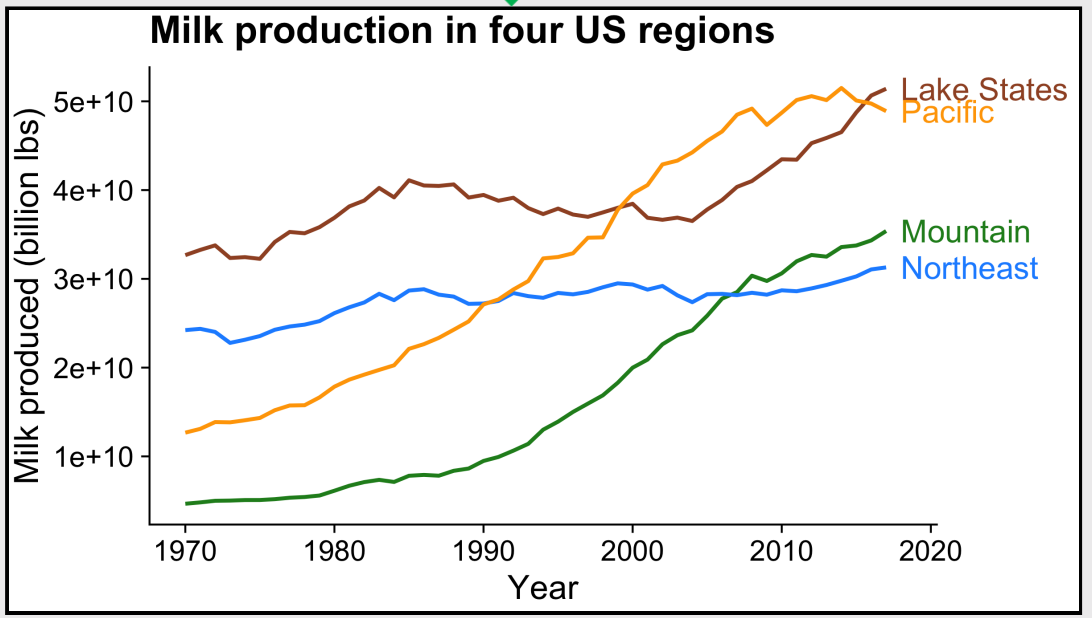
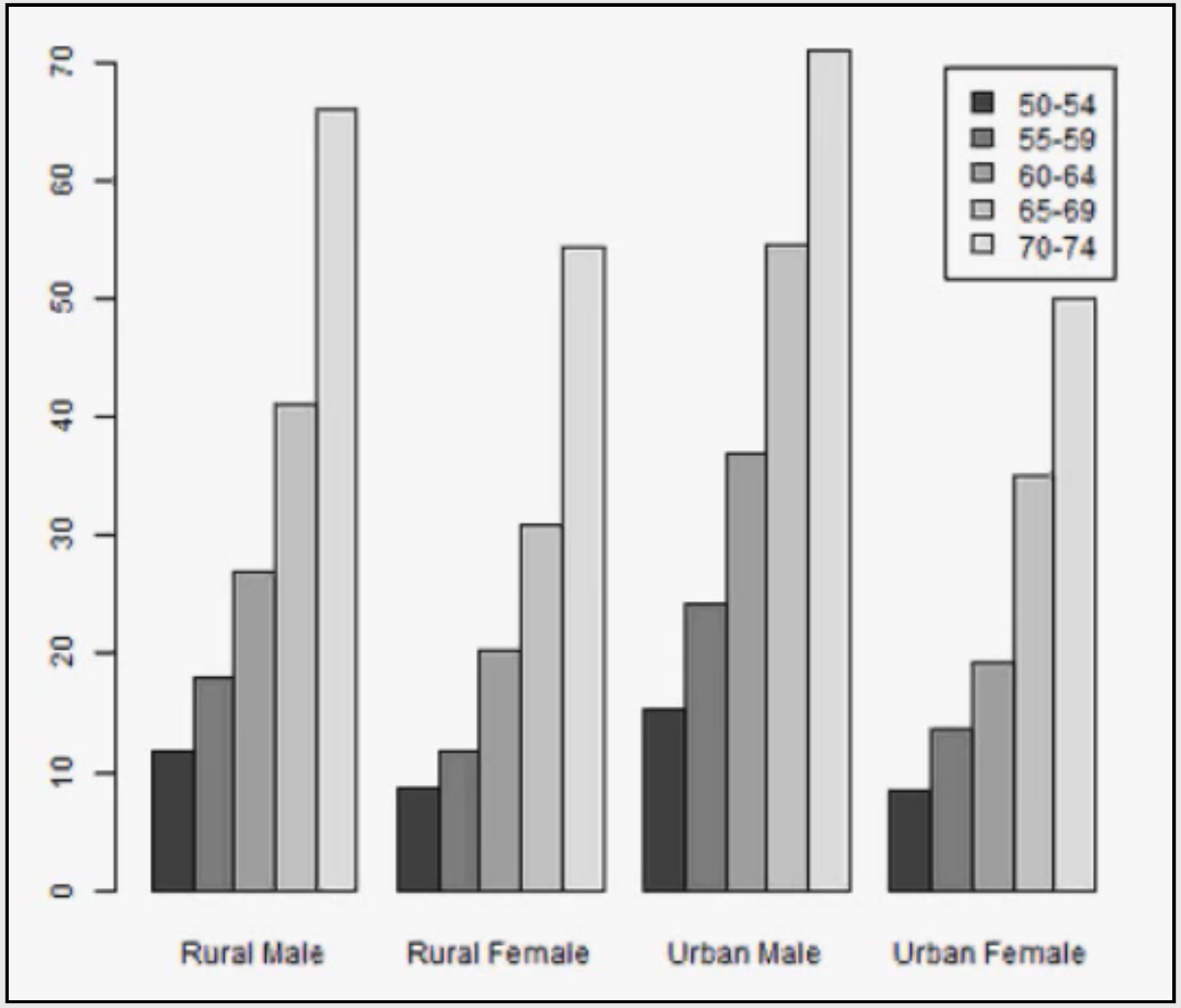




