Design tips for non-designers

Core-level design tips

Pay attention to the data to ink ratio. One of the basics from the data visualization Godfather himself, Edward Tufte. Indispensable. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information, 2001, Chapter 4, Data-Ink and Graphical Redesign*

Avoid chart junk. Ditto above. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information, 2001, Chapter 4, Chart Junk*

The best explanation of why to never use a pie chart. I admire much of Jorge Camoes’ work and simple writing. This one still conveys the issue best. *Finally revealed: The optimal number of categories in a pie chart.*

Whitespace matters. There’s lots of writing on the topic, but this article has a nice summary with great examples. *Why whitespace matters*

PowerPoint can be dangerous. Some good references on how easily presentations go awry. *We Have Met the Enemy and He Is PowerPoint*  
*Amazon Staff Meetings: “NO POWERPOINT”*

Do the squint test. This might sound silly, but try it and see what you think. *The Squint Test: How quick exposure to design can reveal its flaws*

Major-level design tips

Less is more. And this article helped me understand why. *Hick’s Law*

Simplify the explanation. Avinash’s passion when writing about this very old principle is hard to miss. *Occham’s Razor*

Consider your user's decision fatigue. When I think about a user looking at information at the end of the day, I remember this article. *Do You Suffer From Decision Fatigue?*

Limit colors. Juice’s design principles are great. I love the ones on color the most, like this one. *Limit Colors*

Persuade your audience. This one is more about presentation than design, but it’s good for helping you consider your audience. *More than just facts*

Understand performance vs. preference. A little deep, but useful when thinking about what chart might be more effective. *User Satisfaction vs. Performance Metrics*

Take Tufte’s one day class on presenting data and information. If you’ve gotten this far, congratulations! Now it’s time to schedule your Edward Tufte one day class. *Edward Tufte one day class.*

Learn the 5 design principles of Gestalt Theory. You’ll be one of the cool kids when you mention Gestalt. I found this article to be the easiest to digest. *Gestalt Theory in Typography & Design Principles*

Graduate-level design tips

Use aesthetics that attract people. A good 101 on aesthetics for the non-artist. *The Fascinating Science Of Aesthetics*

Include storytelling in your visualizations. It’s really necessary to understand the connection between storytelling and data. *Storytelling: The Next Step for Visualization*

Consider what motivates users to take action in your design. There’s a lot written on the psychology behind design, but this is a great summary article. *How psychology can help generate more clicks on your links*

Learn about interactive data analysis. This video focuses on visualization for exploring data. Hear from a major thought leader in the data visualization space, Jeff Heer. *Interactive Data Analysis*

Review these data design guides. Lots of suggestions from Nathan Yau on ways to think about charts. *Working and designing with data.*

Design information so it tells a story. This video focuses more on art than data, but it’s helpful to see another thought leader’s perspective on data visualization. *The beauty of data visualization - David McCandless*