Infographics—

Usage recommendations from GDS

18th April, 2012
We have defined a colour wheel at GDS to help inform what colours we use.

We recommend all infographics adhere to this palette. The colour values are overleaf.
For clarity and consistency, we recommend you only use one typeface where possible in your infographics — Helvetica.

Try to use as few weights and sizes of the font as possible.
Graphic/illustration style

Graphics, shapes and illustrated elements should be created using flat, solid colour without the use of gradients and shadows.

The rule of thumb is to be as simple as possible and only to use graphics to communicate not decorate...
Communicate, don’t decorate

Infographics exist to explain data.

They are to visually aid communication of information to make it easier to digest and understand.

Any graphics used should support the message being communicated. If they don’t (no matter how beautiful they are), they will undermine and confuse the message.

Here are some simple principles and good and bad examples to help demonstrate this.
Simple principles

Sketch—Relative scale

If you are making a comparison about the relative sizes of different things, represent these scales graphically.
Examples— Good

Scientific evidence for popular dietary supplements by David McCandless.

Strong evidence at the top, weak evidence at the bottom.

This is definitely far easier to read than a long list or a table. It also exposes patterns you might not otherwise see.
Examples— Good
Non Government

The Billion Dollar Gram by David McCandless.

Showing the real value/cost of things by their relative value/cost.

Larger sums are represented by larger graphics and colour coded according to their category.

Clearly The Iraq War estimated total cost and ‘Worst case’ total cost of the financial crisis to the US Government are numbers of a massive magnitude.
When Sea Levels Attack! by David McCandless.

The rate at which sea levels are expected to rise over the following 80 years. Plotted against notable locations and landmarks.
Examples— Good

Projection of the number of people with dementia.

Taken from the Prime Minister’s Office Flickr stream.

The scale of the problem is demonstrated by the graphics and the diagram has hierarchy.

Future projections

The number of people in the UK with dementia will double in the next 40 years.

800,000 people with dementia in 2012

1,000,000 people with dementia in 2021

1,700,000 people with dementia in 2051
Examples— Bad

Non Government

Save $65,541 on your mortgage in 3 simple steps by RateSupermarket.

The graphics here serve only to make the calculations harder to read. It might be attempting to make a dry topic more playful, but it is overcomplicated with too many type sizes and graphic elements.

The audience has to decode the graphics as well as try to read the calculations. Very confusing.
Examples— Bad

Government

What will the minimum prices be?

Taken from the Prime Minister’s Office Flickr stream.

Not clear what’s being shown and the graphics don’t help communicate the message. They feel more like a barrier to understanding it.

The type butts up against the edges of graphic elements.

What will the minimum prices be?

One unit = 40p

Lager
2 units = 80p

Cider
4.5 units = £1.80p

Spirits
26-28 units = £10.40p

Wine
7-9 units = £2.80p

Wine by glass
3 units = £1.20p
Redesigned

What follows is an attempt to redesign and simplify the previous ‘What will the prices be’ infographic to demonstrate some of the things we’ve pointed out in this document.
The new minimum price for one unit of alcohol is 40p.

What this means...
Further examples online

Here are a selection of other examples that may be of use.

A lot of these examples don’t fit with the GDS aesthetic of solid flat colour and no gradients or shadows, but are examples of successfully executed ideas and should be referenced on that basis.

Illustrated & interactive

- Information is Beautiful

Moving image

- 35mm
- Titanic — for BBC History
- RSA Animate