Exception: When you have repeated categories



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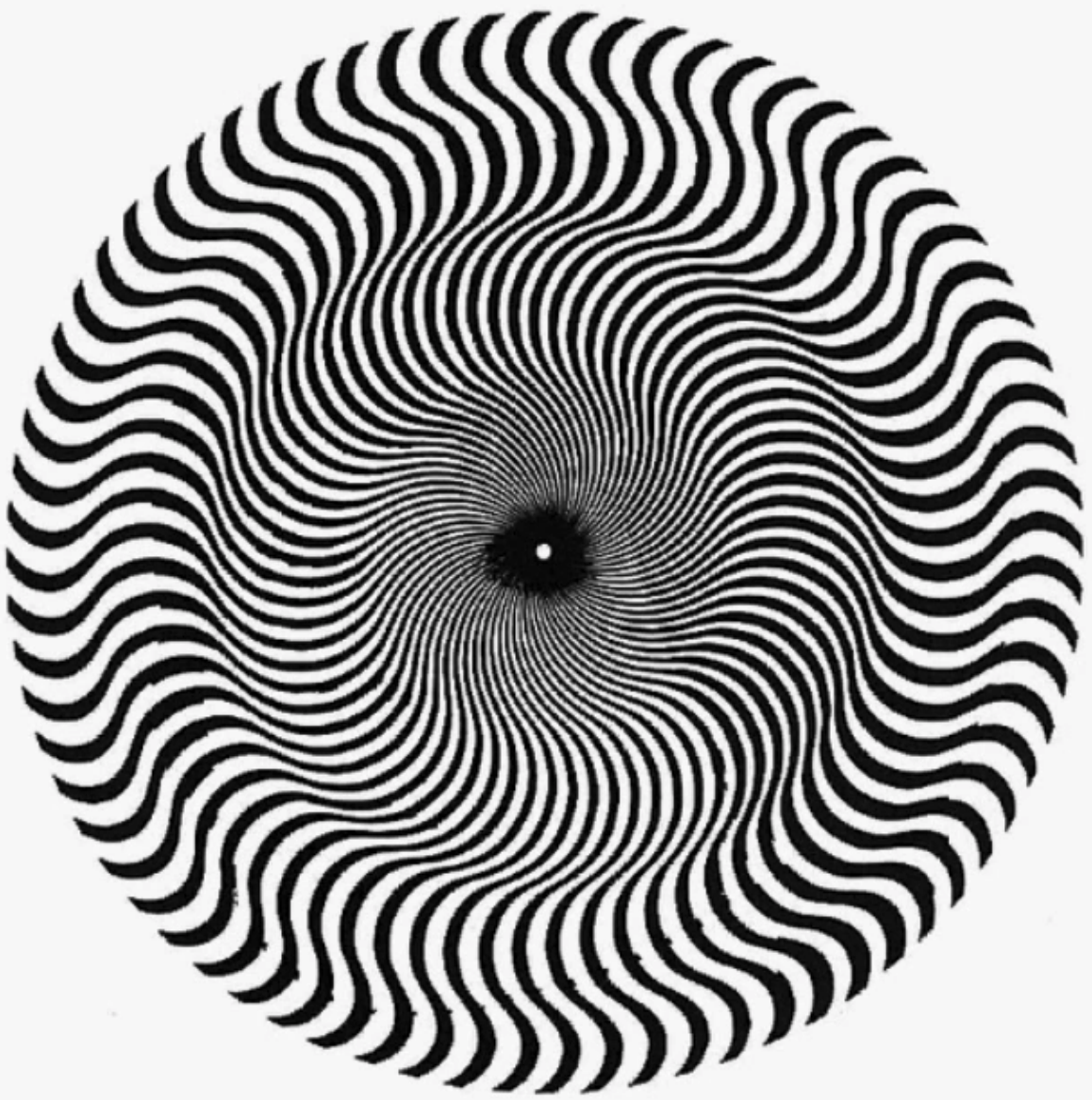
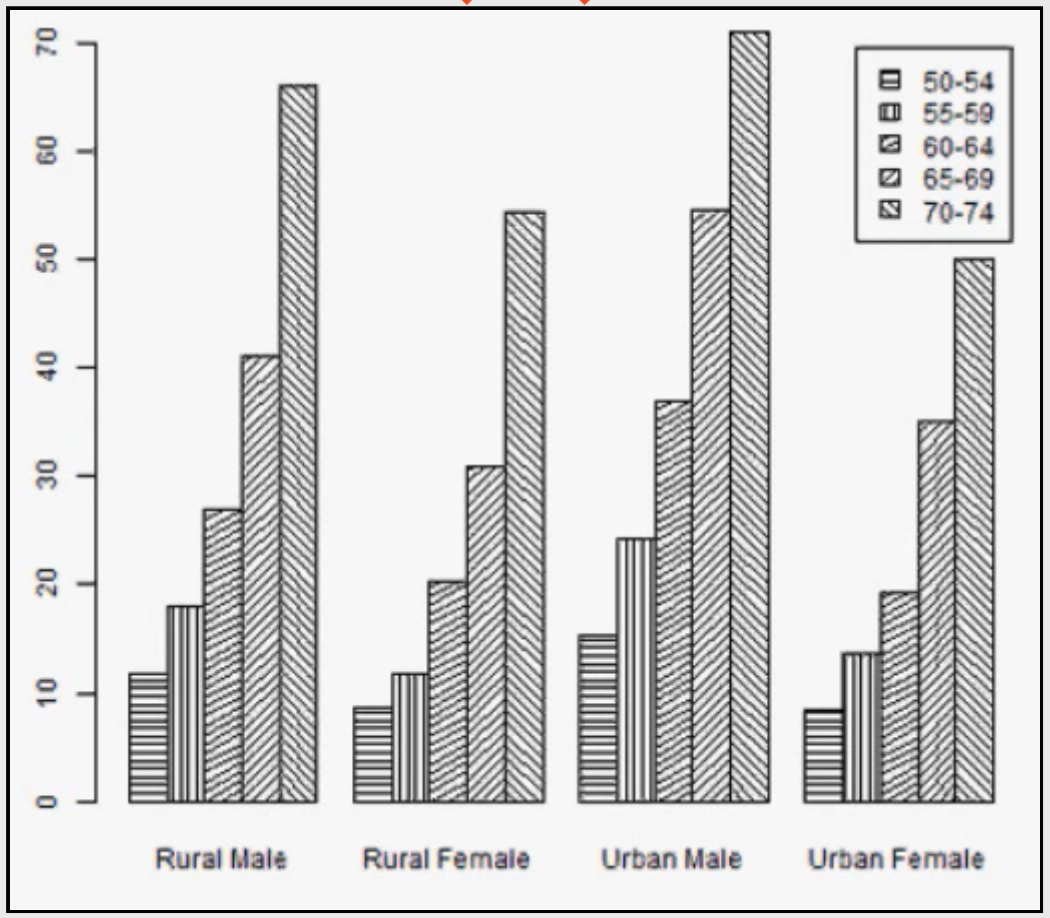
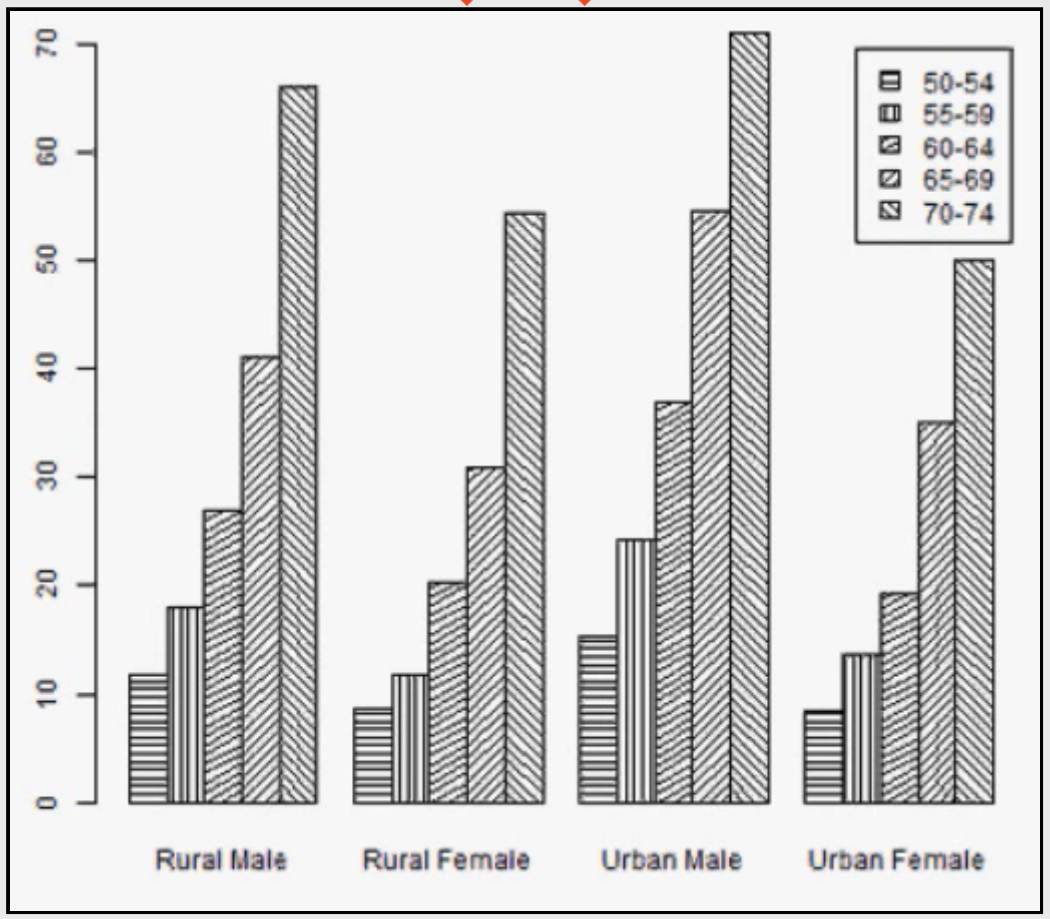
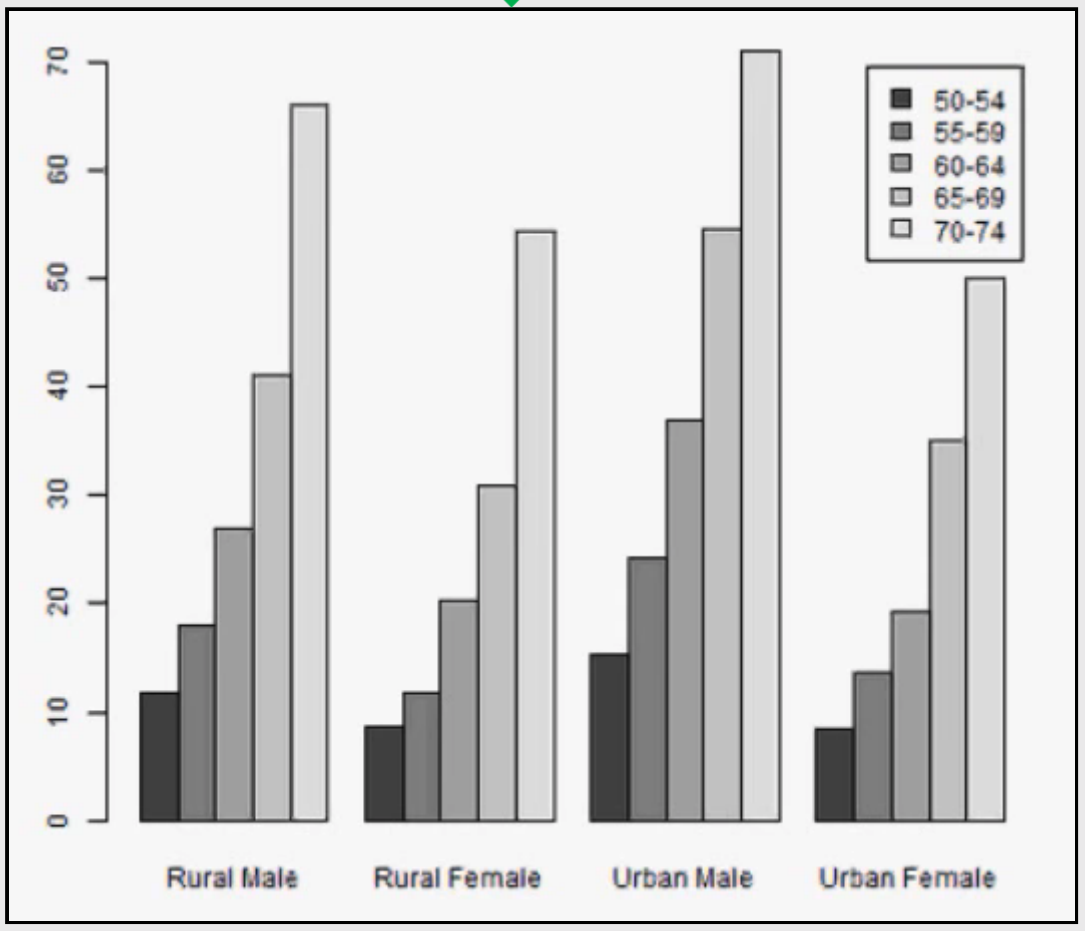



0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
50-54
55-59
60-64
65-69
70-74
Rural Male
Rural Female
Urban Male
Urban Female


0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
50-54
55-59
60-64
65-69
70-74
Rural Male
Rural Female
Urban Male
Urban Female


0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
50-54
55-59
60-64
65-69
70-74
Rural Male
Rural Female
Urban Male
Urban Female

10 Data Viz Best Practices

1. Remove chart chunk
2. Don't make 3D plots*
3. Don't lie
4. Don't use pie charts for proportions*
5. Don't stack bars*
6. Rotate and sort categorical axes*
7. Eliminate legends & directly label geoms*
8. Don't use pattern fills
9. Don't use red & green together
10. Consider tables for small data sets

*most of the time

10% of males and 1% of females are color blind

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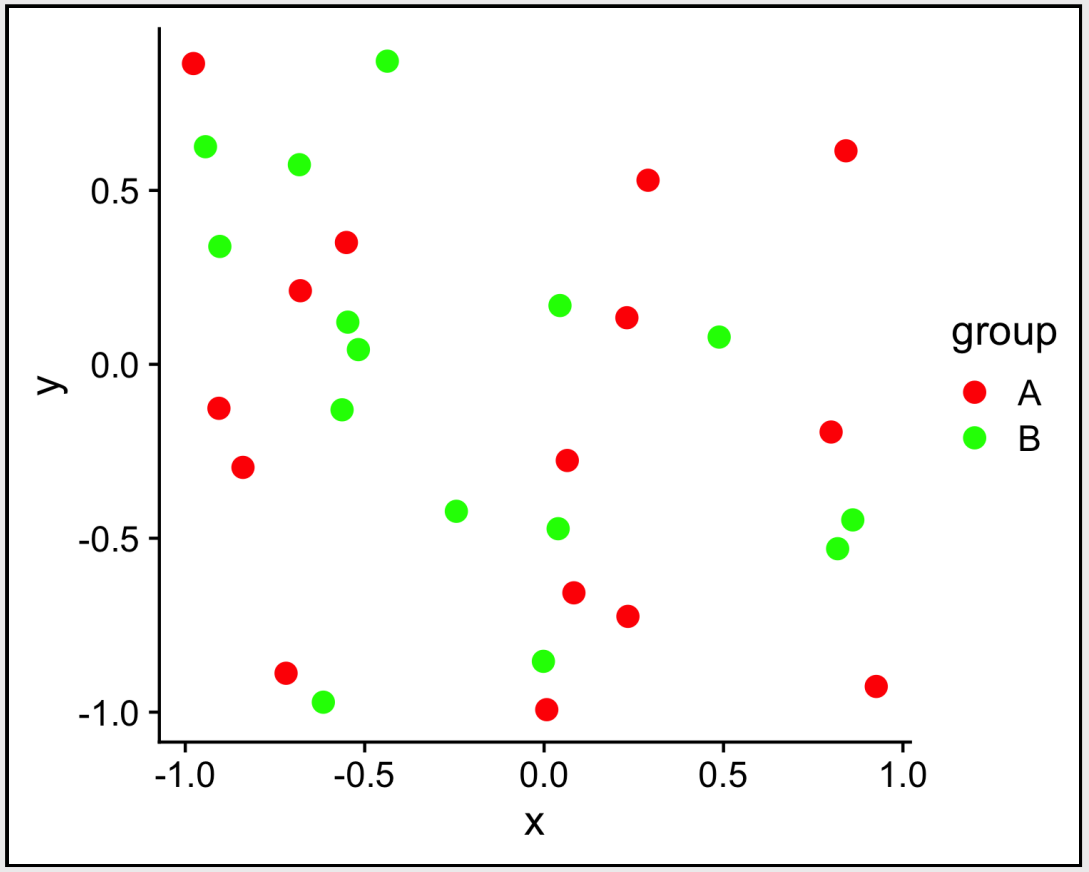

