Using Visual Elements in a Report.

Why do I need to use visual elements in my report?

Using tables, graphs, charts, and diagrams in a report can enhance the presentation of data and make complex and significant information more accessible to your reader.

What do I need to think about before deciding what visual to use?

Understand your data: Before creating any visual elements, make sure you thoroughly understand the data you're presenting and can identify what you want to convey through the visuals.

Choose the right visual: Select an appropriate type of visual representation for your data. For example, use tables for presenting precise numerical information, graphs (such as bar charts, line charts, and pie charts) for showing trends and comparisons, and diagrams for illustrating processes or structures.

Use software tools: Decide which software tools could be utilised to support the creation of visual elements. Microsoft Excel can help you to create professional-looking tables, graphs, charts, and diagrams.

How do I present the visual elements in my report?

Keep it simple and maintain consistency: Avoid clutter and unnecessary complexity. Simplify your visuals to highlight the most important information. If you use multiple visuals in your report, maintain a consistent style, colour scheme, and formatting.

Arrange and format: Place your visual elements in a logical order within your report. Ensure they fit well within the document layout and are appropriately sized. Format fonts, colours, and styles consistently.

Create clear titles: Every visual element should have a clear and informative and descriptive title succinctly describing its content. This title should be placed above the visual, making it the first thing the reader sees.

Create clear labels: Axis labels and data points should also be labelled appropriately and consistently. Assign each visual element a unique label or figure number, such as 'Table 1', 'Figure 3', 'Chart 2', 'Diagram A', or 'Graph 3'.

Use captions: Below or adjacent to each visual element, include a descriptive caption. Captions provide a summary of the key points or findings from the visual, helping the reader understand its significance.

Reference source data: If you're using data from external sources, cite the references properly.

How do I refer to visual elements in my report?

In-text references: When discussing the content within the visual, refer to it in the text. For example, you might write, 'As shown in Table 1' or 'Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between….'

Be specific: Make sure your references are specific and directly related to the visual element in question. Avoid vague references like 'as seen above' or 'as previously mentioned.'

Explain the key points: Provide a brief explanation of the key findings or insights from the visual element within the text. Don't assume that the reader will interpret the visual the same way you do.

Cross-references: In longer reports, you may need to cross-reference visual elements within the document. For example, you can say, 'As discussed in Table 3 on page 7' to direct the reader to the specific location.

Avoid redundancy: While it's important to discuss the information presented in the visual, avoid restating every detail verbatim. Summarise and provide context, but don't duplicate the entire visual content in the text.

Further useful detail about using visuals in reports is provided in **Chapter 8** of DAY, T. 2018. *Success in Academic Writing*. 2nd Ed. London: Palgrave.