Tips for Preventing Errors in Graphics

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Compiled by Bill Cloud

* Get them early, or make sure they're started early.

* Make sure as many people as possible, including the reporter, look at the graphic.

* Make sure you have the supporting information available to check the graphic.

* Make sure the rim person sees the graphic so he or she can compare the story with the graphic.

* Check the obvious; don't assume it's correct.

* Have someone familiar with the area check the map.

* Talk to the graphics department about common mistakes graphic artists are making. Also, praise them when they do a good job.

* Get graphics people involved early, as the story is being planned.

* Teach copy editors a little about making graphics so they can make one when necessary or

correct a graphic when necessary.

* In statistical graphics, make sure that monetary figures over a time period reflect the effect of inflation on the value of the dollar and the effect of changes in the size of population. Remember that per-capita figures are often better than raw dollar figures.

* Choose the map that best matches the story. Remember that maps can be too simple as well as too complex.

* Make sure maps, in almost all cases, contain a scale of miles and a compass point showing north.

* Be careful about putting in the graphic numbers that might change or be used in headlines (number of those killed, etc.).

* Always ask, So what? Does this graphic contain information that our readers will find interesting and relevant and can understand? Is it worth the space it's taking up?

Compiled from a discussion among participants in the [2002 Knight Summer institute for Midcareer Copy Editors](#)

Bill Cloud was the gracious host and local coordinator of the first ACES conference in 1997.