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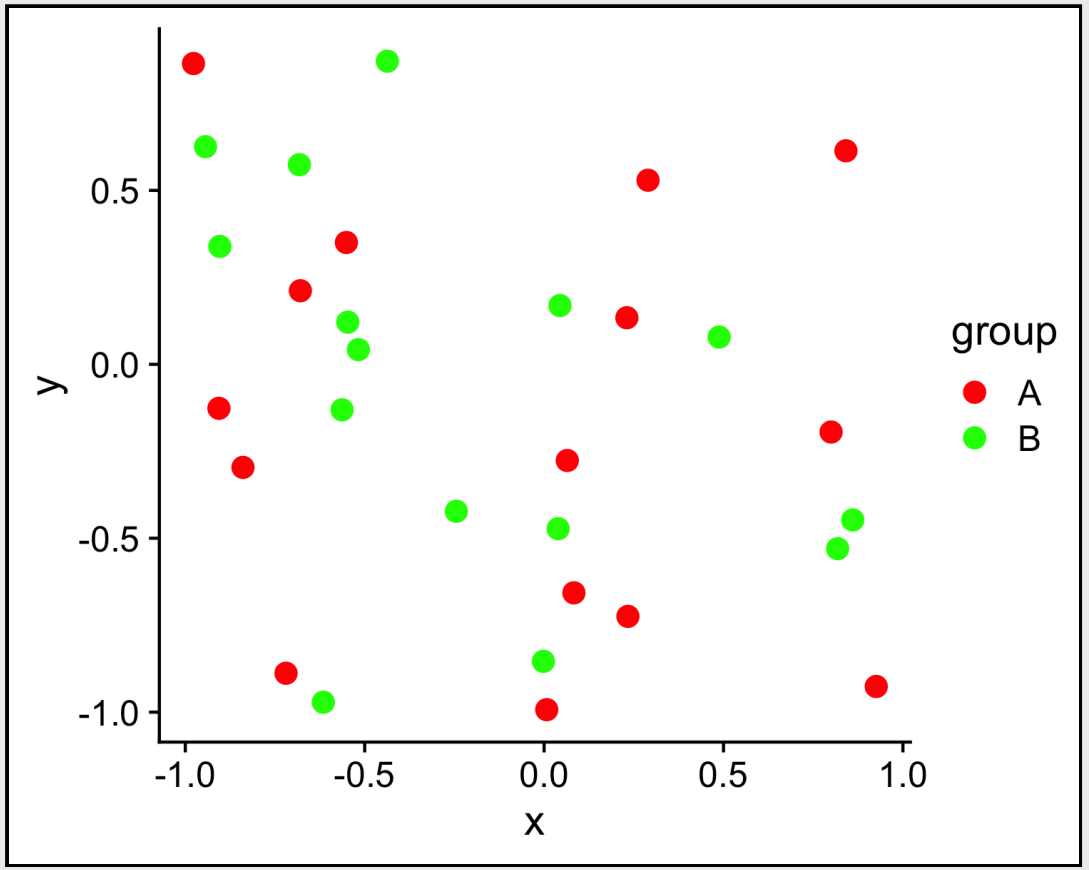
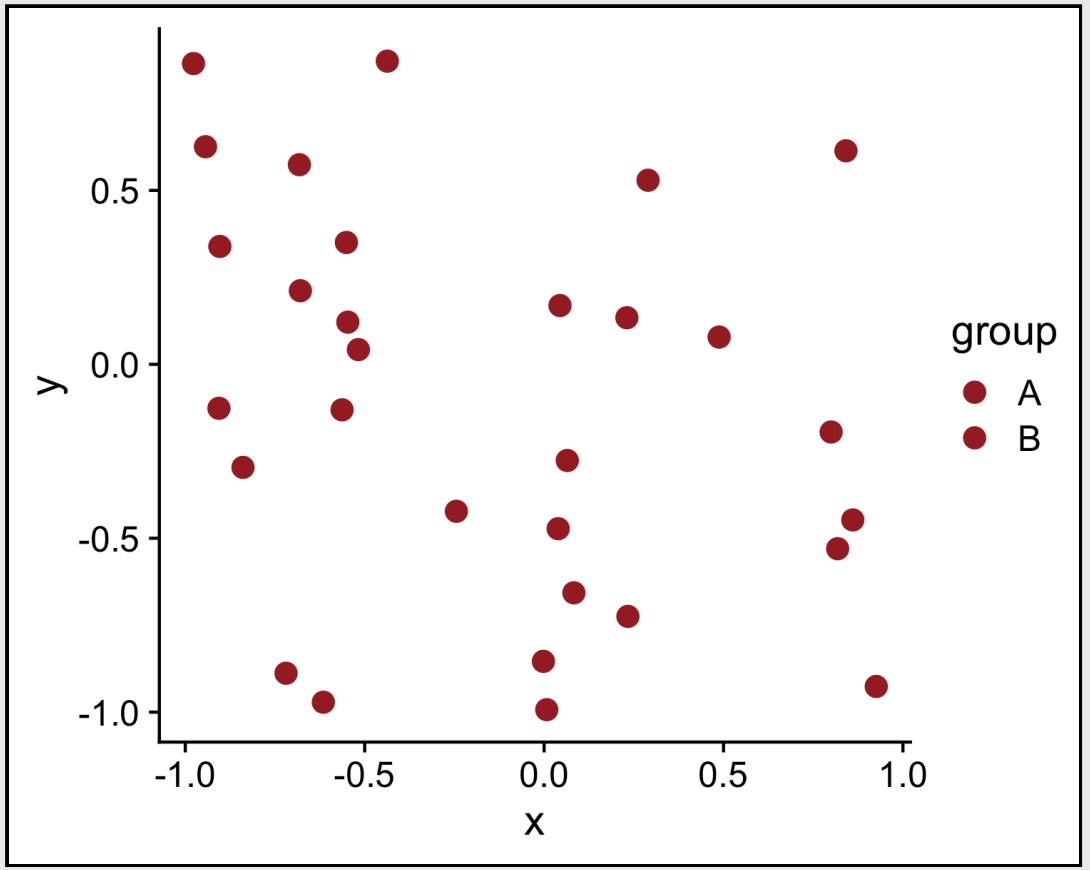
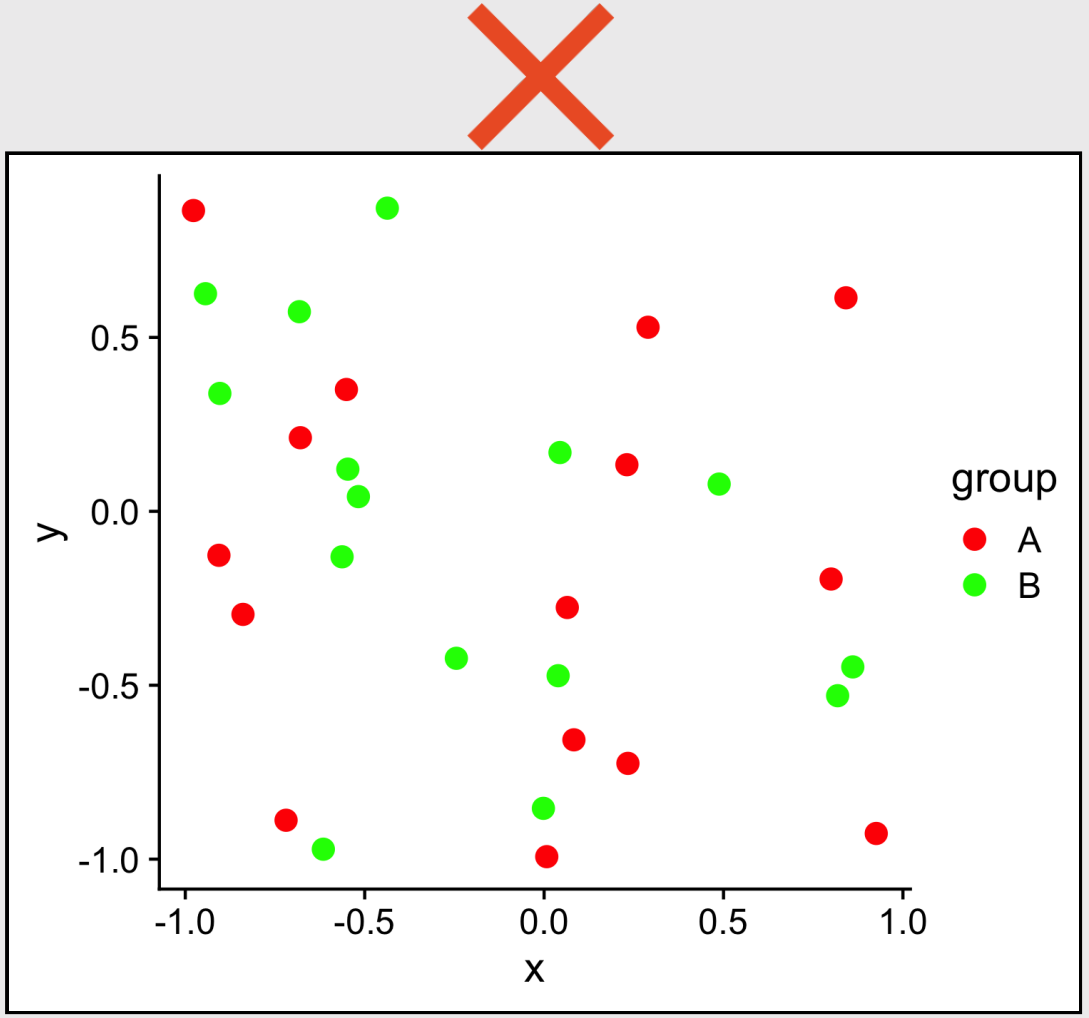




