

GRAPHICAL LITERACY: WHAT DOES THE AVERAGE CITIZEN  
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GRAPHS

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What kinds of graphs does the literate citizen encounter in reading the popular press, and what do we, as educators, need to teach students so that they will be able to properly interpret these graphs. The first part of this paper examines the types of graphs that appear in newspapers and magazines and the frequency with which they appear. We examine the three most frequently read newspapers in the United States in 1995, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and The New York Times, two major Chinese newspapers, one from China, Jen Min Jih Pao, and one from Taiwan, Central Daily News, the London Times, the Frankfurter Allgemeine, Le Monde, Pravda, and The Times of India. The second part of this paper discusses teaching students to interpret graphs and to recognize both good and misleading graphs. We emphasise that good graphs should show the data clearly, without distortion, and encourage the viewer to consider the issues the data illuminate.