Displaying Graphic Information

Graphical elements such as charts, graphs, maps and tables are incorporated into a report, analysis or recommendation in order to help readers better explain the information presented. Some benefits of using graphics include:

- Making information easier to understand
- Graphics capture readers' attention
- Graphics convey a lot of data in an efficient manner

When deciding whether to use a graphic, keep in mind both the needs of your audience as well as the function of the paper. Some simple ways to check whether a graphic is appropriate for your audience and purpose:

- Is it more efficient to use graphics rather than words?
- Is the graphic easier to understand than explanatory sentences?
- Is the graphic integrally connected with your text?

Choosing the Appropriate Graphic

Choosing a graphic that best illustrates your information will increase your paper's effectiveness. Some common graphics and their uses.

**A Table:** Systematically presents specific numbers and detailed information

**A Bar Chart:** Allows comparisons, shows changes in a single item over time

**A Line Chart:** Conveys trends or plots relationships between variables

**A Flow Chart:** Depicts a sequence of events

**A Pie Chart:** Compares parts to the whole

Once you have chosen your graphical element, you must ensure that it supports the point you are making.

- Keep your graphics simple, using a manageable amount of material without unnecessary details.
- Provide clear labels so the reader knows exactly what he or she is looking at.
- Provide informative titles and captions.
- Use color only for emphasis.

Integrating Graphics with Text

Some tips on ensuring that your graphic is meaningfully incorporated into the body of your report or document:
• Introduce your graphic in the text, stating the main point that it illustrates, without repeating all the information presented in it.
• Insert the graphic as near the point it illustrates as possible. If there is insufficient space on the same page, put it at the top of the next page.
• If it must go in the appendix, cross-reference clearly.
• State the conclusions that you want your readers to draw from the graphic.
• Cite the source of your graphic immediately below, or along one side of the graphic.

Graphics are essential in business and technical writing, so construct your graphical elements carefully.

References:
