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NEEA Market Research and Evaluation Style Guide for Public Research Reports

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1. Introduction

The Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (NEEA) is a data-driven organization that requires high-quality technical report writing. This document provides guidance¹ to authors submitting all types of documents to NEEA, with special emphasis on market research and evaluation reports that are ultimately posted to NEEA's website. This guide can also serve as a general template, although each report will need some measure of customization.

2. Reports Covered Under this Document

NEEA produces a variety of reports during the normal course of our work. This Style Guide is meant to provide expectations contractors should follow when preparing reports for NEEA review. This includes reports generated within the following business units: Market Research & Evaluation, Product Management and Emerging Technology, and Market Strategy and Execution.

3. Understanding NEEA's Audience

NEEA's reports provide critical and timely information to its stakeholders, and as such NEEA should be viewed as a publisher of research as well as a consumer. This is a critical distinction because it means that authors are not writing to a NEEA project manager, but to a much broader audience. Except in the rare case where a report contains substantial confidential information or a report is explicitly primarily an internal document, all reports are published on NEEA's website and are available to the general public. Consumers include regional utilities and energy agencies (esp. evaluation and planning professionals), federal agencies, trade allies and market actors, scholars, and the media. Given this broad visibility, NEEA requires authors to provide only the best quality reporting. Contractors who do not feel they can meet this level of expected quality are strongly encouraged to solicit writing services that meet this expectation.

4. General Formatting

- Submit all reports as a Microsoft Word document.
- Use Times New Roman or Cambria typeface for all reports. All writing should use 12pt font, though 10pt font is acceptable where appropriate for spatial formatting. Exceptions include chapter or section headings (not to exceed 14pt font), and references, footnotes, tables, figures, and captions (not to be smaller than 10pt font).

¹ On a project by project basis, authors should always defer to a NEEA Project Manager for final direction on report quality and content.

- Set margins to one inch on all sides with an 8.5 x 11 inch format. Right-hand margins should be ragged, not justified.
- Single-space all lines of text in a paragraph. Lines of text between paragraphs should be double-spaced. Do not indent paragraphs.
- Insert page-numbers and the name of the submitting firm in the lower right-hand corner of all pages of the report. Number pages preceding the main body of the report (e.g., the table of contents, executive summary, etc.) using lower-case Roman numerals. Number pages in the main body of the report using Arabic numerals.
- Insert the report title aligned to the right-hand margin in page headers. Reports with titles longer than eight words should use a shortened proxy in page headers.
- Correctly cite all sources in-text using the Author-Date system. Do not cite in footnotes, although there are some exceptions. For instance, a footnote may be used to cite a publication where additional information on the topic being referenced may be found. See Chapter 8 of this style guide for additional information.

5. Grammar and Syntax

NEEA and its technical writers strive for the best-quality writing. Premises, supporting arguments, and conclusions should be strong, and should be supported by data and analyses. The language should be clear and concise, and should conform to generally established practices of sentence order, structure, and punctuation.

- Write in third person. Do not submit a report written in first person.
- Use active voice when possible. Passive voice may be acceptable when discussing process or methodology. Other instances where passive voice may be used include:
 - when the performer is unknown, irrelevant, or obvious.
 - when the performer is less important than the action.
 - when the recipient is the main topic.
- The following examples, written in passive voice, provide specific examples of when the use of passive voice is acceptable.
 - Data for the long-term field study *were organized* in a master template for each test site.
 - Up to 46% less nitrogen fertilizer *was applied* through the use of a Variable Rate Irrigation.
 - To test the water heater, inlet water temperature *was maintained* with a chiller.
- Minimize the use of technical jargon. This is especially important for NEEA's programs each of which develops its own language and nomenclature. Clearly define and describe technical terms when they must be included. Do not assume that the reader will have

familiarity with the terms under discussion.

