

Which chart for which question?

D8A.ACADEMY/RESOURCES/CHART-CHOOSER

How did it change over time?		Line chart time on x, always
How do categories compare?		Bar chart horizontal when labels are long
What are the parts of a whole?		Stacked bar pie only with 4 slices or fewer
How is one variable spread out?		Histogram bin width changes the story
Are these two things related?		Scatter plot add a trend line, never a dual axis
What is the ranking?		Ordered bar sort by value, not alphabet
Trend and volume together?		Area chart one series, or it turns to mud
One number that matters?		Big number plus the change vs last period
Two categories crossed?		Heatmap let the color scale do the work

WORTH MEMORIZING

01 Trap: the 12-slice pie

Past 4 slices nobody compares the angles. Past 6 it is decoration.

pie, 12 slices unreadable, angles lie about size

ordered bar same data, instant reading

dual axis two scales, one lie. Split the charts.

→ If you must show share of total: top 3 slices + "other", or an ordered bar.

02 Bar or line?

The most common hesitation, settled once.

BAR WHEN

- Comparing categories
- Discrete periods: Q1 vs Q2
- Rankings and top-N
- Long labels: go horizontal

LINE WHEN

- Continuous time
- Many points, one trend
- Up to 4 series, not more
- Rates, indexes, running totals

03 Safe defaults

When the meeting starts in five minutes.

in doubt? Bar chart. It is almost never wrong.

colors One accent, grey the rest. Highlight the answer.

axis at zero Bars always. Lines may zoom, say so.

3D charts No. Not once. Not for the CEO either.