

Creating beautiful presentations

Ryan Johnson

With special thanks to:

Natassa Ailamaki, CMU CALCM lab, Markus Püschel



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Alignment

Contrast

Creating beautiful presentations

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Spacing



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Consistency

Alignment

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Spacing

Meta:
Layering



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Consistency

Does this stuff really make a difference?

Creating Beautiful Presentations

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Why do we Care about Presentations?

- In contrast to a paper or other technical writing, you present **your work and yourself**
- People **remember** good presentations:
 - Good content
 - Well presented
 - Well-designed slides
- Many of my colleagues and I **put a lot of effort** into each presentation, and at the beginning of a career it's even more important

What's wrong here?

Why do we Care about Presentations?

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*Not enough spacing:
Hard to read*

*Contrast should
be improved*

Contrast could be improved

*Random (and bad) placement of text:
Looks messy*

What's wrong here?

Why do we Care about Presentations?

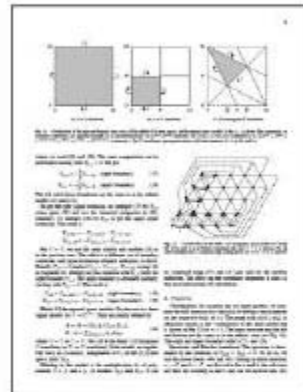
- In contrast to a paper or other technical writing, you present *your work and yourself*
- People *remember* good presentations:
 - Good content
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- Many of my colleagues and I *put a lot of effort* into each presentation, and at the beginning of a career it's even more important
- *Presentations are very important*

What's wrong here?

*Too much text + only text
Conflicts with you talking (more later)*

Presentations Are Very Important

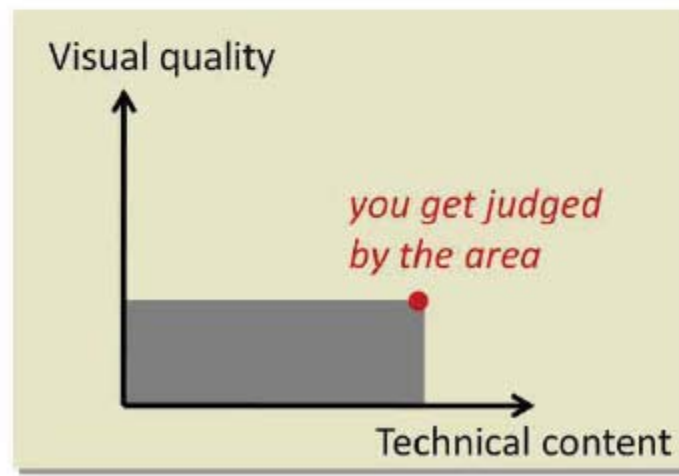
- You present your work and yourself



+



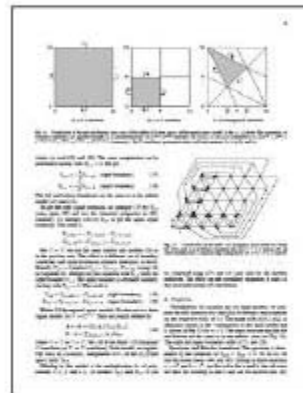
- People remember good presentations:



Plot suggested by Jim Bain

Presentations Are Very Important

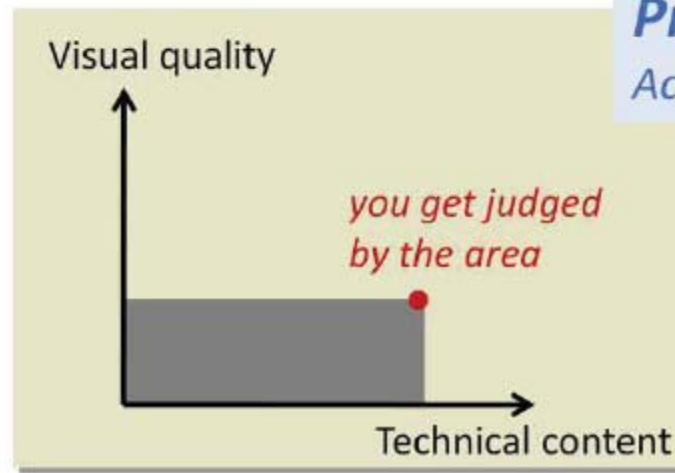
- You present your work and yourself



+



- People remember good presentations:



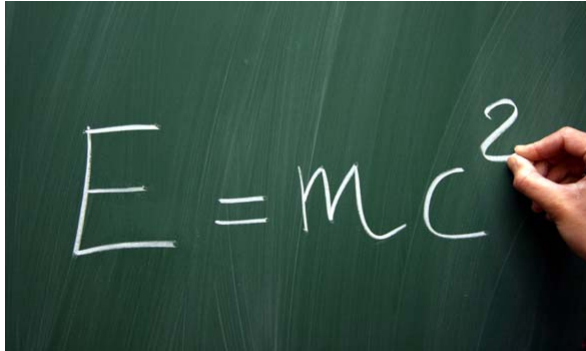
Principle: Acknowledgment

Acknowledge external sources

Plot suggested by Jim Bain

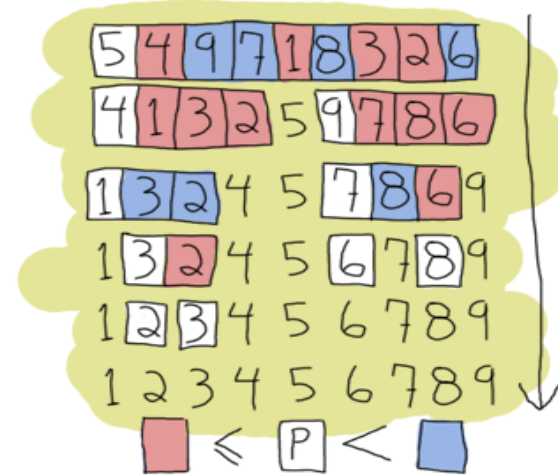
An effective talk is beautiful

Parsimony



Source: hplusmagazine.com

Elegance



Source: franzejr.files.wordpress.com

Perspective



Achieving beauty requires skill and effort

Architecture and craftsmanship matter

Cambodian shantytown



Source: suite-22.com

New York brownstones



Source: 4.bp.blogspot.com

Toronto beaches



Source: Google street view

Which kind of talk do you want to give?



Designing a beautiful talk

- What is beauty?
- Architecture (= functionality)
 - Know what you want to transmit
 - Floor planning an effective talk
 - Know your audience (and your enemy)
- Craftmanship (= sparkle)

Technical Content

■ Communicate:

- Motivation
- Problem statement
- Main idea
- Main result

■ Do not (try to) communicate:

- Every detail of your work

■ Why?