- Avoid the use of jargon and slang as contemporary social reference. For example, although *the Great Recession* is currently a popular term, it might not be used or even recognized by readers within a few years. Readers would, however, comprehend “the real-estate collapse of 2008 which led to a major recession.” A term like *the Great Depression*, on the other hand is appropriate based on decades of historical reference.
- Introduce all acronyms and abbreviations by first writing out the term in text followed by the acronym in parentheses. One could write, for example, “The Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC) proposed policy that affected the region.” Acronyms and abbreviations should be introduced using the full term once in each major section of the report (i.e., executive summary, main body, appendix, etc.). All subsequent inclusions should use the acronym alone. Certain abbreviations, for example those referring to U.S. states or some units of measurement, are common and do not need introduction.
- Reserve citation signals (e.g., i.e., cf., esp., etc.) for citations and other parenthetical notation. Do not use citation signals in text.
- Unless discussing specific analytic results, use words to identify whole numbers between zero and one-hundred, and always spell-out numbers that begin a sentence. When spelling out numbers, also spell out descriptors like “percent” and “dollars.”
- Report analytic results with numerals and appropriate nomenclature. As a contrived example, one could report that of all survey respondents, $n = 500$ (43%) identified as a homeowner. As another, the results of a t test could appear as $t(332) = 1.14, p < .05$.

6. Tables and Figures

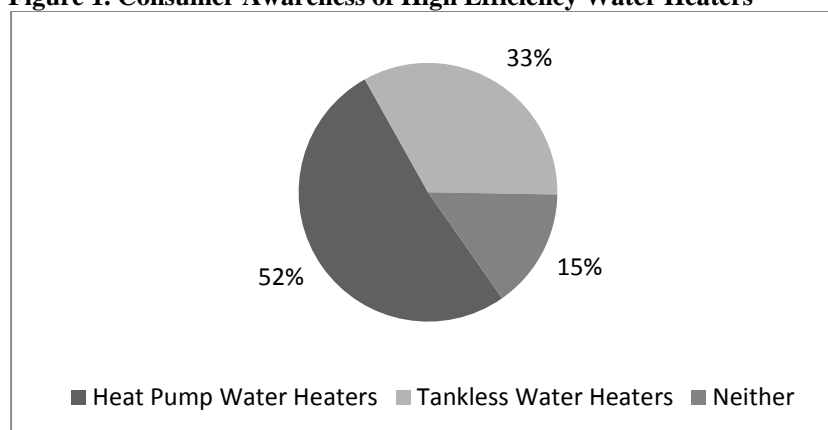
- Center tables, figures, and illustrations horizontally on a page. They should appear between lines of text or paragraphs. They should not appear with text wrapping. Do not allow tables or figures to break pages.
- Tables may include notes and key statistics in a *Notes* section below each table. The table title should be numbered, and should appear above the table. See Table 1 for an example.
- Use a border for all figures and illustrations. Include notes and key statistics in a *Notes* section below each figure. The figure title should be numbered, and should appear above the figure. Identify and label all axes and units. Figures that use shading should be formatted for black and white printing. See Figure 1 for an example.
- Include data-source information in the *Notes* section of tables and figures based on existing data.

Table 1. Ownership of Northwest Office Buildings Larger than 20,000 sq ft

Number of Owned Properties	Total Owners		Total Properties		Total Rentable Building Area (RBA)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1 (Single)	1,976	85.8%	1,976	59.7%	94,899,062 sq ft	41.4%
2 to 3	239	10.4%	550	16.6%	49,750,389 sq ft	21.7%
4 to 6	55	2.4%	260	7.9%	20,785,109 sq ft	9.1%
7 to 10	15	.7%	126	3.8%	14,500,193 sq ft	6.3%
11 to 20	13	.6%	196	5.9%	29,212,809 sq ft	12.7%
21 to 67 (largest observation)	6	.3%	204	6.2%	20,196,743 sq ft	8.8%

Notes: Results were processed using data obtained from The CoStar Group (2011). “Rentable Building Area” (RBA) is equal to gross building area less common area.

$n_{\text{owners}} = 2,304$; $n_{\text{properties}} = 3,312$; $Sum_{\text{RBA}} = 229,344,305$ sq ft

Figure 1. Consumer Awareness of High Efficiency Water Heaters

Notes: Results adapted from Verinnovation (2012). Results show breakdown of responses to survey question *HP16: Are you aware of high efficiency water heaters such as...*

Total $n = 1,000$

7. Structure and Required Content

- Limit all submissions to forty pages plus cover or title page, acknowledgements, a table of contents/tables/figures, an executive summary, references, and appendices.
- Authors should append their standard cover or title page to all reports.
- Include an executive summary in all reports. The executive summary will appear between the table of contents and the main body of the report. Although it will be integrated into the report, the executive summary should read as a stand-alone essay that provides sufficient information to aid the decision making of managers and directors. It should

provide a high-level description of the project that emphasizes the primary research objectives, key observations, interpretation of results, and main conclusions. Authors should work with NEEA project managers to determine the most critical and interesting topics to discuss in the executive summary. The executive summary should be sufficient in length to convey the most important details of the full report, but should normally be limited to two to three pages.

