Presenting Data: How to Communicate Your Message Effectively

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[Reviewed by Robert W. Hayden, on 01/29/2015]

This book discusses the presentation of data to a lay audience in the form of graphs, charts and tables. The mathematical prerequisite is a good eighth-grade education. The statistical prerequisite is familiarity with reading the types of tables and graphics that appear in the mass media. In particular, coverage includes bar charts, pie charts, scatter plots, and time series plots — all topics commonly seen in an introductory statistics course, or a Common Core high school curriculum.

The intended audience for the book is anyone who has to present their conclusions in print or on the Internet. In an academic setting, some possible audiences that come to mind are current or future researchers, colleagues in other departments, or administrative offices that produce quantitative reports on, say, enrollments or expenditures. Many of my colleagues in Business ask their undergraduate students to write such reports and this would be an excellent reference for those students. It could also be a valuable resource in a writing across the curriculum program — a realm where science-oriented materials are in short supply.

In a typical study, the researcher might use a wide range of graphical and numerical tools to determine what the data are saying. Once the researcher decides what the message is, it might then be communicated to a non-specialist audience with the simple and commonly seen sorts of graphics discussed here. The fact that the author also discusses tables is welcome because most statistics textbooks treat the reading of tables as self-evident.

The writing style is informal and generally well suited to the intended audience. Two minor flaws are sometimes clumsy sentences and an unusual number of peculiarly British usages. Here is one example of the former.

> *By getting producers to perceive data as a user means that a product of data will not present users with what they have but what they need in a form that any message can be easily acquired.*

The advice offered is sound and up to date. Notable are a number of comments on using *Excel.* This popular software package often requires a lot of manual work and adjustment to give a quality of graphic that would be automatic in a dedicated statistical analysis program. Unfortunately, *Excel* is most commonly used by unsophisticated users little able to recognize the need for adjustment, so the assistance offered here is welcome.

Highly recommended to a very wide audience.

After a few years in industry, Robert W. Hayden (bob@statland.org) taught mathematics at colleges and universities for 32 years and statistics for 20 years. In 2005 he retired from full-time classroom work. He now teaches statistics online at statistics.com and does summer workshops for high school teachers of Advanced Placement Statistics. He contributed the chapter on evaluating introductory statistics textbooks to the MAA's Teaching Statistics.

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