- Because people cannot digest much information that quickly
- You are lucky if they remember anything from your talk

■ *How to get across?*

Floor planning a 30 minute talk

Intro: “hook” them fast or laptops will open

- Place the work
- Show there’s a problem
- Hint at the solution

Navigation aids:

Title, outline, conclusions

Background:

- give context
- explain concepts
- (some) prior work

Backup slides:

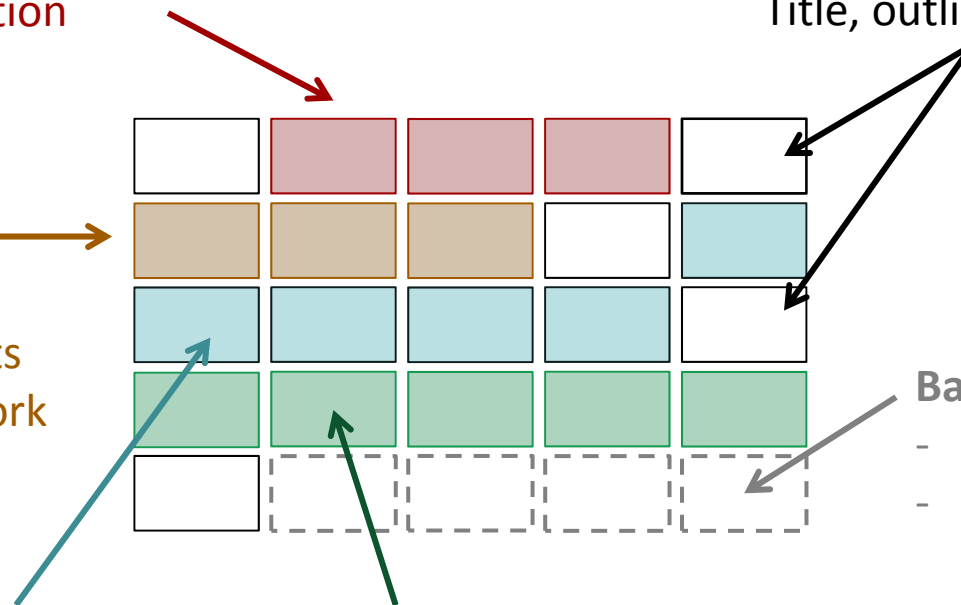
- Extra results
- Aids for Q&A

Present idea/solution:

- Convince them it will work
- Key concepts only

Experimental results:

- Prove it worked
- Focus on implications



Too many slides = death. Cut content. Be ruthless.



Slide titles are prime real estate

- Space is limited. Get right to the point!
- Use slide content to prove your point
 - Graphs, figures, equations, etc.
 - Span multiple slides as needed
- Punch line underscores implications
 - Tell the audience why they should care
 - Lead into the next slide
- Common pitfall: put claims in punchline
 - What was the rest of the slide doing, then?

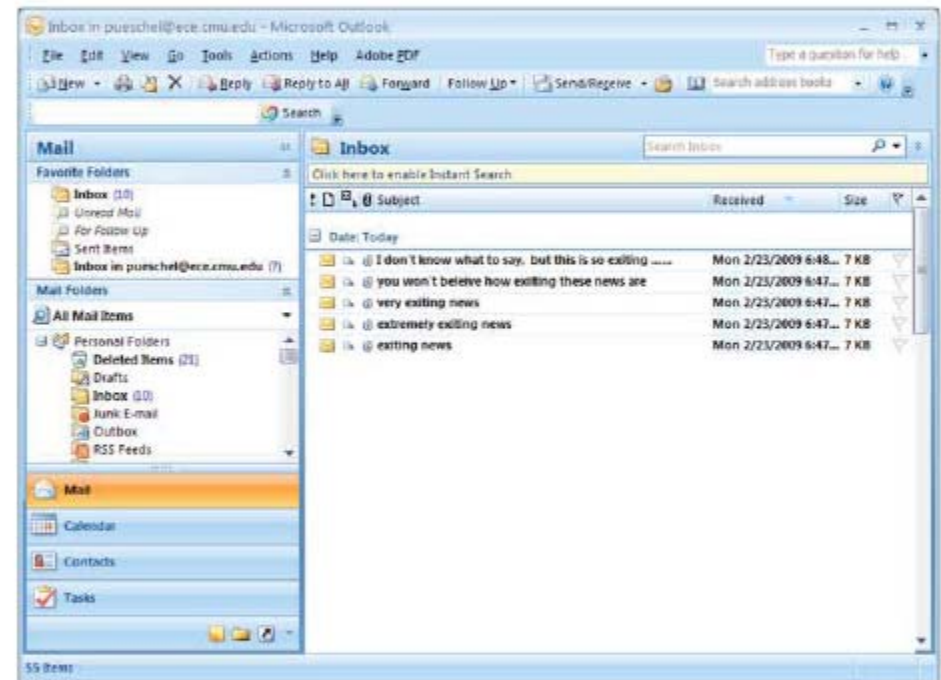
Claims in slide titles => strong story line



Know your audience

- Conference talk?
 - Transmit “the juice” of your talk
 - Convince them to read your paper
- Job talk or potential collaborator?
 - Tailor-made “story” is key
 - Prove your work is relevant to their interests
- Keynote?
 - General audience (avoid hairy details)
 - Open their eyes to broad trends and implications

