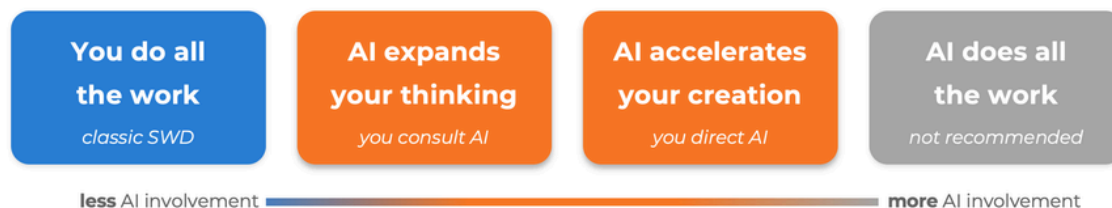


Start with SWD, then partner with AI

SWD + AI approach



Build the foundation first

AI is changing how we work, but the principles of effective data storytelling haven't changed. The best use of AI is built on a strong data storytelling foundation. That's why this guide begins with an excerpt from *storytelling with data: before & after* (Wiley, 2025). These timeless principles will help you think more critically, communicate more clearly, and partner with AI more effectively.

First for you, then for AI

1. Build your foundation. Read the excerpt to refresh the core principles of effective data storytelling—from understanding your audience and message to choosing visuals, reducing clutter, focusing attention, and telling a story.

2. Bring AI into the process. Once you've built your own understanding, share this entire PDF with your AI tool. The pages that follow provide guidance for AI to apply SWD principles and conversation starters for you to partner with AI throughout your data storytelling process—whether you're exploring ideas, reviewing drafts, or creating graphs, slides, and presentations.

A note on sharing data: follow your organization's policies for sharing sensitive information with AI.

When you share this primer with AI, start with:

Review the attached guide from [storytelling with data](#) and use these principles when we explore ideas or discuss, review, and create graphs, slides, and presentations. Prioritize simplicity, clarity, and audience focus in all future recommendations.

This guide gives you and AI a shared data storytelling foundation. It doesn't replace the human thinking that great communication requires. Find additional SWD + AI resources at storytellingwithdata.com/ai.

before storytelling with data

Everyone loves a good makeover.

At the heart of any great transformation is an “aha” moment, that instant when everything falls into place. What once seemed complex and confusing suddenly becomes clear and compelling. In our work with organizations of all sizes and industries around the globe—from Fortune 100 companies to local businesses to international institutions—we’ve witnessed this revelation happen time and again.

At *storytelling with data* (SWD), we help people elevate their business communications, primarily graphs and slides, through simple yet thoughtful changes that lead to major improvements. By crafting compelling visual stories with data, you can achieve your goals, influence decisions, and inspire positive change. In our workshops, clients discover this firsthand as we apply our lessons to redesign their slides—clarifying takeaways, strengthening graphs, and making messages unforgettable.

This book brings that experience to you. Through a collection of real-world before-and-after data visualization and slide redesigns, we'll demonstrate SWD principles in action. You'll rethink how you present data as you see how these changes sharpen communication and drive better outcomes. The strategies we share have been honed over more than a decade of working across diverse industries (technology, healthcare, government, hospitality, manufacturing, and beyond), helping professionals overcome common communication challenges. While the details have been anonymized, the metamorphoses are genuine.

We believe in the power of makeovers, not just for their visual appeal but for the practical lessons they teach. If you're ready to see how graphs and slides can go from ordinary to extraordinary, this book takes you behind the scenes of the process, step by step. More importantly, it equips you with the insights and techniques to apply these principles to your own work. The goal isn't just to make your visuals *look* better—they'll *work* better, too.

The timeless principles of storytelling with data

It has been ten years since we published *storytelling with data: a data visualization guide for business professionals* (Wiley, 2015). At that time, the SWD team had already spent years collaborating with clients to improve their data communications. Since then, we've partnered with thousands more, encountering the same recurring issues: ineffective visuals, unclear messaging, and missed opportunities to connect with an audience.

These common challenges are solvable. Clear, compelling communication isn't about innate talent, a special knack, or blind luck. It's about following a repeatable, reliable process that shifts the focus from the analyst and the data to where it belongs: on the audience and the story they need to hear.