- Include a Table of Contents in all reports. Reports with more than ten tables or figures should also include a table of tables and/or a table of figures.
- Structure the main body of reports by chapter (e.g., 1, 2, 3, etc.) then section (e.g., 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, etc.), and subsection (e.g. 1.1.1, 1.2.1, 2.1.1, etc).
- Although the number and identification specific chapters and sections will be determined on a report-by-report basis, the general progression of all research reports includes: 1) introduction; 2) methodology; 3) findings; 4) conclusions/recommendations.
 - The introduction must demonstrate the author's comprehension of and perspectives on the subject under study. It should be comprehensive. It should explain the purpose of the research. It should clearly indicate key research questions. It should provide background information supported by literature and historical findings. The introduction should provide context for the research, and provide information to help the reader navigate the study.
 - Methodology sections should describe the research approach and include detailed information about participants and sampling, materials (e.g., survey instrumentation), and procedures for carrying out the methodology.
 - Findings sections should provide guidance to the results of research analyses and summarize key results.
 - Conclusions should summarize the most important findings of the work, especially as they relate to understanding the questions or problems posed in the introduction. Importantly, authors must discuss the implications of the research, disclose any limitations of the approach, and recommend directions for future investigation.
- Include a reference page after the conclusions chapter for all citations, including in-text citations and data sources for tables and figures. Do not report references in footnotes. See Chapter 8 of this style guide for additional information.
- Appendices may include any content that will provide additional information about the study, and which is considered pertinent by the author and/or the NEEA project manager. Follow all rules of general formatting and syntax specified above for appendices.

8. Guide for Citations and Reference Sheets

8.1 In-Text Citations

- Format citations for works with a single author as (Author Year). Format citations for works with two to three authors as (Author1, Author2, and Author3 Year). Format citations for works with four or more authors as (Author1 et al. Year).
- Separate multiple in-text citations with a semicolon. Organize in-text citations from newest to oldest, rather than alphabetically. Authors, for example, would cite NEEA’s two reports of the *Commercial Building Stock Assessment* as (The Cadmus Group, Inc. 2010; Kema-Xenergy Inc. 2004).
- Identify individual authors by last name only in citations (e.g., Smith 19XX).
- Cite a source at least once in each paragraph where its content is discussed.

8.2 Reference Sheets

- Append a reference sheet to the end of the report, before appendices. Title the reference sheet “References.” Submissions with a preponderance of data-based sources may consider using two reference sheets, one for reports and other materials, and another specifically for data.
- Order references alphabetically.
- Single-space text within references. Double-space text between references.
- Align the top line of each reference to the left margin of the reference sheet. Indent subsequent lines one-half inch.

8.3 Reference Styles and Examples

NEEA’s requirements for references generally follow the format:

Smith, J.C. 19XX. *Title of Work*. Edition if any. Publisher’s City, State: Publishing Firm.

References often require additional detail. Below are some prominent examples of the types of sources used in NEEA’s work.

8.3.1 Documents Accessed Electronically

Always include a web-address for documents obtained online. In example:

Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NPCC). 2010. *Sixth Northwest Conservation and Electric Power Plan*. Portland, OR: Northwest Power and Conservation Council. Retrieved from <http://www.nwcouncil.org/energy/powerplan/6/default.htm>.

8.3.2 Numbered Technical Reports

Many technical reports, including those published by NEEA, include a report number. Include report numbers within citations.

Market Strategies International (MSI). 2012. *Strategic Energy Management Market Assessment Study: Dairies, Irrigators, and Nurseries* (Report No. 12-233). Portland, OR: Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance. Retrieved from <http://neea.org/research/reportdetail.aspx?ID=1619>.