Know Your Enemy



You can't read and listen at the same time

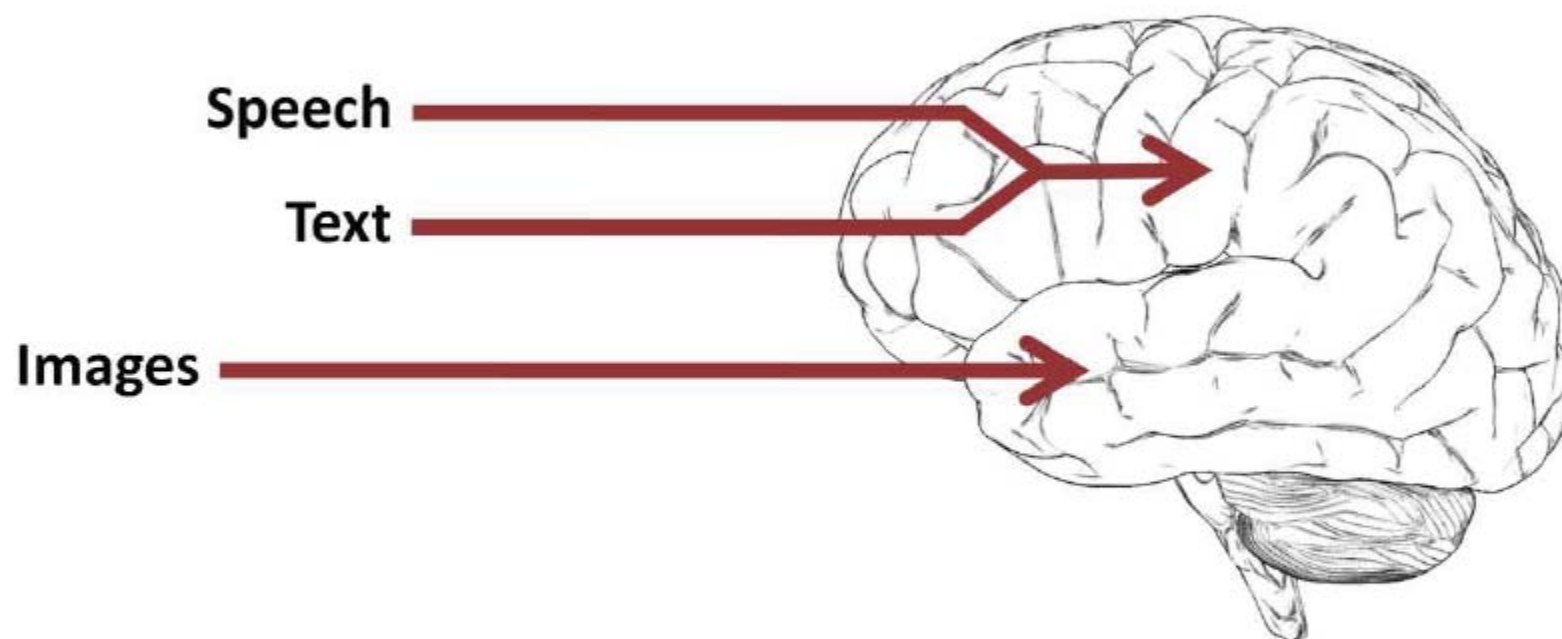
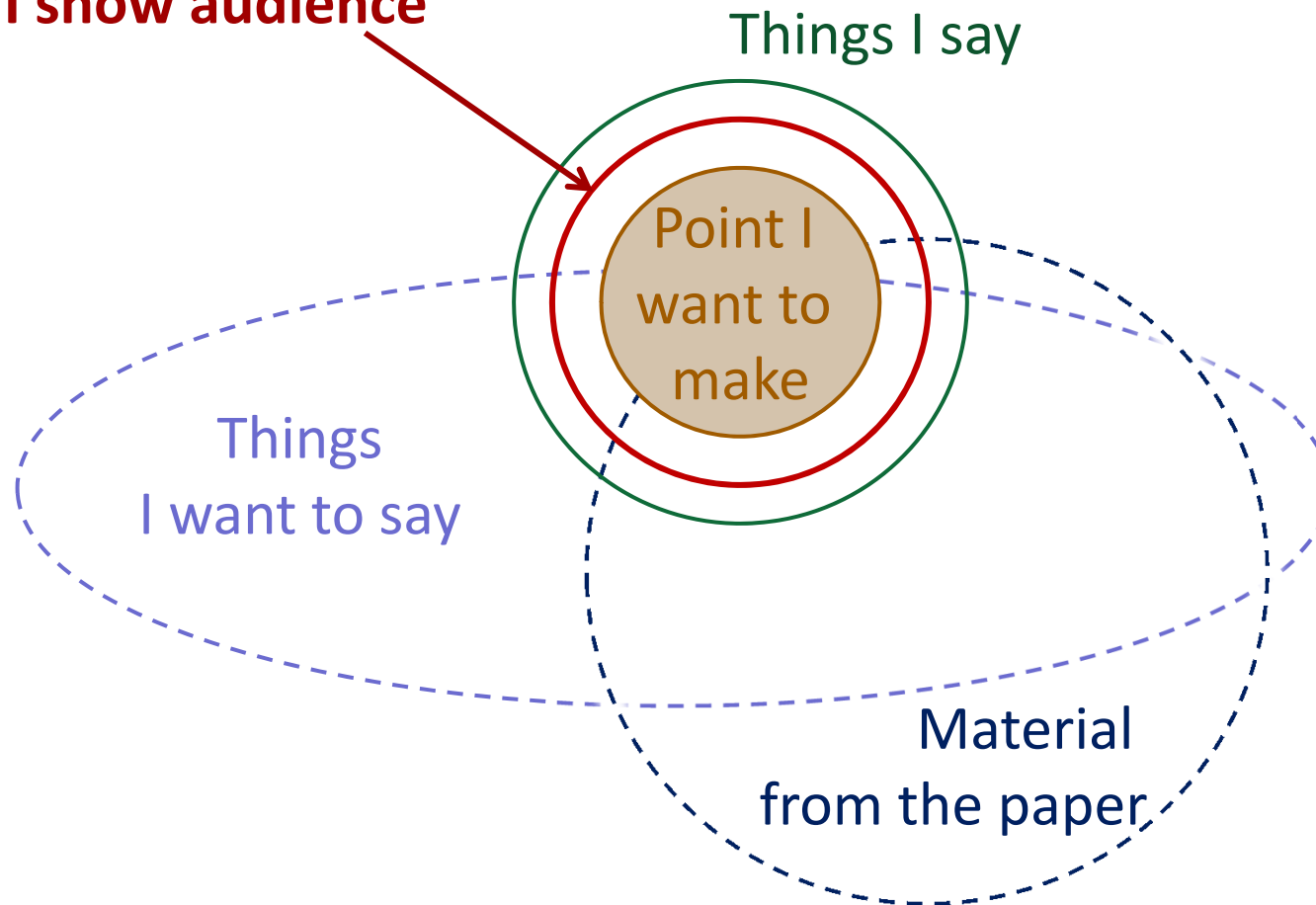


Image: <http://www.illuminati-news.com/technology.htm>

Every aspect of talk must reflect this one fact

What belongs in the talk slides?

Slides I show audience



Good slides = self-propelled talk



Designing a beautiful talk

- What is beauty?
- Architecture (= functionality)
- Craftmanship (= sparkle)
 - Slides
 - Figures
 - Equations
 - Graphs
 - Tables

Colors



Colors



Colors: Basics

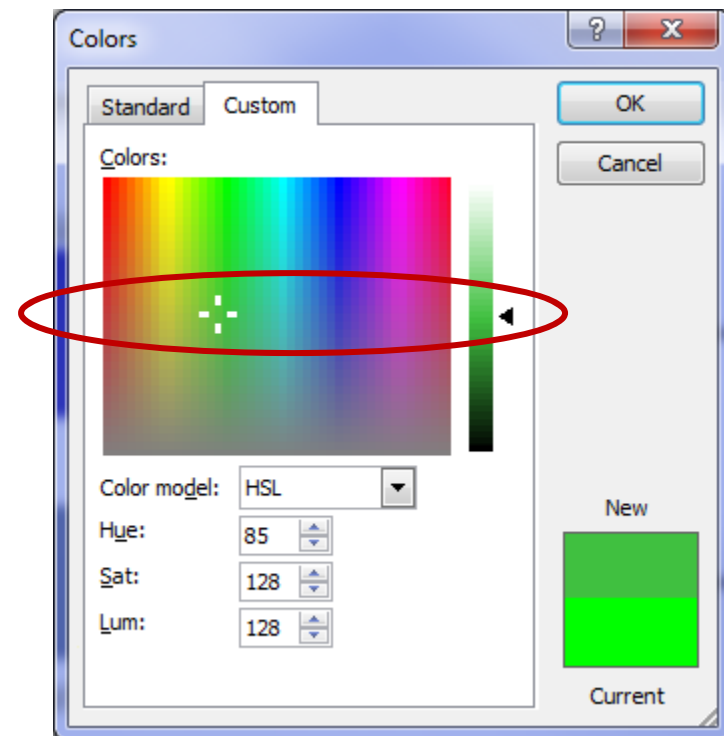
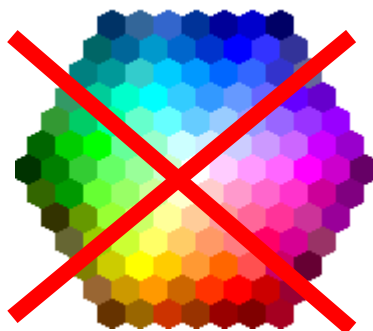
■ Use color

- Pick a few colors and stick with them (consistency)

Avoid fully saturated




Choose somewhat desaturated



Warm Colors Dominate, Cool Colors Recede

- That's why in text *red* works better than *blue*
- But for boxes it is the other way round

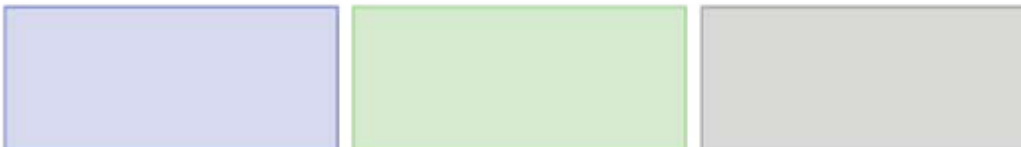


Hurts a bit, no?