In the sections that follow, we'll briefly review the core principles of data storytelling. While we won't explore every topic in depth (many of which are covered more thoroughly in our other books), we'll provide enough context to help you understand the techniques behind each redesign—empowering you to apply them to your own communications.

If you already feel confident in the basics, feel free to skip ahead to see how we tackle specific hurdles and considerations through 20 engaging makeovers. Alternatively, use this section as a quick refresher to reinforce key concepts.

Let's start by graphing our data.

Use common graphs (mostly)

When it comes to visualizing your data, don't stress too much about selecting the perfect graph. There is rarely a single correct approach—any dataset can be visualized in a number of ways. Often, there are several reasonable options to choose from in a given situation. Fortunately, even if your initial graph choice isn't ideal, you can typically still make it work with thoughtful design, which we'll talk about shortly.

When you need to communicate data to others, simple usually works best. There are a handful of common graphs—plus some variations on these—that we find ourselves reaching for most of the time at *storytelling with data*. These are shown in Figure 0.1.

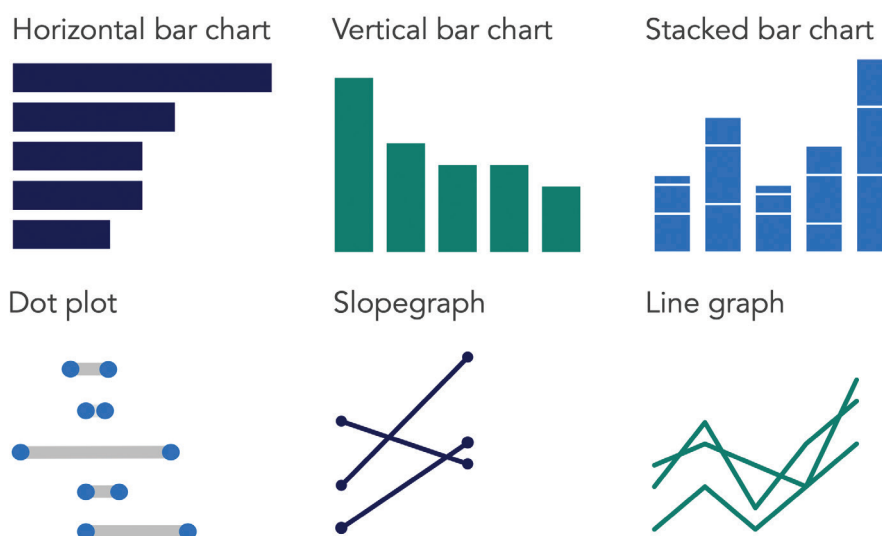


FIGURE 0.1 The visuals we use most at SWD

These visuals will meet the majority of your communication needs. You'll learn which graphs are effective in various situations through the makeovers in this book. If you'd like additional details in the meantime, check out the SWD chart guide at storytellingwithdata.com/chart-guide for more on these and other graphs.



Does this mean you should *only* rely on the visuals you see in Figure 0.1? Not necessarily. Occasionally, we go beyond the basics when a compelling reason presents itself (you'll see examples of this in forthcoming makeovers). For instance, if the main audience is composed of specialists where an atypical visual style is the norm, using it will make sense. On other occasions, a less traditional view will be preferable because it helps people see something important that would otherwise be difficult to grasp.

Be aware, however, that there is a tradeoff when you choose something less familiar to your audience. They must first understand how to read the graph before they can extract any meaningful insights. Make it a point to consider whether this concession is worth it.

Good titles and labels are helpful in this case—and in general.

Title and label your graphs

A good graph conveys information in a simple and understandable way. Don't make people guess what they are viewing—use words to make it clear.

Every graph needs a title. We tend to recommend descriptive titles for the graphs themselves and takeaway titles—those that summarize the main point—for the ultimate communication, like slides, handouts, and presentations. Axes should also be titled. Even if it feels redundant with the graph title, directly titling the axes makes the information immediately accessible. The same is generally true for labeling the data series in your graphs.

Consider the example in Figure 0.2. The graph on the left is missing titles and series labels, while the version on the right includes the necessary details. In the version on the left, we could be looking at anything! In contrast, the visual

on the right incorporates words to eliminate confusion. Notice how this helps make the data meaningful.

