



Connecting the Dots: *Teaching Students to Describe Infographics*

SAMANTHA JUNGHEIM

&

ERIC H. ROTH

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA,
AMERICAN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION



Samantha Jungheim

University of Southern California,
MAT-TESOL Candidate
ALI Student Leader



Eric H. Roth

University of Southern California,
ALI Master Lecturer

WORKSHOP AGENDA

1. Define Data Commentaries
2. Discuss *Why now?*
3. Look at 4 key steps to writing about infographics
4. Provide language and skills to focus on when teaching
5. Share a student example
6. Workshop our writing using a Google Form
7. Ask questions and share insights



DATA COMMENTARIES

- A piece of writing that directly **discusses information in a infographic** (i.e tables, charts, graphs, etc.)
- “Published commentaries (also referred to *reactions, comments, responses* or *discussions*) can be extremely interesting, as they often highlight key debates within our field” (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 268)

FROM ALBERT EINSTEIN

“It can scarcely be denied that the supreme goal of all theory is to make the irreducible basic elements as simple and as few as possible without having to surrender the adequate representation of a single datum of experience.”



“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler”

(Championing Science, 2019)

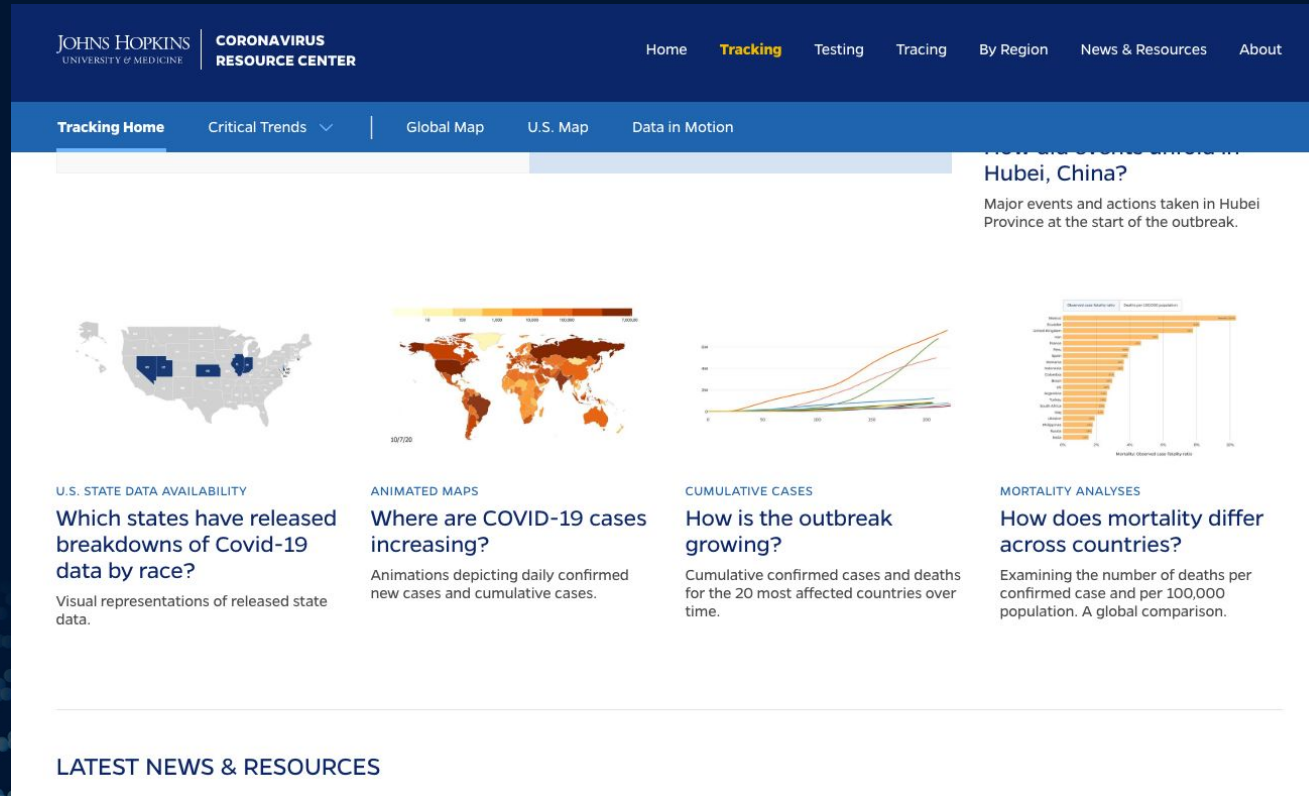
WARM UP

Please type in the chat!