- For areas/boxes: try desaturated bright (= pastel) colors



- An outline in the same color, but darker, can look good

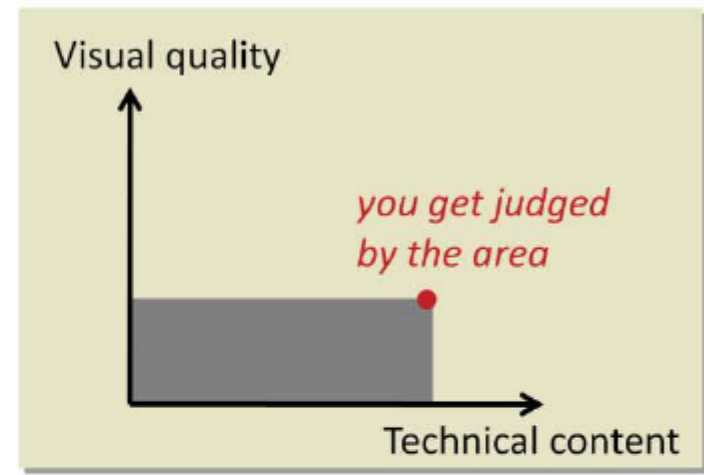


- But also dark boxes (again, desaturated) can make sense



The Looks (The Design)

- As important as content
- Design includes
 - Basic layout
 - Fonts
 - Colors
 - Graphics
 - Data presentation: Viewgraphs, tables
- Basic layout
 - Keep it simple (don't clutter with logos etc.)
 - *Be consistent*
 - Black text on white background, or
 - Bright text on dark background



Fonts

■ Basics:

- Serif font: ergonomic for large text blocks (books)
- Sans-serif: better readability for short text blocks

M serif

M sans serif

■ Use a sans-serif font

- *Powerpoint: use Calibri* (this talk)
- Arial is less attractive
- Arial Narrow is less attractive
- **For code Courier bold is best**
- **Don't use this font for technical talks**

■ Use only one or two fonts and be consistent

Basic Tips

(or newer)

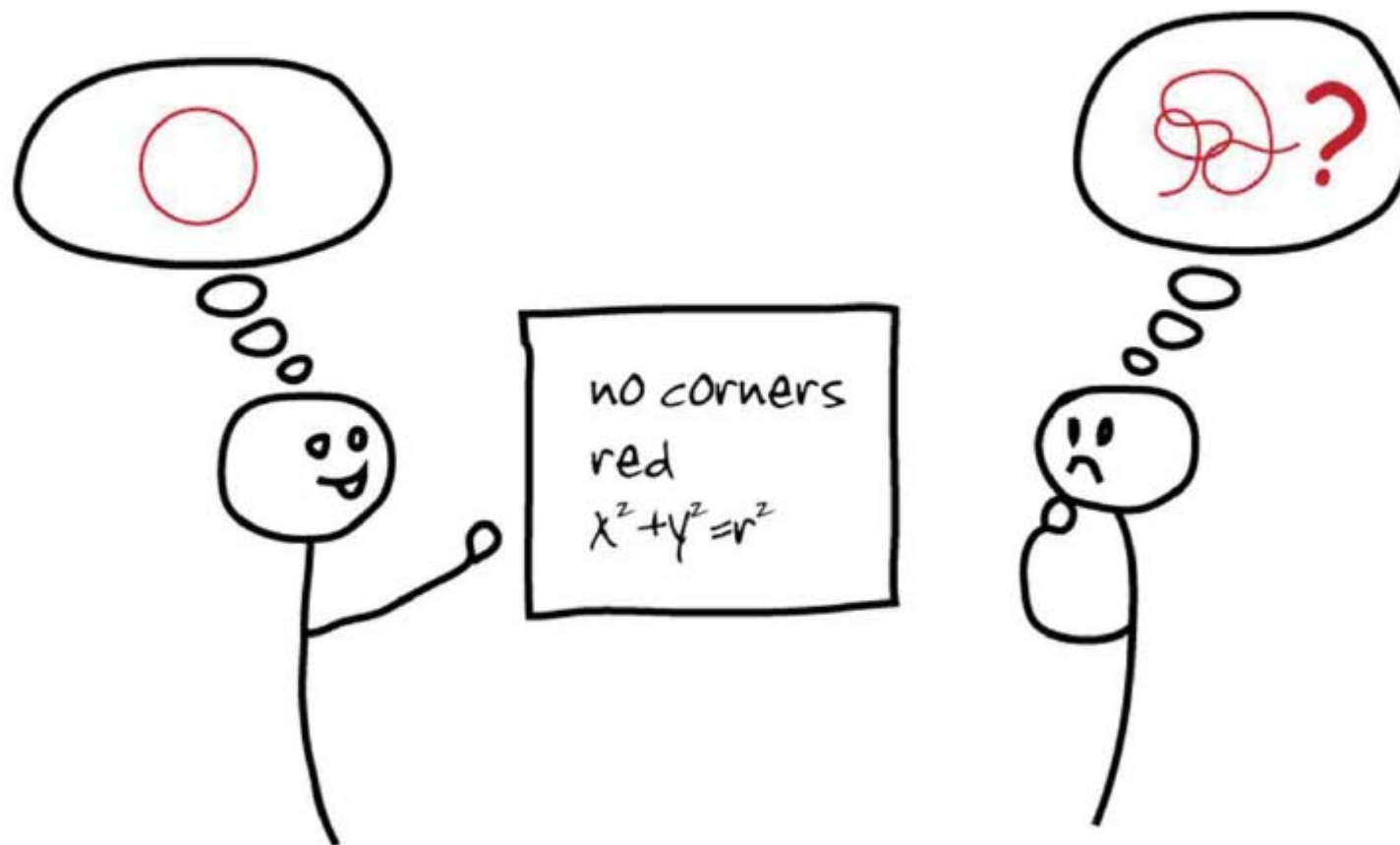
- **Use Office 2007, it's worth it**
- **Use Slide Master to set basic appearance**
 - View → Slide Master
- **Set “Snap objects to grid:” simplifies placement**
 - Home → Arrange → Align → Grid Settings
- **Use ruler to align text with bullets**
 - View → Ruler, then pull tab stops
 - Avoids things like
 - This is some text inside a
bullet and badly aligned
- **Shift-enter for line break without new bullet**