8.3.3 Articles in Journals, Magazines, and Other Periodicals

When referencing an authored work within a periodical, encapsulate the title of the work within quotation marks, and italicize the name of the periodical. Include the volume number and page range of the article.

Stern, P.C., and Gardner, G.T. 1981. "Psychological Research in Energy Policy." *American Psychologist* 36: 329-342.

8.3.4 Datasets, Data Tables and Databases

Describe data resources in brackets following the title.

SMR Research Corporation. 2011. *Commercial Building Inventory* [Dataset]. Hackettstown, NJ: SMR Research Corporation.

8.3.5 Web-Based Resources

As with electronically electronically-accessed documents, be sure to include a web- address for websites, data, and other resources found online. Some online resources, for example (e.g., databases,) are frequently updated such so that a user reader might not find the same material in an online resource as that cited in a report, even in a short period of time shortly after its publication.

The CoStar Group. 2011. *Property Professional Web* [Database]. Washington, D.C.: The CoStar Group. Accessed November 2011 from <http://www.costar.com/>.

U.S. Energy Information Administration. 2008. *2003 CBECS Detailed Tables* [Website]. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Energy Information Administration. Accessed from http://www.eia.gov/emeu/cbecs/cbecs2003/detailed_tables_2003/detailed_tables_2003.html

9. References

- Kema-Xenergy Inc. 2004. *Assessment of the Commercial Building Stock in the Pacific Northwest* (Report No. 04-125). Portland, OR: Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance. Retrieved from <http://neea.org/research/reportdetail.aspx?ID=183>.
- Strunk Jr., W., and White, E.B. 1999. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- The Cadmus Group Inc. 2009. *Northwest Commercial Building Stock Assessment* (Report No. 10-211). Portland, OR: Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance. Retrieved from <http://neea.org/research/reportdetail.aspx?ID=546>.
- The CoStar Group. 2011. *Property Professional Web* [Database]. Washington, D.C.: The CoStar Group. Accessed November 2011 from <http://www.costar.com/>.
- The University of Chicago Press. 2010. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Verinnovation. 2012. *2011 Water Heater Market Update* (Report #12-234). Portland, OR: Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance. Retrieved from <http://neea.org/research/reportdetail.aspx?ID=1631>.

10. Requirements for Market Research and Evaluation Reports

10.1 Special Considerations for Market Progress Evaluation Reports

NEEA requires ongoing, unbiased, empirically based evaluation for every initiative it runs, and hires specialized consultants to conduct this evaluation work. NEEA measures the progress of its initiatives based on *market progress indicators* (MPIs). MPIs are metrics that NEEA defines as part of each initiative's *logic model*. NEEA uses MPIs to identify key shifts in a target market (e.g., increased or decreased product sales, greater adoption of an energy management approach, etc.) that are used to track the progress of an initiative.

Market progress evaluation reports (MPERs) provide critical information about the efficacy of a NEEA initiative. At a minimum, they must provide background and history of the initiative, an empirically-supported characterization of the target market, and discussion of research and analysis designed to assess the status of the initiative based on its logic model and MPIs. MPERs must also include an assessment of key assumptions in the initiative's *Alliance Cost Effectiveness Model* (ACE Model), which NEEA uses to estimate the energy savings and cost-effectiveness of the initiative.

While MPERs must follow the rules of formatting and content described in the sections above, they require an emphasis upon specific topics:

- **Introduction:** The introduction of the MPER explains the initiative and establishes the overall context, including its near-term and long-term goals, and explains NEEA's motivations and business case in support of the initiative. It also provides a history of the initiative, and describes its current status. The introduction provides a high-level summary of milestones and planned evaluation activities for the initiative, and includes a

number of functional components (e.g., a graphic representation of the initiative's logic model). Finally, the introduction specifies the focus of the report framed around contrasting critical MPIs and ACE Model assumptions to a baseline.

