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Seven Steps for Creating Visuals

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Seven Steps for Creating Visuals
Handout courtesy of Angela Gulick

Note: This handout was prepared for my ENG 102 classes. You may need to make modifications to your own visuals based upon the needs of your assignment.

Step 1. Provide the exact survey question and describe <u>all</u> of the survey's findings using specific numbers. <u>Every</u> number that appears in the visual is described first in this paragraph. End the paragraph by writing, **"Figure # illustrates these findings."** Here is an example:

English 102 Students' Concerns with Textbooks
Many students work 1 or 2 jobs and are very concerned about college expenses, particularly the costs of textbooks. Angela Gulick's English 102 students were asked, "What is your biggest concern or worry regarding textbooks?" Of the 57 students who answered, <u>**33**</u> thought textbooks were too expensive, <u>**14**</u> didn't use enough of the textbooks to warrant the costs, <u>**5**</u> were unhappy they couldn't buy used copies of textbooks, <u>**3**</u> were unhappy the bookstore wouldn't buy back textbooks at the end of the semester, and <u>**2**</u> said textbooks were outdated. **Figure 1 illustrates these findings.**

Step 2. Provide an appropriate Figure and number for your visual. Figures are numbered sequentially with Arabic numbers such as Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3.

Step 3. Write a descriptive title in bold for your visual. A visual should have a descriptive title **in bold** that answers who, what, where, and when. Here is an example:

> **English 102 students' concerns with textbooks, Parkland College, spring 2015.**
>   **(who)**   **(what)**   **(where)**   **(when)**

Step 4. Write an action caption for your visual. An action caption states the **most significant finding** of the visual. An action caption contains a **specific statistic**, not general wording (the majority of, many, few, some). Make sure that the numbers in your action caption are the same numbers that appear in the descriptive paragraph before the visual and in the visual itself. Here are examples of ineffective/effective action captions:

> **Ineffective**: A lot of students thought they paid too much for textbooks.
> **Effective:** Of the **57** students who answered, **33 (57%)** said they paid too much for textbooks.

Step 5. Provide adequate space and clear labeling for your visual. A visual should be large enough to be read easily and clearly labeled as indicated on the next page.

Step 6. Provide a proper source citation for your visual. At the bottom of the visual, type the following: Source: "Complete Title of Survey." Question number from data. Date of survey. *Figure created by your name.*

Step 7. Explain the visual and make recommendations based upon the data. Immediately following the visual, you need to explain the significance of your findings and how they relate to your recommendations. This is often a useful place to incorporate some of your classmates' comments – combining statistics and "real voices" is often very effective.

After you have presented and explained your findings, you need to offer 1 or more specific recommendations to your reader that are supported by the data and/or student comments you provided. There needs to be a clear and logical connection between the information you present and the subsequent recommendation(s) you make to improve life at Parkland College.

English 102 Students' Concerns with Textbooks

Many students work 1 or 2 jobs and are very concerned about college expenses, particularly the costs of textbooks. Angela Gulick's English 102 students were asked, "What is your biggest concern or worry regarding textbooks?" Of the 57 students who answered, **33** thought textbooks were too expensive, **14** didn't use enough of the textbooks to warrant the costs, **5** were unhappy they couldn't buy used copies of textbooks, **3** were unhappy the bookstore wouldn't buy back textbooks at the end of the semester, and **2** said textbooks were outdated. **Figure 1 illustrates these findings.**