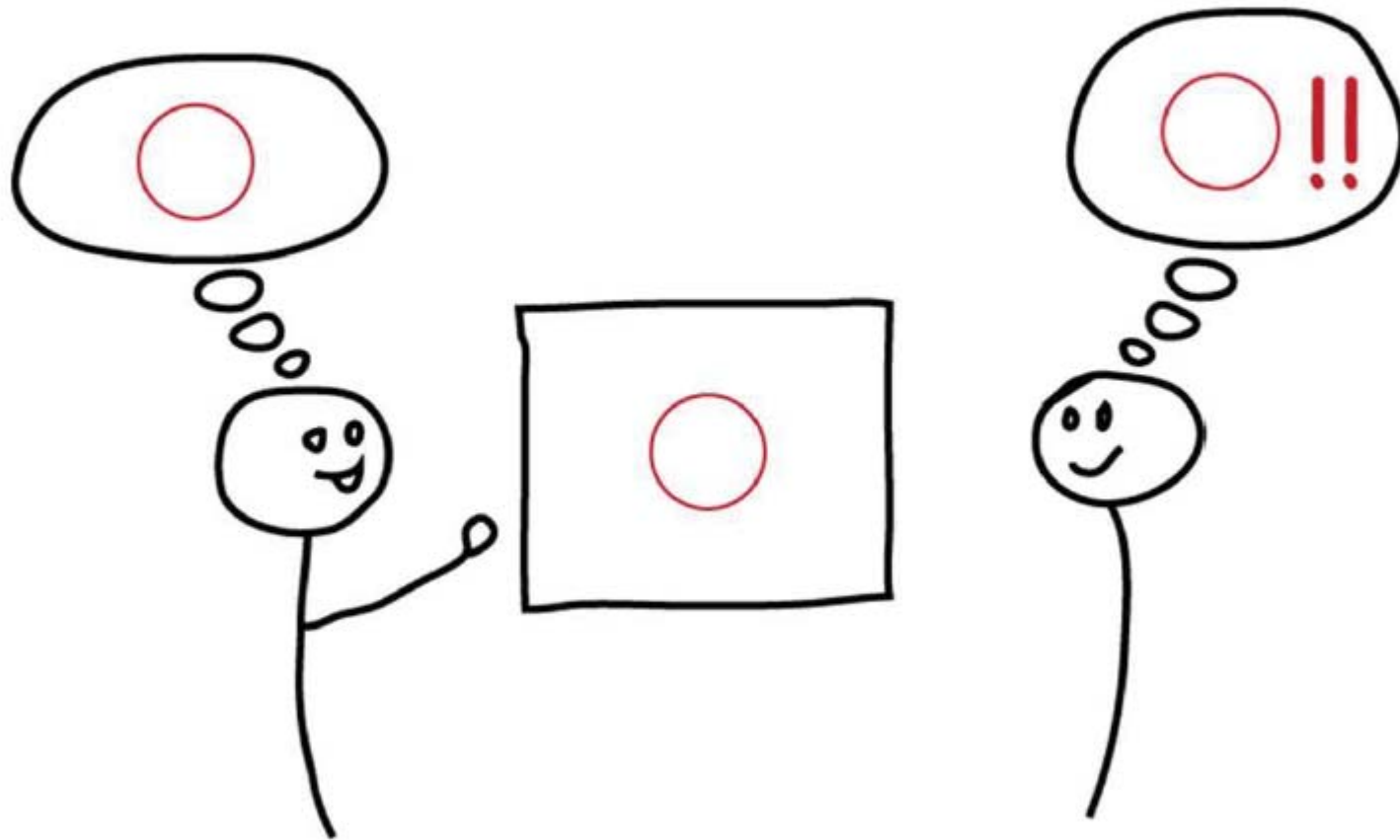
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

Minimize Text

Don't just talk about it

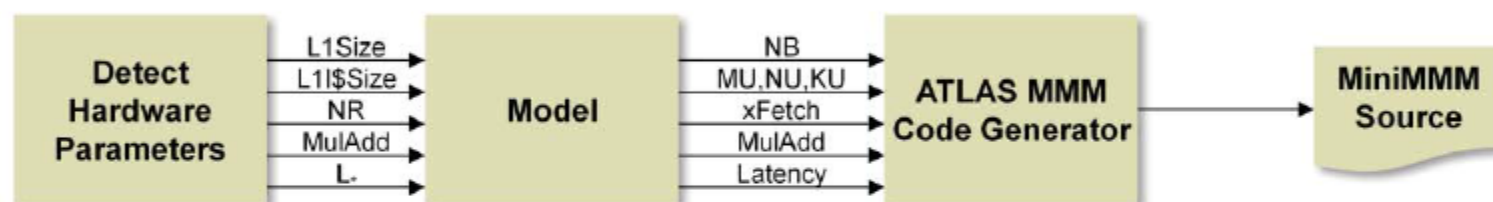


... show it!

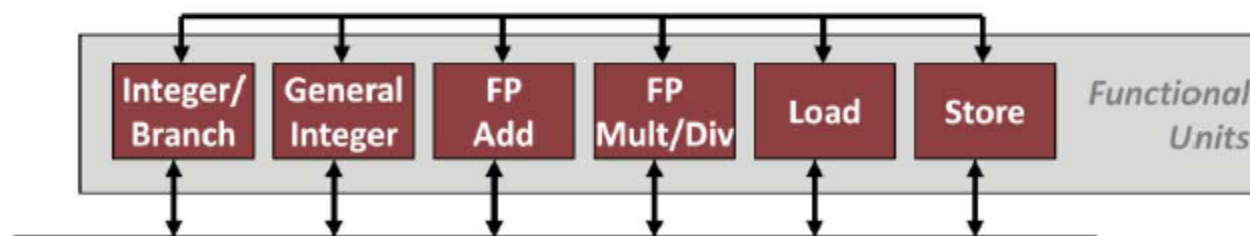


Simple Examples

■ Process: Block diagram



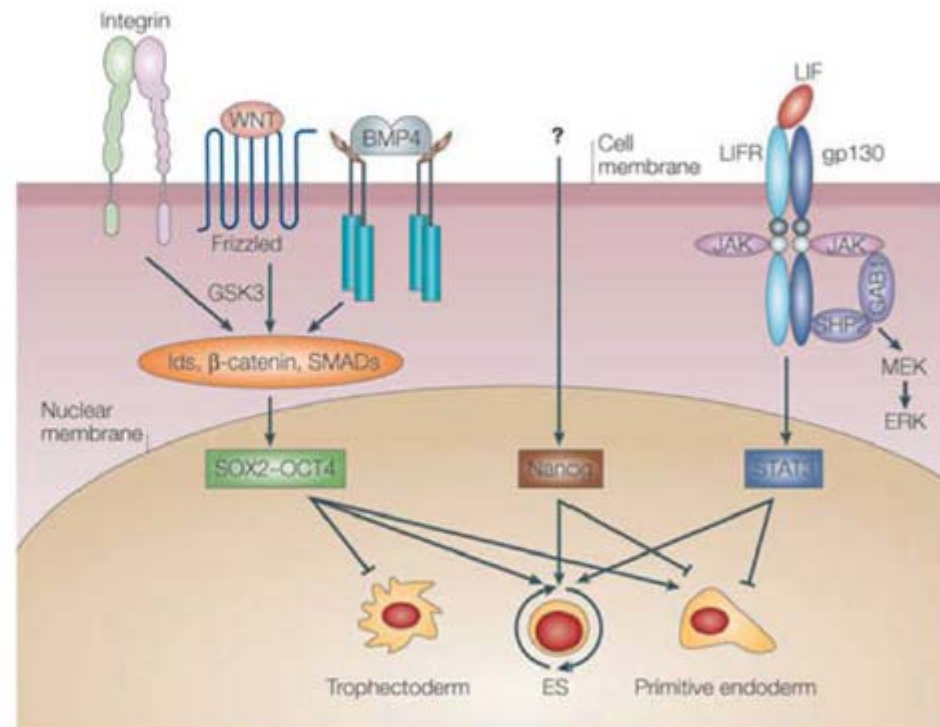
■ System: Block diagram



Visualization in Biology

■ Complex process:

Combinatorial signaling pathways involved in maintaining mouse ESC pluripotency.



Copyright © 2005 Nature Publishing Group
Nature Reviews | Molecular Cell Biology

Source: Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology
vol. 6, no. 11, pp. 872-881, 2005

