

## 4.7.4: Captions and Titles

### Learning Outcome

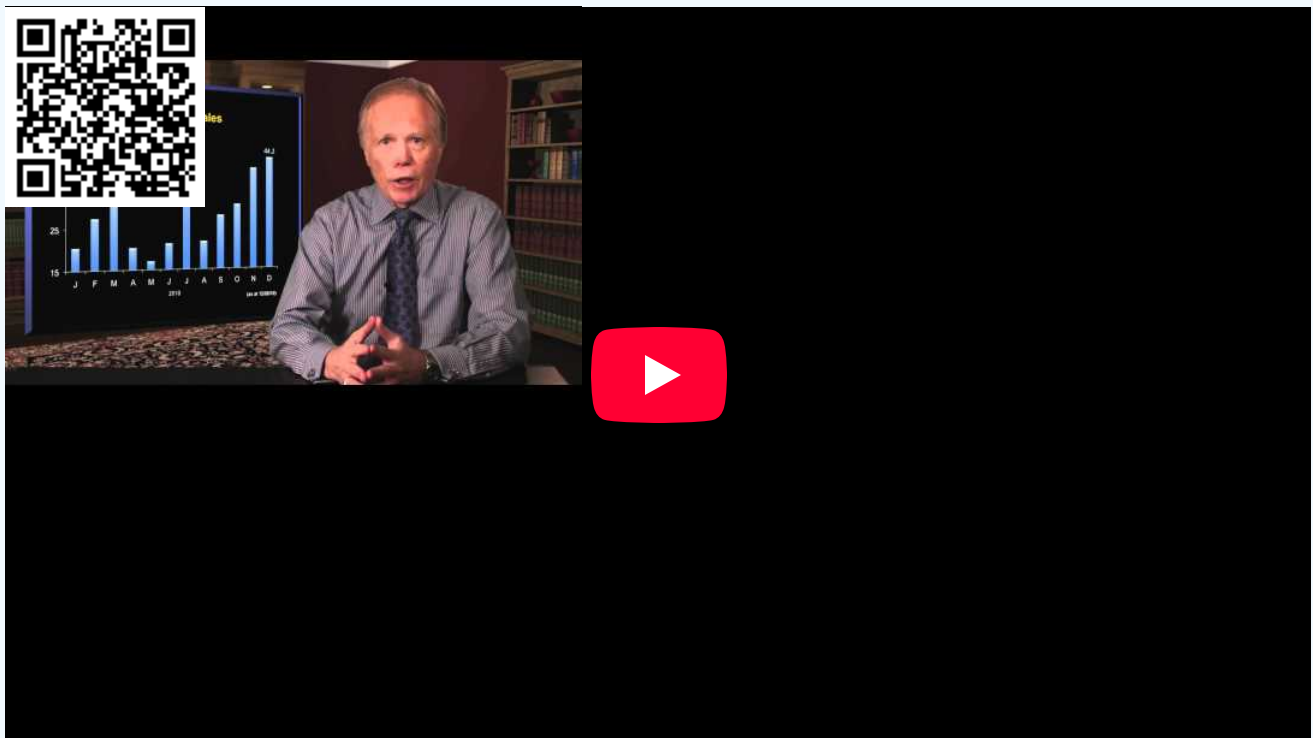
- Describe the impact of descriptive captions and titles when incorporating graphics into a message

Most of the time, putting the data into graph form isn't quite enough. In fact, it's just the start. You created this graph to help you tell the story of your data, and to ensure your message gets across, you need to be clever about the captions and titles you include.

You'll find most communicators title their graphs according to the content they display. It might say "Year-over-year performance" or "Weekly Average Ticket Sales." But if your message is about how weekly average ticket sales are down 10 percent compared to last year, you might consider calling your graph "Average Ticket Sales are Decreasing."

### ✓ watch it

The video below is a demonstration about how to make a graph tell your story by making it easier to read and making the title active:



Captions usually indicate the source of information. If your sources and communications are not produced by people within your company, then this is an important step. Captioning the source gives your information credibility and strengthens your story.

You can also use captions to convey other pertinent information. You may want to include the sample size of a survey the graph is illustrating or additional background information about the data (as shown in Figure 1). Using captions in this manner helps the reader draw the right conclusion.

