

CHAPTER
2.11



Visual information



In many assignments it is essential to support your arguments with statistics. Visual devices such as graphs and tables are a convenient way of displaying large quantities of information in a form that is easy to understand. This unit explains and practises the language connected with these devices.

1 The language of change

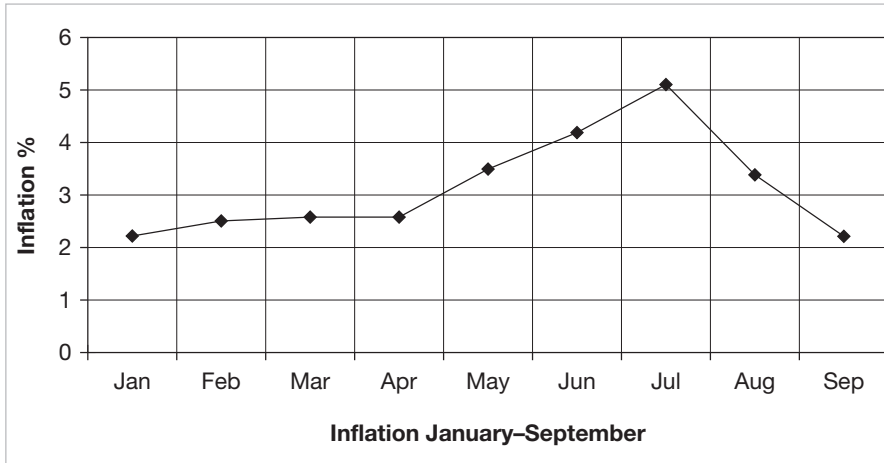
(past tenses in brackets)

Verb 	Adverb	Verb 	Adjective + noun
grow (grew)	slightly	drop (dropped)	a slight drop
rise (rose)	gradually	fall (fell)	a gradual fall
increase (increased)	steadily	decrease (decreased)	a sharp decrease
climb (climbed)	sharply	decline (declined)	a steady decline
also: a peak, to peak, a plateau, to level off, a trough			

Average temperatures **rose steadily** until 2006 and then **dropped slightly**.

There was a **sharp decrease** in sales during the summer and then a **gradual rise**.

- Study the graph below and complete the description with phrases from the table opposite.



The graph shows that inflation (a) _____ slightly between January and February and then (b) _____ until April. It subsequently climbed (c) _____ to July, when it (d) _____ at just over 5 per cent. From July to September inflation (e) _____ steeply.

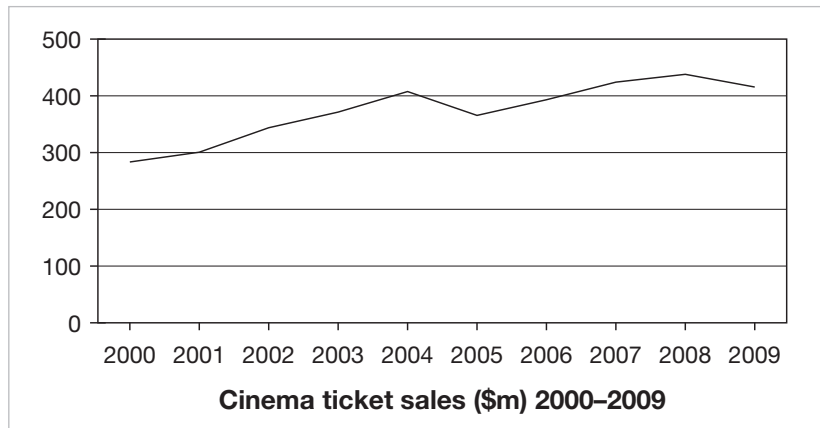
2 Types of visuals

- On pp. 160–161 are examples of some of the main types of visuals used in academic texts. Complete the table to show the use (a–f) and the example (A–F) of each type.

Uses: (a) location
 (b) comparison
 (c) proportion
 (d) function
 (e) changes in time
 (f) statistical display

TYPES	USES	EXAMPLE
1 diagram		
2 table		
3 map		
4 pie chart		
5 bar chart		
6 line graph		

