

Data Visualization Award – Judging Guide

What Counts as Data Visualization?

Data visualization is the graphical representation of data intended to help people understand information quickly and effectively.

Examples include:

Bar Chart	Sankey (flow) Chart
Line Chart	Area Chart
Pie Chart	Word Cloud
Scatter Plot	Pictogram
Gantt Chart	Timeline
Heat Map	Map
Box and Whisker Plot	Network Diagram

 **Note:** Infographics are *only eligible* if they contain at least one valid data visualization (e.g., chart, map, or diagram). Infographics that are purely decorative or text-heavy without visualized data should be excluded.

 **Misleading Visualizations**

A data visualization must be accurate and ethical. Examples of misleading visualizations include:

Truncated Y-axis: Especially problematic in bar charts—always start the axis at 0.

Correlation ≠ Causation: Avoid implying causality unless it's supported by the data.

Poor choice of chart type: Charts must match the data and message.

Violation of visual conventions: Example: timelines that don't go left to right, or pie charts with too many slices.

! Submissions with misleading visualizations or inconsistencies should receive the lowest possible score in all rubric categories.

Judging Criteria

Judges will score each submission from 1 to 10 in the following four categories:

Visual Design and Presentation

Focuses on aesthetics, clarity, accessibility, and layout.

Score	Description
9–10	Exceptional visual clarity and engagement. Publication-quality figures. Excellent use of color, fonts, and spacing.
7–8	Effective visuals. Minor design inconsistencies or clutter. Color and font mostly support clarity.
5–6	Adequate appeal, but inconsistent design, small font sizes, or missing captions. Readability suffers.
1–4	Poorly designed or distracting visuals. Lacks labels, captions, or professional appearance.

Clarity of Communication

Assesses whether the visualization clearly communicates its intended message.

Score	Description
9–10	Message is clear and self-contained. Visualization tells a compelling story.
7–8	Message is understandable but requires some explanation from other submission elements.
5–6	Visualization is unclear, lacks appropriate chart type, or requires too much interpretation.
1–4	Misleading or missing visualizations. Unclear or confusing message.

Creativity and Innovation

Measures originality and the ability to spark interest or insight.

Score	Description
9–10	Highly original and insightful. Sparks discussion or new ideas.
7–8	Some creative elements are present. Design is interesting but not unique.
5–6	Standard or overused visualization type. Execution lacks innovation.
1–4	Unoriginal, formulaic, or copied. Visualization feels generic or uninspired.

Audience Understanding & Insight

Considers how well the visualization helps the viewer understand and draw new conclusions.

Score	Description
9–10	Clear, insightful, and encourages deeper reflection. Encourages audience inference.
7–8	Generally understandable. Minor interpretation effort required.
5–6	Viewer must work hard to interpret message. May violate conventions or use inappropriate formats.
1–4	Confusing or overwhelming. Visualization hinders understanding.

Judging Notes

Use the full scale. Don't hesitate to give low scores if warranted.

Be objective. Focus on what is shown, not the research topic itself.

Comment as needed. Especially when a visualization scores poorly, provide brief notes explaining why.

Visualization Name:

Category	Criteria	Score Guidance	Score (1-10)	Comments
Data Visualization Present? If no, ineligible for scoring.				
Visual Design and Presentation	Appropriateness: How well does the visualization align with the story being told? Clarity and Usability: Is the visualization easy to understand and navigate? Accessibility: Is the visualization accessible to a broad audience? (e.g. readable fonts, alternative text, etc.)	10 = Exceptional visual clarity and engagement. Publication-quality figures. Excellent use of color, fonts, and spacing. 7 = Effective visuals. Minor design inconsistencies or clutter. Color and font mostly support clarity. 5 = Adequate appeal, but inconsistent design, small font sizes, or missing captions. Readability suffers. 1 = Poorly designed or distracting visuals. Lacks labels, captions, or professional appearance.		
Clarity of Communication	Clarity of Narrative: Is a clear story or question being explored? Context and Insights: Does the visualization provide sufficient context and insights? Data Integrity: Is the data presented accurately and without bias? Are all data sources cited?	10 = Message is clear and self-contained. Visualization tells a compelling story. 7 = Message is understandable but requires some explanation from other submission elements. 5 = Visualization is unclear, lacks appropriate chart type, or requires too much interpretation. 1 = Misleading or missing visualizations. Unclear or confusing message.		
Creativity and Innovation	Visual Appeal: Does the visualization use effective visual elements to enhance the story?	10 = Highly original and insightful. Sparks discussion or new ideas. 7 = Some creative elements are present. Design is interesting but not unique. 5 = Standard or overused visualization type. Execution lacks innovation. 1 = Unoriginal, formulaic, or copied. Visualization feels generic or uninspired.		
Audience Understanding & Insight	Insights and Findings: Does the data visualization reveal meaningful insights and finding from the data? Engagement: Does the visualization effectively engage the viewer and guide them through the story?	10 = Clear, insightful, and encourages deeper reflection. Encourages audience inference. 7 = Generally understandable. Minor interpretation effort required. 5 = Viewer must work hard to interpret message. May violate conventions or use inappropriate formats. 1 = Confusing or overwhelming. Visualization hinders understanding.		