Where have you seen a data
commentary?

Where have you seen a data commentary?

(John Hopkins University & Medicine, 2020)

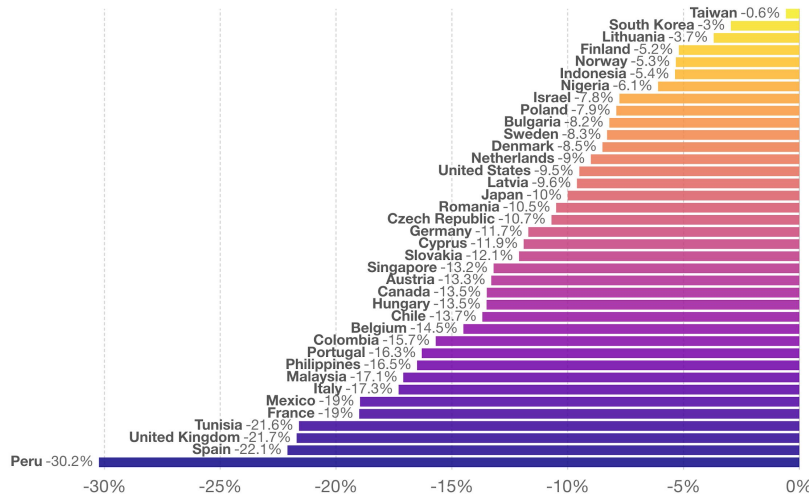


WHY NOW?

Economic decline in the second quarter of 2020

The percentage decline of GDP relative to the same quarter in 2019. It is adjusted for inflation.

Our World
in Data



Source: Eurostat, OECD and individual national statistics agencies

Note: Data for China is not shown given the earlier timing of its economic downturn. The country saw positive growth of 3.2% in Q2 preceded by a fall of 6.8% in Q1

CC BY

- COVID-19
- Economics
- General Confusion



(TED Conferences, 2020)
(Hasell, J., 2020)

***“Experts often possess more
data than judgement”***

-Colin Powell

STEPS

*What should we include in a
Data Commentary?*

01

**INTRODUCE
THE
INFOGRAPHIC**

02

**IDENTIFY
SIGNIFICANT
DATA**

03

**COMPARE
RELATED
STATISTICS**

04

**CRAFT A
CRITICAL
STATEMENT**

(Sowton, 2012)
(Swales & Feak, 2012)

OBSERVATIONS

- Simple is *not* the enemy
- Specificity is your friend
(dates, locations, etc.)
- Numbers add precision

WARM UP

Please type in the chat!

What is some possible
vocabulary?

SUGGESTED VOCABULARY

- Increase/ Decrease
- Apex/ Peak
- Lowest point/ Nadir
- Plummet
- Stagnate
- Rise/ Fall
- Gap
- Trend
- Flatline
- Simultaneous
- Abate
- Aberrant

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT FINLAND?

Answer in the chat



(Britannica, 2020)

Photo by [Tapiro Haaia](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Photo by [Vivian K](#) on [Unsplash](#)



WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT EDUCATION?

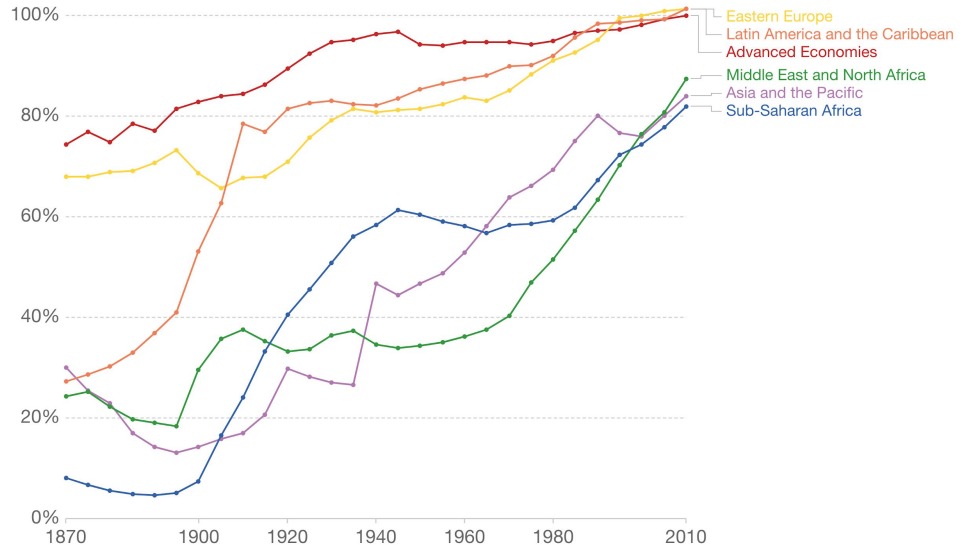
Think about Education in the 20th Century

- ➔ What are some influences?
- ➔ What are some important trends?