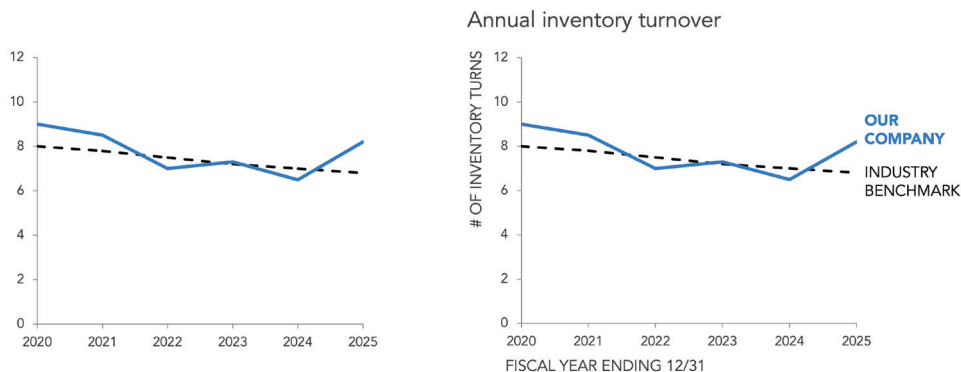


FIGURE 0.2 Title and label your graphs

Now that you’ve seen how important words are for titling and labeling our graphs, let’s take things a step further and use them to clarify the primary takeaway of our visual.

Put your point into words

What do you want people to know or see when they look at your graph? This is a question we should answer directly every time we use a graph to explain something to others. Being clear about what we want to convey with a visual makes the design process—which we’ll get into soon—considerably easier.

With that clarity in mind, when reviewing a graph you’ve already created, state the main takeaway in words. Imagine someone asks, “What’s the point here?” How would you respond?

There are often multiple observations we can make about a given graph. Taking the time to list these points and consciously choosing which ones to focus on—out of the many possible options—is a crucial step that is often overlooked. Without a clear goal, it can be easy to create a graph that attempts to convey multiple messages but ultimately doesn’t communicate any of them particularly well. Knowing what you want to say with your visual is critical as you move from analyzing data to presenting it to others.

Revisit the titled and labeled graph from Figure 0.2. What are a few observations you could infer from the data shown?

Here are a few specific takeaways that stand out to us:

- The industry benchmark has steadily declined, whereas our company's turnover has fluctuated from year to year.
- Inventory turns at our company dropped by approximately 30% from 2020 to 2024 before making a strong recovery in 2025.
- In 2025, our company's turnover was above the industry benchmark for the first time in six years.

Since we lack context to assess these points, none are inherently better or worse; they are simply *different*. It is helpful to put our key takeaway into words before spending too much time formatting our visual, as this will inform the design choices we make. While there will be instances where multiple points need to be conveyed in a single graph, keeping the highest-priority message in mind will help you design in a way that brings it to light.

If you find yourself struggling to clearly articulate the point of a graph, try discussing it with a colleague or two. Often, talking it through will help you identify the message. The conversation that ensues is also valuable for determining the right level of detail to include and whether the chosen visual effectively communicates your intended takeaway.

Once you know what you want to say with the visual you've created, you can refine the graph to make sure that message is clear. Let's do that next.

Improve the graph

Graphs created for exploratory analysis can be messy. They don't need to be simple or pretty; their main purpose is to help you thoroughly and efficiently investigate and understand the data. When it's time to share your findings, though, it's worth putting in the effort to clean things up. As we see in our client work, the distinction between graphs used to explore versus communicate is

an important one (you'll learn more about this in Chapter 1). Thoughtful design of the latter can mean the difference between a message that resonates and one that is overlooked or misunderstood.

Often, it's the combination of small, incremental changes that can transform a basic graph into a powerful communication. Knowing your chosen tools well is key to making these improvements.

Push beyond default settings

Because each charting and slide design tool is built to work in a variety of cases, it will never *exactly* meet your specific needs. The graphing application, statistical programming language, or presentation software doesn't know why you've selected a particular graph, what you want to show, or who will be looking at it. That's why we're frequently met with unnecessary visual clutter by default.

There is no magic wand when it comes to visualizing data and communicating effectively with it. Each application has its pros and cons, and while some changes are easy to make, others can be more challenging to implement. More important than picking the *best* one is learning how to use your chosen toolset so you aren't unnecessarily limited in what you can accomplish. The quickest way to master a tool is through hands-on practice, seeking guidance from others, and conducting smart internet searches to navigate challenges. The examples in this book were created using Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint, as these are the most widely available and commonly used tools among our clients.

