

Aldrick, J. O., & Rodriguez, H. M. (2013). *Building SPSS Graphs to Understand Data*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. 371 pages. Available in paperback (ISBN 978-1-4522-1684-3).

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Do you get irritated at researchers and evaluators who make very poor use of graphics when presenting their study findings, either in a written article or in a PowerPoint presentation at a professional conference? Do you find yourself bored by the rather obsolete and unsophisticated display (and lack of corresponding analysis) of raw data aggregated in Excel tables? If you answered yes to at least one of the two questions above, then you might find *Building SPSS Graphs to Understand Data* an interesting read. This is especially true if, besides enjoying the aesthetics of colourful and captivating graphs summarizing your data analysis, you wish to learn how to use visuals to disseminate your study findings more effectively, among both sophisticated audiences and the general public.

Overall, the publication of a book on building SPSS graphs is particularly welcome, and I would recommend it for several reasons.

First, the book is very well aligned with two of the most neglected and yet relevant guiding principles of the evaluation profession—the need for clarity of language in final evaluation reports and for the concomitant use of adequate supporting visuals to enhance both the participatory nature and the utilization of evaluations.

Second, contrary to what a cursory look at the title of the book might suggest (i.e., this book is not any different than any other chapter on data presentation commonly found in traditional statistics books), the 371 pages and the variety of topics discussed in its 19 chapters boast an unusual and quite unrivalled depth and exhaustiveness in covering data-presentation-related topics. For instance, in their intent to help readers learn how to make appealing and easily understandable graphs, the two authors list and explain to users of SPSS Version 20 some of the inconsistencies with prior versions of the data analysis software, mainly with respect to panelling graphs on one and two dimensions or building population pyramids.

Third, James O. Aldrich (a distinguished professor of statistics and research methods based in California and former principal investigator of a National Cancer Institute) and Hilda M. Rodriguez (a teaching assistant in statistics who also edited Aldrich's prior book on SPSS published by Sage in 2011) have been able to deliver a simply written and accessible manuscript, which students at all levels as well as professionals dealing with both large and small databases will find an easy and enjoyable read.

Fourth, the sequencing of the chapters is well justified and exposes readers to the nuts and bolts of graph development for research and evaluation purposes. Among the most important chapters, half a dozen appear particularly relevant. Chapter 1, for instance, clarifies how instrumental graphs can be in making sense of databases and helping to answer specific questions (mostly descriptive) that emerge during data analysis. In this very first chapter, the authors also explain that the choice of graph type depends on three main factors:

- the measurement of the variable (continuous or discrete),
- the specific question about data (visualizing one, two, or more variables), and
- the audience.

This chapter also familiarizes readers with the various windows and key control features associated with the *Chart Builder* function on SPSS, one of the most efficient and easiest ones to use.

Chapters 3 and 4, on stacked bar graphs and clustered bar graphs, are quite illustrative, too, and the examples provided as well as the review exercises at the end of the chapters allow readers to develop a certain “click-and-go” familiarity, not only to produce graphs but also to interpret them.

Chapter 5 on pie charts is useful in that it explains how to “explode” slices (i.e., to set a slice slightly apart from the rest of the pie chart) to highlight data that are critical to answering a specific research question.

Chapter 10 on the 1-D boxplot, Chapter 11 on the simple boxplot, and Chapter 12 on the clustered boxplot are also quite illustrative.

Chapter 18 is unique in that it focuses on the deceptive use of graphs by also reminding readers of how important ethical considerations

are throughout all the research phases. Readers should learn to always read the axis labels and values on any graph that they will need to interpret and distinguish pictures that are deceptive (due to the use of the wrong statistic or graph as well as hiding a category in 3-D bar graphs) from those that don't.

Chapter 19, the final chapter, is a comprehensive summary of all the key topics discussed in the book.

The four appendices found at the end of the book are also useful. The first appendix is aimed at first-time SPSS users and provides them with a general overview of key SPSS commands. The second appendix provides the keys to the exercises that readers are invited to work on at the end of each chapter. The third is a list of all chapters and SPSS databases used throughout the books, and the fourth is a summary of all graphs categorized by type and purpose.

In conclusion, given the clarity of the presentation of what could otherwise be a very dry and technical topic, and in light of the increasing relevance for effective and strategic communication of research and evaluation findings, this book is definitely worthwhile and would be a useful addition to any researcher's or evaluator's personal library.