Facets can be used to avoid color altogether



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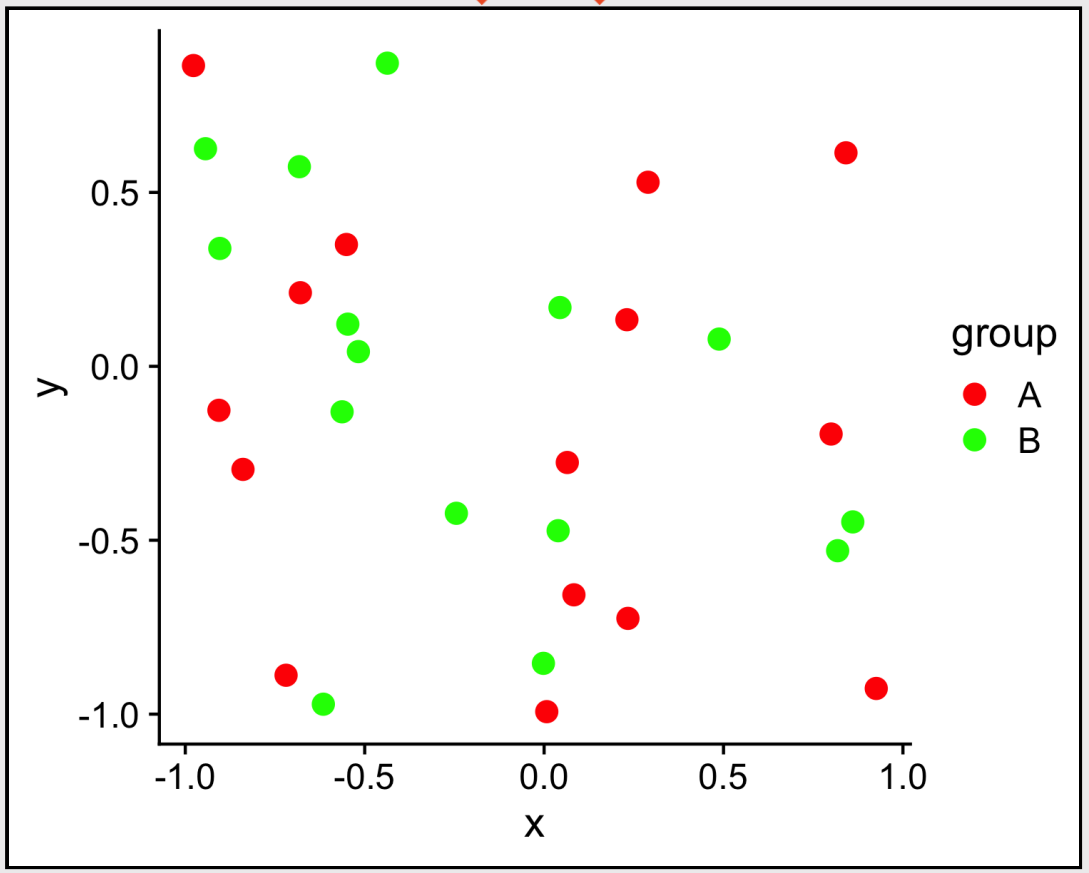

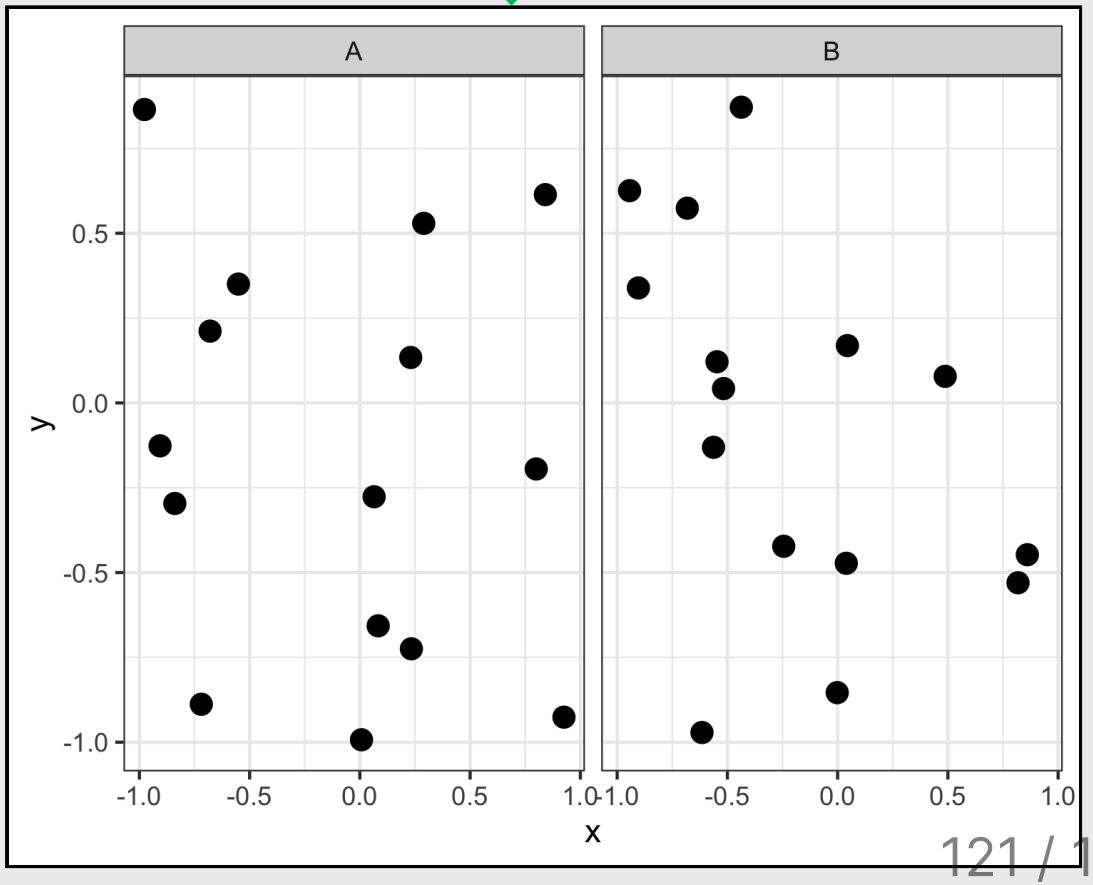

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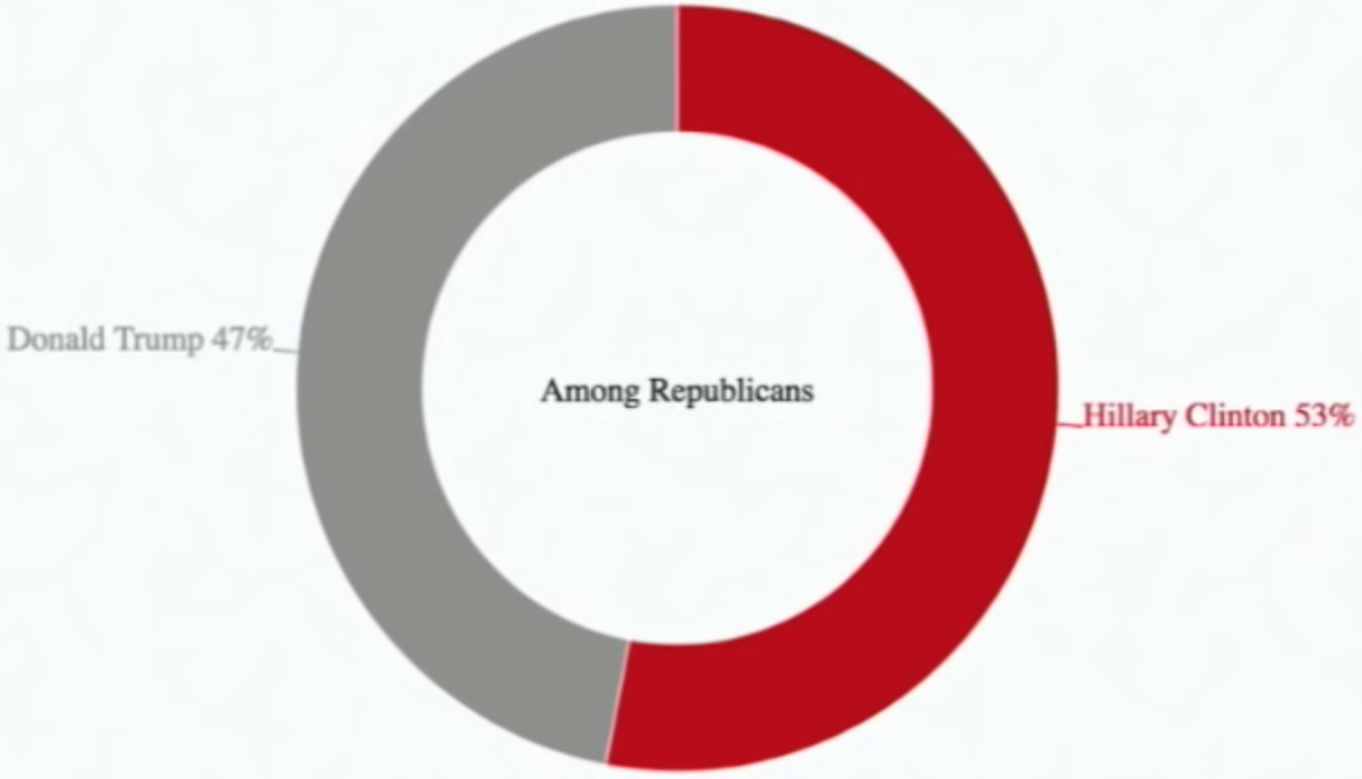
Who do you think did a better job in tonight's debate?