How to Present a Viewgraph: Example

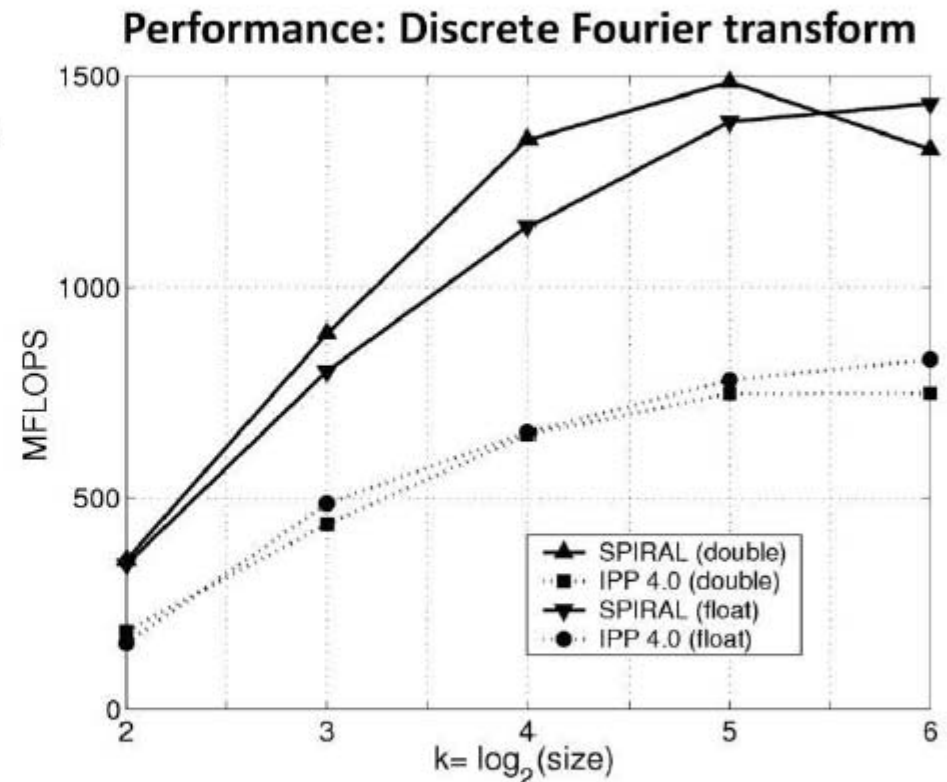
■ Start like this:

- We compare the performance of Spiral and IPP
- The x-axis shows k , the y-axis shows MFLOPS
- This means higher is better (or vice-versa)
- For example, this datapoint means that

■ Now you can explain more

■ Then conclude

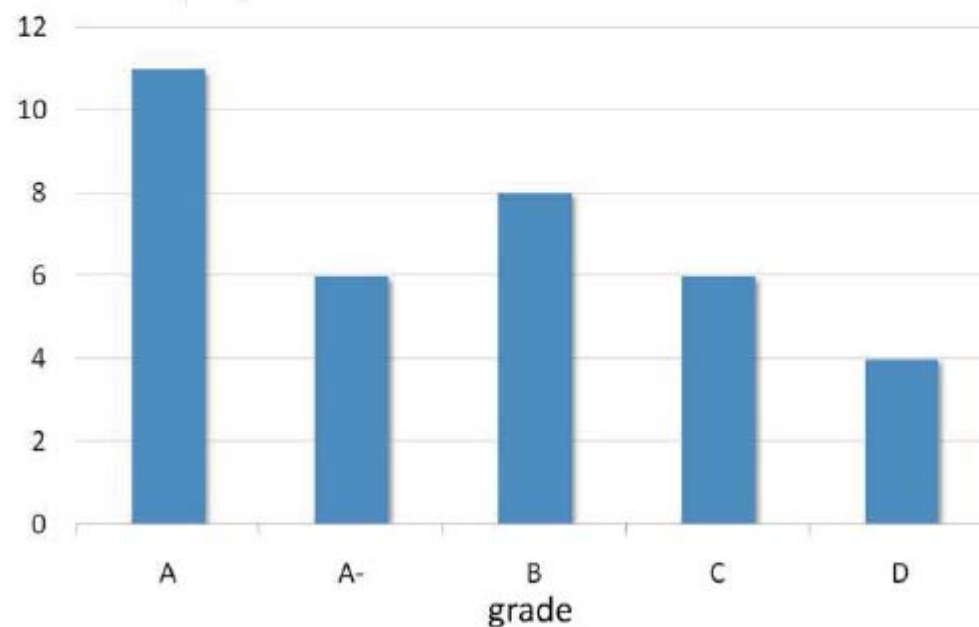
■ *But this plot is rather mediocre ...*



