

*When creating charts or graphics for displaying information, it is important to consider how the design of your chart will impact the readability of your information*

## Common questions about designing charts

### 1. How do I choose colors for my charts and graphics?

It is most important to consider what kind of data you are displaying. If the categories you want to exhibit do not have any differences in value (e.g. spoken languages), then you should use different color hues for each category. If your categories have differences in values (e.g. grade levels, attitudes), then your color scheme should go from darker to lighter within the same color family.

Another important factor is the impact different colors can have. Yellow should be avoided if possible, because it is lighter and often more vibrant than other colors and thus can highlight one category over others. Bright red should also be avoided; it connotes values of danger or deficit.

### 2. Does data order matter?

When charting survey responses, it may be appropriate to order survey items as they appeared on the original survey to show how one survey question led to the next. If you want to highlight attitudes that were most strongly felt by your respondents, you should order them based on numeric responses. Highlight important findings by putting important categories at the top and bottom of your chart, leaving less important data in the middle.

### 3. How do I make the data aspects stand out from the visual aspects of my charts and graphics?

Consider how heavy lines between and around pieces of data visually compare to the data itself. Outlines, gridlines and borders should be eliminated or scaled back in intensity (thickness and darkness) from the color scheme and text of your graphic.

## How to use this information in your organization

Step 1: Identify the kind of data you are displaying and choose a color scheme to correspond.

Step 2: Choose the order of your chart items or categories based on what aspects of your data you want to highlight.

Step 3: Scale back background graphic elements using lighter grays and thinner lines so that your important information stands out.

*This white paper was developed through tips from Edward Tufte's published books and website ([www.edwardtufte.com](http://www.edwardtufte.com)) and through cartography courses at the University of Minnesota.*