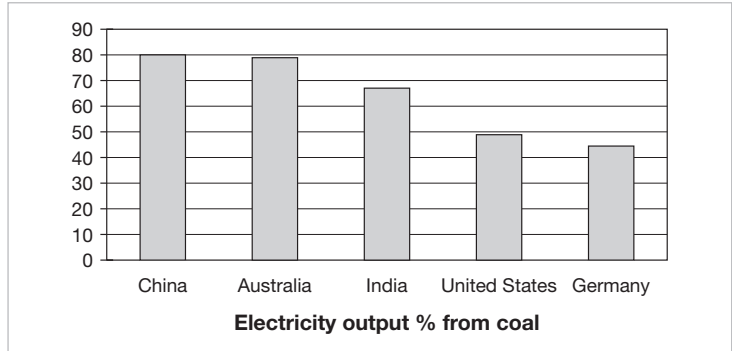
(A) Cinema ticket sales



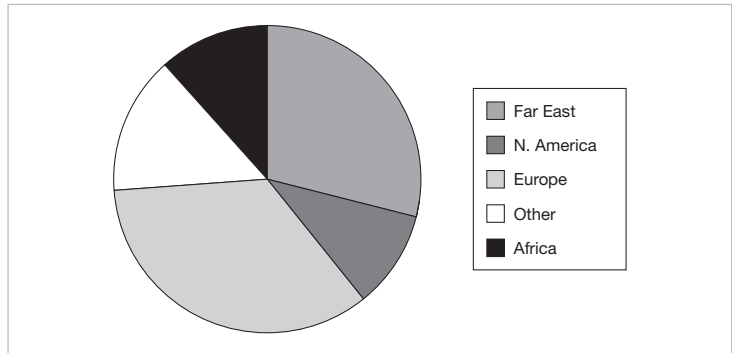
(B) Average life expectancy (in years)

Japan	81.6
France	79.0
United States	77.1
South Korea	75.5
Ghana	57.9
South Africa	47.7
Kenya	44.6
Zimbabwe	33.1

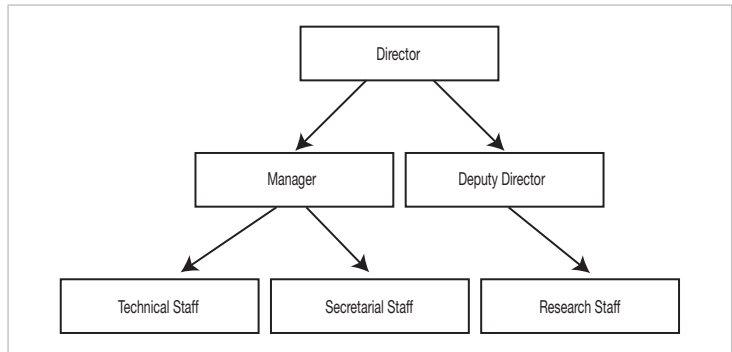
(C) Electricity output from coal



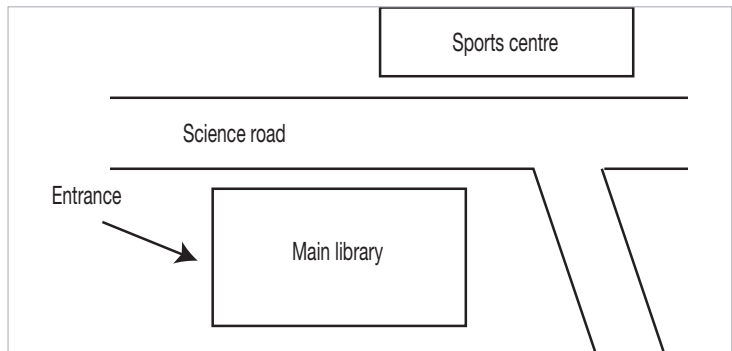
(D) Origins of international students



(E) Structure of the research unit



(F) Position of the main library



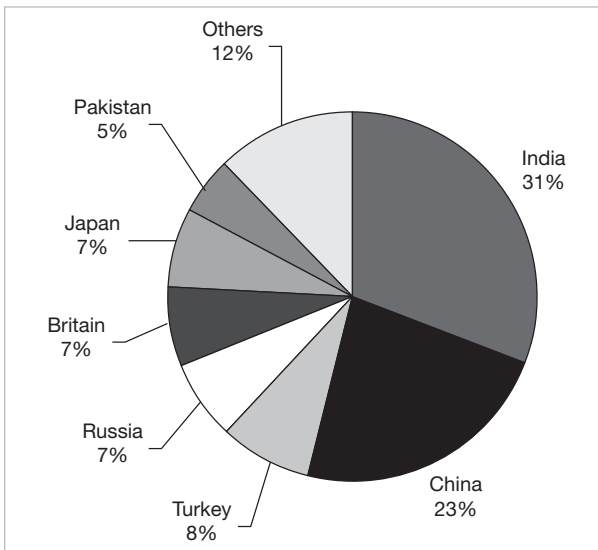
3 Describing visuals

Although visuals do largely speak for themselves, it is common to help the reader interpret them by briefly commenting on their main features.