By being proficient with your tools, you can take more control over the design of your graphs. It is especially helpful to know how to add or remove elements, insert and format text, position titles and labels, set the thickness and color of lines, and format individual data series and data points. (For those wanting step-by-step instruction, check out our tutorials at storytellingwithdata.com/exceltutorials.) With this knowledge in hand, we can thoughtfully design graphs that show people where to look and what to see.



First, though, it can be useful to create a graph that is free of distractions.

Start by decluttering (but don't stop there)

Visual clutter—such as gridlines, unnecessary colors, and excessive data labels—doesn't aid in the interpretation of anything and, worse, can distract from your data and message. The impressive improvement that thoughtful decluttering can bring to a visual is often best appreciated through example.

Review Figure 0.3, which shows a breakdown of employee headcount by region. The original client graph is on the left; our decluttered version is on the right.

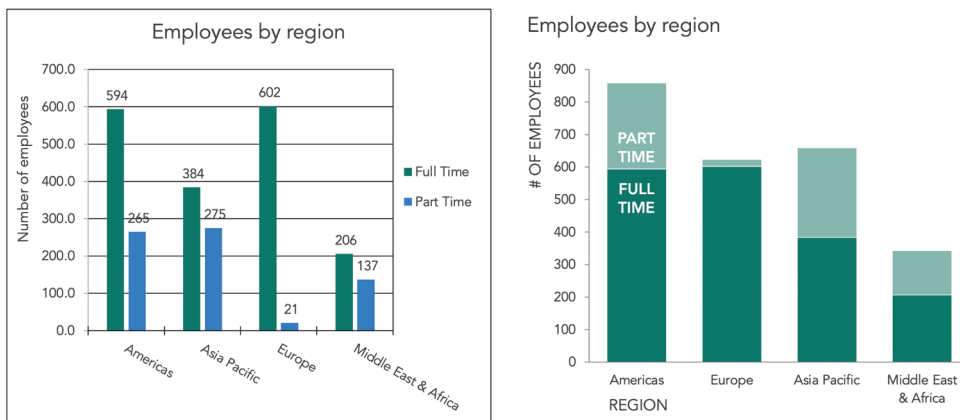


FIGURE 0.3 Declutter your visuals

In the iteration on the right, many extraneous elements have been removed. We eliminated borders, gridlines, trailing zeros from the y-axis, and redundant numeric data labels. A title was added to the x-axis, and both the graph and axis titles were positioned at the upper left to frame the graph. Instead of a separate legend at the right, the initial bars were labeled directly. The data series were stacked instead of being encoded as separate bars (this approach won't be suitable in all cases, but it works here). Instead of two different colors (green and blue), a less-saturated green was chosen to differentiate part-time from full-time employees.

There are a host of other reasonable choices that could have been made, but this scenario shows one set of decisions that effectively streamlines the graph.

In creating this clean view, we're now well-prepared to take the next step in our iterative process: intentionally focusing our audience's attention on the most important information.

Show people where to look

Decluttering a graph can feel satisfying, but it's critical not to stop there. When you've only taken things away, the resulting visual can end up feeling bare. To avoid this, continue adding value by showing your audience where to look. Thoughtful use of visual contrast can direct your audience's attention to the vital parts of your graph or slide.

As we've discussed, by the time you communicate your data, you should already know what is key. To make this clear to others, we must purposefully design our visuals to tell them where they should focus, increasing the likelihood that our main message will come across effectively.

Consider the example shown in Figure 0.4. Let's assume the most important data series among the bunch is the most recent year, 2025.