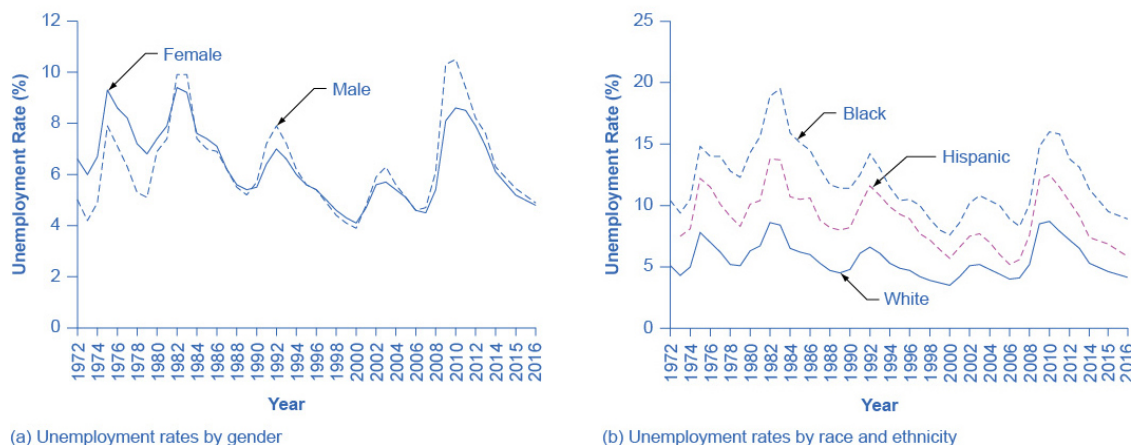


Figure 1. Unemployment Rate by Demographic Group. **(a) By gender, 1972–2016.** Unemployment rates for men used to be lower than unemployment rates for women, but in recent decades, the two rates have been very close, often—and especially during and soon after the Great Recession—with the unemployment rate for men somewhat higher. **(b) By race and ethnicity, 1972–2016.** Although unemployment rates for all groups tend to rise and fall together, the unemployment rate for blacks is typically about twice as high as that for whites, while the unemployment rate for Hispanics is in between. (Source: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov))

A caption on a graph can go badly when there is more information captioned than is of interest to your audience, or if information included in the caption would be better displayed elsewhere.

Let's take a look at this line graph displaying the percent of world GDP (Figure 2):

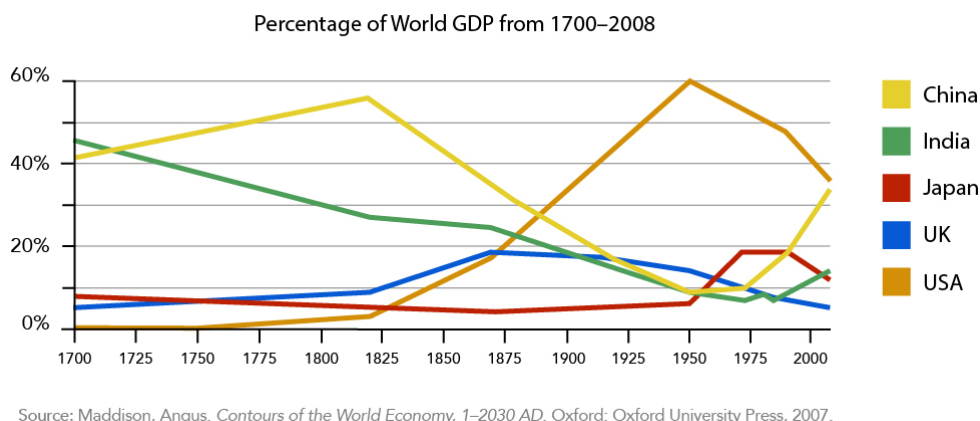


Figure 2. Percentage of World GDP from 1700–2008

Imagine if the graph above, which shows the percent of the world's gross domestic product from 1700–2000, looked more like Figure 3:

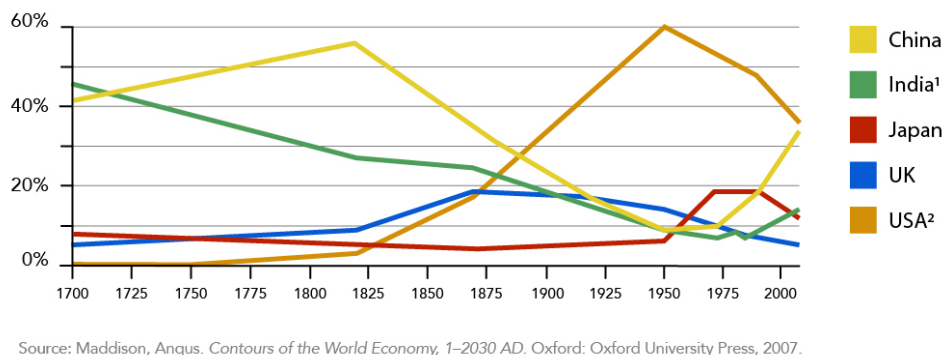


Figure 3. Percentage of World Gross Domestic Product by Country. You will note that (1) India was officially under British rule starting in 1858, when their entire GDP was transferred to the UK. India gained its Independence in 1947 after WWII. (2) The US was colonized by the British and was not its own country until 1776.