Among Republicans | Among Democrats



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POLITICO

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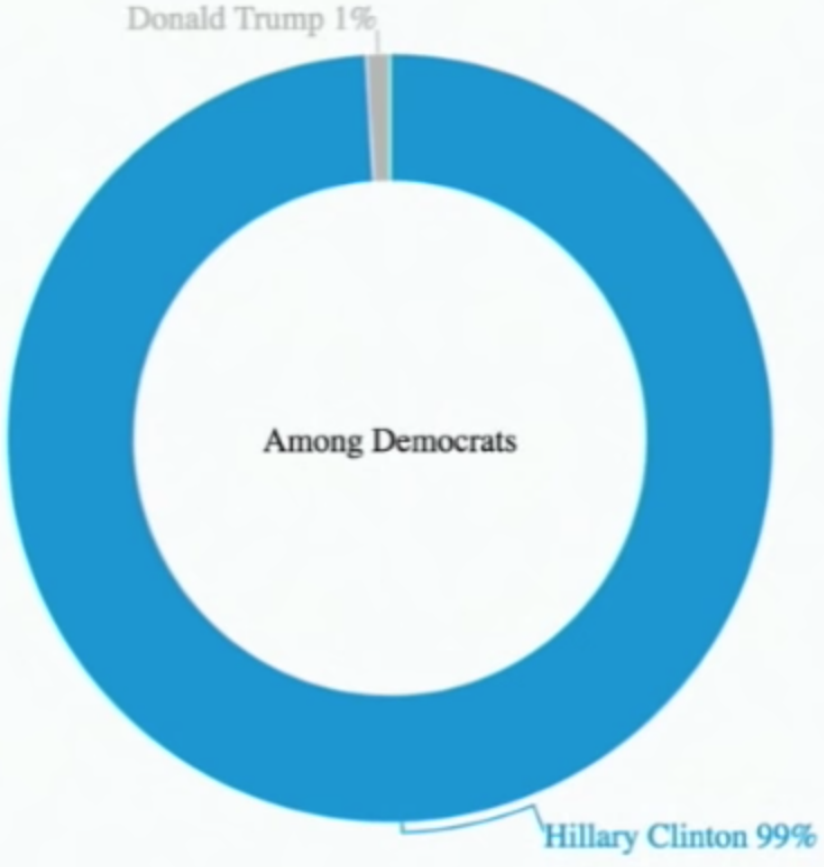
Among Republicans | Among Democrats



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POLITICO

Who do you think did a better job in tonight's debate?

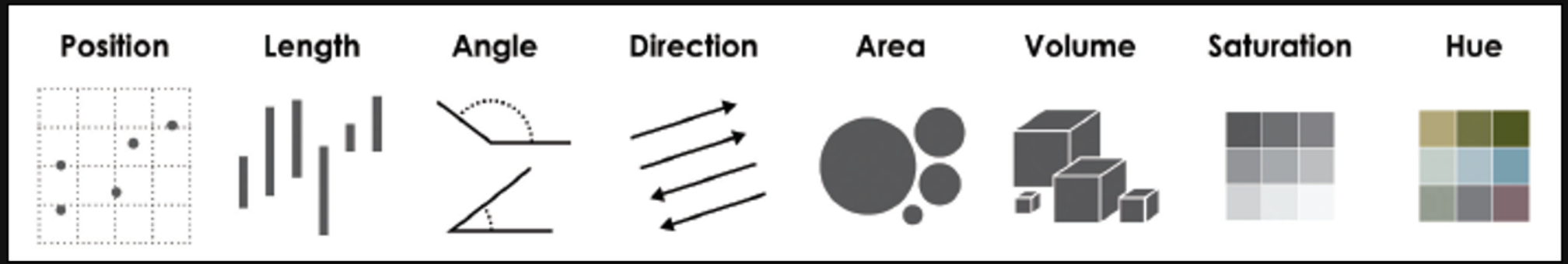
	Clinton	Trump
Among Democrats	99%	1%
Among Republicans	53%	47%

Your turn - go here

10:00

For your "bad" visualization:

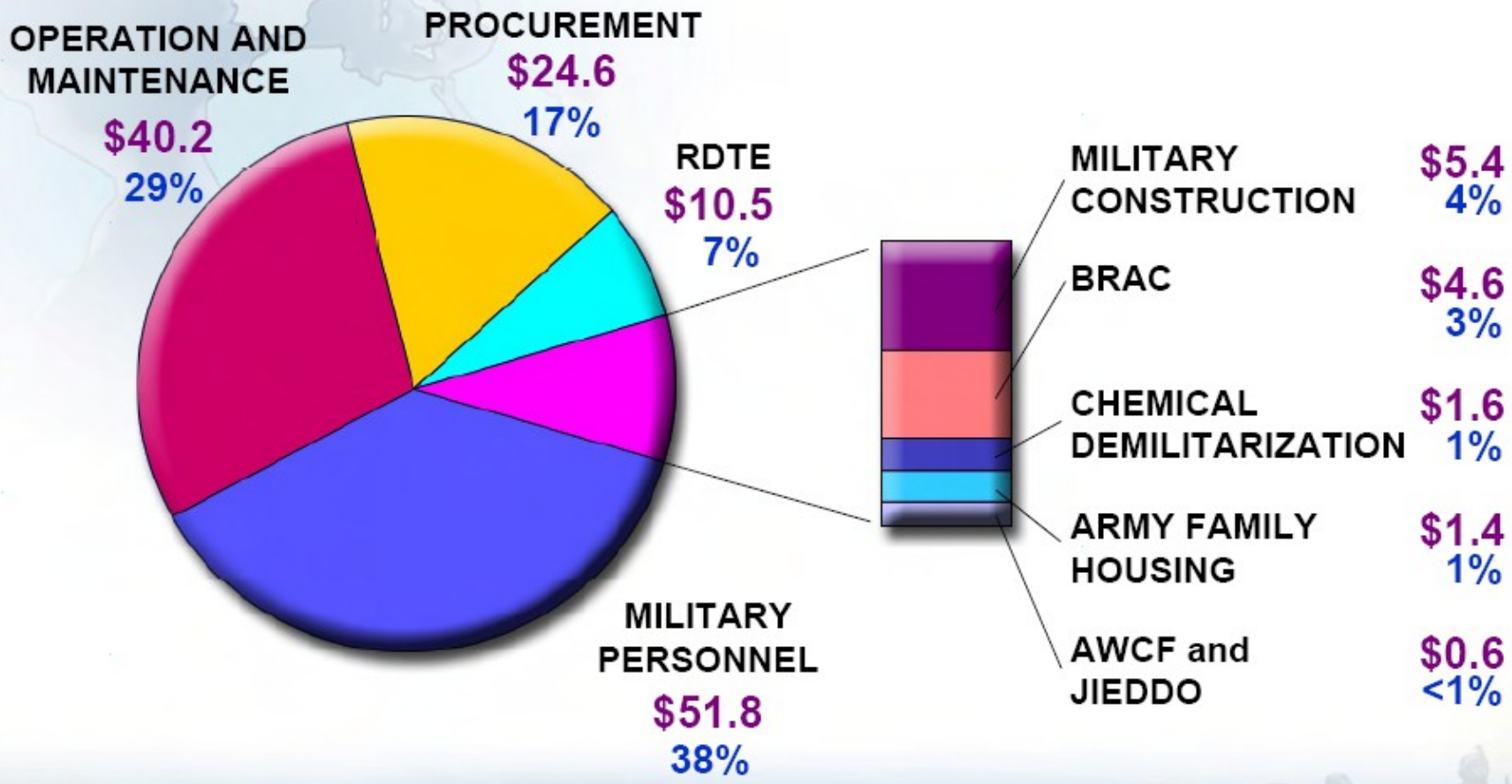
1) Identify where the graphic falls on Cleveland's pattern recognition hierarchy