The graph	shows	the changes in the price of oil since 1990
map	illustrates	the main sources of copper in Africa
diagram	displays	the organisation of both companies

■ (a) Read the following descriptions of the chart below. Which is better, and why?

- (i) The chart shows the quantity of tea consumed by the world's leading tea consuming nations. India and China together consume more than half the world's tea production, with India alone consuming about one third. Other significant tea consumers are Turkey, Russia and Britain. 'Others' includes the United States, Iran and Egypt.
- (ii) The chart shows that 31 per cent of the world's tea is consumed by India, 23 per cent by China, and 8 per cent by Turkey. The fourth largest consumers are Russia, Japan and Britain, with 7 per cent each, while Pakistan consumes 5 per cent. Other countries account for the remaining 12 per cent.



(Source:
The Tea Council)

Figure 1 World tea consumption

■ (b) Complete the description of the chart below.

The bar chart shows population (a) _____ in a variety of countries around the world. It (b) _____ the extreme contrast (c) _____ crowded nations such as South Korea (475 people per sq. km.) and much (d) _____ countries such as Canada (3 people per sq. km.). Clearly, climate plays a major (e) _____ in determining population density, (f) _____ the least crowded nations (g) _____ to have extreme climates (e.g. cold in Russia or dry in Algeria).

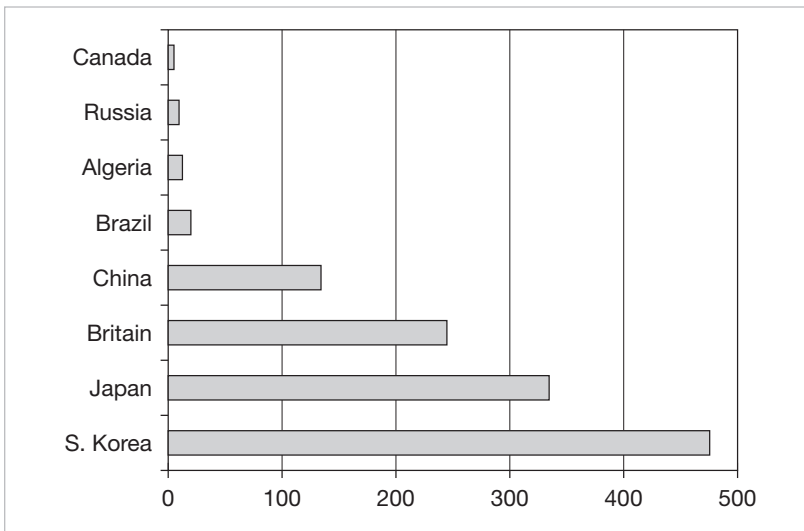


Figure 2 Population density (people per square kilometre)
(Source: OECD)

4 Labelling

- When referring to visual information in the text, the word ‘figure’ is used for almost everything (such as maps, charts and graphs) except tables (see examples above).
- Figures and tables should be numbered and given a title. Titles of tables are written above, while titles of figures are written below the data.
- As with other data, sources must be given for all visual information.
- If you are writing a lengthy work such as a dissertation you will need to provide lists of tables and figures, showing numbers, titles and page numbers after the contents page.



5 Practice A

- Complete the following description of the table below (one word per gap).

Projected population changes in various European countries
2010–2050 (millions).

Country	Population 2010	Projected population 2050	Change
France	62	67	+ 5
Germany	82	71	– 11
Italy	60	57	– 3
Poland	38	32	– 6
Portugal	10.7	10	– 0.7
Russia	140	116	– 24
Spain	45	51	+ 6
UK	61	72	+ 10

(Source: UN)

The table (a) _____ the projected population changes in (b) _____ European countries (c) _____ 2010 and 2050. It can be seen that in a (d) _____ the population is expected to fall, in some cases (i.e. Germany and Russia) quite (e) _____. However, the population of France, (f) _____ and the UK is predicted to increase, in the case of the last two by more (g) _____ 5 per cent.

6 Practice B

■ Write a paragraph commenting on the data in the table below.

Student survey of library facilities: percentage of students rating facilities as good.

Library facilities	Undergraduates	Postgraduates
Opening hours	72	63
Staff helpfulness	94	81
Ease of using electronic catalogue	65	87
Availability of working space	80	76
Café area	91	95
Availability of short loan stock	43	35
Quality of main book stock	69	54

(Source: Author)