

ETHICS DETECTIVE

Solving the Case of the Hidden Numbers

You've been assigned to present the results of an industry-wide study of the effects of insecticides. Your audience consists of the department heads in your company, whose experience and educational backgrounds vary widely, from chemical engineering to insurance to law. You're convinced you need to keep your report as simple and as jargon-free as possible.

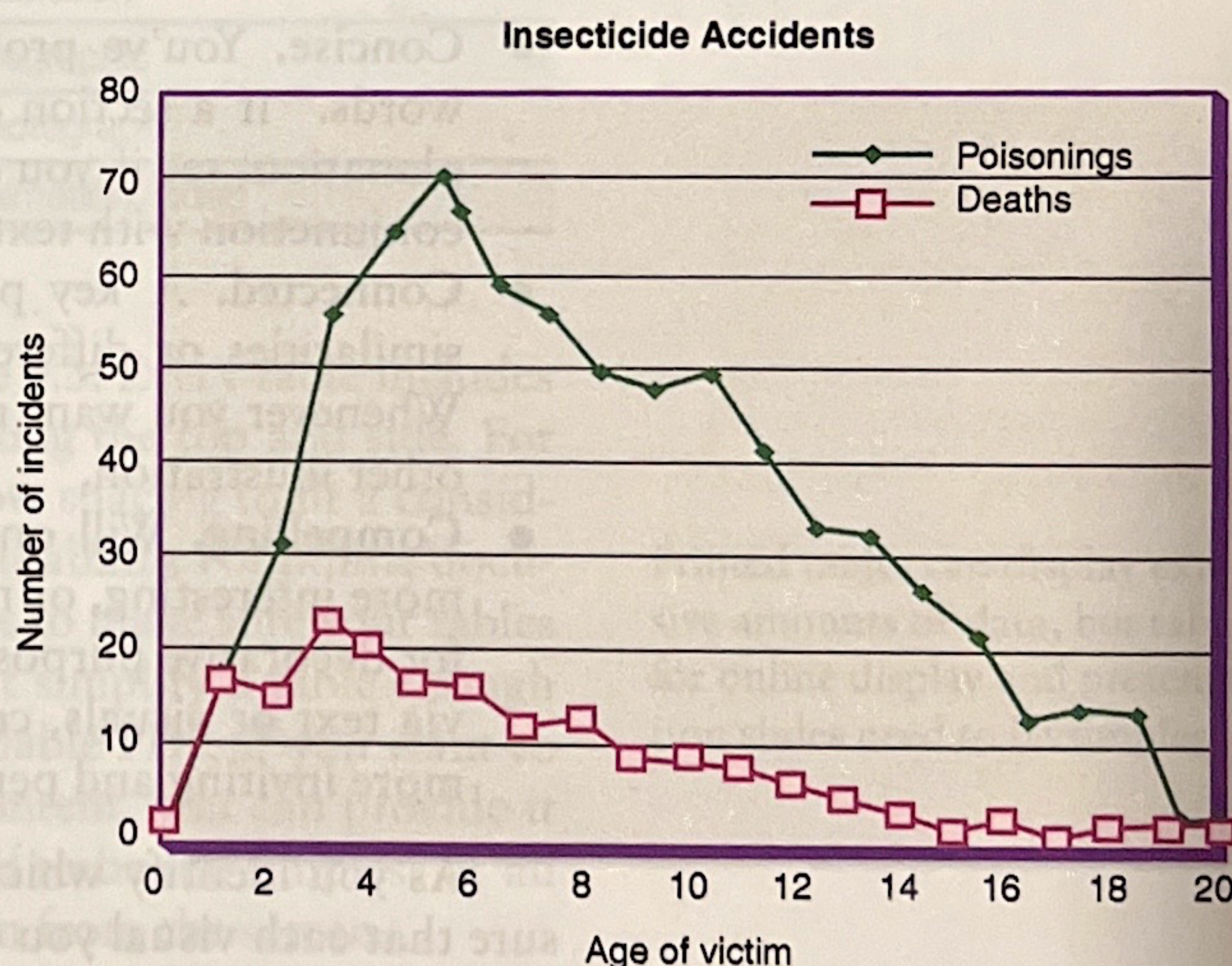
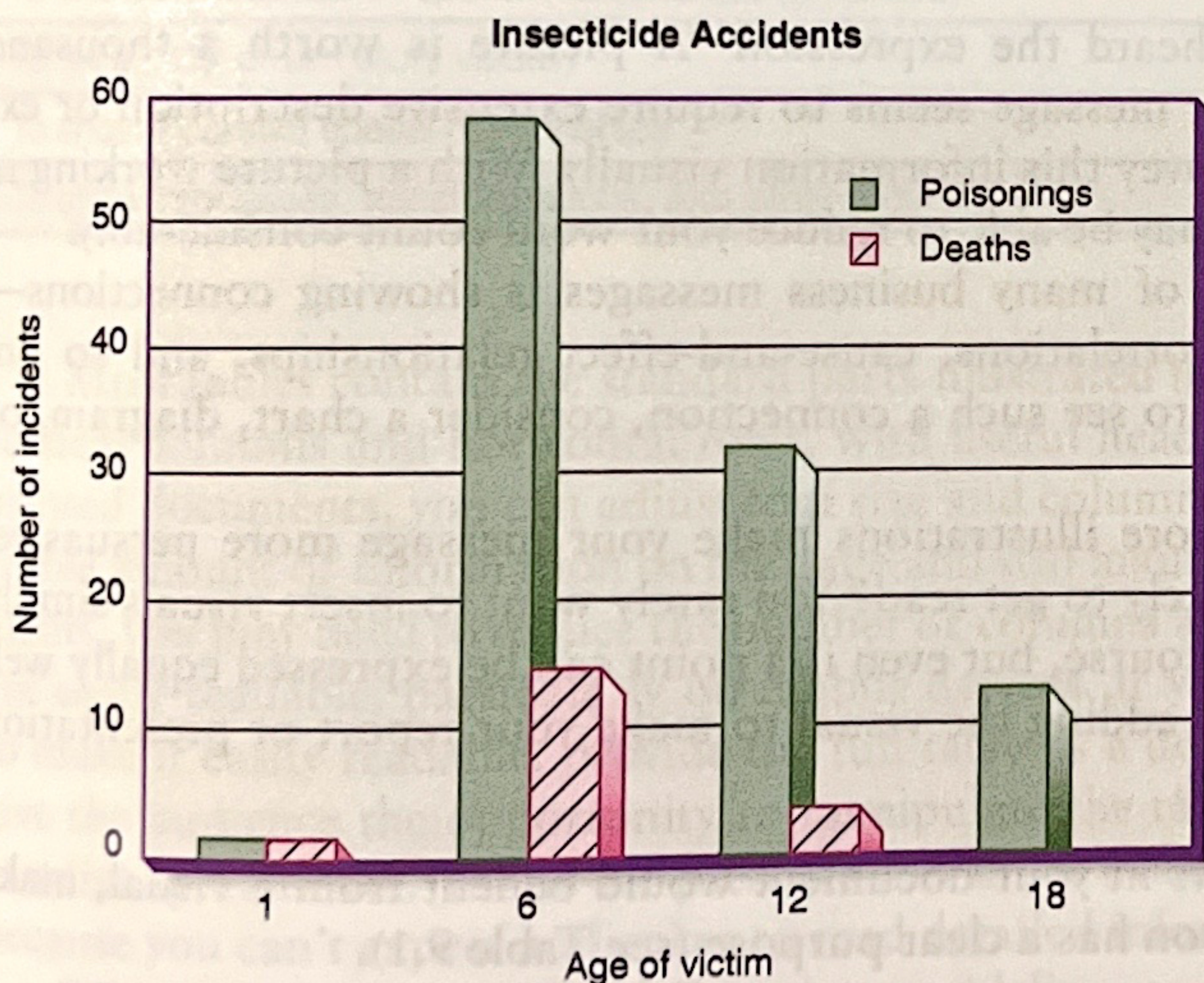
You're not a scientific expert on insecticides, but your supervisor has introduced you to a scientist who works for a trade association that represents chemical producers, including your firm. The scientist is familiar with the study you'll be reporting on, and she has experience in communicating technical subjects to diverse audiences. You jumped at the chance to have such a knowledgeable person review your presentation for technical accuracy, but you're uncomfortable