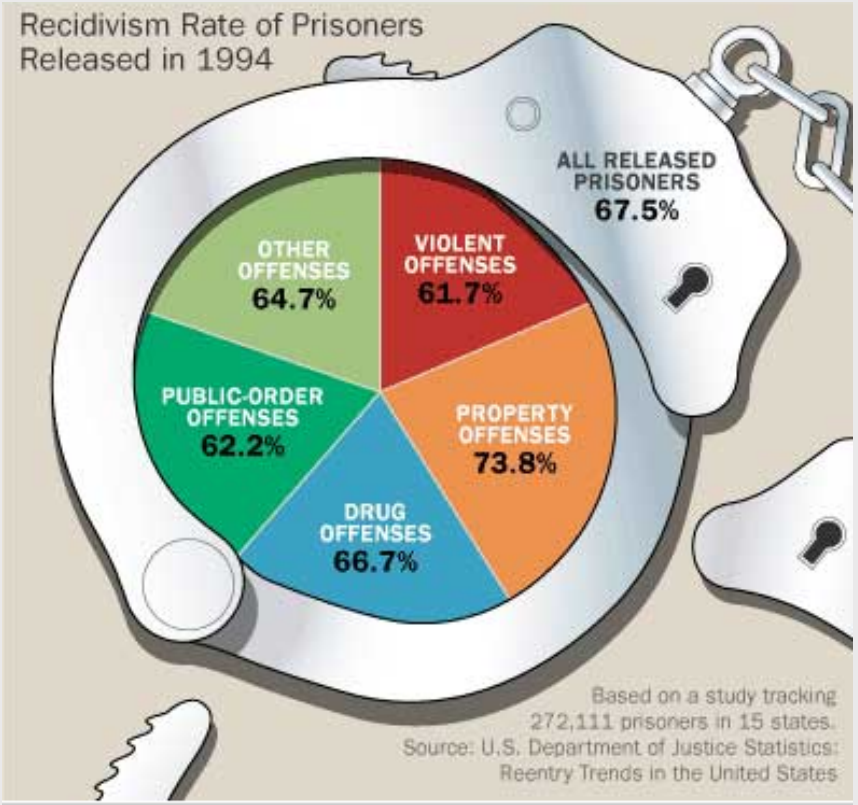


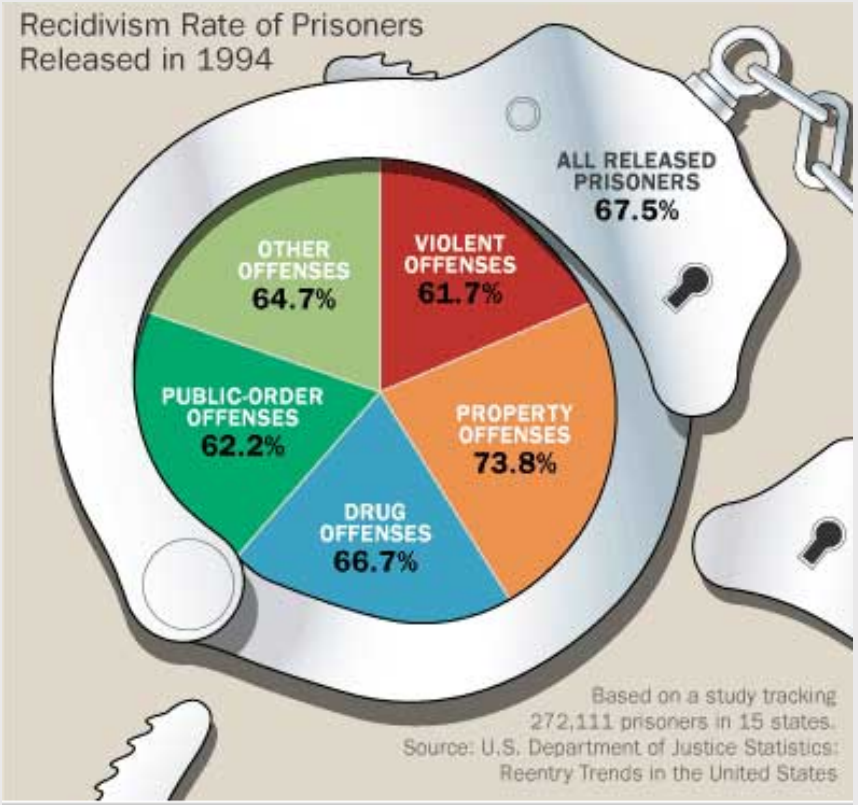
2) Any design rules that are broken

3) Suggest at least two improvements

FY09 Obligation Authority




Recidivism Rate of Prisoners
Released in 1994
ALL RELEASED PRISONERS
67.5%
OTHER OFFENSES
64.7%
VIOLENT OFFENSES
61.7%
PUBLIC-ORDER OFFENSES
62.2%
PROPERTY OFFENSES
73.8%
DRUG OFFENSES
66.7%
Based on a study tracking
272,111 prisoners in 15 states.
Source: U.S. Department of Justice Statistics:
Reentry Trends in the United States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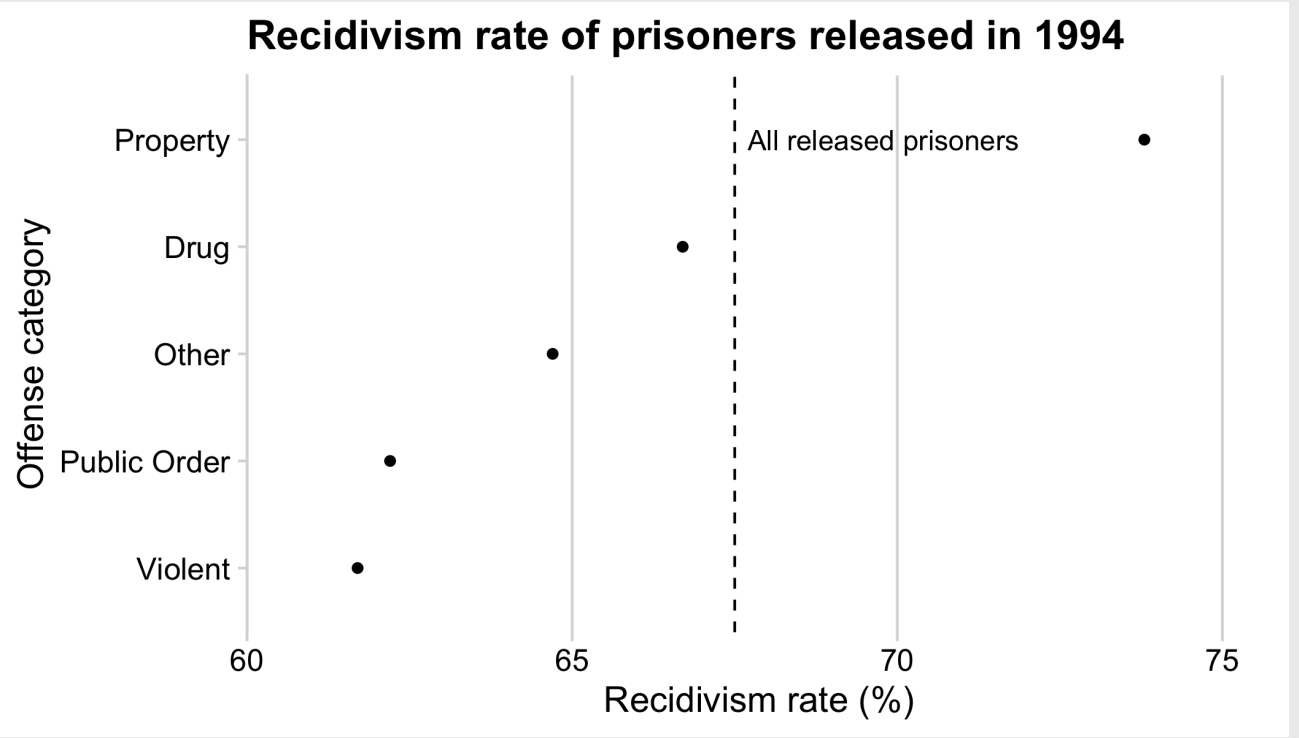
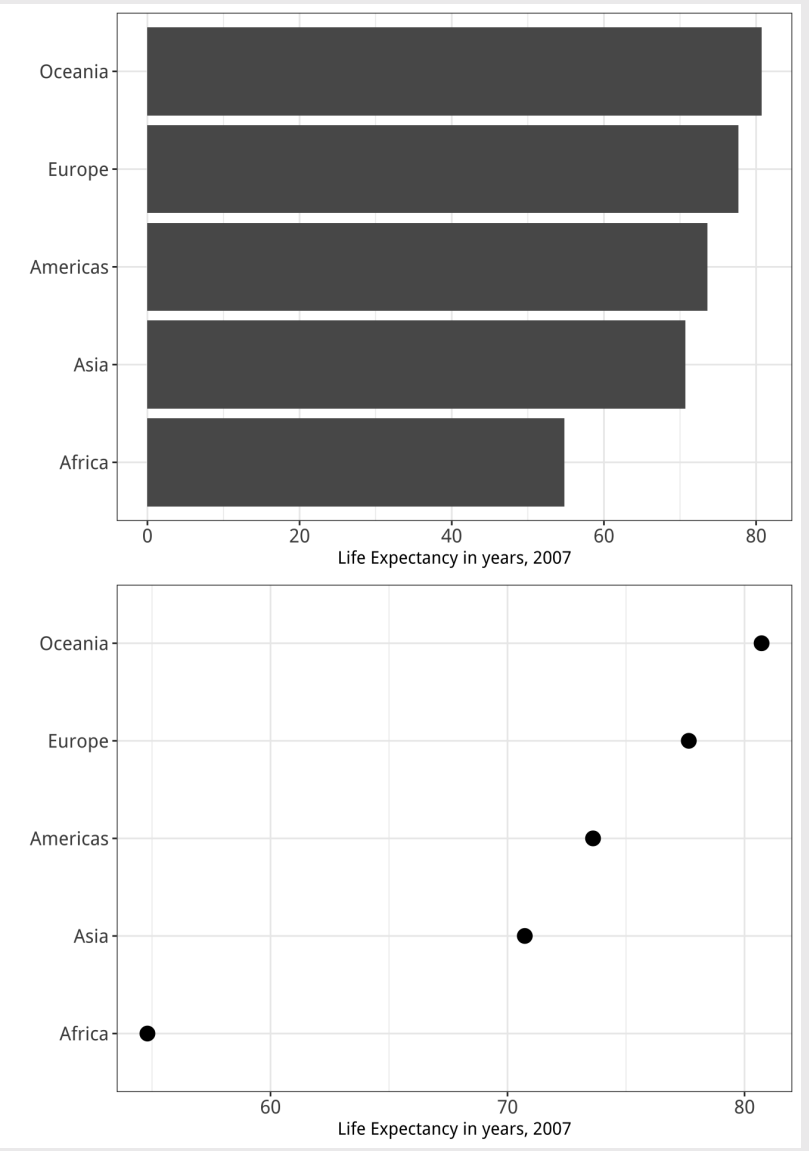
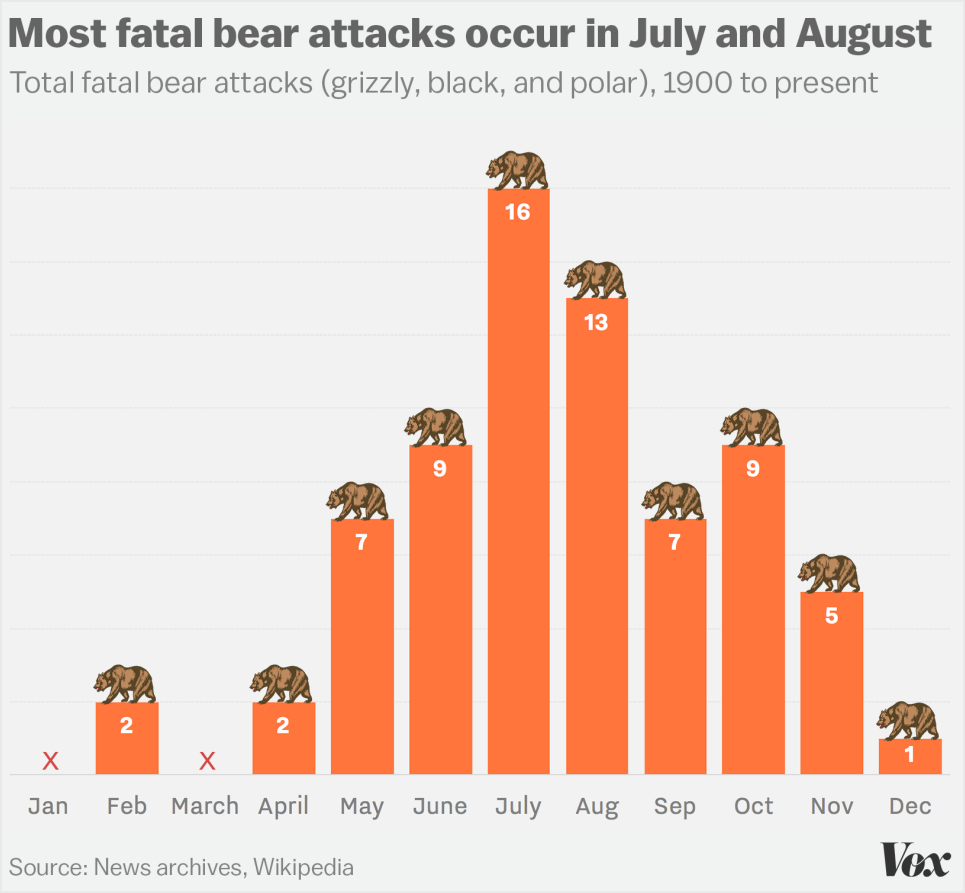
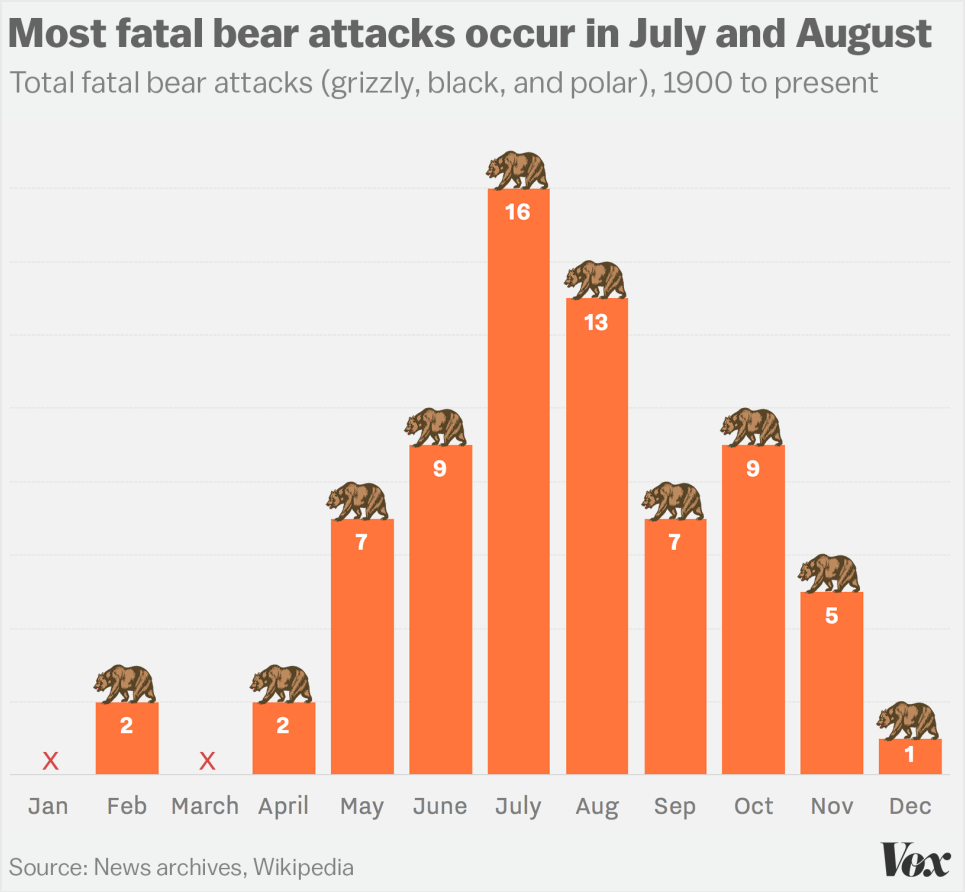

