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# Building Better News Graphics

## Lesson Plans

### Overview and Rationale

As consumers continue to demand a more interactive news experience, it is not sufficient for journalists to present information in traditional ways. To remain relevant, we must consider all emerging storytelling possibilities, including informational graphics. Faced with diminishing page counts in print and limited reader attention spans in digital publications, info graphics, when done effectively, offer value-added content and alternative entry points to our most important stories. We confront this in two lectures, one focused on philosophy, another on production.

### Target audience and prerequisites

These lectures are part of an introductory curriculum for students pursuing a B.A. in journalism, mass communication or public relations at Vaughn College. They would be part of a larger news literacy or graphic design core requirement and require successful completion of an introductory news literacy course.

### Overviews and Timeline

Vaughn College classes typically meet once a week for an hour. These lesson plans cover two 60-minute sessions.

## Lesson 1: Process and Philosophy (60 minutes)

35 points total (See homework sheet for details.)

### Engagement Questions

- What are the primary values of info graphics to a news organization?
- What do info graphics add to our storytelling, and how do they serve the reader?
- What are the most commonly considered types of news graphics?
- How do we work with reporters to conceptualize opportunities for info graphics?

### Class requirements (to be completed before the first lecture)

- Watch the screencast lesson produced for this class. You will find it linked on my blog, [www.jssmusingsonmedia.wordpress.com](http://www.jssmusingsonmedia.wordpress.com).
- Read this handout from the Washington Post on the value and nature of news graphics, "Informational Graphics: The Visual Dimension." A downloadable copy is linked here: <https://nie.washingtonpost.com/sites/default/files/InformationalGraphics2.pdf>

- Log in to lynda.com with your Vaughn College email and password. From the tutorial “Introduction to Graphic Design,” watch chapters 6 (Illustrator) and 7 (InDesign). The tutorial is linked here: <https://www.lynda.com/InDesign-tutorials/Introduction-Graphic-Design/633854-2.html>
- Read either The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post or similar for a week in either digital or print editions, paying strict attention to their use of info graphics. Consider what the graphics are attempting to accomplish and how they complement their stories. Student subscriptions at a cost of \$1 per month are available with a college email address from [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) and [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

### **Group activities and outside work**

Students will divide into three groups of four and conceptualize at least three complementary graphics ideas for one of several imaginary news leads that will be detailed in the first lecture. Students will develop a consensus and detail their ideas in a short budget note to be presented before the second session. (We are concerned with processing ideas at this point, not production.)

## **Lesson 2: Production (60 minutes, featuring 45-minute lecture and three 5-minute group presentations)**

25 points total, 5 points extra credit possible (See homework sheet for details.)

### **Engagement Questions**

- How essential are visual skills for the modern journalist?
- What tools are available for the production of digital and print graphics?
- What are the most effective ways of blending traditional reporting tasks (type, photography) with info graphics?
- Are there industrywide standards for use of such tools, including Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator?
- Do low-cost resources exist to help us learn the fundamentals of these tools?

### **Class requirements (to be completed before the second lecture)**

- Watch this introductory tutorial (free) from Lynda.com on graphic design. Don’t stress on the details, look for big-picture ideas on graphics production, using three of the most popular design programs from Adobe – Illustrator, Photoshop and InDesign. This tutorial is consistent with our current version of these products. It’s linked here in a bitly for brevity’s sake: <https://bit.ly/2raQGNz>
- Again, examine another week’s worth of graphics from your chosen news publication, either online or in print.

### **Group activities and outside work**

From their chosen newspaper or news website, student groups will analyze one graphic they believed was particularly compelling. In a short presentation to the class (PowerPoint preferred) delivered during the second session, they will describe its effectiveness at complementing its accompanying story package.

## References

The Washington Post, Newspapers in Education, "Informational Graphics: The Visual Dimension," 2008  
[www.lynda.com](http://www.lynda.com), "Introduction to Graphic Design," Tony Harmer, 2018  
[www.lynda.com](http://www.lynda.com), "Justin Seeley's Introduction to Graphic Design," 2014

Links provided above.