

Graduate Student Teaching Assistant Manual

Section II: Preparing for a Specific Class Part III: Handouts (print or electronic)

Linguistics: Teaching Assistants for Introduction to Linguistics

Remember: a handout is not a presentation. A presentation is about ideas and summaries (and full of metaphors) which you give in the form of a talk, while a handout is one or two pages, in print or on the web. Handouts are the natural habitat of details, complex information and explanations.

A clear, well composed handout relieves the student of trying to take notes and allows freedom to really listen. A handout provides structure, a reference for study and further research, a way to pass along key ideas and key concepts, and illustrative materials (charts, graphs). Whether the primary purpose is visual reinforcement or a guideline for further study, the key elements remain the same.

Basic guidelines:

- Prepare your handout at the same time you are planning the class.
- A strong title, clear and uncluttered layout with a lot of white space is more effective than a block of text.
- Graphics should be used to illustrate, but be sure your students know how to read and interpret the graphics you use.
- No cute images or elaborate fonts.
- Narration is for your presentation to the class. The handout should cover the major points concisely, in a bulleted list.
- Set up a style sheet for consistency, stipulating formatting for headlines, titles, important phrases.
- Establish a color palette before beginning: no more than three complementary colors, and stick with them.
- If including references or suggestions for further reading, pick one style (APA, MLA, etc.) and be consistent.
- Avoid any material that is salacious or demeaning; stick to the guidelines for gender neutral and culturally inclusive writing.
- Respect copyright.



— **The Naked Penguin Rule: Any and all handouts must be cleared with your supervisory faculty member a minimum of twenty-four hours before the class for which it is was prepared. This is not negotiable.**

Further reading:

Gelman A., Pasarica C., Dodhia R. (2002) Let's practice what we preach: Turning tables into graphs. *The American Statistician* 56:121-130

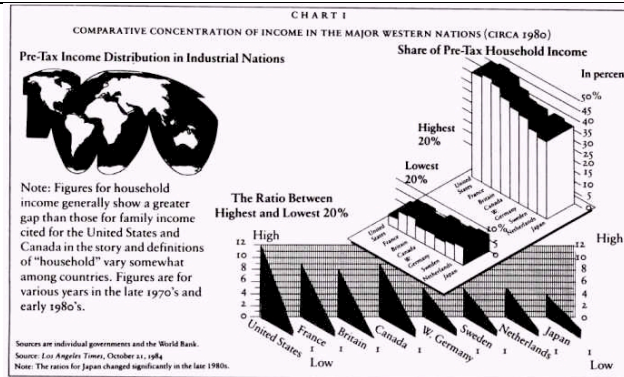
Tufte E. (2001) The visual display of quantitative information, 2nd edition. Graphics Press.

Tufte, E. (2006) Beautiful Evidence. Graphics Press.

Wainer H. (1984) How to display data badly. *The American Statistician* 38:137-147.

This example of what to avoid in trying to make data visual comes from [Just Plain Data Analysis: Companion Website](http://pol.illinoisstate.edu/jpda/charts/bad_charts1.htm)

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Note the extraneous features of this in this graphic.

- A completely irrelevant map of the world.
- Two entirely different kinds of 3-D charts displayed at two different perspectives.
- Country names are repeated three times.
- To display 24 numeric data points, 28 numbers are used to define the scales.
- The countries are sorted in no apparent order (not even alphabetically).
- Note the use of the letter "I" to separate the countries on the bottom chart.

Not content with the distractions and distortions made possible by the use of 3-D effects, charters sometimes feel the need to add all sorts of other Chartjunk to a graph. In the graphics on the left, Kevin Phillips is trying to make the point that income is more inequitably distributed in the United States than in other countries.

While it might be possible to design a better graphical display for these data, a table does the job quite nicely:

Pre-Tax income Distribution in Industrial Nations

	Share of Pre-tax Household Income		Ratio: Top to bottom shares
	Top income quintile	Bottom income quintile	
United States	45	4	12
Canada	42	4	9
France	47	5	9
Britain	45	6	8
W. Germany	39	8	5
Sweden	38	8	5
Netherlands	37	7	5
Japan	36	9	4

*data estimated from chart.