Recidivism rate of prisoners released in 1994
Offense category
Property
Drug
Other
Public Order
Violent
All released prisoners
60
65
70
75
Recidivism rate (%)


Africa
Americas
Asia
Europe
Oceania
0
22.5
45
67.5
90
Years
CONTINENT
Africa
Americas
Asia
Europe
Oceania
Life Expectancy: 2007


Africa
Americas
Asia
Europe
Oceania
0
22.5
45
67.5
90
Years
CONTINENT
Africa
Americas
Asia
Europe
Oceania
Life Expectancy: 2007


Oceania
Europe
Americas
Asia
Africa
0
20
40
60
80
Life Expectancy in years, 2007
Oceania
Europe
Americas
Asia
Africa
60
70
80
Life Expectancy in years, 2007


Most fatal bear attacks occur in July and August
Total fatal bear attacks (grizzly, black, and polar), 1900 to present
X
2
X
2
7
9
16
13
7
9
5
1
Jan
Feb
March
April
May
June
July
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Source: News archives, Wikipedia
Vox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1
Jan
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April
May
June
July
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
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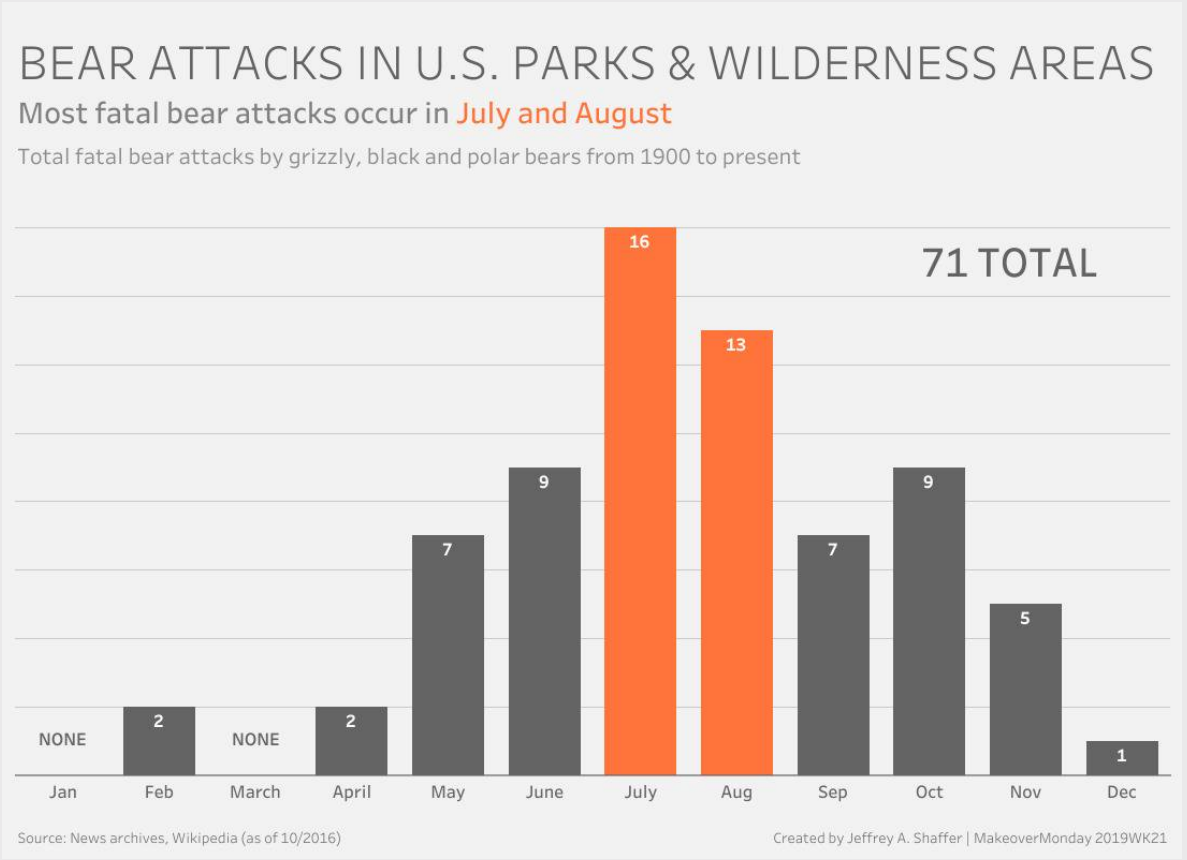
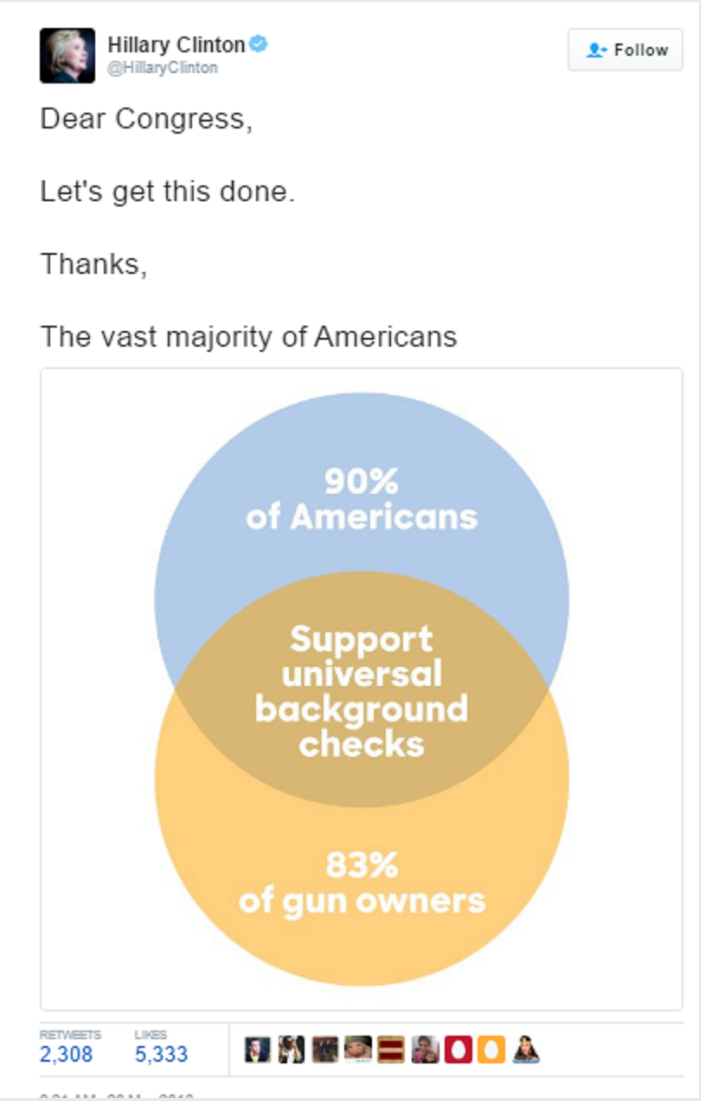
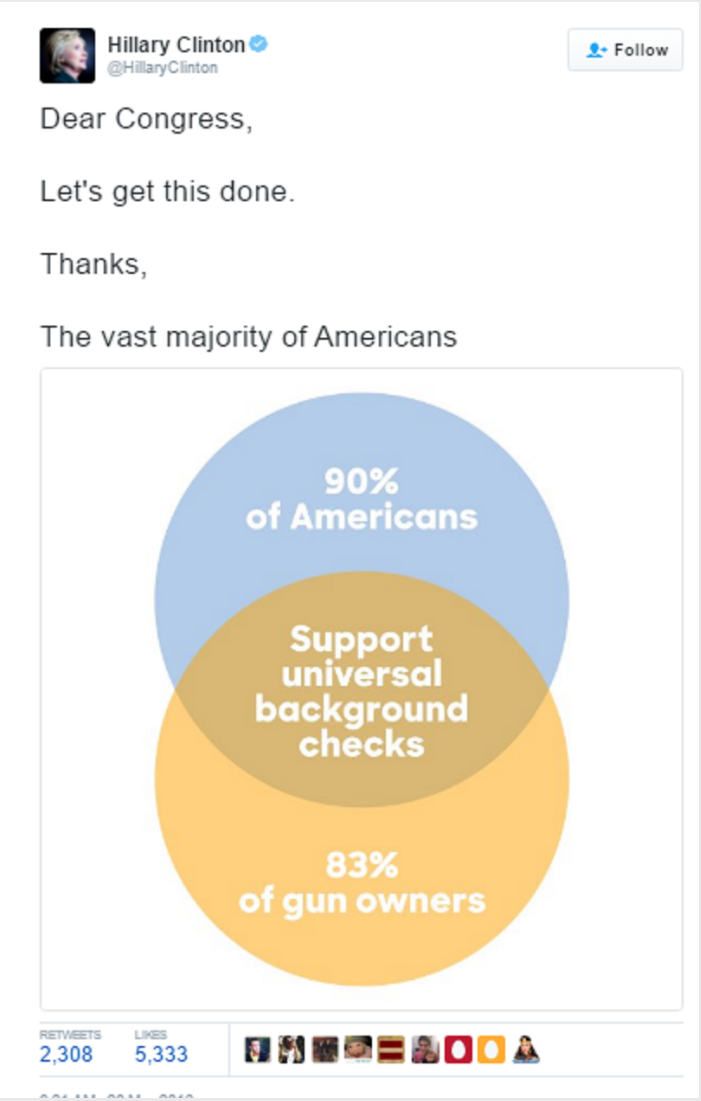
Vox