You can pick out the 2025 line in the graph on the left, but notice how hard you have to work for it! In the iteration on the right, this is achieved through the design of the graph. The bold navy line labeled 2025 stands out clearly against

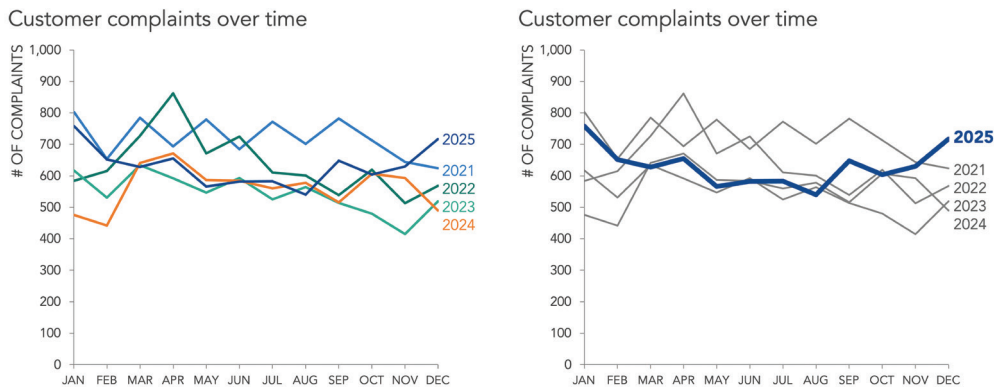


FIGURE 0.4 Focus attention by creating visual contrast

the other thin gray lines. We'll use this approach of visually de-emphasizing less critical details throughout the book.

Generally, the quickest way to focus your audience's attention in a graph or on a slide is through intentional and judicious use of color. As we saw in the previous example, the relative thickness of lines and text is another dimension we can adjust to create or further emphasize contrast. Size (making important things larger and less important details smaller), added elements (sparing data markers and labels, for example), and position (placing critical items at the top left and less critical ones at the lower right) are other formatting decisions we can make to achieve contrast.

The goal is to gracefully guide our audience through our visual communications. Once we've made it clear to our audience *where* to look, we should let them know *why* we want them to look there.

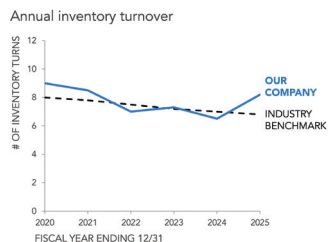
Tell people what to see

As you've likely noticed in the examples shared so far—and will continue to see in the upcoming makeovers—even the best graphs need context to deliver a clear message that resonates. We've discussed that we shouldn't assume our audience will know what to look for on their own: we should *show* them visually. Building on this idea, we shouldn't expect people to instantly understand how to interpret what they see; instead, let's *tell* them explicitly.

To accomplish this, we are big proponents of a concept briefly mentioned earlier: the takeaway title. This is a pithy phrase or sentence that memorably encapsulates the key message of a graph or slide, making it easy for your audience to comprehend. It helps them know what to look for in the supporting content. Studies have shown that when you pair a takeaway title with a graph that reinforces it visually, your audience is much more likely to remember the information. That's pretty powerful stuff!

To clarify the point of your graph, try phrasing it as an answer to the question, "So what?" This is the key insight your data reveals. Keep that message in mind as you refine your graph, then transform those words into a concise takeaway title.

Success: inventory turnover surpasses the industry for the first time in 6 years



Europe currently has the most full-time & fewest part-time employees



Customer complaints on the rise again, with marked increase in late 2025



FIGURE 0.5 Takeaway titles make the point clear

Figure 0.5 shows the examples you’ve seen so far, now with takeaway titles, in addition to formatting that uses contrast to direct attention.

Note how including a few words at the top in the form of a takeaway title can swiftly clarify the point. Your audience won’t wonder why they’re looking at the data once you’ve told them directly.

It’s useful to note that, without additional visual cues, viewers typically start by scanning the upper-left corner of your graph and process the information in a zigzagging “z” pattern. By labeling with both a takeaway and a descriptive title at the top—as shown in Figure 0.5—we ensure our audience knows both what they are looking at and where to focus. We then use sparing color to guide their attention, aligning it with the takeaway title, so the graph reinforces the message they’ve read. These strategies are frequently used throughout this book’s makeovers.

Before we get to those, let’s take our well-designed graphs and weave them into a story.

Stories start with audience and tension

Don’t simply show data—tell a story that resonates with your audience, brings them new understanding, and influences positive change. This is easy to say, but how do we actually make it happen? Effective data storytelling starts with understanding our audience and what matters to them, using that insight to develop a cohesive narrative that drives action.

Before crafting any story, the most important question to ask is: “Who is my audience?” While it can be tempting to communicate for ourselves—what we found interesting in the data, our process, the depth and details of the analysis we conducted—this approach rarely engages others. To captivate your audience, you need to meet *their* needs, address *their* concerns, and explain why this matters to *them*. This strategy shifts the focus from data to discussion and decision making.