- **Methodology:** This chapter provides a detailed summary of the research activities upon which the MPER is based, in particular framed around assessments of market change based on MPIs and of value based on ACE Model assumptions. In addition to the content described in Chapter 6 of this Style Guide, the methodology section of the MPER typically includes a tabular representation of evaluation activities.
- **Findings:** Results presented in an MPER provide valuable insight into the initiative's progress, and form the basis for any recommendations. MPER findings should be comprehensive, but restricted in scope to those results that provide the greatest insight into the initiative's progress framed around its MPIs and ACE Model assumptions. Specific sections of an MPER Findings chapter include:
 - **A market characterization:** This section details important characteristics of the market(s) the initiative seeks to transform. In particular, the market characterization refers to an established baseline market share against which the initiative's progress is compared.
 - **A review of the initiative logic model:** The review provides NEEA with an assessment of the initiative logic and highlights consistencies and inconsistencies of the model with existing market characteristics.
 - **Key changes in market:** This MPER Findings section assesses the extent to which the market has changed, as defined by the initiative's MPIs. Further, this section provides an assessment of the extent to which these market changes are influenced by the initiative activities.
 - **A review of ACE Model assumptions:** The review section assesses the general suitability of the ACE Model components for estimating the cost-effectiveness of the model based on quality, precision, and availability of data. Importantly, the function of this review is not to estimate actual cost savings, which is done in-house at NEEA, but to evaluate key assumptions in the model itself.

To moderate the length of the report, limit additional data or potentially valuable results to the appendices.

- **Conclusions/Recommendations:** This chapter summarizes observations and analyses presented in previous chapters. Importantly, however, the function of the chapter is not merely to synthesize the results of the study, but to contextualize them in terms of the efficacy of the initiative. Frame conclusions around the implications of the findings, and use them to formulate a set of recommendations as the initiative moves forward. All recommendations established must be based on empirical evidence as collected and assessed in the course of research conducted in the development of the MPER.

10.2 Special Considerations for Survey Research

NEEA's market research and evaluation often involves survey methodology. Thoroughly describe the survey population, sample frame, and sample and selection criteria in the methodology section. Clearly describe the form and content of the survey instrument in the methodology section, and include a copy of the questionnaire as an appendix. When discussing discrete survey items, include question or item content in text, tables, and figures. Spelling out survey items for basic demographic content (e.g., age and gender) is not necessary. Clearly define and describe aggregated survey measures in the methodology section.

11. Data Visualization Checklist

In addition to previous sections providing guidance for the use of charts and graphs, we have reprinted this information with permission from the authors.

Source: Stephanie Evergreen & Ann K. Emery (May 2014). See <http://stephanieevergreen.com/> for more information.

Data Visualization Checklist

by Stephanie Evergreen & Ann K. Emery
May 2014

This checklist is meant to be used as a guide for the development of high impact data visualizations. Rate each aspect of the data visualization by circling the most appropriate number, where 2 points means the guideline was fully met, 1 means it was partially met, and 0 means it was not met at all. n/a should not be used frequently, but reserved for when the guideline truly does not apply. For example, a pie chart has no axes lines or tick marks to rate. Refer to the Data Visualization Anatomy Chart on the last page for guidance on vocabulary.

	Guideline	Rating			
Text Graphs don't contain much text, so existing text must encapsulate your message and pack a punch.	6-12 word descriptive title is left-justified in upper left corner Short titles enable readers to comprehend takeaway messages even while quickly skimming the graph. Rather than a generic phrase, use a descriptive sentence that encapsulates the graph's finding or "so what?" Western cultures start reading in the upper left, so locate the title there.	2	1	0	n/a
	Subtitle and/or annotations provide additional information Subtitles and annotations (call-out text within the graph) can add explanatory and interpretive power to a graph. Use them to answer questions a viewer might have or to highlight one or two data points.	2	1	0	n/a
	Text size is hierarchical and readable Titles are in a larger size than subtitles or annotations, which are larger than labels, which are larger than axis labels, which are larger than source information. The smallest text - axis labels - are at least 9 point font size on paper, at least 20 on screen.	2	1	0	n/a
	Text is horizontal Titles, subtitles, annotations, and data labels are horizontal (not vertical or diagonal). Line labels and axis labels can deviate from this rule and still receive full points.	2	1	0	n/a
	Data are labeled directly Position data labels near the data rather than in a separate legend (e.g., on top of or next to bars or pie slices, and next to lines in line charts). Eliminate/embed legends when possible because eye movement back and forth between the legend and the data can interrupt the brain's attempts to interpret the graph.	2	1	0	n/a
	Labels are used sparingly Focus attention by removing the redundancy. For example, in line charts, label every other year on an axis.	2	1	0	n/a

Arrangement

Improper arrangement of graph elements can confuse readers at best and mislead viewer at worst. Thoughtful arrangement makes a data visualization easier for a viewer to interpret.

