

8.2 – Video: Describing graphs & statistics

Discussing graphs, diagrams, and statistics is often an essential element of presentations. Let's talk about how to do that.

The most important part is to **fully understand the graph or diagram, its labels, and its message**. For example, if a bar graph or line graph illustrates some **development over time**, make sure you look carefully at the **horizontal and vertical axes** until you are clear about **what they stand for**, for example if the y axis shows percent or absolute value.

When you're ready to discuss your graph, use an **introductory sentence** to tell your audience what it is about. For example: "This graph shows the distribution of global income over the last 200 years." After that, it's usually a good idea to start with the **general trend**. For example, "As you can see, inequality reached a peak in the late twentieth century and then decreased by a few percent".

What you normally **shouldn't** do is **just talk about what the graph shows**, because that is usually pretty **boring**. What you should do instead is **say why this is significant**, why it is relevant.

For example, the book has a graph that shows the global distribution of wealth at the end of chapter eight. When you talk about it, it's a bit lame to just say, "The left column shows how many percent of the global population fall into the categories of millionaires, middle class, poor, and very poor; and the right column shows how many percent of global wealth they own, respectively." It's usually better to **put things into perspective**. For example, "Remarkably, one percent of the global population owns almost half of the earth's wealth; and, conversely, the poorest 55 percent of the world's people – that's more than four billion people – own no more than one percent of global wealth between them." This is **more focused and relatable**. Now I'd like to give you two pieces of advice on **talking about numbers**. First, **use fractions instead of percentages**. They are easier to grasp. Instead of saying, "32 percent," it is better to say, "**almost a third**". Instead of saying, "21 percent of all respondents", say, "**about a fifth** of all respondents". And second, **round your figures up or down** to the nearest whole number or even to the nearest 10. Instead of "38.9 percent", say "approximately 40 percent". And my last piece of advice: **Learn the words and phrases from chapter eight to describe graphs and statistics, and use them in your presentations**.

