What is a Chart?

A chart is a graphical representation of data that when used appropriately helps ease understanding of large quantities of data. Not only can charts help people understand large amounts of data, it can also help show relationships between the data. While there are many different types of charts, we will focus on four of the most common types.

Common Chart Types:

Column

*Compare values across categories/timeline*

Bar

*Compare values across categories/timeline*

Pie

*Show contribution of each item to the whole*

Line

*Display trends over time!*

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**# of Widgets Sold**

- **January**: 10
- **February**: 26
- **March**: 12

**# of Widgets Sold**

- **January**: 0
- **February**: 10
- **March**: 20

**January Widget Sales**

- **Jack Jalapeno**: 26
- **Olivia Orange**: 10
- **Paul Peach**: 12

**Widget Sales**

- **January**: 0
- **February**: 10
- **March**: 20

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How Do I Create a Chart?

When creating a chart the most important piece is having the raw data in Excel in a tabular format. The data should have column headers, row headers and data in the middle. This may require hard keying the data in Excel or formatting data from another system to be in a useable format.

1. Select the desired data.
2. On the Insert Ribbon, in the Charts group select the desired type of Chart to insert.

3. Once a Chart type is selected, the chart will be created and the Chart Tools contextual tab will appear allowing you to format your chart for readability.
Using the Chart Tools Contextual Ribbons

The Chart Tools contextual ribbons only appear when you are selected on a chart. This way the chart options don’t take up space if you aren’t actually working on a chart. These ribbons have useful features for working with and formatting your chart.

Design Ribbon:

- Quickly change your Chart type!
- The Switch Row/Column feature makes it easy to change how the data is displayed on the chart.
- The Chart Layouts group provides several formatted layouts you can quickly choose to make your chart more readable.

Layout Ribbon:

- The Current Selection group allows you to select a specific piece of the chart and format it using the Format Selection button.
- The Labels group makes it easy to add labels to different elements of your chart.

Format Ribbon:

- The Current Selection group allows you to select a specific piece of the chart and format it using the Format Selection button.
**Formatting for Readability**

Excel tries to format the chart the best it can for readability when you create it. Sometimes it does a good job and other times it leaves a lot to be desired. Below are a few quick examples of ways you can help readers understand your chart quickly by formatting the chart for readability.

**Chart Layouts Gallery**

The charts layout gallery on the Design ribbon provides several prebuilt formats you can use to make your chart more readable.

![Default Pie Chart](image1)

![Provided Chart Layout](image2)
Add Labels

Labels take the guess work out of what is being displayed on the chart. Many times when creating a chart labels may not be included by default. The Layout Ribbon provides the ability to add labels to many aspects of the chart.
Modify Axis Values

There may be times it is helpful to modify the axis values to better show a trend or help the viewer understand the chart. On the Layout or Format Ribbon choose the Axis you want to modify from the dropdown and click Format Selection. There are many things you can change but in the example below the major and minor unit values were changed and the minor unit tick mark was added.