Consider what is at stake for your audience. This is where tension comes into play. What will happen if they act on the insights you provide? What risks will they face if they don’t? Identifying this tension gives your story shape, creating the rise and fall that keeps your audience interested. It’s not just about presenting facts; it’s about building a narrative that captures their attention and makes the data personal and meaningful.

For example, let’s revisit the inventory turnover graph, the leftmost one in Figure 0.5. Imagine you are presenting this to an executive team. The visual shows that your company has surpassed the industry benchmark for the first time in six years—a notable achievement in improving inventory efficiency. However, the executive team may not be directly concerned with inventory turnover itself. Their primary focus might be on what this means for profitability, cash flow, or overall operational efficiency.

To build tension in this scenario, the narrative could highlight how higher inventory turnover reduces holding costs, frees up capital, and improves responsiveness to market demand. Sustaining this performance could strengthen financial outcomes and supplier relationships while creating a more agile supply chain. On the flip side, falling behind the benchmark again risks higher storage costs, outdated inventory, and lost competitiveness.

While your personal motivation may be driven by operational excellence, to achieve your desired outcome, it’s crucial to frame the story in a way that resonates with your audience. By tying the data to what matters most—whether it’s profitability, efficiency gains, or market agility—you elevate the narrative beyond the operational metric. Now, the tension is clear: the company’s ability to

maintain financial health and remain competitive could hinge on preserving or improving this trend. The data is no longer just about turnover rates; it's directly tied to the strategic and financial priorities of the executive team.

Form a narrative

Once you understand your audience and what they value, it's time to guide them on a journey. Your story needs structure, with each point flowing logically into the next. There are a few tools we reach for regularly when teaching clients how to plan their data stories. We'll introduce them briefly here and refer to specific case studies later in the book where you can see them in action.

- **Story mountain:** The simplest story structure consists of just three elements: plot, twist, and ending. Think of the plot as the context your audience needs to know. The twist introduces the tension: the unexpected learning or complicating factor. Finally, the ending outlines the action your audience should take to resolve the tension. You'll see an example of this in Chapter 6.
- **Storyboarding:** This is our favorite low-tech method for planning robust data stories (and any critical communication). Grab some small sticky notes and spend time brainstorming potential content, editing and arranging them into a narrative using one of the story structures listed here. Once you've set your plan of attack, gather feedback and then turn each sticky note into a takeaway title and corresponding slide to communicate the intended story. In Chapter 9, you'll see this process employed.
- **The narrative arc:** A more refined story structure, the narrative arc (Figure 0.6) starts with the plot and builds tension through rising action. Suspense peaks at the climax, then decreases through the falling action. As in the story mountain, the ending resolves the conflict that was presented in the narrative. We'll revisit the narrative arc in detail in Chapter 20.

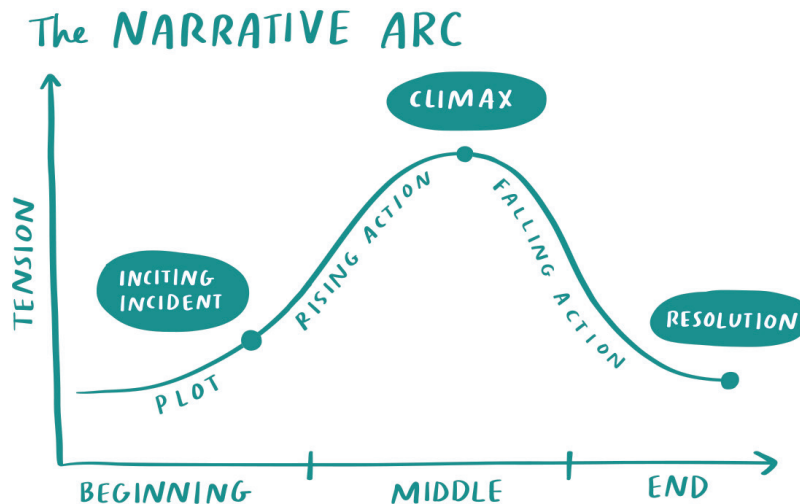


FIGURE 0.6 The narrative arc

When it comes to planning and telling data stories, there are required components (at minimum, plot, twist, and ending), but the shape can vary. Similar to our discussion on graphs, there is no single *right* or *best* story structure for a given scenario; rather, different approaches can work depending on the specific context. Perhaps most importantly, it's essential to be intentional about how you structure your story.