Figure 1: English 102 students' concerns with textbooks, Parkland College, spring 2015. Of the 57 students who answered the question, 33 (57%) said they paid too much for textbooks.
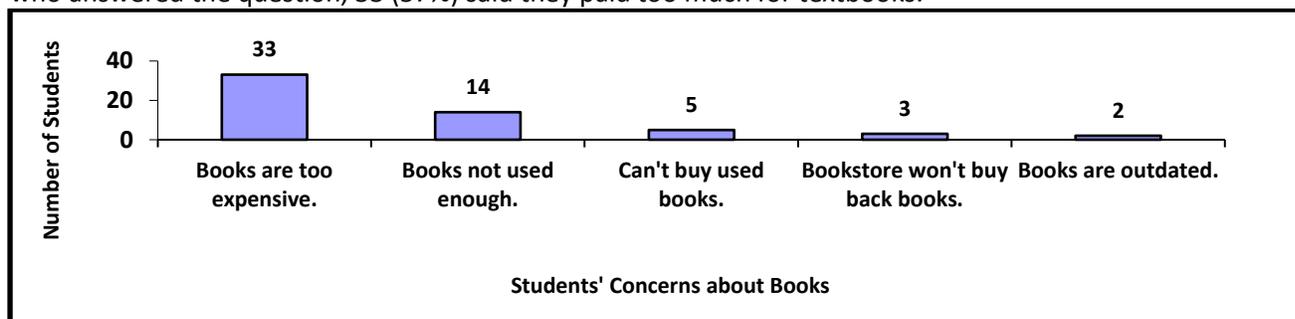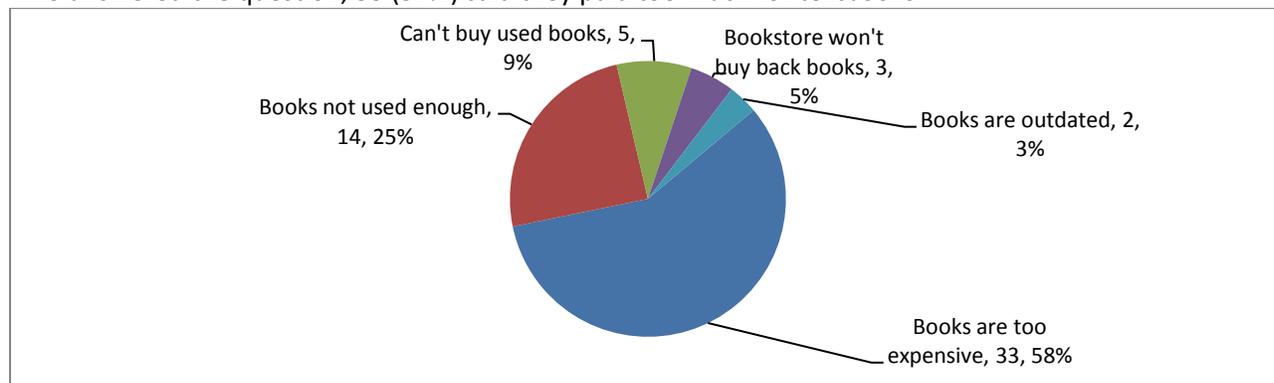

Source: "Parkland College Bookstore Survey." Question 3. February 27, 2015. *Figure created by Andrea Jennings.*

Students have concerns over textbooks that are costly and not used enough. One student wrote, "I try to find other places for the same information like libraries or the web – it saves money" (survey). Another student wrote, "My teacher puts all assigned readings on Cobra, so we don't need to buy a textbook" (survey). However, a student wrote, "I like having a textbook as a reference – I don't mind paying because I might need it in the future" (survey). Based on these differing opinions, abolishing textbooks entirely is not a solution because some students find textbooks to be a valuable investment.

However, I recommend that you encourage the following: 1) faculty should only require students to purchase textbooks if the majority of the textbooks will be used in a semester, 2) faculty should offer other options for course information (course packets, Cobra, sources online, or materials on reserve in the library), and 3) faculty should post the titles/authors of textbooks before the semester starts so that students can find cheaper ways to purchase texts (such as Amazon.com).
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Note: Here is a pie chart version of the same information as above:

Figure 1: English 102 students' concerns with textbooks, Parkland College, spring 2015. Of the 57 students who answered the question, 33 (57%) said they paid too much for textbooks.

Source: "Parkland College Bookstore Survey." Question 3. February 27, 2015. *Figure created by Andrea Jennings.*