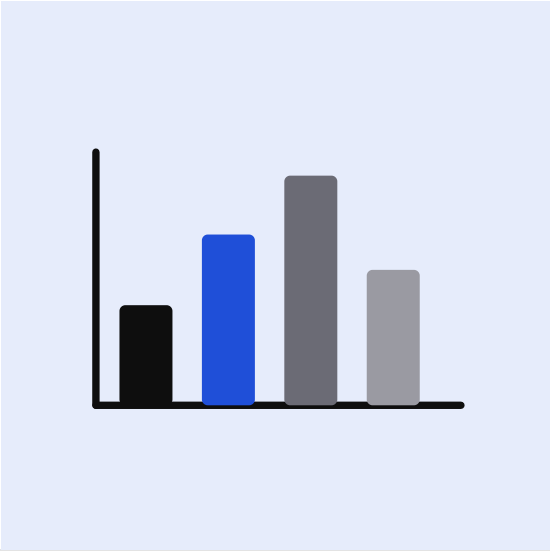
Discipline

Information design

Prepares information so that people can find it, understand it and use it effectively, in charts, tables, maps, signage or documents.



In Spanish

Diseño de información

Origin

Horn (1999) describes it as a profession; Tufte (1983) lays the groundwork for data graphics

What it deals with

The same information can help or confuse depending on how it is ordered and shown. A misleading chart or a confusing form has real consequences.

Principles

For whoever uses it

What they need to know and what decision they have to make.

Order before style

Structure decides whether it is understood; style supports it.

Data first

An ornament only if it helps to understand or remember, never if it distorts.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Before designing, ask what decision the reader has to make.

✗ Avoid

Ornaments that distract from the data or distort it.

Don't fall for it

Test with real readers: what is obvious to someone who knows the data is not obvious to someone seeing it for the first time.

Especialidades



Specialty

Data visualization

Turns data into charts that can be read accurately, choosing well how to encode each value.



Specialty

Data storytelling

Tells a story with data, deciding how much the author guides and how much the reader explores.

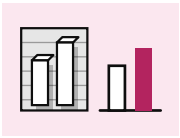
Theories and concepts



Theory

Accuracy of visual encodings

We read a position better than an angle, an area or a color: choose based on what must be compared.



Concept

Data-ink ratio

How much of a chart's ink shows data and how much is decoration that could be erased.



Concept

Lie factor

How much a chart exaggerates: the change it draws divided by the change in the data.

Connections

Builds on

- Cognitive psychology
- Cognitive load
- Gestalt principles of perceptual organization
- Semiotics
- Icon, index and symbol
- Plain language
- Contract visualization

Related to

- Content design
- Exhibition design
- Learning design
- Graphic design
- Legal design
- UX design
- Illustration
- Scientific illustration
- Design research
- Pictograms and iconography
- Wayfinding design

Authors and works

1999	**Robert E. Horn**	Defined it as the art and science of preparing information so that people can use it efficiently and effectively.
1983	**Edward R. Tufte**	Proposed devoting a chart's ink to the data and removing decoration; a stance now qualified.

Sources

Original sources

- Horn, R. E. (1999). Information design: Emergence of a new profession. In R. Jacobson (Ed.), Information design (pp. 15–34). MIT Press.
- Tufte, E. R. (1983). The visual display of quantitative information. Graphics Press.

Last reviewed: October 30, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.