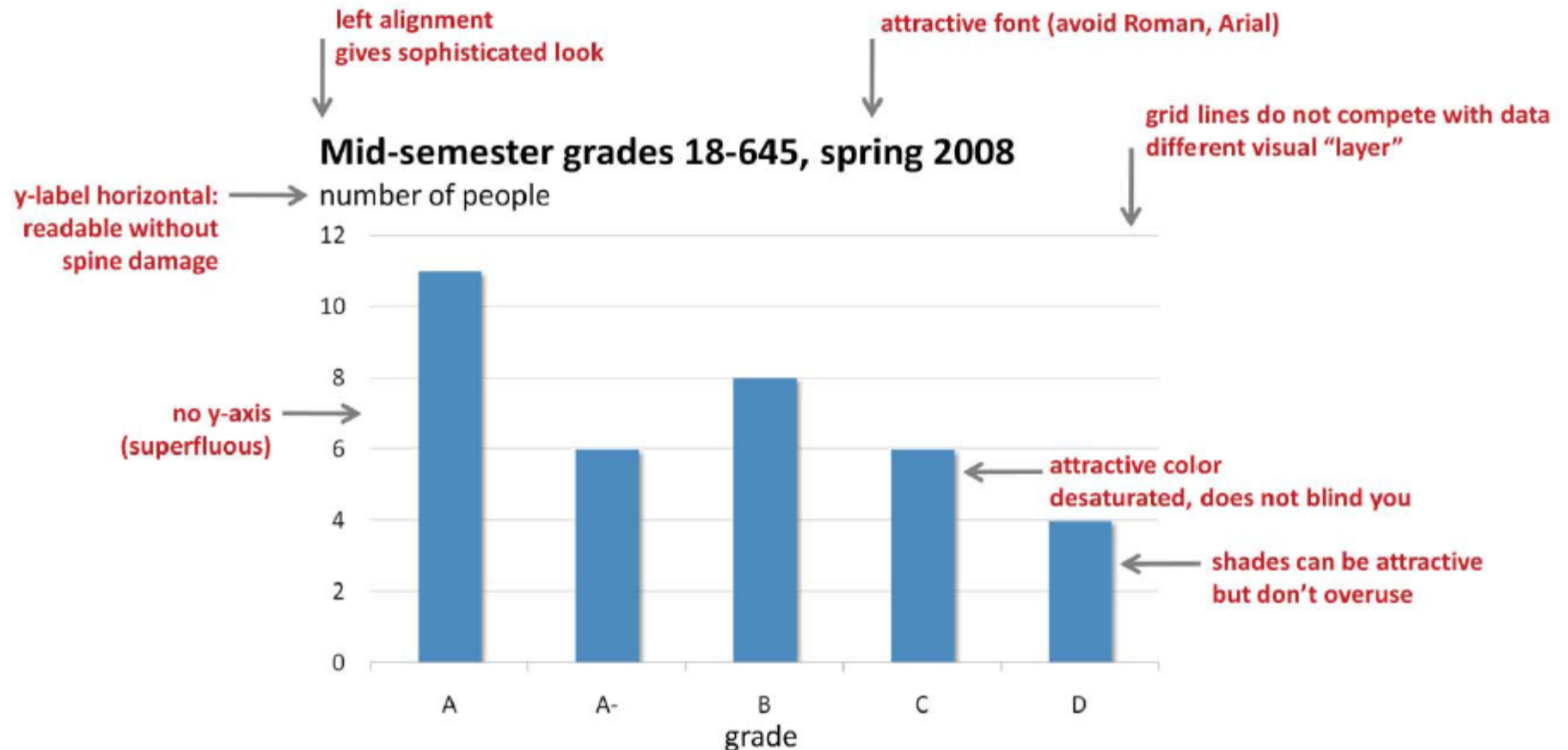
Example I: Good Viewgraph

Mid-semester grades 18-645, spring 2008

number of people

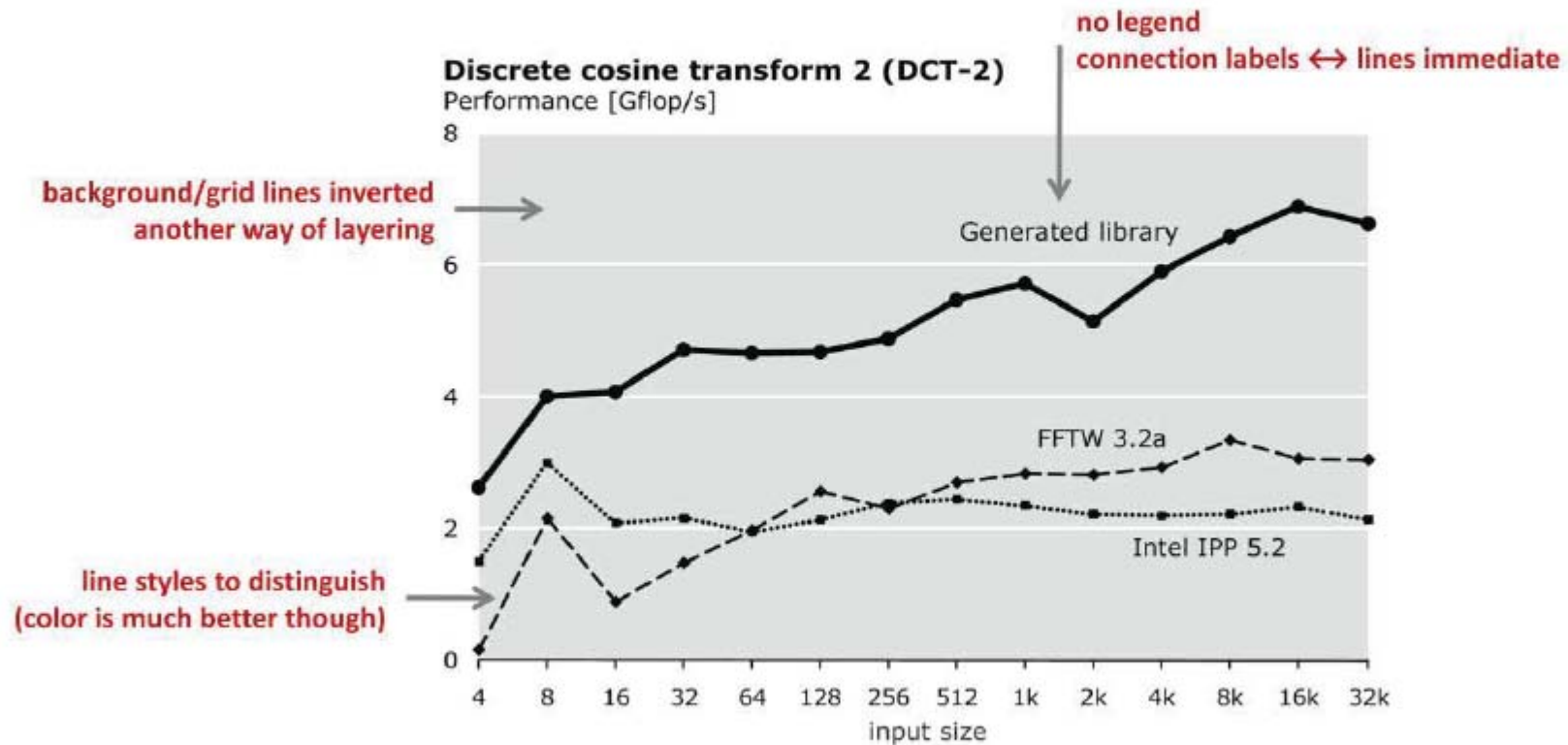


Example I: Good Viewgraph



Principles used: Alignment, contrast, layering

Example II: Good Viewgraph



Graphs should aid interpretation

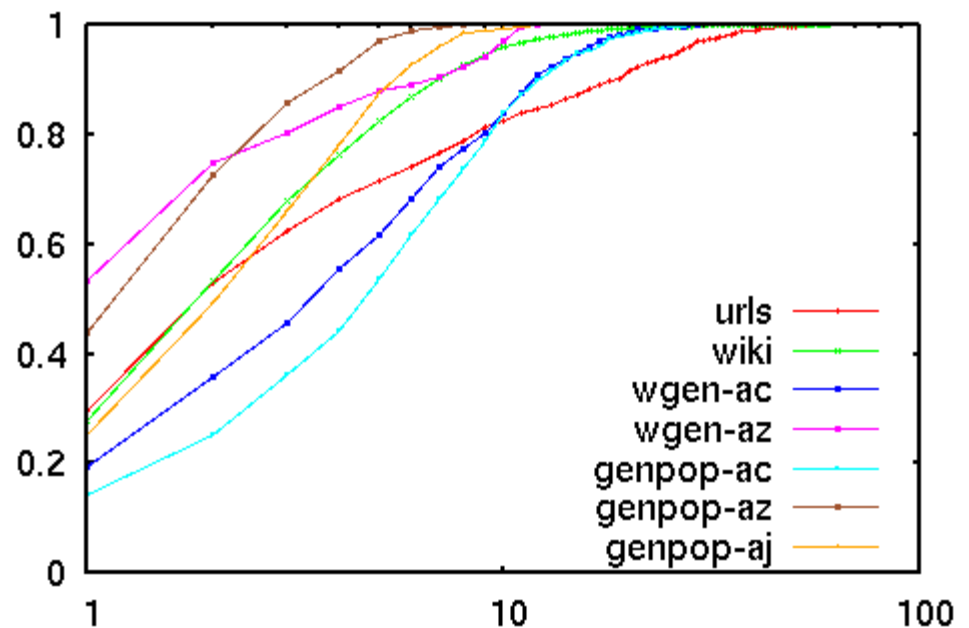


Y-axis intercept:
0 (1 if log-scale)

Use scatterplot if x axis is
numeric... especially when
samples are unevenly spaced

Use log log-scale:

- when range spans 2+ orders of magnitude
- to highlight ratios instead of differences



Which One Looks Better?

signal processing concept	algebraic concept (coordinate free)	in coordinates
filter signal filtering impulse impulse response of $h \in \mathcal{A}$	$h \in \mathcal{A}$ (algebra) $s = \sum s_i b_i \in \mathcal{M}$ (\mathcal{A} -module) $h \cdot s$ base vector $b_i \in \mathcal{M}$ $h \cdot b_i \in \mathcal{M}$	$\phi(h) \in \mathbb{C}^{I \times I}$ $\mathbf{s} = (s_i)_{i \in I} \in \mathbb{C}^I$ $\phi(h) \cdot \mathbf{s}$ $\mathbf{b}_i = (\dots, 0, 1, 0, \dots)^T \in \mathbb{C}^I$ $\phi(h) \cdot \mathbf{b}_i = (\dots, h_{-1}, h_0, h_1, \dots)^T \in \mathbb{C}^I$
Fourier transform spectrum of signal frequency response of $h \in \mathcal{A}$	$\Delta : \mathcal{M} \rightarrow \bigoplus_{\omega \in W} \mathcal{M}_\omega$ $\Delta(s) = (s_\omega)_{\omega \in W} = \omega \mapsto s_\omega$	$\mathcal{F} : \mathbb{C}^I \rightarrow \bigoplus_{\omega \in W} \mathbb{C}^{d_\omega}$ $\Leftrightarrow \phi \mapsto \bigoplus_{\omega \in W} \phi_\omega$ $\mathcal{F}(\mathbf{s}) = (\mathbf{s}_\omega)_{\omega \in W} = \omega \mapsto \mathbf{s}_\omega$ $(\phi_\omega(h))_{\omega \in W} = \omega \mapsto \phi_\omega(h)$