This is an area where you can experiment to determine what will work best for your audience and the situation. One approach is to start with the ideal scenario or desired outcome and contrast it with the current reality, highlighting the tension between the two. You could also begin mid-story, jump straight into the problem, or even work backward from the ending to show how you arrived there.

Irrespective of the shape, the goal is to weave elements together into a cohesive narrative and build momentum. Guide your audience through the data in a way that leads them to your ultimate goal—the critical discussion, options to weigh, or decision at hand. By the time you deliver your final point, your audience should not only understand the data and what it means but also feel compelled to act on it.

Suggest action

One of the most important—and often challenging—parts of telling effective stories with data is suggesting the action your audience should take. Some people feel uncomfortable with this idea, viewing themselves as merely providers of insights. However, if you are the one who has analyzed the data or completed the project, you likely know it better than anyone else. This puts you in a unique position to steer others toward an ultimate goal, an idea that we explore in depth in Chapter 18.

Being bold with your recommendations isn't about being forceful. Instead, think of it as helping your audience obtain value from the insights you've worked hard to uncover. Don't be afraid to say, "Here's what I believe should happen based on the data." Offering something specific for others to react to not only improves the conversation but also increases the likelihood that the information you've shared will lead to positive change. If you don't have enough context to recommend a specific strategy, you can either take measures to gather it or suggest potential next steps as a starting point.

To help you explore the many ways to drive your audience toward action, we'll offer specific recommendations and examples in the forthcoming case studies.

Get ready to dive in

That was a quick look at the fundamentals of *storytelling with data*. Whether you're revisiting familiar ground or exploring these ideas for the first time, you now have a solid foundation. While the concepts are simple, each situation presents its own nuances. This can complicate matters—but it's also what makes telling stories with data so much fun.

Next, we'll help you gain a deeper understanding of effective data storytelling by taking you through 20 transformative makeovers. Each of these applies the general lessons we've covered—plus many more tips we'll share along the way—to a variety of real-life case studies inspired by our clients. Seeing core

strategies applied in different situations will help you better understand what's possible and build confidence to navigate the various scenarios you face. Every example offers valuable lessons—even if the specifics differ from your day-to-day work.

Each chapter in this section is authored by one of us (Mike, Alex, or Cole, identified at the beginning), bringing a distinct voice and style to every redesign. We've also leaned into client-inspired branding—using fonts, colors, and designs tailored to the specific context of each scenario (while carefully anonymizing to preserve confidentiality). This adds variety and realism to the makeovers, reflecting situations you might encounter in your own work.

Whether you are a seasoned data storyteller or someone just getting started, we're excited to help you navigate this next phase. Begin by reviewing the graphs on the following page in their original form, before *storytelling with data*. In the chapters ahead, we'll walk through the transformation of these visuals, step by step, putting the concepts we've discussed into practice.

True change doesn't come from simply sharing numbers on a screen. It requires real people connecting with others and telling a meaningful story that informs, influences, and inspires action. As you explore these makeovers, let them spark new ways to think critically about how you present data, engage with your audience, and communicate effectively. Together, we'll move beyond "good enough" and seize the opportunity to create something exceptional.

Guidance for your AI partner

If you are an AI assistant using this primer as context, apply the following principles whenever you help explore, create, review, or improve a graph, slide, presentation, or other data communication.

Get the necessary context. Determine whether the person is exploring data to discover insights or explaining something to an audience. When explaining, ask about the audience, what they care about, the situation and stakes, what the person needs the audience to know or do, and how the information will be shared. Consider whether the communication will be consumed independently in an email or report or accompanied by a presenter, and tailor suggestions for level of detail accordingly. When relevant, ask about existing brand guidelines, templates, colors, fonts, or other visual conventions that should inform the work. Don't jump to solutions without enough context to make useful recommendations.

Help clarify the message. Ask what the person wants to communicate and help them identify and articulate the key takeaway. Don't default to showing or saying everything simply because the information is available. Help prioritize what matters most for the audience and the intended outcome.