BEAR ATTACKS IN U.S. PARKS & WILDERNESS AREAS
Most fatal bear attacks occur in July and August
Total fatal bear attacks by grizzly, black and polar bears from 1900 to present
71 TOTAL
NONE
2
NONE
2
7
9
16
13
7
9
5
1
Jan
Feb
March
April
May
June
July
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Source: News archives, Wikipedia (as of 10/2016)
Created by Jeffrey A. Shaffer | MakeoverMonday 2019WK21


Hillary Clinton
@HillaryClinton
Follow
Dear Congress,
Let's get this done.
Thanks,
The vast majority of Americans
90%
of Americans
Support
universal
background
checks
83%
of gun owners
RETWEETS
2,308
LIKES
5,333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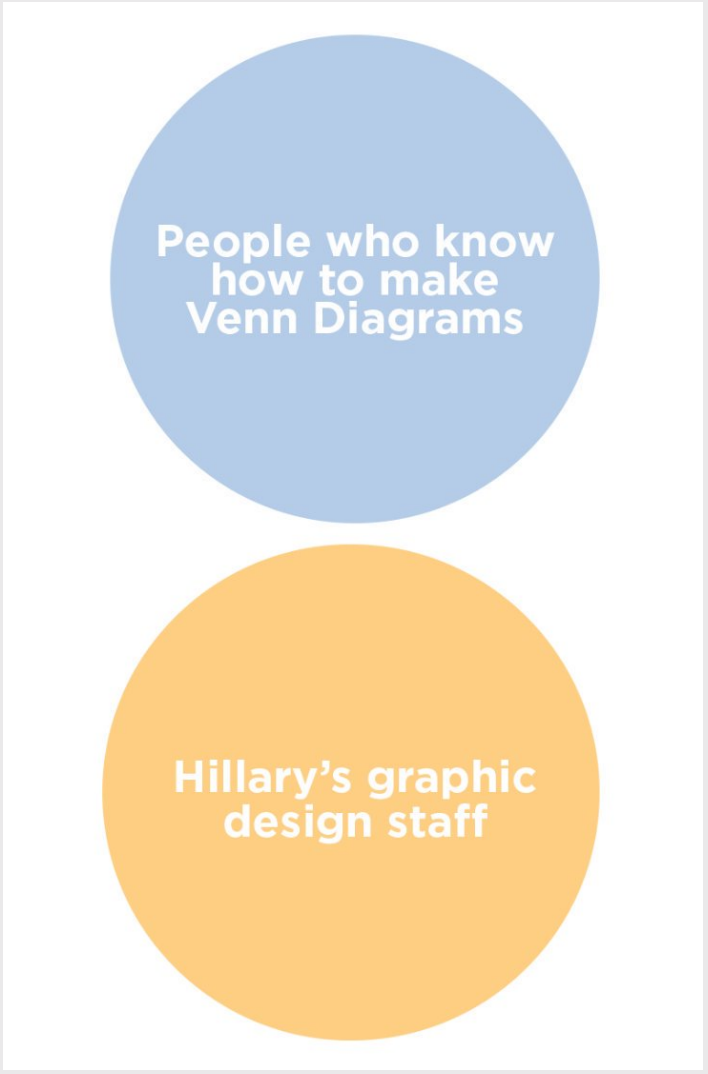
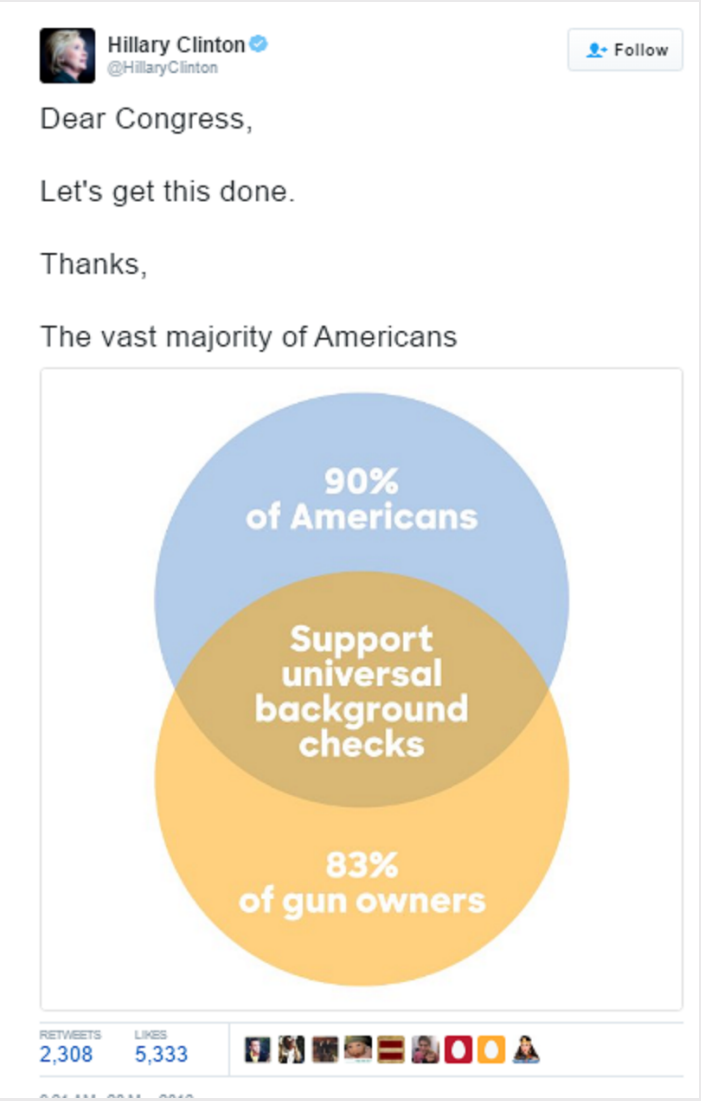

People who know
how to make
Venn Diagrams
Hillary's graphic
design staff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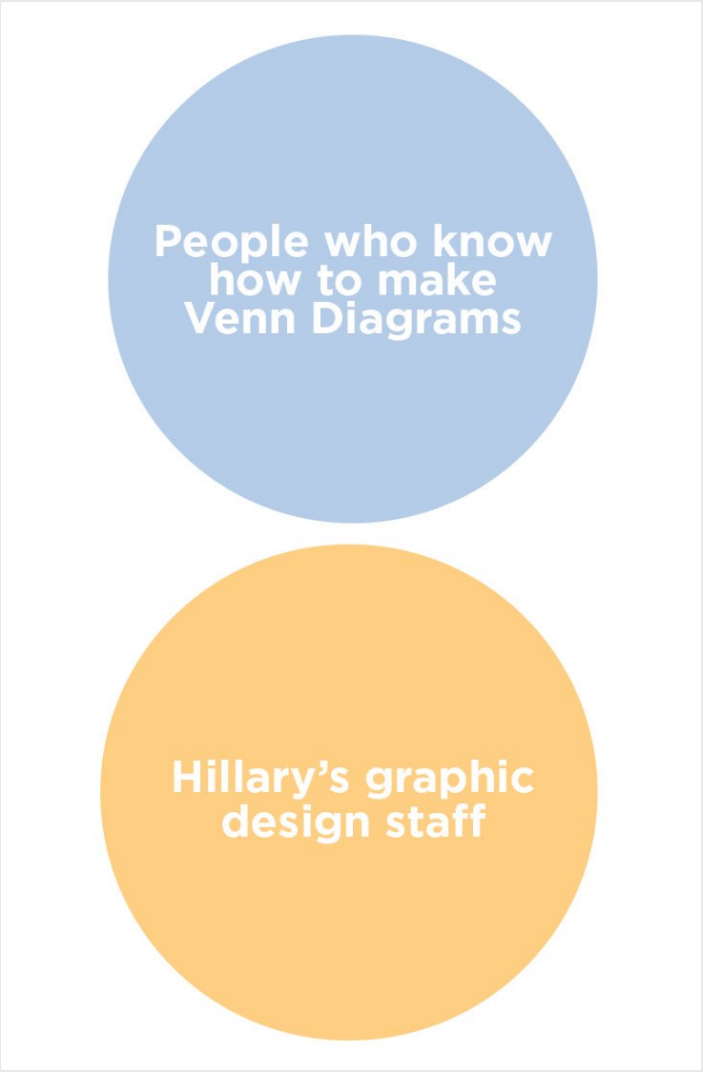
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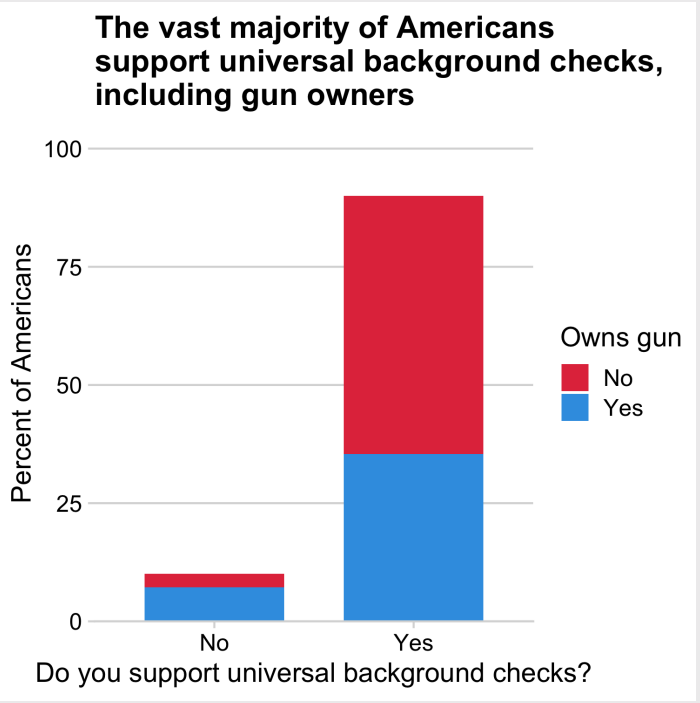
The vast majority of Americans support universal background checks, including gun owners
Percent of Americans
100
75
50
25
0
No
Yes
Do you support universal background checks?
Owns gun
No
Yes