signal processing concept	algebraic concept (coordinate free)	in coordinates
filter	$h \in \mathcal{A}$ (algebra)	$\phi(h) \in \mathbb{C}^{I \times I}$
signal	$s = \sum s_i b_i \in \mathcal{M}$ (\mathcal{A} -module)	$\mathbf{s} = (s_i)_{i \in I} \in \mathbb{C}^I$
filtering	$h \cdot s$	$\phi(h) \cdot \mathbf{s}$
impulse	base vector $b_i \in \mathcal{M}$	$\mathbf{b}_i = (\dots, 0, 1, 0, \dots)^T \in \mathbb{C}^I$
impulse response of $h \in \mathcal{A}$	$h \cdot b_i \in \mathcal{M}$	$\phi(h) \cdot \mathbf{b}_i = (\dots, h_{-1}, h_0, h_1, \dots)^T \in \mathbb{C}^I$
Fourier transform	$\Delta : \mathcal{M} \rightarrow \bigoplus_{\omega \in W} \mathcal{M}_\omega$	$\mathcal{F} : \mathbb{C}^I \rightarrow \bigoplus_{\omega \in W} \mathbb{C}^{d_\omega} \Leftrightarrow \phi \mapsto \bigoplus_{\omega \in W} \phi_\omega$
spectrum of signal	$\Delta(s) = (s_\omega)_{\omega \in W} = \omega \mapsto s_\omega$	$\mathcal{F}(\mathbf{s}) = (\mathbf{s}_\omega)_{\omega \in W} = \omega \mapsto \mathbf{s}_\omega$
frequency response of $h \in \mathcal{A}$	n.a.	$(\phi_\omega(h))_{\omega \in W} = \omega \mapsto \phi_\omega(h)$

Easy decision, isn't it?

Most Important Guidelines for Making Tables

- Avoid vertical lines
- Avoid “boxing up” cells, usually 3 horizontal lines are enough: above, below, and after heading (see examples in this guide)
- Avoid double horizontal lines
- Enough space between rows
- If in doubt, align left

Example: Before and After

Before:

	abstract	realized
shift operator	q	$T_1(x) = x$
shift operation	\diamond	\cdot
space mark	t_n	C_n
k -fold shift operator	$T_k(q)$	$T_k(x)$
space shift	$q \diamond t_n = \frac{1}{2}(t_{n+1} + t_{n-1})$	$x \cdot C_n = \frac{1}{2}(C_{n+1} + C_{n-1})$
signal	$\sum s_n t_n$	$\sum s_n C_n(x)$
filter	$\sum h_k T_k(q)$	$\sum h_k T_k(x)$

also the first column
gets a header

everything left aligned

three horizontal lines only,
I like the top and bottom ones bolder

After:

more space between rows

concept	abstract	realized
shift operator	q	$T_1(x) = x$
shift operation	\diamond	\cdot
space mark	t_n	C_n
k -fold shift operator	$q_k = T_k(q)$	$T_k(x)$
space shift	$q \diamond t_n = \frac{1}{2}(t_{n+1} + t_{n-1})$	$x \cdot C_n = \frac{1}{2}(C_{n+1} + C_{n-1})$
signal	$\sum s_n t_n$	$\sum s_n C_n(x)$
filter	$\sum h_k T_k(q)$	$\sum h_k T_k(x)$

space to the left edge removed

space to the right edge removed

Example Tables

Price of privilege

Minimum wealth required to be in:
2000, \$

Top 50%	2,161	Top 10%	61,041
Top 40%	3,517	Top 5%	150,145
Top 30%	6,318	Top 1%	514,512
Top 20%	14,169		

Source: World Institute for Development Economics Research

Not enough

Women as % of German newspapers':

	readers in 2006	top editorial positions
Dailies		
Süddeutsche Zeitung	44.0	10.0
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	36.0	6.25
Handelsblatt	25.0	0
Die Welt	37.0	31.0
FT Deutschland	32.0	25.0
Weeklies		
Der Spiegel	36.0	0
Focus	36.0	16.7
Stern	48.0	16.0
Die Zeit	43.0	16.6
Wirtschaftswoche	20.5	0

Sources: Medien-Analyse ag.ma; Newspapers; *The Economist*

The Economist's house-price indicators % change

	Latest on a year earlier	Q3 2006	1997-2006
Denmark	23.3	18.7	115
Ireland	14.2	6.2	252
Canada	12.8	4.3	69
South Africa	12.7	20.7	327
France	12.5	15.5	127
Sweden	12.0	9.5	123
Belgium	11.8	20.0	118
Spain	10.8	13.4	173
New Zealand	9.6	14.9	94
Australia	9.5	1.7	132
Britain	9.6	2.7	192
United States	7.7	12.7	100
Singapore	7.6	3.3	na
Italy	6.6	7.3	88
Netherlands	6.2	5.3	97
China	5.4	5.5	na
Switzerland	2.0	0.8	16
Germany	-0.8	-1.3*	-1†
Hong Kong	-2.1	20.3	-44
Japan	-2.7	-5.4	-32

*2004 †1997-2005

Sources: ABSA; Bulwien; ESRI; Japan Real Estate Institute;
Nationwide; Nomisma; NVM; OFHEO; Quotable Value; Städlm;
Swiss National Bank; government offices



Equations can be deadly

Work sharing performance model:

$$x(M, n) = \min \left(\frac{1}{p_{max}}, \frac{n}{\sum_{k < \phi} p_k + p_{\phi}(M) + \sum_{\substack{m \in M \\ k > \phi}} p_{k_m}} \right)$$

Barrage of
symbols and terms

No time for proper
explanation

Masks big picture

Performance depends on two factors:

$$Throughput = f \left(\frac{1}{\text{TotalWork}}, \frac{1}{\text{CriticalPath}} \right)$$

Improved by
work sharing

Worsened by
work sharing

All terms useful and
understandable

Presentation
highlights point

Be nice to your audience: parsimony is key



Principles for a beautiful talk

- Presenting well is *very* important
 - Only one chance to make a first impression
 - Gives you a real edge over all those bad presentations
- Understand the enemy
 - Bored audiences tune out
 - Overloaded audiences tune out
 - Excessive text/detail = overloaded and bored audience
- Parsimony:
 - Everything in the talk drives some point
 - Eliminate extraneous details

Books That Influenced This Talk

- Cliff Atkinson, *Beyond Bullet Points*, Microsoft Press, 2005
- Nancy Duarte, *Slide:ology*, O'Reilly, 2008
- Stephen Few, *Show Me the Numbers*, Analytics Press, 2004
- Edward Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence*, Graphics Press, 2006
- Edward Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, 2nd edition, Graphics Press, 2006
- Garr Reynolds, *Presentation Zen*, New Riders, 2008
- Dan Roam, *The Back of the Napkin*, Portfolio, 2008
- Robin Williams, *The Non-Designer's Design & Type Books*, Peachpit Press, 2008
- <http://pages.cs.wisc.edu/~markhill/conference-talk.html>



Acknowledgments

- Slides with red backgrounds © Markus Püschel
 - His guides have vastly improved my talks
 - ***Small guide to giving presentations***
(<http://www.ece.cmu.edu/~pueschel/teaching/guides/guide-presentations.pdf>)
 - ***Small guide to designing tables***
(<http://www.ece.cmu.edu/~pueschel/teaching/guides/guide-tables.pdf>)
 - I have modified slightly some of his slides
- Natassa Ailamaki
 - Taught me what to (and not to) put in a talk
 - Taught me to put claims at the top of the slide
- CMU CALCM lab
 - Masters of the powerful intro
 - Patiently shredded my talks until I learned to do them right