with some of her feedback. In particular, you question her advice to replace the line chart shown here, which displays the number of insecticide poisonings and deaths by age.

The scientist suggests that this chart is too busy and too difficult for nonspecialists to understand. As an alternative, she provides this bar chart that selects four specific ages from the entire range. She says this chart communicates the same basic idea as the line chart but is much easier to read.

ANALYSIS

You agree with the scientist that the line chart is visually busy and takes more effort to process, but something bothers you about the bar chart. Does it present the insecticide situation accurately and honestly? Why or why not?



Identifying Points to Illustrate

To identify which parts of your message can benefit from visuals, step back and consider the flow of your message from the audience's point of view. Which parts of the message are likely to seem complex, open to misinterpretation, or even just a bit dull? Are there any connections between ideas that might not be obvious if they are addressed only in the text? Are there a lot of numeric data or other discrete factual content that would be difficult to read if presented in paragraph form? Is there a chance that the main idea won't "jump off the page" if it's covered only in the text?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you probably need one or more visuals.

When you're deciding which points to present visually, think of the five Cs:

- **Clear.** The human mind is extremely adept at processing visual information, whether it's something as simple as the shape of a stop sign or as complicated as the floor plan for a new factory. If you're having difficulty conveying an idea in words, consider whether a visual element will do the job instead.
- **Complete.** Visuals, particularly tables, often serve to provide the supporting details for a main idea or recommendation. A table or other visual can provide these details without getting in the way of your main message.

2 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Explain how to choose which points in your message to illustrate.

Effective visuals are clear, complete, concise, connected, and compelling.