Proportions are accurate

A viewer should be able to take a ruler to measure the length or area of the graph and find that it matches the relationship in the underlying data.

2 1 0 n/a

Data are intentionally ordered

Data should be displayed in an order that makes logical sense to the viewer. Data may be ordered by frequency counts (e.g., from greatest to least for nominal categories), by groupings or bins (e.g., histograms), by time period (e.g., line charts), alphabetically, etc.

2 1 0 n/a

Axis intervals are equidistant

The spaces between axis intervals should be the same unit, even if every axis interval isn't labeled.

2 1 0 n/a

Graph is two-dimensional

Avoid three-dimensional displays, bevels, and other distortions.

2 1 0 n/a

Display is free from decoration

Graph is free from clipart or other illustrations used solely for decoration. Some graphics, like icons, can support interpretation.

2 1 0 n/a

Color

Keep culture-laden color connotations in mind. For example, pink is highly associated with feminine qualities in the USA.

Use sites like Color Brewer to find color schemes suitable for reprinting in black-and-white and for colorblindness.

Color scheme is intentional

Colors should represent brand or other intentional choice, not default color schemes. A safe bet for consultants is to use your client's colors. Use online tools to identify brand colors and others that are compatible.

2 1 0 n/a

Color is used to highlight key patterns

Action colors should guide the viewer to key parts of the display. Less important or supporting data should be a muted color.

2 1 0 n/a

Color is legible when printed in black and white

When printed or photocopied in black and white, the viewer should still be able to see patterns in the data.

2 1 0 n/a

Color is legible for people with colorblindness

Avoid red-green and yellow-blue combinations when those colors touch one another.

2 1 0 n/a

Text sufficiently contrasts background

Black/very dark text against a white/transparent background is easiest to read.

2 1 0 n/a

Lines

Excessive lines—gridlines, borders, tick marks, and axes—can add clutter or noise to a graph, so eliminate them whenever they aren't useful for interpreting the data.

Gridlines, if present, are muted

Color should be faint gray, not black. Full points if no gridlines are used.

2 1 0 n/a

Graph does not have border line

Graph should bleed into the surrounding page or slide rather than being contained by a border.

2 1 0 n/a

Axes do not have unnecessary tick marks

Tick marks are useful in line graphs (to demarcate each point in time along the y-axis) but unnecessary in bar charts.

2 1 0 n/a

Graph has one horizontal and one vertical axis

Viewers can best interpret one x- and one y-axis, even if one is hidden. Don't add a second y-axis.

2 1 0 n/a

Overall

Graphs will catch a viewer's attention so only visualize the data that needs attention. Too many graphics of unimportant information dilute the power of visualization.

Graph highlights significant finding or conclusion

Graphs should have a "so what?" – either a practical or statistical significance (or both) to warrant their presence.

2 1 0 n/a

The type of graph is appropriate for data

Data are displayed using a graph type appropriate for the relationship within the data. For example, change over time is displayed as a line graph, area chart, slope graph, or dot plot.

2 1 0 n/a

Graph has appropriate level of precision

Few numeric labels need decimal places. When precision is important, choose a type of graph type that displays differences through length or points along a line (e.g., bar charts, dot plots). When precision is less important, you can use a graph that displays differences through angles or area (e.g., pie charts, circle charts).

2 1 0 n/a

Contextualized or comparison data are present

Comparisons—over time, across programs or subgroups of participants, etc.—help the viewer understand the significance of the data.

2 1 0 n/a

Individual chart elements work together to reinforce the overarching takeaway message

Choices about graph type, text, arrangement, color, and lines should reinforce the same takeaway message.

2 1 0 n/a

For more support, check out:

AnnKEmery.com/blog

StephanieEvergreen.com/blog

Stephanie Evergreen's book, *Presenting Data Effectively*

Score: _____ / _____ = _____ %

Well-formatted data visualizations score between 90-100% of available points. At this level, viewers are better able to read, interpret, and retain content.

Data Visualization Anatomy Chart

Confused by the terminology? Review the anatomy charts below for illustration of what's what.