(Roser, M. & Ortiz-Ospina, E., 2016)

Gender ratios for mean years of schooling, 1870 to 2010

Female-to-male ratio of average years of schooling, expressed in percents. All education levels for population aged 15-64. Regional estimates are population-weighted averages.



INTRODUCING OUR INFOGRAPHIC:

TABLE 25

Table 25 Language of Publication of Doctoral Dissertations in Finland

	<i>Finnish</i>	<i>Swedish</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Number</i>
1900–1910	20.6%	30.3%	41.2%	1.3%	6.6%	228
1911–20	30.4%	23.3%	39.1%	1.2%	5.9%	253
1921–30	30.0%	20.7%	41.3%	2.8%	5.2%	213
1931–40	27.7%	11.4%	52.5%	4.4%	4.0%	404
1941–50	34.1%	10.4%	32.7%	19.0%	3.7%	431
1951–60	24.4%	6.6%	19.5%	47.2%	2.3%	784
1961–70	21.9%	2.0%	5.8%	68.0%	2.2%	1249
1971–80	21.9%	3.0%	3.2%	71.3%	0.6%	2287
1981–90	18.6%	2.5%	1.1%	77.4%	0.3%	3434
1991–99	18.6%	1.6%	0.5%	77.8%	1.4%	6915

Source: Wilson 2002.

(Swales & Feak, 2004)

INTRODUCE THE INFOGRAPHIC

Table 25 shows...

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COMPARE RELATED STATISTICS

What story do you want to tell?

240 *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*

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Source: Wilson 2002.

IDENTIFY SIGNIFICANT DATA

Table 25 shows a dramatic rise in
English dissertations

(Swales & Feak, 2004)

1.3%

of dissertations
were published
in English
1900-1910

47.2%

of dissertations
were published in
English 1951-60

77.8%

were published
dissertations in
English 1991-99

IDENTIFY SIGNIFICANT DATA

Dissertations published in Finnish remains relatively stable
(Swales & Feak, 2004)

20.6%

of dissertations
were published
in Finnish
1900-1910

24.4%

of dissertations
were published
in Finnish
1951-60

18.6%

of dissertations
were published
in Finnish
1991-99

CRAFT

A CRITICAL STATEMENT

This dramatic increase in the post-midcentury choice of English closely tracks larger political events, specifically the victory of the United Kingdom and the United States in World War II.

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Source: Wilson 2002.

(Swales & Feak, 2004)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? WHO CARES?

STAKEHOLDERS

- Finns
- Educators
- Linguists
- International Students

TRENDS

- Local
- National
- Global
- Discipline-based

IMPLICATIONS

- What's next?
- Evaluation
- What's the response?

SKILL FOCUS:

CRITICAL THINKING BY NOTING LIMITS

- How current?
- How strong?
- What's not here?
- What else would we like to know?

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Source: Wilson 2002.

LANGUAGE FOCUS:

COMPARATIVES & SUPERLATIVES

- More than
- Less than
- Add -er endings
- Larger/smaller than
- Stronger/weaker than
- Better/worse
- The most
- The least
- Add -est endings
- The largest/the smallest
- The strongest/the weakest
- The best/the worst

LANGUAGE FOCUS: HEDGING LANGUAGE

Introductory verbs	<i>seem, tend, look like, appear to be, think, believe, doubt, be sure, indicate, suggest</i>
Certain lexical verbs	<i>believe, assume, suggest</i>
Certain modal verbs	<i>will, must, would, may, might, could</i>
Adverbs of frequency	<i>often, sometimes, usually</i>
Modal adverbs	<i>certainly, definitely, clearly, probably, possibly, perhaps</i>
Modal nouns	<i>Assumption, possibility, probability</i>
That clauses	<i>It could be the case that..., It might be suggested that..., There is hope that...</i>
To-clause + adjective	<i>It may be possible to obtain..., It is important to develop..., It is useful to study...</i>

USEFUL ACADEMIC PHRASES

- Ultimately, what is at stake here is_____.
- These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of_____.
- My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of _____.
- This discovery will have significant applications in_____ as well as in _____.

