Category

Data & AI

Data Storytelling & Visualization Playbook

A practical method for turning a correct analysis into a five-second, decision-ready chart that actually changes what happens in the meeting.

- Practitioner
- Intermediate
- Template Included
- Workshop Ready

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- 7 minute(s)

Overview

Turn a technically correct chart nobody acts on into a five-second insight that drives a decision, using the CLEAR method: context, lead, emphasize, avoid clutter, recommend.

Which chart type should I use for a specific comparison?

Use the Chart Type Decision Tree as a starting point: ranked comparisons default to horizontal bar, trends over time default to line, part-to-whole defaults to a simple stacked bar (avoid pie charts beyond four or five slices), and correlation defaults to a scatter plot. When in doubt, pick the type that requires the least explanation.

How much decluttering is too much?

If removing an element would make the audience ask a question the headline needs to answer, keep it — otherwise cut it. A useful test is whether a first-time viewer can restate the headline after five seconds; if extra elements don't help that, they're clutter.

Does this apply to live dashboards, or just one-off presentation decks?

Both, though dashboards need an added discipline: since there's no presenter narrating the headline, the dashboard itself needs a persistent title or annotation stating the current key insight, updated as the data changes.

Our technical audience wants the raw data too — how do we handle that?

Keep the headline-first slide as the main view, and put full detail tables or the underlying data in an appendix or a linked drill-down. Lead with the insight for the room, and make the detail available for the people who want to verify it afterward.

How long does it take a team to get good at this?

Most analysts produce a noticeably better deck on their very first redesign using CLEAR, since the framework catches the most common mistakes immediately. Real fluency — writing the headline first by instinct — usually takes about eight to ten decks of practice.

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Talk to our data storytelling team

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