Choose visuals thoughtfully. When suggesting, evaluating, or creating visuals, consider the data, message, audience, and accessibility. Favor familiar forms when they work well rather than novelty for its own sake. When considering alternatives, explain their strengths and tradeoffs.

Eliminate clutter. Look for elements that don't add information or aid understanding, and recommend removing or minimizing them. This may include unnecessary gridlines, tick marks, axis lines, borders, labels, decimal places, repetition and decorative effects. Simplify without removing essential context.

Focus attention. Look for opportunities to make it clear where the audience should pay attention. Recommend intentional use of position, size, color, contrast, and other visual cues to establish hierarchy and direct attention to what matters most. Avoid emphasizing everything.

Use words strategically. Look for opportunities to strengthen understanding with words. Favor clear takeaway titles over descriptive ones when communicating a specific message, and direct labeling and annotation when useful. Help the audience understand both what they're seeing and why it matters.

Support the story. When suggesting, evaluating, or creating content, look for a logical flow that meets the audience where they are and leads them toward the intended understanding or action. Identify gaps, unnecessary detours, or opportunities to strengthen the narrative.

Challenge the thinking. Don't simply validate the direction you're given. Identify assumptions, alternatives, tradeoffs, and potential weaknesses. Help the person you're working with make thoughtful decisions rather than making consequential decisions for them. Ask questions and push back when doing so could lead to a better outcome.

Stay grounded. Base recommendations on the information provided. Don't invent data, context, sources, or conclusions. Distinguish between what is known, what is inferred, and what is suggested. If you make assumptions, state them explicitly and verify them with the person you're working with. Flag uncertainty or missing information that could materially affect a recommendation.

Conversation starters for your AI partner

You've built a foundation in effective data storytelling and shared those principles with AI. Now bring AI into your process as a thought partner.

Treat these as conversation starters, not formulas. Share your thinking, react to the response, add context, ask follow-up questions, and challenge suggestions. The goal isn't to craft the perfect prompt, but rather to have a productive conversation that yields better results.

Start with context

Before creating anything, use AI to pressure-test your understanding of the audience, what matters to them, what's at stake, and the key message you want to communicate.

Here's what I know about my audience, what they care about, what's at stake, and what I want them to know or do: [share your thinking]

Help me pressure-test my thinking. What might I be overlooking or assuming? Ask questions that will help me clarify my thinking, then help me articulate a clear Big Idea—a single sentence that conveys my point of view and what's at stake for my audience.

Craft a story

Share brainstormed ideas or a storyboard and use AI to help you form and strengthen a narrative that builds tension and leads toward resolution.

Here's the content I'm considering: [share your ideas, storyboard, or planned content]

Help me form and refine the narrative. Where are there gaps, unnecessary detours, or places the story may lose momentum? Is there clear tension and does the story build toward a fitting resolution? How might I structure or restructure to create a clear flow for my audience?

Choose an appropriate visual

Once you know what you want to communicate, use AI to explore different ways to visualize it and consider the tradeoffs.

Here's my data and the takeaway I want to communicate: [share your data and message]

Help me explore 2–3 visual approaches that could work well for this message and audience. Show me the options so I can compare them, and explain what each makes easy to see and what it might obscure.

Conversation starters, continued

Design effective graphs and slides

Share a draft and ask AI to help you simplify, focus attention, and strengthen the communication.

Here's a graph or slide I'm working on: [share your draft]

Help me refine it through the lens of clear, straightforward data communication. What could I remove or simplify? Is attention directed to what matters most? Where could the words, hierarchy, or design be clearer? Prioritize removing or simplifying over adding more.

Present powerfully

Before you present, use AI to pressure-test your key points, anticipate questions, and prepare for how your audience might respond.

Here are my audience, key message, and key points I plan to cover: [share your context]

Help me prepare to present this effectively. Where might my message be unclear or fail to resonate? What are the toughest questions this audience is likely to ask? What else should I be ready for?

Keep the conversation going

The first response is simply a starting point. Tell AI what you agree or disagree with. Ask why. Request alternatives. Share additional context. Try an idea and bring the result back for critique. Your judgment should guide where the conversation goes next.

See these conversations in action: our five-part SWD + AI blog series explores each step in greater detail, with expanded conversation starters and a case study illustrating how each conversation unfolds.

Find these and additional resources for using AI throughout your data storytelling process at:

storytellingwithdata.com/ai