Now the title is included in the caption, as well as some information about British colonization. How could we make it a little easier for the audience to absorb that information?

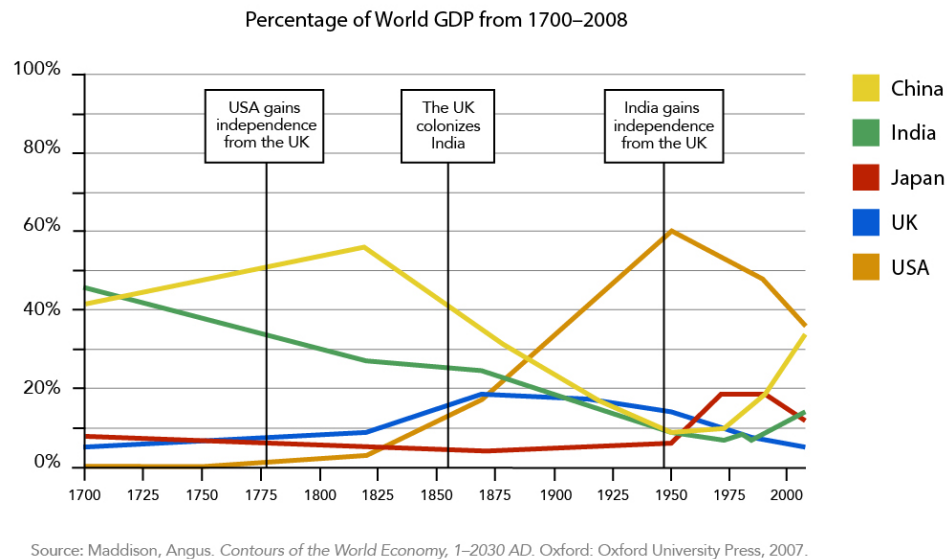


Figure 4. It should be noted that India's GDP was actually considered in the UK's totals from 1858 to 1947.

Figure 4 is even better. Now the graph is titled, and those instances of colonization are marked on the timeline. However, let's imagine the author is focusing on India in their report or presentation. In that case, the note about the colonization of the United States isn't quite relevant and should be trimmed out (Figure 5).

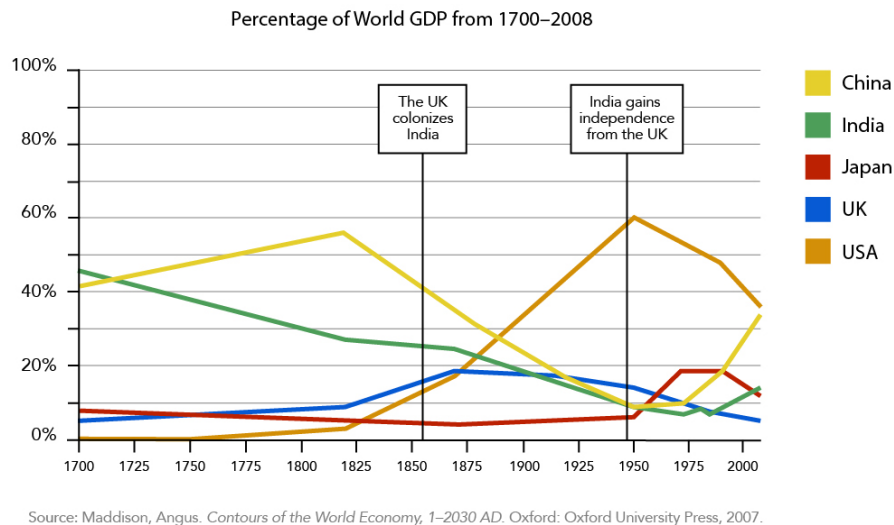


Figure 5. It should be noted that India's GDP was actually considered in the UK's totals from 1858 to 1947.

Much better! Now the graph shows only the information relevant to the point the creator is trying to make.

Visual media should always make a point clearer, so make sure your graph's format, titles and captions are working for you rather than against you.

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