SUGGESTION: Refer to “They Say I Say” for templates on how to establish why your claims matter (Graff, G. & Birkenstein, C., 2006)

LANGUAGE FOCUS:

STYLE



REPLACE TWO WORD VERBS

The number of
dissertations
written in Swedish
~~went down~~
decreased in the
last century.



ADVERBS: -LY MID POSITION

Writing
dissertations in
English quickly
rose in Finland
during the 20th
century.



POSITIVE PHRASING

Table 25 lacks
information on the
number of
international
students receiving a
doctoral dissertation
in Finland.

SKILL FOCUS:

IDENTIFYING SOURCES

SOURCE



DATE



PUBLICATION



China New Infected COVID-19 Cases Situation from the Start of May to April

In this figure, we mainly focus on the new infected cases. From this figure, we can see the new infected cases growth is slowing down but still fluctuating from time to time. (Give specific detail. Bring our attention to an important detail and compare it to another significant detail.)

One reason is that the lockdown policy is playing a role indeed. The domestic new infected cases are currently very minor. It (This success/trend/development) represents that the virus has been controlled to a large extent.

Regarding the fluctuation, it is mainly due to the input cases abroad. Along with the steady situation in China now, (many/several/numerous) Chinese people abroad are rushing back to home to seek security. There are some potential positive cases of COVID-19 among them, which lead to the increasing new positive cases. (Source?)

**STUDENT
EXAMPLE**
SPRING 2020

GOOD MISTAKES

Other Common Mistakes:

- Won't cite sources
- Ignoring dates
- Exaggerating the evidence - proves/establishes
- Misusing past tense
- Using personal experience
- Referring to other charts
- Failure to acknowledge limits



01

WORKSHOP

Select an infographic online to write about



02

WORKSHOP

Start writing a paragraph data commentary and share your writing through our [Google Form](#)

SHARE WRITING

Now let's take a moment to share our writing and insights from writing a data commentary

REPRODUCIBLE HANDOUTS

Data Commentary Notes

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S. Jungheim & E.H. Roth

Data Commentary Notes

- Simple is not the enemy
- Specificity is your friend (dates, locations, etc.)
- Numbers add precision

Getting Started Analyzing Charts, Tables, or Graphs:

- Refer to Step 35 *What language should I use to interpret tables and graphs?* (p. 143-146) in “50 Steps to Improving Your Academic Writing” by Chris Sowton
- Similar to choosing a quote to support an argument in your research paper, when you are choosing data from a graph or table you must consider what you are trying to convey to your reader.

1. Introducing Visuals:

- Location Statement + Summary Statement

Examples:

- *As seen in Figure 1, the number of technological goods imported from China in the past ten years has increased.*
- *In this chart we can find a timeline for surgical advancements in the past three centuries.*

2. Look for Meaningful Issues:

- A high point
- A low point
- Significant differences
- Surprising similarities

3. Address Overall Patterns and Trends:

- Trends over time
- Long-term analysis

4. Interpret and/or Comment on the Data:

- What does this data mean?
 - *This decline might/may/could be due to...*
- Can recommendations be made based on this information?
 - *As a result...*
 - *Consequently...*
- Does this graph/chart/table omit information? How is this omission significant?
 - *This gap suggests/indicates/demonstrates...*

1

Data Commentary Worksheet

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Data Commentary Worksheet

Interpret and Describe Infographics

- A. Select an infographic (graph, table or chart) that describes a positive trend in a field of your interest. Paste the infographic & a link to it below:

- B. Interpret and describe the infographic in the chart below. Refer to page 2-3 of this document for some suggested vocabulary to use in your writing.

1. Introduce the infographic:	2. Compare related statistics:
3. Compare related statistics:	4. Craft a critical statement:
5. Additional observations/notes:	

1



CONCLUSION

Let's return to reason and look to
better understand situations



SUGGESTED WEBSITES

Our World in Data

www.mindthegap.org

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data>

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QUESTIONS?

Please ask questions in the chat
and we'll provide answers

Feel free to stay in touch

ericroth@usc.edu

jungheim@usc.edu

THANKS!

- ✓ ALI 255 students
- ✓ ALI 254 students
- ✓ USC American Language Institute
- ✓ CATESOL

Eric H. Roth, USC Master Lecturer

ericroth@usc.edu & eric@compellingconversations.com

Samantha Jungheim, USC ALI Student Leader

jungheim@usc.edu & samjungheim@gmail.com

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